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Examining Elementary Teachers’ Feelings of Self-Efficacy as Writers: Do the Writing Samples Tell More Compelling Stories?

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“Writing is easy. You just sit in front of your type-writer, open a vein and bleed.”
(Red Smith, Syndicated Sportswriter, 1905 –1982).

Introduction

Teaching writing to elementary students can be a difficult instructional task for many teachers, due to the complexity of the writing process, and the variety of skills and applications that students are expected to demonstrate in order to be considered proficient writers. Some researchers have argued that in order to be effective, writing teachers must control both the crafts of “teaching and writing” (Graves 1983, p.5). Fletcher (1993) stipulates that for elementary teachers to be successful instructors of writing, they must draw upon three distinct areas of expertise: know their students, know how to teach, and “know something about writing itself” (p. 2). These areas cover both pedagogical and content knowledge. Others (Smagorinsky, 1987) have critiqued conclusions drawn from research of teachers as writers, (e.g., Graves, 1983) as “reportage” rather than scientific inquiry, due to difficulties in replicability of the social contexts that produced such results, and constraints in generalizability of findings. Yet, the general notion that teachers of writing must be writers themselves persists, and remains the focus of both professional development and research, because arguably, one cannot teach what one does not know. Advocates of teachers as writers delineate the role of writing teachers as including: explicit instruction, modeling, and providing students

opportunities to engage and practice writing across school disciplines (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2006; Graves, 1983). Through engagements in such multifaceted writing tasks, teachers could develop writing skills that both inform their practice, and potentially impact students' writing achievements.

However, not much is known about teachers' sense of themselves as writers. A synthesis of research conducted between 1990 to 2015 on teachers as writers, and their potential to impact students' writing (Cremin & Oliver, 2017), indicates that "teachers have narrow conceptions of what counts as writing and ...multiple tensions exist [in their conceptualizations] that ...relate to low self-confidence and negative writing histories [and], challenge [their ability] of composing and enacting the positions of teacher and writer in the classroom" (p. 294). Shulman (1998) explores the tensions that often occur in discussions of the importance of theory and practice for professionals, and concludes:

In the context of this tension, Dewey argued that theory and intellectual mastery must take a certain precedence in the preparation of professionals. Not only must theory be taught directly, vigorously, and extensively. It must serve as the rationale for the teaching of practice (p.11).

This study utilizes three main sources of data: (a) self-reports in surveys, (b) teachers' writing samples, and (c) *The History of the Piece* (a reflective recollection of how a teacher approaches a writing task), to examine teachers' understandings of their self-efficacy as writers, and their role as teachers of struggling student writers.

Being a Teacher-Writer: Why it Matters for Writing Teachers

Teacher competence in specific subjects is especially important in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) era. Requirements for teacher effectiveness and accountability have become more stringent, and some states such as Massachusetts are pushing for teacher licensure renewal to be tied to student performance as determined by a measure of Student Growth Percentile (SGP). SGPs are measures of students' growth based on comparisons of individual changes in students' performance at statewide assessments such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), to that of other students. Teacher training programs are also required to adopt rigorous standards to meet the challenging federal and state legislative requirements for student accountability. The Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP Commission, 2013) states in Standard 1: Content and pedagogical Knowledge:

The provider [should] ensure that candidates develop a deep understanding of the critical concepts and principles of their discipline and, by completion, are able to use discipline-specific practices flexibly to advance the learning of all students toward attainment of college and career readiness (p.10).

These requirements place inordinate amounts of pressure on teachers to master content, which may not be the only factor that contributes to students' writing proficiency.

A 2003 report by *The National Commission on Writing* indicated that two-thirds of elementary, middle, and high school students in U.S. schools write below grade level proficiency. Since then, available data provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] have shown that few gains have been made in the writing skills of middle and high school students. According to *The Nation's Report Card on Writing*, released by NAEP for 2007, average writing scores for 8th graders who performed at *Basic* achievement level improved by 3 points from 2002 to 2007 (85% to 88%), but not at *Proficient* level; and average writing scores for 12th graders performing at or above the *Basic* achievement level increased from 74% to 82%. The NAEP *Basic* level indicates partial mastery of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade. Only a third of 8th graders and less than a quarter of high school seniors tested at or above the proficient level. There was no significant change in the percentage of students performing at, and above *Proficient* level at both 8th and 12th grades. Students at *Proficient* level are expected to clearly demonstrate the ability to accomplish the communicative purpose of their writing over challenging subject matter (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). In the 2011 computer-based NAEP writing assessment, 54% of 8th graders and 52% of 12th graders performed at the *Basic* level, 24% of students at both grades performed at the *Proficient* level, and only 3% percent of 8th and 12th graders performed at the *Advanced* level (The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011). Despite some gains made at the proficiency level in writing from 2002 to 2011, too many students are still stuck at basic levels, and too few are scoring at advanced levels across the nation. The NAEP statistics indicate that it can take several years for students' writing scores to show improvement. In fact, 2019 NAEP literacy results showed some losses or stagnation among certain demographics of students between 2009 and 2019. Sharon Washington, executive director of the National Writing Project maintains that these results should be used as a catalyst to continue identifying the most effective instructional practices to move students toward higher levels of writing achievement. Seventy-five percent of Americans agree, and suggest that schools should place more emphasis on writing (NWP Annual Report, 2015).

While on the one hand, much emphasis is placed on teacher competence as an indicator of students' performance, not as many studies in the research literature have focused attention on teachers' writing identities-perceptions of self as writer. Socio-cultural concepts of identity deal with relations between social and personal facets of human development, especially the development of "self-understandings" (Holland et al., 1998). "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as who they say they are" (p. 3). This self-consciousness forms the bases "from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (p. 5). McCarthy and Moje, (2002) argue that teachers' writing identities are constructed through multiple interactions with others such as their students, classrooms, other teachers; and that these identities, shape literacy instruction (Andrews, 2008a; Commeyras, Bisplinhoff, & Olson, 2003; Cooper & Olson, 1996). When teachers write, their modeling, enthusiasm, confidence, and other writing behaviors benefit student-writers in their classrooms (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, & Radencich, 2000). Much work in the NWP is founded on the belief that teacher writing is fundamental to teaching writing. Professional Development (PD) settings where teachers have opportunities to write together in various genres (narrative, expository, poetry), may develop their confidence and sense of efficacy as writers, and strengthen pedagogical practice through discussions with other teachers (Whitney, 2009). Because identity is dynamic and evolving, even if teachers have negative identities as writers, reflective practices such as those provided in PD settings may help them redefine what it means to be a teacher-writer and a writing-teacher (Burke, 2006). "PD may serve as an activity through which to reconsider writing identities" (Zoch, Myers, Lambert, Vetter, & Fairbanks, 2016, p. 3).

Many teachers find difficulties teaching writing because they had very little training in the teaching of writing in preservice preparation programs or in-service PD workshops (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Anecdotal reports from faculty in colleges of education indicate that writing continues to be one of the most challenging skills for pre-service teachers. According to the National Commission on Writing statistics (2003), 1 in 5 first year college students requires remedial writing classes, and more than half of college students are unable to write a paper relatively free of errors. Pre-service teachers who struggle with writing often carry these difficulties into their practice. Teachers' lack of confidence in their writing abilities is also often associated with negative emotions towards writing, and "This is likely to have consequences for student motivation and achievement" (Cremin & Oliver, p. 292).

Bandura (1986) maintains that a teacher's sense of efficacy can be a powerful construct in determining students' achievement and success. When teachers believe that they have the ability to produce desired results, they are more

likely to persevere when things go wrong with their students. Unfortunately, many teachers do not appear to have confidence in their writing abilities; and those that do, often decry the lack of time to practice and hone their skills, which may further erode their confidence. Professional development can foster teachers' writing proficiency, improve their feelings of self-efficacy as writers, and provide them useful strategies to efficiently manage classroom writing tasks that will in turn improve students' writing achievements across school disciplines (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Wood & Lieberman, 2000).

Purpose

This mixed methods study was conducted within the context of a Writing Professional Development partnership between a local university and a public school district in northeastern Massachusetts, U.S.A. Four of the participating schools had been identified as needing improvement based on the English Language Arts (ELA) in MCAS standardized test results; and participating teachers were selected based on the understanding that they would act as trainers, mentors, and peer models for their colleagues in the second and third years of the project. The design, content and delivery of the workshop was based on one of the core principles of the National Writing Project (NWP) (Blau, 1988; Wood & Lieberman, 2000), that teachers of writing must envision themselves as writers. Workshop providers integrated elements of the Writers' Workshop (planning, drafting, revising, editing, conferencing and publishing) into the content (Calkins, 1994, 2010; Graves, 1983). In planning meetings, both teachers and school officials had indicated that they used some elements of the writer's workshop as their approach to teaching writing, but it was evident that this approach was not being implemented consistently across grade levels and teachers. Workshop objectives included helping teachers: (a) understand the full spectrum of the writer's workshop, (b) participate in and learn to construct mini-lessons within writing workshops that include-writing, conferencing, editing, and publishing, (c) learn useful strategies to motivate both themselves and their students become more proficient writers, and (d) help teachers examine their attitude and sense of efficacy towards writing. This paper focuses on the last objective: helping teachers critically examine their attitudes and feelings of self-efficacy as writers. The research questions are:

- (1) Is there a relationship between a teacher's feelings of self-efficacy (perceived beliefs in the ability to perform certain tasks) as a writer, and actual performance on a writing sample?
- (2) What insight does the *History of the Piece* provide into a teacher's development of self-efficacy as a writer?

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura (1997), the pioneer of self-efficacy theory describes self-efficacy as “concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (p. 122). Humans need to believe in themselves to take control over their own lives, and engage in purposeful efforts that result in outcomes affecting their lives; if not, they will not attempt action. Feelings of self-efficacy can create self-beliefs and inspire action (Bandura, 1997). Although Self-efficacy developed from a socio-cognitive perspective, researchers in academic environments have examined the mediating effect of self-efficacy on mechanisms such as motivation and its outcome on cognitive tasks (Zimmerman, 2000), and concluded that the concept of self-efficacy has more to do with “self-perception of competence rather than with actual level of competence” (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2012; Tschannen- Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 211; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy research focusing on domains like literacy (specifically, tasks such as reading and writing), indicate that feelings of self-efficacy are affected by student performance, context, and often interact with other self-regulatory learning processes that may be mediated by contextual factors that include: the quality of instructional resources, and the amount of scaffolding provided. Therefore, self-reported judgments of how well one can perform academic tasks may, or may not necessarily result in proficient performance of such tasks in authentic contexts (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Zimmerman, 2000).

Other socio-cognitive models of human behavior and learning that provide theoretical lenses through which we examine teachers’ performance in peer-assisted environments such as PD, suggest that human behavior can be understood within three interdependent, reciprocal, and causative factors: behavior, internal personal factors (cognitive, affective and biological), and the external environment (Vygotsky, 1978, 1999; Wertsch, 1985; Pajares, 2006; Schunk, 2012). Individuals have tremendous control-human agency, in this system of reciprocity. Within the context of a writing workshop, teachers engage in various social and collaborative activities including: sharing, responding to colleagues, mentoring, teaching peers, and providing feedback in discussion groups; while at the same time learning new skills that they can apply to their own writing engagements. These intertwined transactions in the socially mediated context of PD may be properly coordinated to produce successful outcomes in a task as complex as writing. However, if left on their own, teachers may not adequately control these mediating factors, and may therefore not feel as successful. Therefore, reports of self-efficacy in such contexts may or may not accurately reflect actual competence. Engaging in a reflective activity such as writing the *History of a Piece*, that is done without the benefit of group mediation, may provide an additional lens through which teachers’ abilities as writers can be examined.

Method

Participants.

Twenty-eight teachers from four elementary schools in the district participated in the workshops for ten weeks. Participants included: eleven 4th grade teachers, four 3rd grade teachers, four 2nd grade teachers, three 1st grade teachers, one kindergarten teacher, two Reading Specialists, two Special Education teachers and one Academic Coach. All workshop participants were female of Caucasian descent. While this may be a limitation for the study, this sample is almost reflective of the statistics for teacher demographics in Massachusetts where 93% of teachers are white and more than 80% female <http://search.doe.mass.edu/?q=teacher%20demographics>. All participants signed informed consents; however, only twenty-one (n=21) participants completed both the pre- and post-workshop surveys for this study. Non-study participants included the three 1st grade, one kindergarten, and two Special Education teachers.

Table 1: Schools and Number of Students Served in Target Grade Levels.

SCHOOL Number	NUMBER of GRADES	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	Identified for Improvement?
1	3-4	Up to 7	N=168	Yes
2	3-4	Up to 7	N=194	Yes
3	3-4	Up to 7	N=139	Yes
4	3-4	Up to 7	N=130	Yes

Procedure.

Teachers were surveyed pre-and post-workshop. The survey, adapted from Elbow and Belanoff (2003) included Likert scale-type items and open response questions. Questions and prompts focused on teachers' attitudes toward writing instruction, their feelings of competency as writers and writing teachers, and perceptions of their students' attitudes and abilities toward writing. The paper and pencil surveys

were administered anonymously with participants' identities concealed. Participants selected their own unique nicknames and identifying numbers so that pre- and post-workshop survey responses could be matched. This level of anonymity was necessary, given the power differential that may exist between workshop providers and participants. Power dynamics is centrally connected to student and teacher perceptions of social interactions within academic settings. While teacher-research could provide invaluable data on how teachers make sense of their roles and how they make decisions about how to use their power over students within their classrooms, researchers studying teachers' classrooms practices could inadvertently rock these dynamics. In PD workshop settings, the roles and uses of power and teacher-student relationships are reversed; with the university professor /researcher becoming the teacher and the elementary teacher, the student. Both the professors and teachers may have assumptions about what it means to teach and learn. To effectively gather information about teaching practices, mutual understandings and trustworthy collaboration is necessary; but this could be difficult to achieve, given the limited time duration in research projects. Anonymity could foster a risk-free and non-judgmental research environment that would guarantee the collection of credible data from teacher participants.

Part 1 of the survey examined teachers' general attitudes towards specific domains of writing, and their self-efficacy as writers in the target domains. Areas of writing skills examined included (1) Attitudes/Perceptions toward Writing, (2) Generating, (3) Revising, (4) Feedback, (5) Collaboration, (6) Awareness and Control of Writing Process. Participants were instructed to respond "Yes," "No," or "Sometimes" to Prompts. For details on discreet items under each category, *See Table 2: Writing Skills Questionnaire (taken from, and adapted from a Community of Writers by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, 2003, pp.xxvii).*

Workshop sessions began after teachers had turned in pre-workshop survey responses. Sessions were conducted in traditional-style classroom from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. weekly. The first session opened with participants discussing what they felt they could do as writers, what their students could or could not do, what approaches they used in teaching writing, and concerns that they had regarding their students' performances on the MCAS. Participants were informed that they would be writing a paper on a topic of their choice over the duration of the workshop. They could write in any genre: narrative, personal letters, memos, technical essays, or poetry. The writing session began with brainstorming. Participants were asked to list things that they know and care about, categorize them, and give titles to those that they may want to write about. At the second session, they were asked to select one of the topics or any other topic not listed and start writing immediately, and to continue working on their topics whenever they could find time outside of the workshop

periods. Opportunities for teachers to share their writing in small groups and get feedback from peers were created within sessions. When writing samples were completed, participants were guided through the process of writing the *History of the Piece* -a reflective recollection of how they had approached the writing task. The workshop facilitators provided the following leads: “*The first thing I did after reading the prompt was..., next..., then....*” After this guidance, teachers were asked to write their histories outside of the PD sessions. Teachers indicated their real and nicknames on surveys, the writing pieces, and the *History of the Piece*, so that all three sources of data could be matched. Survey responses were examined to determine teachers’ feelings of competence in performing specific domains of writing and compared with actual writing samples to determine if the survey responses matched the quality of the writing. The history of each writing piece was examined to gain interpretive insights into the cognitive processes of the writer as she performed her craft. Conclusions were drawn as to whether self-reported feelings of efficacy [or the lack thereof] in survey responses, were corroborated by the participant’s writing sample and the *History of the Piece*. Out of the twenty-one teachers who participated in the study, fifteen gave permission for their writing pieces to be published, but six did not feel comfortable publishing their work. Names of teacher-writers and other personal information have been masked by the use of pseudonyms.

Univariate analyses of survey data were conducted comparing pre- and post-workshop responses to determine if there were changes in workshop participants’ attitudes towards writing, their sense of self-efficacy as writers and writing teachers, and their perceptions of their students’ attitudes towards writing and writing proficiency. On reports about self-efficacy, “Yes,” and “Sometimes” responses were calculated together, and pre and post workshop percentages compared to determine shifts in participants’ perceptions of ability. Fisher Exact Probability Test ($p < .05$) was conducted to determine statistical significance in pre- and post- survey responses.

Evaluation Criteria for Writing Samples.

Spandel’s (2004) model for effective writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions were used as a framework for evaluating teachers’ writings. Three out of the six traits: generating ideas, organization, and voice were used to determine the quality of the piece, because we believed that these traits corresponded with, and could provide insights into writing domains from *Generating to Revising*, which span the stages of the cyclical writing process.

Generating Ideas. Culham (2003) states that ideas are the “heart of the message” (p.11). Strong ideas make up the content of writing. Good writers must

therefore know how to come up with original ideas, and develop them well to account for a clear and focused piece of writing. Good writers use details to create vivid images and senses in the readers' minds. Of the 88.05% of teachers who identified "ideas" as a component of good writing and responded to the prompt, "Good writers know how to...", five stated that good writing, "engage[s] readers/audience," six, "express thoughts/ideas," four, "communicate effectively," three, "write creatively," and two, "use details."

Organization. Spandel (2004) describes organization as putting information in the internal structure of the text in a manner that informs and enhances the central idea. A well-organized piece of writing should have a strong opening, leads that grab the audience's attention, and logical progression and transition of ideas. Over ninety-five percent of participants felt that they had the kind of control over elements of their writing that would produce a well-organized piece.

Voice. Voice, which Culham (2003) refers to as the "soul of the piece" (p.12), is the magic, the wit, and feeling that connects the writer to the audience. Writing with voice...has that fluency, rhythm, and liveliness that exist naturally in the speech of most people, when they are enjoying a conversation...the power to make you pay attention and understand.... "Real voice is whatever yields resonance, whatever makes the words bore through" (Elbow, 1998, p. 313). A strong and effective voice would combine elements of word choice, sentence fluency, and good writing conventions. Each writing piece was rated by two raters separately, followed by discussions and consensus.

Results

Due to the small sample size (n=21), judgments on self-efficacy appeared to be more significant when examined by percentages of respondents. Results indicate that most teachers (88.87%) began the workshop feeling positive or somewhat positive about writing, and feeling competent in performing various domains of writing, including: generating ideas, collaborating, revising, and having control over the writing process. Teachers who indicated that they enjoyed writing, also perceived themselves as good writers (85.7%). Teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy in various domains dealing with the control of writing were equally high. A detailed percentage breakdown is as follows: four out of twenty-one teachers (19%) stated that they enjoyed writing; fourteen out of twenty-one (66.7%) said they sometimes enjoyed writing, and three out of twenty-one (14.3%) responded with "No" to enjoyment of writing. Prompted as to whether they thought of themselves as good writers, ten out of twenty-one teachers (47.6%) responded "Yes," eight, (38.1%) said "sometimes," depending on the kind of writing, and three out of twenty-one (14.3%) did not think of themselves as good writers.

Cumulatively (“Yes” and “Sometimes”), respondents who indicated that they enjoyed writing (85.7%), also perceived themselves as good writers (85.7%). Teachers’ rating of their abilities to effectively perform certain writing skills were equally high, cumulatively (Yes + Sometimes), post and pre-workshop.

Table 3. Teachers’ Self-efficacy percentages pre- and post-workshop

Domain of Writing	Pre-workshop	Post-Workshop
<i>Revising and Editing</i>	92%	91.79%
<i>Generating Ideas</i>	88.05%	69.1%
<i>Giving Feedback,</i>	86.75 %	76.18
<i>Awareness and Control of Writing</i>	95.3	94%
<i>Control of Writing</i>	90.48%	77%

Evaluation of individual participants’ writing samples using the criteria of Generating Ideas, Organization, and Voice, revealed some differentials in teachers’ beliefs about their writing competence and their actual writing performance. In addition, teachers’ reports of enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of writing, did not always correlate with the quality of their writing samples. One would think that the lack of enjoyment of a task would produce less than average performance results, due to lack of engagement and perseverance. However, some teachers who did not enjoy writing, actually produced good writing samples, while those who stated that they enjoyed writing, produced samples that were not highly rated, based on the evaluation criteria. The section below presents writing portraits of two teachers whose self-reporting neither matched evidence from their writing samples, nor the *Histories of the Pieces*.

Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Portraits as Writers

Aimee (pseudonym) 4th grade teacher.

Aimee stated on her survey and open-ended responses that she did not enjoy writing. Notwithstanding her lack of enjoyment, she considered herself a good writer with “average” skills in generating ideas on a topic of interest, providing details, revising effectively, collaborating with peers [providing feedback], and exercising control over the writing process. About 50% of her responses on individual items on each domain were “Sometimes,” and the other 50%, “Yes.” It would be fair to presume that if Aimee were using NAEP categorizations, to rate herself, she would place herself at the “basic” level of writing.

Aimee's personal narrative.

All right, let's go, move it! Cathy, my gymnastics instructor sounded like a drill sergeant on the 1st day of boot camp, yelling out orders to a group of restless recruits. But I can't say I was surprised. In the ten years I'd known her, Cathy had become my living nightmare, my own personal demon.... the gym Nazi, if you will.

'Aimee, pick a beam and GET ON!' she screamed from across the gym. I sighed wearily as I joined the other nervous girls waiting instructions. It wasn't that I didn't feel just as anxious as everyone else, but I was finally starting to question the notion of free will.

'Today we're doing handsprings and you will perform one on your own on the high beam.' Uh, oh. Back handspring on the high beam is as scary as you can get, especially intimidating to those of little faith...or balance. I knew my sister Kelly was deathly afraid of this particular task and I could feel a heavy weight settle in my stomach.

I meandered over to the low beam to get out of Cathy's attack range and started practicing. Minutes later I found myself listening in horror to Cathy screaming at her latest victim. As time stands still, I realize it is my sister Kelly who's under fire. There she was, a 70lb string bean quivering like a dandelion in the breeze. Cathy was inches from her face, shouting orders rather than encouragement with no sign of stopping. Kelly cracked. She was hysterically sobbing and desperately trying to jump off the beam. Cathy blocked her path and forcibly tried to push her backwards into spring position.

I bolted towards the balance beam and shoved my finger in Cathy's face. 'get your hands off her!' I yanked Kelly down from the beam and angrily strode out of the gym, Kelly in tow. 'You should be ashamed!' I hollered. 'You are the adult here. You have no right to put your hands on a student. Wait until my parents hear about this!'

It was at this moment I realized that I had crashed through the glass ceiling from childhood into adulthood. For the rest of my life I will remember the event as the moment when I realized that no one could really tell you what to do. People could yell or threaten, or even bribe you, but free will was alive and kicking in this girl.

Look out world----here I come!

Analysis of Aimee's writing.

Aimee's writing has a strong voice that grips the reader's attention from the first sentence. Her "dramatic lead" (Fletcher, 1993, p. 82), "Alright, let's go. Move it," intrigues the reader who wants to know what is going on, what occurred prior,

where the event is taking place, and who is talking to whom? These questions hurry the reader along to read and find out. Then, we meet “Cathy, [the] gymnastics instructor [who sounds] like a drill sergeant on the first day of boot camp, yelling out orders to a group of restless recruits.” While the question of “who” and probably “where” have been resolved to a certain extent, we feel a new level of tension. What is Cathy going to do? How would Aimee respond? Aimee’s opening paragraph and indeed the rest of her paper meet the criteria of “symmetry” that Fletcher (1993), describes as, “a balancing act. Tension and resolution. Dramatic scene and narrative summary. Action and reflection. A beginning that fits with the ending” (p. 68). The reader can feel Aimee’s apprehension and fear of Cathy even before she states that “Cathy had become my living nightmare, my own personal demon.... the gym Nazi.” This tension is maintained until the climax of the story when Aimee confronts her nemesis. Aimee’s intimacy with the subject matter commands the reader’s attention and empathy and sustains it until the point where she orders her sister’s tormentor to “get your hands off her!” The reader almost yells out, “hurray!” at this satisfying resolution to the conflict. Aimee selects a topic that is deeply personal and through her skillful use of language, draws readers into her story and makes them experience her intimacy with the subject.

Yet, Aimee states in the open responses that she neither enjoys writing, nor feels strongly about her abilities as a writer. She also indicates that she “dislikes sharing her drafts with friends,” which further illustrates her lack of confidence in her writing abilities. An examination of Aimee’s *History of the Piece* indicates conflicting perceptions between her identity as a writer based on her writing performance, and reflections on herself as a writing teacher, based on her students’ struggles.

Analysis of the *History of the Piece*.

In the first paragraph of Aimee’s *History of the Piece*, she discusses how she felt when asked by the workshop facilitators to choose a topic in her preferred genre, and write uninterrupted for 30 minutes:

My biggest realization this day was how much I hate to write and reflect. It occurs to me that in future assignments for my own classes, I would allow free time writing for 10-minute periods in order to get unmotivated writers writing about something, and perhaps offer creative options /prompts as options.... as I write this history, several ‘dawning moments’ have hit me. One, I am not a writer. I don’t care for it. I don’t have the motivation or interest.... Most importantly; I had my eyes opened to the horrors of time

limits.... I am now very aware of my expectations with regards to time in my classroom (Aimee, *History of the Piece*).

Aimee also describes the revision process as being “tedious.” She examines the process of changing words, conferencing with a colleague, and weeding out extraneous content to make her story more focused as almost a necessary evil, which further reveals to her that she is “not a writer.” She also decries the unrealistic expectations of workshop facilitators regarding time to write; referring to it as “the horrors of time limits.” She does not spend too much time on her own writing identity. Her reflections on her writing “behaviors,” seem to quickly take the backseat to the awareness of her students’ writing challenges. She spends a considerable amount of space on her *History*, reflecting on how this awareness would impact her teaching. Focusing more on helping her students rather than improving her own perceived poor writing habits and perceived skills, she makes commitments on how to improve instruction, including: “perhaps offer creative topics/prompts as options” to students. The realization that not having enough time to write is a “horror,” seems quite important to her not only as a writer, but as a teacher of writing, and she comes up with action that would improve her instruction: “I have since incorporated a more flexible approach to writer’s workshop and finished products.”

These vacillations in the “enactment” of her history as a writer, into introspections about her students as writers are worthy of note. Aimee’s identity as a teacher of writing (instructional efficacy) appears to take precedence over her identity as a writer (self-efficacy). Her preoccupation with her instructional practices suggest that teachers’ identities as writers are inextricably bound to, and affected by their identities as writing teachers; which makes feelings of self-efficacy more complicated to determine. If their students are succeeding, teachers may tend to have positive beliefs in themselves, not only as good writing teachers, but as good teacher-writers, and vice versa.

Janet’s Personal Narrative.

I gently placed the phone in its cradle. There was a huge lump in my throat. My father-in-law just told us he had been diagnosed with small cell lymphoma. My husband and I were devastated. We knew that the cancer was terminal, but we didn’t know any of the details. Who knew he only had 12 months to live? They didn’t tell us.

Raymond (pseudonym) was the rock of the Lionel (pseudonym) clan. He was an accomplished and famous pathologist, who had recently retired from his prolific career as a lab director and researcher at a Mid-western university just five years ago. He never suffered from illness. So, it was a shock when he had to be

rushed to the hospital to have emergency surgery to remove his gall bladder. There was a tumor. How do you deal with that kind of news? My husband and I devised a schedule to travel out there to visit-to have some final quality moments. What else could we do besides blubber like babies?

The initial visit was about a month after the depressing news. We flew out over the summer to spend time at their house in Solon, Iowa, which is adjacent to a fabulous lake. My in-laws are big naturalists, so one of the activities that we planned on doing was a trek at the conservation land near their home.

It was a picture-perfect day and everyone was relaxed and laughing when we piled into the maroon Subaru Outback with Rosie the black Labrador, a recent addition to the family. We had water, snacks, digital cameras and binoculars for the outing. It was a steamy day, so we were all in shorts and tees. When we got to the opposite side of the lake, Betsy began describing the new conservation project to restore the tract back to its original prairie. It was fascinating!

On the hike, I was on the lookout for interesting critters and creatures. I also had a secret agenda to take as many pictures as possible to document our time together. We were able to find a large and a green frog hiding in the grass, a yellow and black garden spider, a variety of birds and two special swans. When we arrived at the end of the trail, there were some benches under a shady tree. Raymond sat on the bench and Betsy lay down with her head in Raymond's lap. It was so romantic. I secretly snapped pictures of them together. I felt a sense of urgency with the knowledge that the pictures would help us hold onto the times that we had all shared. More importantly, the picture is a testament to the bond of love that Raymond and Betsy shared.

My husband, Brandon, is a very sensitive and thoughtful person, so when we returned home, we reviewed the pictures. We chose the bench picture. I searched for the perfect frame and went to gift shops and craft stores to create a beautiful backing for the photo. I created an artful arrangement and then sent the picture to them for Valentine's Day.

Betsy and Raymond didn't remember where the picture was taken until we shared it with them. But the second it dawned on them, I could feel, through the telephone line, the emotion in their voices telling me that they were thrilled with the photo. My heart felt light and heavy at the same time.

After the memorial service, in Iowa, I went into Raymond's office. His ashes were looking upon the calm and multi-dimensional waters of the lake. The ashes were placed next to the flag he earned as a naval veteran and photo. My mother-in-law picked up the picture and gazed at it for several minutes with a tear rolling down her cheek. I looked into her bright eyes and knew that this gift was truly a treasure.

Analysis of Janet's Writing.

Janet writes a solid narrative that draws the reader in, right from the opening sentences, "I gently placed the phone in its cradle. There was a huge lump in my throat." Janet's emotions are raw, pulling the reader into becoming emotionally invested in her experience. Her word choice is excellent, clearly depicting what type of person Raymond was: "the rock of the Lionel clan; and an accomplished and famous pathologist." After the reader meets Raymond, it is perfect timing to transition into the final visit. The progression seems natural and takes the reader to a happier place. Janet continues with vivid word choices when she describes the home by the lake: "My in-laws are big naturalists, so one of the activities that we planned was doing a trek at the conservation land near their home." Trekking is more befitting to naturalists than hiking or something more common place. Janet builds upon the reader's curiosity, who wants to know what happened during that trek, that made it hold such a special memory in the writer's heart. When Janet discusses the photograph of her mother-in-law resting her head on the father-in-law's lap, the reader can visualize the closeness. She captivates and holds the reader's attention, as she describes the process of getting the perfect frame for the picture and presenting it to Betsy and Raymond. The use of the imagery of a light and heavy heart is relatable and creates a natural transition into the memorial service. This was a "treasure." "My mother-in-law picked up the picture and gazed at it for several minutes with a tear rolling down her cheek. I looked into her bright eyes..." a befitting closing to a valuable chapter in life, that is delicately and beautifully narrated.

Based on Spandel's (2004) six traits of effective writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and convention, Janet's writing would be considered proficient. The overall organization is logical; bad news and diagnosis, building up to emotional connections; then a perfect last visit that ties in with a sense of closure, and a "forever memory" for her family. Yet, Janet stated that she did not particularly enjoy writing, with the exception of personal narratives. *See Table 4: Analysis of Janet's Writing Using Six Traits Writing Rubric.*

Conversely, some teachers whose writing scored less on Spandel's six traits rubric considered themselves good writers. For example, Minnie whose poem is not included in this article, scored an inter-rater average of 16/24 on the same rubric. Evaluators' comments included, "rudimentary topic/idea development and/or organization; basic supporting details; simplistic language."

Discussion

Self-reports of self-efficacy may not be reliable measurements of teachers' abilities as writers. Teachers in this study appeared to evaluate their self-efficacy as writers based on their students' writing performances. Perceived ability or the lack-of as a writer, did not often match the quality of the written piece (Klassen, 2002a); as shown by the writing pieces analyzed in this study. Aimee and Janet neither felt confident about their writing abilities, nor liked writing; yet both teachers were indeed good writers. On the other hand, Minnie who produced an average writing sample, evaluated as "rudimentary" in topic development, and "simplistic" in the use of language, reported feeling confident in her writing abilities. Gennrich and Janks (2013) suggest that teachers may "recreate" their own literacy identities in their students, and that these identities may shape teachers' instructional decisions. For example, one of Aimee's instructional decisions was to provide more time for her struggling student-writers. This pattern is troubling because, while having "emotional" connections with students' academic realities could foster teachers' investment in their students' learning (Alvermann et al., 1999), such emotional investments could obscure teachers' sense of self and awareness of who they themselves are as writers, regardless of their students' performance. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy is an important factor in their ability to teach a skill and produce positive results in students (Bandura, 1986), because perceptions of ability, influence and regulate the locus of control over modeling tasks that students can observe and emulate. Without a good sense of self-efficacy, teachers cannot set high expectations for students, or convincingly persuade them to persist in their efforts.

According to Bandura (1977), performance accomplishment (enactive), the most important of the four sources that influence self-efficacy, is based on past experiences and self-accomplishments. This implies that, without a pattern of expectation for success to draw upon, a teacher may not be able to enact verbal persuasion (the 3rd source of self-efficacy), or teach students confidently. Conversely, if a teacher with average writing abilities is unaware of the areas that need improvement, this may affect the amount of effort invested in preparing and modelling writing activities to students.

Teachers' feelings of self-efficacy as writers may be difficult to determine, because such feelings are inextricably bound with assessments of their abilities to successfully impact their students' academic performance-instructional efficacy. Unfortunately, instructional efficacy (the ability to influence students' performance) has often been one of the most prevalent constructs for teacher evaluation, especially in a high-stakes testing environment (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011, p. 21; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). The histories of the written pieces revealed teachers' heightened awareness and pre-occupation with their students' performances, rather than with their own writing abilities and

development as writers. Such awareness can create emotional tensions in teachers' conceptualizations of their writing identities, and hinder them from effectively assessing their own efficacy as writers. Teacher participants in this study appeared to equate self-efficacy as writers to instructional efficacy-often, stake-holders' evaluation (Lavale, 2006).

Conclusion

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) contend that it is necessary for teachers to be competent in various subject-specific disciplines, because such competence may guarantee quality instruction, which is highly predictive of students' achievement. When students perform well on a task, teachers often view it as an outcome of their competence and instructional effectiveness and vice versa. It is not surprising therefore, that despite writing good personal narratives, some participants in this study appeared to lack confidence in their writing abilities. Both teachers who showed a lack of confidence and dislike for writing, also reported having struggling student-writers.

As policy makers continue to seek ways to improve educational standards in the Common Core State Standards era, requirements for teacher effectiveness and accountability have become more stringent. While this is laudable, it is worth noting that teachers are not often consulted about their abilities to implement educational policies that are designed or enacted into laws that regulate practice. Writing is known to be a complex and recursive process that requires time and practice to achieve proficiency; yet, the fear of the consequences of high-stakes assessments may place unrealistic expectations on teachers to produce good academic results in student-writers over a short period of time. Policy makers, and other stakeholders must be aware that expectations for teacher effectiveness that are often tied to students' assessment output could negatively affect teachers' sense of self-efficacy, which may in turn have undesirable consequences for teaching and learning. "Teachers need adequate time to reflect on their beliefs and practices, and a supportive environment where they can evaluate the effect of their practices on their students' learning" (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013, p. 154). This is especially important in school districts where students are struggling, and where teachers often unduly take the blame for students' poor academic performances. Teachers' voices are important in policy decisions. They need to be trusted to be able to determine their competences and abilities in the content that they teach, irrespective of how their students perform in those subject areas. Confidence in the mastery of subject would drive pedagogic competence. Self-efficacy, "the capacity to mobilize available resources to solve problems and promote development" (The efficacy Institute, Inc. 1996, p. 25), is vital in delivering effective writing instruction, especially to struggling student-writers. Ongoing professional development can provide in-

service teachers skills that enhance their writing abilities, and boost their confidence as teacher-writers. This would in turn impact instruction that produces more positive academic outcomes for students.

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Appendices

Table 2. *Writing skills questionnaire (taken from and adapted from A Community of Writers by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, 2003, pp.xxvii).*

WRITING SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE (taken from *A Community of Writers* by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff).

Directions: You will benefit most from this questionnaire if you fill it out three times--at the beginning, middle and end of the course. This way you'll be able to see more about what changes are taking place. (The second and third times you use this form; you may want to cover your previous answers.)

When you complete the questionnaire at the beginning of the course, fill in the *left-hand* column of the blanks. In the middle of the course, use the *middle* column and at the end of the course, use the *right-hand* column of blanks.

Use Y, N, and S, for "Yes," "No," and "Sometimes." If you don't know the answer--which may often happen at the start of the course--use a question mark.

ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Do you enjoy writing?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	In general do you trust yourself as a person who can find good words and ideas and perceptions?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Do you think of yourself as a writer?

GENERATING

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	On a <i>topic of interest to you</i> , can you generate lots of words fairly quickly and freely--not be stuck?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Again on a topic of interest to you, can you come up with ideas or insights you'd not thought of before?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	On a topic that <i>doesn't</i> much interest you (perhaps an assigned topic), can you generate lots of words fairly quickly and freely--not be stuck?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	On a topic not of interest, can you come up with ideas or insights you'd not thought of before?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	On a topic where you start out not knowing what you think, can you write or think your way through to a conclusion?

			On a topic where you start out with your mind made up, can you write or think your way into actually <i>changing</i> your mind?
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REVISING

			Can you revise in the literal sense of "resee"--thus rethink and change your mind about major things you have said?
			Can you find a main point in a mess of your disorganized writing?
			Can you find a <i>new</i> shape in a piece of your writing which you had previously organized?
			Can you find problems in your reasoning or logic and straighten them out?
			Can you make your sentences clear--so they are clear to readers on first reading?
			Can you get your sentences lively? Can you give them a human voice?
			Can you get rid of <i>most</i> mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so on? Can you clean your writing up enough so most readers would not be put off?
			Can you get rid of virtually <i>all</i> such mistakes?
			Can you guess how most readers will react to something you've written?
			Can you adjust something you've written to fit the needs of particular readers?

FEEDBACK

			Can you enjoy sharing with friends a draft of what you've written?
			Can you read out loud to listeners a draft of your writing so it is really clear and "given," that is, not mumbled and "held back"?
			Can you openly listen to the reactions of a reader to your writing and try to see it as he/she sees it, even if you think his/her reactions are all wrong?
			Can you give noncritical feedback--telling the writer what you would like and summarizing or reflecting what you hear the words saying?
			Can you give "movies of your mind" as a reader--a clear story of what was happening in your mind as you were reading someone's writing?
			Can you give "criterion-based feedback"--telling the writer how the draft matches up against the most common criteria of good writing?

COLLABORATION

			Can you work on a task collaboratively with a small group; pitch in, share the work, help the group cooperate, keep the group on task?
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AWARENESS AND CONTROL OF WRITING PROCESS

			Can you give a <i>detailed</i> account of what was going on when you were writing: the thoughts and feelings that go through your mind and the things that happen in the text?
			Do you notice problems or "stuck points" in your writing and figure out what the causes are?
			Can you make changes in the way you go about writing based on those things you noticed?
			Can you vary the way you go about writing depending on the situation: the topic, the audience, type or writing, and so on?

Table 4. Janet's Writing Analysis, Using Six Traits Writing Rubric. Score- 24/24

	6 Exemplary	5 Strong	4 Proficient	3 Developing	2 Emerging	1 Beginning
Ideas & Content ⌘ <i>main theme</i> ⌘ <i>supporting details</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong supporting detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear, focused, interesting ideas with appropriate detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited	<input type="checkbox"/> Main idea may be cloudy because supporting detail is too general or even off-topic	<input type="checkbox"/> Purpose and main idea may be unclear and cluttered by irrelevant detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks central idea; development is minimal or non-existent
Organization ⌘ <i>structure</i> ⌘ <i>introduction</i> ⌘ <i>conclusion</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Effectively organized in logical and creative manner <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creative and engaging intro and conclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong order and structure <input type="checkbox"/> Inviting intro and satisfying closure	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization is appropriate, but conventional <input type="checkbox"/> Attempt at introduction and conclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Attempts at organization; may be a "list" of events <input type="checkbox"/> Beginning and ending not developed	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of structure; disorganized and hard to follow <input type="checkbox"/> Missing or weak intro and conclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of coherence; confusing <input type="checkbox"/> No identifiable introduction or conclusion
Voice ⌘ <i>personality</i> ⌘ <i>sense of audience</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expressive, engaging, sincere <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strong sense of audience <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shows emotion: humour, honesty, suspense or life	<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate to audience and purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Writer behind the words comes through	<input type="checkbox"/> Evident commitment to topic <input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent or dull personality	<input type="checkbox"/> Voice may be inappropriate or non-existent <input type="checkbox"/> Writing may seem mechanical	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing tends to be flat or stiff <input type="checkbox"/> Little or no hint of writer behind words	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing is lifeless <input type="checkbox"/> No hint of the writer
Word Choice ⌘ <i>precision</i> ⌘ <i>effectiveness</i> ⌘ <i>imagery</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Precise, carefully chosen <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strong, fresh, vivid images	<input type="checkbox"/> Descriptive, broad range of words <input type="checkbox"/> Word choice energizes writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Language is functional and appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Descriptions may be overdone at times	<input type="checkbox"/> Words may be correct but mundane <input type="checkbox"/> No attempt at deliberate choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Monotonous, often repetitious, sometimes inappropriate	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited range of words <input type="checkbox"/> Some vocabulary misused
Sentence Fluency ⌘ <i>rhythm, flow</i> ⌘ <i>variety</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> High degree of craftsmanship <input type="checkbox"/> Effective variation in sentence patterns	<input type="checkbox"/> Easy flow and rhythm <input type="checkbox"/> Good variety in length and structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Generally in control <input type="checkbox"/> Lack variety in length and structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Some awkward constructions <input type="checkbox"/> Many similar patterns and beginnings	<input type="checkbox"/> Often choppy <input type="checkbox"/> Monotonous sentence patterns <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent run-on sentences	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult to follow or read aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Disjointed, confusing, rambling
Conventions ⌘ <i>usage appropriate, spelling, caps, punctuation, grammar</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Exceptionally strong control of standard conventions of writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong control of conventions; errors are few and minor	<input type="checkbox"/> Control of most writing conventions; occasional errors with high risks	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited control of conventions; frequent errors do not interfere with understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequent significant errors may impede readability	<input type="checkbox"/> Numerous errors distract the reader and make the text difficult to read