FIGURING IT OUT: THE SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT OF SECONDARY ELA (ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS) TEACHERS OF WRITING

Alma M. Vera
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THE SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT OF
SECONDARY ELA (ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS) TEACHERS OF WRITING

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FIGURING IT OUT: THE SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-EMPOWERMENT OF SECONDARY ELA (ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS) TEACHERS OF WRITING

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Abstract

Knowing how to write well has been linked to college and career success and learning to write well is reliant on the effectiveness of highly prepared teachers of writing. However, secondary ELA (English Language Arts) teachers of writing report that they were not prepared to teach writing in their pre-service teacher preparation programs or in-service professional development. Based on personal experience, such educators engage in their own professional learning in the teaching of writing to meet their students’ needs (grades 9-12). This explanatory sequential mixed methods study sought to identify the professional learning choices made by in-service secondary ELA teachers to grow as teachers of writing and the rationales that guide these choices. Phase 1 of the study was an online survey (quantitative data) followed by Phase 2 consisting of focus group interviews (qualitative data) that drew participants from survey respondents. Analysis of survey data revealed a wealth of information including teachers’ beliefs on writing, writing instruction, teacher preparation, and professional learning sources. Subsequent analysis of focus group data expanded on the survey findings as participants expressed strong feelings about their students as writers, writing practices, and their professional learning. This data also established several important themes, namely, the collaborative nature of writing, teacher self-reflection, writing instruction, and professional learning. Implications for future research, policymakers, and practice are discussed.
Acknowledgements

I was taking one of my educational foundation classes in the fall of 1997 when I read about the factors that contribute to students being “at risk” for failure. That section of the reading hit me like a ton of bricks because it was, through no fault of my own, describing me. I should never have made it out of high school let alone this far. But because I did beat the odds, I owe a debt of gratitude to those who supported me along the path to this tremendous accomplishment.

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One particular person from my early life who saw beyond all that “at risk” for failure mess and believed in me when I didn’t even know what it meant to believe in myself was my seventh and eighth grade teacher, Mr. John A. Posner. I wish you had lived to see all that I have accomplished and could know how I came to realize the influence of your subtle direction. I know you would be proud because you could see when others could not. Thank you, Mr. Posner.

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Lastly, to my children Leah and Aaron, Mom did it. You two can also do anything you set your minds to as well. I love you and believe in you.
I dedicate this work to all the teachers of writing out there at all grade levels—ELA and other subjects—who are endlessly devoted to teaching writing and being the very best teachers of writing they can be. You inspire me. Don’t stop striving.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my beloved grandmother. Mimi, I thought of you often as I worked on this. You were the strongest person I have ever known, and I like to think I have just a little of your strength. And finally, to my mom who I know would be beside herself with pride. Look what your baby has made of herself, Mom.
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For all intents and purposes, I was not supposed to make it to this point,

but God always has the final say.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

*A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it.*

— Jean de la Fontaine

**How did I ever end up here?**

I excitedly entered the teaching profession a little over two decades ago with a B.A. in History and a secondary education certification. I also had a middle school endorsement “just in case” even though I had my path all mapped out. I was going to teach high school History and that was that. Simple enough. Or so I thought.

What some people call fate, others refer to as destiny. Whatever you want to call it, things were not going to go quite as I had planned. Surely enough, the “just in case” middle school endorsement came in handy as the only job I could find at first was at a brand-new middle school poised to open a week and a half before the start of the new school year. The position was for a self-contained, eighth grade classroom. In all honesty, I had no idea what *self-contained* even meant. I was just ecstatic to have an actual teaching position and not to start out as a substitute teacher, so I told myself I would just figure it out. Little did I know, “just figure it out” would be a constant theme throughout my teaching career.

Much to my relief, my new principal made the eleventh-hour decision to let the teachers departmentalize if we wanted. This was back in the waning days of education before the introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), so I partnered with another new teacher who also had a degree in History. We agreed that we would teach History to our own Homeroom students;
she would then teach Math and Science to both of our classes, and I would teach the English/Language Arts (ELA) block to both groups.

The irony of this arrangement was not lost on me because I entered college knowing I wanted to be a teacher, but I wasn’t sure if I would major in History or English as I loved both. However, one thing I never liked about English was grammar. The thought of diagramming sentences and doling out endless grammar worksheets and assigning exercises for the next thirty-four years… so, a history major it was then! So, despite all of this, I found myself charged with teaching all things ELA—spelling, reading, writing, and yes, grammar—none of which I had been prepared to teach in my secondary preservice History teacher courses.

Contrary to the confidence I felt in my preparation to teach History, I was in way over my head when it came to ELA. Enjoying a subject and personally excelling in it does not a teacher make. While I entered the profession armed with the theories deemed necessary for all new teachers, I likewise entered teaching equally burdened with many assumptions based on my own prior learning experiences, which is not uncommon (Norman & Spencer, 2005; Hinchey, 2010). A complete lack of ELA pre-service preparation, together with a lack of substantive professional guidance within my building, left me to realize that I had to “figure it out.”

Like so many in this situation, I resorted to implementing the very same instructional practices that my teachers used, a practice Lortie (1975) refers to as “apprenticeship-of-observation.” I figured that since I successfully learned that way, it couldn’t be all that bad. And besides, what other choice did I have in such a pressing situation?

Reliance on my experiences helped me survive the first year: Weekly spelling lists grammar worksheets, textbook exercises, and, thanks to my seventh and eighth grade teacher, writing. Lots of writing. I did the most writing during my entire K-12 experience in those two
grades. I can likewise attribute my limited understanding of how writing was “taught” directly to that teacher and a few others I had throughout the years. Writing was assigned, given a due date, graded, and returned with a letter grade written on it and maybe some comments. I taught this way as well because it was all that I knew.

I did not begin to consider that there might be a different way to teach writing until I read Nancie Atwell’s book In the Middle (1998) in one of my graduate level Reading classes in 2001. Atwell wrote about grammar mini lessons based on actual student writing errors instead of drill and kill worksheets and isolated exercises. She also discussed Writing Workshop for the middle grades, which was so much more than the “assigning, grading, and moving on to the next thing” instructional method I experienced in school and was using with my own students.

Thankfully, my intuition told me that writing was important, something to be enjoyed. I also embraced the idea that there had to be a better way to teach it. At this point, I wish I could say that I became an amazing writing teacher practically overnight. Alas, this was not the case. These “radical” ideas and my own new realization were just the start of what would become a lifelong journey of discovery for me as a teacher of writing.

After four years, I moved to high school where I was hired to teach a split Social Studies/English course load. By that time, I had completed additional English coursework to attain an ELA teaching endorsement and be considered Highly Qualified to teach English under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. I was also working on a graduate degree in Reading toward a K-12 Reading Specialist endorsement at the time. Despite the advanced coursework, nothing prepared me to teach writing better. However, as my teaching experience progressed, I became increasingly aware of specific issues my students had with their writing. Yet, I was still
no better prepared to address these issues, and, for the most part, continued doing what I had been doing.

The English curriculum at my new school consisted of subjecting the students to a solid month of kill-and-drill grammar exercises at the beginning of every school year with a list of concepts that grew longer with each grade level. The only required writing of any kind in the whole curricula was a research paper in students’ second semester senior year. Moreover, despite receiving instruction in the same grammar concepts annually, little of it transferred to students’ actual writing in either of the English or Social Studies classes.

My English department colleagues commiserated with me, but when I ventured to suggest that there must be a more effective way to teach grammar, I received blank stares in return. My gut kept telling me that if this wasn’t working, there had to be another way, and so I determined to keep at it until I “figured it out.”

Finally, in the fall of 2013, I excitedly took a Writing Research class as part of my doctoral coursework. I would surely, at long last, learn how to teach writing. Yet, at the end of the class, I was left wanting to know even more. Why did my students’ writing skill levels fall everywhere and anywhere along a continuum of writing ability regardless of course level (e.g., inclusion, standard, or honors)? Why did their collective class ability levels seem to fit neatly within the classic bell curve shape? There were always a small number of students who could write with few errors and with ease. Equally small were the students who could not even seem to write a complete or coherent sentence. What and how were the better writers taught to do what their much less skilled peers were not? Could I even provide instruction that would improve their writing skills at this late stage of their schooling? They were missing so much, where should I begin? What about the mid-range ability students? All these writers were in the same classes
together. How could I provide them differentiated instruction at their respective levels and see improvement across the board? How?

During a discussion in the writing research class, a classmate made a comment that I would probably not have thought about otherwise: English teachers are prepared to teach literature, not writing. This struck me as so odd given that these educators are, by default, charged with teaching writing. So how is it possible that they were only prepared to teach literature?

This idea was so foreign and counterintuitive to me that I had to confirm it with my English colleagues. I spoke to teachers who had a variety of years’ experience from different teacher preparation programs. One newer teacher in my department even completed a Master of Arts in Teaching at a well-known Midwestern Big Ten school and reported that he did not take a single class on the teaching of writing. Others shared that they were not required to take any coursework in the English grammar they taught so religiously.

While this made things clearer, I still could not wrap my brain around the fact that my English colleagues received absolutely no formal instruction on how to teach writing, and yet were expected to teach it and ensure success for their students in this area. Despite the passage of time, the present writing instruction in my classes was simply a mirror image of my own high school skill-and-drill “writing experience.” It seemed that we were all teaching by way of the “apprenticeship-of-observation” method for lack of anything better.

Still, I could not ignore the issues my students had with writing. I accepted that a simple reliance on my own learning experiences would not help them grow as writers. I fully embraced the idea that I was the one who would have to grow as a teacher of writing. I had to learn, experiment, self-evaluate, reflect, adjust, and do whatever was necessary for them. My
experiences and subsequent realization helped direct my doctoral studies and formulate the goal of this dissertation—to “figure it out”—so I, and others just like me, could become the writing teachers our students need and deserve. And thus, this research journey was born.

Statement of the Problem

Knowing how to write well has been attributed to a student’s future academic success and professional opportunities for advancement (Bazerman, 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007a). It also contributes to civic engagement and personal well-being (Graham and Perin, 2007b). Because of the role writing reportedly plays in the future lives of students, one would think it must surely receive a significant amount of instructional attention. Yet, the National Assessment of Educational Progress’s (NAEP) findings, reported by the National Center for Education Statistics’ Nation’s Report Card (2012b) suggest another reality in which American school children in grades 4, 8, and 12 are not being adequately prepared to meet future writing demands.

While these numbers can be cause for concern, the necessary skill of writing well simply cannot be acquired without deliberate and adequate instruction (Graham & Harris, 1997). Although children begin to display a predisposition to writing from a very early age before ever setting foot in a school (Bradford & Wyse, 2013), the extent to which they acquire mastery of writing hinges on the level of instructional preparedness possessed by their teachers (Graham & Harris, 1997; Kiuhara et al., 2009; Delpit, 2012; Graham & Harris, 2015). The National Council of Teachers of English’s ([NCTE], 2006) position statement on writing assessment, the National Writing Project (NWP) and Nagin’s (2006) work on improving students’ writing in schools, and the International Literacy Association’s ([ILA], 2018) literacy leadership brief all assert that teachers need to receive pre-service preparation to teach writing, as well as continuous in-service
professional development in the teaching of writing. For example, one of the Core Principles of the NWP (n.d.-a) states:

Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically. (para. 12)

The recommendations of these professional organizations stand in stark contrast to the experiences of my secondary ELA colleagues who, as noted above, completed their teacher preparation programs at various colleges and universities throughout the state of Illinois and some surrounding states without receiving any preparation to teach writing. These peers also reported an inconsistent degree of coursework in learning to write themselves, specifically in English grammar and composition. Taken together, an examination of the state licensure requirements in Illinois and other states provides further insight about the nature and extent of this problem.

**State Licensure Requirements: Illinois**

In my home state, teachers must complete a state approved teacher preparation program at an accredited college or university to receive a Professional Educator License (PEL) from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). At the time of this writing, ISBE listed 46 universities and colleges with approved Grade 9-12 ELA teacher preparation programs throughout the state (ISBE, n.d.-b). The secondary ELA programs at these institutions may include a variety of course offerings in the areas of composition, rhetoric, grammars of English, theory, research, and pedagogy of writing instruction. Whether writing course offerings are required as part of a university degree program depends entirely on each individual school’s program as ISBE does
not require completion of specific coursework to teach writing as part of its secondary ELA PEL (ISBE, n.d.-d). In fact, ISBE’s only explicitly required coursework for individuals seeking a new Illinois PEL in any subject area or grade level is stated as follows: “Methods of teaching exceptional children, methods of reading, methods of reading in the content areas, and instructional strategies for English language learners” (ISBE, 2018). Furthermore, all new teaching applicants must successfully pass the edTAP (Test of Academic Proficiency) and a content area exam in the respective degree area completed (ISBE, n.d.-c).

Interestingly, the ELA content exam required of those seeking a PEL to teach English consists of four sections. One is specifically devoted to evaluating an aspiring ELA teachers’ knowledge of writing and research. This is despite the lack of requirements for the completion of any coursework in the teaching of writing. What’s more, this section of the test carries more weight in every category than all the others. To be precise, the “Writing and Research” category has seven measured objectives versus the five for Reading Comprehension, with 31 scorable items for writing compared to 22 for Reading Comprehension. These items account for 39% of the total test score compared to the next highest subarea of 28% in Reading Comprehension (Illinois Licensure Testing System, n.d.). This is quite ironic given that Reading Comprehension is an actual area of required coursework for Illinois state licensure.

Acquiring a PEL is not the only way to obtain certification to teach secondary ELA in Illinois as the state also provides a pathway for adding an English endorsement to an existing teaching license. My own Illinois PEL is a prime example of this as I had the endorsements to teach English (grades 9-12) and to teach Language Arts (grades 6-8) added to my original teaching certificate in History, which was acquired through completion of an approved Illinois teacher preparation program. To add the ELA endorsement, an Illinois teacher simply needs to
do the following: Complete 24 semester hours of self-selected content from the list of acceptable English, Journalism, Reading, and/or Speech courses—with 12 of these being upper division courses—and pass the state content licensure exam (ISBE, n.d.-c). ISBE further stipulates that the coursework must be 100-level or higher, and that all courses must be passed with a grade of C- or higher. Of note, when I added the subsequent endorsements to my teaching certificate in 2003, the content exam was not a requirement.¹

While my own coursework submitted for the endorsements consisted of a mixture of literature, speech communication, and two 100 level writing classes, I did not complete—nor was I required by the state to do so—anym coursework in the pedagogy or theory of writing instruction. ISBE currently lists a number of classes that are deemed acceptable toward an endorsement in secondary ELA including: composition, English grammar, language arts methods, literacy, literary techniques (dialect, narration, etc.), and rhetoric (ISBE, n.d.-a). To stress the point, ELA teachers in the state of Illinois may very well not take any of these writing-related classes when seeking to add the ELA endorsement to their teaching certificates. Likewise, they may not have taken any of those classes when completing their original degrees toward certification. The classes mentioned above are merely considered “acceptable” but are not specifically required. Teachers are fully able to have the ELA endorsement added to their PEL, and ultimately, end up teaching writing to students without any formal preparation to do so whatsoever.

¹ I was unable to determine precisely when the content exam became a requirement for licensure for additional teaching endorsements after 2003 despite my own research and personal telephone communication with ISBE licensure personnel (August 8, 2019).
Other State Licensure Requirements: Texas, California, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania

This in-depth examination of the state of Illinois’ licensure requirements and procedures certainly confirmed my secondary ELA colleagues’ informal reports. However, I still wondered if Illinois was the standard or the exception across the country. I next turned to an analysis of secondary ELA teacher licensure requirements in other states by reviewing the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ([BLS], 2018) site to determine which states employ the most secondary teachers. Although the data provided by BLS is not aggregated by content area, it is interesting to consider in relationship to teacher preparation requirements for writing instruction. With more than one million total teachers employed nationwide as of May 2017, BLS reports that Texas, California, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania employ the most secondary teachers in the country. I reasoned that because four years of English is typical for American high school students, these five states likely also employ the most secondary ELA teachers; therefore, I decided to closely examine all these state’s teacher licensure requirements.

Each of the aforementioned states requires prospective teachers to pass a state approved teacher preparation program, as well as a content exam (State of California, 2019; New York Office of Teaching Initiatives2 n.d.; Ohio Department of Education, n.d.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.-a; Texas Education Agency, n.d.). California is the only state of the five largest certifiers of secondary education teachers that requires all its teachers to take a reading methods course as a condition of licensure (State of California, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2019). At the same time, writing or writing related content not associated with

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2 The complete citation for the New York State Office of Teaching Initiatives site is provided in the resource; however, finding this specific information is difficult so that the following path is helpful to view it completely. Once on the NY State Office of Teaching initiatives site, (http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/home.html) click on the Certification link in the banner at the top of the page, then Search Certification Requirements, and choose the following from the dropdown menus: Classroom Teacher (Area of Interest), English (Subject Area), Adolescent-Grades 7-12 (Grade Level), English Language Arts 7-12 (Title), Initial Certificate (Type of Certificate). Lastly, click on the link titled Pathway: Approved Teacher Preparation Program 05/01/2014.
pedagogy is assessed on each of these states’ required content exams to varying degrees as indicated in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1**

*Writing Content on State Content Exams*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Content Exam Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>• 30% on written communication:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ writing process stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ helping students develop their own writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ writing processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ text types and purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ production and distribution of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ conventions of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018; p. 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ writing arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ writing informative and explanatory texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ writing narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pennsylvania and Ohio both use Praxis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(California Subject Examinations for Teachers, 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ informative, argumentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ task, purpose, and audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ characteristics of clear and coherent writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ effective and ethical research practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ research-based approaches to teaching components of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ assessing writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ incorporating students’ perspectives, knowledge, and cultures into writing instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ 25% on language usage and vocabulary, including: conventions of standard English grammar, usage, syntax, and mechanics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, California’s Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) and Pennsylvania’s
Pre-Service Academic Performance Assessment (PAPA; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.-b) both require teachers to demonstrate proficiency in the Three Rs: reading, writing, and math. As is the case with Illinois, there is clearly importance placed on assessing a teacher’s knowledge of writing and the teaching of writing through licensure content exams in each of these states. However, as reported nearly 20 years ago in The Neglected “R” (National Commission on Writing, 2003), “only a handful of states require courses in writing for teacher certification” (p. 23). The six states discussed here, which as previously noted, include the five states believed to provide licensure to the most secondary education teachers in the country, together with the state of Illinois, are not among this “handful of states” with such requirements.

Applebee and Langer (2011) assert that there have been many changes regarding policy and other factors that have influenced writing instruction in the past thirty plus years, such as the impact of technology on writing with word processing on computers, the Internet as a research tool, and writing programs and practices effected by new and changing standards and assessments. Yet these changes have yielded extraordinarily little evidence as to the extent they have influenced actual classroom writing instruction (p. 14). Likewise, this is inarguably the case for recommendations around teacher licensure requirements and in-service teacher preparation programs put forth by the two leading professional literacy organizations that support secondary ELA teachers, namely, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Literacy Association (ILA). NCTE’s position statement “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” (2016b) asserts that developing writers need support from high-quality instruction by teachers “well versed in composition theory and research,” (para. 21) as well as in methods for implementing that theory. Similarly, ILA (2018) contends that middle and high school classroom teachers should also “demonstrate knowledge of major theoretical,
conceptual, and evidence-based foundations of adolescent writing development, processes, and instruction in their specific discipline” (p. 86).

Both professional organizations’ recommendations were made well after the National Commission on Writing (2003) report called on states to require new educators to complete coursework in writing theory and practice as a requirement for teacher licensure, part of its suggested five-year action agenda for writing instruction. Although more than a decade and a half has gone by, middle level and secondary pre-service state-level requirements for teacher preparation in the teaching of writing remains elusive and inconsistent with ELA content area licensure testing.

**In-Service Teacher Preparation**

The teacher licensure requirements of the above states suggest a prevailing lack of overall importance placed on middle and secondary pre-service teacher preparation in the teaching of writing. Since state departments of education send their newly minted teachers into the field largely unprepared to teach writing, one must wonder if there is any sense of urgency toward changing this contrary reality once teachers enter the classroom and begin to impact the lives of their students.

Despite the recognizable gap in pre-service professional preparation in the teaching of writing as described above, opportunities for subsequent learning and professional growth in sound writing instruction for in-service, secondary ELA teachers also do not appear to be an imperative for state education officials and policymakers. This is in disregard to the crucial nature of continuous professional development of in-service teachers called for by ILA (2018), the National Commission on Writing (2003), and NCTE (2006).
Kiuhara et al., (2009) conducted a national survey of high school teachers regarding writing instruction which made inquiry into their pre- and in-service preparation to teach writing. Not only did their findings affirm that educators receive little or no preparation in writing instruction, but of the 71% of teachers who responded as such, only 44% indicated experiencing any further in-service preparation to teach writing (p. 148). Participants also indicated that when they did receive professional development, it was an isolated occurrence that came in the form of a one-time workshop, or that it was not particularly relevant to the needs of their given students (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

The topic of continuous professional development for in-service teachers of writing is a sparse area of study beyond that of Kiuhara et al., (2009) cited above. It should go without saying that since initial state licensure requirements do not include writing coursework, continuous professional development requirements in writing for teachers is certainly not required either. Concerning my own district’s attention to writing, I myself never received any school-based or district-level professional development in the teaching of writing as a middle school teacher. Furthermore, as a secondary teacher of nearly two decades, I have only received one professional development session on the topic of writing which merely consisted of examining the type of writing that junior-level students are expected to produce for the SAT essay exam. More importantly, it did not include instruction or recommendations on how to teach that form of writing to students. Once again, I was left to “figure it out” on my own along with teachers of writing all across this country.

**Scholarly Focus**

The problem in relation to the teaching of writing is threefold. First, teaching writing is an instructional task in high school that, by default, typically falls upon secondary ELA teachers
Next, secondary ELA teachers are, by and large, not required to complete coursework in the teaching of writing to obtain their respective states’ professional licensure beyond a mere handful of exceptions (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Finally, the continuous lack of state level requirements despite the long-standing research and theory between the relationship of teacher preparation to student outcomes results in inadequate pre-service preparation, exacerbated further by an insufficient focus, or even complete absence of additional in-service preparation provided for practicing teachers (Kiuhara et al., 2009). These factors in combination may leave a good many teachers struggling to figure out how best to teach their students the all-important skill of writing. Such continued neglect in pre- and in-service teacher preparation to teach writing stands in stark disregard to recommendations made by the National Commission on Writing (2003), ILA (2018), NCTE (2006, 2018), and NWP (About NWP, n.d.).

The long-standing reality described here leaves secondary ELA teachers with two options. One is for teachers to continue their current form of writing instruction “as is” maintaining the status quo of stagnant student writing development and standardized test performance. The other option necessitates those teachers take command of their own professional growth to affect a more positive change in their instruction and in their students’ writing development. For educators to choose to engage in the latter option is to do so despite the lack of official requirements, and most often in addition to what they are already obliged to do to maintain their professional certifications and all of this without much initial professional guidance. Teachers are often left to “figure it out” on their own.

Whether these secondary ELA teachers arrive at this professional decision via completion of a secondary ELA teacher preparation program that failed to include long espoused research,
theory, and/or pedagogy on the teaching of writing or by some other unintended path as I did, the question begs to be answered: What self-directed professional learning choices do secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing? Therein lies the focus of this scholarly research.

**Research Purpose and Questions**

Preparing students to write well is crucial to their future college and career success (NCTE, 2008; NCTE & IRA, 2012; Graham et al., 2015). This preparation is reliant on a well-prepared teacher (Graham & Harris, 1997; Kiuhara et al., 2009; Delpit, 2012; Graham & Harris, 2015). However, as noted, too many secondary ELA teachers are ill-prepared to teach writing prior to entering the classroom (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; ISBE, 2018; Ohio Department of Education, n.d., TEA, 2019) and are not developed further once they have entered the profession (Kiuhara et al., 2009).

As professionals, secondary ELA teachers may rely on their own beliefs and prior experiences (Hinchey, 2010; Lortie, 1975). They may also get to a point where they have similar realizations about their educator preparation as I did and seek additional theoretical and instructional knowledge to further advance their classroom writing practices. Such self-directed professional learning choices may be influenced by a variety of factors including a teacher’s given instructional assignment, beliefs about the importance of writing (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Porter & Brophy, 1998; Shrofel, 1991), and the presentation of specific student needs (Brooks, 2007; Graham & Perin, 2007b), not to mention personal financial cost and access to such resources (Hicks et al, 2018). In consideration of the overall importance of students’ writing development, these voluntary choices to promote professional growth for teachers of writing are a matter that deserves focused attention.
Therefore, the purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify what, if any professional learning choices in-service secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing and the rationale(s) that guide(s) those choices. Hence, this study is framed by the following research questions:

1. How do secondary ELA teachers describe effective writing instruction?
2. What specific aspects of their writing practice have teachers sought to develop?
3. What measures, if any, have these teachers taken to grow professionally as teachers of writing?
   A. What is/are the rationale(s) for their professional learning choices specifically related to writing instruction?
   B. To what extent do secondary ELA teachers of writing feel their engagement in professional development or professional learning for writing instruction has helped them grow as teachers of writing?

**Significance of the Study**

As outlined in the preceding sections, this research inquiry is significant for multiple, interconnected reasons. First, it is crucial simply because all secondary students must be provided with well-prepared teachers of writing as highlighted in consistent national student writing data (NCES, 2012b) and the overall societal importance for students to be able to write well (Fanetti et al., 2010). Secondly, this study is necessary given the overall lack of importance placed on educator preparedness to teach writing as evidenced in state licensure requirements. Finally, it is significant given the reported lack of in-service professional development for the teaching of writing (Graham & Perin, 2007b; National Commission on Writing, 2003) which
also reveals that ELA teachers are on their own when it comes to writing instruction and their own professional growth and development in this area.

In order to rectify the paucity of scholarship outlined here, this study seeks to reveal the sources that secondary ELA teachers access on their own initiative when seeking to develop themselves professionally in the area of writing instruction. The resulting findings serve to provide a list of viable options for teachers seeking financially, locally, or Internet accessible and instructionally effective professional resources dependent on their current levels of instructional expertise and need. These findings also make clear whether secondary ELA teachers have an appetite for professional growth in writing instruction despite the inconsistent focus on pre-service preparation, the overall lack of state teaching licensure requirements, and a general absence of in-service teacher development offerings. It also gives insight into what drives the teachers who do have this interest to pursue continued learning, and how they grew as a result of such participation.

It is my hope that by drawing attention to the needs and existing realities of in-service secondary ELA teachers in relation to writing instruction, this inquiry will raise the awareness of those in educational leadership and policy development positions related to teacher preparation, state licensure, and continued professional development and learning, and consequently, will promote changes in current practices, policies, and procedures. Changes that, if implemented thoughtfully and deliberately, bring significant changes to these areas that ultimately serves to strengthen overall student writing development.

**Scope of the Research**

This scholarly, mixed methods inquiry employed a survey that was presented to a broad sample of high school ELA teachers from across the United States. The survey data and analysis
provided generalizable, quantitative data in relationship to the research questions and the choices this demographic of teachers made to grow professionally as teachers of writing after completion of preservice preparation and attainment of their teaching licensures. Survey participants were given the option to voluntarily indicate interest in continued participation, and a subset of those individuals who did so were selected to participate in a focus group interview. The resulting qualitative data provided additional, detailed information on the participating teachers’ rationale for electing to complete (or not) the various professional development and learning options they indicated on the survey. The use of a mixed methods research design served to paint a more complete picture of the professional learning and development choices that a set of in-service secondary ELA teachers of writing made to become more effective teachers of writing.

**Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the key terms used frequently throughout the research are these defined as follows:

**English Language Arts (ELA)**

The range of content taught in secondary English classrooms including literature, writing/composition, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing.

**In-service**

Educators currently working as classroom teachers in the field of education, with a focus on those who hold a teaching license, and an endorsement in ELA.

**Pre-service**

Teacher candidates enrolled in a degree-granting teacher preparation program leading to a teaching license.
**Professional Development (PD)**

A series of activities including, but not limited to workshops, meetings, conferences, and webinars. PD is designed for and provided to teachers through a transmission model of instruction with material presented by an “expert” for the purpose of improving teachers’ classroom instruction. It typically has a set time and place for participation with a definitive beginning and end, often lasting for only one session, and participation is typically a requirement.

**Professional Learning (PL)**

A series of activities and resources including, but not limited to workshops, meetings, conferences, webinars, book clubs, college coursework, and professional learning communities (PLCs). These consist of a group of educators with similar needs or interests, often within the same school or district or professional learning networks (PLNs) who have similar professional needs and interests across locations. Participation may occur in person (face-to-face) or in online formats with flexibility in the amount of time spent involved and levels of engagement. An example of PL includes leading or directing the learning of group participants and teachers who often co-construct professional knowledge. PL activities may be required but allow for individual choice when educators select activity topics and professional resource options. These are intended to promote professional growth. (See Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion on this term in comparison to PD.)

**Secondary (as in Secondary School or Secondary Teachers)**

A focus on students in grades 9-12 in high school who are generally between 14–18 years of age.
Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters, with Chapter One presenting the background of the study, the extent of the problem at hand, and questions guiding the inquiry. Chapter Two provides an examination of existing literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three details the theoretical perspectives framing the inquiry, the research methodology employed, and data collection and analysis procedures. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings of the quantitative data in Chapter Four and analysis of the qualitative data set in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, the study concludes with a report on the conclusions drawn from the findings of both data sets regarding the research questions, together with the implications these findings have for shaping future policy and practice concerning school and/or district-level professional development opportunities provided for secondary ELA teachers of writing, as well as a final word for secondary ELA teachers of writing.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

*Do the best you can until you know better.*

*Then when you know better, do better.*

— Maya Angelou

**Introduction**

Despite a lack of deliberate and focused pre-service preparation and professional state licensure requirements, secondary ELA teachers keep forging ahead to the best of their abilities to meet the job-related expectations and responsibilities placed on them to teach their students to write. To improve student writing achievement in preparation for college and career writing success, it is, therefore, important to examine the current state of scholarly literature on student writing development as it relates to the professional preparation of secondary ELA teachers of writing. By examining the disconnect between teacher preparation and the realities of the instructional task, it may be possible to identify the missing elements required to provide teachers with the quality professional growth opportunities they need.

Hence, this literature review examines several key aspects of existing research related to this larger issue. Those factors first include current and historical instructional traditions and trends as related to writing theory, policy, and practice. Next, teachers’ perceptions of their professional preparation and the role of their own beliefs about writing and writing instruction are also reviewed, as well as the recommendations of key professional organizations for writing instruction and teacher professional development and learning opportunities. Finally, I examine effects that external factors—specifically standards-based reform and assessments—have on writing instruction and the role that these may play in teachers’ professional growth choices.
There Is More to Literacy than Just Reading

When people think of the word literacy, they most often think of reading. However, literacy is much more than simply reading. In its 2018 reference work, *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals*, the International Literacy Association more specifically identified the components of literacy as “reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing” (p. 143).

Despite this, writing is treated like the disregarded stepchild of literacy and is often placed on the back burner where it languishes away in instructional neglect, only called out to demonstrate reading comprehension. Most times, however, it is intentionally jettisoned in favor of lavishing all the instructional attention on the favorite child, Reading. Elbow (2004) bluntly stated that reading is privileged over writing. Such indifference toward writing was particularly tangible with the federally mandated policies of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that failed to recognize the importance of students’ writing proficiency on their overall academic achievement (Applebee & Langer, 2006). In truth, reading has received the lion’s share of instructional attention for quite some time (Elbow, 2004; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

Writing, nonetheless, is an inseparable component of overall literacy development. Writing is thinking; it gives permanence to mere thoughts (Graham & Perin, 2007a; Graham & Harris, 2015), and being able to write effectively enables a person to express one’s ideas clearly in a way that is comprehensible to an audience a writer may never speak to directly. Such written words serve to communicate for a variety of purposes including to argue, persuade, question, and demonstrate knowledge or even misconceptions (Graham & Harris, 2015). A strong command of
writing as a skill becomes a matter of vital importance as young writers’ transition from secondary to postsecondary studies (Fanetti et al., 2010). Teachers would not dispute this.

Such unbalanced instructional attention is largely attributed to a few factors. First, reading has been the focal point in state and federal learning standards for years as can be seen in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Pederson, 2007; Kiuhara et al., 2009). Reading and math are also the two most frequently measured skill areas on various standardized tests, such as the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) administered to K-12 students, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) administered to high school juniors, and even the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) taken by college undergraduates intending to pursue graduate level studies. While some standardized test results are used to determine a student’s promotion to the next grade or admittance into colleges and universities (Graham & Perin, 2007), the results of a standardized writing assessment have no bearing on student academic promotion or school accountability measures, both of which have often been tied to school funding (Pederson, 2007).

In the interest of self-preservation by teachers who are held to hardline individual accountability measures and by schools whose progress is based on the student growth supposedly measured by high stakes tests, it is only natural, therefore, that the bulk of literacy instructional time be devoted to the teaching of reading.

What’s more, the major professional organization—the International Literacy Association—that guides research, policy, and professional development in the literacy field, and which also provides a unifying community for its professionals spent roughly the first 60 years of its existence under the name of International Reading Association ([emphasis added] ILA, n.d.). It was just over half a dozen years ago in 2015 that the governing body of the organization decided that the group’s overall purpose was to encompass all aspects of literacy research,
instruction, and policy guidelines, and that the organization’s name should reflect that objective (ILA, 2018). Nevertheless, none of these factors negates the overall importance of writing.

**The Common Core State Standards Thrust Writing into the Spotlight**

After vacillating in and out of instructional importance for many years, writing is presently receiving a heightened sense of instructional attention with the release of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010. Currently, the standards are being implemented in 41 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity ([DoDEA] Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], n.d.-a, para. 2).

The CCSS signaled a concerted effort to standardize student learning standards nationwide in the subject areas of English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Literacy’s new, focused attention on writing is attributable to the CCSS’s inclusion of an increasingly complex set of writing skills in various genres from kindergarten to twelfth grade (Graham et al., 2015). The present, large-scale effort to implement a uniformly deliberate and scaffolded trajectory for student writing development is the first of its kind. As such, this new set of standards marked the first national attempt to enact recommendations made in 2003 by the National Commission on Writing and to return writing to a position of greater focus in U.S. classrooms again (Graham & Harris, 2015).

This new wave of attention also shed fresh light on the long-documented struggle educators have had teaching writing that goes back well over one hundred years. There have been research inquiries for decades since the study conducted by Copeland and Rideout (1901) on their Harvard University freshman composition students as well as concerted efforts by organizations such as the National Writing Project—which began in 1974 as the Bay Area
Writing Project (National Writing Project, n.d.-b)—to understand and address student writing development and its effective instruction.

Despite the efforts of such inquiries, little has changed in writing instruction. For one, writing remains an elusive component of literacy development because it is challenging to teach (Applebee & Langer, 2006). For example, Applebee & Langer (2006; 2009) found that despite process writing reported by teachers to be their dominant instructional method since the early 1980s, its implementation varies considerably. Furthermore, writing is overwhelming for teachers to grade in a timely manner (National Commission on Writing, 2003) and difficult to assess (Hillocks, 2003). The CCSS’s focus on writing as an essential literacy skill does provide a road map for student writing development; however, it likewise caused the persistent challenges with teaching writing to resurface anew (Graham et al., 2015).

Although the CCSS may have revived awareness of the challenges of teaching writing for some, these challenges have been evident for years in the consistently unchanging results of the NAEP writing assessments, which will be discussed at length in the following section.

The Context and Influence of NAEP on Writing Instruction

The History of NAEP Assessments

A major source of data used to identify leading trends in students’ writing development yields from NAEP assessments. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which publishes NAEP data reports, states that NAEP is a congressionally mandated project administered by NCES within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (National Center for Education Statistics [hereafter cited as NCES], 2018a). NAEP assessments have gathered information about the academic performance of students across the
United States in various subjects over the years—with writing included at periodic intervals since 1969 (NCES, 2018a).

In addition to the assessments themselves, NAEP gathers additional information from three types of survey questionnaires voluntarily completed by students, teachers, and administrators at participating schools (NCES, 2019e). These questionnaires exist to gather demographic information about students and their collective educational experiences. For instance NCES reported that 191,000 students completed the 2017 Grade Eight writing assessment, in which participants were asked: a) whether they had a desktop or laptop computer they could use in their home, b) the highest educational attainment level of each of their parents, c) how often they write for different audiences or readers, and d) how often they complete written assignments of two or more pages in length (p. 4-11; NCES, n.d.-b). The responses of each group surveyed acted as a source of additional information, or context of student learning both in and out of school. It is also used by teachers, policymakers, and researchers alike to improve the quality of education provided in classrooms across the country (NCES, 2019e).

The first year NAEP trial assessments were administered in 1969, students ages nine, 13, and 17 were assessed in citizenship, science, and writing performance (NCES, 2019d). They were initially selected by age and not by grade because state education policies for the ages students began school and grade retention policies varied across the country. Participants were also chosen by national regions to avoid reporting on any specific states (NCES, 2019d).

As a matter of standard procedure, after alternating NAEP assessments are administered each year³, NCES generates a report of the data for groups of students across states with similar characteristics such as race and ethnicity, gender, and free lunch status (NCES, 2018a). In 2002,

³ For a list of upcoming assessments and dates through 2029, visit the NCES website at https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/calendar.aspx
NCES (2018c) introduced the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) in six districts to “focus attention on urban districts” (para. 3). As of the 2017 NAEP administration (NCES, 2018c), that number has expanded to 27 districts across the country and includes such cities as Atlanta, Detroit, Houston, and San Diego (NCES, 2017a).

It is important to note that national assessments for writing were last administered in 2017 and then only to students in Grades 4 and 8. However, the last full report on writing performance data available from NCES was for the assessments administered in 2011. The writing of students in Grades 4, 8, and 12 at the national and state levels, and in Grades 4 and 8 for TUDA districts will not be assessed again until 2029 (NCES, 2018). As of the time of this writing, a report detailing the findings of the 2017 administration has not yet been released. According to NCES (2019f), initial analysis of students’ writing performance for that year “revealed potentially confounding factors in measuring performance” (para. 2).

The NAEP performance data that is perhaps particularly confounding for NCES is that yielded by the Grade 8 assessments. This is because the 2017 writing assessments marked the first time the test moved from being solely administered via laptop computers to also include tablets with attached keyboards (NCES, 2019a). This decision was made when NCES discovered that a dearth of research existed comparing students’ composition performance using digital devices. Therefore, it was decided to conduct a comparability study between Grade 8 participants as part of the 2017 assessment to determine whether the type of digital device students composed on affected the writing they produced. Interestingly, the results yielded lower writing performance scores with this change in devices as compared to the 2011 Grade 8 data.

Although NCES (2019a) found the data indicated potentially interesting insights, they felt that further investigation was needed to determine if the differences were related solely to a
change in the digital device used or if there were additional factors at play. Because of this, NCES (2019f) intended to release a special report in Summer 2020 after completing a more in-depth analysis of the performance data; however, that report is still pending. It will be interesting to ultimately see what NCES analysis determines to have influenced the decrease in student writing performance using a device considered commonplace by students today and whether this also impacts other longstanding findings (e.g., female students performing higher than their male counterparts and private school students outperforming public-school students). It will be even more interesting to see how these findings will—or even if they will—affect writing instruction and assessment and education policy.

**NAEP Data: Identifying Trends Over Time**

**NAEP Framework for Writing**

All NAEP assessments use a framework that guides their development and subject-specific content, and which include the thinking skills students need to address the academic complexities they face in and out of the classroom (NCES, 2019b). According to NAEP, these frameworks are created through a rigorous, thoughtful process that must meet current educational requirements, objectives, and curricula while also considering current teaching practices and research findings.

The 1998, 2002, and 2007, NAEP writing assessments were administered using the framework developed for the 1998 assessment, which involved a national consensus process with the guidance and approval of the National Assessment Governing Board (NCES, 1999). That rendition of the writing assessment required students to write essays for the following purposes:

- narrative (telling a story),
• informative (informing the reader), and

• persuasive (persuading the reader). (p. 3)

This writing framework was revised for Grades 8 and 12 in the 2011 assessment cycle to signal a focus on computer-based assessment and the social and educational changes brought about by an increased use of technology (NCES, 2012a). Students were asked to respond to one of three types of common communicative writing tasks through prompts asking that students do one of the following:

• To persuade, in order to change the reader’s point of view or affect the reader’s action.

• To explain, in order to expand the reader’s understanding.

• To convey experience (real or imagined), in order to communicate individual and imagined experience to others (p. 4).

The writing framework was revised yet again for the 2017 assessment taken by students in Grades 4 and 8 to include an emphasis on writing on digital devices as previously discussed. In particular, the change made was from desktop computers to writing with tablets with attached keyboards (NCES, 2019a), although the three types of writing tasks remained unchanged.

Under previous versions of the writing assessment based on the 1998 framework, students were evaluated on their ability to “develop and organize ideas, use language effectively, and be aware of their audience” (NCES, 1999, p. 133). Students completing the 2017 NAEP writing assessment were evaluated on three broad domains based on the learning standards and benchmarks held in common by most states that included development of ideas, organization of ideas, and language facility and conventions (p. 10; NCES, 2017b).
Achievement Levels in Writing

NAEP reports its assessment data in two ways, namely average national, state, and district scale scores aggregated by student groups (discussed previously). Average scores for writing assessments are reported using a 0-300 point scale (NCES, 2018d). Like all other NAEP scales, this data is based on a statistical procedure called Item Response Theory (ITR) (NCES, 2008), which is described to be “useful in summarizing student performance across a collection of test exercises requiring similar knowledge and skills” (para. 2).

The second method reports measures of students’ achievement levels using descriptive performance standards that indicate what students should know and be able to do. NAEP then reports these assessment results as percentages of students performing at three achievement levels defined as follows:

- **Basic:** Denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.
- **Proficient:** Represents solid academic performance. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.
- **Advanced:** Represents superior performance. (NCES (2012), p. 7)

NCES (2012) felt it necessary to make clear that although state and national officials might use their achievement levels frequently, they should “be used on a trial basis and … interpreted with caution” (p. 7). Examination of the NAEP 1992 Writing Report Card (Applebee & And Others, 1994) revealed that achievement levels were not part of the close analysis of Grade 4, 8, and 12 writing data at any point in this 230-page document. Based on NCES’s 2012 description of the levels as a “trial basis” and their lack of inclusion in the 1992 report⁴,

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⁴ This report is not available on the NCES website but can be found by searching for it in ERIC.
achievement levels appear to be a relatively new student performance indicator in the fifty-year history of NAEP assessments and the department’s warning should not be taken lightly when interpreting and using this data.

**Twenty Years of Accessible NAEP Writing Data**

A wide array of NAEP secondary student data is available in its online databases using the NCES Data Explorer (NCES, 2018b). Here, one can search the results of 12 different subjects, by grade, framework/year, and scale scores. Additional criteria such as jurisdiction (e.g., national public or charter), variables (e.g., gender or parental education level), and statistics (e.g., achievement levels discrete or cumulative and percentiles) for a narrower more specific snapshot of student performance are options to create custom data reports (NCES, n.d.-a). The following Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 contain data retrieved from customized searches of Grades 12, 8, and 4 NAEP Writing assessments using the NCES Data Explorer. The search data represented in these tables include the additional search criteria:

- all frameworks/years available based on previous assessment administration
- jurisdiction (national)
- statistics (achievement levels, discrete)

These three tables clearly illustrate that student writing achievement levels have remained relatively unchanged for more than twenty plus years. This, despite the changes during that expanse of time, namely the standards reform movement, No Child Left Behind, and now Common Core State Standards (all to be discussed further). Yet they have influenced, impacted, and shaped student writing whether intentional or not.

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5 For customized data reports visit [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE)
Figure 2.1

NAEP Achievement Levels, Grade 12 Writing

Note. Detail may not sum to total due to rounding.

Figure 2.2

NAEP Achievement Levels, Grade 8 Writing

Note. Detail may not sum to total due to rounding.
Figure 2.3

*NAEP Achievement Levels, Grade 4 Writing*

![Graph showing NAEP Achievement Levels, Grade 4 Writing](image)

*Note.* Detail may not sum to total due to rounding.

Such static achievement levels lend further credence to the need for this research inquiry and join more than a century of calls for increased attention to writing instruction in America’s classrooms and to the teachers who provide it. All of this has been published in research (Copeland & Rideout, 1901; Hillocks, 1986; Graves, 1978), national reports (National Commission on Writing, 2003; 2005), and professional publications and position statements (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Writing instruction has also been subject to explicit state learning standards (Bridge et al., 1997; Strickland et al., 2001) and student writing is now a key component of national learning standards (CCSS, 2010). Yet it seems that there is almost a complete disregard to all of this, given the lack of upward movement toward ensuring that students are better prepared to write successfully for college and careers. Taken together, it it evident that a serious look is needed into inconsistent teacher preparation requirements for pre-service ELA teachers and, in the case of this study, into the continued professional learning and growth of the nation’s in-service teachers of writing.
Trends in Adolescent Writing

Although an in-depth report on the 2017 Grade 8 NAEP writing assessment has been delayed, previously available reports on Grades 4, 8, and 12 survey data gathered as part of writing assessments have been the subject of researcher scrutiny and to identify student trends in writing. Applebee and Langer conducted two such close examinations in 2006 and 2009 respectively, and as two leading authors of the 1992 NAEP Writing Report Card. The trends they discovered in a more recent analyses will be discussed in the next section.

Time Spent Writing

As previously suggested, writing instruction has been generally neglected within the literacy field (Applebee & Langer, 2009), and consequently, students do not spend nearly enough time writing (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Graves, 1978; National Commission on Writing, 2003). This was found to be the case even though NAEP data suggests a link between the higher assessment scores of students who reported writing more often and for longer periods of time throughout the school day versus those who did not (Applebee & Langer, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

More specifically, Applebee and Langer (2006) conducted an analysis of NAEP survey data from a representative national sampling of students in Grades 4, 8, and 11 collected between 1971 to 2004. These data sets were analyzed to identify trends in writing instruction including time spent writing, amounts of instructional time on writing, types of writing students produced, and scale scores of the frequency of writing in school. These researchers’ findings support the assertion that students do not write enough in school.

In a second close examination of writing trends extracted from NAEP data from 1984 to 1996, Applebee and Langer (2006) did note some increase in the amount of writing students
were doing. In 1984, 41% of Grade 8 students indicated they had written at least one essay, composition, or theme in English class the week prior in comparison to 55% in 1996 (Applebee & Langer, 2006, p. 11). Their Grade 11 counterparts also experienced an increase from 60% to 69% during the same timeframe. Furthermore, the data set from a narrower expanse of time, 1988 to 1998, which employed a different sampling of student and teacher survey questions showed an increase in the length of writing required: papers of one-to-two pages to papers of three or more pages in length (p. 12). While Grade 12 students experienced the greatest increase for writing three or more pages (21%) when compared to their Grade 8 peers (4%), the trend leveled off and showed a 1% decrease between 1992 to 1998.

Explicit analysis by Applebee and Langer (2006) of the 2002 NAEP data sets demonstrated that while 40% of 8th graders spent between 15-30 minutes a day writing in ELA classes, those who spent 30-60 minutes doing so scored higher on average on NAEP writing assessments than their peers who wrote less frequently. This holds true for 12th grade students who wrote 4-5 pages a week in their ELA classes (National Assessment of Educational Statistics, 2012) versus those who wrote only 1-2 pages (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

Although national test scores in writing generally remain unchanged over the year, the analysis of NAEP data does seem to suggest that students who write as little as a paragraph across the curriculum at least once a week, score better than those who do not (Applebee & Langer, 2006). NCES (2012) likewise found that Grade 12 students who wrote four or more pages a week scored higher than their peers who did not. Again, these findings support the call for increased writing, together with writing across the curriculum to improve student writing scores.
Types of Writing

Applebee and Langer (2006) also identified trends in the types of writing students are most often asked to produce in school as part of their analysis of 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment data. Six types of writing were identified: analysis/interpretation, summary of reading, study or research reports, logs or journals, persuasion, and story. Of these, the researchers found that a greater percentage of Grade 12 students’ monthly writing fell within two types as compared to that completed in Grade 8, with the first being analysis/interpretation at 65% for Grade 12 versus 58% in Grade 8. The next most common type of writing completed on a monthly basis was the summary of reading. Here, 61% of Grade 12 students engaged in this type of writing, a negligible 1% higher than their Grade 8 counterparts.

Although these numbers show promise, they also reveal that only 42% of Grade 8 and 35% of Grade 12 students reported writing essays requiring analysis or interpretation a few times a year at the most. Yet it is the analytical, synthesis, and interpretation writing of expository papers that are essential to meet college writing expectations (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Fanetti et al., 2010). Applebee and Langer’s (2006) findings showed that large percentages of students are not receiving opportunities to engage in such writing.

Additionally, Grade 8 students reported study/research reports, logs/journals, persuasive, and fictional story writing with greater frequency—at least once a month. Yet fewer of the Grade 12 students delineated doing likewise at least monthly in every remaining category. In sum, these findings indicate that Grade 12 students engage in less writing than their younger counterparts, which is concerning given how crucial student writing ability is in relation to future success in both college and careers (CCSSI, n.d.-c.; National Commission on Writing, 2003; Graham & Perin, 2007b).
Stagnant Achievement Levels

Using the data available to them at the time, Applebee and Langer (2006) sought existing trends in writing proficiency, finding that student writing ability remained steady over time. Similarly, Graham & Perin (2007b) found that adolescent literacy levels kept stagnant, while any attempt to call attention to this finding focused almost exclusively on reading initiatives, rather than on writing. In some rather disconcerting findings, a later study by Applebee & Langer (2009) also noted that while Grade 12 students held constant writing performance levels, with a majority reaching “proficient,” the greatest gains in proficiency were made by Grade 4 students. According to currently available NAEP data from 2011, only about a quarter—24%—of 8th and 12th graders performed at the “proficient” level (NCES, 2012b).

Writing and Historically Marginalized Students

The NCES (1993) began tracking illiteracy rates in 1870, with initial data documenting the illiteracy of those 14 years or older by “race and nativity” (p. 21). At that time there were only two races identified, and the distinction of nativity seemed to apply solely to Whites who were differentiated as "natives" (those born in the U.S.) or “foreign born” (Whites not born in the U.S.). All other non-Whites were grouped into “Black and other” regardless of birthplace (p. 21). Today, NCES further aggregates NAEP assessment data into many other categories including six different race/ethnicity categories (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more races), socioeconomic status (SES) based on students’ eligibility in the National School Lunch Program, and parental education levels which yield a range of information about the writing achievement of White students and their historically marginalized peers (NCES, n.d.-a).
One item of interest is that White students and those not eligible for free/reduced lunch receive more time composing on computers than their counterparts (Applebee & Langer, 2006) and subsequently score higher on NAEP assessments. This is significant because of the role computers play in writing and potential workforce success (Graham & Perin, 2007b; NCES, 2012). Applebee and Langer (2006) also found that Black, Hispanic\(^6\), and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families are doing more writing than before; however, they note that it is likely of a lower substantive scholarly quality, such as journals and persuasive writing, rather than analytical writing.

While overall NAEP achievement results in 2011 (52% and 54% at Grade 8 and 12 respectively) mirror the students’ ability levels in my own classroom teaching experience, with most falling in the \textit{basic} level, data shows that Black and Hispanic Grade 12 students’ scores tell a different story. The writing of these adolescents’ is at the \textit{below basic} level more than double the number of those who score at \textit{proficient} and \textit{advanced} levels in all subgroups combined, putting them in a heavier concentration at the low end of the writing continuum (NCES, 2012). Applebee and Langer (2009) found that while there have been gains made by historically marginalized Black and Hispanic students, the persistent gaps that remain are still larger than their gains, which is troublesome.

Despite the success of White students over most of their peers, Asian students score highest over all other ethnic/racial groups (p. 12), while females, another historically marginalized group, score consistently higher in both Grade 8 and 12 in comparison to their male counterparts (Graham & Perin 2007b; NCES, 2012). Demographic location and school type seem to influence students’ writing performance as well. Students who attend private schools

\(^6\) Hispanic is the term used by NAEP in reference to students of Latino/Latina backgrounds, and the more contemporary, inclusive term Latinx.
score higher than their public-school counterparts, while suburban students score higher than all other locations, and urban students bringing up the rear (NCES, 2012). Lastly, and perhaps not surprisingly, students from higher SES brackets score above their lower SES peers in Grades 8 and 12. In sum, a variety of demographic descriptors have an influence on overall student writing performance as evidenced in the data and must be taken into consideration in any research related to the teaching of writing.

**The High School/College Writing Gap**

The National Commission on Writing claimed in its 2003 report, the last of its kind, that 50% of first-year college students lacked necessary writing skills (p. 14). In truth, there is a long-documented history of a gap between high school students’ writing abilities and their preparedness to meet the rigors of first-year college writing expectations (Copeland & Rideout, 1901; Elbow, 1968; The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Considering the negative effects of NCLB on the writing of U.S. school children for nearly a decade and a half (McCarthey, 2008), and the persistent stagnation of already low writing achievement scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), there seems to be no end in sight to this problem. It is actually not a question of whether today’s students *can* write, but rather if they can write well enough to “meet the demands they face in higher education and the emerging work environment” (National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 16).

First and foremost, there are discrepancies in the high school to college writing curriculum, which include the types of essays high school students are taught to write, how often they write, the length of the writing they are asked to produce, and the type of instruction they receive. For example, 70% of college professors reported occasionally expecting students to write papers of more than five pages, as compared to just 39% of high school teachers (Sanoff,
2006). This speaks further to the NAEP data indicating that students do not complete much writing in school (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Graves, 1978). Additionally problematic is that only 13% of social science and history professors combined never require their students to write papers versus a whopping 54% of their high school counterparts (Sanoff, 2006). Chances are that the high school students who never wrote outside of their English classes will be expected to write a significantly greater amount in their college content area classes than they did in high school and will have virtually no idea where to begin. Certainly, they will be, at the very least, writing for a freshman composition class since that requirement has grown more widespread in the past few decades (Moghtader et al., 2001).

There also seems to be a large gap in teachers’ perceptions of student readiness at both levels as high school educators seem more confident of their students’ preparedness to meet the rigors of undergraduate writing than their college and university level peers (Sanoff, 2006). The number of university educators who think their students are not prepared for college writing is fairly high, although there are perceptual differences on how high those numbers are in reality. One study found that 84% of college professors surveyed, as opposed to only 65% of high school teachers, felt their students could not handle college level writing (Sanoff, 2006).

Interestingly, there is also disagreement between high school teachers and college professors on the usefulness of standardized test results to rightly determine students’ preparedness for college studies (Sanoff, 2006). This discrepancy may speak to the accountability measures teachers at the high school level have imposed on them. High stakes tests measure easily quantifiable skills and knowledge, so that learning is seen to be easily measurable, resulting in teachers gearing a watered-down level of instruction (Fanetti et al., 2010), such as the five-paragraph essay. All of this at least helps explain why students are so
good at such essays; however, it would be helpful if high school teachers and professors could align their writing expectations in the very near future. As with all things concerning this issue, there is no single component that can explain away the existing gaps, which are discussed separately in the next section of this chapter.

Newkirk et al. (1977) affirmed the same problem first reported by Elbow (1968), that is, students’ inability to write with an audience in mind. In fact, this was one of the top five student writing issues identified by professors in Newkirk et al.’s (1977) study of freshmen composition teachers at the University of Texas Austin. The study participants identified additional problems with their students’ writing such as poor organization, lack of transitions and of revision, as well as failure to identify poorly written sentences. While problems with mechanics were also noted, the respondents were apt to attribute this issue to poor proofreading rather than to a lack of the writing skills noted in the Elbow (1968) study.

Regardless, such problems with student writing have led colleges and universities to recognize their students’ problems with writing, resulting in an increase in offerings of remedial writing courses. In many cases, this has resulted in an outright requirement of writing classes for all students by some universities (Moghtader et al., 2011). In a 2011 survey on the freshman composition class requirement, Moghtader et al. found increasing numbers of students in need of this course, and that universities were having a difficult time staffing them with qualified instructional personnel which naturally presents its own set of problems.

As noted previously, the only type of writing that high school seniors showed an increase in writing frequency over the years was analysis/interpretation (Applebee & Langer, 2006), which represents the more complex level of thinking they will be required to regularly demonstrate in future college writing. However, even that type of writing did not increase greatly
from Grade 8 to 12, which may contribute to the lack of such skills in first-year college students’ writing.

**Approaches to Writing Instruction**

As Graham and Perin (2007a) unequivocally state, there is no single, acceptable measure for teaching writing that will meet the needs of all students (p. 11). In fact, the manner in which writing as a mode of communication is actually taught to a developing writer can be carried out in multiple ways, some more effective than others, depending on the student acquiring the skill and the competence of the instructor. These ways of teaching and learning are called *epistemologies* and represent the way a learner may acquire knowledge, as well as the set of philosophical beliefs and values driving a teacher’s instructional methods (Hinchey, 2010). In addition, the actual pedagogical methods used by teachers are crucial to a discussion of the teaching of writing, and as such, the roles of each are discussed here.

**Epistemological Approaches to Writing Instruction**

*Positivism*

Positivism is considered the predecessor of the three main epistemological perspectives, and its origins are well-grounded in science. In its purest sense, it holds the notion that knowledge exists in nature and is just waiting to be noticed. This epistemology, therefore, advances the idea that knowledge is found outside of an individual in their surroundings (Bredo, 2006), and can only be acquired through observable, quantifiable means, resulting in reliable, factual findings (Crotty, 1998). If something is verifiable and quantifiable, a researcher can say that they are positive of a set of facts, hence the term *positivism*.

Positivism is typically identifiable in writing instruction that holds an emphasis on a final written product over the process used to compose it. Writers are expected to adhere to a
prescribed set of rigid rules governing grammar and structure. Weaver (1979) argues that writers would be better served if instruction emphasized the “deep structures” of writing, or a writer’s deeper intended meaning in their words, versus a perfunctory focus on external structures of proper form which often sacrifices content for form (Campbell, 2014). Strict adherence to formulas and prescribed forms of writing that disregard the developing writers’ process are clear examples of positivism in writing instruction.

**Constructivism**

The epistemology of constructivism developed after positivism and, unlike positivism, does not adhere to the concept of knowledge simply existing in the world and waiting to be observed (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Crotty (1998) states quite plainly, “We construct meaning” (p. 44), and this is done internally as a result of a person’s interaction with the world and other people in it (Hinchey, 2010). While Hinchey acknowledges the importance of the positivist principle with its emphasis on meaning as made up of facts and information, constructivism goes a step further. Here, true meaning occurs when information is processed by the individual, so that personal knowledge construction is valid to them (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, constructivist learning can be both quantitative, like positivism, as well as qualitative in nature.

**Critical Theory**

Closely related to its preceding epistemology of constructivism, Critical Theory shares its focus on student-directed learning. It also has the extra element of equity and social justice, advocating for demonstrations of learning intended to bring about a social change and empower students. Hinchey (2010) points out, “All constructivists are not critical theorists, but all critical theorists are constructivists” (p. 52). She goes on to clarify that between the two, critical theorists believe “there is no part of the status quo that should be left unquestioned” (p. 52), and likewise
for power (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Danforth and Smith’s work specifically addresses the concept of cultural imperialism and how schools, and especially teaching, have been politicized toward reifying the cultural imperialism of the dominant culture. It espouses that all things must be questioned with these tenets in mind: how we teach, what we teach, and why we teach it (Danforth & Smith, 2005; Hinchey, 2010). Nothing can claim to be known until the perspectives of others are first considered (Hinchey, 2010).

The espousal of any one of these epistemologies in writing instruction influences and is influenced by the pedagogical mindsets, dispositions, values, and belief systems of the teachers providing writing instruction. Similarly, epistemologies influence policy, assessment measures, standards, and instruction and play a role in writing instruction, as well as in the specific way an educator approaches it.

**Prevailing Instructional Methods**

Despite years of scholarly research, the standards movement, nationally standardized testing data, and the process writing movement of the 1970s, not much has changed in the way of teaching of writing (Applebee & Langer, 2009). There are, nevertheless, two prevailing schools of thought guiding how writing instruction is presented to children in the U.S. system, within which are differing instructional approaches.

*“Traditional” Instruction*

In consideration of how American schools are structured for learning, the very name itself—“traditional”—suggests a type of teaching and learning reliant on positivist methodology. This type of writing instruction relies heavily on strict adherence to rules, form, and structure over the substantive content of actual writing or thoughtful revision (Fleischer, 2004), the voice of the writer and author’s craft, or consideration of the intended audience (Elbow, 1968).
Traditional instruction also presupposes that composing a piece of writing is a simple, linear process that moves from prewriting to writing and rewriting (Hairston, 1982). It is also heavily reliant on skill and drill exercises presented to children in workbooks where, depending on the grade level, a focus on skills such as spelling, capitalization, and endless grammar exercises are the crux of what passes for writing instruction (Graves, 1978; Langer, 1984).

Positivist instruction regards teachers as the providers of information (Langer, 1984) and knowledge holders, while students are viewed as empty vessels to be filled with that knowledge because it is believed they have very little of their own. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) referred to this way of teaching as “banking” (p. 53) and described how the teacher’s knowledge is deposited into the passive learner. To assume the student has no knowledge of writing is to take a deficit approach to writing instruction (Brannon et al., 2008). To reach such a blanket conclusion about one’s students may certainly impede their writing development as it ensures they spend time receiving instruction on things they already know.

The prevailing format for teaching writing in traditional instruction, particularly persuasive or informational/expository writing, is the five-paragraph essay (FPE), which is very appealing to teachers. Campbell (2014) described FPE writing instruction as utilizing a fixed, linear formula consisting of an introductory paragraph concluding with a thesis, followed by three evidence paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph that reiterates the thesis. While the FPE provides teachers an easy way to prepare students to attain a level of writing proficiency for standardized tests (Wiley, 2000) and is intended to help them organize their thoughts, it ultimately impedes thinking because the focus ends up being all about filling in the formula, rather than attending to the meaning behind what the writer is trying to say (Wesley, 2000; Campbell, 2014). This method of instruction is so ubiquitous, that first-year college professors
bemoan the challenge of breaking their students from its use (Wesley, 2000). Whether it is just an instructional matter of ease for teachers (Wesley, 2000; Wiley, 2000) or the fact that, as Wiley (2000) asserts, teachers are so poorly prepared to teach writing that overreliance on formulas leave teachers unsure of what more they can do to further develop their students’ writing and ultimately does little to prepare students to handle the rigors of college writing.

**Student-Centered Instruction**

As in any educational setting, every writer brings a plethora of thoughts and experiences, both personal and academic—their individual “funds of knowledge”—to the task of writing (Amanti, 2005). A more progressive, student-centered instructional plan takes those experiences into account and gauges the starting points of students’ writing abilities through analysis of informal writing samples. Although very few students can be deemed to be advanced writers, progressive instruction embraces the idea that they come to class and approach writing tasks with a certain level of prior knowledge and writing experience (Amanti, 2005; Delpit, 2012). This is especially true for high school students who already possess some knowledge of writing structures and grammar and are equipped to begin developing their writing styles while staying within the basic parameters of the concepts their teachers may want or be required to teach.

The dominant approach in progressive writing instruction is process writing, an approach which signaled a shift in focus from the teacher to the writer (Langer, 1984). Applebee and Langer (2006) believe that process writing has been a prevalent instructional method since the early 1980s, first emerging in U.S. classrooms in the 1970s (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Since that time, it has been described in a variety of ways by literacy researchers and professionals. Hillocks (1986) identified *process writing* as the *natural process mode*, and Applebee and Langer (2006) referred to it as *process-oriented instruction* that taught “students the skills and
strategies needed to write effectively in a variety of contexts” by emphasizing “extensive prewriting activities, multiple drafts, sharing of work with partners or small groups, and careful attention to writing conventions before sharing with others” (p. 23). Onozawa (2010) defined process writing as an approach “.... where language learners focus on the process by which they produce their written products rather than on the products themselves” (p. 154). Pioneers in the approach include Graves (1983), Calkins (1983), and Atwell (1987)—all referring to the instructional method as Writers’ Workshop—together with Pritchard (1987) in his study of student writing by teachers trained through the National Writing Project.

Despite the fact that process writing has been an accepted instructional method for a few decades, teacher implementation varies considerably (Applebee & Langer, 2006). Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) assert that the original process has been distorted over time, becoming linear and prescriptive with commercial curriculum and writing textbooks contributing to the reason that there is not a single agreed upon method of implementation.

Nonetheless, Graham and Sandmel’s 2011 meta-analysis on process writing, state that there are some fundamental principles that characterize the approach: planning, drafting, revising, editing, individualized feedback from peers and teachers, and publishing. Graham and Perin (2007a) argued in their meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescent students that these defining steps should occur preferably in a Writer’s Workshop setting. These researchers also found that there was a moderate effect on the writing quality of students whose teachers received professional development on the implementation of the process writing approach. For those educators who did not receive such training, their students (grades 4-6) only showed only a small effect, with students in grades 7-12 having no effect. These researchers noted that
professional development in the implementation of this approach is crucial (Graham & Perin, 2007a).

The Role of the Teacher in Students’ Writing Development

As noted, students’ writing abilities can run the full gamut from poor to advanced, and everything in between (Brooks, 2007; Copeland & Rideout, 1901). Although they may bring pre-existing knowledge of language to the classroom (Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 2005), students do not develop as writers without some help along the way (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Graham & Harris, 1997).

As the disparities in student writing indicate, the importance of the teacher in their writing development, or the lack thereof, cannot be overlooked. The educator, charged with the responsibility of teaching writing to their pupils, bears great influence on young writer’s immediate and long-term academic, social, and workplace successes (Graham et al., 2015; NCTE, 2008; NCTE & IRA, 2012). For students to meet the increasing rigors of writing outcome expectations with each advancing year of schooling, they must be provided with purposeful and informed instruction (Graham & Harris, 2015). That is where the well-prepared teacher is indispensable (Delpit, 2012; Kiuhara et al., 2009).

The following categories of scholarship on the factors affecting the paramount role teachers play in student writing development are discussed in turn: teacher mindsets, professional preparation, and self-perception.

Teacher Mindsets

Based on personal experience, I know that teachers sometimes find themselves in situations where they feel ill-prepared to teach the material at hand (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). As such, they tend to fall back on the one thing they do know currently, namely, their own
learning experiences (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Such experiences can vary drastically and are greatly affected by what Lortie (1975) identified as the “apprenticeship-of-observation” (p. 61), or the way teachers are socialized to erroneously believe they are fully equipped to be teachers simply because they interacted with their own teachers over an extended period during their academic career. Thus, a student observes and experiences instruction and then assumes they can simply replicate what was observed in their own classroom without a hitch. Lortie asserts that this is rarely the case because such observational memories are devoid of any reflective thought processes or consideration of outside influences that contributed to the way lessons were implemented at the time. Yet these empirical learning experiences wield great influence on a teacher’s instructional decisions and are imitated unwittingly.

In Norman and Spencer’s (2005) qualitative study of 59 preservice teachers, one of the two questions they sought to answer was how other people and personal experiences shape preservice teachers’ views of writing instruction and learning to write. Their initial data source consisted of participant written autobiographies, and one finding was revealed the salient characteristics of effective teachers and instruction. Participants recalled the positive effects of teachers who were supportive and offered praise for their attempts as opposed to those who were overly critical of their writing and emphasized grammar and conventions over content. Interestingly, when the authors observed these pre-service teacher candidates during individual writing conferences within their student teaching placements, they resorted to the very same grading techniques of the educators they critiqued in their autobiographies. Kennedy (1998) attributes this phenomenon to teachers who “enter their professional educations trapped in their own relationship with the subject.” (p. 14)
Norman and Spencer (2005) concluded that to avoid the unconscious activation of Lortie’s (1975) apprenticeship-of-observation, all pre-service teachers need deliberate, professional preparation that takes into consideration their pre-existing beliefs. This would enable them to provide high-quality instruction and create positive, beneficial writing experiences for students. Otherwise, Norman and Spencer (2005) found, teachers will revert to the very habits they denounced as pre-service teachers once they begin teaching.

**Teacher Preparation**

**Pre-service Teachers**

Well-prepared teachers are essential to student writing development (Kiuhara et al., 2009). In an NCTE (2016b) policy statement titled, “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing,” literacy educators are called on to understand “appropriate genres for varied academic disciplines and the purposes and relationships that create those forms” (para. 5) in order to provide high-quality writing experiences for their students. Resultingly, this makes many teachers uncomfortable teaching writing since so many admit to not feeling properly prepared to do so (Birmi, 2012; Cheung, 2013; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011).

The National Commission on Writing (2003) pointed out that teachers receive little overall pre-service instruction on the teaching of writing. Echoing this finding, the National Writing Project and Nagin (2006) also discovered that a mere handful of states make completion of coursework in writing pedagogy a condition of certification, even for elementary level teachers. Kiuhara et al. (2009) found that teachers who are not taught to teach writing are uncomfortable assigning it. Yet, if students are to develop their writing skills, they need to be provided with opportunities to write (National Commission on Writing, 2003; Graham & Perin,
This general lack of preparation to teach writing cannot help but have a wide-reaching, negative effect on how U.S. teachers do or do not provide writing instruction.

**In-service Teachers**

Pre-service teacher preparation is inarguably an important first step in ensuring that students receive quality writing instruction. Continuous professional development of in-service teachers is equally imperative (ILA, 2018; National Commission on Writing, 2003; NCTE, 2006). Kiuhara et al. (2009) conducted a national survey of 361 high school teachers from around the country using a random stratified sampling procedure. The content areas the respondents represented were Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science. These researchers constructed seven guiding research questions on high school writing instruction, including one question related to the educators’ role in the teaching of writing: “Are high school teachers prepared to teach writing?” (p. 138). They found that 71% of all study participants indicated they received “minimal to no preparation to teach writing” during their pre-service teacher preparation, and only 44% received any in-service preparation. Of the three content areas, ELA teachers felt most prepared to teach writing, followed by Social Studies, and then Science teachers. Yet even among the ELA participants, only 47% agreed to some extent as having received adequate preparation to teach writing in their teacher education programs, and 58% felt similarly about the in-service development opportunities they received.

Gilbert and Graham (2010) conducted a study like that of Kiuhara et al. (2009) but focused solely on teachers of Grades 4-6. One of their research questions was, “Are elementary teachers in grades 4–6 prepared to teach writing?” (p. 498). Reflective of the results in the Kiuhara et al., (2009) high school teacher study, nearly two of every three participants indicated receiving “minimal to no preparation to teach writing” during their pre-service teacher preparation.
preparation coursework. But unlike their high school level colleagues, 80% felt they had received adequate to extensive preparation to teach writing since college, as well as on their own accord.

Both sets of results lend credence to the statement of the National Commission on Writing (2003), the authors of which also claimed that well-prepared teachers are essential to the writing reform movement. Students, in turn, stand to benefit the most as better prepared teachers will be able to address their specific writing needs and varying levels of proficiency. As recipients of a more focused, deliberate writing plan created and implemented by a prepared teacher, students can reasonably expect to participate in the most “influential roles in society” (Bazerman, 2016, p. 16) as a direct result of improved access to college and career opportunities earned from their highly developed writing skills (NCTE, 2008; NCTE & IRA. 2012).

Despite the evidence of a lack of formal and deliberate in-service preparation in the teaching of writing, educators, like their students, are not blank slates when it comes to this literacy skill. They too bring their prior experiences, beliefs, and knowledge of writing (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Porter & Brophy, 1998; Shrofel, 1991) to the task of learning how to teach writing (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Street, 2003) and the actual teaching of writing (Kennedy, 1998; Lortie, 1975). Whereas, elementary level teachers are often provided with commercial literacy programs, intermediate and secondary teachers are largely left without guidance or support in the teaching of writing (Street & Stang, 2008). And when left to their own devices—such as when implementing CCSS writing standards—educators will make the best instructional choices they can in a given situation (Fleischer, 2004; Lortie, 1975). Perhaps this is why the National Commission on Writing (2003) pointedly identified “comprehensive professional development for all teachers to improve classroom practice” (p. 32,
emphasis added) as one of its five major recommendations to address what they argue is the “need for a writing revolution.”

Depending on a given teacher’s mindset and dispositions toward writing and the formal pre- and in-service preparation to teach writing they may or may not have received (the extent of which can vary greatly in both cases), some of their instructional choices may be more beneficial to students’ writing development than others. Hence, continuing in-service professional growth of secondary ELA teachers of writing is crucial.

**Professional Development**

The idea is that professional learning and growth should continue once teachers complete their teacher preparation programs and enter the field of education, and the widely accepted method for accomplishing this goal is through participation in professional development. Tienken and Achilles (2003) define professional development (PD) as the “… ongoing education through which certified education professionals learn processes that relate to classroom instruction. The planned and long-term focus is on improved performance of professionals and their students” (p. 154).

Going as far back as the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (1983), which urged for increased PD to ameliorate student achievement, this expected outcome of improved teacher and student performance has become inextricably tied to the demands of various standards reform movements initiated by that report (Garet et al., 2001) and continued with NCLB legislation and the present Common Core State Standards Initiative. However, the success or failure of any educational reforms are directly dependent on the quality of the professional development (PD) provided for teachers (Desimone, 2011).
Two leading professional organizations that support teachers of writing, National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) and International Literacy Association (ILA), put forth their own separate documents regarding professional development for ELA teachers. NCTE first issued a formal position statement titled “Principles of Professional Development” (2006a). This statement was revised recently (NCTE, 2019) and renamed “Shifting from Professional Development to Professional Learning: Centering Teacher Empowerment.” In the revised statement for NCTE, Cabusao et al. (2019) assert that PD must consist of four specific components if it is to achieve the goal of being an “empowering experience.” Those include:

1. collaborative learning
2. participatory professional development
3. collaborative knowledge production
4. commitment to cultural competency (para. 2)

The International Literacy Association also released an updated set of standards for professional development in 2018 in its Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017 that alternately refer to PD as professional learning (PL). Specifically, Standard 6 of its seven standards focuses on Professional Learning and Leadership, and states: “Candidates are lifelong learners who reflect upon practice, use ongoing inquiry to improve their professional practice and enhance students’ literacy learning; advocate for students and their families to enhance students’ literacy learning” (p. 91). This standard is further broken down into four components, two of which explicitly define ILA’s position regarding PL for literacy professionals. Component 6.1 states: “Candidates are readers, writers, and lifelong learners who continually seek and engage with print and online professional resources and hold memberships in professional organizations” (p. 92). In addition, component 6.3 further defines PL, declaring:
“Candidates collaboratively participate in ongoing inquiry with colleagues and mentor teachers and participate in professional learning communities” (p. 92).

It is important to highlight the discrepancy between the terms *professional development* and *professional learning* used by NCTE and ILA in their respective updated position statements. This also includes the dual use of the term *professional learning* in the title of the newly revised NCTE (2019) position statement and the use of the term *professional development* thrice in the “Statement” section of that same document. While the terms *professional development* and *professional learning* are often used interchangeably, there is indeed a difference between the two that should not be dismissed as a superficial matter of terminology preference. The distinct differences are discussed at length in a section below.

**General Characteristics of Professional Development**

As stated above, PD is a common practice for the purpose of improving the performance of teachers and their students (Tienken & Achilles, 2003). Its typical delivery mode is in that of a single-day, often school-based in-service meeting (Tienken & Achilles, 2003), workshop, conference, college coursework (Desimone, 2011), and/or webinars delivered by presenters deemed to be “experts” (Hicks et al., 2018; Laster & Finkelstein, 2017). This, despite research findings that the material presented in these various PD sessions typically does not have a positive effect on the instructional practices of the attending teachers or improve student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hicks et al., 2018; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Sawyer & Stukey, 2019; Tienken & Achilles, 2003).

These traditional methods of PD, referred to as the *training approach* by Laster and Finkelstein (2017), are linked to a history of failure to meet the intended goal of PD (Easton, 2008; Fullan, 2007) and have, therefore, been heavily criticized for a variety of reasons. In the
training model, teachers receive the information presented by an expert (Laster & Finkelstein, 2017) in one of the standard learning environments listed above. Liberman and Wood (2003) refer to this approach as “one size fits all” (p. 4), noting that it is rarely relevant to every teacher attending the PD or to their specific instructional assignments. Additionally, Hicks et al. (2018) found this method problematic because it relegates the participants to passive recipients of information that some “expert” decided they needed to know. In essence, it approaches teachers from a deficit perspective, viewing them as in need of being developed and failing to recognize their own prior professional knowledge, the differences in their students, or their specific instructional needs at the given time. Hicks et al. (2018) also says that this type of PD leaves teachers feeling “de-professionalized” and that it is “intellectually and emotionally unsatisfying” (p. 2).

Awareness of these criticisms and the obvious lack of professional and student growth it produces has resulted in a body of research seeking to identify the actual components of effective PD. Researchers have posited five essential elements of effective PD: 1) content focus, 2) active participant learning, 3) coherence, 4) duration, and 5) collective participation (Lieberman, 2012; Desimone, 2009; Wei et al., 2010). With some overlap, McCarthey and Geoghegan (2016) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), expand on these PD elements, noting that they should be

- content specific
- part of a coherent school-wide effort
- engage teachers as active participants
- intensive, sustained, and ongoing, and linked to the analysis of teaching and student learning,
• and connected to professional learning communities that provide expert support through coaching, modeling, and feedback

**Characteristics of PD for Teachers of Writing**

While the features above provide clear direction for improving PD experiences for teachers and have been found to be effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2001), literacy experts contend that additional factors specifically addressing the PD needs of teachers of writing are necessary.

The role of teachers’ personal histories as writers has a great influence on their overall attitudes toward writing, the way they acquire knowledge of writing instructional methods, and how they teach writing to their students (Street and Stang, 2008). Teachers of writing also need PD that helps refine them as writers, which in turn, also supports their writing instruction (Fleischer, 2004; Street & Stang, 2008). This reality is especially pertinent given that teacher preparation is directly linked to student writing achievement (Allington & Johnston, 2000; Applebee & Langer, 2006, 2009; National Commission on Writing, 2003; NCTE, 2006; NWP & Nagin, 2006).

**The National Writing Project: An Exemplary Model**

The National Writing Project (NWP) was first established in 1974 as the Bay Area Writing Project, and its Core Principles embrace these additional PD elements specific to teachers of writing, in fact, they serve as the cornerstone of this organization’s PD for the teachers who participate in its programs (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; McCarthey & Geoghan, 2016; Street & Stand, 2008; Whyte et al., 2007). In fact, NWP’s PD program for teachers has been studied for decades and is well documented as to its effectiveness on its participants and their students. Described below are two such examples.
The Legacy of the NWP as a Broader Teaching Orientation

Whitney and Friedrich (2013) completed a qualitative study interviewing 110 former NWP participants over the course of two decades beginning in 1974. They wanted to know how former teacher-consultants (TCs) described the influence of their work with NWP on their teaching. The interviews revealed three major conclusions. First, the teachers’ purpose for writing was clarified or revised. Next, they began to see the act of writing as a means for learning, developing ideas, and writing for an audience. The teachers also organized their classroom for a workshop model, and lastly, they identified the importance of their own writing to their writing instruction. The researchers ultimately describe the legacy of the NWP as transcending orientation dispositions, values, lenses (perspectives), and stances toward classrooms and writers of teachers and students alike. This orientation to writing has had a far more enduring effect on participating educators than any other strategy or technique they learned. Therefore, Whitney and Friedrich recommended conceptualizing PD as a series of interactions with ideas and strategies rather than isolated, discrete events for a long-term effect.

Impact of the National Writing Project’s College-Ready Writers Program

In 2012, NWP won an Investing in Innovation grant from The U.S. Department of Education as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to provide professional development for secondary teachers in high-poverty, rural school districts across 10 states. The purpose of the PD was to prepare teachers to implement their College Ready Writers Program (CRWP) to improve the argument writing skills of students in Grades 7 through 10 based on nonfiction texts. In a study of this program, Gallagher et al. (2015) randomly assigned 44 rural high-poverty school districts to either the CRWP program or a control group for a two-
year period beginning in 2013. The districts not assigned to the CRWP group engaged in their regular, ongoing professional development activities.

As per their core principles, NWP designed a PD program that called for at least 80% of ELA teachers in each CRWP district to participate in a minimum of 45 hours of professional development each year for two years. The PD included model lessons, coaching, and collaborative lesson designing and planning. Teachers were also provided with a set of National Writing Project-developed curricular resources for argument writing that included formative assessments to inform instruction.

The results of the study showed that the students whose teachers received the CRWP PD outscored the students in the control groups, and that there was a positive, statistically significant impact on their writing in the areas of content, structure, stance, and conventions as measured by the Analytic Writing Continuum for Source-Based Argument Writing (Gallagher et al., 2015). Additionally, consistent implementation of the program in more than 20 districts across 10 states, indicated the effectiveness of this program.

The Shifting Nature of Teacher Professional Growth

Professional development is an established expectation and, in many cases, a required aspect of continuous teacher licensure. While long-standing methods of providing PD still exist at the school level, and professional organizations continue to hold local and national conferences annually, a change is nevertheless taking place. Research on effectiveness, greater understanding of adult learning, evolving foci in instructional goals and standards, technology, and teachers’ own interests and demands on their time necessitate something different, something more.
The NWP seems to have been the pioneer in embracing and even creating many aspects in the shifting focus toward professional development because it acknowledges the professionalism of its teacher participants and consultants. Recently, however, a broader new approach has begun re-envisioning PD as we know it, one that moves teachers into a more active role in their own professional growth and is likely attributable to technology (Hicks et al., 2018; Laster & Finkelstein, 2017). Known as Professional Learning (PL), it should not be confused with, or interchangeably referred to as Professional Development (PD) as the two are indeed different things.

**What is Professional Learning?**

To reiterate the main points of the previous section, PD was initially required of teachers with the best of intentions, thrust upon them by everyone from their local school administrators to their school districts and state boards of education. However, it became something that was done *to* them and not *for* them (Sawyer & Stukey, 2019), and definitely not *with* them. Hicks et al., (2018) assert the need for a fresh approach that is different from the old modus operandi, one that recognizes teachers as professionals and active participants in their own learning, with the capacity to contribute to that learning. Cabusao et al. (2019) call for, “participation, not indoctrination” of teachers to ensure their collective expertise is shared and accessible across a network of professionals. These alternate approaches to continuous, voluntary in-service professional growth opportunities are referred to as Professional Learning (PL).

**An Emerging Paradigm Shift**

As noted, the terms *professional development* and *professional learning* have often been used synonymously; however, upon close examination, there are indeed distinct differences between the two. Of the two professional organizations supporting teachers of writing cited
above, namely ILA and NCTE, ILA seems to be taking the more definitive lead on this shift from more passive PD to the more active PL. Each organizations’ shift will be examined in greater depth below.

**International Literacy Association**

In 2018, ILA updated its *Standards for Reading Professionals- Revised 2010* by publishing *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017*. Significant revisions include that of Standard 6 which is entirely focused on Professional Learning and Leadership. The new standards now also call on literacy educators, coaches, and leaders to actively “seek,” “engage,” and “participate” (p. 92) in their own professional learning and growth (ILA, 2018) as well as that of their peers.

Table 2.1 illustrates the differences in the components of Standard 6: Professional Learning and Leadership, together with the criteria descriptors pertaining to middle and high school teachers (the descriptors in Table 2.1 focus solely on middle and high school classroom teachers. It is worth noting that the 2010 standards publication was issued when the organization was known as the International Reading Association (IRA), and the 2017 revised edition (published in 2018) was issued after the organization transformed itself to include aspects of literacy more purposefully beyond just reading and changed its name to the International Literacy Association (ILA). Close examination of the differences in the wording between the two documents provides clear evidence of this change, together with the organization’s move toward more engaging and proactive professional growth for literacy educators.
<table>
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<th>IRA 2010</th>
<th>Candidates recognize the importance of, demonstrate, and facilitate professional learning and leadership as a career-long effort and responsibility (p. 15).</th>
<th>6.1: Demonstrates foundational knowledge of adult learning theories and related research about organizational change, professional development, and school culture (p. 30).</th>
<th>Standard 6 Descriptors: Demonstrate awareness of the factors that influence adult learning, organizational change, professional development, and school culture.</th>
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<tr>
<td>ILA 2017</td>
<td>Candidates are lifelong learners who reflect upon practice, use ongoing inquiry to improve their professional practice and enhance students’ literacy learning; advocate for students and their families to enhance students’ literacy learning (p. 91).</td>
<td>6.1: Candidates are readers, writers, and lifelong learners who continually seek and engage with print and online professional resources and hold memberships in professional organizations (p. 92).</td>
<td>Standard 6 Descriptors: Participate in a wide range of individual professional learning activities (e.g., reading, journaling, reflective notetaking, blogging) that support lifelong professional growth. Participate in PL activities designed to improve a school’s literacy program. Belong to literacy- and content-focused professional organizations. Regularly read and critique professional publications and promising practices and educational research. Identify relevant and authentic PL opportunities. Select and engage critically and strategically with PL content to improve literacy-related teaching and learning practices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3: Participate in, design, facilitate, lead, and evaluate effective and differentiated professional development programs (p. 32).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard 6 Descriptors: Contribute to the collective improvement of disciplinary literacy teaching and learning in their school through participation in and/or co-planning and co-facilitation of in-school, district, state, national, and/or virtual PL opportunities. Collect, analyze, and act on context-specific data as part of inquiry work. Address and solve instructional dilemmas with colleagues within the PL community to improve discipline-specific literacy teaching and learning. Understand the importance of their role as teacher leaders.</td>
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Where ILA has put forth its one set of standards for professional learning and leadership for literacy professionals, NCTE has two such statements on its website. One reflects the organization’s revised position on professional development entitled “Shifting from Professional Development to Professional Learning: Centering Teacher Empowerment,” and the other is, “Resolution on Professional Learning in the Teaching of Writing for Inservice Teachers.” The latter of these specifically addresses the professional learning of teachers of writing. Each of these statements will be discussed below.

The very title of the NCTE revised 2019 position statement signals an unquestionable declaration to move toward a more teacher-centered focus on professional learning. Cabusao et al., (2019) explain that the intention of this revised position is to shift professional growth from the passive “PD for teachers” to the more active “PD with teachers.” Inarguably, the revised document transitions away from its former language which defined what PD is to a clear explanation of what NCTE currently embraces as PL (see Table 2.2 below). The revision accentuates all the positive traits of the recipients of PL, referring to educators as professionals, co-constructors of knowledge, and holders of their own expertise; individuals who become “empowered educators, visionary leaders, and inspired knowledge producers” as a result of this deliberate shift (Cabusao et al., 2019).

However, in contrast to ILA’s updated set of professional standards on PL, the overall language of NCTE’s revised PL statement is directed at those who provide opportunities for professional learning and growth for teachers as opposed to a call to action on the part of the teachers to take command of their own professional growth. Table 2.2 illustrates this language and NCTE’s precise shift from PD in 2006 to PL in 2019.
### Table 2.2

**NCTE Position Statements on PD and PL**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1. Professional development of teachers/faculty is a central factor leading to student success.</td>
<td>1. Teachers are seen as professionals; their knowledge and expertise are valued.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Professional development treats teachers/faculty members as the professionals they are.</td>
<td>2. Teachers are seen as co-constructors of knowledge, not as passive recipients of knowledge, i.e., transmission model.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Professional development supports teachers/faculty at all levels of expertise; its value is confirmed by external validation.</td>
<td>3. Collaboration is recognized as a vital component. When teachers share their own expertise, learning from each other, as well as from administrators and consultants, a different kind of knowledge results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Professional development relies on a rich mix of resources, including a theoretical and philosophical base; a research base; and illustrations of good practices.</td>
<td>4. Teachers are encouraged to explore published research and given time to do that. However, this published research is not presented to teachers as the sole source of expertise but rather as part of a conversation with teachers that inspires their thinking and helps them develop their own expertise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Professional development can take many different forms and employs various modes of engagement.</td>
<td>5. Teachers are encouraged to use their expertise to study the learning in their own classrooms in a systematic manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The best models of professional development—best in the sense of enhancing first, teacher practice leading to second, student learning—are characterized by sustained activities, by engagement with administrators, and by community-based learning.</td>
<td>6. Teachers set goals for their own learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Professional development is systematically reviewed with evidence of efficacy provided by a review process including multiple stakeholders and NCTE’s own research.</td>
<td>7. Teachers become empowered educators, visionary leaders, and inspired knowledge producers through professional learning and cultural competency.</td>
</tr>
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In addition to the changes noted in Table 2.2, Cabusao et al. (2019) reassert the organization’s commitment to facilitating the professional growth of its members, especially as
the profession navigates the “corporatization of education” (para. 1) in the 21st century. They also state that it is “necessary to rethink the notion of professional development” (para. 1) and that by focusing on PL, the revised statement “enables us to honor the vision that NCTE developed in 1911, as well as to articulate the continued relevance of NCTE to the professional growth of ELA teachers in the 21st century.”

Despite the declared intentions of the statement revision, its authors then go on to use the term professional development, the very term it professes to be shifting away from, eight times in the document, with three of these occurring in the section immediately following the intentions outlined in its Overview (cited above) which reads in its entirety as follows [emphasis added]:

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) supports the professional development of English language arts (ELA) teachers at all levels—from PreK to the university level. In order for professional development to be an empowering experience for ELA educators, it must have four key dimensions: collaborative learning, participatory professional development, collaborative knowledge production, commitment to cultural competency. (Cabusao et al., 2019)

It should be noted that the term professional learning is also used twelve times after the Overview. This interchangeable use of these two terms presents a bit of a contradiction regarding the clear stance of the organization and suggests why the two approaches to continuous teacher growth is still so easily confused during this paradigm shift.

NCTE’s second position statement specifically concerns the professional learning of in-service teachers of writing and as previously noted is entitled “Resolution on Professional Learning in the Teaching of Writing for Inservice Teachers” (2018). Here the organization reaffirms a commitment to its original position, “Professional development of teachers/faculty is
a central factor leading to student success” (NCTE, 2006) and notes that *professional learning* [emphasis added] is to be completed by “providing books, digital resources, annual and regional conventions, and institutes that are all accessible to teachers to enhance their writing curricula and instructional practices” (NCTE, 2018).

However, within the same document, NCTE (2018) encourages “school districts, colleges, and universities who provide such high-quality professional learning *to give* [emphasis added] teachers the necessary strategies and curricula to deliver effective writing instruction” (para. 4). Such wording contradicts the language in its pointed call in the very same position statement (noted above), which claims that “Research indicates that growing numbers of teachers *seek* (emphasis added) ongoing high-quality professional learning that focuses on writing in the disciplines across all grade levels” (para.2).

Seemingly insignificant on the surface, there are noteworthy significant differences between the two emphasized phrases. “Teachers seek” indicates active engagement and proactive pursuit of professional learning on the part of educators, hence *professional learning*; whereas the phrase “to give” paints teachers as passive recipients of what others decide they need to know, a previously noted criticism of professional development. As the concept of professional growth continues to shift from the passive to the active, NCTE should clarify its definition of the term in its full meaning to match the organization’s stated firm resolve to support professional learning and disambiguate the concept for literacy professionals, administrators, educators in other disciplines, and policymakers, all of whom who could benefit from a clear stance on this issue.
New Approaches to Teacher Professional Growth

As the paradigm shifts, it is important to identify what exactly constitutes PL, together with the evolving modes of learning it entails. In keeping with its professed mission to support the work of literacy educators at all levels mentioned above (“About Us,” n.d.), ILA has taken a firm lead as evidenced in their 2018 Literacy Leadership Brief entitled “Democratizing Professional Growth with Teachers from Development to Learning.” This document outlines the critiques of traditional PD, and clearly specifies what its PL alternative should be. ILA does not put forth a single, distinct definition of PL in this brief; however, it asserts a rationale for it, describing the core tenets of the approach and arguing for its necessity.

Why PL?

As discussed above, one critique of traditional PD models is that they treat teachers as passive recipients of someone else’s knowledge (Hicks et al., 2018; Laster & Finkelstein, 2017; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). In other words, PD tends to occur under the direction of local administration, the school district, or the state who ensure that material or information deemed crucial is presented to teachers with little consideration of the individual educator’s starting point, instructional assignment, goals, context, or the personalized instructional needs of students within their charge. Conversely, PL views teachers as “learners able to model and enact the processes of active inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving with their students” (Hicks et al., 2018, p. 3).

The ILA brief further calls on PL opportunities offered for and with teachers to include consideration for the “civic and aspirational goals” teachers have for their students determined by their active “inquiry and authentic assessment” of those children (p. 3). Key to this shift is a respect and acknowledgment that teachers have continuing aspirations to invest time, energy, and
money into their own education before and after entering the classroom, all of which has afforded them a wealth of practical knowledge and experience that should be recognized, respected, honored and leveraged for their continued professional growth (Hicks et al., 2018). Throughout its brief, ILA reiterates that teachers must be considered when implementing what they call “democratic PL” (p. 4). Participation in democratic PL represents self-empowerment and a sense of agency for teachers (Hicks et al., 2018).

**Core Tenets of PL.** Hicks et al. (2018) assert that democratic PL is unique in that it is ongoing versus the traditional “one shot fashion” of traditional PD. (p. 2) Whereas educators were simply “given” (or required to complete) PD, now they can use professional judgement, and elect to voluntarily participate in the PL of their choice. PL which they view as providing content that directly impacts their current classroom routines and is linked to the instructional needs of their students and their own relevant, self-perceived professional growth areas. The PL teachers select allows them to engage at the level they currently find themselves, rather than being forced to operate under the assumption that they know nothing of the content at hand. As such, it allows them to co-construct and even facilitate their own learning (Hicks et al., 2018). Such PL is engaging and presents opportunities for teachers to interact with other professionals as equals to co-construct subsequent professional growth rather than simply be subjected to the expertise of an individual(s) outside their current realities.

PL learning environments also differ from traditional PD even though they may take place in the teachers’ schools—what ILA calls “ambient PL” (p. 5), as PL offers options of face-to-face, online, and hybrid formats. Online and hybrid (sometimes called blended) formats can be either synchronous (e.g., participants meet simultaneously on set dates and times) or asynchronous (e.g., participant engagement is not simultaneous given that engagement occurs
across a time span, such as a month or semester). This allows teachers greater opportunity to choose flexible PL options with learning environments that allow them to enter in/out of as their schedules allow, and for a convenient duration of time. Online PL now available to teachers include social media outlets like Facebook pages and groups, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and LinkedIn, among others. Some of these online digital spaces consist of formal Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and others are more informal.

It is important to note that teachers who engage in PL have not completely abandoned traditional avenues of professional growth such as workshops, conferences, and webinars, or even university coursework. Rather, these newer PL options simply offer them additional venues for interacting and learning from and with colleagues in ways that best suit their personalized needs, schedules, and interests.

As there is no single “right” way to teach writing, there is no single “right” way to engage in PL. However, the 2018 ILA leadership brief by no means suggests a blind leap into an entirely new direction as it calls on researchers to work with teachers in examining PL as an evolving social learning process (p. 6). Reading comprehension researchers Laster and Finkelstein (2017) also stress that teachers’ personalized learning choices need further scholarly investigation.

**Teacher as Writer Self-Perception**

Applegate and Applegate (2004) proclaimed that it is the beliefs of the teacher that drive classroom instruction and they do so, according to Kiuhara et al. (2009) by teaching what they feel is important. The pedagogical beliefs that shape their decisions are guided by many factors. One such influence noted previously is an educator’s pre-existing beliefs about teaching (Street & Stang, 2009) which are the result of their own educational experiences (Lortie, 1975; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Another is teacher preparation and continued professional growth (ILA, 2018; National Commission on Writing, 2003; NCTE, 2006). Sometimes the level of importance a
Teacher places on teaching writing is also influenced by external factors such as assessments and accountability measures (Bridge et al., 1997; Hillocks, 2003). Equally influential to how important teachers consider writing is the writing they do themselves and if they self-identify as writers.

Teacher writing activities may consist of everything from keeping a personal journal, writing lesson plans, emails, and shopping lists, to publishing blogs, books, or articles. However, when it comes to self-identifying as a writer, average people—teachers included—fall into two distinct, self-identified categories: writers and non-writers (Brooks, 2007). Graves (1978) stated that for many, writing is the flawless adherence to rules, and, therefore, “People do not see themselves as writers with anything of value or interest worth reading. Besides, if they were to write anything, it would be done “incompetently” (p. 4). He explained that for them, “real writing” is a mode of communication reserved for professionals or for “proper etiquette” (p. 4).

This restrictive, self-imposed definition of a writer influences the perception teachers have of themselves and in turn affects how they teach writing and whether they possess the self-efficacy to do so effectively. Some educators believe good writing cannot be taught, which stems from the notion that professional, published writers are the only individuals who constitute real writers (Graham & Harris, 1997). Thus, writing, like creating art, is viewed as an innate gift or talent so that not everyone possesses such abilities. Such perceptions of who a writer is directly impacts how and what educators teach by way of writing (National Commission on Writing, 2003).

In their 2004 study, Applegate and Applegate explored the idea that teachers are expected to teach reading and, although they may not have an enthusiasm for it in their own lives, are expected to instill this love for reading in their own students. They questioned what effect
teachers could have on students when they themselves did not have such an enthusiasm and named this *The Peter Effect* from a story about the Apostle Peter in the biblical Book of Acts. In this story, a beggar crippled from birth asks Peter for some money, to which he replies that he cannot give the man what he does not have. Therefore, Applegate and Applegate (2004) applied this idea to teachers who do not like reading themselves yet must instill this desire in their students.

While the original idea was related to reading, it can certainly be applied to teaching writing, especially in relation to educators who do not view themselves as writers or who only recognize the writing they do in their lives as strictly utilitarian, discounting it as “real writing” (Graves, 1978, p. 4). Such lack of enthusiasm for writing may contribute to how teachers do or do not emphasize the teaching of writing in their classrooms, and even how they teach it or what they emphasize in their instruction.

Brooks looked at this concept in his 2007 qualitative case study of four, fourth grade teachers, all identified as exemplary literacy teachers by their administrators. He wanted to know if these teachers of reading and writing considered themselves to be readers and writers themselves and how the latter might affect their writing instruction. He found that each teacher believed themself to be a competent teacher of writing. However, their definitions of what was considered “writing” varied and, therefore, impacted whether they believed themselves to be writers or just people who could write. Two of the teachers cautioned that being a writer did not assure that a teacher necessarily had the pedagogical knowledge or skills to make the best writing instructional decisions.

Only one of the four teachers described herself as an individual who writes competently, and yet she still did not see herself as a writer. While she looked to her students’ ability levels
and interests to help guide the direction of her instruction, her main goal for them was that they become competent writers. Whether they ultimately found writing to be a pleasurable activity or not was of little concern to her. The sole male educator of the four was also the only teacher to identify district-level mandates as the primary factor guiding his instructional decisions and ranked second the item that the others scored first, namely, the ability and interests of his students.

Brooks (2007) reasoned that teacher attitudes and dispositions do vary; however, a positive self-perception of their own writing ability was consistent across his four participants, even if they did not consider themselves to be writers. Despite their self-perceptions, these educators felt they had a responsibility to meet the academic needs of their students. In addition, they also had different perceptions of writing “competency” and the ultimate purposes for their students to be able to write well. The key finding in Brooks’ study seems to be that teachers must consider themselves competent in their own writing, rather than consider themselves to be “writers.”

Whyte, et al. (2007) conducted a related qualitative study seeking to empirically examine the claim that has defined the PD model of the National Writing Project (NWP) since the late 1970s. NWP strongly believes that teachers of writing should write (p. 5), a conviction included in the executive summary of The Neglected “R” (National Commission on Writing, 2003). As such, these researchers specifically wanted to know if the writing completed by their 35 public school ELA teachers (grades 7-12) from a southeastern state had any effect on their students’ writing achievement. They first had the educators complete extensive surveys regarding their writing behaviors, after which they gathered writing samples from these teachers’ students. Data analysis revealed that students of teachers with high writing frequency levels in their personal
lives, both those who had gone through the NWP workshop series and those who had not, had higher student writing scores than did those with low levels of personal writing (p. 11).

Although only two specific empirical studies on teacher self-perceptions regarding writing are delineated here given the paucity of research in this area, their findings suggest that a teacher’s self-perception as a writer is indeed important. If educators view the writing activities they do on a regular basis as writing and, therefore, call themselves writers, they approach writing instruction in a manner quite different from those who do not consider themselves writers. The same holds true for educators who consider themselves to be competent writers as such a sense of self-efficacy influences their instruction as well. Thus, if a teacher feels able to handle the writing task at hand adeptly and has the prerequisite skills to support that self-perception, student writing development will be positive.

External Factors Affecting Writing Instruction

Aside from the internal teacher factors discussed above, there are two significant external factors that also influence educator instructional decisions: state and federal learning standards and assessment measures.

The Impact of Standards-Based Reform

The seminal report, A Nation At Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), helped launch the standards reform movement. While it did a thorough job of pointing out various problematic issues concerning content, expectations, teaching, and time, thus raising the cry for a national standards reform, it failed to suggest specific guidelines to correct these inadequacies in the American education system. States were left to take the initiative to develop their own localized educational standards in lieu of federal guidance. Some readily accepted the challenge while others did not.
Any successes achieved by some states, however, were short lived. For example, gains made by individual states in the 1990s such as Kentucky (Bridge et al., 1997) and New Jersey (Strickland et al., 2001) suffered a setback to their writing standards’ reform movements with the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which started a new era for literacy instruction and assessment. An era in which the subject of writing was excluded from the high stakes testing frenzy that took hold of the U.S. education system (Kiuhara et al., 2009).

During that time, only math and reading were subject to scrutiny (Pederson, 2007), despite the ironic NCLB Act grant authorization (Section 2332) to the National Writing Project for the purposes of providing “teacher training programs in effective approaches and processes for the teaching of writing” (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2004, para. b.1). But because of things like funding and school ratings—so much was riding on the demonstration of adequate yearly progress (AYP) as measured by high stakes tests in math and reading—writing instruction took a hiatus from the classroom (Pedersen, 2007).

As mentioned, CCSS adopted in 2010 revived writing as an area of instructional focus subsequent to the NCLB period of dormancy. Two national assessments were developed to assess student learning of these new national standards: The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, commonly referred to as PARCC exams, and Smarter Balanced created by Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (CCSSI, n.d.-d).

While progressive in sophistication, the CCSS currently in place at the time of this study only provide benchmarks for student learning. The creators of these standards left teachers with the freedom to make their own instructional decisions regarding how to implement them in curriculum and instruction. Since there is no single, one-size-fits-all writing instructional method that applies to all students (Graham & Perin, 2007b), this is a benefit to teachers as they are free
to make instructional decisions that meet the needs of their individual student populations. On the other hand, this may seem like an overwhelming challenge to educators whose inadequate preparation in writing instruction may leave them without a clear instructional path to help their students achieve these learning standards.

Issues with Assessments

Once writing is taught to students, assessment naturally follows suit, as in the NAEP writing assessments. These are moored in the National Assessment Governing Board’s 2011 Framework in which writing is defined as: “… a complex, multifaceted, and purposeful act of communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a variety of language resources and technological tools.” (NCES, 2012, p. 4)

However, even if clearly defined, assessing writing, as previously stated, is no easy task (Hillocks, 2003; National Commission on Writing, 2003).

Hillocks (2003) particularly has a lot to say about writing assessments in his research, declaring that no single piece of writing can fully indicate a student’s overall writing proficiency. This pronouncement was affirmed by the National Commission on Writing report (2003) and in the NCTE (2006b) position statement on writing assessments. Despite the clear guidance provided by these documents, this is exactly how students are all too often assessed in writing.

Such a firm declaration by Hillocks and supported by the National Commission on Writing and NCTE presents a whole different set of issues, specifically, that teachers elect to only instruct in the type of writing assessed given that their own performance evaluations are now linked to their student outcomes on such measures—even if this means changing their whole literacy curriculum to accommodate the assessment (Higgins et al., 2006). More bluntly, Hillocks (2003) states that “writing assessment drives instruction” (p. 64), further arguing that
writing assessments set the parameters for the exact kind of writing that should be taught and establishes the standards for what constitutes “good writing,” which in turn dictates what is considered writing proficiency. Ultimately, all these factors determine what students learn about writing (p. 64). Not holding back his contempt for the whole business, Hillocks (2003) concluded by saying that “....no matter how foolish the testing, it drives the writing curriculum…” (p. 64). The “foolishness” of the assessments can be found in the fact that what is assessed, or how students are assessed, is often contradictory to how they are taught (Hillocks, 2003).

The Strickland, et al. (2001) research team was comprised of a group of four teachers and two teacher educators from New Jersey, all of whom who felt it necessary to examine their respective professional roles in relation to various issues concerning their state’s writing reform initiatives. Two of these factors included the strict adherence to rubrics used for high stakes tests and teachers’ the individually motivated instructional emphases of each teacher researcher and their students’ writing needs with the necessity to meet assessment expectations. They found that, like Hillocks argued (2003), their assessments did not align with “best practices” in writing instruction, and specifically with the process writing approach. Notwithstanding, Strickland, et al. (2001) also found that when the pressure was on, teachers disregarded what they knew to be best practices in favor of teaching to the test at hand, especially if they were not adequately prepared to teach writing. This finding affirms the findings of Norman and Spencer (2005) discussed above within the Teacher Mindsets subsection.

The newly redesigned SAT essay test is an example of this misalignment. When taking the essay portion of the SAT, students are expected to “explain how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience” with supporting evidence (The College Board, n.d., para. 2).
Students are given 50 minutes to complete this written portion of the test, and while it is designed to be like “a typical college writing assignment,” (para. 1) its implementation illustrates the issue raised by Hillocks (2003), namely, that most writing assessments do not reflect the type of writing instruction students receive prior to completing the writing portion of standardized exams. Specifically, if students are taught using the process writing approach, writing a one-time essay in response to a prompt they have not seen prior to the test, and within a 50-minute timeframe, is contrary to the type of instruction they receive.

Many college and university application processes are now requiring prospective students to submit essays in addition to, or in place of standardized test scores to directly counteract a misalignment in standardized test writing outcomes and what these individuals can actually produce in writing. Some examples of universities where this is common practice include the University of Chicago (see, https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/apply), Columbia University (see https://undergrad.admissions.columbia.edu/apply/first-year/testing), and University of Pennsylvania (see https://admissions.upenn.edu/admissions-and-financial-aid/apply-for-admission). Depending on the institution, this could be anywhere from one to six essays, all of which allow time for prospective students to demonstrate evidence of their writing process in authentic samples. With the number of colleges and universities making standardized test scores optional for its applicants, the ability to write well is growing increasingly more important to our secondary students.

**Written Tests That Do Not Assess Writing**

Elbow (2004) proclaimed that “writing serves reading” (p. 10). Not only is this true in classroom instruction, but it is also evidenced in assessments of writing, as this is the means often used to assess reading comprehension, rather than writing itself (Snow & Biancarosa,
2003). A case in point is the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) which uses the Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago (REACH) Exams (2017).⁷

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, CPS required all its K-12 teachers⁸ to administer the two subsets of the REACH exams called “beginning of year” (BOY) and “end of year” (EOY) to students annually for the purpose of evaluating teachers’ instructional effectiveness and measuring student growth (Chicago Public School, 2015). Again prior to the pandemic, all high school teachers were required to choose at least two different classes of the same course (e.g., English I) from their instructional program for the purpose of administering these assessments. Based on a given teacher’s course load—in the case of the exam administered in English classes—one would think that the test would assess students’ knowledge of literature, literary elements, grammar, and/or the basic conventions of writing, as these are all content usually associated with the classes in which they are administered. Yet this is not the case. Rather, since the inception of this latest accountability measure in 2015, Chicago Public Schools high school English teachers are required to administer an exam purposed to assess students’ “literacy” as evidenced by the titles of the exams I personally had to administer: *Literacy Grade 10 Performance Task*, and *Literacy Grade 12 Performance Task* (2017).

These exams solely consist of reading passages drawn from historic speeches delivered by famous individuals such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton on women’s suffrage and President Bill Clinton on the Oklahoma City Bombing, to name two examples. The intention is that the students nor their teachers are to have seen these speeches prior to the tests. Therefore, this is not an assessment based on any specific content or process, but rather on specific writing skills.

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⁷ These documents are only accessible online to current CPS employees.

⁸ Currently (2022), only teachers who are non-tenured or tenured but did not receive a satisfactory rating during the school year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 are required to administer the REACH exam.
connected to content-area text reading comprehension. As discussed in the introduction to this literature review, the term “literacy” denotes the related skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening which are recognized by the Common Core literacy standards. The REACH test standards are theoretically based on CCSS literacy skills, and their name would, by definition, indicate that these are the skill areas being assessed. Yet this is not the case.

The test directions identify alignment with anywhere from two-to-four different sets of CCSS reading standards—depending on the grade level—with the reading standards most identified for assessment including those citing strong textual evidence to support analysis (RI 9-10.1 and RI. 11-12.1) and those requiring students to determine a central idea and analyze its development and how it is shaped by the details (RI 9-10.2 and RI. 11-12.2) The writing standards cited in the directions call for the examinee to identify evidence for literary or informational texts (W.9.10 and W.11.12.9). Interestingly, Grade 10 is the only grade that does not identify a writing standard as being assessed is the Literacy REACH exams.

Identified writing standards or not, all the high school level REACH exams include the following cautionary note for teachers:

*Note: This REACH performance Task assesses “literacy through reading” standards. Students will respond in writing. However, this task is NOT a measure of student writing. Expectations do not require a fully developed essay (i.e., introductions, conclusions, mechanics, and grammar). (p. 1)

Calling an assessment a “literacy performance task” when in reality it is merely evaluating students’ reading comprehension and no other element of literacy, particularly writing, is a prime example of the contradiction that educators were warned about by Hillocks (2003) regarding writing and assessments. All of this further proves his point, especially given
that this test only allows students one class period for completion, specifically stated to be 45 minutes.

The puzzling question here is when exactly CPS expects that CCSS-related writing skills are to be taught, for they must indeed be taught. Writing is not a skill that comes naturally; it must be taught (Graham & Harris, 1997). This is the contradiction and the real problem with writing assessments: The presumption that writing skills are being taught; whereas the mandatory assessment measures in place to assess teacher’s writing instruction and/or their students’ level of learning and application of writing skills are not aligned in any way.

Summary

Although national writing data indicates a prolonged period of stagnation in students’ writing development, students can learn to be good writers and enjoy all the benefits that are associated with that accomplishment. Achieving this goal is reliant on competent, well-prepared teachers of writing. High caliber writing teachers are especially important when reports like The Neglected “R” (2003) and Writing Next (2007) make recommendations for instruction, and the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) outline a set of progressively complex writing skills for students. None of these documents offer an implementation guide that informs teachers how to best teach writing. Graham and Perin (2007a) explain that this is because there is no single “right” way to teach writing; therefore, the authors of these documents wisely refrained from dictating instructional guidelines for teachers. As clearly emphasized in this chapter, what is “right” varies depending on the specific writing task at hand and the present skill level of the students within a given context. Therefore, it takes well-prepared teachers to recognize where their students are for a
given point of instruction, to then can expertly provide them with varied opportunities to write using appropriate, effective instructional practices and formative and summative assessments.

As demonstrated in this literature review, teachers bring a variety of preconceived notions to the act of teaching (Brooks, 2007; Lortie, 1975). Also, their own prior and current experiences with writing contribute to their writing instruction. Regardless of how these factors may interact and influence overall teaching, nothing can take the place of a teacher who possesses a strong foundation of well-established writing theory and research-based practices (Graham & Harris, 2015), and who considers themselves to be a competent writer. Kiuhara et al. (2009) argue that effective writing instruction hinges upon such a teacher.

Given that teachers are so essential, if pre-service preparation does not include a strong focus on writing pedagogy, practicing teachers must participate in effective in-service professional learning activities to implement up-to-date, research-based practices that work in tandem with what they learn about their students’ writing instructional needs, all of which is based on their present skill levels, personal motivation, and identifying demographics (Brooks, 2007; NCTE, 2016).

In conclusion, NAEP data and subsequent analyses thereof show a stagnation in student writing scores over an extended period. This stagnation is despite the shift in focus provided by state and federal instructional standards, the inclusion of the process writing approach in writing instruction (without stable consistency), and even adjusting how and what is measured on NAEP writing assessments. What seems to be missing in this equation is the longitudinal focus on the professional preparation of teachers of writing, both pre-service and in-service. Between the examination of state-level, pre-service teacher preparation requirements, to the lack of consistent, effective provision of intentional professional development for in-service teachers, the current
study examines a relatively unexplored area worthy of investigation. In sum, it focuses on ELA high school teachers’ self-selected professional learning choices, activities which they determined would meet their goals of professional growth as teachers of writing.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

I am a firm believer that teachers will find time for what they believe is important.

―Tina Curry, Ed.D.

Purpose of the Research

The implications of a person’s ability to write well have been established by research as outlined in the previous chapters (Bazerman, 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; National Commission 2003, 2004, 2005). Further, students’ futures are greatly dependent on the quality and effectiveness of teacher instruction (Delpit, 2012; Graham & Harris, 1997; Kiuhara et al., 2009) detailed in Chapter Two. While writing as a literacy skill has been placed in the spotlight with its inclusion in the CCSS (Graham & Harris, 2015), the “How To” of actual writing instruction has been left to the discretion of individual teachers. On one hand, instructional freedom is highly desirable in the field of education because it allows teachers to make choices that are best for their unique student populations. However, with that freedom comes the inherent responsibility of making the soundest instructional decisions possible every time students receive writing instruction.

The assumption underlying this study is that teachers everywhere, at all grade levels strive to accomplish such instruction and instructional decisions for their students. It is the intrinsic nature of the teaching profession. Therein lies the issue at hand: Many teachers feel professionally ill-prepared, both at the pre-service level (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; National Commission on Writing, 2003) and at the in-service level (Kiuhara et al., 2009; NWP & Nagin, 2006) to implement the effective instructional practices necessary to provide their students with
strong writing skills. Nevertheless, secondary ELA teachers, by and large, bear the instructional burden of teaching writing to their students. If my assumption is correct, the question remains as to how exactly these teachers fulfill their compelling sense of professional obligation despite the self-reported lack of pre- and in-service preparation in the teaching of writing to meet the needs of their students.

In consideration of the overall importance of writing to students’ future lives, and teacher reports of the lack of proper preparation provided for the teaching of writing, this is a matter that deserves focused attention. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the professional learning choices that current in-service secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing, as well as the factors they identify as guiding those choices.

**Research Questions**

The questions guiding this mixed methods study include:

1. How do secondary ELA teachers describe effective writing instruction?
2. What specific aspects of their writing practice have teachers sought to develop?
3. What measures, if any, have these teachers taken to grow professionally as teachers of writing?
   A. What is the rationale for their professional learning choices specifically related to writing instruction?
   B. To what extent do secondary ELA teachers of writing feel their engagement in PD or PL on writing instruction has helped them grow as teachers of writing?

**Guiding Theoretical Framework**

To determine the appropriate theoretical perspectives to guide this study, I first considered the teachers who are at the heart of this inquiry—the secondary ELA teachers of
writing who voluntarily seek out and engage in professional learning that is, by and large, not required of them. I have known many of these teachers, in fact consider myself to be one. While there is only the Kiuhara et al. (2009) study that cited a small percentage (44%) of high school teachers who indicated they had ever received any in-service professional development on the teaching of writing, I believe secondary ELA teachers of writing are out in the world actively seeking their own professional learning.

These teachers are motivated by their own reasons to seek professional growth. They find writing to be an enjoyable and personally satisfying endeavor and want to share that with their students. Additionally, these educators identify students’ particular struggles with writing and recognize the importance of writing to their academic success, both in the present and in the future. They also recognize the importance for students to be able to communicate well in writing in a variety of life situations, both in the present and in the future. These teachers understand that whatever preparation they had to teach writing does not match the realities of their current instructional situations. Thus, they trust in their own ability to seek out the resources necessary to address such issues, to learn, to grow, and to be better teachers of writing going forward. These teachers—the ones I just know exist, who are quietly going about the business of learning and growing as teachers of writing—are the basis for this study and its guiding theoretical approach.

As highlighted in Chapter 2 (see “In-Service Teachers” section), despite whatever preparation teachers may lack, they are not blank slates when it comes to writing and teaching writing. They come into the profession equipped with a foundation upon which to grow professionally as writers and teachers of writing through engagement in self-directed, continuous
learning opportunities. Given these beliefs, the main theoretical perspectives framing this research inquiry are Adult Learning Theory, self-efficacy, and Social Cognitive Theory.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Adult Learning Theory has evolved and expanded over the course of nearly a century with the earliest research in this area published by American educational psychologists and thinkers Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, and Woodyard in their 1928 book *Adult Learning*. In this work, they took a behavioral psychological approach to learning theory, an approach that prevailed until the 1950s when researchers began to view the theory through the lens of adult learners’ cognitive development (Merriam, 2001). It was not until 1968 when Malcolm Knowles (1980) introduced the concept of *andragogy*, the art and science of helping adults learn, which remains dominant even today. While this was a new idea for American educational thought and research, Reischmann (in Knowles et al., 2014) points out that andragogy was actually a part of European educational thought since its introduction by Alexander Kapp in 1833. Kapp described andragogy as the “lifelong necessity to learn” (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 2). He also noted that learning takes place not just through the teacher, but as part of the learner’s self-reflection and life experience. Knowles’ own later initial explanation of andragogy was marked by two defining traits: adult learners are self-directed and autonomous, and teachers serve as facilitators of learning, not transmitters of their knowledge (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2014).

Adult Learning Theory is a rather obscure concept as it views learning to be influenced by each person’s unique life experiences and guided by an equally unique set of intended learning goals. Currently, there is not a single learning theory or model in existence that is applicable to all adult learners (Merriam, 2001, 2008; TEAL Centers Staff, 2011). Nevertheless,
there is agreement on a general set of guiding principles that builds and expands on Knowles’
original two descriptors of adult learners. In an extended andragogical model, adult learners

• are positioned to learn when their experiences reveal a need to know or do
  something,

• make the decision to engage in learning that is life-, task-, or problem-centered,

• are motivated by their sense of self-esteem, a better quality of life, self-
  actualization, and personal fulfillment (Harris, 2003)

Furthermore, learning needs are linked to the changing roles of the learner who is driven
by internal motivation and problem-centered factors that demand immediate application of the
newly acquired knowledge (Merriam, 2001). The learning the adult engages in can also be
described as co-operative, experiential, individualized, contextualized, voluntary, and
immediately applicable to the learner’s real-life needs (Zmeyov, 1998).

In the andragogical model of Adult Learning Theory, secondary ELA teachers do not
need to be told that they should or must engage in professional learning in the teaching of
writing. Rather, they recognize a “problem of practice” they feel compelled to address and
through their own self-reflection on their practice they choose to engage in professional learning
to grow as teachers of writing. Thus, they self-determine to take command of their instructional
realities. Through these conscious and deliberate choices, secondary ELA teachers possess a
sense of agency to take command of their life experiences as teachers of writing, as well as the
self-efficacy to believe that their choices will result in the desired outcome: Their students will
grow as writers because they will have grown as teachers of writing.
Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Self-Efficacy

Like Adult Learning Theory, Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory ([SCT], 1986) has also expanded and evolved from his earlier position on Social Learning Theory ([SLT], 1977b) of which the notion of self-efficacy was a major construct, one that takes a more defined role in SCT. His early work contributed a broadening theoretical perspective to the existing SLT concepts first posited by Miller and Dollard (1941) which Bandura grew to feel were too narrow and closely tied to Watson’s Behaviorist Theory, the dominating perspective of the psychology field since the early 1900s (Grusec, 1992). Bandura felt that traditional behaviorist theories of learning were not entirely inaccurate, but certainly incomplete (Bandura, 1977b). His second publication with colleague Richard Walters, Social Learning and Personality Development (1963), signaled a clear departure from the prevailing behaviorist views of SLT at the time (Grusec, 1992). He argued that current notions of SLT were based on observations of animals and human learning in extremely limited situations devoid of human interaction (Grusec, 1992). He expanded that theory by adding two key ideas:

- there is a mediating process that occurs between stimuli and a person’s response to it
- observational learning takes place when a behavior is learned from the environment (Bandura, 1977)

Within the same year, Bandura wrote specifically about his theory of self-efficacy (1977a), a term which refers to a person’s belief in their worth, influence, and capacity. This was related to their “personal aspirations and perceived opportunities” (p. 10) to affect change that resulted in accomplishing their desired outcome or enacting behavior that produced a specific performance. Bandura (2000) later said it this way: “When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and
failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up and settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their efforts to master the challenge” (p. 120).

Later Bandura expanded on his earlier position on SLT, noting that the development of SCT was his attempt to further separate from the behavioral aspects of SLT that he felt still had a limiting effect on the theory (Stone, 1998). Thus, his new theory stressed a greater emphasis on the cognitive processes of learners and further advanced the construct of self introduced in his work in the previous decade (Bandura, 1977a). As the pioneer and preeminent scholar of SCT, Bandura first posited the construct of self-efficacy as a function of this broader theory.

Self-efficacy is therefore a theoretical construct of both SLT and SCT that is relevant to the current research study and is reliant on a set of three interactive factors, as in personal, behavioral, and environmental (Bandura, 1984; Ponton & Carr, 2012). Bandura refers to this interaction as the model of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1989a). He describes the functioning of these interactive factors, together with their influence on the concept of self-efficacy, as follows:

Persons are neither autonomous agents nor mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make casual contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation. In this model… action, cognitive, affective, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants. (1989a, p. 1175)

For this study, these three factors serve as interactive determinants of secondary ELA teachers’ practices and proactive engagement in their own continuous professional growth (Bandura, 1986 & 1989a). The following is an example of how this relationship could be
actualized for the study’s focal teachers: An educators’ perceived ability to teach writing (behavioral factors) is influenced by their own experiences with writing and learning to write and the belief attached to the importance of teaching writing (personal factors), together with the assessed need to teach writing to their students based on observation of the students’ current writing abilities (environmental factors). Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of this example.

**Figure 3.1**

_Reciprocal Causation Model Applied to Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing_

In other words, as teachers come to recognize their students’ deficient writing skills through their performance on written assessments (both informal and standardized), and the overall quality of their written work on formative and summative assignments, educators may begin to identify areas of their own pedagogical knowledge of writing instruction—the methods
and strategies they possess to effectively teach writing—that also need development. This recognition, coupled with their personal beliefs that writing proficiency is a skill essential to students’ capabilities to communicate effectively and for continuous academic success, becomes an issue of personal instructional responsibility, a moral imperative as a teacher. Additionally, there may be social justice considerations for many educators. These personal realizations activate the need to seek out and engage in continued professional growth as it pertains to teaching writing.

Teachers of writing cognitively assess their own need for pedagogical growth based on observational learning as they evaluate students’ written performances, relevant skills, and their own instructional practices (Bandura, 1989a). This is where a high sense of self-efficacy is essential as it influences how they elect (or not) to participate in continued professional learning. Possessing the belief that one’s engagement in professional learning activities will affect a desired change is not enough. A teacher must act on that belief. The resulting action of PL engagement has the reciprocal and momentous effect of further stimulating the growth of self-efficacy and cognitive processing skills. Simply put, a strong sense of self-efficacy in one’s ability to affect change influences the cognitive processing of potential actions and relevant PL so that participation in it then strengthens their sense of instructional self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Kazdin, 1979).

To reiterate, a strong sense of teacher self-efficacy is crucial to effective writing instruction and subsequent student writing development. To this end, professional educators have the self-efficacy to acknowledge the issue, determine a course of remedy, and then take actionable steps to address it despite any challenges or deterrents they may face. Based on the theories discussed above and my own experiences and observations, I believe that the sense of
teacher self-efficacy is so strong that educators are not only willing to acknowledge gaps in their skill sets but are also ready to experience the discomfort of trial and error, to face their assumptions and possible misconceptions, and to reconstruct their beliefs and instructional practices for accomplishing the task. This deep-rooted belief in oneself allows teachers to continue developing instructional skills in the teaching of writing through involvement in professional learning activities until they are satisfied with the outcome.

To conclude, the frameworks of Adult Learning Theory and the reciprocal relationship of the self-efficacy construct contained within the broader Social Cognitive Theory provide a guide for examining the motivation(s) and rationale(s) for the professional learning choices related to writing instruction of the participants in this study.

**Research Design**

This mixed methods study intended to capture a more comprehensive story of what the participants do or have done regarding their PL and development choices and the rationale for these actions. In determining the study design, I was cognizant of the fact that individually, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies have their own freestanding merits. In turn, each has its share of limitations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and presents its own specific challenges for implementation. However, when used in concert, the two methodological approaches complement each other to provide a more complete, multidimensional picture of a research topic. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) pointedly assert that, “…the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (p. 5).

This design choice is supported by a statement contained in the American Educational Research Association’s 2019 Annual Meeting Call for Submissions (AERA, 2018), themed
“Leveraging Education Research in a ‘Post-Truth’ Era: Multimodal Narratives to Democratize Evidence.” This document described the way “powerful leaders” have embraced a post-truth paradigm wherein current policy issues were advanced by appealing to feelings and emotions rather than facts (AERA, 2018). To this point, AERA stated that nearly three quarters of a century ago, W.E.B. DuBois argued that facts could nonetheless be manipulated, leading the education research field to its current state.

Compounding the problem of the increasing dismissability of factual evidence is the undermining of the teaching profession by special-interest groups, together with “teacher-proofing pedagogy, fast-tracking professional preparation, and dismissing powerful evidence on child development” in pursuit of data driven results (AERA, 2018, p. 1). This places educational researchers in a double conundrum of “disrespected craft in a disrespected field” (p. 1). To combat this reality, AERA called on prospective presenters to

…mobilize interdisciplinary and mixed-method bodies of evidence that coalesce to tell powerful, empirically driven, and multimodal narratives connecting the findings of advanced statistics to the lived experiences of educators, students, and parents across multiple contexts. (p. 1).

Therefore, to stand against what AERA (2018) calls a “post-truth paradigm” (p. 1), researchers are called upon to conduct mixed-method research wherever possible and to join their work with that of other disciplines, so as to create a “powerful front in the fight to create evidence of the complexities of our work and to provide hope to those who have been denied equal access to the best education possible” (p. 1). This impassioned plea speaks of standing in defense of the teaching profession, as well as the social justice aspect of defending the right to a quality education for the most vulnerable students.
As such, this study uses an explanatory sequential, mixed-methods research design in order to attain the best that each approach has to offer, and so that the separate data sets will complement and fortify the findings of each other to provide a more complete picture of my topic of inquiry. By definition, this type of methodology begins with statistical data collection during its quantitative phase (an online survey) followed by a qualitative phase, (focus groups). When utilizing a mixed method research design, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stress that:

It is important to bear in mind that a holistic approach to knowledge construction necessitates that the methods are not simply used to generate a greater volume of data but that the methods inform one another and are used in a way that creates a more complex understanding of social reality. (p. 172-173)

This research design follows this sequence so that the second qualitative data set serves to further explain or tell a more descriptive and emerging story of the first statistical data set collected from the quantitative phase—hence the name *explanatory sequential mixed methods* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Instrument Design**

To ensure that the two separate data sets did more than produce a large volume of data, the instruments drew on existing research findings and were mindfully designed to function separately when their respective data were gathered while still complementing each other when analyzed in relation to one another. Below is a description of how each was created separately using the body of existing research as a guide and then carefully checked with a matrix to make sure the two survey instruments worked together to address a) the study's research questions; b) that qualitative measures and data explained the quantitative data according to the research design; and c) that each data set edified and strengthened the other (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1

Survey Items & Focus Group Prompts Alignment to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey Items/Questions</th>
<th>Focus Group Prompts/Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do secondary ELA teachers describe effective writing instruction?</td>
<td>14. Aside from established curricular obligations at your school, what level of importance do you personally place on teaching writing in your classroom?</td>
<td>What aspects of writing do you feel are most essential to your students’ academic success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Of the following common instructional practices, which are the most essential to your own classroom writing instruction?</td>
<td>What does writing instruction look like in your classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Which of the following factors have the greatest influence on your writing instructional decisions?</td>
<td>Tell me what hinders you from teaching the writing you feel your students need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What would you say is the greatest influence on your instructional decisions regarding writing instruction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.1 continued

Survey Items & Focus Group Prompts Alignment to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Survey Questions</th>
<th>Survey Items/Questions</th>
<th>Focus Group Prompts/Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3B. To what extent do secondary ELA teachers of writing feel their engagement in PD or PL on writing instruction has helped them grow as teachers of writing?</td>
<td>21. To what extent do you feel the professional development or professional learning you have completed has helped you grow as a teacher of writing?</td>
<td>Do you feel your sense of self-efficacy as a writer and teacher of writing influences your voluntary engagement in PL or that your engagement in PL increases your sense of self-efficacy as a writer and teacher of writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. How confident are you in your ability to improve your students’ writing skills after completing professional development or professional learning in the teaching of writing?</td>
<td>Of the aspects of your practice that you wish to improve, how well does the PL you complete accomplish that goal? How do you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do you know now that you wish you had known about writing when you started teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The first nine survey items collected demographic information.*

**Survey Design**

To aid in the development of the survey, I referred to the only quantitative survey instrument I located during my review of the literature that had some resemblance to what I hoped to accomplish with my survey. This five-section, 76-item survey instrument was designed by Kiuhara et al., (2009) for a national survey on teaching writing to high school students. I chose to scale my survey down significantly from theirs to include only the section and items that were relevant to my research focus. First, I drew on some items from the researchers’ demographic section that were pertinent to my study’s demographic needs. These included gender, race/ethnicity, grades taught, school setting, and number of years teaching. Since my research needs differed from the Kiuhara et al. study, I cherrypicked specific prompts and response options from the survey’s writing instruction and writing activities sections (e.g., teaching grammar, have students study and emulate/imitate good writing models) and the writing adaptations section (e.g., conference with students about their writing, have students conference with each other about their writing). I used these responses to guide the creation of my survey item regarding essential common instructional practices used by the respondents.
Kiuhara, et al., (2009) also constructed lists of instructional practices and writing activities based on the meta-analyses of experimental/quasi-experimental writing intervention research (Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b) which was recently published at the time of their study. The Kiuhara, et al. study also influenced the way I referred to the instructional practice options provided teachers in the prompt asking participants to identify the practices they thought were “most essential to writing instruction.” Instead of referring to the practices as “evidenced based” or “research based” I simply labeled them as “common instructional practices” to eliminate the likelihood that participants might respond in what Kiuhara et al., referred to as a “socially desirable manner” (p. 139). By this, I hoped to get participating teachers’ most honest responses, devoid of unconscious influence by the wording of the survey item.

What secondary ELA teachers of writing deemed to be essential teaching practices was just one aspect of what I hoped to discover from my research. I also wanted to look at the findings from other scholarly studies and convert those findings into survey questions to best answer my research questions. For example, Applegate and Applegate (2004) found that teachers’ beliefs drive their instructional decisions. This leads them to teach what they feel is important (Kiuhara, et al., 2009). Hence, I created survey items that focused on teachers’ beliefs regarding the importance of writing and teaching writing, including the extent to which the external factors that Bridge et al., (1997) and Hillocks (2003) claim exist have an influence on their instruction.

Furthermore, since professional organizations like ILA (2018) and NCTE (2006) champion continued professional growth for teachers of writing, I wanted to know if my study participants were engaging in it on their own given the sparse body of research indicating it is missing from the larger equation of professional practice (Kiuhara at al. 2009). In addition, I
wanted to know if my study would support the findings of Brooks (2007) and Whyte, et al. (2007) whose research suggests a connection between teachers’ self-perception as competent writers and their ability, or self-efficacy, to teach their own students to be competent writers.

Since self-efficacy is a guiding theoretical framework for this study, I needed to craft some very specific survey items to try to assess the existence of this concept in my own participants and how it influenced their instruction and PL pursuits. Therefore, I asked participants about their level of confidence in their own writing abilities and the frequency of their own writing engagement. I hoped to thereby see if there was a relationship between how often the focal teachers wrote and whether they felt confident as writers. I further wanted to know if personal levels of self-efficacy as confident writers affected how they felt about the PL they completed and likewise what effect that PL had on their sense of self-efficacy to meet their instructional goals. I used Likert scale response options to elicit data related to all these areas.

In sum, I used these key related findings drawn from existing research to craft survey questions that carefully aligned to my intended goals and research questions for the first phase of my study (see Appendix A).

**Focus Group Questions Design**

The creation of a semi-structured focus group interview tool required me to delve deeper into what was behind some of the survey responses so that I could best elicit explicit, identifiable evidence from the teachers’ lived experiences. For example, in the survey, I asked how much pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing participants completed; therefore, in the focus groups I needed teachers to speak more directly to what that pre-service preparation entailed to attain a complete picture. Also, since self-efficacy was such a critical feature of this study, it was imperative that I ask questions of my focus groups that the survey could not capture.
adequately—especially those which garnered Likert scale responses. For example, where survey respondents could indicate their feelings of better preparedness to teach writing after completing PL, that data necessitated the focus groups to describe with specificity how they knew they were better prepared and what the observable effects of their PL engagement were on both their instruction and their students’ writing development. In the case of the factors that influenced teachers’ PL choices, the qualitative responses from the focus groups needed to explain and clarify the quantitative survey results surrounding that issue, which if analyzed in isolation, could be very misleading as to the teachers’ top motivation for engaging in PL. (Please note that this and other complementary findings are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.)

In conclusion, I designed each research instrument to yield its share of valuable data in response to my scholarly goals and more specifically my research questions to add to the larger body of professional knowledge outlined in Chapters One and Two. The quantitative instrument was designed to gather initial information related to pre-existing research and address gaps in that same body of knowledge. The survey instrument and its data then served as a guide for the design of the qualitative instrument. The purpose of the focus group interview protocol was to ensure the data it yielded, namely, vital supporting, explanatory data, could extend the findings of the same research that informed the survey design. In other words—the stories and the lived experiences of the teachers behind the anonymous survey data. What resulted was a more detailed description concerning a complex issue, which fulfilled the purpose of this scholarly inquiry design (see Chapter Six).

**Phase 1: Quantitative Empirical/Analytical Data Processes**

*Implementing the Survey Instrument*

I created the survey using the online tool SurveyMonkey for the purpose of capturing
specific data about the teacher participants (see Appendix A). I set up the survey so that it was linked from the website directly to my National Louis email account so that I was the only one who had access to the data. This way, I could also keep track of responses and the resulting data as it was gathered.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that such a research instrument can be used to create a numeric description of participants’ basic demographic information, as well as additional survey content. My survey contained five specific parts beyond the initial items that gathered basic demographic descriptions of the participants which included

- pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing
- personal attitudes and dispositions toward writing
- instructional practices they believed to represent effective writing instruction
- specific professional learning experiences they elected to engage in to develop themselves as teachers of writing, together with their rationale for doing so

At the end of this survey, teachers were asked to provide personal contact information only if interested in further participation in the qualitative phase of the research project, namely, in one of three Zoom Focus Groups discussed in detail later in this chapter.

**Identifying the Ideal Participants**

In order to identify participants for this study, I ran a cursory Internet search of a sampling of other states’ secondary ELA teacher certification requirements in different regions of the country (Arizona, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Florida). These were in addition to the top five secondary ELA teacher producing states closely examined in Chapter 1 (Texas, California, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania). This revealed that each of these states also have their own unique certification requirements for secondary ELA teachers. Based on the
findings of the initial, purposeful research of the top five ELA teacher-producing states I then assumed that the other five states likely do not have teaching licensure requirements for the teaching of writing as well.

Thus, my participant selection process took into consideration the importance of writing, the stagnation of national writing scores, and the lack of teacher licensure requirements in the teaching of writing. This led me to determine that the ideal participants should be currently licensed and practicing secondary (grades 9-12) English Language Arts teachers. Considering the inconsistencies found in my formal and informal searches of state teacher licensure practices, I also determined that ideal participants should also be drawn from states around the country. This is because a geographically diverse group of research participants holds the greatest potential to reveal the myriad ways which secondary ELA teachers address a common instructional challenge faced by many: feeling ill-prepared to teach writing after completing pre-service preparation and continuing to feel this given a lack of continuing, in-service professional development offerings.

To locate such a group of educators, I initially turned to and intended to draw survey participants exclusively from a closed Facebook group called High School ELA Teachers Support Group that I have belonged to for nearly five years. The stated purpose of this group (see Figure 3.2) is to provide “A place for high school (grades 9-12) English teachers [to] share resources, stories, and ideas” (High School ELA Teachers Support Group, 2015). Although this group can be found in an open search, prospective members must request admittance of the group administrator (also a member and a high school ELA teacher). This process involves answering a few short questions about one’s purpose for joining the group and the grade levels
one teaches. There were over 7,000 members in the group at the time I solicited their help with my research survey in Summer 2020.

**Figure 3.2**

*Screenshot of High School ELA Teachers Support Group*

Based on the information included in members’ posts over the last few years, I knew this community of teachers consisted of educators from all over the country teaching in a variety of settings—public, private, and online—at each secondary grade level. There are numerous posts daily from members seeking to draw on the expertise of the community regarding curricular resource recommendations, feedback on course materials, suggested instructional ideas and methods, and professional advice or support from fellow group members. Although I was aware that some group members were teaching at the middle school level and have their own grade level contributions to make, I elected to focus solely on ELA educators of grades 9-12 for two reasons:

- teacher preparation programs focus on these grade levels for the licensure of secondary content teachers, and
- the standard secondary teacher licensure granted by State Departments of Education across the country is grades 9-12
Survey Data Collection (June-July 2020)

The online survey was first posted as part of a status update within the ELA support group for the first of five times on Monday morning, June 8, 2020 (see Figure 3.3). It soon became clear not long after the second post on June 11, 2020, and the third on June 13, 2020, that I was not going to receive the volume of responses I had hoped for despite the number of members in the group.\(^9\)

Figure 3.3

Screenshot of High School ELA Teachers Support Group

Circumstances at the time necessitated seeking additional survey participants through other social media outlets, as well as through an AERA Special Interest Group (SIG). After considering the paucity of responses from the Facebook group, I elected to expand my search using other social media platforms such as my professional Twitter account (@WtgMatters) and

\(^9\) There were a couple of possible explanations for this phenomenon which I discuss below in the very last subsection of the description of Phase 2 of the study.
LinkedIn. The first tweet soliciting survey responses was sent on June 19, 2020, and read as follows:

Calling all HS ELA teachers of writing: Share your teacher prep experiences and ongoing professional learning by completing this short doctoral research survey.

Surveymonkey.com/r/VZBW2KT #writing #ELAteachers #professionallearning

When that first tweet attempt garnered no attention, I decided to retweet the original message on June 22nd and tag some leading professional organizations in it after consulting with my dissertation committee. Those organizations were National Council of Teachers of English (@ncte), International Literacy Association (@ILAToday), and National Writing Project (@writingproject). This time my survey tweet received two retweets, one from my co-chair who suggested it and the other from the National Writing Project itself.

Then I noticed that I did not have a great deal of diversity in the survey participants, and so I decided to tweet again with a different approach on June 25, 2020:

Seeking to include additional voices, esp those of male & BIPOC HS ELA writing teachers. Please share your teacher prep experiences & ongoing PL by taking this short research survey. @ncte @ILAToday @AERA_EdResearch @KellyGToGo @DFISHERSDSU @StevenZemelman Surveymonkey.com/r/VZBW2KT

In mid-July 2020, I was pleased with the variety of states represented by participants but decided to purposefully target the states not yet represented by survey respondents. One of my dissertation committee co-chairs suggested I check NCTE’s website for a list of state level affiliate organizations that I could also tag in my survey tweets. The NCTE website includes an affiliate page (ncte.org/groups/affiliates/find-an-affiliate/) with hyperlinks for affiliates for 49 of the 50 states and Manitoba, Canada. Some states have multiple affiliates, some belong to
regional chapters, and some states do not have an affiliate (e.g., Tennessee), and the state of Washington’s Twitter affiliate account @WLAC_NCTE (see Appendix B) is also no longer activated (NCTE, n.d.).

In a series of twelve tweets, I included my original message and tagged nearly 50 state affiliations of ILA and NCTE and other literacy organizations all located in states I wanted to include in the survey data in addition to some individuals in the field of literacy. (See Appendix B for the full list). Despite this extensive effort, I only gained four additional survey responses via this social media platform.

Shortly after launching the survey on Twitter, I posted my message for the first of four times on LinkedIn on June 22, 2020. Despite having approximately 360 professional connections on LinkedIn, I received just one share from a former classmate at National Louis University and received a single new survey response for my efforts.

Lastly, I reached out to Dr. Jamila Lyiscott the chair of the AERA Writing and Literacies SIG of which I am a member. I explained my research and my previous attempts to attain survey participants, asking her any additional suggestions. To my delight she offered to put my survey out to the SIG if I sent all the information. This attempt proved to be the second highest source for survey responses after the Facebook ELA teachers support group (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2**

*Variety of Survey Collectors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>77.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing &amp; Literacies SIG</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Participants

A total of 122 high school ELA teachers began the survey mainly via the link posted in the Facebook group. Although 14 respondents did not complete the survey through to the end, there was representation from roughly two thirds of the states from a variety of locations, types of schools, grade levels, years of experience, and educational backgrounds. The demographics of the participants are reported in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Analyzing the Survey Data

The initial data for each question was tallied by SurveyMonkey according to response rankings. The survey tool also visually represented the data in pie charts and bar graphs. Next, the raw data was entered into the IBM Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for further analysis. This software enabled deep analysis by processing the data for correlations. Lastly, the data were painstakingly aggregated by isolating and comparing specific survey items and their responses so as to answer additional questions or explain anything unexpected that arose from the disaggregated data and correlation results.

Phase 2: Qualitative Interpretive and Critical Data Processes

Identifying Focus Group Participants

The next phase of the study was designed to gather qualitative data from a subset of the online survey respondents. As discussed above, all survey completers were asked if they were willing to participate in the next phase of the study. Those who indicated such interest were directed to a linked Google form where they supplied their names and preferred contact methods. Initially, 28 survey respondents indicated interest in participating in the Focus Group interviews and these were all contacted to schedule a time for such participation.
Doodle Poll, and online scheduling tool, was used to set up six possible meeting dates for the focus groups and to allow for selection of the dates and times that best fit participants’ schedules. The proposed dates ranged from July 26 to August 3, 2020 and, in consideration of participants’ time zone differences, included morning, afternoon and early evening time slots. All interested participants were contacted by email, some at first through my National Louis University student account and others directly through Doodle Poll for greater ease of tracking and follow-up for non-respondents. The emails were personalized with each person’s name and read as follows:

Dear —.
Thank you for your interest in participating in the focus group phase of my study and for providing your contact information. Just as a reminder, the study is called "Figuring It Out: The Self-efficacy and Self-empowerment of Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing." I am really looking forward to hearing what you have to share regarding your professional learning experiences!

While I am in the preliminary phase of analyzing the survey data, I would like to provide you with some proposed interview dates to consider. Each session is an hour long and you need only participate in one session. You can find those at the link below. Choose as many as you feel would best meet your availability. Once final dates are selected, you will receive an email that contains a link to an electronic letter of consent to participate in the focus group interview. Feel free to contact me at this email or you can reach me at my cell at 773-937-XXXX.

Thank you!

Alma

[Doodle Poll Link]
Four of the initial 28 survey participants indicated a preference for telephone contact. In addition to the email, I personally called them about their interest in also participating in the focus groups and informed them that an email had been sent containing a Doodle Poll link to indicate their availability for scheduling purposes. Finally, if prospective Focus Group participants did not respond to the Doodle Poll scheduling link, this tool sent me notification of who they were, and I was able follow up with reminders sent directly from this tool.

A few prospective participants reached out to me personally to inform that they were no longer available to participate because their schedules had changed, many others simply did not respond at all. Understandably, some of those who expressed initial interest were from states that were experiencing high levels of COVID-19 surges at the time, specifically, Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, and Michigan; therefore, I was none too surprised when I did not hear from them considering the circumstances. Table 3.3 provides complete data detailing how the original 28 potential Phase 2 participants dwindled down in the process leading to the actual Focus Group interviews.

Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Interest and Participation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Interest</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability Responses to Doodle Poll</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed Electronic Letters of Consent</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Participants</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the 17 interested participants submitted their focus group availabilities, they were sent a follow-up email linked to SurveyMonkey again. This linked form (Appendix D) contained three specific items asking them: 1) to electronically sign the Letter of Informed Consent, 2) to provide their names and email addresses for verification of consent, and 3) to provide a
pseudonym to be used in place of their names to maintain anonymity when reporting on the qualitative data in future. Twelve participants signed the Letters of Informed Consent and were scheduled to participate in one of three focus groups; however, two of them had last minute personal matters arise that made them unable to participate. Of the ten teachers who eventually participated in the focus group interviews, eight were drawn from the ELA Teachers Support Group on Facebook. One each of the remaining two originally came to the study by way of Twitter and LinkedIn.

**Data Collection (July-August 2020)**

The second phase of this inquiry consisted of three semi-structured focus groups. Being the only qualitative interview structure whereby participants interact with other participants in a collective experience, focus groups are by nature a dynamic process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Hesse-Biber and Leavy describe the unique interaction between a given set of focus group participants as “producing a ‘happening’ that cannot be replicated” (p. 166), including discussions in other focus groups that contain members with similar characteristics. These researchers suggest that the reason focus group discussions are so inimitable is not due to participants’ responses to a researcher’s guiding questions, but rather to the fact that they are responding to one another as well within a group dynamic their very participation helps create.

According to Creswell and Crewsell (2018), the ideal number for any focus group scenario is six to eight participants per group. On the other hand, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) recommend four to eight participants, stressing that focus groups consist of “people who can best shed light on your topic” (p. 178). While attempting to identify as many complexities in the participants’ voices as possible, the focus groups for this study, nevertheless, were dependent on
the following factors: representation across a broad geographic range in the United States, together with consideration for their time zones and personal availability.

The initial participant response and submission of informed consent enabled me to create three groups of four participants each; however, As mentioned above, two were ultimately unable to participate. Eventually the groups consisted of three, two, and five participants, respectively (see Tables 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6). Despite the unanticipated variety in each group’s size and variance from the six to eight participants Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended and even the four to eight participants suggested as ideal by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), in the end, each focus group participant proved to be highly qualified to “shed light” on my topic and contribute to a “happening” in their respective groups each of which was unique and not replicable.

The geographic locations of the participants coupled with COVID concerns necessitated the focus groups to meet online. Zoom was the chosen technology tool because it provides audio and visual recordings of the session including a transcript of comments placed in the chat for later reference. The video recording also lends itself to review and analysis of participants’ nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and tones. Because of the anticipated minimal length of the focus group interviews, one of my dissertation co-chairs set up the Zoom sessions through her university account and then turned the host controls over to me before the scheduled start time of each meeting. I also used a digital recording device as a back-up to the Zoom recording.
### Table 3.4

**Focus Group 1: July 26, 2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant* Gender and Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Initial Teaching Certification</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Instructional Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billie Pool Female White</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Undergraduate: Other Subject</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>Urban Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce Female White</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Undergraduate: ELA</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>Rural Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Male Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Graduate level: ELA or other related field</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>9, 11, 12</td>
<td>Suburban Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aAll names are pseudonyms chosen by the respective participant.

### Table 3.5

**Focus Group 2: July 29, 2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant* Gender and Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Initial Teaching Certification</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Instructional Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audrey Female White</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Undergraduate ELA</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>9, 10, 11</td>
<td>Public collaborative program of 3 counties, a mix of urban, suburban, and rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June Female White</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Graduate level ELA or other related field</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Suburban Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aAll names are pseudonyms chosen by the respective participant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant “a”</th>
<th>Gender and Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Initial Teaching Certification</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Instructional Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea Female White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Graduate level ELA or other related field</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>9, 11</td>
<td>Rural Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida Lopez Female Black/Latina</td>
<td>Black/Latina</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Graduate level ELA or other related field</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
<td>Urban Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Taylor Female White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Alternative Teacher Preparation Program</td>
<td>6-10 total, 3-5 ELA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Urban Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Female White</td>
<td>Female White</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Undergraduate ELA</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>Suburban Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Female White</td>
<td>Female White</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Graduate level ELA or other related field</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>11, 12</td>
<td>Urban Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aAll names are pseudonyms chosen by the respective participant.

**Focus Group Interview Protocol.** Each focus group was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix E) developed to attain further insight into data from the from Phase 1 survey (quantitative data). The interview guide’s prompts were intended to guide focus group conversations; however, they were not intended to rigidly dictate the conversations. The focus group discussions naturally touched on these prepared prompts many times before I was able to pose them to the group which eliminated the need to do so.

Participants were not provided with the discussion questions prior to their focus group sessions. While the benefits of allowing participants access to the questions prior to their sessions may have yielded more thorough, complete answers, I felt it was worth sacrificing that
potential benefit to elicit spontaneous responses and allow for a natural flow to the exchange of ideas and discussion amongst the participants. Participants were informed at the start of each Zoom session that I expected their conversations would take on an organic direction as they interacted with one another during the session (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Each session was anticipated to last 30-60 minutes; however, the conversations flowed so naturally between each group’s participants, that all three sessions lasted well over an hour.

The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview method was chosen for the express purpose of allowing participants to speak freely, while the pre-established, open-ended questions and prompts provided support and guidance if the conversation stalled. My intended role during each focus group meeting was to function solely as a moderator, rather than a participant. However, the teachers interacted so naturally that I often became the outside observer as they reflected and talked with passion and openness about writing, writing instruction, their students, and actively teaching writing to their students—the thrill and the reward, the challenge and the struggle.

Nevertheless, I had to remain cognizant of the group effect that occurred in the moment—the unique dynamic produced within a group and how that affects the individual participants and their responses (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The last group being the largest with five members had a few participants who guided the conversation almost to the point of taking over the session. On occasion—as in a classroom where a small number of students tend to dominate a discussion if allowed—I had to interject to make sure some of the less assertive teacher participants were given an opening to share their rich and unique perspectives.
Additionally, Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) recommend advance preparation of the interview protocol allowing space for notes and time markings (how long and how often a person speaks). Knowing it would be difficult to predetermine sufficient space, I simply took handwritten notes on paper during each session to capture my own in-the-moment thoughts and observations as the interviews unfolded. This allowed me to refer to those in the moment observations when later analyzing the transcripts and video recordings.

*Data Analysis (July-August 2020, July-August 2021)*

**Initial Analysis.** Immediately after each focus group, I recorded my concluding thoughts and reactions to the session in a notebook. Then I reviewed each recording against my contemporaneous notes for accuracy and to record any additional observations. After all the focus group sessions were completed, I went back through and watched each interview consecutively for a second time. Later when I reviewed the raw transcripts, the cleaned transcripts, and subsequent viewings of the interviews in whole or in part, I took additional notes and reviewed them against each other to see what repeat observations stood out to me and what was new. Here is where the Zoom video recordings were a tremendous help for reviewing facial expressions, pauses, gestures, and speakers’ tone.

The next step in analyzing the qualitative data was transcribing each focus group session verbatim using the voice-to-text application Temi, which allowed me to submit either my digital audio recordings or Zoom recordings for transcription. I chose to submit the Zoom recordings which made clear which participant was speaking. This was especially helpful because the raw transcript was not 100% accurate and needed to be cleaned. Watching and listening to the recordings from my Temi account allowed me to make sure the text matched the recording, each speaker was labeled properly, and correct any unclear words and incorrect transcriptions.
Notwithstanding needing to clean up the transcript, this application saved me days if not weeks of transcription work as it produced a raw transcript in my Temi account in a fraction of the time allowing me to go on to coding faster.

**Coding.** Once the individual transcripts of the three focus group sessions were thoroughly cleaned, I set out to read them through multiple times. The first readthrough was to note any distinctions in the responses and identify anything that stood out to me such as immediate concepts or overarching ideas. A yellow highlighter was used for the first reading of each transcript. I then reviewed the initial highlighting and made annotations in the margins. I then needed to begin to make sense of these markings and annotations. From those I created a colored coding system ranging from the broad such as key words and phrases to the more focused such as instructional goals and purpose to begin to group the many annotations I had made on the transcripts (see Figure 3.4).

**Figure 3.4**

*Qualitative Focus Group Annotation Codes*

- Formulas, formulaic
- Key words, phrases
- Authentic writing, writing is a process
- Researcher Qs
- Participant Qs/rhetorical
- Instructional goals, purpose
- Process of writing
This initial annotation coding system began to help me break the ideas down into smaller ideas and concepts in subsequent read-throughs by identifying frequently used words and phrases—a process Creswell and Creswell (2018) refer to as “bracketing chunks” (p. 193). Several themes began to emerge from this round of analysis, so I created another coding system that aligned with the broader ideas from the literature review and sections of the survey. Some coded themes from the literature review that emerged were teachers as writers and assessment writing. At this point, I noticed that some of the coding themes that closely aligned with specific sections of the survey, namely, teacher preparation (both pre-service and in-service) and professional learning. Figure 3.5 for a detailed list of coded emergent interview themes.

**Figure 3.5**

*Focus Group Interviews Thematic Codes*
While these themes were present throughout the focus group interviews, there were far too many of them to analyze at one given time. Consequently, I put the coding and analysis work aside for a few days to ruminate on these ideas and concepts and think about how they connected with each other. To aid the process of condensing so many themes into fewer concepts, or more cohesive “chunks” or themes, I identified some larger ideas, such as instruction and grouped smaller ideas from the interviews under them. (See Figure 3.6 for an example of this process.)

Figure 3.6

*Larger Thematic Coding Ideas Expanded*

This painstakingly deliberate coding process served to generate a very detailed description of the ELA teachers and their professional learning choices as well as generate a
smaller more unifying set of themes for analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify five to seven as an advisable number for a research study. By nature of my chosen research design, these reduced themes were analyzed in relationship to the research questions in an attempt to discover what overall insights they provide and to determine if they reveal gaps in the research that necessitates future investigation. The interviewees words, the emergent themes, and possible future research are discussed at length in Chapter Five.

The Context of 2020

In consideration of the unprecedented nature of 2020 from nearly start to finish, I believe it is necessary to discuss the unforeseeable considerations and subsequent delays that effected the data gathering processes of this study.

In the month of May 2020, I was finally nearing full readiness to launch my survey. As a classroom teacher myself thrust suddenly, and with no advance preparation, into full time eLearning, wrapping up the 2019-2020 school year presented more than its share of normal challenges. Because I work in a district which begins and likewise ends its year later than most others around the country, I knew from reading posts on the various social media teacher groups with which I hold membership status, that teachers who had already finished the school year were immediately launching into discussions of their fears, worries, and concerns about what the next school year would hold as the pandemic continued with no end in sight. I decided to wait until June to initiate the survey and give my intended participants time to decompress at the beginning of the summer break. I planned to post my survey to the ELA teachers’ group on Monday, June 1, 2020.

Then Memorial Day happened.
The horrific event that took place that day in Minneapolis, Minnesota ignited a powder keg the likes of which this country had not seen since the assassination of Dr. King and the Vietnam War protests in the late 1960s. May 25, 2020, was the day an unarmed Black man named George Floyd was heinously murdered by a Minneapolis police officer for all the world to bear witness on livestreamed social media.

Try as I did not to watch the video, in the coming days, I could not escape it. Certainly, this was the same for everyone else who turned on their televisions or logged into their computers or turned on their cellphones. It was everywhere. Even if you could avoid all this technology, the reaction to Floyd’s murder erupted all over the U.S. from coast to coast, filling the streets with loud, disbelieving, and pained protest cries by day and louder, angrier cries of outrage when darkness fell all demanding justice for George Floyd and countless others like him, such as Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and Ahmaud Arbery. These voices demanded real change in how policing is done in this country, especially for Black Americans.

Feeling numb and shocked over the senseless and unspeakable murder and the public outcry that followed, I knew I could not post my survey just yet. While I have never lost belief that my research is important, I knew there were far more important things going on at that particular moment. First, with a surge in the pandemic and then George Floyd’s murder, I knew it would have to wait. People would not be in a proper mindset to complete an online research survey because even I, first as an American and second as an empathetic human, was grappling with feelings of my own that were inexpressible at that moment in time. I made the decision to delay the launch of my survey by a full week to let my potential research participants “feel their feels.”
As the rescheduled survey launch day of Monday, June 8, 2020, drew near, another issue arose: my Facebook profile picture (see Figure 3.7). The murder of George Floyd reignited the Black Lives Matter movement in this country, and those three simple words evoked strong emotions on both sides of the issue. A week prior, I saw a black and white image which read *this teacher believes BLACK LIVES MATTER* on Facebook and decided to make it my profile picture as well. The civil unrest that came in the days and even weeks after Floyd’s murder with those three simple words at the center of it polarized Americans anew.

**Figure 3.7**

*My Facebook Profile Photo during the Summer of 2020*

The online Facebook teacher groups I belonged were not exempt from the racially, politically, and socially inspired polarization. Some were very vocal about their feelings of the daily peaceful marches across the country calling for justice for George Floyd, all of which often devolved into arson and violence when darkness fell. Many expressed their beliefs that systemic racism was real; they saw it firsthand through their students’ lived experiences. Many had lived it themselves. To them, the violence was not a surprise and was not indicative of the entire movement. Therefore, the change the people cried out for across the country should not be condemned. I could not agree more. With the country in the throes of this violent outcry for
justice and change and with those who wanted nothing more than to silence it, I knew that my profile image could alienate possible survey respondents simply because it clearly indicated my position on the issue.

    I thought earnestly about this. I had research to complete, data to collect. While I had definite views on current events and systemic issues, my research survey was not political. It was not related to any of major issues like social justice, police brutality, systemic racism, the pandemic, protests, the president, Antifa, or Black Lives Matter. I just wanted to know what other secondary ELA teachers do for professional growth when it comes to the teaching of writing!

    I questioned whether I should change the profile picture for the duration of my solicitation for survey responses. I contemplated whether doing so would betray my belief that Black lives do, indeed, matter, and wondered if I could live with the knowledge that I had changed my profile image at such an unprecedented time in American society to collect an adequate number of survey responses. Faced with this unforeseen dilemma, I decided to consult a close friend who is also a teacher, someone I have known since our teacher preparation program days and who shared my stance on social justice issues.

    When I expressed my concerns about potentially repelling possible respondents with my profile picture, she immediately asked, “Do you really want those kinds of teachers doing your survey?” My answer was, “Probably not.” Knowing how important this study was to me, and wanting to be supportive, she expressed that it would most likely be fine to temporarily replace it for the timeframe of the survey. Ultimately, she acknowledged that she was not a member of the affected race in question, she advised, “Ask your Black friends what they think.”
At this urging, I immediately turned to my trusted “Diz Crew,” a group of fellow doctoral students from other programs that I had “fallen in with” during a mutual class in which we created a sketch demonstrating our learning and performed a dramatization of the dissertation process for our classmates. The sketch was called “The Diz,” a play on the African-American version of The Wiz, hence the name The Diz Crew. All my Diz Crew members are educated, professional, strong Black women seeking doctoral degrees.

Most of the group was able to meet in a conference call and one of my trusted advisors quickly asked, “Do you want people like that doing your survey?” As I listened to her words, I wondered if there was an echo in my mind or just the TRUTH. Another friend further argued that an actual photo of me or the specific ethnicity suggested by my name could likewise rebuff potential respondents based on implicit biases. These friends reminded me to stand by my beliefs and that there were plenty other educators who would not be deterred by the profile image because they felt as strongly as I did about the subject of the survey—professional learning in the teaching of writing. Thus, I made my decision with confidence and shared the survey with the BLM profile picture, proceeding with my research despite the unusual circumstances of the time.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

Spending much of my professional career as a Secondary ELA teacher of writing, I have a unique perspective having transitioned into this content area from my original degree completion in History. I personally believe writing is important to students and make time to teach it throughout the year. I fully understand the challenges of trying to find time to teach and grade writing, as well as the discomfort of feeling that I am not quite “doing it right.” I am, likewise, aware that my background influences my perspective on this topic. It was through this lens that the quantitative survey was fashioned around my own personal and professional
experiences and curiosity, in addition to my experiences and observations of colleagues and students. During the qualitative focus groups, my role was to allow the teachers to speak freely on their experiences with writing and teaching writing and stepped in only to guide the discussion if it moved off topic, or if I felt the participants needed direction toward more focused responses. I also entered the conversation when I needed to ask a follow-up prompt to elicit more detail about specific participants’ responses. I made every effort to let focus group participants speak freely about their lived experiences as teachers of writing without interjecting my thoughts, ideas, or opinions, and without showing any expression that might have indicated judgment of their responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Research Validity**

In order to ensure that my study is valid and reliable, I piloted the online survey with a handful of my English teacher colleagues for feedback which I then used to revise the final rendition of the survey before officially launching it on the Facebook group. I invited participants to contact me after the interviews as I analyzed the focus group data if they felt the need to provide additional comments when reflecting on the process. I also contacted a few focus group participants individually to clarify unclear or inaudible sections of the recordings to ensure their accuracy before summarizing the findings.

**Ethical Concerns**

The design of this study presented little risk to the participants. Each individual acknowledged their consent by choosing to participate in the Phase I SurveyMonkey survey (see Appendix A). They also each had the option to give additional consent to potentially participate in focus groups by digitally providing their contact information and school’s geographic location. As part of the survey, participants were only asked general, descriptive details about
their schools and geographic locations. Neither participant names, school names, nor specific place names were required as a condition to participate in the survey to maintain participant anonymity. Once selected to participate in a Phase II focus group, participants were required to sign an additional electronic consent form via SurveyMonkey (see Appendix D). They were also informed at each phase of the study that they could choose to withdraw from participation at any time.

All reasonable attempts were made to protect participants’ identities during the presentation of the qualitative phase of the study discussed in Chapters Five and Six. In this study, self-selected pseudonyms are used in place of participant names. Additionally, the teachers’ school and district names were not attained as it was not necessary to answer the research questions. The only information explicitly requested was that of the participants’ states of licensure and the state where they were teaching at the time of data collection.

The SurveyMonkey data was accessible through my password protected National Louis University email account, while the recorded focus group Zoom meetings, together with their chats (if used) were stored in my password protected, cloud-based Google drive. Upon the successful defense of this dissertation, the personal SurveyMonkey account was closed. All data analysis beyond that tallied on SurveyMonkey, such as the transcription of focus group sessions, were kept in separate Google Docs stored under my password protected personal Gmail account and on separate Word Docs kept in the hard drive of my laptop, which is also password protected. This laptop is my personal computer and does not leave my locked and secured home office. Handwritten notes taken during and after focus groups were also kept secured in my locked home office.
Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research design for this mixed methods study that seeks to identify the professional learning choices that current in-service, secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing and the reasons guiding these choices. As evidenced in Chapter Two research has revealed that teachers often make choices regarding their own professional growth to empower themselves as educators, and in turn, empower their students (Brooks, 2007; Hicks et al., 2018). Thus, this study has the potential to validate secondary ELA teachers as professionals who bring their own ideas and wealth of experiences as writers and teachers of writing to the classroom. Their choices may ultimately influence the ways in which both professional development and professional learning opportunities are viewed by PD and PL providers, school administrators, professional organizations, policymakers, and even teachers themselves. Depending on the types of PD and PL the participating teachers prefer, this study may also shed light on secondary educators’ adult learning preferences.
CHAPTER FOUR

Quantitative Data Analysis

Being able to "go beyond the information" given to "figure things out"

is one of the few untarnishable joys of life.

—Jerome Bruner

Analyzing the Survey Data

Previous research has indicated that secondary ELA teachers feel unprepared to teach writing effectively (Birmi, 2012; Kiuhara et al., 2009). While this problem of practice raises concern, the number of research studies with findings of this nature is limited. The existing research also do not present a clear picture of the depth and extent of the problem. For that reason, one section of this study’s research survey pointedly included items directly related to the teacher participants’ feelings of preparedness to teach writing.

In total, this quantitative instrument contained 26 items divided into five parts: demographics, preservice preparation, personal attitudes toward writing, instructional practices, and professional learning. Presented below are the results of those research items, the analysis of the resulting data and discussion of the findings.

Part 1: Survey Completion

This study was completed using an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. The first component of this two-part inquiry consisted of an online survey created using SurveyMonkey (Appendix A). As stated, it consisted of 26 total items: one that required participants to give consent to participate in the study before proceeding, 24 items that were linked to the research questions of this study, and one final question that asked respondents if they were interested in further participation in the focus group phase of the study. The majority
of these 24 items required Likert scale response options; however, participants were also given space to select “other” on a handful of items to provide any additional information they wished to contribute. Four of the survey items allowed participants to check all answer choices that applied, two others allowed them to choose up to five responses.

To gain access to the survey, prospective participants had to acknowledge their informed consent by responding “Yes” to the very first item, otherwise they were directed to a screen that informed them the survey was over at that point. There was a total of 122 respondents who granted their informed consent to participate in the survey; 108 of them responded to all 25 research-related items, with others choosing not to complete the survey at various points along the way. (See Appendix E for the number of respondents for each part of the survey.)

Survey Responses

Section 1: Participant Demographics

The first set of questions in the survey gathered necessary demographic information about the participants. Although survey respondents hailed from thirty-three different states (see Table 4.5 for an abbreviated list and Appendix F for the complete list of states), they were predominantly women (90.98%) and White (85.25%) (see Table 4.1). While there was a fair spread across both the grades they taught, from ninth to twelfth, and locations of their schools (see Table 4.4), the participants were also predominantly fully certified (91.85%) (see Table 4.3) public school teachers (81.96%) with only one reporting having taken a year off from the classroom (Table 4.4). The data in Table 4.2 indicate that some of the participants moved in and out of teaching ELA as the data does not remain the same for each range of years in the category of “years of teaching” compared to that of “years of teaching ELA.” Those two
demographic questions do not offer any further information than to show if participants began as ELA teachers and then taught other subjects or vice versa.

Table 4.1

*Participants’ Gender and Racial Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>90.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino/a/Latinx</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mexico, Central or South American, the Spanish Speaking Caribbean)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Mexican/Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Participants could choose all that apply.*
### Table 4.2

*Participants’ Years of Professional Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.74</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years teaching ELA</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.3

*Participants’ Current Licensure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Licensure Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently licensed/fully certified</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>91.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never licensed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probationary license</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expired license</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing license</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total responses: 122
### Table 4.4

*School Locations and Instructional Settings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>81.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades taught&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/Freshmen</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>58.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/Sophomore</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/Junior</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/Senior</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>51.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Participants could select all that apply.

### Table 4.5

*Single States Represented by the Largest Number of Survey Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Thirty-three states were identified by a total of 122 participants. See Appendix F for a complete list.
Section 2: Pre-service teacher preparation

The second section of the survey asked participants about their pre-service teacher preparation: the programs they completed before entering the profession (Question 11), the pre-service coursework geared specifically toward preparing them to teach writing in those programs (Question 12), and their feelings of preparedness to teach Writing once they entered their own classrooms (Question 13). This group of questions sought to gauge the variance in teacher prep programs completed by the participants, the extent of their preparation to teach writing and how that affected their sense of instructional preparedness. It should be noted that if respondents chose the option, “I have not completed a teacher preparation program” as their response for Question 11, the survey skipped over the next two questions.

Of the 120 participants who responded to the question about their pre-service teacher preparation, all but four (3.3%) had completed some teacher preparation program or another (see Table 4.6). There was nearly an equal number of the remaining 116 who completed a graduate level ELA or other related subject program (n=44) as those who did so at the undergraduate level (n=46). The remainder of respondents, roughly 11% for each pre-service preparation level indicated completing either an initial teacher prep program in a non-ELA program or an alternate certification program like Teach for America. Since my own experience involved coming to teach ELA after completing a teacher preparation program in a different content area, and if these percentages are generalizable, then more than 20% of secondary educators currently teaching ELA writing most likely had no pre-service preparation to do so. At the same time, the data also showed that 75% of the participants had completed an undergraduate or graduate level teacher preparation program in English/Language Arts.
Table 4.6

Participants’ Pre-service Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of preparation program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate: ELA</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate level ELA or other related field (Reading, Writing, ESL, Bilingual, etc.)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate: Other subject (History, Science, Social Studies, Math, etc.)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Teacher Prep Program (Teach for America, Teaching Fellows Program, etc.)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not completed a teacher preparation program*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If respondents chose this option as their response, the survey was designed to skip over the next two questions which asked about the preparation in the teaching of writing included in their pre–service programs.

The participants were next asked about the amount of writing instruction that was included in their pre-service teacher preparation programs (Table 4.7). Approximately 37% of participants reported receiving more focused and significant amounts of pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing. Unfortunately, about 63% indicated receiving little to no coursework in this area. This is significant because nearly two thirds of the 75% of teachers who did complete an ELA teacher preparation program were not much better prepared to teach writing than the 22% who had not completed a secondary ELA preparation program at all.
Table 4.7

*Pre-service Teacher Preparation in the Teaching of Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of writing instruction coursework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little, part of a general methods class</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small part of a literacy methods class</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An entire class devoted to the teaching of writing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A significant part of a literacy methods class</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more classes focused on the teaching of writing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>115</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsequently, when asked how prepared they felt to actually teach writing, the same 37% who reported receiving more pre-service preparation to teach it than 63% of their peers did *not* report correspondingly high levels of preparedness when it came to assuming their roles as ELA teachers of Writing. In fact, only 16.5% of all participants who completed a teacher preparation program reported feeling *Moderately* or *Extremely* prepared for the task (see Figure 4.1). This data reaffirms findings in previous studies (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Kiuhara et al., 2009) demonstrating that secondary ELA teachers of writing are inadequately prepared to teach writing in their pre-service preparation programs and raises the question about the content and rigor of the coursework completed by those who still felt unprepared to teach writing.
Section 3: Attitudes Toward Writing

Research suggests that teachers will teach Writing if they have positive attitudes and personal experiences with it (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Brooks, 2007; National Commission on Writing, 2003); therefore, the next section of the survey sought to determine the participants’ attitudes toward writing. These questions included how important the participants feel writing well is to a person’s overall well-being and success (Question 14), their own level of confidence as writers (Question 15), and how frequently they engage in writing (Question 16).

Nearly an equal number of survey participants said the ability to write well was extremely important (48.31%) or moderately important (45.76%) with the remainder of the 118 respondents saying it was only somewhat important (5.93%). No one selected the very little or not at all options in response to this question. These numbers are significant because teachers
who deem writing to be important are more likely to teach it than not (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Kiuhara et al, 2009).

Likewise, as other studies have found, teachers self-perception of themselves as writers also influences if they teach writing or not (Brooks, 2007; Graves, 1978). The participants in this study selected the same three answers regarding their confidence in themselves as writers on Question 15, but with a greater variance in two of their choices. Almost twice as many participants (64.71%) described themselves as extremely confident versus those who identified themselves as moderately confident (31.93). Less than a handful of participants (3.36%) identified themselves as somewhat confident as writers. (See Table 4.8 for the responses to both Questions 14 and 15.) These findings suggest, in keeping with the research, that teachers who feel confident as writers will teach writing.

### Table 4.8

**Attitudes toward Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of writing well</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>48.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence in own writing</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, when it came to frequency of engaging in writing activities which included everything from personal to professional and formal to informal writing, the overwhelming majority (nearly 79%) indicated that they engaged in writing on a daily basis (Figure 4.2). The participant responses to this section of the survey largely support the body of existing research.
(Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Brooks, 2007; Graves, 1978; Kiuhara et al., 2009, National Commission on Writing, 2003) that show a relationship between teachers’ positive beliefs about, and experiences with writing and the likelihood that they will teach it to their students.

**Figure 4.2**

*Percentages of Participants’ Personal Writing Engagement*

![Survey Question 16](image)

**Section 4: Instructional Practices**

Earlier in this study it was stated that students’ writing development is inextricably tied to the quality and effectiveness of their teachers’ instructional practices (Delpit, 2012; Graham & Harris, 1997; Kiuhara et al., 2009). Hence, this topic comprised the next section of the survey as follows: the emphasis placed on teaching writing in participants’ own classrooms despite curricular obligations (Question 17), the specific practices that are part of their pedagogies (Question 18), the influences on their writing instructional decisions (Question 19), and what they seek to acquire anew or further develop about their practice in teaching writing through PL engagement (Question 20).
When it came to the level of instructional importance for writing beyond curricular obligations at their respective schools, nearly 71% of teachers who responded to Survey Question 17 (n=112) said teaching writing was *extremely important* in their classrooms. In contrast, 26% of the remaining respondents said it was *moderately important* with only 4% saying it was *somewhat important*. The 4% who consider writing instruction as only *somewhat important* in their classrooms closely mirrors the nearly 6% who think it *somewhat important* to know how to write well. However, the 71% who place such a high value on teaching writing in their own classrooms is interesting when compared to the roughly 48% who said the ability to write well is *extremely important*. The 71% suggests more teachers feel writing is important to their instruction than those who feel it is important to actually write well. I would think that there would be a closer similarity in the response rates between teaching writing and thinking it is essential that students do it well. Unfortunately, the data does not suggest further explanation for this difference. This might be an area of future research for an explanation for the seemingly contradictory findings.

Next, teacher participants were given 10 common instructional practices and tasked with identifying up to five they felt were most essential to teaching writing (see Figure 4.3). Here several elected to write-in responses despite the number of choices supplied. However, of the 112 participants who answered this question, four were identified as most essential in the teaching of writing by a majority of respondents as follows:

- Providing students with mentor texts/models of good writing to study and emulate/imitate (72%)
- Having students give and receive peer feedback and/or providing teacher feedback during the writing process (68%)
• Modeling the writing process and sharing my own writing and writing processes with my students (65%) 

• Engaging students in prewriting activities (e.g., reading, completing a graphic organizer or outline) to help them gather and organize their writing ideas (65%) 

(See Figure 4.3 for the full results and the list of write in responses.)
Figure 4.3

Common Instructional Practices Considered Essential to Writing Instruction

Note: Participants were allowed to choose up to five practices.

The “other” instructional practices teachers listed included the following:

- Frequent low stakes writing practice
• Using culturally relevant pedagogies in the service of writing instruction—such as cultural modeling (Carol Lee, 1995)

• Worrying large quantities of writing

• Rewriting

• One-on-one writing workshops with me, the teacher, during the writing process

• Allowing the students the chance to free write

• Emphasizing the requirements of different writing styles, and methods used to fulfill those requirements. I teach the kids that it's a toolbox: you can't reach into it and find nothing, then hope your writing will communicate what you want it to. You have to fill that tool bag, then know what task you're trying to complete.

These preferred collaborative or interactive instructional methods speak to active writing practices and engagement between teachers, students, and texts. This stands in contrast to transmission models of instruction, formulaic writing practices, and students left to write in isolation without consideration of an audience. Perhaps these are not what research says are the dominant trends in instruction (Elbow, 1968; Graves, 1978; Hairston 1982; Langer, 1984; Wesley, 2000; Wiley, 2000), but they are favored by the teachers of this study.

Question 19 asked participants to identify up to five factors that have the greatest influence on their instructional decisions (see Figure 4.4). There were many write in responses to this question as well and four participants specifically stated that their involvement with the National Writing Project was a factor of great influence on their instruction. Interestingly, although 37% of participants reported receiving a fair amount of pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing, less than 5% of survey respondents identified their pre-service teacher preparation as a strong influence on their current, in-service instructional decisions. This result
was unexpected since teachers by and large report not receiving pre-service preparation to teach writing, and those who did rated that preparation as having the least bearing on their instruction. (The survey findings related to pre-service teacher preparation and its implications are examined more closely later in this chapter.)

**Figure 4.4**

*Factors that have the Greatest Influence on Participants’ Writing Instructional Decisions*

![Bar chart showing factors influencing writing instruction](chart)

- Your students’ current writing ability levels or instructional needs: 83.93%
- Personal experiences with and beliefs about writing: 64.29%
- Your students’ personal interests: 44.64%
- Personal level of instructional confidence: 43.75%
- Local/State/Federal Standards (e.g., Common Core, state English/Language Arts standards, etc.): 43.75%
- In-service teacher professional development/learning activities: 36.61%
- School/District Curricular Demands or Guidelines, including scope and sequence guides: 32.41%
- Assessments demands (e.g., PSAT, SAT, or ACT): 29.46%
- Other: 13.39%
- Pre-service teacher preparation: 4.46%

Note: Participants were allowed to choose up to five factors.

Participants listed the following responses as “other” influences on their writing instructional decisions (see Figure 4.4 for the complete results for this question):
• Participation/involvement in local Writing Project
• Research on disciplinary literacies around writing about and studying literature (e.g. Rainey, 2017 in *Reading Research Quarterly*)
• Students’ disabilities and which tools/modifications are needed for their success
• Graduate coursework in writing instruction
• Working at a writing center in college
• Preparing students for next grade level writing
• Independent research paper on writing instruction and my own development as a writer
• Methods advanced by the National Writing Project
• The poor writing ability of our incoming freshmen students
• Writing my dissertation and completing a PhD in English
• Reading research on the teaching of writing in the secondary classroom
• My own pursuit of how to teach writing, through reading many reliable authors (Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, etc.), as well as 20+ years of experience!

Conversely, there was one factor selected by nearly 84% of the 112 responses to Question 19, and this was students’ current writing ability levels and instructional needs. Standards, assessments, and district or state curricular demands and guidelines all garnered less than half the participants’ selection as being influential to their instructional decisions regarding writing.

This brings attention to a few key issues for writing instruction. First, the participants of this study discredited the amount of pressure and influence external factors have on their instruction in contrast to the findings of previous research to this regard (Bridge et al., 1997; Higgins et al., 2006; Hillocks, 2003; Strickland et al., 2001). If researchers like Hillocks (2003)
call the value and purpose of standardized writing assessments into question and if fewer than 30% of the current participants say they are influenced by external assessment demands, maybe it is time to completely overhaul how writing is assessed or even do away with them all together.

Furthermore, the creators of the CCSS purposefully included writing to provide a semblance of uniformity for writing instruction across K-12; however, the teachers here reported that standards, local and federal, influence their writing instructional decisions less than 44% of the time as compared to other factors. Interestingly, this is the same level of influence as their own confidence to teach writing. This raises a question of why standards have not taken on a greater role in teachers’ instructional decisions, especially the CCSS which have been in place for more than a decade. These questions warrant further examination; however, it is significant that the teacher participants in this research hold their individual students’ needs to be the leading factor in their instructional decisions. This supports the call for teacher professional development to be differentiated for teachers of writing and tailored to their students’ instructional needs by schools and districts.

Question 20 asked participants to identify what areas of their instructional practice they sought to acquire or develop when engaging in PL (see Figure 4.5). For this prompt, participants were allowed to select all that apply. Here, more than half of all participants chose writing for diverse learners/special needs students and feedback strategies, while the option of writing for culturally and linguistically diverse students was selected by just under half of the participants. Meanwhile, writing genres and development of standardized test writing instruction took low priority.
Figure 4.5

Aspects of Instructional Practice Participants Seek to Acquire or Develop when Engaging in Professional Learning in Writing Instruction

Survey Question 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Area</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing for diverse learners/special needs students</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback strategies</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for culturally and linguistically diverse learners</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing processes</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment methods (formative and summative)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/pedagogy</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and writing</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English grammar and usage</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/strategies to improve student writing on standardized assessments</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing genres</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participants were allowed to select all options that applied.

While one survey participant indicated full confidence in each of these instructional areas, three others supplied the following responses as “Other” that they sought to acquire or develop through professional learning:
• Methods to get kids more fluent in writing and more interested in writing.

• practitioner inquiry and academic research methods (quantitative and qualitative and participatory) to launch our own inquiries about writing.

• AP writing method

Section 5: Engagement in Professional Learning (PL)

The final series of questions in the survey pointedly asked teacher participants about their engagement in PL including the sources that provided it (Question 21), what factors influenced their selection of PL (Question 22), the best time of year to engage in PL (Question 23, see Table 4.9), the extent to which teachers felt the PL or PD they engaged in developed their instruction (Question 24, see Figure 4.8), and how confident they feel to develop their students as writers after completing the PL or PD (Question 25, see Figure 4.9). In this final section, participant survey completion fell slightly to 108 responses for each of these five questions.

When it came to top instructional source for professional learning (Question 21), participants tended to turn to other teachers as a resource for their learning. Given the opportunity to select all choices that apply, 74% identified colleagues as their main go-to, 72% also turned to other teachers on online social media support groups, and 71% utilized professional trade books often written by teacher practitioners. (Figure 4.6 contains the complete data of participant responses.)

For those who selected the other option, one participant indicated that they did not utilize outside sources to develop their practice, and others identified the following resources: 1) research (personal research, their own inquiry/action research, examining English curricula of schools of interest for students, and checking out resources, teaching methods, and syllabi); 2) online teachers or TPT sellers with large followings; and 3) State Department of Education.
Figure 4.6

Sources Used by Participants to Further Develop Their Writing Instructional Practices

The data from Question 22 revealed specific factors that influenced participants’ choices of PL—even though they were offered the opportunity to choose all that apply and write-in a response. Here, the primary factor guiding teachers’ PL choices was cost, with approximately 65% selecting this option. A close second at 61% was interesting PL content, and participants’
personal growth and fulfillment registered third at just over 55%. Less than half or 45% selected the option of targets an area of desired instructional growth, despite the wide range of responses to this issue earlier in the survey. This latter finding is curious given that participants also identified their students’ current writing ability and instructional needs as the main factor driving writing instructional decisions in Question 19. (Figure 4.7 contains full results for Question 21.)

**Figure 4.7**

*Factors that Influence Participants’ Choices of Professional Learning in Writing Instruction*

![Survey Question 22](image)

*Note: Participants were allowed to select all that apply.*
Table 4.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing of professional learning</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During summers/between school years</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple times during the school year, starting after a routine has been established</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever a writing professional development/learning opportunity presents itself</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During professional development days immediately prior the start of a new school year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever an instructional or professional need presents itself</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near the end of a school year as things are winding down</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Participants could select all that apply.

A very small number of participants felt these other times were most optimal times of year for engaging in PL:

- Some combination of during summers and/or whenever the need or opportunity presents itself
- All of these can apply—it depends on the year and my personal life more than anything else.
- as the need arises, I seek guidance
- We close early once a week and have PLC

One participant also wrote that they had never had any PL in writing instruction while two others were very specific about what influenced their choices citing the following:
• Supports teacher agency and participation in the CREATION of research and knowledge and not only in the CONSUMPTION of research/knowledge
• Reliability and validity of information being offered

**Figure 4.8**

*The Extent to which Participants Feel PL or PD has Helped Them Grow as Teachers of Writing*

![Survey Question 24](chart.png)

\[ n=108 \]

**Figure 4.9**

*Participants’ Level of Confidence in Their Ability to Improve Their Students’ Writing Skills after Completing PL or PD in the Teaching of Writing*

![Survey Question 25](chart.png)

\[ n=108 \]
**Correlational Analyses**

I used SPSS to compute additional analyses of the survey data searching for association between the participants’ responses to certain questions in relation to others. All variables were analyzed for correlational relationships. The process yielded a handful of weak correlations which were *negative weak* to *weak*. However, because of their lack of statistical significance, these will not be discussed. The correlational analysis did, however, reveal three particularly noteworthy results (Table 4.10). The discussion of the results which range from *weak* to *moderate* depending on the survey data compared with significant statistical significance is discussed below.

**Table 4.10**

}*Correlational Significance between Survey Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions 14 and 17</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions 19 and 24</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions 24 and 25</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).*

**Question 14 and Question 17.** A comparison of the data from these two items, how important writing well is to a person’s overall success and wellbeing (Question 14) and outside of curricular obligations, the importance teachers placed on teaching writing in their own classrooms (Question 17) revealed a weak to moderate correlation coefficient of $r = .300, n = 111$ that is statistically significant ($p = .001$). This data suggests that teachers who believe the ability to write well is linked to a person’s success and well-being will make time in their instruction to teach writing to their students even if the curriculum does not include it.
In light of this finding, it is important to consider that if teachers do not feel prepared to teach writing, they may experience much trial and error as they experiment with various methods and instructional strategies in their efforts to implement the instruction they feel is necessary for their students. If writing instruction is not a priority in their respective schools, teachers may struggle in isolation to develop their pedagogies. They may also experience resistance and a general lack of support in their efforts from administrations and/or colleagues who do not share their instructional beliefs on the importance of writing. Consequently, teachers may not actually teach writing as much as they would like if it is not a curricular obligation at their schools despite their feelings of importance, especially if there are other factors at play such as time.

**Question 19 and Question 24.** The data from each possible response choice (up to five) in Question 19 (which factors had the greatest influence on teachers’ instructional decisions) were individually measured against Question 24 (the extent to which teachers felt the PD/PL they completed helped them grow as teachers of writing). The singular instructional decision option of in-service teacher professional development/learning yielded a weak to moderate positive correlation coefficient of \( r = .321, n = 108 \) that is statistically significant \( (p = .001) \).

Whether secondary ELA teachers enter the profession with the experience of quality pre-service preparation to teach writing or not seems to be a matter of chance in the U.S. This data suggests teachers pursue their own professional learning in response to three factors: their inadequate pre-service preparation, their students’ needs, and the instructional demand to meet those needs. Thus, their independently acquired knowledge and instructional practices around writing suggest a greater statistical influence on their professional growth as teachers of writing than any of the other factors related to their instructional decisions. Although this particular response represented a weak to moderate correlation to influences on instructional decisions, it

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does not specifically address the types and quality of professional learning that participants experience. Further research into the specific types and quality of professional learning teachers access would be helpful to examine in the future.

**Question 24 and Question 25.** The data from Question 24 (the extent to which teachers felt the in-service PD/PL they completed helped them grow as teachers of writing) and Question 25 (how confident teachers were in their ability to help their students improve their writing after they completed PD/PL) yielded the greatest correlational results of the data. The two questions revealed a moderate to moderately strong correlation coefficient of $r = .607$, $n = 108$ that is statistically significant ($p = .000$). This data suggests that in-service teachers who engage in their own PL in teaching writing report a greater confidence in their ability to help students improve their writing skills. An additional consideration here is that these teachers could be more proactive educators with additional years of experience who place greater importance on teaching their students to write based on their personal beliefs and levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy. Those factors could also make them more in tune to what their students’ need and how to acquire and deliver the necessary instruction.

**Additional Aggregate Data Comparisons and Analyses**

When reviewing the survey data, I noticed what seemed to be an unexpected result between one response option for Question 12 (amount of writing instruction preparation completed at the pre-service level) and Question 13 (feelings of preparedness to teach writing upon entering their own classrooms). Ten teachers reported completing two or more courses focused on the teaching of writing in Question 12 which seems like a rather extensive preparation in the teaching of writing in respect to the overall lack of national certification
requirements. I assumed these 10 teachers would naturally feel so well-prepared that they would choose *Extremely* to describe their feelings of preparedness to teach writing.

To my surprise, only five total survey participants indicated feeling extremely well-prepared to teach writing. That made me curious to know what additional factors might explain these seemingly misaligned responses. I also wanted to know if the five teachers who indicated feeling extremely prepared to teach writing were also five of the ten who reported having so much pre-service coursework in the teaching of writing. My curiosity led me to delve further into the data related to these two questions.

The following tables (Tables 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13) examine three levels of teacher pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing in conjunction with feelings of preparedness to teach it when entering their own classrooms. I also included data on the participants’ degree level at which they completed their teacher preparation programs, their current home states (which may or may not be where they completed their teacher preparation programs), years as a teacher, and years as an ELA teacher if they differed. This deliberate examination of these responses revealed some interesting findings for a possible explanation to the discrepancy between the initial two questions.

The data in Table 4.11 is particularly astonishing to me because of the disconnect between number of courses taken and feelings of preparation to teach writing. I would hope that two or more classes focused expressly on the teaching of writing would yield stronger feelings of confidence to teach writing for the teachers who completed them. However, a mere ten teachers out of 115 participants who completed pre-service teacher prep programs and answered this question reported coursework that included two or more classes devoted to teaching writing. An equal number did so at the undergraduate and at the graduate levels. Six of the 10 had been
teaching 6–10-years and included the two most veteran ELA teacher respondents. However, there was a spread of years across the 10 participants ranging from the novice to the most experienced. Therefore, the variance in this data, coupled with the fact that the teachers hailed from 10 different states made it difficult to identify any one state that may be deliberately focusing on preparing their ELA teachers to teach writing.

Even more surprising was that only two of the ten teachers said they felt “extremely well-prepared” to teach writing despite completing two or more classes devoted specifically to this topic. Five said they only felt “somewhat” prepared, one indicated moderately prepared, and one felt their coursework did “very little” to prepare them for the task—despite the high amount of pre-service preparation work. Seven of these 10 teachers indicated having less confidence going into the task of teaching writing after completing the coursework than they reported having in themselves as writers initially. These findings raise two questions:

1. What concepts, processes, skills, and theories were taught in this seemingly extensive pre-service coursework?
2. What was the preparation of the university instructors of these classes and the quality of the overall instruction they provided to the pre-service teachers who completed these two or more courses?

These questions warrant further future investigation as well to understand the findings in Table 4.11. They may also prove helpful in looking at all the pre-service preparation reported by the survey participants.

When looking across all three Tables—4.11, 4.12, and 4.13—the one thing that is certain is that pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing is random and unpredictable in its implementation and effectiveness across the country. Even the state of California, which appears
seven times across the three tables and more than any other state, does not show a clear pattern of consistent levels of teacher preparation coursework in the teaching of writing which yields any strong sense of preparedness in its teachers.

**Table 4.11**

*Comparative Significance between Survey Items for Participants whose Pre-service Preparation to Teach Writing Consisted of Two or More Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Degree Teacher Prep Received</th>
<th>Years Teaching/ Years Teaching ELA</th>
<th>Feelings of Preparedness to Teach Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>21-29/6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>21-29/6-10</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KY</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 10.*

The data suggests the most populous state and the largest producer of secondary ELA teachers in the country (BLS, 2018) has no identifiable pattern for how much pre-service preparation in the teaching of writing is provided, nor how well-prepared its recipients felt to teach writing when they entered their own classrooms. The one factor evident in this data about California is that its graduate-level pre-service teachers seem to receive some preparation to teach writing. This raises the question of what happens when teachers complete their preparation at the undergraduate level and never go beyond that for ELA. In addition, how many other states across the country are similar to California in this regard?
Table 4.12

Comparative Significance between Survey Items for Participants whose Pre-service Preparation was an Entire Class Devoted Solely to the Teaching of Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Degree Teacher Prep Received</th>
<th>Years Teaching/Years Teaching ELA</th>
<th>Feelings of Preparedness to Teach Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>16-20/11-15</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>16-20/3-5</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>6-10/3-5</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 21. *Participant completed their pre-service teacher preparation in a degree area that was not ELA (such as History, Science, etc.).

One explanation here is that the state of California does not have ELA teacher certification requirements for writing instruction. However, if in a state like California there is such variance in teacher preparation programs and an apparent failure to acknowledge the
importance of effectively preparing its ELA teachers of writing, this leaves little hope that other states do much better. As such, it would seem that ELA teachers are left on their own to meet their students’ needs in writing, as well as to fulfill their own sense of instructional obligation to teach writing and teach it well. This is a glaring problem in effective ELA teacher preparation.

Table 4.13

*Comparative Significance between Survey Items for Participants whose Pre-service Preparation was a Significant Part of a Literacy Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Degree Teacher Prep Received</th>
<th>Years Teaching/ELA</th>
<th>Feelings of Preparedness to Teach Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Extremely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>21-29/6-10</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>16-20/11-15</td>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 11

These discoveries from the analysis of the data made me also wonder about the relationship between teachers’ feelings of preparedness to teach writing to how important they believe it is to know how to write well and to the level of importance they nonetheless placed on teaching writing in their own classrooms.

As noted, Question 14 asked participants how important writing well is to a person’s well-being and overall success. Overall, teachers reported feeling only somewhat prepared to
teach writing at best (Table 4.14). Specifically, 57 of the 118 respondents to Question 14 said writing well was extremely important, and yet only two reported feeling “extremely well-prepared” to teach writing when they entered the classroom. This equates to roughly 3.5% of those who think writing well is extremely important (see Table 4.14). Even more paltry is the fact that 79 of the 112 participants (70.54%) who responded to Question 17 said they personally put extreme importance on teaching writing in their classrooms. This number included the same two respondents who felt extremely well-prepared to do so. Yet this is just 1.6% of the 79 survey respondents and a problematic finding on both accounts because teachers who put extreme importance on writing well and teaching writing do not feel prepared to deliver such instruction.

Table 4.14

Breakdown in Feelings of Preparedness of the Teachers who Believe Writing Well is Extremely Important to a Person’s Success and Wellbeing and the Teachers who Believe Teaching Writing in Their Classrooms is Extremely Important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings of preparedness to teach writing</th>
<th>Writing well is extremely important to success and well-being</th>
<th>Teaching writing in own classroom extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer/has not completed a teacher prep program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Feelings of confidence in one’s own writing ability does not naturally transfer to the confidence to teach it to others. Specifically, Question 13 showed only five teachers out of 115 (4.3%) who answered the question felt extremely well prepared to teach writing when they entered the classroom. Only five! This number increased to 77 of the 118 respondents to Question 15 who reported they felt extremely confident in their own writing ability. This indicates a clear disconnect.

In Chapter One, I presented clear evidence that state boards of education do not require newly certified ELA teachers to complete coursework in the teaching of writing although they clearly expect teachers to demonstrate knowledge of writing on their certification exams. When is it that these departments of education think teachers are getting the necessary preparation to teach writing? It leaves me to wonder if the teachers who pass the writing portion of the certification exams do so solely on their own abilities to write well because the findings from this study clearly demonstrate they are not receiving the preparation to teach writing from their university programs in any consistent, reliable, or universal way within any given state or across states on a national level. I also wonder how many aspiring teachers fail to achieve the minimum passing score or just scrape by on the writing-related sections of their certification exams. That data may be worth examining in the future and may also serve as a question to pose to the state education policymakers and the testing companies.

Although the in-service teachers in this study, by and large, indicated extreme confidence in their own abilities to write well, they nevertheless entered their own classrooms lacking that same confidence to transfer their knowledge and skills to their students. If the assumption is that pre-service teachers successfully attain certification based on their own existing writing abilities without formal preparation and that they have no need for further nurturing, this is erroneous
thinking indeed. The state departments of education not only set initial certification requirements but also establish what is needed for continuous certification. Teaching writing needs their attention.

Likewise, university and college schools of education need take note: ELA teachers crave this preparation. They need more than simply teacher preparation to check off a box. Rather, they need such preparation to be real, deliberate, quality instruction at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The data is clear: Teacher preparation in the teaching of writing needs to exist!

Summary

The analysis of the survey data confirmed the feelings of overall unpreparedness experienced by in-service secondary ELA teachers of writing through their memories of pre-service preparation and current situations previously reported by pre- and in-service teachers in other studies (Birmi, 2012; Cheung, 2013; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kiuhara, Graham & Hawken, 2009). This analysis also found evidence to support a strong argument in favor of the power of teacher instructional self-efficacy. Findings suggested a dominant sense of self-efficacy in teachers’ own pre-existing writing skills that aligned with proactive engagement in professional learning in the teaching of writing. Such belief, together with their newly acquired skills and knowledge then increased their already high sense of instructional self-efficacy and fortified their instructional confidence to teach writing effectively.

The findings also affirmed some of my hypotheses, for instance, that teachers’ perceptions of their ability to effectively teach writing (behavioral factor) coupled with their beliefs in the importance of writing for their students (personal factor) contribute to educators’ self-motivated engagement in professional learning in the teaching of writing. And all of this even though writing may not hold a similar level of importance to their schools and districts or
be evaluated on formal district- and state-level assessments. These two factors in conjunction with the observation and evaluation of their students’ writing needs (environmental factor) are the three factors that seem to be necessary to activate the triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 1989a) for the professional growth efforts of in-service, secondary ELA teachers of writing. The next chapter provides an in-depth examination of the emergent themes extracted from the three focus group interviews.
CHAPTER FIVE

Qualitative Data Analysis

“Teach the writer, not the writing.”

—Lucy Calkins

Emergent Themes

It has been well-documented in this study that there is no universal preparation or continuing professional development requirements for secondary ELA teachers of Writing. This was also the experiences of the survey participants and further supported by the experiences of the focus group participants. The following sections and subsections share the participants’ views and experiences relevant to topics and concepts that are part of existing research. They additionally explore the significant themes that emerged across the three focus group interviews.

Part 2: Focus Group Analysis

Professional Development (PD) versus Professional Learning (PL)

PL By Any Other Name Is Still Not PL. As stated in Chapter Two, there are many differences between the terms PD and PL; however, these two terms are often used interchangeably and taken for general granted as meaning the same thing when they do not. Interestingly the teachers who participated in all the focus groups overall seemed to use these terms interchangeably in a similar generic way. In the truest sense of the word, they all actively pursue their own professional learning opportunities for personal growth, instructional enrichment, and a general love of learning. Marie from Utah is the only participant to refer to her professional learning activities exclusively by that term. This became apparent in the analysis of the focus group transcripts.
Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I was very rigidly sequential in following the list of questions and discussion prompts posed to the participants with the first focus group. As each interview session took place, I adapted by allowing the conversations to flow more freely among the participants and instead tried to tune in more to how their responses may organically address questions further down the list of the prepared protocol without needing to ask them. Table 5.1 below lists the questions specifically pertaining to PL asked with the codes I assigned them during the qualitative data coding phase, together with the respective focus groups which were asked those questions. Not a single question was asked using the phrase “professional development.” Table 5.2 reports the number of times participants in each group used each term in response to the questions posed regarding PL.

Despite the common misuse of the phrase *professional learning* by participants, the way they spoke of what was handed to them and what they willingly chose to engage in were described in markedly different ways, with adjectives used to describe their feelings and evaluation of the usefulness of the two, and overall tone. The following are examples of the focus group participants’ opinions when speaking of “professional development” in the traditional teacher-as-passive-and-often-unwilling-recipient-of-information sense of the word:

- **Joyce:** We don’t like staff developments, right? Like we don’t like staff meetings, you know, but I always try to go in there with this concept of I want to walk away with something to better my craft as a teacher. So, I go in with very low expectations, but hopeful for high outcomes.

- **Susan:** That “professional development” <adds air quotes> BS you have to sit through for days and days and days every semester, every year is just flushed down the toilet.
Nobody ever asks us “What is it you want to learn how to do?” <more excitedly> My God, if somebody was to ask me that... Holy crap! I've got a list!

- Billie: I think a lot of the district stuff, like I remember we had this PD when I taught in Phoenix and this guy's name was [omitted]. [I] remember that 'cause I will hate him forever. <scoffingly, mockingly> One of these super enthusiastic, ‘I have an answer for everything. This is what you need to do to get your students to do that.’ And like, districts are always about finding the formula. This is going to be the answer to all our problems. This guy comes in, whips our teachers into shape and that's not how it works. That's not how any of this works.

In contrast, teachers enjoyed seeking out and engaging in their own growth through self-directed, professional learning. The following excerpted quotes were spoken with a tone of reverence for their own professional learning, and show a significantly different perspective:

- June: Um, just love, love of it. Love of the game. Love of it. I mean, I just love it. It's just the passion, it's the passion. …. It’s very, I mean, I've been called a nerd before, by my own teacher friends, but whatever.

- Wesley: I guess the learning is like professional learning. I don't even really think about it as professional learning. I just think of it as personal learning. It's a lifestyle choice.

- Audrey: I work in a really amazing school and so it was really just built right in, this expectation that we're always learning and improving our craft. And like I said, we’re so fortunate to have to learn the professional development opportunities that we do. It’s just a way of life. I just really love to learn and I guess that’s one of my favorite parts of the teaching profession, that it’s expected of us to continue learning.
### Table 5.1

**Questions Asked Containing the Phrase “Professional Learning”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Code</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
<th>Focus Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>How well do you feel that PL [already completed] addresses what you were intending to get out of it?</td>
<td>■</td>
<td>■</td>
<td>■</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>What are your preferred PL formats?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>Do you believe your sense of self-efficacy influences your engagement in PL does your engagement in PL build your self-efficacy?</td>
<td>■</td>
<td>■</td>
<td>■</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>How do you think the pandemic may influence your future PL choices?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>Why do you engage in PL when you don’t have to?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>■</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There were no questions asked about “professional development.”
Table 5.2

*Times the Terms PD and PL Were Used by Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group &amp; Number of Participants</th>
<th>Times Each Term was Used by Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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**Finding the Gems.** During the first focus group, Joyce initially referenced the notion of going into required PDs with an open mind and trying to get something useful out of them to improve her teaching craft. She was not alone in this sentiment. When responding to the question about PLs in her group, Marie also unknowingly touched on the concept of finding additional useful things during those activities. She made a clear distinction between the two terms for teachers by saying this:

Don't you find those are really the gems that you get when you have relevant professional learning? Where you might be going for a completely different skill or topic or whatever, but then occasionally if you are engaged and it’s relevant and applicable professional learning, those little gems just start popping out at you. Then that spurs you on to want to have more professional learning, even though the topic may not be your primary interest. You just keep finding these gems or something clicks for you that you can take back and phrase it in a way or ask a particular question or whatever that looks like. And so, I feel like when you have those relevant ideas, it’s not just that you’re learning the topic, but
you are being rewarded for being at a relevant professional learning which makes you want to do more and more. Like it all ties in so much. But when you’re forced to do a professional learning, well professional development—I wouldn’t say learning ‘cause it’s nothing to do with it—where it’s so irrelevant you don’t even find any of those gems anywhere, no matter how hard you’re trying. And I think that’s a really good dividing line. Is it beneficial? Is it not beneficial?

Professional development—the outside decision making of what teachers “need” to learn, the passive direct transmission mode to a recipient, the drive-by, one time session likely never to be revisited again, the one-size-fits-all students ideology—by any other name is still just professional development. While they may struggle in Joyce’s words “to walk away with something to better my craft,” this group of teachers are clearly active in their professional learning, proactive in seeking out opportunities of interest and personal instructional needs, determined to figure out how best to reach their students, and confident that they can.

**Fearless Teachers of Writing Nurture Fearless Student Writers**

When the question “What aspects of writing do you feel are most essential to your students’ academic success?” was posed to Group 1, Billie jumped in and said, “Fearlessness.” This may not seem like the answer one would expect to hear from a writing teacher, but it hits the nail right on the head.

**Teachers as Writers.** Fearlessness takes on many different forms for teachers and students, but it first starts with the teachers being writers themselves. Nine of the ten participants readily self-identified as writers: two said “I’m a good writer” while another said, “I’ve always been a decent, pretty good writer,” two others said they were writers before they became
teachers, two had published in different genres of writing, one identified as an “experienced writer,” and another expressed the desire to “make myself a better writer.”

Even Susan, the one teacher who did not self-identify as a writer, spoke of needing to think her way through her own writing process to be able to teach it to her students. When she finds she isn’t sure how to teach some aspect of writing such as writing claims or conclusions, she experiments with things she read about in books or learned from PL or from a colleague and has no qualms about saying to her students, “Let’s try this and see how it works.” Susan freely admits she wasn’t taught the essentials of writing in high school or college and since becoming a teacher has had to “figure it out.”

Chelsea did not figure out she was a writer until after she completed a summer institute with the Kentucky Writing Project:

For me, I didn't consider myself a writer until I did the Writing Project for a summer. We worked a lot on just our own writing and who we are as writers. And then, because I felt comfortable and enjoyed writing again, I was better at teaching my kids and helping them feel comfortable and excited to write, so it's more clear cut [sic] for me. The confidence in my own writing had to come first before I was able to teach my students.

Many teachers would rather die than admit to their students that they do not know how to do what they are expected to teach. As teachers, we are somehow supposed to know everything and have all the answers. But we don’t. Frida openly shared a story with her students about her success and struggles at being a writer:

It wasn't until I entered a contest, which was a blind contest, and won and they said, “We have an exceptional writer.” And I was like, “Oh, shit it's me!” <still sounding surprised> You know? So, I do write well, but then I had to share that with my students, I said, “For
some people this would have taken a day to do or two days to do. It took me two weeks to do, so writing is hard for me.”

For some, the label “writer” comes easy while for others, it comes from hard work and self-discovery. Sometimes writing teachers are reluctant to give themselves that description as in the case of Susan. However, she felt no pressure to identify as a writer after the four others in her focus group did. Regardless, these writing teachers are at various stages of their own development and confidence levels as writers.

**Progress, Not Perfection.** These teachers additionally offered their own writing up to their students as Exhibit A of how the notion of writing a perfect piece on the first attempt is preposterous. Joyce asserts that, “Even as experienced writers, it doesn’t come out perfect the first time.” Producing something far from “perfect” on the spot is seen as necessary by these teachers to drive this point home, to break students out of what Wesley referred to as the “one and done” mindset that all their students seem to bring to class.

This level of honesty, that of being writers themselves, allows students to see they are not alone in their struggles. They’re also not wrong. Writing is hard. But perseverance at what Wesley calls “the endeavor” of writing produces better writing. It’s the only real way for the participants.

**Teacher Writers as Thinkers.** Writing is thinking and as writers, these teachers openly share their thought processes by modeling the writing process in real time in front of their students. Susan said one of her favorite things to use is a document camera. This allows her to write whatever she asks of her students along with them in a format where they can see every word. Then she uses her writing as the first example the class talks about together. “We talk about whether or not it’s any good and sometimes it’s great and sometimes it’s crap.”
In addition to allowing herself to fearlessly share her writing, Susan and others in the focus groups allow themselves to be vulnerable to criticism of their writing. Of such real time modeling practice, Billie said, “I love it when theirs [written work] is way better than mine. It's like, ‘Well, obviously I wasn't coming from a place of power this morning in terms of my word choice.’ But it happens and it's so good for them to see that.” Modeling writing in this way is an opportunity to encourage the developing writers sitting before them, the students who look to their teachers to show them how it’s done. It takes fearlessness to share, “This is how I do it and it’s not always easy and it’s not always perfect.” Yet the teachers who participated in this study do not hesitate to be that open and transparent with their students.

The Self-Reflective Teacher. Many teachers are intimidated by critique of their instruction. Not these participating teachers. Self-reflection is second nature to them. They are comfortable reflecting on and critiquing their teaching of writing so as to make any necessary adjustments to their instruction. Reflecting on her own instructional practices, Susan said:

When we’re done, I can see the light bulbs around the room. Are there more light bulbs than there were before? <animatedly> Yay! I’ll do that again! <with seriousness> And if not, well, hell, did I do it wrong? Or is that just not particularly effective? It was effective with me, but maybe not with the kids, you know? So, it’s a constant reflection and perception thing.

Taking it a step further, Marie has no reservations owning her challenges as a writing teacher with her students:

As writing teachers, giving yourself permission to fail helps your students understand you’re not going to get it. And that’s okay. And look, we just had this crappy class or crappy activity. OK. We’re going to try again tomorrow. … I don’t know, for me though,
but the older I’ve gotten and the longer I’ve taught, the more confidence I have in saying to a kid, “You know what? You didn’t get it. That’s my fault because I didn’t present it in a way that was good for you.”

This level of self-awareness, honesty, and confidence likely explains why these teachers engage in PL so eagerly and often. They identify the need in their students in relation to their instructional agency and take the necessary steps to align the two. What is most impressive is they do this without a sense of inadequacy, but rather perceive this as self-empowerment as teachers of writing. Fearlessness is not something that is imparted to the students. You must live it and be it as a writer to instill it in someone else. Maybe that’s why these teachers refer to themselves as writers and not simply as teachers who write.

**Advocates of Writing and Writers**

At the onset, I hypothesized that there were teachers out there like me who started out in a different content area right alongside those who received their original preparation in English. Both doggedly and ardently working on strengthening their instructional capacity to teach what they hold dear to themselves and believe to be essential to their students: writing. They have a deep-seated belief in the essential need for writing instruction. They see glaring gaps in their students’ skills. They recognize where they struggle meeting their students where they are through no fault of their own. They also fearlessly strive to be the teachers their students need by engaging in professional learning in the teaching of writing. They do this on their own time. They do it at their own expense. They do this not expecting any accolades from their respective school administrations. They do this with no expectation of advancement. Instead, they do this out of pure passion for teaching writing the very best they can and see this as their professional responsibility.
Let Me Show You. In fact, these teachers show fearlessness by making writing an integral component of their instruction even when their colleagues, for whatever reasons, do not. In fact, they may even teach writing in a way that contradicts the way other teachers do it.

For example, Wesley uses mentor texts as a regular practice. He does this so his students can study them to see what the author did and how they did it, or the author’s craft, so as to analyze the effectiveness of that writer’s moves. He believes this approach helps his students make more deliberate choices within their own writing. Joyce also uses mentor texts but to demonstrate to her students that real writing does not follow the rigid formulas they have been taught, in both number of paragraphs and even sentences in them. “I pull articles and say, ‘Show me a paragraph in here. Count the number of sentences in this paragraph. They're not five to seven.’ That is the standard that may be, but we've all seen paragraphs that have one sentence. We've seen sentences that have one word. Quit with that,” she said with an eyeroll and a tone of annoyance.

Using mentor texts in these ways takes the expertise out of the teachers’ hands and allows the students to examine, evaluate, assess, and think about writing for themselves instead of just being told what to do in their own writing.

Writing Is Not a Math Equation. These teachers had quite a bit to say about formulaic writing, including how it limits young writers. The two Diverse Learner teachers in Focus Group Two agreed when it came to five paragraph essays and graphic organizers, as June emphatically agreed with Audrey’s statement,

Some of my colleagues are not content certified necessarily in English. And when they have to teach English classes, they go back to that good old five paragraph essay because that's what they were taught. And [because] they don't know how to teach Writing,
they're just going to give a formula for the kids to plug in and if the kids plugged in, they get their grade.

June went on to add,

Unfortunately, a lot of high school teachers, and I work with some, they just get stuck in like, “Here's your graphic organizer, fill in your parts.” And then they just hope and pray that when they get to that reasoning piece, they can get a sense or two of originality out of the kids. But basically, everything is plugged in some formula. And I think it's really a detriment. <repeating her emphasis> I think it's really a detriment. It's a disservice to the kids. We're not encouraging. I have a lot of people that I work with that would agree with me on that. Like we're not encouraging the problem solving and the thinking part of it where it's more like, okay, yeah, put this in this box. What goes in the box? And it's going to change every time for purpose and the audience. That reason is going to change every single time, so it's not cookie cutter. You can have as many graphic organizers as you want, but you're going to get to that point when, as always, it’s going to be a new hurdle.

Frida, also a teacher of Diverse Learners, spoke similarly of templates which become repetitious. She moves her students away from them towards writing with sentence strips that can be manipulated into paragraphs, as well as writing on chart paper and thus fostering authentic writing to the best of her students’ abilities. In the first interview group, Wesley said of writing formulas:

Formulas don’t really work all the time if ever. Every writing occasion is an opportunity to sort of fashion something completely new. You obviously want certain qualities in any kind of writing, but every opportunity is kind of a unique set of circumstances that you
have to tackle and wrestle with … to embrace aspects that might be novel to this particular situation. You know, not taking the simplest sort of path to completion.

The participants in this study do teach writing structures based on different genres; however, not as “cookie cutter” formulas. They also teach revision strategies among other things. They instruct their young writers to own their writing, that their writing can follow a structure while simultaneously be theirs. They teach their students to be fearless by being vulnerable. There is plenty of vulnerability to go around while acknowledging that you are not being as effective as you would like to be as a teacher and doing something about it. The ability to lay it all bare and do better when the need arises is a key component of effective teachers of writing.

**Administrative Interference.** These pedagogical and philosophical differences do not just exist between the teachers here and their colleagues. Sometimes such instructional frictions exist at a much higher level. Billie, for example, recounted an incident with a former administrator who, after popping in on one of her classes, raised questioned about what her students were doing when he saw them writing. He proceeded to tell her not to teach writing and instead “Have them do the practice [reading] tests.” She felt a sense of vindication the next school year when that same administrator told the staff their writing scores needed to go up and writing was now an area of instructional focus. It is obvious when speaking with these teachers and really listening to them, that they want those things too because they embrace the importance of writing on an entirely deeper level as classroom teachers, one that appears not to be held by the average administrator.

**Each Writer Is an Individual.** Formulas suggest sameness, not originality. Form over function. Structure over originality. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that focus group participants took issue with what they see as formulaic writing instruction, ative
pedagogy that ignores each writer as an individual. The participants, as teachers of writing, aim to nurture each student as an individual writer who warrants individualized and differentiated instruction.

**One-Size-Fits-All Instruction.** Joyce’s strategy is to identify her students’ strengths and weaknesses early in the school year and meet them where they are by individualizing her instruction. In keeping with this, she does very little group writing instruction, and when she does, it centers on topics such as grammar and revision activities in which the entire class needs to become skilled. Rather, the bulk of her writing instruction “becomes individual conferences” which are “key to helping the students with their personal [writing] endeavors.” She says her first responsibility is to get them to put words on paper and then meet with them to work on their logic and reasoning.

Maybe it is because Wesley is a published writer or because he had a wealth of life experiences before becoming a teacher, but he has some rather strong ideas about how students are taught in a very “one-size-fits-all” way as follows:

I know I said one of the things that gets in the way [of teaching the way he wants] is this idea of some sort of unified experience, which I think is a ruse because you know, even within my single class there's not a unified experience because the kids are not the same. Um, so I would say the things that get in the way often are sort of like institutionalism, you know, whether it's expectations of the school or the department or the enclave of teachers that you work with. The more formal or structured the desire to be, the more problematic it becomes because that works at odds with this sort of individualization that we're talking about.
Grading the Imperfect. The problem of uniform instruction for all students does not end with pedagogy as students are assessed in a similar way. This includes everything from informal writing tasks to standardized tests. Wesley greatly dislikes grading student writing to the point where he said with a laugh, “I have spent most of my career trying to undermine and make grades of [as] little value as possible, so I give multiple opportunities to revise their writing before I grade it.”

Later in the conversation Joyce circled back to support what Wesley said about grading by adding, “Because like you said earlier, grades shouldn’t matter. It should be about continuous improvement and perfecting your craft…. Individual students need to be measured individually.” In keeping with his philosophical ideas about grading, Wesley did not hesitate to add. “Or not at all” regarding grading student writing. The dilemma raised here is not one of not grading writing but at what point in the process to rightly grade a student’s product. For these teachers, grading is not a simple conclusion or response to an assignment but should be tailored to the individual writer and their progress. Meanwhile, the practice of grading students’ developing writing with little or no consideration of progress and growth on a given assignment or over time, continues in this way.

Audrey called a spade a spade when she questioned the fairness of this common practice in this exchange with June during Focus Group 2, where the two anticipated the other’s thoughts and completed each other’s sentences as they did throughout the interview as evidenced below:

Audrey: 'Cause one of my issues with writing, that I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about is that, you know, like an Algebra class, you’ll learn how to solve for X, solve a, an equation. You know, the teacher models it, you do some examples together as a class and then you practice on your own, and then you get tested on it.
June: Right. <nodding>

Audrey: And writing is so time consuming that we don’t do that. But ultimately isn’t that what research says we should be doing?

June: Right.

Audrey: Right? We need to model it, do it together, give independent practice and then test it. But usually...

June: Small, more formative, more formative, lot of more ...

Audrey: Yeah.

June: .... formative kind of formative, and [with] feedback, formative and feedback. And so many English teachers that I work with,...

Audrey: Yep. <nodding>.

June: ... you know, they're still doing that the paper is the final assignment and it's, ...

Audrey: Right.

June: .... it's one and done and there's the paper and there's your grade and next we're moving onto our next unit.

Audrey: Right. And so, you know, how fair is it that we are grading their practice?

June: Right.

Audrey: Um, so I liked, you know, as I was pondering this question for the last few years, and then 180 Days\textsuperscript{10} (two secondary ELA teacher practitioners’ guide to their action researched yearlong writing program) came out and I'm like, ah, laps\textsuperscript{11}. That’s how we give them some practice.


\textsuperscript{11} Laps are an instructional practice discussed in 180 Days.
June: Right. I’m definitely getting this book. <laughing>

The participating teachers frequently spoke of writing development as craft—their own writing and that of their students. Grading a product as final without attending to the process—the standard way that writing is assigned in high school classrooms at all levels and how it is evaluated when it does appear on standardized assessments, arguably contributes to the “one and done” mentality long ingrained in students. This signals the exact opposite about writing, clearly disassociated the belief that writing is a *craft*. This is ingrained in teachers as well, throughout their personal academic and professional experiences.

Billie (Group 1) echoed my own experiences when she said she wished she remembered when she was a new teacher that all the helpful comments she wrote as “opportunities” on students’ final papers would really be interpreted by them as, “You hated it!” She quickly learned to try something else because she didn’t want the papers with hours of helpful comments going straight into the trash unread. As evidenced here, the participants freely embraced the teacher-student and even student-student conferencing technique to a much greater level of success than “the old way of grading,” involving extensive marking-up of students’ papers with the red pen. However, they acknowledged that this conferencing takes far more time than the prevailing practice.

**Teaching to “Unlearn.”** We have expectations of teaching and learning when we get new students every year. However, these teachers came to anticipate the need to teach their students to “unlearn” certain things before they could begin to move forward each year with the writing instruction they *want* their students to learn. For example, Joyce, from Focus Group 1

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12 The practice of editing is also often incorrectly referred to as conferencing at times. To be clear, “conferencing” is *not* editing, which is the practice of correcting grammar, spelling, etc. Rather, conferencing involves a discussion between the writer and the reader about the writer’s purpose, direction, clarity of ideas, etc.
quickly noted “past teachers” as a barrier to her own instruction, clarifying this statement and noting:

… they [students] come in with this idea that their writing has to be a five-paragraph essay. Um, I—my first two weeks are spent myth-busting these, these…<pauses looking for the right phrase> formulaic writings that these elementary and middle school teachers who have 30 to 40 kids in a class or whatever the case may be—I spend my time debunking their myths…. So, the um, whatever one of y’all said it. The unlearning.”

The concept of “unlearning” was initially brought up by Billie in response to my prompt to describe what writing instruction looks like in their classrooms:

It's continually looking for what the student is adept at and what they could use to develop. Like, if you come from the five-paragraph essay, you know, I'm like, “You know, it doesn't have to be five paragraphs. It can be three, it can be 20. Now when you get into college, if your professors say only two pages, then you only write two pages. ‘Cause I don't want to read 150 thirty-page papers. <laughs> But a lot of it is kind of unlearning stuff that it's okay not to do exactly what it is.

Sometimes the unlearning students must do is the misconception that they cannot write, a conclusion they come to after experiencing excessive red pen lashes on their writing often from well-meaning previous teachers. As a teacher for senior high school students myself, I have seen these same beliefs and the same hatred of writing as that expressed by Chelsea’s students (below). By the time a lot of these students near the end of their high school years, they come to hate writing because of the instruction they received and the writing they have been asked to produce. These things must be unlearned.
Below is an exchange that took place in Focus Group 3 started by Julie from Texas whose low income ninth grade students only take writing tests in fourth and seventh grade.

Julie: They don’t know how to write sentences. Nobody knows how to write a sentence because they have no practice in writing. And I think I agree with text structures and how important that is. I was a writer before I was a teacher, so I come from that background. But when I tried to explain that to teachers at my school, they just wouldn’t have it. They were like, “No, no, our students can’t handle that. They can only handle STAAR essays, that’s it. You just know how to write and so it’s easy for you to handle all these different structures.” So, I couldn’t convince my coworkers that that was a good way to teach until we started doing something that's now called Abydos, but it was a New Jersey Writers Project…um, did some professional development and then they kind of got it because somebody else brought that idea in. But my kids need sentences. They don't know what a verb is. So, it's where you can't even...people like do sentences in context, but if a child can identify a verb and doesn't know what a sentence is, naturally, you got to teach them that, you know, subject and predicate kind of thing. But I spent a lot of time on things that they should have learned in second, third, fourth grade.

Frida: But do you think that's because teachers don't, your teachers don't know how to write?

Julie: I think the teachers in my school, I think the teachers in my school know how to write, but they have never practiced writing if that makes sense. So, because they're teachers, they've come into only with like teacher curriculum, you know,
and, and the STAAR is so pushed, our state test is so pushed because they
[students] write basically for the first time in the ninth grade, you know, in the
fourth grade they write like, you know, it's a little thing about, you know, they
have two ideas it's really basic but, and then they do another one in the seventh
grade. That's pretty basic too. And so really, I feel like it in my area, people are
just trying to get their kids through the state tests, right, um, and not actually
teaching the skills behind it, just like, how can I get you to get at, you know, a
passing score.

Susan: Right.

Chelsea: I have a similar issue with my kids. Um, I teach primarily juniors and by the
time they get to me, they hate writing. And also we have to go back over nouns
and verbs...

Frida: Um hmm. <nodding>.

Chelsea: ...because they've slipped through the cracks somehow. Um, so the most
important thing for me with them is to teach them that writing is a process and
that it’s not perfect the first time that you do it because that’s the mindset that
they’re stuck in of, “Well, if it sucks this first time, then I'm just never going to be
a writer. I can't write. Um, so we so a lot of unlearning with that in the beginning,
um, of writing every day and going back revising and... So, it's more of the
theoretical parts of it that they need to learn before we can get into the sentence
structure or patterns.

The unlearning in writing that must be done can likely be attributed to teachers’
widespread reports that they were not being prepared during pre-service coursework (Birmi,
nor received deliberate, in-service development thereafter (Kiuhara et al., 2009). As evidenced in Julie’s story, the teachers in her school indirectly stated that they could not teach certain aspects of writing like she did as writing was easy for her in general. Additionally, they noted that after participation in professional learning experienced provided by what was known at the time as the New Jersey Writing Project of Texas, their sense of confidence seemed to change. What is uncertain is if they “kind of got it” because as Julie said, “someone else brought that idea in” or simply because the well-documented, effective structure of the PD they received from the New Jersey Writing Project built her colleagues’ self-efficacy to teach writing the way she recommended. Based on the research on the NWP model, I conclude it was the latter of the two that had a positive effect on Julie’s colleagues proving that even a little of the right PD can go a long way.

Writing as Collaboration

Writing is typically viewed as a solitary activity and subsequently taught that way in high school classrooms. Far too often a single student writes something for an audience of one—the teacher—for the purpose of receiving a grade for it and everyone moves on to the next thing. This narrow treatment of writing has led teachers to complain far too long that students write without an audience in mind (Elbow, 1968; Newkirk et al., 1977). However, writing is a much greater endeavor than it traditionally has been allowed to be by most teachers, administrators, and teacher preparation programs.

Writing is a rich expression of language that stems from a collaborative exchange between the writer, those they consult along the way as they write, and the ultimate intended audience who consumes the writer’s work. Collaboration is even common among adults, for example, doctoral students have dissertation chairs to give guidance and feedback on writing of
the research process, teachers and other adults ask each other, “How does this sound?” or “Does this make sense?” about everything from assignment directions to parent emails. It would only seem natural to also facilitate students’ collaboration during the writing process as well. Whether the focus group participants were able to articulate this idea or not, they understood the collaborative nature of writing and reported teaching it as such by modeling with their own writing in front, sharing other things they have written including the marked-up draft of a novel (Billie) and to models written earlier in the day with other classes (Susan), and preparing A and C grade exemplars for with every writing assignment (Frida). They also collaborate with their students during one-on-one writing conferences while students work with one another to provide feedback. Billie urges her students to publish their work online in shared spaces where others at the school can see their work. Frida has her diverse learners write collaboratively using sentence strips and flip charts so they can support one another and feel comfortable to take risks when writing.

The participants seemed to also prefer the collaborative aspect of professional learning. Joyce preferred any type of writing PL that was social in nature, and five of the ten focus group educators participated in various chapters of the National Writing Project, namely, Chelsea (Kentucky Writing Project); Joyce (Swamp Fox Writing Project, South Carolina), Julie (ABYDOS, formerly the New Jersey Writing Project of Texas); Audrey (New York Writing Project), and Wesley (Boston Writing Project and Chippewa River Writing Project, Michigan). The NWP’s record of effective professional development (Gallagher et al., 2015; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013) stresses that teachers become acquainted with themselves as writers first, and then collaborate with each other over the course of their institutes and beyond. From professional learning engagement to writing instructional practices, collaboration is a key component to the
learning, teaching, and production of writing (Applebee & Langer, 2006; ILA, 2017; Yarrow & Topping, 2001).

A Parting Piece of Advice

A final prompt for all three focus groups focused on any advice they wish they could provide to policymakers. Some participants needed little time to consider their answer, and some echoed what the teacher participants noted in previous research. Some were very blunt. All were sincere. Below are the excerpted sections from each focus group’s responses to this question.

Focus Group 1: Micromanaging, Computer-Scoring, Authentic Writing Assessment

Billie: How about teaching students how to use a semi-colon should not be an objective in and of itself?

Joyce: Preach. <Wesley laughs>.

Billie: Quit micromanaging my class or (inaudible) nationally, … standards. And every state has to come up with its own standards and it's like, man, beat the horse to death because you can still go from state to state, then it's not going to be standardized. You know, you'll get the kid that missed similes because they didn't do it in that grade. And then your district, they did it the grade before.

Wesley: Yeah. So many things. So, so many things. But if I had to pick one that is like, I think on my mind a lot lately, ‘cause I always get really, really fired up when this comes across my radar, but um, <pause> machine scoring writing for an assessment undermines the whole purpose of the endeavor because if the writing is not going to be read by a human being, why bother writing to begin with?

Billie: Really, it just needed the parts of speech in the right order, punctuated.

Wesley: Yeah. I just, every time I see that, you know, some testing company wants to run
the work through a machine to score it. I’m just like, <pause and then haltingly> that is like, I don’t even understand how people don’t see that, that is the dumbest idea going. I mean, I know it’s all about the money, but like, you know, that to me is like throwing the baby out with the bath water in summary.

Joyce: Can I just ditto both of their responses? You know, I think, yeah. Um, there's, there's so much there, but I think for me the biggest thing, and I guess maybe it ties into both comments is individual students need to be measured individually.

Billie: Yeah.

Wesley: Or maybe not measured at all.

Focus Group 2: Evidenced Based Strategies, Pre-service Teacher Prep Necessary

Audrey: <without hesitation> It (preparation to teach writing) needs to be included period. It's not…. And maybe it's changed since I graduated college, but I wasn't taught how to do that at all. I had to figure that out on my own…. It just needs to be included. And I know that it's hard, but even if they just gave pre-service teachers the opportunity to have these kinds of conversations, that would be valuable.

June: Yeah. You know, you have to spend a whole semester student teaching, right? And your student teaching, at least for me, and this was many years ago, but I don't remember having any conversations with my adviser of student teaching about assessment and feedback. It was more about classroom management and engagement in the moment … and they observe you and they sit, you know? But why aren't you looking at … writing samples of kids together and going “What did you do?” You know what I mean? … Why aren't you [having a] kind of
evidence-based, growth kind of conversation when you’re student teaching? That's the time to do it because you're student teaching. I, yes, class management is very important. Yes, engagement is very important. All those things are important. But the … evidence kind of based … you're doing something good…

Audrey: Yeah. I would say, you know, in student teaching, and even leading up to student teaching, they spend a lot of time teaching us how to fill in a lesson plan, which is arbitrary and created by the college is not what is used by schools. And by the way, I haven't, you know, other than my observed lessons every year for my evaluation, I don't ever write lesson plans…. My cousin was working on a teacher certification a few years ago and he emailed me and he's like, can you send me a copy of a lesson plan that you've done so I can see what it looks like? I'm like, I don't write them. … I feel like that, you know, they waste a lot of time teaching you how to fill in this arbitrary format of a lesson plan and you’re encouraged (to) try the cool new thing, like create a Snapchat for your character, from the book, which again, high engagement, but what is, what are we actually teaching there? What skills that tell us that's getting at?

June: What does that tell us about what the student is able to do? Right?

Audrey: Yeah. So, evidence-based strategies need to be…need to be a heavier influence.

Focus Group 3: Pre-service Prep, Ongoing In-service Prep, Knowledgeable

Administrators, Inclusion of Writing

Susan: It [writing] feels instinctive because you've done it since you were in kindergarten, but it's like …. the difference between being a fan of basketball and being a basketball player. And I'm not expecting my students to go off to do the
NBA, but they need to be able to go down to their local … basketball court with their buddies and shoot around a little bit and not look like an idiot. So, you, policymaker, you think that everybody knows how to do this because you’re a fan. And by the time you get to be a policymaker, you’re not the one doing your own writing. There’s somebody sitting in a cubby someplace writing your speeches for you. <laughs> And that’s awful convenient, but my students have to be able to play. And because of that, you got to teach me how to teach them to play. You know, I can’t be a fan and teach them how to play.

Marie: I was going to say, teachers need the opportunity to take course[s], not once, not twice, but from the beginning and throughout their career to help them become better writing teachers. Now, what that looks like … maybe it’s implemented more as a degree in your undergrad, maybe it’s the district or the state [that] creates a menu every year of opportunities for teachers of writing or anybody else who wants to learn to be a better writer, that there’s some king of conference or whatever they get to pick and choose. And it’s not something that’s pushed to the back burner and it’s not something that they have to pay for out of their own pocket, but it’s something that you’ve done to pull together opportunities for them to pick and choose where they think they need … assistance or education or whatever to become better writing teachers. So, I think it needs to be somehow built into not only degrees, but into professional learning, but in a way that allow for choice … without having us, having [sic] to go find every single time we want to do a professional development.

Julie: I would say that you just can’t ignore writing and hope that it will happen….
because that’s what I see. Writing needs to happen all the time in all the
disciplines because it’s different in different disciplines. And so, all teachers kind
of need to understand how to write and how to teach writing in their discipline.

Frida: I think I would say going back to my administrator, that the district members as
stakeholders need to take a writing class. You need to come and sit in a classroom
and experience what it’s like to write. Let me do the same thing that I do with my
students with you and see how good a writer you are. Because like Susan said,
 once you become high on the totem pole, you don't write, someone else [is]
writing for you. You learn to speak it well, but you're not actually writing…. 
come and sit in the classroom … watch me teach writing and you participate in
the activity and let’s see what your feedback is. Let me see if you’re part of the
80% who gets it… [L]ike our secretary of education (DeVos) never been in a
classroom. How do you know what's going on in the classroom? Never sat in the
seat. How do you know what it's like being a seat holder? So being in the moment
real-time makes a big difference, I think.

Marie: I think also that there’s a healthy volume of dialogue that needs to happen
between legislators and universities because universities make all sorts of money-
based decisions about what classes students take and like our student teachers
come to us without ever having any instruction in classroom management.

Frida: That's true. That's true.

Susan: And zero … writing. Absolutely. But fricking classroom management is
foundational. You know. They've never received any instruction on how to create
a relationship with the class … and their methods class is taught by a woman who has either been on sabbatical or taught remotely, which means that she actually like attends by remote instruction, less than 50% of the classes in one semester that they have a "methods class" <Susan adds air quotes> and how the university makes those decisions based on money. And so, legislators need to be talking to universities about…Hey listen, you know, we kind of expect teachers to able to do X, Y, and Z. And that means you have to teach them that and [if] you can’t afford to do that, then you need to close your teaching program.

**Summary**

What is clear from the teachers who participated in the focus groups is their courage and confidence. It could be said that they break the mold of writing teachers; however, no mold really exists because secondary ELA teachers of writing did not and do not receive any official guidance or systematically structured preparation to learn to teach writing as noted in Chapter 2. Instead, these teachers function on raw instinct and intuition—what feels right to them as writers themselves and as teachers at heart who want success for their students.

It’s not easy to be a standout, to be seen as a rogue. However, these participants show visionary fearlessness by going against the grain, for teaching writing when no one else is or in a way that contrasts with “how my department does it.” They show fearlessness in challenging their departments, questioning their colleagues about common instructional practices that are taken for granted, or “just how things are done.” Their fearlessness is also evident when they do not back down even if it means quietly going into their classrooms, closing the door, and instructing in a way they sometimes instinctively know to be the best for their students. They show fearlessness to embrace what they know to be right with confidence and by boldly facing
what they know is not. They have the self-efficacy to believe they can do something about it, and the agency to act on it. All of this contributes to a cyclical relationship between their writing instruction and voluntary, self-selected PL engagement which allows them to take risks with new methods, information, or things they have learned, and boldly and honestly reflect on their instruction—always looking for the value in what they do or can do for the benefit of their students.

These focal ELA high school teachers lead by an example that they unintentionally set, teaching their students to be fearless by being vulnerable. There is plenty of vulnerability to go around with acknowledging that you are not being as effective as you would like to be as a teacher and then actually doing something about it. The ability to lay it all bare so as to actively strive to do their absolute best is a key component of effective teachers of writing.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Final Discussion

We’ll spend a lifetime crafting our own teaching in order to allow children to be the authors of their own texts.

—Donald Graves

Before this research report comes to an end, this final chapter will provide a deeper look at the findings from across the two combined data sets collected in Phase 1, the online survey, and Phase 2, the focus group interviews. By design, in an explanatory sequential mixed method study, one data set intends to inform and support the other. The two data sets worked separately as reported in Chapters 4 and 5, and in conjunction with one another to answer the established research questions. Analysis of the full data yielded a few findings in addition to those sought by the guiding inquiries also discussed below, followed by a summary of the study. Next, I discuss implications of these findings for educational policy and practice, limitations, and implications for future research based on new or unanswered questions it generated. Finally, I conclude with some final thoughts for the subjects who inspired this research, namely secondary ELA teachers of writing.

**Question 1: How Do Secondary ELA Teachers Describe Effective Writing Instruction?**

The survey yielded four top responses for effective writing instruction. Those included providing students with mentor texts/models of good writing to study and emulate/imitate, having students give and receive peer feedback and/or providing teacher feedback during the writing process, modeling the writing process and teachers sharing their own writing and writing processes with students, and engaging students in prewriting activities (see Figure 4.3). The last
two methods had an equal number of selections by participants. I was glad to see these make the top of the list because they are all things I do when teaching writing. Although there was, however, something I have done in the past that did not make it anywhere near the top of the list which left me surprised. The focus group participants had plenty to say about this and the practices they valued as essential to writing instruction.

According to research I have read, grammar taught in isolation does not strengthen grammar in students’ writing (Elley et al., 1976; Graves, 1978; Hillocks, 1986; Mart 2013; Weaver, 1979, 1996). Putting that research aside, my expectation at the onset of this study was that the participants would rank grammar rather high on the list as an essential component of writing instruction. This assumption was based on a combination of my own experiences as a student with formal writing instruction which focused on grammar in isolation and my early teaching methods that did the same (see Chapter One). I have also seen many of my colleagues place a heavy emphasis on grammar over the years, including the English Department at the school where I work. Considering my own trial and error with teaching grammar and what I have learned from existing research over the years, I was also hoping that grammar would not be given too much emphasis by the participants when it came to determining the essential elements of effective writing instruction. What I did not expect, however, was that teaching grammar would come in dead last. Only 22 of the 112 survey participants (less than 20%) responding to Question 18 selected teaching grammar as an option for one of their five essential elements of writing instruction.

It is noteworthy to consider that grammar was also unimportant for focus group participants. Instead, they vocalized whole-hearted support for the survey’s top three essential
writing instructional elements that focused on mentor texts, teacher or peer feedback, and teacher modeling through their own writing.

To be clear, when the subject of grammar was mentioned in the focus groups, no one deemed it or the standard conventions of English-language writing to be unnecessary or unimportant. And this is the crucial point to stress since many mistakenly believe that if a writing teacher does not place heavy emphasis on grammar, they simply are not teaching it, and if they are not teaching grammar, then they cannot possibly be teaching writing!

In contrast to this misconception, the focus group participants agreed with what Joyce noted as the end goal for her students: to write effectively. Effective writing includes grammar. However, Billie’s comment that “teaching students how to use a semi-colon should not be an objective in and of itself” suggests that the participating teachers do not consider the requirement of knowing the systematic rules and structures of grammar to be the sole focus of writing instruction, especially when this comes at the sacrifice of students’ authentic writing and expression.

Simply put, the great majority of the participants felt that teaching grammar was not due the level of elevated attention it receives in writing standards. Rather, they emphasized the importance of formulating writing ideas, together with a concern for writers’ moves—both for published writers and for their young developing writers—over isolated, direct grammar instruction.

Participants also spoke clearly to the essential pedagogical approach of providing their young writers with feedback (both teacher and peer input) through gentle guidance such as clarifying questions and suggestions provided throughout the writing process. This type of instruction stands in stark contrast to the stinging lash of the red pen experienced by many of
us—and not surprisingly, experienced by many of our students even today. At the same time, it also allows students the freedom and opportunity to express themselves during the writing process. It is these points, most discussed among the focus group participants, that correspond highly with the survey results.

Two conclusions are evident from the analysis of the survey and focus group data sets, both of which are related to what teachers of writing deem to be effective writing. First, writing should not be completed in isolation, nor should it be by strict rule adherence and plugging words and sentences into a formula. Instead, like writing itself, effective writing instruction is an active process. It is also an interactive process between a writer and their audience in addition to a writer and the teacher, and between a writer and an existing mentor text to be studied for the author’s craft—for what the author wrote and how well it works. This is how the participants believe writing instruction works, and how burgeoning young writers should be taught, simply out: To be supported in the creation of new, original text(s) of their own.

Writing is also collaborative. Whereas writing instruction has been dominated by the old transmission model of instruction, there is a collaborative co-construction that instead takes place during what the participants described as the process of effective writing instruction and the development of student writing. For years, scholars have indicated that effective writing instruction consists of mutual transactions between teachers and their students, the students and their teachers, the writer and the text, the writer and their audience, and the text and its readers (Atwell, 1998; Elbow, 1968; Graham et al, 2016; Graham & Harris, 2019; Graham et al., 2013; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 1986; Paas et al., 2012; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Yet the scripted, formulaic transmission model so common in high schools even today was clearly debunked by participants in both the survey and the focus groups.
Question 2: What Specific Aspects of Their Writing Practice Have Teachers Sought to Develop?

The survey and focus group data sets reveal interesting patterns in relation to this question. Two options to this question tied for being the number one aspect of their teaching that survey respondents sought to develop through engagement in writing PL: 1) writing for diverse learners/special needs students and 2) feedback strategies. Writing for culturally and linguistically diverse learners ranked third on the survey, writing processes fourth (chosen by just one less person), and methods/pedagogy ranked fifth (see Figure 4.5).

Based on the focus group participants’ supporting comments, methods and pedagogies should have appeared higher on the survey response rankings than it did. In Focus Groups 1 and 3, the participants spoke quite a bit about wanting to improve themselves as teachers of writing for their students. None of them specifically referred to or categorized their students’ needs as being those of diverse learners (DLs), even by the three special education teachers. Rather, they simply noticed the struggles their young writers experienced and sought to find ways to help them develop as writers, to progress forward with them from their starting points, and to develop and further their skills as writers.

In explanation of the survey results, Wesley (Group 1) did try to seek out PL in writing; however, he and Joyce (also Group 1) said they often just hoped for some new idea or strategy they could use with their students. Audrey (Group 2) said she sought to “build my understanding of teaching writing” and June (Group 2) sought PL in things she wants to “tackle and develop my capacity for.” Marie (Group 3) wanted her students to be successful and used self-reflection of her teaching as a strategy when she felt her students were not progressing. Julie (Group 3) phrased the sentiment most concisely for herself, Marie, and Susan when she said she simply
wanted to “teach better for my students.” These teachers all identified themselves to be good writers but wanted to continue growing in this regard to be able to more effectively model writing and the process for their students. Frida (Group 3) said it was important to her to “build respect in my students” through her own writing.

As alluded to previously, the focus group participants did not specifically cite diverse learners or culturally or linguistically diverse learners as a motivator for PL in their teaching writing pursuits. Even though these participants included two special education teachers in Focus Group 2 and one in Focus Group 3. Conversely, the two DL teachers in Group 2 pushed back against the colleagues in their respective schools who they felt were too reliant on graphic organizers and formulas with their special education/DL populations. Audrey and June both agreed that a professional learning strategy was “good” if they could specifically think of one or more of their students it would directly help. However, there was no mention that such method needed to be anything specifically geared toward DLs.

The findings from the data of the focus groups further explains that of the survey data, making it clear that the secondary ELA teachers who participated in the focus groups are driven first and foremost by their students’ needs. They do not focus on any single student demographic, but rather see all students as needing them to be the very best teachers of writing they can be to meet the students wherever they may be as writers at the current time. It is this goal that is the driving force behind their engagement in professional learning in the instruction of writing.
Question 3: What Measures, If Any, Have These Teachers Taken to Grow Professionally as Teachers of Writing?

The top three preferred methods for writing PL indicated by the survey responses—each ranking over 70%—are all teacher self-directed options (see Figure 4.6). If a secondary ELA teacher of writing is struggling with teaching a certain aspect of writing to their students, a trusted colleague is often just across the hall. It is also easy to pop into any number of ELA teacher support groups on social media and ask members for advice and suggestions. Colleagues and online support groups are both excellent places to receive targeted suggestions for the third highest measure on teachers’ lists: professional books that other writing teachers have found helpful.

The colleague and the support group are fast and, better yet, free resources. They also provide timely PL when teachers need it that addresses the instructional problem at hand. Professional trade books are relatively inexpensive, unless like Audrey and June (Focus Group 2), you develop a “slight addiction to professional development books.” Addicting or not, teachers can pick these titles up at leisure and refer to them thereafter as needed. Colleagues, online professional support groups, and professional trade books are preferred by secondary teachers of writing more than anything else at teachers’ disposal.

When it comes to engagement in professional learning, teachers utilize a variety of sources. However, their preferred methods have some common characteristics. The top PL choices for teachers are low or no cost, are always available, and can be completed or accessed at will; they are also specific to a teacher’s given instructional needs determined by their level of teacher preparation and the needs of their students, apply no pressure or judgment, and allow for the desired professional learning and growth a teacher seeks. This should be the main
consideration when providing teachers with PL opportunities as it will garner greater voluntary engagement. Increased engagement will, in turn, contribute to greater professional growth, which is the most desirable outcome for all concerned.

**Question 3A: What Is the Rationale for Their Professional Learning Choices Specifically Related to Writing Instruction?**

As previously indicated, in both the survey results and focus group discussions, the participants in this study are already engaging in PL in the teaching of writing first and foremost for their students. Survey Question 19 (see Figure 4.4) shows that their students’ current writing abilities and instructional needs to be the number one factor that guided their writing instructional decisions. Thus, their writing instruction PL is not about pay raises, state or district requirements, standardized assessments, or college credit. In their own words which echoed throughout and across the three focus groups, the participating teachers’ rationale is centered on being the very best teachers of writing they can be. This passion is driven by their confidence as writers, their sense of professional obligation to their students, and their sense of self-efficacy as teachers of writing which allows them to embrace and then overcome any perceived instructional gaps. Students’ needs are the rationale that drives these secondary ELA teachers of writing to engage in continuous independent professional learning and growth as teachers of writing.

Something that didn’t quite line up at first glance across the data sets was the professional growth measures taken by teachers and the motivation for choosing PL. The survey indicated cost as the greatest factor of influence when it came to choosing PL in the teaching of writing. On the bare surface, it appears that teachers chose money before their students’ instructional needs. This assumption is unequivocally wrong as discussed below.
The cost of PL was an issue that came up in each and every focus group as the majority of the participating teachers’ districts do not reimburse their teachers for PL. Audrey in New York was the clear exception as her district paid for everything up to and including conferences with overnight stays. Here it is necessary to recall that schools and districts are not required by any of the states that I found to make a point of developing their in-service secondary ELA teachers of writing. Subsequently, teachers are not required to do so outside of work as a condition for maintaining continuous certification. But they do. At their own cost. Both in time and money.

Chelsea made a blunt, eye-opening—even damning—condemnation of this factor, clearly expressing her opinion of school districts who allow teachers to personally bear the expense to grow as teachers as follows:

I think they take advantage of our naturally inquisitive natures as well because they know if they’re not paying for it, we’ll find it somehow, whether it’s free or we pay for it. We will find out how to become stronger teachers and then the problem’s out of their hands. They don’t have to pay for it. They don’t have to look for it [the funding and the PL opportunities].

Her fellow Focus Group 3 participants nodded their agreement with her words throughout this statement.

Schools and districts are inadvertently benefitting from the efforts of these teachers’ extraordinary sense of professionalism. Their students are too. However, the extent of the effects of PL engagement by teachers like these is voluntary and largely unknown. Therefore, it is difficult to be cognizant of the full extent and benefit of this engagement on teachers and its effects on students.
Since writing is so crucial to student academic development and future careers (NCTE, 2008; NCTE & IRA, 2012; Graham et al, 2015), this is also a social justice issue. For example, if an unknown number of teachers are seeking their own development in teaching writing, fighting an uphill battle against districts and states that may not give a whit if writing is even taught, nor at what quality level, and pushing back openly or quietly against departments caught in the endless trap of “this is how we have always done it” dispositions around formulaic practices or even no identifiable practices at all, how many students are benefitting from the extraordinary efforts of said teachers? As things currently stand, there is no real way of telling.

Furthermore, since teachers foot the bill for their PL, a teacher with the desire to attend a conference, for example, may not be able to afford to attend. This may extend to enrolling in advanced college courses or even workshops or webinars. Access and affordability to PL are equity issues as well. When out-of-pocket cost is involved, disparities in teacher pay cannot be overlooked in this equation. It stands to reason that these teachers should be supported and encouraged in their efforts. Many more teachers, especially those without the necessary funds, need to be provided with easy and transparent access to high quality professional learning in the teaching of writing to the end benefit of all students.

**Question 3B: To What Extent Do Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing Feel Their Engagement in PD or PL on Writing Instruction Has Helped Them Grow as Teachers of Writing?**

There were a just a few teachers who indicated in the survey that their PL did not add to their instructional abilities. This number was a minority. Given that no explanation was garnered for this small handful of teachers, I am left to wonder about the factors that resulted in such responses. Was it about the PL they completed—who provided it, what was the format, the
length of time or the number of sessions involved, and how did they feel about PL not related to teaching writing? Could it have also been factors related to the teachers themselves—what are their backgrounds as writers, what are their feelings toward and experiences with writing, both personal and professional that would explain those responses? Although a small number, it would be helpful to hear from teachers who feel this way about the writing PL in which they engaged to improve the overall offerings and experiences for teachers.

On the other hand, none of the focus group participants indicated feeling this way. Instead, when asked if they knew how their completed PL helped them grow as teachers, they referred to observable engagement in their students, as well as measurable growth in student writing quality. Observable engagement seemed to be defined as more writing completed in class and students talking to each other about writing when working with a partner or small group. Two teachers spoke of quantifying their student growth at an 80% correctness threshold for the skill being taught. If students did not meet that minimum threshold, the teachers retaught the material, concept, or strategy. Frida (Group 3) even had students who grasped the concept taught to then teach it to their classmates who were not quite there yet. June (Group 2) spoke of collecting student writing and evaluating it for growth and for her own instruction and then comparing writing samples over the course of the semester and year. Chelsea spoke of “feedback from the students” while Julie from Texas and Marie from Utah (all Group 3) sincerely owned their responsibility to do better instructionally. For example, when Marie recounted telling a student, “You know what? You didn’t get it. That’s my fault because I didn’t present it in a way that was good for you,” and then trying all over in a different way to help the student grasp the concept more effectively. In this way, each teachers’ methods for determining growth were directly dependent on student observation.
For the participating teachers, being in tune with student engagement and growth was the indication as to whether their PL in the teaching of writing was instructionally valuable or not. They acknowledged that implementation was not always successful on the first try, and that they sometimes had to modify their instruction from class period to class period. Regardless of how they measured their students’ growth, it all circled back to teacher responsiveness and instructional self-reflection.

**Final Discussion**

Based on the results of this research, two things can be determined. For one, writing is a collaborative process. For another, professional learning is also a collaborative process. Despite the collaborative aspect of both, they are also very individual in nature. Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint any single “right” way to write, or any single “right” way to teach writing, or even any single “right” form of PL for secondary ELA writing teachers. Preferred methods vary from teacher to teacher and will do so depending on each teacher’s intended goal as this is what prompts their PL level and frequency of engagement, together with its subsequent benefits and usefulness. Thus, like the process of writing itself which varies from writer to writer and according to the task at hand, it would be very difficult to impose a set schedule, single format, or focal content on teachers of writing. Just like writing instruction, a one-size-fits-all PL in the teaching of writing does not exist.

As a reminder, PL is *not* the same thing as PD. Writing teachers must have a variety of options available to them to meet their myriad teaching situations and instructional and student needs. Writing teachers must have the opportunity to meet with their trusted colleagues, be it to discuss and share ideas, or observe one another to offer feedback and extend collegial support. Writing teachers must be able to engage with other writing teachers they can relate to on some
level in person, at conferences, workshops, or online, wherever and whenever it is convenient to
their busy schedules. Writing teachers must have financial and professional support, the latter in
terms of credentials, certification, and recognition of their professional knowledge, and of their
time. Most importantly, writing teachers must be trusted as professionals. These things are
essential if teachers of writing are to do the necessary work of nurturing themselves as educators
and developing their student writers for future success. There is no other way around it.

**Findings Lend Additional Support for the National Writing Project (NWP) Model**

As discussed in Chapter Five, half of the focus group participants had participated in
NWP sites prior to their involvement with this study and thought enough of their experiences to
write them into some open-ended responses on the survey and discuss them in their focus groups.
Additionally, many of this study’s findings regarding preferred PL for secondary ELA teachers
of writing aligned with NWP’s proven method of professional learning and continuous
development of teachers of writing.

As discussed, these participants preferred PL that was collaborative. The NWP model
fully embraces collaboration through its summer institutes and elevation of those participants to
the level of teacher-leaders thereafter. Teacher-leaders are viewed as a great asset because NWP
recognizes them for their capacity to learn and lead as writers and teachers of writing (Hicks et
al. p. 81). The participants of this study took ownership of their learning and were actively
engaged in their own professional growth. A key component of NWP’s model involves
collaboration, viewing teachers as active participants who possess the capacity to contribute to
their own learning.

Here I point out that NWP itself recognizes that there is no single form of PL that meets
everyone’s needs (About NWP, n.d.). However, participation and continued involvement with
NWP would be an ideal choice for teachers of writing who value collaborative activities, seek continuous and sustained PL, appreciate being seen as active learners with the capacity to lead others, and appreciate acknowledgement of their professionalism in a model that has a solid research base of proven effectiveness.

**Limitations**

This study solicited participation from a nationwide group of secondary ELA teachers of writing within the data collection timeframe. At the onset, I had hoped to hear from a few more teachers in additional states beyond what I did in both the survey and the focus groups; however, the conditions of the Summer of 2020 (see Chapter 3) proved to be an unanticipated hinderance to my efforts.

Those conditions may have created limited participation on this study by the negative impact those factors had on potential participants. Many teachers openly expressed feelings of burnout and sheer exhaustion after being thrust into remote instruction with just mere days to prepare for the unprecedented shift at the onset of nationwide lockdowns resulting from the pandemic. Other teachers may also have voluntarily taken a hiatus from social media during that time due to the pandemic, politically fueled vitriol, and social unrest gripping the country at the time this study was launched. Being that participants were solicited largely via social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, they may have missed the opportunity to participate in the research.

I must also consider it a potential limitation that the teachers who participated here may have simply needed a distraction at the time. I also recognize that those who did contribute to the research pushed beyond those unanticipated conditions to participate in one or both parts of this
study because of their exceptionally strong beliefs in the importance of writing and their teaching of it and more of the voices not heard should be sought in future.

Additionally, by voluntarily participating in a study of this design and focus, these teacher participants already possessed a strong belief in the importance of teaching writing and their own sense of self-efficacy to do so to the very best of their abilities. They also had the time and availability to participate. However, I was only able to gather their opinions and beliefs regarding the effects of professional learning on their instruction and subsequent student writing development after they engaged in PL. Therefore, a potential second limitation to this study involves a lack of contemporaneous observations of the PL and any related materials it involves, as well as of classroom observations of writing instruction and/or student writing samples gathered before and after participants’ engagement in professional learning to support their positive feelings in both. Evidence of this nature was not a part of this study.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

**The United States Department of Education**

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released; they were created by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to establish a uniform set of national standards to “ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life” (CCSSI, n.d.-c, para. 1). The adoption of the CCSS is recommended and even incentivized by their connection to federal Race to the Top education funding by the U.S. Department of Education (Mathis, 2010; Lavenia et al., 2015).

The NGA Center and CCSSO deemed it necessary to include national K-12 writing standards in the CCSS. The introduction to the English Language Arts section of the standards
states, in part that, “…. (“the standards”) represent the next generation of K–12 standards
designed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life by the time they graduate
from high school” (CCSSI, n.d.-c, para. 3). The introduction goes on to say, “Because students
must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content
areas, the standards promote the literacy skills and concepts required for college and career
readiness in multiple disciplines (para 2)”.

The introduction to this section further asserts that
“The skills and knowledge captured in the ELA/literacy standards are designed to prepare
students for life outside the classroom. …. The standards also lay out a vision of what it
means to be a literate person who is prepared for success in the 21st century” (para. 5).

What is missing from this significant set of pronouncements in the Writing section of
the CCSS—indeed all sections of the ELA standards—is guidelines for how teachers are to
help their students meet these important academic milestones. Although the CCSS creators
emphasized that they did not want to tell teachers what or how to teach, it was several years
after the standards were released that secondary teachers were finally offered some guidance
in the teaching of writing. Such assistance finally came from the U. S. Department of
Education (DoEd) in 2017 in the form of a practice guide for secondary teachers titled
Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively (Graham et al., 2016). The established goal
of this publication was

….to offer educators specific, evidence-based recommendations that address the
challenges of teaching students in grades 6–12 to write effectively. This guide
synthesizes the best publicly available research and shares practices that are supported by
evidence. It is intended to be practical and easy for teachers to use. (p. i, para. 2)
The three recommendations for practice in this guide were supported by the authors who cited 23 total research studies, seven of which specifically included professional development of in-service teachers before implementing the given instructional strategy being presented. Graham et al. (2016) also included suggestions for PD and PL and pointedly stated twice in sections titled “How to use this guide” that “Professional development providers, program developers, and researchers can … use the guide to implement evidence-based instruction and align instruction with state standards or to prompt teacher discussion in professional learning communities” (p.i, para. 5; p. 4, para. 4).

In 2010, the DoEd did not provide any clear policy statement on the preparation of pre-service teachers or continuing professional development or learning for in-service teachers of writing in ELA or any other content area in support of CCSS writing with the release of the CCSS in 2010 or with the practice guide for effective secondary writing in 2017. To reiterate, the CCSS are a set of standards the department recommends and promotes through federal funding. Instead of taking a firm position in support of in-service teacher professional learning or continuous professional development when it appeared in the practice guide, the DoEd opted to include a disclaimer on p. ii of the practice guide that reads as follows:

The opinions and positions expressed in this practice guide are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions and positions of the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education. This practice guide should be reviewed and applied according to the specific needs of the educators and education agency using it, and with full realization that it represents the judgments of the review panel regarding what constitutes sensible practice, based on the research that was available at the time of publication. This practice guide should be used as a tool to assist in decision making
rather than as a “cookbook.” Any references within the document to specific education products are illustrative and do not imply endorsement of these products to the exclusion of other products that are not referenced. (para. 2)

Likewise, there were no recommendations provided in either the 2007 or 2011 Nation’s Report Card on Writing published by the DoED. The release of the 2017 NAEP Writing scores and its subsequent Nation’s Report Card, as mentioned in a previous chapter, are currently still pending but precedence suggests no recommendations will be forthcoming.

It is understandable that the DoEd is reluctant to tell teachers what PL to engage in and would not instruct states’ schools how to go about implementing professional development or appear to set requirements regarding professional learning. However, a more definitive statement on the importance of continuous educator professional learning and development relative to effective teaching of writing, continuous teacher growth, and student learning would be helpful. I feel certain that various professional organizations like the National Writing Project, the International Literacy Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and countless researchers devoted to writing research and teacher professional growth would appreciate the backing of the federal government. This is likely true of all the individual secondary ELA teachers of writing everywhere who routinely engage in PL. In sum, a clear position, indeed any guidance for pre-service and in-service professional learning in the teaching of writing would help states, university teacher preparation programs, districts, and individual schools to establish their own policies in this area.

State Level Departments of Education

The research discussed in Chapter One revealed a complete lack of required coursework in the teaching of writing for initial certification by state boards or departments of education. I
also wish to point out a disconnect between pre-service preparation and state certification examinations.

I previously argued that the teaching of English Language Arts is not solely about teaching literature. Yet, the lack of pre-service coursework in teaching writing in many states suggests otherwise—an interesting phenomenon given the number of teaching writing items included on some state certification exams, such as in Illinois. This makes me wonder how states expect the preservice teachers taking these exams to acquire the knowledge base expected for teaching writing to pass and become certified. If items based on the teaching of writing are important enough to include on the initial certification exam, it would seem that teaching writing would also be important enough to require a minimal amount of related pre-service coursework.

In this study, secondary ELA teachers across this country reported that they were not prepared to teach writing when they entered their own classrooms despite meeting the established pre-service requirements in their respective states, including passing required state teaching certification exams. This is an issue that Kiuhara et. al., (2009) revealed over a decade ago, lending urgency to this study’s findings for change in content of state pre-certification requirements for the teaching of writing at the secondary level.

More specifically, another state-level change needed here is the establishment of curricula for secondary teaching of writing and literacy methods pre-service classes. As reported at the start of this study, the “literacy classes” that currently exist in the State of Illinois vary widely in their course materials and even inclusion of specific literacy skills. These classes often tout themselves as “literacy” classes but are more narrowly focused on just reading and no other aspects of literacy (Calkins et al., 2012; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Myers et al, 2016). Setting a clear, state-level conceptual framework based on research and standards set by leading
professional organizations such as ILA and NCTE (see Chapter Two), established writing experts, and practicing secondary ELA teachers would provide universities and colleges with the expected knowledge and skills to which their classes must align.

**Schools and Districts**

This study demonstrates that teachers desire to be the very best teachers of writing for their students, *all* their students, from diverse learners to culturally and linguistically diverse students, to “average” and the advanced placed. Thus, districts and individual school administrators should first identify that they are taking advantage of their teachers’ “inquisitive nature’s” as Chelsea (Group 3) said and their selfless sense of professionalism. Even more, they should refrain from leaving their teachers on their own to identify professional learning opportunities in the teaching of writing, and from paying for it out of their own pockets. Rather, it is crucial to begin to grasp the notion that districts and schools need to begin providing their staff with the professional learning that they seek.

One precaution toward this end is that districts and schools must not move to the other end of the spectrum and hijack teachers’ professional learning to turn it into more of the same cookie cutter, ill-planned, short term, poorly thought-out, one-shot drive-by professional development opportunities. Because secondary ELA teachers of writing *crave* professional learning, it is imperative not turn it into something they dread, something they loathe. Rather, there is a delicate balance that *must* be considered so that professional learning in the teaching of writing efforts do not run the risk of becoming another responsibility dumped on teachers’ full plates of responsibility and become “another thing” they must do. This would simply negate the purpose of the PL all together and extinguish teachers’ innate desire for engagement.
Surveying teachers’ specific needs in the teaching of writing rather than pre-determining what they want and need is a vital first step. Additionally, assumptions that the writing instruction needs are the same for all students, or that all teachers are at the same level of instructional expertise should be avoided at all costs. Rather, assume that teachers do have expertise and that they want the best for their students in relation to writing instruction. In other words, *trust them* to tell you what they need and want.

Another step is to contact the local chapter of the National Writing Project (NWP) and secure well-prepared experts in the teaching of writing to provide real, deliberate, applicable, sustainable, and long-term (over the course of a whole school year or longer if necessary) professional development for secondary ELA teachers of writing. Furthermore, make it possible for teachers to attend NWP’s local summer institutes. Once you have some staff members who complete the institutes, use them as a continuous professional learning resources for all your teachers. Teaching writing is not the sole responsibility of your secondary ELA teachers. Writing is specific to each content area and the responsibility of all teachers as June said. It is and should be a shared responsibility by all your teachers.

Lastly, as Frida suggested, engage in some writing PL of your own, attend some PD in the teaching of writing, sit in on one of your ELA teacher’s classrooms when writing instruction is taking place and participate along with the students. This is an excellent first step in getting to know yourselves as writers. This would put you in position to really understand your secondary ELA teachers of writing and student writers. Walking in their shoes would go a long way for teacher professional growth as well as student writing development at your schools.
University Preparation Programs

Previous research has shown that teachers reported not feeling prepared to teach writing by their pre-service preparation programs (Kiuhara et al., 2009). The teachers who participated in this study affirmed their general lack of unpreparedness as well. Therefore, universities must closely examine their secondary ELA teacher preparation programs. Do programs include coursework in the teaching of writing at both the undergraduate and graduate levels? Or, like many universities, have these classes been jettisoned to keep their teacher preparation programs viable in comparison to other universities who do not require such courses to attract candidates who want to quickly complete a degree with certification in the least expensive manner possible? It is also apparent that universities may have eliminated this crucial course content—if they ever had it to begin with—because their respective state’s teacher certification requirements do not require such courses. Whatever the reason, this study revealed that writing and teaching to write coursework at the undergraduate and graduate levels is not always available, and some teachers may only receive their teacher preparation at the undergrad level. Therefore, it is crucial that colleges and universities prepare as many teachers as possible to meet the instructional realities of the secondary ELA classroom beyond the narrow focus of teaching literature.

If teacher preparation programs do include coursework in the teaching of writing, how many courses do they have? To be clear, it is not simply a matter of adding a class or more classes to an existing program and considering the issue resolved. What is being taught and how it is taught matters greatly given that too many of the teachers in this study who completed pre-service coursework in the teaching of writing reported not feeling prepared to teach writing upon entering the classroom. Universities could also survey their alumni who are currently employed...
as secondary ELA teachers to gauge how well they felt prepared to teach writing and provide feedback to inform the revision of course curriculum.

Furthermore, I strongly recommend that universities refer to the International Literacy Association’s (ILA) *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals* (2018) and the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement titled, “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing,” (2016b) when creating or recertifying their curricula. To reiterate, NCTE stresses the importance of supporting developing writers with high-quality instruction provided by teachers knowledgeable in composition theory, research, and methods of practical application of said theory. Likewise, ILA (2018) maintains that writing teachers should “demonstrate knowledge of major theoretical, conceptual, and evidence-based foundations of adolescent writing development, processes, and instruction in their specific discipline” (p. 86). To overlook the recommendations of these leading professional organizations when creating writing pedagogy coursework would be irresponsible and has the potential to render the coursework offered pointless.

Lastly, it is necessary to determine if the instructors of the courses that focus on the teaching of writing have a strong background in writing themselves. As the focus group teachers confirmed, considering oneself a writer and believing in the importance of writing does not an effective teacher of writing make. Therefore, do the pre-service instructors of teaching writing courses have specific background in the teaching of writing? Are they not only well versed in composition theory, but also in seminal and current writing research and its practical applications? Do these course instructors have experience teaching the student age groups they are preparing pre-service teachers to teach? These are all factors that warrant serious consideration in order to provide effective teacher preparation in the teaching of writing.
Implications for Future Research

As someone for whom teaching writing was never my original professional plan, it has often left me feeling uncertain of what I was doing and how to make it better. I knew, however, that I could not be alone in my perplexity and pursuit of professional growth as a teacher of writing. Completing this study has in many ways validated my own experiences and efforts, while also debunking many of the commonly held beliefs about prevailing practices in the teaching of writing. It also revealed commonalities that I have with my colleagues across the nation about the beliefs we share and our motivations to continuously grow. At the same time, this study has presented new avenues of future scholarly inquiry.

Initial teacher preparation in ELA is an area for further exploration. Of particular interest is researching into why existing secondary pre-service teacher preparation in the teaching of writing—as rare as it is—has little or no influence on the teachers who have the opportunity to complete it, leaving them feeling completely unprepared to teach writing. This warrants an in-depth examination of how many secondary teacher preparation programs require courses specifically in the teaching of writing, what that coursework consists of, and who is teaching it because such information may help explain this common teacher experience of feeling unprepared to teach writing.

Secondly, the survey and focus groups showed that many teachers routinely use two main sources for professional learning that I have over the years: namely colleagues, professional trade books, and professional organizations. What may be worth further examination here is the professional trade books, author-practitioners, strategies and practices, and collegial advice/mentoring that are most impactful for secondary ELA educators’ instruction and student growth. This would likely require teacher interviews, surveys, classroom observations and the
comparison of student writing samples before and after a teacher’s engagement in the professional learning experience so as to assess its effect on student writing development and on instruction.

Lastly, I am curious about teachers who do not freely engage in PL and wonder if and where such teachers exist and how prevalent are they in the profession. I wonder what factors influence their lack of engagement, and if their decisions not to participate in PL opportunities are related to external factors like cost or time? Could it be that there are internal factors contributing to choices not to pursue professional learning in the teaching of writing? Do such teachers have the same sense of confidence in their writing as those who reported being confident in themselves as writers? Is a strong sense of teacher self-efficacy missing? Do teachers who do not pursue PL have self-doubt in their personal writing abilities or instructional abilities that would explain the reluctance or avoidance to engage? These are just a few questions to guide future research in this area.

**Final Thoughts**

Although I made an extensive list of recommendations to various policymakers above, secondary ELA teachers are not politely waiting for policymakers to catch on to what they already know instinctively as writers and experientially as teachers of writing. They are out there all across this country continually growing as teachers of writing in their schools, and online in their homes, on their own time, at their own expense, and at their own pace all actively pursuing professional learning for themselves and the students they teach. They are driven by a compelling sense of self-efficacy as writers and educators. Their proactive pursuits are beneficial not only to themselves on personal and professional levels, but to their students who benefit from their teachers’ efforts, self-efficacy, and self-empowerment.
Writing has been referred to as “the neglected “R” by the National Commission on Writing (2003). Eighteen years later and I agree it is still neglected; however, this study provides strong evidence that it is not deliberately neglected by secondary ELA teachers of writing. These teachers are writing for themselves and alongside their students. They are teaching writing. They are striving to meet the instructional demands of the task at hand. They are pursuing, often on their own, the best methods of doing so to meet their students’ ever-present and ever-changing needs. I am sure they would all appreciate support from their school administrations, district leadership, as well as from the state and federal government, but these self-efficacious and self-empowering teachers are not waiting for the nod or the green light from anyone above them to meet the challenge head on. They are actively engaged in professional learning in the teaching of writing and all that it entails.

I want to conclude this study by saying this: Secondary ELA teachers of writing, I see you. As writers and educators, you are already reflective and inquisitive; don’t ever stop. It would be more than wonderful if this study and your powerful words and actions described herein would initiate the prioritization of writing, the pre-service teacher preparation in writing, and in-service professional learning in the teaching of writing by policymakers from the very local level to the federal level. That would be amazing. In the meantime, while we wait for that to happen, I encourage you to continue to hold firm to your self-efficacy, to drive that necessary change from your individual classrooms up to the very top. Keep empowering yourselves and your students. The National Commission on Writing (2003) previously indicated a need for a revolution in writing, and this is still an existing need, at least for now, and teachers are the ones who will lead it.
Footnotes

1 I was unable to determine precisely when the content exam became a requirement for licensure for additional teaching endorsements after 2003 despite my own research and personal telephone communication with ISBE licensure personnel (August 8, 2019).

2 The complete citation for the New York State Office of Teaching Initiatives site is provided in the resource; however, finding this specific information is difficult, so that the following directional path is helpful to view completely: 1) Go to the New York State Office of Teaching initiatives site at http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/home.html; 2) Click on the Certification link in the banner at the top of the page, then 3) Search Certification Requirements, 4) Choose the following from the dropdown menus: Classroom Teacher (Area of Interest), English (Subject Area), Adolescent-Grades 7-12 (Grade Level), English Language Arts 7-12 (Title), Initial Certificate (Type of Certificate) and lastly, 5) click on the link titled “Pathway: Approved Teacher Preparation Program 05/01/2014.”

3 For a list of upcoming assessments and dates through 2029, visit the NCES website at https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/calendar.aspx

4 This report is not available on the NCES website but can be found by searching for it on ERIC.

5 For customized data reports go to https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE

6 Hispanic is the term used by NAEP in reference to students of Latino/Latina, or the more contemporary term Latinx, backgrounds.

7 These documents are accessible online to current CPS employees only.

8 Currently, only teachers who are non-tenured or tenured but did not receive a satisfactory rating during the last school year prior to the pandemic are required to administer the REACH exam.

9 There were a couple of possible explanations for this phenomenon which I discuss below in the very last subsection of the description of Phase 2 of the study.


11 Laps are an instructional practice discussed in 180 Days.

12 The practice of editing is also often incorrectly referred to as conferencing at times. To be clear, “conferencing” is not editing, which is the practice of correcting grammar, spelling, etc. Rather,
conferencing involves a discussion between the writer and the reader about the writer’s purpose, direction, clarity of ideas, etc.
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Appendix A

Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing Professional Learning Survey

Letter of Informed Consent, Online Survey

You are being asked to participate in an online survey for a research project conducted by Alma Vera, Doctoral Candidate at National Louis University for an EdD in the Teaching & Learning Program, with a major in Reading and Language. The study is called “Figuring It Out: The Self-efficacy and Self-empowerment of Secondary English Language Arts Teachers of Writing” and is occurring from June 2020 through late Summer 2020. The purpose of this study is to identify the professional learning choices that in-service secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing and the factors they identify as guiding those choices. This study will help researchers develop a deeper understanding of the professional learning choices of secondary ELA teachers of writing and contribute to the body of professional literature for ongoing in-service teacher preparation. This information outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the professional learning choices made by teachers and the relevant factors guiding those choices and not to evaluate any individual’s teaching of writing. Participation in this study will include completion of the following online survey expected to take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences and employed to inform professional learning opportunities provided to teachers, but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality, the data file of compiled results will be kept in a password-protected folder on an external cloud-based storage system. Only the researcher, Alma Vera, and her dissertation committee chair, Dr. Ruth Quiroa, and committee member, Dr. Angela Elkordy, will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to teachers, teacher educators, professional development providers, administrators, and education policymakers toward understanding the professional learning options most accessed and valued by secondary ELA teachers of writing. It may also contribute to the professional development and professional learning options provided to teachers of writing.

You may request a results summary for this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please contact the researcher, Alma Vera, by email at amartinez20@my.nl.edu or by phone at (773) 937-XXXX if you would like to request results for this study, have questions, or need further information.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Ruth Quiroa at RQuiroa@nl.edu or by phone at (630)
Thank you for your consideration.

*1. Consent: I understand that by checking “Yes” below, I am agreeing to participate in the study “Figuring It Out: The Self-efficacy and Self-empowerment of Secondary English Language Arts Teachers of Writing.” My participation will consist of the activities below during June 2020-late Summer 2020:

   - Yes
   - No

* 2. My gender is:
   - Female
   - Male
   - Non-Gender Conforming
   - Prefer not to answer
   - Other (please specify)

* 3. My ethnic identity is: (check all that apply)
   - African American/Black
   - Asian (South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian)
   - Hispanic/Latino/a/Latinx (Mexico, Central or South America, Spanish-speaking Caribbean)
   - Middle Eastern
   - Native American or Alaskan Native
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   - White/Caucasian
   - Prefer not to answer
   - Other (please specify)

* 4. I have been a teacher for ________ years.
   - 0-2
   - 3-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-20
   - 21-29
   - 30+

* 5. I have been a secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teacher for_______ years.
   - 0-2
   - 3-5
   - 6-10
* 6. ___________ best describes my most recent school/workplace location (prior to recent COVID-19 school closures).
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Rural
   - Online/Virtual
   - Other (please specify)

* 7. ___________ best describes the type of school where I teach (before recent COVID-19 school closures).
   - Public
   - Private
   - Charter
   - Online/Virtual
   - Other (please specify)

* 8. The state where I currently teach or most recently taught is:

* 9. I currently teach or most recently taught students in the following grade(s): (check all that apply)
   - 9 / Freshmen
   - 10 / Sophomores
   - 11 / Juniors
   - 12 / Seniors

*10. My current teaching licensure status is:
   - Currently licensed (fully certified)
   - Expired licensure
   - Probationary licensure
   - Pursuing licensure
   - Never licensed

11. Which of the following best describes the pre-service teacher preparation program you completed or are completing?
   - Undergraduate: English Language Arts
   - Undergraduate: Other subject (History, Science, Social Studies, Math, etc.)
   - Graduate level English Language Arts or other related field (e.g., Reading, Writing, ESL, Bilingual)
   - Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (e.g., Teach for America, Teaching Fellows Program, etc.)
I have not completed a teacher preparation program.

12. How much writing instruction coursework did your pre-service teacher preparation program include?
   None
   Very little, part of a general methods class
   A small part of a literacy methods class
   A significant part of a literacy methods class
   An entire class devoted solely to the teaching of writing
   Two or more classes focused on the teaching of writing

13. To what extent would you agree that you felt/feel well prepared by your coursework to teach writing once you entered/entered your own classroom?
    Please answer on a scale of 5 to 1 with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.
    5- Extremely
    4- Moderately
    3- Somewhat
    2- Very little
    1- Not at all

14. How important is it to a person’s overall success and well-being to be able to write well?
    Please answer on a scale of 5 to 1 with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.
    5- Extremely
    4- Moderately
    3- Somewhat
    2- Very little
    1- Not at all

15. Which of the following best describes your level of confidence in your own ability to write well?
    Please answer on a scale of 5 to 1 with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.
    5- Extremely
    4- Moderately
    3- Somewhat
    2- Very little
    1- Not at all

16. Approximately how often do you personally engage in writing? (This can be anything from composing and responding to emails, to professional writing like lesson plans, or journaling, social media posts, To Do lists, texting, writing for pleasure and expression as in poetry, stories, etc.)
    Daily
    3–4 times /Week
    1–2 times / Week
    4+ times / Month
    2–3 times / Month
17. Aside from established curricular obligations at your school, what level of importance do you personally place on teaching writing in your classroom? Please answer on a scale of 5 to 1 with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.
5- Extremely important
4- Moderately important
3- Somewhat important
2- Not so important
1- Not at all important

* 18. Of the following common instructional practices, which do you consider to be most essential to your own classroom writing instruction? Choose up to five.
Modeling the writing process and sharing my own writing and writing processes with my students
Providing students with mentor texts/models of good writing to study and emulate/imitate
Using a process writing approach
Using the Writer’s Workshop approach
Using direct writing instructional methods for brainstorming, planning, organizing, summarizing, editing, and publishing
Engaging students in prewriting activities (e.g. reading, completing a graphic organizer or outline) to help them gather and organize their writing ideas
Teaching grammar
Teaching self-regulating strategies using checklists and rubrics so students learn to monitor their own progress, goals, and performances
Engaging students in collaborative or shared writing activities
Having students give and receive peer feedback and/or providing teacher feedback during the writing process
Other (please specify)

* 19. Which of the following factors have the greatest influence on your writing instructional decisions? Choose up to five.
Personal experiences with and beliefs about writing
Pre-service teacher preparation
In-service teacher professional development/learning activities
Personal level of instructional confidence
School/District Curricular Demands or Guidelines, including scope and sequence guides
Local/State/Federal Standards (e.g., Common Core, state
English/Language Arts standards, etc.)
Assessments demands (e.g., PSAT, SAT, or ACT)
Your students’ current writing ability levels or instructional needs
Your students’ personal interests
Other (please specify)
20. What aspects of your instructional practice do you seek to acquire or develop when engaging in professional learning in writing instruction? Check all that apply.
Writing for diverse learners/special needs students
Writing for culturally and linguistically diverse learners
Technology and writing
Writing processes
Methods/pedagogy
Feedback strategies
Writing genres
English grammar and usage
Assessment methods (formative and summative)
Methods/strategies to improve student writing on standardized assessments
Other (please specify)

21. Please identify the sources you use to further develop your writing instructional practices. Check all that apply.
Colleagues
School/district/county-provided professional development
Professional trade books by authors like Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, etc.
National and International Conferences or institutes by professional organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) or the International Literacy Association (ILA)
Local or state conferences or institutes by State Chapters of national professional organizations such as Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (NCTE affiliate) or the Illinois Reading Council (ILA affiliate)
Professional organizations’ journals
Webinars or workshops by publishing companies
Online or other social media teacher support groups, blogs, etc.
Workshops provided by local affiliates of the National Writing Project
School/district provided/mandated coaching
Graduate School program of study
Other (please specify)

22. What factors influence your choice of professional learning in writing instruction? Check all that apply.
Frequency of meetings (one-time, weekends, at your own pace, etc.)
Length of meetings (an hour, a week, a semester, ongoing, etc.)
Modality of meeting (face-to-face, online, blended)
A set time for participation (synchronous)
Flexible participation times (asynchronous)
Structure of meetings (university class, discussion board, book club, workshop, etc.)
Location/accessibility
Instructional needs of students
Targets an area of desired instructional growth
Cost
Required by school/district/state
Interesting content matter
Earn Continuing Professional Development Units/Continuing Education Units
Potential for professional advancement
Personal growth/fulfillment
Graduate school requirement
Other (please specify)

* 23. When choosing professional learning, what do you feel is the most optimal time to engage in such activities?
During summers/between school years
During professional development days immediately prior the start of a new school year
Multiple times during the school year, starting after you have established a routine
Near the end of a school year as things are winding down
Whenever an instructional or professional need presents itself
Whenever a writing professional development/learning opportunity presents itself
Other (please specify)

* 24. To what extent do you feel the professional development or professional learning you have completed has helped you grow as a teacher of writing?
5- A great extent
4- A moderate extent
3- Some extent
2- A small extent
1- Not at all

* 25. How confident are you in your ability to improve your students’ writing skills after completing professional development or professional learning in the teaching of writing?
Please answer on a scale of 5 to 1 with 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest.
5- Extremely
4- Moderately
3- Somewhat
2- Very Little
1- Not at all

Thank you for completing this survey! Your participation is greatly appreciated!
I am seeking volunteers to participate in the next phase of the study. Further participation consists of one focus group interview of 3-6 secondary ELA teachers of writing (or possibly one individual interview). Participants will meet via the videoconference platform Zoom to further discuss their professional development pursuits.

For the next phase of the study, I am interested in hearing in more detail about teachers’ personalized professional learning choices related to writing instruction, and how these activities support their instructional practices and improve students’ writing. All participating teachers will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Sincerely,
Alma Vera  
Doctoral Candidate  
EdD. Teaching and Learning—Reading & Language Major  
National Louis University

26*. Please indicate below if you would like to opt into the next phase of the study.

  o Yes  
  o No

If you are interested in further participation in my study, please click on the link below. This link will take you to a new tab to ensure that your survey responses remain anonymous and are not linked to your contact information.

https://forms.gle/JJpwHkdwxbmpVMEV6

After providing your contact information at the above link, be sure to return to this page and click DONE on the survey.

Thank you!
Alma
Appendix B

Complete list of organizations and individuals tagged in survey solicitation Tweets

ACTELA (Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts); @ArkansasELA
AERA; @AERA_EdResearch
AL English Teachers (Alabama Council of Teachers of English); @ALcouncilofEng
Colorado Language Arts Society; @ColoLangArtsSoc
Dana A. Robertson (Executive Director, UW Literacy Research Center); @drober36
Dr. Anna Smith (moderator of @NCRLLorg); @anna_phd
Douglas Fisher; @DFISHERSDSU
ECET2RI (Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching & Teachers in Rhode Island)
   @ECET2RI
IATE Online (Illinois Association of Teachers of English); @IATENow
ICTE Executive Board (Iowa Council of Teachers of English); @ICTE_Border
IL Writing Project; @IllinoisWP
Indiana Council of Teachers of English; @ICTE17
International Literacy Association; @ILAtoday
KATE (Kansas Association of Teachers of English); @KansasEnglish
Kelly Gallagher; @KellyGToGo
LILAC (Long Island Language Arts Council); @LILangArtsCoun
Literacy Association of Greater Erie (LitAGE); @LiteracyAGE
Litearcy Research: Theory, Method and Practice; @LRA_LRTMP
MATELA (Montana Association of Teachers of English Language Arts); @matelamt
MCELA (Maine Council of English Language Arts); @MaineCELA
MCTE (Michigan Council of Teachers of English); @MCTE_MI
MCTE (Minnesota Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts); @MCTWtweets
MD Council of Teachers of English Language Arts; @mdctela
Mississippi Literacy Association; @msliteracyassn
National Council of Teachers of English; @NCTE
National Writing Project; @writingproject
NEATE (New England Association of Teachers of English); @NEATofEnglish
New Jersey Literacy Association; @NJLit}
NC English Teachers (North Carolina English Teachers’ Association); @TeachEnglishNC
NCRLL (National Council of Research on Language & Literacy); @NCRLLorg
NCTEAR (National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research); @NCTEARorg
NDCTE Boardmember (North Dakota Council of Teachers of English); @NDCTEBoard
NeLAC (Nebraska English Language Arts Council); @NebLangArts
NHCTE (New Hampshire Council of Teachers of English); @NHCTEorg
NJCTE (NJ Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts); @NJCTEnews
NMCTE (New Mexico National Council of Teachers); @NMCTE_
NYS Education Council; @NYSEC
OH English Teachers; @OCTELA
OKCTE (Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English); @oklacte
SCCTE (South Carolina Council of Teachers of English); @SCCTE1
SNCTE (South Nevada Council of Teachers of English); @SNCTE
Steven Zemelman; @StevenZemelman
TCTELA est. 1965 (Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts); @TCTELA
Teach Write; @TeachWriteEDU

TeachWriteEDU; @TeachWriteED

TNTE (Tennessee Council of Teachers of English); @TCTEnglish

TN Education Assoc.; @TEA_teachers

UCTELA (Utah Council of Teachers of English; @UCTELA

UWYO LRCC (University of Wyoming Literacy Research Center & Clinic); @uwlrcc

Washington Language Arts Council; @WLAC_NCTE (currently deactivated on Twitter)

WVCTE (West Virginia Council of Teachers of English); @wvcte

Wyoming English Language Arts Council; @WyoWELAC
Appendix C

Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing, Focus Group Interviews
Letter of Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in the focus group phase of the research project of Alma Vera, Doctoral Candidate at National Louis University (EdD, Teaching & Learning Program, Reading and Language major). The study is titled “Figuring It Out: The Self-efficacy and Self-empowerment of Secondary ELA Teachers of Writing” and occurs from June-August 2020.

The purpose of this study is to identify the professional learning (PL) choices that in-service secondary ELA teachers make to grow professionally as teachers of writing, as well as the factors they identify as guiding those choices. This study may help the field of literacy to develop a deeper understanding of the PL choices made by secondary ELA teachers of writing, thus contributing to the body of professional literature for ongoing in-service teacher preparation. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

Please know that the purpose of the study is to explore the PL choices made by secondary in-service ELA teachers, together with the relevant factors guiding those choices. It does not seek to evaluate an individual’s teaching of writing. Participation in this study will include one focus group interview consisting of 3-6 participants or one individual interview scheduled at your convenience within the defined period of this study (June through August 2020).

Focus group and individual interviews will last up to one hour and include approximately 10-15 questions that intend to elicit teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about teaching writing, their instructional practices, and PL choices. Interviews will be recorded, and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences and may serve to develop PL opportunities provided to teachers, participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality, the data file of compiled results will be kept in a password-protected folder on an external cloud-based storage system. Only the researcher, Alma Vera, and her dissertation committee will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study may be useful to teachers, teacher educators, professional development providers, administrators, and education policymakers toward understanding the PL options most accessed and valued by secondary ELA teachers of writing. It may also contribute to the professional development and professional learning options provided to teachers of writing. Upon request, you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may result. Please email the researcher, Alma Vera at amartinez20@my.nl.edu to request these findings.
In the event that you have questions, concerns, or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Alma Vera by email at amartinez20@my.nl.edu or phone at (773) 937-XXXX. If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Ruth Quiroa at RQuiroa@nl.edu or by phone at (630) 874-XXXX, or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth at Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu or by phone at (312) 261-XXXX; and/or Dr. Kathleen Cornett at kcornett@nl.edu or by phone at (844) 380-XXXX. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

* 1. Consent: I understand that by selecting the YES option below, I am agreeing to participate in the study “Figuring It Out: The Self-efficacy and Self-empowerment of Secondary English Language Arts Teachers of Writing.” My participation will consist of

- Participating in one focus group interview or individual interview between July 2020 and August 2020 lasting approximately 60 minutes
  - Yes
  - No

Participant Info

* 2. Please provide your full name and email address as part of your electronic consent.
Name
Email Address

3. Please provide a pseudonym to be used in place of your real name to ensure your anonymity in subsequent written reports and oral presentations. If no pseudonym is indicated here, one will be selected for you.
Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Guide Questions and Discussion Prompts

What aspects of writing do you feel are most essential to your students’ academic success?

What does Writing instruction look like in your classroom and what factors influence your instructional decisions most?

What factors have the greatest influence on your instructional decisions regarding teaching writing?

Tell me what, if anything, hinders you from teaching the writing you feel your students need.

What do you feel are the biggest roadblocks to teaching writing?

What led you to develop your writing instructional practices? What factors compel you to engage in PL for writing?

When you choose PL related to writing, what specific aspect or aspects of your instructional practice do you seek to improve?

Please discuss your preferred PL format or formats meaning the way the content of the PL is delivered. Specifically, what is it you like most about those formats?

Do you feel your sense of self-efficacy as a writer and teacher of writing influences your voluntary engagement in PL or that your engagement in PL increases your sense of self-efficacy as a writer and teacher of writing?

Of the aspects of your practice you wish to improve, how well does the PL you have completed accomplish that goal? How do you know?

How do you anticipate your professional learning choices to change, or how have they already changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Do you foresee social distancing as affecting your future PL choices, and if so, in what ways?
Aside from social distancing concerns, how could PL for the teachers of writing be better?

What do you know now that you wish you had known about writing when you started teaching?

If you could tell education policymakers one thing about teaching writing, or the preparation of teaching teachers of writing, what would it be?
Appendix E

Number of Completed Survey Items

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Appendix F

Single States Represented by the Participants

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