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Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers

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USING MINDSET PEDAGOGY TO PROMOTE GROWTH AND INCREASE EFFICACY
IN STUDENT WRITERS

by

Sara Hoeve

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctoral Committee:

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USING MINDSET PEDAGOGY TO PROMOTE GROWTH AND INCREASE EFFICACY IN STUDENT WRITERS

Sara Hoeve, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2018

This dissertation offers four in-depth, vivid profiles of twelfth grade writers and the ways in which writing mindsets impact self-beliefs and inform the writing process. The multiple case study explores the impact of a mindset pedagogy, which is defined as an instructional paradigm that emphasizes the malleable nature of writing, as an ability that can be developed with effort, learning, and dedication over time. This belief contrasts the notion that writing ability is fixed trait that cannot be significantly developed over time.

Derived from Dweck's mindset theory, my dissertation argues for a discipline-specific construct of the "writing mindset," which refers to students’ beliefs about the nature of writing. This dissertation joins a vibrant discussion about how student beliefs are linked to efficacy, motivation, grit, hope, and academic achievement. It also offers new understandings which may be fundamental for advancing both practice and theory in English Education. Students can be taught how to develop and apply writing strategies, but they must believe writing ability is malleable in order to exert the necessary effort and be truly invested in the learning process.

Data was collected from four student participants through multiple individual interviews, surveys, and writing samples as the twelfth-grade teacher Mr. J. implemented a mindset intervention during the College English course. The data revealed significant changes in the
students’ beliefs about writing, including: the malleability of writing ability, the value of failure, and the impact of effort.

I argue that these new understandings about writing led to greater growth mindset thinking for all four case study participants. As they came to understand that it is within their control to grow as writers, the students found greater value in drafting and revision during the writing process. When encountering challenges within their writing, they were able to utilize growth mindset thinking, which recognizes that our abilities are being cultivated through effort, support and failure. This perspective increased the students’ confidence, as well as their willingness to take risks and seek out feedback from others.

Finally, I suggest that teachers can use a growth mindset lens to reevaluate and revise their teaching practices and feedback language to intentionally promote effort and growth, rather than reinforce fixed beliefs about writing. Mindset interventions can provide students with a strategic way of thinking and overcoming the obstacles in their writing process.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my incredibly patient and supportive husband, Mitch, and our three incredible children, Grace, Austin, and Jackson. I am grateful for the time and space you have all given me to pursue this crazy dream. Thank you to my mother, Barb Erffmeyer, and mother-in-law, Lorri Meeuwsen, who have filled in for my absence so many times. Our kids are so lucky to have the love of these two grandmas.

I am also grateful for the friendship, advice, and resources of the English Education alumni, including Kristin Sovis, Amanda Stearns, Suzanne Ehst, Christy McDowell, Lindsay Jeffers and Steffany Maher. Watching these incredible women pursue their passions while juggling teaching, grading, homework, marriage, parenting, pregnancy, nursing, commuting, job searching… (the list could continue forever!) has been the best source of encouragement and inspiration.

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Finally, I am grateful for all the teachers who have poured into my life and inspired so many steps in my journey: Lisa Schnyders, who made me want to teach English; Dr. Elizabeth VanderLei and Professor LeRoy Stegink, who taught me how; Eric Burgess, who guided me through my first try; Thelma Ensink, who walks alongside me as I continue to grow. Their influence will continue to ripple outwards, touching others through my classroom and through my students who enter this profession.
Perhaps most of all, I have been influenced by my father. After 41 years in the classroom, he has impacted the lives of countless students; however, his greatest impact has always been on me. From an early age, he inspired in me a love for learning, a space to ask questions, and a belief that I could accomplish my goal. Through any of my achievements, I only hope to make him proud.

Sara Hoeve
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Each new semester, fifty college students walk through the doors of my classroom, and most possess negative attitudes toward writing. At this point in the school year, we are strangers to one another. I have never read a piece of their writing, and they have not yet received a syllabus, assignment or a grade from me. However, the majority believe that they will not be successful in my class. On the first day of class, when I ask the students to write a brief portrait of themselves as writers, they point to their writing ability as the clear indicator for their certain achievements or future failures in my class.

I am a terrible writer, so I’ll be lucky to get a C.

I’ve always been a bad writer, probably because my parents are bad writers too.

My middle school teacher told me I’m a great writer, and I’ve always gotten As.

Over the years, I have become frustrated by these labels, the self-diagnosis, and the ways in which they inhibit students from taking risks, asking for help, and showing persistence when writing becomes challenging. How can we help students see that prior experiences with failure do not determine future outcomes? Can we disrupt the labels students assign after receiving a low grade or constructive critique? Rather than just teaching new strategies or assigning new activities, can we alter students’ beliefs about the very nature of their writing?

In order to combat this predeterminism, I began to alter my instructional strategies, classroom activities, and assessment practices to emphasize growth during the writing process, rather than aiming to create a perfect product. In order to increase self-awareness, we used meta-
cognitive exercises, reflecting on our drafting, composing and revising processes, pointing to successes and struggles, and locating areas of writing growth. Additionally, my feedback and assessment identified areas of writing that were particularly effective, but also pointed to specific areas of growth for all students, regardless of current ability level. As growth became a greater focus for my teaching and responding, the students’ self-talk began to change as well.

*Overall I’m starting to find my voice and who I am as a writer. Come to find out I am a better writer than I originally thought, but I can see areas of growth. I know for a fact though that I have much more potential to grow as a writer too.*

In addition to the impact on student perceptions, the emphasis on growth seemed to alter their actions as well. More than ever before, the students attended office hours and visited the writing center, seeking out additional feedback on their writing. As I continue to teach writing, I look for new ways to emphasize growth rather than talent or current ability, and I weave this theme through goal setting, self-assessments, writing assignments, and even my classroom policies.

Similar to other teacher-researchers in my field, most of my understanding stemmed from observational learning-- watching my writers to for signs of what worked and what did not. However, as I began to understand the psychology of growth mindset thinking, I saw correlations between the students’ beliefs about their abilities and the way they approached the writing process. Since mindsets offer a way to help students reframe their beliefs about their abilities, they carry great potential for the writing classroom. Yet, **no research to date has examined the role mindsets play in writing processes, or how pedagogical approaches to mindsets might increase efficacy and alter attitudes for student writers.**
This line of inquiry led me to investigate the impact of a mindset pedagogy on student writers. If teachers could develop a teaching approach that fostered growth mindset thinking, students might find greater value in the writing process.

Mindset Theory

In 2006, Stanford psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck published a book called Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, which chronicled over thirty years of research into how and why people succeed. Dweck pointed to mindsets-- underlying beliefs we possess about ourselves and our most basic qualities-- as the pivotal factor for understanding success, motivation and achievement. In Mindset, Dweck details her simple, but powerful, theory on two mindsets she identified in her subjects, which she named the fixed mindset and the growth mindset.

FIXED MINDSET: A belief system that suggests that we’re born with a predetermined amount of intelligence and ability and those levels cannot be changed. People operating in the fixed mindset become prone to avoid challenges and failures, thereby robbing themselves of a life rich in experience and learning.

GROWTH MINDSET: A belief system that suggests that our intelligence and abilities can be grown or developed with practice, perseverance and effort. People operating in the growth mindset believe that they have limitless potential to learn and grow. Although it might take some struggle and failure, they understand that with effort and perseverance, they can succeed. People operating in the growth mindset tackle challenges, unconcerned with making mistakes or looking smart, focusing instead on the process of growth and learning.

Although Dweck’s work initially focused on success in business and athletics, subsequent research on student mindsets has informed the way we approach learning, instruction, and motivation in education. Identifying the general mindsets students and teachers possess can help
us understand how they approach teaching and learning tasks. The students’ beliefs about the nature of their abilities will often impact their decisions, attitudes and reactions within the learning process. For example, learners with a growth mindset believe that they can increase their intelligence through effort, persistence, and the necessary support. They respond to challenges by working harder, trying new strategies and seeking out additional help. An educator with a growth mindset believes that, with effort and support, all students can demonstrate significant growth, and therefore, all students deserve opportunities for challenge. These beliefs, when paired with differentiated instructional strategies, are foundational for a culture of success and student achievement in schools (Ricci, 2013).

In contrast, a student with a fixed mindset may truly believe that they have a set level of intelligence or talent, one that cannot be changed by effort or learning. These students who struggle, or do not believe they are smart, give up quickly and avoid effort. After all, what is the point in working hard if they will not be successful? On the other hand, advanced learners can also possess fixed mindsets. They may have coasted through school without exerting much effort, yet are often praised for their high grades and strong skills. These students often feel anxiety and become consumed with “looking smart,” as they avoid risks or challenging tasks. Perceiving negative feedback or “failure” as a reflection of their intelligence, fixed mindset students often blame outside forces and disengage in the learning process.

The fixed mindsets of educators and parents can directly influence a child’s beliefs about themselves or how they view themselves as a learner. Throughout various educational contexts, adults can communicate damaging mindset messages to students. When teachers determine that a class or activity is “too hard” or “not the right fit” for certain students, they hamper student potential. School structures driven by fixed mindset beliefs eliminate opportunities, communicate
low expectations, and prematurely remove students from challenging environments. Rather than evaluating student potential by standardized test scores or pace at which work is completed, growth mindset educators value the student’s persistence, effort, and drive.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) have identified two self-theories that stem from people’s beliefs about the fixedness or malleability of their personal qualities, such as their intelligence: Do people believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait (“You have it or you don’t”) or a malleable quality that they can cultivate through learning and effort? (Dweck & Molden, 2005). It is these self-theories that create meaning systems which go on to foster particular strategies (Dweck, 1999; Dweck & Molden, 2004; Grant & Dweck, 2003). These strategies result in different levels of self-esteem, interest, and competence, especially in the face of challenge, failure or threat.

These theories are often measured by asking people to agree or disagree with a series of statements, such as “Your intelligence is something basic about you that you really can’t change” or “No matter who you are, you can substantially change your level of intelligence.” Agreement with statements like the first one generally reflect an entity theory of intelligence, which includes the fixed mindset, attempts to measure fixed abilities that are believed to stay consistent over time regardless of effort and assistance (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In contrast, agreement with statements like the second one reflects a malleable or “incremental” theory supporting the growth mindset, emphasizes learning in which every challenge, task and effort is seen as a chance to learn and develop. According to Dweck’s (1999) research on student achievement and mindset theory, students must possess an incremental/growth mindset about their abilities in order for them to achieve academic success. When students believe they can control their learning, they are more motivated to work hard, while others fall into patterns of helplessness.
Empirical data demonstrated that those with incremental beliefs typically achieve greater academic achievement, while students holding an entity theory are less likely to attempt challenging tasks and are at risk for academic underachievement (Dweck & Molden, 2005; Pintrich, 2004; Weiner, 1986; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Yeager and Dweck (2012) have outlined the major differences between incremental and entity mindset students in academic settings, which can be found in the table reproduced below (Table 1). Through targeted interventions, students’ self-theories can be altered if teachers and students possess incremental mindsets about abilities and traits (Dweck & Molden, 2005; Yeager & Dweck, 2012) believing strengths can grow and develop with effort, support, and persistence. Incremental mindsets can lead to learning strategies that increase the attainment of competence in academic skills like writing (Dweck & Molden, 2005).

Table 1. Academic Mindsets, Incremental vs. Entity Implicit Theory of Intelligence (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 303)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Incremental theory (Growth mindset)</th>
<th>Entity theory (Fixed mindset)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Look smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of effort, help, and strategies</strong></td>
<td>[Higher]</td>
<td>[Lower]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response to challenge</strong></td>
<td>Work harder and smarter</td>
<td>Tendency to give up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes in grades during times of adversity</strong></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>Decrease or remain low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the decade since the publication of *Mindset*, educational researchers have considered the ways in which mindset theory can impact specific disciplines, grade levels, academic, social and emotional needs; yet, the research on growth mindsets is largely absent within writing studies. While research has proved that mindsets are a pivotal factor for student motivation and academic achievement, English educators do not have a clear understanding of the role of
mindsets in writing processes, or how pedagogical mindset interventions might encourage growth and increase efficacy in student writers.

Writing Mindsets

The belief construct “writing mindset” is derived from Dweck’s mindset theory and how it can be applied specifically to the teaching of writing. In the context of writing competencies, students who recognize the potential to “grow” or develop their writing abilities possess an incremental or growth writing mindset. Believing their writing abilities are malleable skills, which can be increased by effort and support, students may exhibit greater confidence, motivation and efficacy, as they feel control over their achievement. Likewise, they may be more willing to utilize writing strategies, seek out feedback and exert effort once they embrace their potential for their success. Thus, the writing mindset- beliefs about the nature of one’s writing ability- may be foundational for both the dispositional traits students’ possess and the choices they make during the writing process.

In contrast, fixed mindsets can be limiting for students when they believed in the fixed nature of their writing abilities. If they cannot alter or increase their skills, they possess little motivation for learning new strategies and will likely have negative attitudes towards the writing task. As indicated in Table 2, students with growth writing mindsets choose writing goals that emphasize long term gains like mastering certain writing skills and processes; whereas students with fixed mindsets about writing set weaker writing goals, such as earning a certain grade on a specific assignment, leading them to select formulaic or “safe” writing structures and topics. Their negative internal monologues loop on a fixed mindset script: “I’m just not a good writer,” “Writing is not one of my strengths,” or “No matter how much I try, I will never be good at writing.” Finally, they are easily discouraged by and defensive to critique on their writing,
believing that constructive comments confirm or expose their lack of skills; instead, they aim for perfection or “error-free” writing. Table 2 outlines the characteristics of the writing mindsets, their emphasis and applications developed by Sieben (2018) and adapted from Yeager & Dweck’s table on mindsets (2012).

**Table 2. Writing Mindsets, Emphasis, and Applications (Sieben, 2018, p. 51)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Writing growth mindset</th>
<th>Writing fixed mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>Master writing skills</td>
<td>Perform well on specific assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of effort, help, feedback and strategies</strong></td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response to challenge</strong></td>
<td>Work harder and smarter</td>
<td>Tendency to give up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindset mantra</strong></td>
<td>“I can always improve my writing ability”</td>
<td>“There is nothing I can do to change my writing ability”</td>
</tr>
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**Impact on Writing Efficacy and Attitudes**

Given the importance of writing skills for college and career readiness, and the current climate of increased accountability, it is critical to gain additional insights into the writing process of secondary students if we are to motivate all writers to engage with literacy tasks and improve their proficiency as writers. Seeking to understand the complex cognitive writing process, a multidisciplinary body of scholarship has focused on students’ thinking about their own success and performance. Decades of research in educational settings shows (McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985; Shell, Murphy & Bruning, 1989; Pajares & Johnson, 1994, 1996; Gillespie, Olinghouse & Graham, 2013; Graham et al., 1993) that a student’s self-beliefs about their ability to write well (writing efficacy) has significant impact on their attitude, motivation and actual achievement of the writing task. The confidence that the student has in their own capability helps determine what they will do with the knowledge and skills they actually possess.
Therefore, self-beliefs can be strong predictors of future academic performance and important motivational factors because they impact “the choices [students] make, the effort they expend, the persistence and perseverance they exert when obstacles arise, and the thought patterns and emotional reactions they experience (Pajares & Johnson, 1996). Believing that they are capable writers, for example, will serve students well when they attempt to write an essay, not because the belief itself increases writing competence, but because it helps create greater interest in writing, more sustained effort, and greater perseverance and resiliency when obstacles get in the way of the task (Pajares, 2005).

Many of these outcomes also overlap with the thinking dispositions, or habits of mind, outlined by the National Council of the Teachers of English and published in the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (the complete document can be found at http://wpacouncil.org/files/framework-for-success-postsecondary-writing.pdf). Along with rhetorical and twenty-first century skills, the document outlines learning stances that support students’ success in college and career. These habits, such as curiosity, openness, flexibility, and persistence, are both key characteristics of growth mindset and necessary attributes of successful writers.

By drawing on the substantial research in composition and research, writing across the curriculum, and English education, we can consider what teachers can do to foster successful habits of mind and encourage growth writing mindsets.

**Writing Mindset Pedagogy**

Just as mindset interventions regarding intelligence have been shown to increase student achievement (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Blackwell et al., 2007, Study 2), a writing mindset intervention may help students adopt incremental theories
about writing. A writing mindset pedagogy utilizes instructional strategies and assessment practices that promote the belief that writing ability is malleable. Within a growth mindset writing classroom, the teachers must truly believe that all writers can be successful, and create a classroom culture that values growth.

The validated Writing Mindset Scale (Sieben, 2015) is a useful tool for determining students’ mindsets about their writing abilities. After collecting and analyzing student responses, teachers can design instructional interventions which seek to emphasize growth, build writing confidence, and encourage appropriate responses to failure. By targeting student mindsets, teachers aim to increase the effort and persistence students devote to a writing task, their willingness to try new strategies, and their receptiveness to instruction and feedback. Specific instructional strategies for nurturing writing mindsets will be discussed in more detail in future chapters and some examples include: positive self-talk, growth-oriented goal-setting, metacognitive reflection exercises, growth-oriented assessment, flexible grouping, differentiated feedback, modeling writing strategies, sharing past lessons learned from failure.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Mindset theory offers a new lens for writing educators to examine the role of meaning systems within the writing process, and their relationship with efficacy and attitudes of student writers. Thus, the overarching aim of this research project was to investigate the role writing mindsets play in the writing process of twelfth-grade students. In order to achieve this aim, the goals of the study were to (1) establish a new domain-specific construct of mindset (i.e., writing mindset) (2) follow the ways in which one teacher understood and implemented a writing mindset pedagogy (3) examine the impact of the writing mindsets interventions on the students’ self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing.
The following served as the guiding question for this study: What is the role of writing mindsets in twelfth-grade student writers? Additional questions included:

1. How do writing mindsets impact the writing habits and processes of twelfth-grade student writers?
2. How do writing mindsets correlate to the efficacy of twelfth-grade student writers?
3. How do writing mindsets affect the attitudes of twelfth-grade student writers?

Study Overview

In order to answer the research questions, one secondary ELA teacher used the writing mindset framework to create and implement a writing mindset pedagogy in his College English classroom. From the teachers’ classes, four twelfth-grade students were chosen to participate in in-depth case studies, sharing their writing and reflecting on their writing processes through personal interviews. This study is important as a better understanding of writing mindsets may illuminate new avenues for writing instruction and interventions.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to better understand factors that influence student writers, this research project investigates the role writing mindsets play in the writing habits and processes of twelfth-grade students. Using the lens of Dweck’s mindset theory, I propose a new domain-specific construct of writing mindsets and then consider the impact a growth mindset intervention may have on students’ self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing.

Because this research explores students’ beliefs about writing not in isolation, but within the social and educational context of a growth mindset writing classroom, Bandura’s social cognitive theory (SCT) guided this research inquiry and is essential for understanding the relationship between cognitive processes and environmental factors. Furthermore, I outline the research done by Dweck and colleagues on mindset theory, exploring the ways in which students’ understanding of intellect impact their effort and response to failure. When direct teaching interventions are used to teach students about the malleability of intelligence, data shows that student efficacy and achievement increases.

After a thorough overview of mindset theory, I point to similar growth or fixed mindset characteristics regarding students’ beliefs concerning the nature of writing. These writing mindset beliefs correlate with writing self-efficacy and attitudes, particularly in the ways students’ respond to failure, approach challenging tasks, utilize writing strategies, and value growth.

Finally, this review of existing literature addresses concerns that mindset theory simply disregards socio-economic factors and furthers a “pull yourself up by your bootstraps”
philosophy. Instead, I argue that writing mindset interventions can further social justice aims by providing students with agency, as it has been shown to be especially effective with student populations saddled with stereotypes and assigned “at-risk” educational labels.

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Cognitive Framework

Bandura (1986) proposed a view of human functioning that emphasized the role of self-referent beliefs. In this sociocognitive perspective, individuals are viewed as proactive and self-regulating rather than as reactive and controlled by biological or environmental forces. Also in this view, individuals are understood to possess self-beliefs that enable them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. In all, Bandura painted a portrait of human behavior and motivation in which the beliefs that people have about their capabilities are critical elements. In fact, according to Bandura, how people behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing, for these self-perceptions help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) further situated self-efficacy within a theory of personal and collective agency that operates in concert with other socio-cognitive factors in regulating human well-being and attainment.

Historically, researchers in the field of composition have focused on the processes in which writers engage as they compose a text (Faigley, 1990; Hairston, 1990). Cognitive aspects have received particular attention as investigators have attempted to understand the thought processes underlying the compositions of students (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goelman, 1982). Hull and Rose (1989) noted that the more that researchers learned about the relationship between cognition and writing, the more complex the relationship seemed
to be. During the past decade, researchers have attempted to address this complexity by investigating the affective factors that influence writing (D’Mello & Mills, 2014; Micciche, 2007; Richmond, 2003; Brand, 1989, 1991). As a consequence, a number of researchers have explored the relationship between students’ beliefs about writing and their own self-perceptions of their writing competence (Beach, 1989). However, mindset theory offers a new lens for writing educators to examine the role of meaning systems within the writing process, and their relationship with efficacy and attitudes of student writers.

Mindsets and Education

According to Dweck (2006), a Stanford University psychologist with three decades of research on achievement and success, two mindsets about learning exist: a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. A growth mindset holds that your basic qualities are malleable, and can be cultivated through effort and support. One’s brain and talent are merely a starting point. In contrast, a fixed mindset holds that your basic qualities cannot be significantly changed or developed. Through the mindset construct, Dweck examines the beliefs individuals possess about themselves and their abilities. In Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, Dweck's research reinforces a simple, but powerful, theory: our self-beliefs directly correlate to our success.

These self-beliefs are typically measured by asking people to agree or disagree with a series of statements, such as “Your intelligence is something basic about you that you can’t really change” or “No matter who you are, you can substantially change your level of intelligence.” Those who believe with statements like the first one reflect an “entity” theory, the idea that intelligence is a fixed entity. In contrast, agreement with statements like the second one
reflects a malleable or “incremental” theory, which is the idea that intellectual ability can be increased through one’s own efforts (Dweck & Molden 123).

After identifying these influential belief systems, Dweck (2006) and colleagues (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999; Cimpian, Arce, Markman & Dweck, 2007; Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008, Yeager & Dweck, 2012) have examined the impact theories about intelligence have on students’ self-esteem, motivation, resilience, and subsequent achievement. They found that students who believed that effort drives intelligence (e.g., “I [worked hard/did not work hard] enough”) did better than children who their intelligence was a fixed quality (e.g., “I’m just [good/bad] at mathematics”), even when two had similar skills or IQ scores; meaning their mindsets, beliefs about the nature of intelligence, impacted success or failure, rather than the actual abilities they possessed. Believing that they have no control over their abilities, those with fixed mindsets avoided challenges or risks, become easily frustrated, found little value in effort, rejected negative feedback, gave up quickly, and blamed others. Meanwhile, students with growth mindsets believed that they could develop their abilities through hard work, persistence, and dedication. Their mindsets caused them to be energized by challenge, persist despite setbacks, see effort as necessary for success, learn from mistakes and criticism, and find lessons and inspiration in the success of others.

While the student’s self-efficacy, or other self-beliefs of their own ability, was important, it was not necessarily enough to create success; instead, the mindsets were important influences on the student’s attitudes, self-efficacy, motivation, and resilience, which, in turn, directly impacted the subsequent achievement. It was necessary for the students to believe that their
abilities were malleable before they could strengthen self-beliefs or utilize self-regulation strategies.

First, studies showed that students’ theories of intelligence affected their reactions to failure and were significant predictors of other key motivational variables, such as strong learning goals, attribution of difficulties, and beliefs about effort. Students with incremental theory of intelligence (vs. an entity theory of intelligence) were also more willing to use new strategies (i.e. spend more time studying, seeking out a new resource) after encountering failure, while those with an entity theory attributed their failure to lack-of-ability and were concerned about exposing further deficiencies. They were left with no good recipe for success. If they lacked ability, and further effort would just confirm it, few constructive strategies were left at their disposal.

Next, research by Dweck, Blackwell and colleagues (2007) found that students’ implicit theories of intelligence predicts their academic performance over time, particularly when they face challenging work. This happens because the two implicit theories of intelligence-- entity (fixed) and incremental (growth) -- appear to create different psychological worlds for students: one that promotes resilience and one that does not (Dweck, 2006; Dweck et. al. 1995). The entity theory world is about measuring your ability (or lack thereof) and everything (challenging tasks, efforts, setbacks) measures your ability. It is a world of threats and defenses. The incremental world is about learning and growth, and everything (challenges, effort, setbacks) is seen as being helpful to learn and grow. It is a world about opportunities to improve.

More precisely, an incremental versus entity theory shapes students’ goals (whether they are eager to learn or instead care mostly about looking smart and, perhaps, even more important, not looking dumb), their beliefs about effort (whether it is key to success and growth or whether
it is a signal that they lack natural talent), their attributions for their setbacks (whether a setback means they need to work harder and alter their strategies or whether it means they might be dumb), and their learning strategies in the face of setbacks (whether they work harder or whether they give up, consider cheating, and/or become defensive. Blackwell et. al. (2007) showed that these are the variables that explain why students with more of an incremental theory were more resilient and earned higher grades when they confronted a challenging school transition. In addition to academic motivation, the self-theories and their meaning systems predicted changes in students’ self-esteem trajectories (Robins and Pals 2002).

This research shows that self-theories and their subsequent belief systems led to goals, attributions and strategies leading to self-esteem and achievement outcomes. These findings raise several important issues. While attributions have long been known to be important predictors of self-efficacy and coping in the face of setbacks, they have also been significant in each of the findings from mindset studies as well. Thus, the importance of attributional processes was confirmed. However, the attributions in each case were predicted by the self-theories and goals. Thus the attributions appear to grow out of the meaning systems or mindsets in which people are operating. When people believe in fixed intelligence and are oriented toward competence validation, negative outcomes speak to a lack of ability. When, instead, people believe in developable intelligence and are oriented toward competence acquisition, negative outcomes speak to effort and strategy. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the origins and impact of attributions in terms of the meaning systems that appear to give rise to them. Table 3 outlines the two beliefs systems and the ways in which they influence differing reactions to obstacles, challenges, criticism, and success of others, as well as perceptions of effort. Therefore,
it is the belief system, and the subsequent reactions, that impact the individual's level of achievement.
Impact of Praise

A series of studies by Mueller and Dweck (1998) showed that students’ mindsets can be affected by the verbal feedback they receive from adults. Even seemingly positive teacher or parent behaviors—such as praise or comfort for struggling students—can either lead a student to adopt a growth mindset by encouraging challenge and increasing achievement, or support more of a fixed mindset, where students begin to look for an easy way out. Dweck & Mueller argued that praise for intelligence, even when it follows a genuine success, teaches children that they can measure how smart they are from how well they do. If they subsequently do poorly, children will remeasure their ability by that performance. Therefore, “intelligence praise” encourages a fixed mindset, whereas “effort praise” cultivates a growth mindset and builds resilience after failure. Figure 1.2 represents achievement data following the two different types of feedback, effort praise and intelligence praise.

Table 3. Impact of Praise on Resilience After Failure (Mueller and Dweck, 1998)

In his books *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children’s Learning* and *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives*, Johnston (2004, 2012) draws from Dweck’s research to explain how the language teachers use contributes to students’ construction of one or
two worldviews: either a fixed performance framework or a dynamic learning framework. When students were given feedback encouraging a dynamic, or growth, framework, they were more interested in pushing themselves than those given fixed mindset and fixed ability feedback. For example, seemingly positive remarks such as “You are so smart” were actually shown to promote a fixed performance framework and lead to decreased learning, risk-taking and even sense of self (Johnston, 2012). In contrast, remarks about the student’s actions, rather than internal characteristics, led to increased learning, risk-taking and agency.

**Mindset Interventions**

Remarkably, intervention experiments have shown that it is possible to alter students’ theories of intelligence and affect academic behavior over time (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Blackwell et al., 2007, Study 2). In each of these studies, researchers used a mindset intervention, in which students learned about the growth mindset specifically that all people are capable of learning and that struggle and challenge in academic work is part of the learning process, not an indication of failure or inadequacy. The interventions were shown to be especially effective for students (1) labeled as “at risk” for becoming high school dropouts or (2) stereotyped due to race, gender or class.

Aronson and colleagues (2002) provided college students with scientific information about the brain’s functioning and potential malleability, and then tasked them with writing “pen pal” letters, teaching this message to a struggling middle school student. The group who learned about growth mindset showed a significant increase in overall grade point average for the year. The effects were especially significant for African American students, who reported attitudes of valuing and enjoying school more after the mindset training.
Other research indicates a strong correlation between mindset intervention and improved grades and engagement. Good et al. (2003) designed a field experiment to test methods of helping female, minority, and low-income adolescents overcome the anxiety-inducing effects of stereotype threat and, consequently, improve their standardized test scores. Seventh-grade students in the experimental conditions were mentored by college students who encouraged them either to view intelligence as malleable or to attribute academic difficulties to the novelty of the seventh-grade educational setting. Results showed that students—who were largely minority and low-income adolescents—in the experimental conditions earned significantly higher reading standardized test scores than students in the control condition. Especially large effects were seen in the math scores of the middle school girls—students who may face negative stereotypes about girl’s ability to succeed in STEM courses.

Blackwell and colleagues (2007) designed two different interventions (an incremental theory intervention and a study skills intervention) and delivered each to predominately racial minority seventh-grade students. Students were randomly assigned to learn either useful study skills for eight sessions (the control group) or the incremental theory along with study skills for the eight sessions (the treatment group). Results showed that the math grades for students in the control group continued to decline, as is common during the transition to middle school. However, for students who learned the incremental theory, this downward trend was eliminated and reversed. At the year’s end, the results showed an estimated .30 grade point difference between the two groups. Teaching study skills alone did not impact the decline in student scores; instead, meaningful interventions must also address belief systems before students are willing to put their study skills into practice.
Paunesku, Yeager, Romero and Walton (2012) built on the Blackwell et al. (2007) intervention to address the high failure rate of community college students who are placed in remedial or “developmental” math classes. Placement into remediation classes or similar “tracking” practices lead students to conclude that math is a fixed ability that they do not possess. In such developmental math classes, more than 68% of students endorse an entity theory about math ability (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Paunesku and colleagues delivered a reading and writing exercise on incremental theory to a sample of more than 200 community college students enrolled in developmental math classes. At the end of the semester, students’ records suggested that the intervention’s effects were substantial. Although roughly 20% of students in the control group withdrew from their math class, that number was reduced to only about 9% in the incremental theory treatment group.

Social Justice Aims

Standardized tests continue to generate gender and race gaps in achievement despite decades of national attention. Research on “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995) suggests that these gaps may be partly due to stereotypes that impugn the math abilities of females and the intellectual abilities of Black, Hispanic, and low-income students. This body of research suggests that teaching mindset theory may be a way to combat negative ability stereotypes. Aronson and colleagues point out that stereotyped students adopt many fixed mindset traits, regardless of their ability beliefs. In this case, the stereotyping places students in the same predicament as an entity or fixed ability theory: the troubling implication that he or she is intellectually limited (often dumb or stupid), with little to no hope for improvement. Stereotyped targets, similar to fixed mindset students, tend to choose easier tasks when their abilities are subject to scrutiny or if their ethnicity or gender is noted (Aronson & Good, 1999),
experience greater performance pressure and anxiety (Blascovich et al., 2001; Steele & Aronson, 1995), and devalue ability domains in which they have performed poorly (Major & Schmader, 1998; Major et al., 1998). Just as mindset interventions undermine implicit beliefs about intelligence, the same interventions are countering the mindsets imposed by stereotype threat. Rather than responding to stereotype threat in a maladaptive fashion—that is, by adopting a performance goal orientation—students become more agentic when they believe their abilities are malleable.

In addition, this theory offers an additional learning framework against the backdrop of societal inequality. Claro, Paunesku, Dweck (2016) obtained permission to gather a nationwide sample of high school students, virtually all of the schools and socioeconomic strata in Chile, to explore the relationship among academic achievement, socioeconomic background and mindsets on a systemic level. This study not only examined the impact of mindset intervention on achievement, but highlighted the theory’s potential to disrupt systems of inequality and privilege nationally.

Extending prior research on family income and achievement, Claro and colleagues found that a growth mindset (the belief that intelligence is not fixed and can be developed) is a comparably strong predictor of achievement and that it exhibits a positive relationship with achievement across all of the socioeconomic strata in the country. Furthermore, they found that students from lower-income families were less likely to hold a growth mindset than their wealthier peers, but those who did hold a growth mindset were significantly shielded from the detrimental effects of poverty on achievement: students in the lowest 10th percentile of family income who exhibited a growth mindset showed academic performance as high as that of fixed
mindset students from the 80th income percentile. These results suggest that students’ mindsets may temper or exacerbate the effects of economic disadvantage on a systemic level.

These findings also document a relationship between mindsets and economic disadvantage. The lowest-income Chilean students were twice as likely as the highest-income students to report a fixed mindset, and their mindset was an even stronger predictor of success for these low-income students. Although existing data cannot explain why low-income students were more likely to endorse a fixed mindset, this finding does suggest that economic disadvantage may lead to poorer academic outcomes, in part by leading low-income students to believe that they cannot grow their intellectual abilities. The observation that mindset is a more important predictor of success for low-income students than for their high-income peers is novel, although it is consistent with prior research, which has found that a fixed mindset is more debilitating (and a growth mindset is more protective) when individuals must overcome significant barriers to succeed (Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2016).

The Question of Environment

While interventions may have the power to disrupt or alter fixed student mindsets, they do not remove the object adversities in students’ environments. Moreover, I am not suggesting that teaching students a growth mindset is a substitute for systemic efforts to alleviate racism, poverty and economic inequality. Rather than denying the profound impacts of environmental influences or structural inequalities, mindset theory highlights the psychological factors within the student’s control that can be more readily changed (Olson & Dweck, 2008).

Many major school reforms address structural factors such as the size of the class, the quality of the teachers, or the length of the school day, or they have attempted to directly teach students skills for studying or learning. These efforts are undoubtedly important, but they rest on
the assumption that students are not learning or engaging because they have not been given the correct resources or skills. Mindset theory proposes that student mindsets may prevent them from fully taking advantage of those forces (Yeager & Walton, 2011; cf. Lewin, 1947). As a result, a well-timed and psychologically precise intervention to address those mindsets can unlock the latent effectiveness of educational environments and lead to long-term effects on students’ achievements (Yeager & Walton, 2011).

Additionally, it may be that structural inequalities give rise to psychological inequalities and that those psychological inequalities can reinforce the impact of structural inequalities on achievement and future opportunity. As such, research on psychological factors can help illuminate one set of processes through which economic disadvantage leads to academic underachievement and reveal ways to more effectively support students who face additional challenges because of their socioeconomic circumstances (Claro et. al. 2016).

My understanding of mindset theory is different than those who oversimplify it, using it as grounds for encouraging students to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps.” I acknowledge that systemic inequities exist in schools and in society that privilege some groups of children and marginalize others. These inequities often create situations in which many students do not feel agentive. What I find powerful about mindset theory is that it can reframe students’ understanding of their potential; students come to see that success reflects opportunities to learn, not aptitudes. Many students receive the privilege of years of practice at something or the privilege of a cache of strategies or support networks that their peers may not receive. Students who have not had such privileges are not inferior or incapable; with the opportunities, tools, structures, and/or time for learning, they too can achieve.
Mindset interventions challenge the determinism of fixed ability categories by shattering the myth that assumes some students are inherently smarter or more talented. Rather than implying that success is solely dependent on individual effort, I understand mindset theory as a new lens that can be used to understand student beliefs and increase achievement, as well as a way to defeat myths and stereotypes about students’ potential.

**Writing Mindsets**

**Writing Mindset Construct**

The influence of mindsets has been widely researched across different academic domains, including computer science (Murphy & Thomas, 2008; Shell et. al. 2013), teacher education (Gutshall 2014; Dweck, 2014); reading (Andersen & Nielsen, 2016; Wilson, 2016), second language (Lou & Noels, 2016; Mercer & Ryan, 2009), music (Davis, 2017), art (Tseng, 2016), engineering (Adams, Dancz, & Landis 2015), science (Esparza, Shumow & Schmidt, 2014), medicine (Fillmore, 2015) and math (Suh, et.al 2011; Boaler, 2013, 2015; Jones, 2016; Upadyaya & Eccles, 2015). In each case, instructors consider discipline-specific characteristics and implications of mindset theory, communicating that mindsets and subsequent interventions can be content, task or skill specific.

As research continues to establish the impact of growth mindsets on student success, K-12 educators, administrators and instructional coaches are designing growth-oriented classrooms and using interventions to teach students about the power of mindsets. Education experts (Ricci 2013; Sparks 2013) are publishing school improvement plans and instructional frameworks based on growth mindset theory, which aim to build cultures of success and student achievement. Moreover, educators and psychologists are focusing on mindsets to help students make easier transitions into high school (Yeager et. al. 2016; Cunningham 2015), to teach inquiry (Piercey &
Cullen 2017), develop adversity and grit (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015), and stress success in community colleges (Auten 2011; Powers 2015).

Although research on implicit theories originated within an academic context, scholars have extended the theory to additional achievement domains, such as athletics (e.g., Kasimatis, Miller, & Marcussen, 1996; Ommundsen, 2003), weight management (Burnette, 2010), and leadership (Burnette, Pollack, & Hoyt, 2010). Across these contexts, implicit theories have been postulated to be linked to various self-regulatory processes, including goal setting (e.g., Robins & Pals, 2002), social comparison (Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008), overcoming stereotype threat (e.g., Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002), selective information attention (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006), and remedial action (e.g., Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999).

While research continues to examine the influence of mindsets both in and outside the classroom curriculum, it is surprising that there is a lack of research on mindsets about writing process. Given that many people believe that there exists a specific aptitude for successful writing, as shown by claims that one must have a “gift” for the “art” of writing, the role of mindsets appears particularly important for understanding student writers’ motivation. Although mindsets have been shown to be a pivotal factor for motivation and academic achievement, we don’t have a clear understanding of what role of mindsets play in writing tasks, or how pedagogical approaches to writing instruction might encourage student growth and increase achievement.

Moreover, mindsets are considered to operate in a domain-specific fashion, such as they differ across people and academic domains (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Leslie, Cimpian, Meyer, & Freeland, 2015). For example, one could believe that writing ability is incremental, but
math ability is fixed (Dweck et al., 19995; Lou & Noels, 2016). Additionally, writing has long been argued to be a distinctive educational domain in considering dispositional factors (self-efficacy, self-regulation, hope theory) and motivational dynamics (interest in topic, authentic task and audience, clear purpose) can be important for successful learning. Consistent with these claims, previous research has consistently found that writers differ in their beliefs about the nature of writing ability (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001, White & Bruning, 2005). Given its distinctiveness from other academic subjects, it is important to have a domain-specific understanding of writing mindsets and their influence on the writing process.

The term “writing mindset” has recently appeared in an English Education publication for the first time (Sieben, 2018) Dr. Nicole Sieben, Assistant Professor of Secondary English Education at the State University New York College at Old Westbury, conducts research on the “writing hope” theory (Sieben, 2013b) a discipline-specific construct derived from “hope theory” as defined by positive psychology (Snyder, 1996, 2002). According to Sieben, “writing hope” is a “cognitive-motivational, strengths-based framework,” which includes three central components connected to writing: Pathways (strategies), agency (motivation), and goals (Sieben, 2013b).

In Writing Hope Strategies for Writing Success in Secondary Schools, Sieben suggests that mindset theory should be an important consideration for students and teachers hoping to build writing hope in the classroom. Sieben’s research indicates a strong writing growth mindset is significantly correlated with high levels of writing hope (2015). When students believe in their growth as a writer, they are more likely to exhibit both writing hope agency (positive beliefs about future success) and have faith in the pathways or strategies that will aid them in achieving their goals.
Through the construct of “writing mindsets,” I am arguing for the importance of considering domain-specific characteristics, messages, and interventions for mindset theory. This understanding of mindsets means that self-theories and their meaning systems may vary based on each distinct ability. Furthermore, a domain-specific mindset may possess unique characteristics to the knowledge and skills of the discipline. Finally, new understandings of the domain-specific mindsets can carry important implications for more effective pedagogical approaches and interventions.

**Characteristics of Writing Mindsets**

Just as many of Dweck’s participants viewed their intelligence through a “fixed” mindset, I believe some student writers may understand their own writing ability as an innate, unchangeable quality, a gift that was given or withheld at birth. This notion would assume that good writers will always have success in writing and the terrible writers will continue to fail regardless of their actions or effort. A fixed mindset writer would believe that their writing skills could not be significantly developed, much like someone who says “I’m not athletic” or “I can't do math.” If you aren’t naturally talented or don’t catch on right away, you might as well forget it.

The writing mindset could also impact the student’s perception and reaction to feedback and process. If “good writing” is an innate quality, they would likely believe a “good writer” should be successful immediately. Fixed writing mindsets may view peer or teacher feedback, drafting and revising as indicators of their failure. Imagining that “good writers” find quick success on the first attempt, they may resist the writing process, feeling defensive and dejected by any teacher suggestions, interpreting the best writing as the one with the least amount of teacher comments.
This belief system could be problematic at both end of the ability spectrum. For the students who struggle or do not perceive themselves as good writers, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because they don’t really believe they can be successful, they may often give up quickly and avoid putting forth the effort. However, the fixed mindset could also pose problems for those who sincerely believe they are “good writers.” They may be consumed with “looking smart” at all costs, avoiding any writing that requires risk or potential failure, preferring instead to stick with formulaic structures, cliché or dull topic choices.

In contrast, a growth mindset writer would perceive their writing ability as a set of skills, able to be cultivated with effort, support and feedback. These students would recognize their limitless potential as writers. Understanding their own agency, these writers may show more optimism, less writing anxiety and apprehension. They might even be able to struggle and even fail without losing confidence to try again, showing resilience in the face of difficult tasks. Growth mindset writers would enjoy challenge, viewing it as an opportunity to learn. Grasping the importance of effort, growth mindset writers would respond to set-back by remaining involved, seeking out more feedback from others, trying new strategies, and using all of their resources.

Although we might be able to identify mindsets in student writers, writing instructors will most likely be more interested in how to nurture growth mindsets, since the students’ beliefs about their abilities play a critical role in their attitudes and actions. For these answers, we can look to efficacy and motivational research, which contends that certain instructional approaches can alter these beliefs, increasing writing efficacy, motivation, and perceived value.

These conclusions lead to my hypothesis that teaching students about mindset theory and embedding it into growth-oriented instructional approaches will alter the way students perceive
their ability, thereby increasing self-efficacy, motivation, and perceived value of writing tasks. By integrated mindset theory into writing instruction, teachers may be able to alter self-beliefs by utilizing classroom practices that communicate and reinforce the importance of growth. If students can accept that all writers can “grow” their abilities, they can move through the writing process with confidence, rather than obsessing over an error-free product or feeling defeated after an unsuccessful attempt.

**Impacting the Writer’s Self-Efficacy**

According to Bandura (1986), social cognitive theory provides a larger framework for our understanding of *self-efficacy*, one’s beliefs in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task in a given domain, because self-efficacy represents the personal perceptions of external social factors. Developed from external experiences and self-perception, self-efficacy impacts the ways in which one approaches goals, tasks and challenges, and, according to Bandura, these approaches are consistently linked to the outcomes in human performance. For example, people with high self-efficacy—that is, those who believe they can perform well—are more likely to view difficult tasks as something to be mastered rather than something to be avoided. Consequently, one’s self-efficacy beliefs have significant implications for their performance, relationships, and careers.

Consistent with social cognitive theory, students’ self-efficacy beliefs are developed from social experiences. According to Bandura (1986, 1997), the greatest influence on these beliefs is the interpreted result of one’s performance, or *mastery experience*. Essentially, students gauge the effects of their actions, and their interpretations of these effects help form efficacy beliefs. If they interpret the outcomes as successful, their self-efficacy rises; if they see failure, it lowers. In education, grades provide clear indicators to students, concerning the success or failure of
their action. In addition, results like winning a contest or being placed in an “advanced” class would also help students gauge their success.

Two studies by McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer (1985) are often cited as the first to test Bandura’s self-efficacy theory in the domain of writing. The researchers recorded the first-year college students’ beliefs regarding whether they could demonstrate specific skills required for the writing course. These self-beliefs were then compared to the actual student performance in the writing course assessments. In both studies, students with higher self-efficacy tended to demonstrate higher achievement.

After conducting a study similar to McCarthy et. al. on college students, Shell and his colleagues (Shell, Murphy, & Bruning 1989; Shell, Colvin & Bruning, 1995) ran a cross-sectional study of fourth, seventh, and tenth graders, finding again that writing skills self-efficacy correlated with writing performance. However, they also noticed that writing task self-efficacy changed across grade levels, a finding which prompted future studies to consider student age in light of efficacy trends.

Meanwhile, Zimmerman & Bandura (1994) published a highly influential study of self-efficacy for self-regulation-- judgments of capability to use various self-regulated learning strategies-- which also correlated with writing competence. Using a causal modeling framework, Zimmerman and Bandura showed that college students’ self-efficacy for regulating writing activities influenced their writing self-efficacy, which impacted the grades they achieved.

Subsequent findings across the k-12 spectrum have consistently shown that writing self-efficacy plays a critical role in the writing process and impacts writing performance. Beginning in the 1990s and continually until Pajares’ death in 2009, research by Pajares and his colleagues dominated the field of writing self-efficacy (Pajares 2007; Pajares, Britner & Valiante, 2000;

One of Pajares’ final publications (2007) was a detailed analysis of his Writing Self-Efficacy scale, which he used to assess writing self-efficacy for more than 1,200 fourth through eleventh graders. Findings showed consistent correlations between writing efficacy and writing achievement at all grade levels. Pajares concluded, “self-efficacy beliefs and writing competency work in tandem, and improving one requires improving the other” (p 246). Advancing writing self-efficacy and subsequent achievement is a clear and likely goal for mindset instruction.

**Targeting Response to Failure**

As any writer knows, mistakes, obstacles, and multiple drafts are part of the process of strengthening our craft and growing as writers. However, inside the classroom, student writers respond to adversity in markedly different ways. While all students gain confidence and an increase in self-efficacy when they encounter success, their reactions to failure and mistakes are often in contrast. Dweck’s mindset theory offers insight on why students differ in their interpretation of their experiences with failure.

Research by Lou and Noels (2016) examined how an entity (fixed) theory or an incremental (growth) theory impacted the learners’ goals, and, in turn, influenced their reactions to failure. The results showed that in the incremental condition, learners more strongly endorsed learning goals regardless of their perceived competence, and in turn reported more mastery-oriented responses in failure situations and stronger intention to continue learning.

In contrast, entity theorists focus on demonstrating their ability and winning positive judgements of their competence. These learners endorsed performance-approach goals and reported feeling helpless and afraid of failure. Believing that the negative outcome was a
reflection of their natural ability, they were likely to give up or assign blame after encountering failure. According to Ricci (2013), they rationalize: “I am just not good at science,” “I will never be able to learn another language,” or “It doesn’t matter if I do it again, I will have the same results.” Therefore, the way in which they interpret the mastery experience of failure lowers the student’s self-efficacy.

In studying student response to failure, Moser and collaborators (2011) found that all participants shared an initial first brain signal, an “oh crap response” when noticing a mistake. The next signal occurs when the person realizes the error and subsequently, attempts to correct it or decides to quit. The study found that those who produced a bigger second signal are those who can better redirect their thinking to say, “OK, that wasn’t right; now let’s see what I need to do to correct it.” If mindset interventions can alter students’ interpretations of their mastery experiences, or how they respond to writing challenges, it should lead to increases in writing efficacy and, subsequently, higher achievement.

**Altering Writing Attitudes**

This study is also focused on the outcome of attitudes toward writing, another motivational construct. Attitude is “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6.). Earlier investigators have indicated that this construct forms a continuum ranging from positive to negative extremes (Alexander & Filler, 1976; Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). For purposes of this study, writing attitude was defined as an affective disposition involving the writer’s feelings concerning the act of writing, ranging from happy to unhappy.

Research (Knudson, 1995) establishes relationship between students’ writing performance and writing attitudes, as evidence shows attitudes towards writing predicts writing
performance for children in Grade 2 and higher. Using a 24-item attitude measure to study beginning writers, Graham, Berninger, & Abbott (2012) established that writing attitudes are a separable construct, and have “a unique and significant contribution” to the prediction of writing success in third-grade students. It's important to gauge attitudes about writing, as a child’s attitude may influence factors such as engagement and practice (McKenna et al. 1995). For instance, students with a less favorable attitude are likely to write less often and expend less effort when composing than students with a more favorable attitude (Graham et al., 2007).

The Intervention: Writing Mindset Pedagogy

Teachers encounter opportunities every day to encourage a growth mindset in our students, empowering them to achieve their goals and gain confidence in their abilities. For this reason, this study also aims to identify specific areas of writing instruction that offer opportunities to cultivate growth mindsets among student writers. This growth-oriented teaching approach or “Writing Mindset Pedagogy” functions as the growth mindset intervention for the case study students. In the following chapter, I will outline the ways in which two veteran writing teachers conceptualized and implemented their versions of a Writing Mindset Pedagogy by recognizing the characteristics for writing mindsets, and then planning appropriate instructional strategies to foster growth, encourage risk and increase resilience.

Study Justification and Contributions

In examining students’ motivation to write, Bruning & Horn (2000) found that beliefs about writing must be sufficiently potent to carry the writer through the difficult and often emotion-laden processes of writing. These beliefs included the perception that writing has value, and belief in one’s competence as a writer, or writing efficacy. However, the authors also wondered: “Is there for example, a parallel to the belief structures identified by Dweck and
Leggett (1988), where some students take an entity view of writing, assuming that their writing ability is largely fixed?” They cite the work of Palmquist and Young (1992), which hinted at this possibility, “students who believe strongly that writing is a gift (i.e., an entity view) show significantly more writing anxiety and asses their own capabilities more negatively.”

Using a domain-specific construct of writing mindsets provides a valuable lens for better understanding the correlations between a student’s beliefs about writing, their beliefs about their own abilities and their writing process. Before addressing elements like self-regulation or revision strategies, we must first attend to the students’ underlying beliefs about their writing abilities. If students hold tightly to an implicit theory of writing as a fixed, innate ability, no amount of lesson planning, conferencing, or writing practice can make much of difference in their writing process. Instead, they are just moving through the steps in order to complete a task or achieve a grade. Even when adolescents are taught the skills or attitudes they need to be successful, they may not employ them adequately unless they possess a mindset that believes in their potential to improve.

Moreover, this study considers the impact of a writing pedagogy and subsequent instructional practices that treat writing as a learnable skill. When teachers create and support a growth-oriented writing environment, they will help students see writing as learnable, but may also improve attitudes and increase efficacy. As students gain confidence and positive dispositions, they are better able to achieve goals, accept feedback, and persevere through setbacks.

Writing mindsets can continue the shift in writing education theory and practice to include more strategies that target dispositional factors and motivation, thus increasing the meaning of writing in students’ lives.
Conclusion

Dweck’s mindset theory provides a powerful new lens to understand the ways in which student beliefs regarding their abilities impact key developmental features, and, thus, their achievement. Applying mindset theory to student beliefs about the nature of writing-- whether writing is a fixed, incremental ability or a malleable skill-- may provide important understandings of the ways in which student react to challenges, obstacles, and feedback within the writing process. These belief systems may explain certain student writers demonstrate resilience, utilize writing strategies, and apply self-regulatory skills, while other students become quickly discouraged, avoid risks, or give up easily. Furthermore, writing mindset interventions offer a means to target those beliefs about writing, impacting the responsive behaviors and increasing achievement.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the measures, participants, procedures, and rationale for the method employed. The study design, data collection, guiding framework, and research questions employed for this study are discussed, followed by a description of the participants’ demographics and characteristics and the process for informed consent. Next, the strategies used to establish trustworthiness will be reported. Finally, the research protocols and materials employed throughout the study are described and the treatment of the qualitative and quantitative data sources will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework and Guiding Questions

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bandura’s social cognitive theory (SCT) guided this research inquiry. Bandura’s SCT posits that (1) learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction and (2) an individual’s behavior is influenced by his or her environment. This research explored seventh-grade and twelfth-grade students’ beliefs about writing not in isolation, but within the social and educational context of a growth mindset writing classroom. Furthermore, this research examined the effect of the growth mindset intervention on the students’ self-efficacy and attitudes towards writing, as well as how these self-beliefs impact the writing process.

Case Study Design

I conducted a case study of four twelfth grades students who were currently enrolled in a College English class at the same high school. This case study included open-ended interviews with the four students and document analysis of surveys and writing samples. I also worked with
the classroom teachers on Growth Mindset pedagogy and practices, observed class periods, and reviewed other course documents. These interviews and documents allowed me to learn about the students’ individual writing experiences, beliefs about themselves as writers, and beliefs about the nature of writing. Through the interviews and review of documents, I investigated these students’ writing mindsets, and the ways in which these mindsets impacted their writing processes.

I employed a case study methodology in order to explore, in detail and holistically, the individual beliefs and practices of each student writer. While I could have relied solely on survey findings to report on trends within student writers, I could not provide a holistic picture of the students’ writing processes and systems of belief without the case study research. Given that the goals of this study centered on self-beliefs and internal motivations, in-depth qualitative research was necessary. Therefore, a case study was most appropriate, as it is the best way to investigate the complex issue at hand: the relationships between students’ mindsets, beliefs about the nature of writing, prior experiences, pedagogical influences, classroom environments and their writing processes. According to Creswell (2013), “in a case study, a specific case is examined, often with the intent of examining an issue with the case illustrating the complexity of the issue. In this case study, the “issue” is the role of writing mindsets and the “cases” are the holistic observations and descriptions of four students’ self-beliefs, beliefs about writing and writing process.

This case study is, then, a “collective case study” (or multiple case study), defined by Creswell as a study in which “one concern or issue is selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue.” This collective case study design allowed me to “purposefully select multiple cases to show different perspectives on this issue,” an approach I
chose in order to evaluate the diverse roles mindsets play in the writing processes of student writers. Additionally, Marshall & Rossman (2011) case studies can provide a complete and precise picture of a situation: “case studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytical reporting formats.” While the surveys provided an overview of students’ mindsets and attitudes towards writing on a macro-level, the case studies provide a much more holistic and detailed picture of individual secondary students and their writing processes on a micro-level. Furthermore, the case study does what the survey cannot as it “allows for multiple sources of information, such as interviews and document analysis,” both of which I relied on, to report “a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell).

The collective case study, then, allowed for this complex issue, including all of the above-mentioned elements, to be explored through “multiple bounded systems,” or cases, as I enacted “detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell). In addition to understand the growth and fixed mindset characteristics students possessed, I investigated how these mindsets impacted the decisions they were making during the writing processes through “multiple sources of information” (interviews and writing samples) in order to report a “case description and case-based themes” (Creswell). Through analyzing these individual cases, then, my aim to better understand the construct of writing mindsets, as well how writing mindsets impact the writing process writing mindset pedagogy was best achieved (Creswell, Yin, 2013).

Participant and Site Selection

In selecting the participants for this study, I employed both purposeful and convenience sampling, purposeful that “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem” and sampling that “saves time and money,” respectively (Creswell, Marshall & Rossman).
Creswell cites that “purposeful maximal sampling” is that which he prefers as an expert researcher because it shows “different perspectives on the problem, process, or event [he] want[s] to portray” (Creswell 75). In this vein, I selected instructors of different grade levels and case study participants of diverse abilities and experiences to examine different instructional approaches, writing attitudes, and mindsets.

Preliminary criteria for instructor and student selection were that participants were employed or enrolled at Chicago Christian Middle and High School.¹ More specific criteria used for both selections will be discussed shortly.

Convenience was also an element of participant selection, as the two instructors and four case study participants were willing to collaborate with me and our collaboration required few time or money constraints. Since I have been employed by Chicago Christian Schools for the past ten years, I am familiar with the faculty, students, and school culture. My credibility as a faculty member allowed me to easily obtain parental consent, and to observe class periods without much disruption for the students. Although I knew each of the case study students by name, I have neither had them as students, nor will I in the future. As I currently work at the high school building part-time, I was able to conduct all my interviews with in-person during the course of school hours. Likewise, all participants agreed to share writing samples physically or electronically via Google Docs. Selecting case study participants purposefully, along with conveniently, increased the “do-ability” factor of this study, allowing for meaningful interviews and the sharing of writing samples (Marshall and Rossman 11).

Upon selecting a familiar research site, I had to carefully consider how my own experience with this location might influence my research findings. I was purposeful in selecting

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the school and student participants
students who I had little knowledge or contact with prior to the study. In an effort to further reduce any personal bias, I asked my dissertation director and other colleagues to review my data analysis and collection methods as well.

**Description of Participating School**

The teachers and students involved in this study were members of a private religious school in a suburban district in Midwestern United States. The school’s enrollment included approximately 500 students in grades 6-12. The student body consisted of 53% female students and 47% male students. The ethnicities of the student population were as follows: 6% Asian, 5% Hispanic, 4% Black, 84% White, and 1% two or more ethnicities. Currently, 5% of students receive free or reduced lunch. 10% qualify for special education services or accommodations, and 1.5% have been diagnosed with mild to severe cognitive disabilities, but attend class as part of an inclusive education program.

While this research site was accessible and convenient, it presented a few additional concerns for my study. First, this study was conducted in a private religious school, so my analysis in Chapter 5 addresses the ways in which the students’ Christian beliefs may have impacted their beliefs about the nature of their writing abilities. In addition, this location lacked diversity within the pool of student participants. Due to these limitations, my research study could be expanded in many ways, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6.

**Description of Selected Courses**

Two courses from the English department were selected for this study. The school had recently hired two first-year English faculty members, both of whom were overwhelmed by writing curriculum, demands on their time and establishing clear pedagogical practices. Thus, in addition to selecting courses housed in the English department, my criteria included course
taught by established faculty. I defined “established” as teachers with more than two years of teaching experience, and those who were not currently on probation for ineffective instruction.

These courses included: English 7, English 8, English 11, English 12 and College English. With the exception of College English, all courses are required 1-year courses, assigned by appropriate grade level (i.e. English 7 for all 7th graders). All course curriculums are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, and include standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening, and Language.

College English is also a 1-year course, which students can elect to enroll in, rather than taking the English 12 course. In partnership with a local college, College English is a concurrent-enrollment course. This means students are enrolled as students at the college, but the class is housed on the high school campus. The course is taught by a member of the high school faculty, and contracted by the college to teach only the concurrent course. Students enrolled in College English receive 6 credits for the 1-year course, 3 for the first semester of composition and 3 for the second semester of literature. Students who do not wish to take the class for college credit often elect to take the Advanced Placement English exams, both in Literature and Language, although the class is not currently endorsed.

For this study, I began with the two sections of English 7 and the two sections of College Writing. I chose these courses due to the variation in student age, a factor which is often considered in both writing efficacy and growth mindset research. Furthermore, these two courses were both taught by established teachers. These criteria meant that two English teachers and one hundred seventh and twelfth-grade students were possible candidates for this study.

After analyzing the results of the pre-study Writing Mindset Scale, I narrowed the study to focus on one high school English teacher and four students from his twelfth-grade College
English course. These four students demonstrated a variety of initial mindset beliefs, which would allow me to track the various impacts of the mindset pedagogy. In addition, I selected students of the same age, grade, and course in order to reduce the possibility of other variables that might influence the results. Finally, in this study, the opportunity to conduct multiple in-depth interviews with a limited number of participants offered an opportunity to understand mindset in a more authentic and personal way.

**Informed Consent and Participant Protection**

In June 2017, two veteran teachers were invited to participate in the study via an email that explained the research process (see Appendix A. Teacher Information Letter). Following the emails, a meeting was held with each teacher to review the process outlined in the letter, during which the teachers had opportunity to pose questions or ask for further clarification. At the end of the meeting, teachers were invited to sign the appropriate consent form (see Appendix B. Teacher Consent Form).

After consent was obtained from both teachers, I sent each teacher-participant one educational text on growth mindset, *Mindsets in the Classroom: Building a Growth Mindset Learning Community* by Mary Kay Ricci. Both teacher-participants read this book prior to our first meeting. Additionally, I scheduled a two-day “writing mindset workshop,” which occurred on the school campus for two consecutive days in July of 2017. The purpose of this workshop was for the teachers and researchers to engage in a discussion of the book, and begin collaboration on the writing mindset pedagogy. The workshop time had the following three aims:

- All researchers and participants will discuss the educational text, and its implication for writing education.
Next, participants will join researchers in creating an instructional framework for a writing mindset pedagogy, based on mindset theory and research-based practices in writing instruction.

After the framework has been established, researchers will introduce the central task for teacher-participants: to develop writing mindset communities in their ELA classes during 1st semester of the 2017-18 school year (August-December 2017).

The remaining workshop time was dedicated to collaborative planning and designing of writing activities, classroom materials and teaching strategies that intentionally promote a growth writing mindset. This workshop was necessary to establish a writing mindset pedagogy, the condition under which the case studies would be examined.

In the beginning of September 2017, letters were sent to the parents of all potential student participants (see Appendix C. Parent Information Letter- General), which were the students enrolled in English 7 or College English. In the letters, I introduced myself, explained the project, and outlined the involvement for their child, which included my observation of the class periods and their response to brief surveys (see Appendix D. Writing Mindset Scale and Appendix E. Writing Attitudes Survey). Parents responded by returning the signed consent forms to the child’s ELA teacher (see Appendix F. Parent Consent Form- General). Following parental consent, I visited each class, introducing myself, the project, and the student involvement. Students had an opportunity to review the information on a handout, ask questions, and provide assent (see Appendix G. Student Information Letter- General and Appendix H. Student Assent Form- General).
In early October, students were selected as potential participants for the individual case studies. These selections were made based on their survey responses and teacher recommendations. A second informational letter was sent to the parents of the potential case study student participants, explaining the additional steps of involvement, in which the students will be invited to share their writing and reflect on their writing process (see Appendix I. Parent Information Letter- Case Study). Following the letter, I requested an after school meeting with each parent and student to review the process outlined in the letter. When this meeting was inconvenient for the families, I spoke with them by phone. These conversations provided an opportunity for the parents and students to ask any questions. At the end of the meeting, parents were invited to sign the appropriate consent form (see Appendix J. Parent Consent Form- Case Study). At this time, students were also given the opportunity to sign their assent form (see Appendix K. Student Information Letter & Assent Form- Case Study).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study began after IRB approval was obtained from the researcher’s university. The study and data collection were completed over 18 weeks during the participating school’s first semester in the fall of 2017.

In conducting this study, I utilized three main forms of data collection methods: surveys, open-ended interviewing and document analysis. The quantitative data collected included teacher and student surveys. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews, observations, and students’ writing samples to examine the writing mindset construct, identify possible links between the data, and answer the research questions related to writing efficacy and attitudes. The qualitative data collection methods helped capture the complex connection between teachers’
pedagogical knowledge, the students’ self-beliefs about their abilities, and the students’ writing processes (Graham et al., 2001).

After obtaining consent, I began by distributing the Writing Mindset Scale and Writing Attitudes Survey to all student-participants in the two sections of English 7 and the two sections of College English. All surveys were completed within the 50-minute class period. Both surveys were used to assess writing mindsets and attitudes prior to the study, as well as to gather information for selecting diverse case study participants.

Writing Mindset Scale. In order to identify students’ current writing mindsets, I created a Writing Mindset Scale, adapted from Dweck’s Growth Mindset Scale (1995, 2006). Dweck’s scale measures mindsets by asking participants to respond to statements tied to theories of intelligence. The mindset questions include three statements about basic intelligence, which have been previously validated by Dweck, et al. and used in subsequent studies by other authors:

1) You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic intelligence.
2) Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much.
3) You have a certain amount of intelligence and you really can't do much to change it.

Respondents are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement.

While the Growth Mindset Scale aims to measure beliefs about intelligence, this study was more concerned with beliefs about writing. Thus, the survey was adapted to elicit feedback from respondents about the nature of writing of writing ability. In order to make this shift, the word “intelligence” was changed to “writing ability.”

1) You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic writing ability.
2) Your writing ability is something about you that you can't change very much.

3) You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can't do much to change it.

Students were asked to respond to each statement with a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (score: 1) to strongly agree (score: 6).

Recently, Sieben established content validity and reliability of her own Writing Mindset which she developed within the context of the “Teaching Writing Hope” study (Sieben, 2015). This scale includes eight items that are rated by responders based on their agreement using a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (score: 1) to strongly agree (score: 6). The eight-item scale represented the WMS as two factors: (1) writing growth mindset and (2) writing fixed mindset (Sieben, 2018) contributing to its construct validity, as it confirms the research on the two distinct factors in the mindset construct: growth and fixed (Dweck, 2006, 2010).

Noticeably, Sieben and I include an identical item on our scales (Hoeve Item #2, Sieben Item #2): *Your writing ability is something about you that you can't change very much.*

Additionally, the two other items from my scale are similar in wording to Sieben’s validated WMS. For example:

Sieben’s Item #7: *You can learn new writing strategies, but you cannot really change your basic writing ability.*

Hoeve Item #1: *You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic writing ability.*

Sieben’s Item #1: *You have a certain amount of writing talent, and you cannot really do much to change it.*

Hoeve Item #3: *You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can't do much to change it.*
While I composed my scale independently, it is gratifying to see its close alignment with Sieben’s validated scale. I was not present at Sieben’s NCTE panel session in 2015, when her WMS was first introduced. It was not until her book publication in 2018 that I first encountered the scale in print. Since both of our scales were adapted from Dweck’s Growth Mindset Scale (1995, 2006), it is logical that many of our items would be closely worded, or even identical statements.

Writing Attitudes Survey. The 28-item Writing Attitude Survey (WAS) was administered to all seventh and twelfth grade participants at the beginning of the study to obtain initial indicators of students’ attitudes and self-efficacy towards writing. The survey was given a second time at the end of the study to the case study students in an effort to obtain pre- and post-measurement for students’ attitudes and self-efficacy towards writing.

The WAS, a tool for assessing writing attitudes, was developed to be applicable for Grades 1-12 and appropriate for group administration within a short period of time (Kear et al., 2000) . Each item begins with uniform wording (i.e., “how would you feel…”) to establish students’ consistent expectations on the instrument. The attitude measurement uses the cartoon character Garfield the cat and a Likert scale in which point values are assigned to each image of Garfield; students are asked to circle the image of Garfield that most closely matches their feelings. For example, a score of 4 is given when a student circles the “very happy” Garfield, and a score of 1 is given when the “very upset” Garfield is circled. The value for each question is converted to a raw score out of 112 possible points, and the total score is then converted to ranges of “very happy” to “very upset” The WAS has a high degree of reliability, with reliability coefficients ranging from .85 to .93 (Kear et al., 2000).
Case Study Interviews. From this point, I reviewed the surveys and consulted with the two teacher-participants. Together, we selected four students for case-study interviews. In total, four interviews were conducted with each of the four case study students throughout the semester. For each case study student, four total interviews were administered, from September through December 2017. Each interview was limited to a maximum of 20 minutes, and the scope of the interview questions was limited to the writing processes of the students.

The first round included loosely structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with the four twelfth grade student participants. Because I was interested in not only the students’ mindsets, but also how those beliefs impacted their writing processes, it was necessary to explore participants’ backgrounds and experiences, as they related to their perceptions and approaches to writing. Initial interviews served the purpose of creating profiles of each participant as a learner. Questions focused on the student’s relationship with writing, general attitudes towards other subjects and education in general, career interests, and experiences with failure.

The following three interviews were thematically organized so as to provide participants the opportunity to share thoughts, reactions, stories, and opinions on a variety of issues that impact their writing process, including but not limited to: risk-taking, response to failure, the nature of their writing abilities, grades, teacher and peer feedback, teacher expectations and values, writing attitudes, self-efficacy and growth.

Writing Samples. In speaking with the case study students during interviews, I asked them to reflect on and reference past writing pieces, as well as drafts they were currently working on. These writing samples were shared electronically with me by the participants, and served to provide a more complete illustration of each student’s metacognition during the writing process and the influence on drafting or revising their paper.
Data Analysis

As data emerged from the survey, interviews, and writing samples, I continued to focus on the guiding question and sub-questions. I read, reread, and marked survey results, writing samples, and interview transcripts with these questions in mind and as I did so, patterns emerged. These patterns became an important part of my analysis, as I was able to focus on commonalities amongst writing mindsets and writing process, self-efficacy and writing attitudes, as well as unique features and attributes of individual students. I looked, specifically, for patterns in their beliefs about writing and themselves as writers, how these beliefs correlate to self-efficacy and writing attitudes, and how these beliefs impact the writing process. Such analysis, though “the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis [is] one that can integrate the entire endeavor [of analysis]” as it “link[s] people and settings together” (Marshall and Rossman 159).

In completing my analysis (of survey results, interview transcripts, and writing samples), I relied on three strands that guided my inquiry in organizing and conducting both the survey and case study interviews: Writing Beliefs, Efficacy and Attitudes, and Writing Process.

- **Writing Beliefs:** When examining writing beliefs, I sought to learn about the students’ beliefs about the nature of writing, as well as the way they described themselves as writers. In analyzing data, I focused on questions such as those that follow. Do students perceive writing as an innate, fixed trait or as a malleable, incremental quality? How much control do they feel they have in their writing ability? Do these students tend to display growth or fixed mindset characteristics in the statements, conclusions, or excuses they use when discussing writing? What pedagogical or instructional approaches drive mindset beliefs? These questions helped me create a profile of each student’s writing mindset by identifying specific systems of beliefs.
• **Efficacy and Attitudes:** In focusing on efficacy and writing attitudes, I aimed to learn whether the students’ mindsets correlated to their confidence and enjoyment when performing writing tasks. In order to gain these insights, I asked students to review a list of statement that paired “I can” statements with specific writing tasks. For each statement, the students indicated the degree to which they felt the statements were true. Additionally, I reviewed each student’s Writing Attitude Survey, and posed follow-up questions in the interviews. When reviewing the data, I looked for patterns among mindsets and efficacy and attitudes. How do the students conceptualize themselves as writers? What messages or experiences have formed these beliefs? Are students more efficacious and positive when they possess growth mindsets about writing? Were growth mindsets necessary for high efficacy and positive attitudes? What experiences and feedback impacted their self-beliefs? What other influences or factors might negate or lessen the impact of mindsets? These questions allowed me to isolate data that characterized the students’ perceptions of their own writing abilities and attitudes.

• **Writing Process:** In the third strand, I analyzed the choices made by each student within the composing or revising process. Rather than just identifying mindsets, I wanted to examine to what extent those beliefs impacted the writer’s decisions. Questions that helped me focus on how mindsets influenced the writing process include those that follow: How do students characterize their growth throughout the writing process? How do they react to mistakes, failure and risk-taking in their writing? Are they willing or hesitant to try out new techniques or approaches? What factors drive their writing decisions and priorities? Might students possess a growth writing mindset, but not actually practice it? These questions kept my analysis focused.
In regards to the case studies, I used open-coding as part of the analysis process, lifting in-vivo text to form initial codes within each (and even outside of) the three abovementioned strands. From this coding, categories emerged that then helped me to establish themes and patterns in the data. As suggested by Yin, I also used cross-case synthesis as an analytic technique with which I created a word table to display the data from individual cases (Creswell 163). This table illustrated common features and distinguishing characteristics amongst the multiple cases, aligning with one aim of this study: to examine common characteristics and distinguishing characteristics amongst writing mindsets. In representing findings, I aimed to “present an in-depth picture of the cases using narrative(s) and figures” (Creswell 157).

While this study does seek to highlight important thematic issues within the fields of positivist psychology and English education, it does not claim to establish trends in writing mindsets that are transferable to contexts other than the four studied in the multiple case studies. The findings from individual case studies are not suggesting that writing mindsets would manifest or impact writing in the same way in other students.

However, as will be discussed later in this study, these findings have the potential to lead to further studies that could inform pedagogical approaches in the teaching of writing. This study, though, offers four in-depth, vivid profiles of twelfth grade writers and the ways in which their mindsets impact their self-beliefs and inform their process.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Marshall & Rossman (2011) explain that case studies illuminate in detail larger trends while focusing on the individuals. In order to better understand the role of writing mindsets, and the themes that subsequently emerged, I collected data from teacher and study participants, using a collective case study methodology. According to Creswell (2013), “A hallmark of a good case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case” (p 98). In order to provide a complete and accurate profile for each case, my research strategy required immersion into the educational setting, as well as an understanding of each participant’s writing experiences and processes.

Additionally, my data collection strategies, such as in-depth interviews and surveys, involved close personal interactions between myself and the participants. The details taken from this data collection have been woven together to form a detailed picture of the collective case study and “allow the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats” (Marshall & Rossman 2011, p 267).

While this study initially began with two veteran English teachers and multiple sections of seventh and twelfth grade students, I chose to focus on five main participants: the classroom teacher (Mr. J.) and four twelfth grade students from his College English course (Austin, Emma, Lauren, and Erin). This chapter provides a detailed profile on the each of the participants. Each profile contains details and anecdotes from the participant's background, educational experiences and mindset beliefs.
Teacher-Participant. Mr. J.

The English instructor, Mr. J. is a white male in his early forties. After receiving both a Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree in English Literature, he taught ten years in two private high schools and two years in public post-secondary classrooms. He also holds a Secondary Education endorsement. In addition to teaching 11th and 12th grade English courses, Mr. J. serves as the English Department Head, and the director of Drama and Forensics.

As a classroom teacher, Mr. J. appears to be engaging and personable with students of various personality traits and ability levels. His classroom looks as if it has just survived a natural disaster, as play props and student papers are strewn across every flat surface, yet Mr. J. spends much of his time in conversation or sharing a laugh with his students. The high school principal reports that Mr. J. is highly regarded in the high school community, both for challenging gifted students and providing additional time and support when students are struggling.

As a self-described “people-pleaser,” he recalls a heightened awareness of his grades in high school and college writing, and he struggled to accept his teachers’ feedback or critique. He did not care for the structured nature of research writing or assignments, especially when it required him to merely synthesize the ideas of others. He describes himself as a writer who always looked “to push the edges of a writing assignment.” Now that he is no longer writing for school and does not need to consider the pressure of grades, he is comfortable taking writing risks and does not fear failure. Each morning, Mr. J. carves out a half hour for personal, reflective journaling, biblical analysis and composing short stories.

As a writing instructor, Mr. J. feels the most satisfaction in helping students develop their writing voices. He values vulnerability in his students’ writing, and his best moments are when
students gain insight from their writing or when he has an opportunity to validate “a brilliant moment in their writing.” He notes his hesitation about teaching topics like research or discourse communities, which function within expected boundaries and structures. In an effort to de-emphasize the “rules” of writing, Mr. J. points to his deliberate use of the phrase “moves writers make.” However, he suspects students still sense his frustration with the expectations that accompany certain writing genres and the ways those structures contrast his own inclinations.

When I administered the “Teacher Survey of Classroom Writing Practices,” (see Appendix 13) Mr. J. indicated that the process writing approach best describes his writing pedagogy. He names Peter Elbow and Donald Murray as key figures in shaping his expressivist ideals about writing instruction, including the beliefs that writing is a process of discovery and experimentation and the teacher should serve as a facilitator or guide for student expression. In the survey, he “moderately agrees” with the statement “I like to teach writing” and also “moderately agrees” that he is effective at teaching writing, while he only “agrees slightly” that he effectively manages his classroom during writing instruction.

The administration at Chicago Christian High Schools requires each teacher to demonstrate growth in student learning using a SMART goal framework. The teacher selects their own SMART goal based on a perceived need in the classroom, seeks out resources for professional growth, and collects data to assess the students’ learning gains. This goal work is an important piece of the teacher’s end of year evaluation and continued employment. For the duration of the 2017-18 school year, Mr. J. plans to focus his own professional growth on providing more timely and effective feedback for his students. Like many secondary English

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2 SMART is an acronym, which provides criteria for creating a goal that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, Time-bound

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instructors, he struggles to balance the large amount of papers and students within the confines of his school and home schedules.

In an average week, Mr. J.’s students spend 90 minutes writing. 40% of his writing instruction includes small group or cooperative learning activities, while another 40% involves individualized instruction. The remaining 20% of time is spent in whole class instruction. The 12th grade classes will complete the following writing activities this year: personal narratives, journaling, letters, informational writing, writing to persuade and responding to reading.

Mr. J.’s writing pedagogy values sharing writing with others on a weekly basis, both through peer and teacher conferencing, and student choice in writing topics. He frequently assigns writing homework, models writing strategies, and asks students to work at writing centers. Furthermore, writing is often paired with reading, as he views the two skills as interdependent.

Summer Workshop

During July and August of 2017, I facilitated a two-day workshop on Writing Mindset pedagogy, which Mr. J. attended. When inviting the teacher-participants to the workshop sessions, my aim was not for the teachers to just receive instruction or acquire new knowledge, but to invite them to share in designing a portion of the research study, while I served as the workshop facilitator and “colaborer” in the process. Since the teachers were experts in their classroom communities, I saw the value in soliciting their input and concerns throughout the two-day workshop.

My goal for the workshop sessions was to create a final product: a collective framework for a Growth Mindset Writing Pedagogy, which I defined as “an instructional approach that targets writing mindsets in order to strengthen self-beliefs and attitudes of student writers.” In
our sessions, I inquired how the teachers interpreted this pedagogy, as well as which instructional approaches, writing strategies, and assessment procedures they would use to support the pedagogical aims.

In preparation for the workshop sessions, Mr. J. joined the other teacher-participants in reading Mary Cay Ricci’s *Mindsets in the Classroom: Building a Growth Mindset Learning Community* (2013). Inspired by Dweck’s mindset theory, this text provided teachers with ways to build a growth mindset classroom culture focused on critical thinking, challenge and learning from failure. In addition, the book includes planning templates, step-by-step descriptions and “looks-fors” in a differentiated instructional model, sample parent communication and a professional development plan. Participants were also provided with additional resources throughout the workshop sessions, including: *Mindset* (Dweck, 2006), *A Mindset for Learning* (Mraz & Hertz, 2015), *The Growth Mindset Coach* (Brock & Hundley, 2016), and *Ready-To-Use Resources for Mindsets in the Classroom* (Ricci, 2015).

Each of the texts the teachers reviewed specifically focused on applying mindset theory to general educational settings and practices. So, the first goal of the workshop became transferring those general mindset beliefs and practices into a domain-specific pedagogy for writing mindsets. By the close of the first session, we had outlined the following pedagogical goals for a writing mindset framework:

1. Teach students that writing is a malleable skill, rather than a fixed entity
2. Emphasize growth in writing over perfecting a final writing product
3. Encourage positive and rational responses to writing frustration and failure
4. Build student’s confidence in taking writing risks and challenging writing rules
We had also used the texts to begin forming a picture of growth vs. fixed writing mindset students. Some of the behaviors and beliefs were general mindset characteristics, while others were specific to the student’s writing approach. However, we felt as though all of the characteristics carried the potential to impact the student’s writing process and subsequent achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Writing Mindset</th>
<th>Growth Writing Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Anxious and apprehensive towards writing</td>
<td>· Confident and optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Writing task feels out of their control</td>
<td>· Copes well with fear and anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Likely to withdrawal effort and give up when facing difficulty or frustration</td>
<td>· Able to face difficulties, even fail, without losing confidence to try again, resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Pessimism and “negative thinking”</td>
<td>· Overestimates or accurately estimates ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Underestimate their ability</td>
<td>· Loves new challenges and shows curiosity about unfamiliar approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Believe writing ability is a fixed entity</td>
<td>· Values improvement and effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Values looking smart over learning</td>
<td>· Believes writing ability is incremental and malleable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Does not care to explore topics in depth</td>
<td>· Responds to setbacks by remaining involved, trying new strategies, using resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Not disposed to critical thinking</td>
<td>· Seeks out writing feedback, open to critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Low on self-accountability and self-assessment</td>
<td>· Willing to take risks and question rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Prefers formulaic structure or routine topics</td>
<td>· Sees agency in writing achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Tries to hide weakness</td>
<td>· Appreciates models and examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Avoids feedback from teachers or peers on their writing</td>
<td>· Can accurately assess own strengths and areas of growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Often defensive or combative when receiving critique</td>
<td>· Grade is not as important as growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Defines writing ability as part of who they are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Grade is most important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Fixed vs. Growth Writing Mindset Characteristics

The following day of discussion was spent brainstorming teaching strategies and classroom activities that would support these pedagogical aims. Our list included:
After reviewing our pedagogical aims, mindset characteristics and teaching practices, much of our discussion focused on the importance of grading practices and feedback, two areas we saw as essential to a Writing Mindset Pedagogy.

- **Assessment**: All of the teachers present agreed that assessment must be carefully considered in a writing pedagogy. As my interviews indicate, students derive enormous meaning about their abilities from the grades they receive, and often, attaining a high grade is the singular goal of completing a writing task. Moreover, any effective writing pedagogy must mirror its beliefs and values in its assessment practices. When considering assessment as a key component of our pedagogy, the teachers asked: *How can we change assessments to allow students to take more risks in their writing? How*
can our assessment practices demonstrate that we value growth and effort? Is it possible for students to accept or even embrace possible failure in an educational environment where grades carry so much power? What would a Growth Writing Mindset rubric look like? How can we balance an individualized “growth grade” with all students mastering the same standards?

- **Feedback:** We identified the second essential component of the writing framework to be feedback, which included the feedback from the teacher or parent to the student writer, as well as from one peer to another. Similar to Mindset theory, the language of the feedback should focus on growth. Rather than praising a student’s ability (i.e. *You are such a talented writer*), a writing instructor should emphasize the student’s growth and effort (i.e. *Your revision work on the descriptions really paid off! The new sensory details make the story come alive for me!*). In addition to praise language, writing teachers use their written and verbal feedback to explicitly encourage students to take writing risks, to help students process their frustrations and failures, and to remind them of the ways they have already begun expanding their skills. One teacher suggested we teach our students to use different language as well. For example, when a student feels disappointed with a score on their writing, they could be trained to ask “How can I become a better writer?” rather than “How can I get a higher grade?” Another teacher shared that she requires students to use the phrase “areas of growth” rather than “mistakes” when they are giving one another writing feedback. Again, this shift in language supports a classroom culture that values growth throughout all members’ writing abilities, rather than pointing out errors and failures in order to achieve a perfect end product. Rather than using revision work as a time to rank writers according to how many “errors” were present, both teacher and peer
feedback should identify “areas of growth” for all students. This change in emphasis communicates that all writers, regardless of current ability level, can continue to grow and improve their skills. Additionally, the teachers found it helpful to assign specific areas of focus for different peer responding sessions or separate drafts. For example, the focus of an early draft may be to just ask clarifying questions to develop purpose, while a later session may be reserved for close editing before a polished draft. These “focus correction errors” help students recognize that peer revision means so much more than just correcting grammatical errors.

During the workshop session, the teacher-participants wrestled with questions concerning feedback as well: How do we find time to give each student meaningful, individualized feedback, which not only points out areas for growth, but actually HOW to improve in that area? How can we provide critical feedback that doesn’t harm students’ writing efficacy? Can we train students to provide more meaningful, growth-oriented feedback? What might be ways to incorporate more self-assessment and reflection into the feedback process? How do we encourage or support the students who are defensive or dismissive of others’ feedback?

Following these two days of fruitful discussion, each teacher-participant prepared materials to implement the mindset framework, using the teaching methods, instructional strategies and classroom activities that they believed would be most appropriate for their students and classroom culture.

After the workshop completed, my study focused on Mr. J.’s implementation of the Writing Mindset Pedagogy in his twelfth-grade College English class. In order to gain a thorough understanding of its impact on the student writers, I administered surveys and conducted interviews with four case study student-participants: Austin, Lauren, Erin, and Emma.
The following student profiles provide a detailed description of each student’s educational outlook and experiences, offering a more comprehensive depiction of each learner and providing context for the study conclusions.

Student #1. Austin

Background

Austin lives in small town near the school and is the third of four children. His mother cleans houses, and his father is a yard manager for a local business. Austin’s father holds an Associate’s Degree, while his mother did not pursue higher education. His oldest sister, four years older, is a social work major at a nearby state university; his older brother, two years older, studies Criminal Justice at Christian college out of state. While both of his older siblings are enrolled at four-year colleges, Austin notes that neither possesses his level of academic drive. The other brother, two years younger, is a sophomore at the same high school.

With a 3.89 cumulative GPA, Austin is ranked 26 out of 96 twelfth-grade students. After graduation, Austin plans to attend a local state university to study pre-med, and has received a sizable scholarship for his academic accomplishments.

In addition to his academic achievements, Austin serves on the Student Life Committee, a leadership organization that coordinates most of the social and volunteer school activities. Austin has received All-Conference and Academic All-State, and All-District awards for his performance in three varsity sports: soccer, basketball, and baseball. He plays in orchestra and in the student praise band, and he is a member of his church praise band as well.

Learning Profile

Austin’s attitudes towards his education are often based on the class structure and instructor, rather than his success and self-efficacy in the subject area. He expresses negative
feelings toward Math, although his grades have usually been high and the work has come easy for him. Noting that English classes have historically been more difficult, Austin recalls having to work harder to keep his grades high.

Rather than the discipline itself, Austin’s reactions to his learning are tied to the class structure and instructor’s approach. He prefers challenging courses—ones that require students to pursue inquiry, think critically, and participate in stimulating discussion—even if the class comes with a heavier workload. In fact, Austin explains that he would rather enroll in a work-intensive challenging course than an easy course with low expectations and little homework. He connects his frustration with school to rote or meaningless learning activities, especially when the purpose is unclear.

These factors—higher level critical thinking, discussion-based, clear college-prep purposes—are the reasons Austin has chosen to take advanced classes during high school, such as College English, A.P. Government and A.P. Calculus. Furthermore, he explains that the academic challenges provide him with a great sense of satisfaction, especially the feeling of “working hard, not achieving success immediately, then working even harder to finally achieve my goal.”

While Austin is a confident student, he notes his struggle to maintain his high grades in A.P. Calculus this year. When he scored low on assessments or struggled to master new concepts quickly, Austin felt his confidence dropped as he questioned his ability and intelligence. After receiving a low score on his Calculus midterm, his confidence immediately sank and he questioned whether he should have taken the course: “Was I even smart enough? Was this just a waste of time?” He felt inferior to his classmates, especially when the students began to compare their grades, inquiring from one another “What [grade] did you get?” Resisting the initial urges
to quit, Austin reports that he worked even harder and sought out help from the teacher to review missed concepts.

These concerns differ from a recent experience in A.P. Government, in which he felt like the smartest person in the room. After learning that he was the only person to receive an A on the mid-term exam, he felt superior on his knowledge about government, especially since he did not study for long or find the test difficult. This high score, paired with relatively little effort, seemed to reinforce a natural “smartness” and raised Austin’s confidence.

Initial Beliefs about Writing

According to his interview responses, Austin believes that both intelligence and writing ability are malleable if the individual has a strong work ethic; however, he believes there are limits to what we can achieve, as some students are ahead because they are born with some natural talent or good genes. He compares academic ability to athletics, explaining that students need to maximize their natural abilities through hard work in both areas.

Austin feels that he has been successful if he has received a grade of 93% or higher, positive peer responses and complements from his instructor. He would view a B -grade or lower as failure. He also mentions negative peer response as an indicator of failure, such as his classmates looking bored during his presentation. If he is able to maintain his academic knowledge over a substantial period of time, or connect it to a “real world” context, he feels that he has grown as a learner.

Austin admits some struggles with writing. Although he describes himself as a “slightly above average” writer, as he has “always written in the same style, never really excelling.”

He sees himself in a writing “rut,” where his skills prevent him from reaching a higher level of writer; he supposes this belief stems from his comparison to others, especially those who
he perceives as being “just naturally gifted writers.” Furthermore, he admits to telling himself “I’m not a good writer” due to past negative experiences with writing.

After receiving a low grade on his first paper of the semester, Austin reports that he initiated a conference with his instructor, Mr. J. He believes his teacher is preparing him to be a better writer; so, rather than focusing on the grade, he tried to follow his teacher’s direction by using the phrases: “How can I become a better writer? How can I become a college-ready writer?”

Mr. J. notes that many of the College English students are binary thinkers, who crave clear divisions of right and wrong answers, and he believes Austin is especially wired this way. Mr. J. views Austin as desiring an “I have arrived” moment of mastery, and can be frustrated by the lack of “arrival” in writing. From Mr. J.’s perspective Austin also feels big emotions, although he is adept at hiding this from his peers. These “big highs and lows” often influence the way that Mr. J. provides feedback to Austin, as he avoids being too direct in order to help Austin remain calm rather than triggering anger, panic, or frustration.

When writing in school, Austin names his writing goals as wanting to get a high grade and figure out what his teacher wants from him. He recalls his enjoyment in writing personal narratives throughout high school, as these assignments allowed him to reflect on memorable experiences. In contrast, he remembers feeling miserable while composing a formulaic 5-paragraph essay, which only asked for quotes from the novel and “erased all my voice and ideas.”

When speaking about his most recent piece of writing, he explained the difficulty he encountered. As he composed the paper, an analysis of a Greek play, he lacked confidence in his ideas, low motivation, and no interest in the topic. These feelings led to his procrastination,
followed by minimal time and effort in writing; instead he felt like he was “just trying to get by.” He believes that good writing teachers allow students freedom in their writing, especially allowing them to choose a topic of interest, which will result in the best product for both the student and teacher.

Although Austin emphasizes hard work and effort in his interview answers, his responses on the Writing Mindset Scale indicate fixed beliefs about writing. He selected “Agree” for Statement #1 (You can learn new things, but you can’t change your basic writing ability). In addition, he selected “Somewhat Agree” for Statement #2 (Your writing ability is something that you can’t change very much) and Statement #3 (You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can’t do much to change it). In the beginning of the semester, his description of himself as a writer reflected the entity view as well: “I am just an average writer. I don’t feel like I get better as I have gotten older.”

Student #2. Lauren

Background

Lauren believes her fellow classmates would describe her as creative, friendly, outgoing, and laid-back. She adds that she is both a leader and an extrovert. Lauren’s family lives locally, and all five of their children have moved through the K-12 system. Her mother earned a graduate degree in education and now works alongside Lauren’s father at their family business. Lauren’s oldest sibling, her only sister, is nine years older and works as physician assistant. Her oldest brother, six years older, is a financial manager. The second brother, three years older, graduated from a local college, and works in online marketing. Her third brother, two years older, is currently employed at the family business. In addition to her four siblings, Lauren has a brother and sister-in-law, as well as four-month-old nephew.
Similar to her older siblings, Lauren excels academically and participates in a wide range of school activities. A member of the National Honors Society, Lauren’s GPA is 3.88 and she ranks 28 of 96 students. A local private college has awarded Lauren two large academic scholarships, and she plans to study nursing in the fall.

In addition to her academic achievements, Lauren participates in many high school activities, including orchestra, and the student leadership team. Additionally, Lauren plays Varsity Volleyball and Basketball, for which she was given the Excellence in Sports Leadership award. Outside of school, Lauren is employed as a salesperson at shoe store and volunteers as a Sunday School teacher at her church.

Learning Profile

Lauren reported a positive attitude towards school as she “loves learning” and “school comes pretty easily.” She believes her ease stems from listening well, taking good notes, and adapting the information to her visual learning style, such as making diagrams and using different colors to separate the material.

According to her responses, her confidence is the highest in Math and Science courses, and her favorite class is Chemistry, as it involves a lot of hands-on learning. She feels smart in Science courses, where she is able to move through the lab quickly in comparison to her classmates. For example, she was able to distinguish tissue samples quickly in a lab for Physiology. The pace of her success seems to increase her confidence substantially.

In contrast, she confesses her struggles in Spanish and English, particularly with grammar and writing. She connects her lack of confidence to her classroom experiences, when she listens to others speaking in the foreign language and compares her own fluency: “For some people [Spanish] comes really naturally to them. For me, I’m a good listener, but speaking is harder for
me.” Although she admits her lack of confidence, her grades are still excellent, which she attributes to the extra time she spends on these courses.

Lauren articulates her indicators of success as an A grade and positive feedback from the instructor, such as when her teacher wrote “excellent” on her paper. She also continues to gauge her success or struggle by the pace at which she is able to acquire new knowledge. In a recent Physiology lab, she felt smart when she “could distinguish tissue samples really fast, especially compared to everyone else.” She would view a B-grade or lower as failure, or if she scored worse than her classmates.

Since she was a child, Lauren remembers her parents as always encouraging her by saying, “You’ll do your best on this.” These words have reassured her that she can only try her best. In general, her parents are not involved in her school work, as she believes they have confidence in her responsibility and self-motivation.

**Initial Beliefs about Writing**

Lauren’s interview answers indicate that in general, she views intelligence as a fixed trait. She believes that the students labeled “the smart kids” will always be the smartest kids in the class. She doesn’t diminish the fact that those students are working hard, citing this as a possible reason they are successful, yet “I just know they are born with that ability and I think that will carry on.” While she feels that Math is similar to intelligence, attributed to natural “gifts,” she believes writing is a little different. With writing ability, “you can grow, but then you get to a peak and level off. You can’t keep getting better and better.”

Lauren’s responses on the Writing Mindset Scale reflected similar fixed entity beliefs. She chose “Somewhat Agree” for Statement #1 (*You can learn new things, but you can’t change your basic writing ability*) In addition, she selected “Agree” for Statement #2 (*Your writing...*)
Lauren recalls her best writing memory as a large 8th grade project, in which she was able to write freely about her past experiences, major life changes, and her faith. In contrast, her worst experience was being required to write about the Nigerian Civil War during her sophomore year, since the writing assignment only asked for a factual account. She didn’t feel that she was able to engage in the topic because she could not develop her own opinion in the writing.

Lauren describes a “good” writing teacher as one that provides examples or models for the writing activity and provides students with individual feedback. She believes these areas will help “make sure students are on the right page” with their writing. Prior to taking College Writing, Lauren perceives herself as a writer who has “tried to sound smart by using big words and always following the rules, especially the five-paragraph essay.”

Although she notes writing has an area of struggle, Lauren explains that she chose to enroll in College English because she likes to challenge herself and believes the class will help her succeed in college and her future career. Her goals are to receive a good grade, gain practice and become a better writer.

Mr. J. recognizes Lauren’s fun and creative side, but feels that she often needs permission or validation to take risks in her writing. While the same is true of another participant, Emma, he views Lauren as being a little safer of a writer. In College English, Mr. J. believes that the struggles Lauren perceives in her own writing may be attributed to the level of critical thinking the class demands, rather than her writing skills.
Student #3. Erin

Background

Erin also lives in town and is the middle of three children. While both of her parents have completed graduate degrees, her mother is a homemaker and her father is an auditor. Erin’s sister, four years older, graduated from a local university, and is currently applying to graduate schools to study music performance. Her brother, two years younger, is a sophomore at the same high school.

Of the four case study students, Erin holds the greatest academic achievements. Her GPA is the highest at 4.02 and she ranks fourth of 96 students. Erin is a member of the National Honors Society, and was named a Commended Student in the 2018 National Merit Scholarship Program; Although Erin has not finalized her plans for after graduation, she has been accepted by a number of private and public colleges within the state. She would like to study biology and then attend medical school after completing her Bachelor’s Degree.

In addition to her academic achievements, Erin is extremely involved in high school activities. She is a member of the International Club and Math Club, and she writes for the school newspaper. She also competes on the Quiz Bowl team and plays multiple instruments for the school praise band.

Like her older sister, Erin is perhaps best known for her talents on the violin. She plays in the school orchestra, as well as in the city youth symphony and church orchestra. Notably, she received a perfect score at State Solo and Ensemble, for which she was awarded an invitation to play in the honors orchestra at the Michigan Youth Arts Festival.
Learning Profile

Overall, Erin reports enjoying school, although she notes that her “super type A personality” causes her anxiety, as she feels stress from the amount of work and her busy schedule. While she is highly conscious of her grades, she is also motivated by her college and career goals. For example, she focuses on Science courses because she would eventually like to pursue a medical career. This has led her to enroll in advanced courses like Calculus, A.P. Biology and Physiology. While she enjoys her English classes, especially writing, she prefers the freedom of writing independently than for school assignments. Erin would not enroll in an easier course if she would not be engaged; instead, she would choose a more challenging and engaging class.

Erin claims that she values both praise and critique feedback from her teachers. This balance of feedback allows her to see “the big picture”; otherwise, she finds that she will only focus on the criticism and feel as if “I’m doing everything wrong.” She is thankful that her parents are “hands-off” about her academics, trusting her to complete her work well based on her past years of success. They seem to be content “as long as you try your best and work hard,” rather than emphasizing the final grade. If they didn’t believe she was working hard, she believes they would intervene out of concern about her performance.

When asked about a previous failure, Erin immediately recalled a B+ she received on her first quiz in Geometry during her freshman year. Upon seeing her score, her immediate reaction was “the rest of the year is going to suck.” At first, she considered giving up, especially since many of her classmates responded in that way, saying “Geometry is so hard” and “We’re never going to be able to do this.” Eventually, she decided that she had to “at least try” and began dedicating extra time in the subject in order to receive an A.
It seems as though her classmates’ reactions to school work impacts Erin’s confidence quite a bit. She noted pointed to Calculus as another area of confidence, because the new material and exam seemed quite easy to her, while she overheard her classmates discussing the difficulty of the work. If the situation were reversed, it would lower her confidence and cause her to feel “not as smart.”

Although she achieves A grades in all of her course, she feels more confident and proud of the classes in which she has put in more time and work to master the material. This is a departure from the other case study participants, whose confidence often depended on the pace and ease at which they reached mastery. In addition, her confidence seems to be tied to external factors, such as positive feedback from her teachers, parents or peers. She is particularly proud of a recent test in Physics, after which the teacher offered her work as an example of excellence, reading one of her answers to the class. She also feels confident when a teacher provides positive feedback, such as writing “excellent” on her paper.

Initial Beliefs about Writing

Erin does not believe that intelligence is a fixed entity and can grow, although she suspects there might be a limit to how much one could grow or change based on genetics. She also points out that scientific research has shown that engaging and challenging your brain can help grow that intelligence. In considering her classmates, she does not believe that successful or “smart” high school students will be as successful in college, as success depends more on the work ethic of each student as they encounter a new level of challenge.

Indicators of success for Erin would be an A grade, although she no longer believes it must be 100%. She would still be disappointed with an A- and would feel as if she “could have done better.” She also views success as mastering new material and affirmations from her
teachers. In contrast, she defines failure as a B grade or lower, mistakes in her school, or a lot of feedback focused on editing her paper. Similar to success and failure, growth is indicated by a rise in grades, as well as increased confidence and acquiring new knowledge.

One of her best experiences with writing was an ongoing story she has been writing with a friend since middle school. She enjoys the freedom and lack of rules in writing fiction. Her most painful writing experiences occur in research writing, which include a lengthy list of requirements and the long process of planning and research.

Erin’s goals for writing include achieving a high grade, gaining confidence that “I’m able to write well” and is prepared for college. Additionally, she hopes to feel like she keeps growing and improving as a writer. When I asked Erin to describe her writing, she explained, “I always edit my writing because I never think it’s very good, but sometime get frustrated because I don’t always know how to make it better.”

Mr. J. describes Erin as “fantastically contradictory.” When she trusts herself and possesses confidence, then she is willing and able to “go against the grain” and take writing risks. For example, on the first prompt of the semester, Erin raised her hand and asked if she could disagree with the author. While she possesses the critical thinking skills to challenge or complicate another piece of writing, she still needs permission from her instructor to do so. When she lacks confidence, Erin seeks out individual feedback from her teacher more than any of her fellow classmates, but Mr. J. finds that their conferences focus more on calming her critical voice than addressing any significant issues in her writing. While Dweck’s research does make connections between fixed mindsets, anxiety and negative self-talk, only research on efficacy (Pajares & Johnson, 1994) addresses the role of teacher feedback and the student’s view of their writing ability.
Erin’s answers on the Writing Mindset Scale demonstrated significant growth writing mindset beliefs. She chose “Disagree” for Statement #1 (You can learn new things, but you can’t change your basic writing ability) and Statement #2 (Your writing ability is something that you can’t change very much). In addition, she selected “Strongly Disagree for Statement #3 (You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can’t do much to change it).

Student #4. Emma

Background

Emma describes her identity as a leader and an athlete. Her family resides near the school, and she is the youngest of three children. Her mother completed a bachelor’s degree in education, but now runs a home business serving the elderly. Her father, who also earned a bachelor’s degree, works as a CPA for a local business. The oldest child, Emma’s brother, graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. The second child, Emma’s sister currently studies Art and Business.

Emma’s current GPA is 3.98, ranks 17 of 96 students, and she is a member of the National Honors Society. Although Emma has not finalized her plans for after graduation, she is considering private colleges, both in and out of the state. She plans to major in Nursing and minor in Spanish.

In addition to her academic achievements, Emma is an accomplished athlete. She was awarded the Sports Leadership Award after being voted team captain for the Varsity volleyball, basketball and soccer teams, and participating in cross country. Outside of school, Emma serves on her church’s leadership team and leads Sunday School classes for 6th grade students.
Learning Profile

While Emma initially presents as a bit shy and soft-spoken, her personality emerges when she begins discussing her experiences in school. A history of high grades has given her confidence, made school enjoyable and also fuels her motivation to continue working hard. She smiles as she describes the fulfillment of receiving a good grade. Now in her Senior year, school comes pretty easy. Emma describes herself as “book smart,” and school has become a place where she doesn’t have “to think as hard” as other areas of her life. She describes her siblings as “more naturally smart,” but she earns higher grades because she works harder in school.

Throughout her school career, Emma prefers Math and Science courses, as they require more concrete thought and she is able to “see the patterns” emerging. Math is her best subject, and, when I ask why, she gives an example from her Statistics class. In the beginning of a new chapter, the teacher announced that this section was particularly difficult, but Emma understood the concepts quickly, much faster than her classmates, explaining that “it clicks faster for me.” Like Lauren, her confidence seems to emerge from the pace at which she can master the new knowledge or learning target.

Similar to the other case study students, Emma uses grades to determine her success or failure in school. However, she also values positive feedback and praise from her teachers and parents. At this point in her school career, she does not feel much pressure from her parents, as she is highly self-motivated. Emma also mentioned that her parents expect good grades at this point, but did not equate those high expectations with additional pressure. Most of Emma’s anxiety surrounding school comes from trying balance a large workload with sports and extracurricular interests. She also feels unease with speaking in public, such as class presentations.
Initial Beliefs About Writing

When considering the “smartest” students in her class, Emma believes that they will continue to be the smartest in their college course as well. However, Emma attributes their intelligence to their work ethic, explaining that “those kids are the hardest workers,” rather than their innate gifts or talents.

Interestingly, Emma’s responses on the Writing Mindset Scale include a close, mixture of growth and fixed mindset beliefs. She chose “Somewhat Agree” for Statement #1 (You can learn new things, but you can’t change your basic writing ability) and Statement #3 (You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can’t do much to change it), both of which indicate entity beliefs about writing. However, she selected “Somewhat Disagree” for Statement #2 (Your writing ability is something that you can’t change very much), which seems to contradict with her other two selections.

Emma describes herself as a “decent” and “average” writer, but also “young” and “inexperienced.” However, she feels the areas where her skills are lacking, such as grammar, are largely due to lapses in her education or training in writing. Emma perceives failure in her writing when she spends a lot of time on an essay, and, in response, she receives a low grade or many teacher comments on areas she “needs to fix.” Even when she has the option to revise the essay, she feels frustrated that the teacher didn’t recognize her hard work. Her response depends on the grade- the lower the grade, the less motivated she feels to continue putting in effort. Often, the amount of writing that needs to be “fixed” feels overwhelming.

The greatest and most important indicator of success for Emma is her grade. She views success as a good grade, nothing below an A, and maintaining a high GPA. A grade of B- or
lower would translate as failure, and she would recognize growth in her abilities if her grades continued to improve.

In elementary school, Emma recalls her most positive writing experience as when she participated in the Young Authors competition after writing the short story, *Ski-arella*. She also enjoys writing essays that allow her to revisit and reflect on interesting life experiences, such as her mission trip. Her most negative experiences include allegory assignment that required her to find 25 quotes from *The Magician’s Nephew*, and a research paper on Native Americans. Neither assignment allowed her to incorporate her own ideas; instead, she found herself bored with both of the lengthy assignments.

Throughout her education, Emma has had to work harder and needed more support from her instructors in English, writing in particular. Although English has been challenging, she has chosen to take the College English course this year because she believes it will help her be better prepared for college success. Her goals for the class were to maintain an A grade and learn ways to develop her writing flow and fluency. Near the beginning of the semester, Mr. J.’s teaching style motivates her to work hard, and she believes her writing skills are improving because she is engaged in the learning. To Emma, a good writing teacher allows students to break “writing rules” and gives clear, regular feedback to the students.

Like her classmate Lauren, Mr. J. is impressed by Emma’s creativity; yet, she still requires permission from her teacher to break the “rules of writing,” as she perceives them. Mr. J. also feels that Emma may yearn for the validation that comes with the process of memorizing and repeating, present in traditional quizzes and tests.
Conclusion

While each of the profiles can offer insight into the diverse experiences of learners, it is the trends or patterns that highlight meaningful concerns for the study of writing mindsets. Based on the initial interviews and surveys, all of the student-participants place a high value on grades, both as an indicator of success (or failure) and a determinant in gauging their ability level. These responses immediately raised questions of whether the importance of high grades will diminish the students’ willingness to take risks and value failure, essential elements in a growth writing mindset. In addition, the student answers led Mr. J. to wonder: “How can writing instructors alter the grading process to communicate a growth mindset message? Is a writing mindset pedagogy even possible within the current constraints of grading student writing? How do instructors balance the rigor of grading with rewarding risks, effort, and mistakes?”

Similar to the topic of grades, the student-participants frequently referenced pace as an indicator of their success and ability. In the beginning of the study, it was unclear which factors impacted the differences the students perceived in their abilities and confidence, since they consistently received high grades in all of their classes. Throughout the interview anecdotes, both confidence and ability seemed to correlate with the speed at which they acquired new skills or successfully finished a task, especially in relation to the speed of their peers. Often, the amount of effort was relative to their speed. In cases where they finished a task or learned a new concept quickly, they expended little effort or struggle. All of these students were not deterred by working harder or studying longer, but the slower pace of learning did seem to lower their confidence. The initial responses indicate a belief that the higher one’s ability or intelligence, the faster and easier it will be to master a task.
Finally, all of the students mentioned the importance of personal investment throughout their educational experiences. When they were allowed to make choices or became interested in a learning environment, they felt willing to expend more effort, listen to feedback, and embrace additional challenges. A key element of writing mindset pedagogy may be attention to student interest, as it increases the motivation and perseverance necessary to drive learning forward. Writing experiences that incorporate student interest and offer choice can also be an effective way to counter the allure of easy and safe grades within the mindset classroom.

The results in the following chapter will explore the ways in which Mr. J. implemented the writing mindset pedagogy in his College English classroom. Additionally, the discussion of notable themes will highlight the impact of his instructional approach on the writing attitudes, efficacy and processes of the student-participants.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT THEMES IN WRITING MINDSETS

Mindset theory offers a new lens for writing educators to examine the role of meaning systems within the writing process, and their relationship with efficacy and attitudes of student writers. This chapter outlines Mr. J.’s writing mindset pedagogical framework, and the ways in which it was implemented in the College English classroom. Furthermore, the chapter includes common key themes, which emerged from multiple individual interviews with each case study participants. These common key themes supported the increase in growth writing mindset beliefs, as shown by pre- and post-study data collected from student surveys. Since each of these themes encapsulated foundation beliefs about writing, I explain how the themes directly impacted the writing processes of the students as well. Finally, this chapter considers the impact of mindset theory on student efficacy and writing attitudes.

Mr. J.’s Interpretation of Writing Mindset Pedagogy

One of the initial questions of this study wondered how teachers would interpret and implement a writing mindset pedagogy. During the summer workshop, I worked with Mr. J. and other members of the English department to create the pedagogical aims for a writing mindset framework. We created a list of growth vs. fixed writing mindset characteristics to identify the beliefs systems held by our students. Finally, our group brainstormed a list of instructional strategies and classroom activities that would support a growth-oriented writing classroom. After reviewing our pedagogical aims, mindset characteristics and teaching practices, much of our discussion focused on the importance of grading practices and feedback, two areas we saw as essential to a Writing Mindset Pedagogy.
Once the school year began, I was interested to see how the discussions from our workshop sessions would translate into Mr. J.’s classroom instruction. Throughout the year-long course, I followed Mr. J.’s pedagogical approach through classroom observations and individual interviews. Additionally, the case study participants offered their reactions to various teaching methods used in the course. Overall, Mr. J. used his feedback as a writing mindset intervention. In order to encourage growth writing mindsets, Mr. J. provided individualized, balanced feedback that supported positive self-talk, risk-taking and appropriate reaction to failure.

*Individualized feedback* was a central component to Mr. J.’s mindset pedagogy, and essential to the students’ growth-oriented view of their own writing. After assessing the degree of mastery in each student’s draft, Mr. J. chose effective, differentiated, and responsive feedback. Through one-on-one conferences, draft comments, and clear rubrics, Mr. J. recognized each student’s strengths, while also challenging each writer to grow in specific areas. This individualized approach considers what each student needs when they walk into the classroom, and provides appropriate feedback for mastery of writing skills and a growth-focused mindset.

In addition, Mr. J. was committed to giving each student the same amount of feedback, which encouraged all students to grow as writers, regardless of the level of writing proficiency indicated in their drafts. Typically, students perceive teacher feedback as an indication of their errors; thus, they believe that “good writers” receive few teacher comments, while “bad writers” have a lot of mistakes they need to fix. Mr. J.’s approach disrupted this perception, informing students that they would all be receiving the same amount of feedback, although that feedback would be individualized based on the student’s strengths and needs. This approach encouraged the students to view feedback as a tool for growth, rather than a way to measure their ability.

In addition, Mr. J. sought out additional professional development training in his
strategies for writing feedback. His annual SMART goal aimed to make writing feedback a more valuable tool for student revision and writing achievement. Rather than giving the majority of his comments on final product, he gave feedback during the writing process. By offering feedback earlier, students were able to utilize his questions and suggestions during the revision process. The feedback became much more meaningful for students when they used the comments to implement changes and strengthen their writing, rather than just giving a cursory glance as they searched for their grade. Offering comments on an early draft also ensured that all students received adequate feedback had opportunity for growth, instead of feedback being only available for students who sought out individual help.

**Balanced feedback** was another way Mr. J. hoped to encourage growth writing mindsets. While much of growth-oriented feedback is aimed at improving students’ current skills, Mr. J. realized the importance of providing intentional balanced feedback. Students need to be challenged in order to continue growing towards their potential, but Mr. J. worried that too much constructive criticism may overwhelm or discourage the student writers. Rather than pointing out every weak, confusing, or mistaken phrase on a draft, he balanced his feedback with a mixture of praise and critique. Given the fact that a writing mindset pedagogy asks so much from the writer in terms of effort and persistence, it is essential to keep fostering student motivation and engagement through classroom activities and individual instruction.

Learning from the research of Dweck and colleagues, Mr. J. was intentional about using growth mindset praise in his feedback. As someone who is “naturally encouraging,” he had to be deliberate in praising what a student does, not who is a student is-- to focus on effort-based praise. While he previously would tell students, “You are a good writer!” his praise now communicates that he values their effort, willingness to try, risk-taking, and persistence: “I can
Encouraging positive self-talk was another way for Mr. J. to foster writing mindsets through his feedback. In A Mindset for Learning (2015), Mraz and Hertz recognize positive self-talk as a key habit of resilient students. Negative self-talk like “This looks really hard,” or “I’m not going to make it,” can become toxic to the student’s motivation, confidence and the act of writing itself. Conversely, students become more strategic and successful when engaging in positive, instructive self-talk. Mraz and Hertz believe that teachers can promote productive dialogue by helping students develop positive internal voices. Constructing these new “neural pathways” can guide student to productive and positive places, rather than hold them back.

From the beginning of the course, Mr. J. was bothered by the negative self-talk coming from the students. For example, students announced, “I cannot write thesis statements,” or “My writing is terrible.” Case study participant Erin regularly referred to her writing as “garbage” or “trash” during conferences with Mr. J. In order promote a more positive discourse, Mr. J. followed advice from Dweck’s TED Talk (2014) regarding the word “yet” in an effort to give students greater confidence and persistence. When a student complained, “I can’t come up with a conclusion,” Mr. J. rephrased the students comment: “You can’t come up with a conclusion yet.” By including “yet” at the end of the sentence, Mr. J. reminds the student that they are still in the process of learning and that they are capable of completing the task. Once student believe that they will, with effort and persistence, be successful, they are more likely to succeed. According to Sieben (2018), if teachers “encourage students to see the feedback they receive on their writing as a useful tool for success in the future and shift their self-talk accordingly, we have a
greater change of helping them to increase their writing hope levels and writing growth mindsets as well.” (Sieben, 2018, p 172).

Encouraging risk and reframing failure were two more important goals for Mr. J.’s growth-oriented feedback. Influenced by Elbow’s Writing Without Teachers (1998), Mr. J. provided time for low-stakes writing that was not graded or publicly evaluated through frequent and purposeful free-writing activities. These writing situations were critical to the students’ development as writers as they provided space for students to take risks, try new approaches or make mistakes without fear of consequences. While teachers can encourage students to care more about the learning than the grade, it is difficult for them to ignore the academic currency of grades in college admissions and scholarship awards.

As students spent time testing out their ideas, Mr. J. offered feedback by asking questions (Have you tried...? What if you...?) to coach students through their cognitive processing. In addition to encouraging risk, Mr. J.’s feedback reframed failure as an opportunity for growth. During individual conferences, he helped students brainstorm new problem-solving strategies when they became stuck, reminding them that struggle is the place where the hard work happens and often, when the deeper learning occurs. He also shared his own writing frustrations and lessons he has learned from experiencing failure. While the scope of this study did not include the teacher’s writing mindset, Mr. J. tried to promote growth mindset thinking when discussing his own writing experiences.

As Mr. J.’s feedback became more explicit in addressing risk and failure, he came to realize that “mindset theory provides a name and voice for some of my natural instincts and implicit communication.” Feeling a resistance to formulaic writing, he continues to frame his writing instruction as less of an algorithm and instead, he encourages students to view their
writing more heuristically.

From the beginning of the courses, Mr. J. recognized the importance of “practicing what he preached.” If he truly believed in the importance of a growth writing mindset, he needed to embed the values of growth into his entire pedagogical approach. This growth-oriented framework helped determine his feedback strategies, placing value on effort, positivity, and persistence for writing growth. By using instructional approaches that promoted a writing growth mindset, Mr. J. provided an intervention that shifted the students’ writing mindsets.

Changes in Writing Mindsets

In order to analyze changes in writing mindsets, I administered a survey using the Writing Mindset Scale prior to the students’ class with Mr. J. and again, after the class had been completed. My Writing Mindset Scale was adapted from Dweck’s Growth Mindset Scale (1995, 2006) and similar to the Writing Mindset Scale recently validated by Sieben. Both surveys included the same three statements:

1) You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic writing ability.

2) Your writing ability is something about you that you can't change very much.

3) You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can't do much to change it.

For each survey, students were asked to respond to each statement with a six-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (score: 1) to strongly agree (score: 6). Since each statement reflects a fixed writing mindset, the higher the total on these items, the stronger the student’s writing fixed mindset level. A score of 12-18 would indicate a fixed writing mindset, while a lower score (3-9) shows growth writing mindset beliefs. A range of 10-11 represents a mixed or undecided mindset about writing.
While all students did not demonstrate the same mindset beliefs at the end of the study, all four participants showed a shift towards stronger growth writing mindset beliefs. Prior to the study, Erin indicated the strongest growth writing mindset beliefs with a score of 5; however, at the conclusion of the study, her score decreased even further, as she now “strongly disagrees” with all three fixed writing mindset statements. Next, Austin’s survey results demonstrate his shift from mostly agreeing with fixed mindset statements in his score of 13, to mostly agreeing with growth mindset beliefs in a score of 9. Likewise, the responses from Emma initially include mostly fixed beliefs at 11, while her second survey shows a strong growth mindset of 5. This change (-6) is the greatest change within the students’ responses to the Writing Mindset Scale. Finally, Lauren maintained fixed writing mindset beliefs; yet, her scores decreased (-1) as well, indicating that the pedagogical intervention shifted her prior beliefs in the direction of a growth mindset.

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Common Themes Among Participants’ Mindset Beliefs

The guiding question for this study asked: *What is the role of writing mindsets in twelfth-grade student writers?* In order to carefully consider the relationship between mindsets and student writers, this study used the intervention of one teacher’s implementation of a writing mindset pedagogy. Data was collected from the four case study participants in the form surveys, student writing samples and extended interviews.

Austin, Emma, Erin, and Lauren’s writing mindsets were each influenced by their unique experiences with writing and education. The students’ interpretations of their experiences helped form and mold their current beliefs about the nature of writing and their own writing abilities. As the four case study participants were members of Mr. J.’s College English course, some of their perceptions and beliefs began to change in unique ways. Through the data analysis, however, it became evident that some changes in thought were common to all participants’ experiences; these are termed “common key themes” as they could be directly tied to the increases in growth mindset thinking for all four case study participants:

1. The malleability of their writing ability
2. The value of failure
3. The impact of effort

The following discussion will show that the writing mindset pedagogy impacted the students’ beliefs about their writing ability and encouraged them to use growth mindset thinking throughout the writing process.

Theme #1: The malleability of their writing ability

Beliefs about the nature of one’s own writing ability are central to the construct of writing mindsets. When students recognize the malleability of their writing ability, they are able
to identify the growth they have achieved, while also pointing to areas they would still like to
develop. In the pre-study surveys, three of the four students indicated fixed writing mindsets
through their agreement with fixed writing mindset statements. These beliefs corresponded with
their initial interview answers, in which they described the writing ability as an innate, fixed
amount. Austin explained, “I am just an average writer. I don’t feel like I get that much better as
I have gotten older. I’ve always written in the same style, the same rut.”

However, Austin’s post-survey responses show a much greater tendency for growth
mindset beliefs, and his comments during the final interview were consistent with this change in
thinking. Rather than believing that he was stuck in the same writing “rut,” he now recognizes
his potential for growth: “I am a writer who can improve and who has the ability to get better. I
could get a lot better at writing, because there’s so much I can grow in.”

When considering the gains he has made as a writer, Austin points to the importance of
the feedback he received from Mr. J.:

Mr. [J.] knew each of [the students] really well as writers, and he pushed us in different
areas. Like, he encouraged one of my friends to put more of himself in his writing, but for
me… he helped me work on clarity. There were overall themes we all learned about
writing, but individually, he motivated each of us to work on different areas. That type of
feedback helped me become clearer with my ideas and my purpose.

Similar to Austin, Emma’s surveys demonstrated a marked change in her writing
mindsets. In the first survey, she selected “somewhat agree” for two of the three fixed mindset
statements. When first asked to describe herself as a writer, she also spoke of her ability in innate
terms: “I am an average writer, never outstanding, but not bad.” In contrast, her post-study
survey results show that she now “strongly disagrees” or “disagrees” with all three fixed beliefs,
and describes her writing as malleable: “I know that I have gotten better as a writer this year, but there is a lot of room for improvement.”

In comparison to previous writing courses, Emma received more teacher critique in College English. As Emma was a student who typically earned high grades on her writing, her writing teachers rarely pointed out “mistakes” she needed to correct. Although Mr. J. has continually given her constructive criticism, Emma feels more confident as a writer after his class. She credits this confidence to the many positive comments Mr. J. included with his critique, as well the growth she is able to now see in her writing.

While the growth-oriented pedagogy alters mindset beliefs, it also offers students a balanced approach to assessing their writing skills. While Erin’s pre-survey results showed that she understood her own capability for growth, she was mostly attentive to what was lacking in her ability. Although she recognized that she could strengthen her writing skills, this understanding highlighted her current inadequacies and lowered her confidence. In describing herself as a writer, she spoke of her ability as malleable; however, she only focused on her perceived failings: “I always edit my writing because I never think it’s very good, but sometimes I get frustrated because I don’t always know how to make it better.” These interview responses were consistent with the negative self-talk Mr. J. reported hearing in their individual conferences, in which Erin refers to her writing as “garbage” or “trash.”

At the conclusion of the study, Erin still recognized room for improvement, but Mr. J.’s balanced and growth-oriented feedback has enabled her to engage in more positive self-talk and embrace her success as well:

I’ve learned to be kinder to my own writing. I’m still one of those writers who is very critical of their own writing, and I’m always reading and rereading my essays to see what
I can improve upon. I am a writer learning to see the positives in my writing and what I have done well, rather than just looking at the bad parts, and I’m more confident as a writer now as well.

Rather than her immediate reaction of “Oh, this is terrible,” she has come to recognize her strengths as well. At the conclusion of the study, Erin felt that she had developed a stronger writing voice and flow between sentences. She was also more confident when synthesizing her ideas with those in her research sources.

In addition to the focus on growth, the students demonstrated their malleable beliefs about writing by articulating their future writing goals. Rather than feeling content with their gains, all four case study participants expressed a desire to continue growing as writers. Rather than just aiming to produce error-free essays, the majority of the students identified areas in their writing process that they hope to make more efficient or effective. For example, Austin’s goal is to “continue working on my revision process. My revision work got better as time went on, but it’s still not where I want it to be. I want to be able to recognize the problems with the flow of my paper during my editing time.”

While Erin, Emma and Austin came to speak of their writing ability as a quality that could be changed and improved, Lauren continued to see writing as a natural gift. Consistent with her WMS surveys, her interview responses showed fixed mindset beliefs, that writers possess a certain amount of talent or natural gifts, and they cannot be changed: “Honestly, I don’t think I could be as good of a writer as other students, even with my max effort and resources. I think it’s more natural for some people to transition their thoughts to paper. They just have a gift.”
Although Lauren’s writing mindset beliefs may have been influenced by prior messages or feedback, her education in a private, religious school could also be an important factor. A key principle of Christian education is identifying and developing each student’s God-given gifts and talents. Students learn from the Bible that they are all born with distinct talents and gifts, setting them apart from one another. From preschool, children memorize Bible passages, such as Romans 12:6 (We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us”) and 1 Peter 4:10-11 (Each of you should use whatever gifts you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in various forms). Furthermore, this discovering one’s talents is essential for choosing vocation, or God’s unique calling to a career or pursuit. While growth mindset beliefs are not in contrast with Christian doctrine, the school’s emphasis on gifts and talents may have affected the student responses to a writing mindset pedagogy.

Theme #2: The value of failure

According to Dweck (2006), a key indicator of one’s mindset is their view of failure. For those with a fixed mindset, failure is no longer an action (I failed), but an identity (I am a failure). Because of this, they avoid all challenge and stay rooted in their comfort zone: never risking looking stupid, but continually missing out on new experiences or different results. When mistakes are made, they quickly give up or blame others, trying to avoid the shame of “being a loser.”

While failure can still be painful within the growth mindset, it no longer defines a person. Instead, students recognize that they will make mistakes and the mistakes will help them learn. As part of the learning process, mistakes become routine and expected, rather than embarrassing and uncommon. Ultimately, they recognize that failure can propel learning in a way that success

3 All verses from New International Version
never could have. This understanding of failure is especially important when considering “stereotype threat” or self-fulfilling prophecies. As I discussed in Chapter 2, research (i.e., Aronson & colleagues) suggests that mindset theory may be a way to combat negative ability stereotypes, which cause stereotyped students to adopt many fixed mindset traits, regardless of their ability beliefs.

One of the most interesting components of this study was observing the students’ discomfort with potential failure. Given that this was a college-level course, the case study participants were all high achievers and they expected above-average grades to mark their success. Prior to taking the course, all of the students believed that college writing would carry stricter writing “rules” and less flexibility. Erin worried about whether she had the expansive vocabulary she would need to sound smart enough for college writing. Instead, Mr. J.’s writing instruction encouraged them to resist formulaic structures, take writing risks, and incorporate their own voice and ideas. While at first, Mr. J.’s approach seemed freeing, the students soon became terrified by the potential for failure. Early in the study, one student’s voice lowered as she admitted to me, “I just wanted to be told what I needed to do to get an A.”

Initially, all of the students expressed reservations about taking risks and trying new approaches in their writing, especially if the changes might have a negative impact on their grades. However, as the study continued, their perception of failure changed. Consistent with growth writing mindset beliefs, they came to value mistakes as learning opportunities. As they became more comfortable with trying and failing, the students began taking risks in their writing as well.

When reflecting on the course, Erin notices that she is now “experimenting more as a writer, and not just following the strict rules I set for myself. I am exploring to find new things
that might make my writing better.” Her positive attitude to risk-taking was influenced by Mr. J.’s instructional approach: “In class, we had a lot of freedom. He wanted us to experiment and find the way that worked best for us-- not just write to fill a mold or write for a grade, or figure out what the teacher likes even if we hate it.” She appreciated how Mr. J. often offered the students a model for a new writing assignment but also said that “if we found something that worked better, to go ahead and try it out.” By providing examples and allowing room to fail, Mr. J. offered Erin a safe space to experiment in her writing. While offering models of successful writing, he did not dictate a formula; instead, he gave the students space to find the writing strategies that worked best for them.

Throughout the duration of the study, Mr. J. changed many of Emma’s beliefs on writing as well, as she learned to “go beyond my normal boundaries of writing, while adding my own opinion and perspective too.” When given this new freedom, Emma took a risk with her creative approach to a traditional essay assignment. In the midterm exam, Mr. J. asked students to respond to the class readings by questioning or “talking-back” to the experts’ advice for successful college composition. Emma chose to try a new approach by structuring her essay in the form of dialogue, mimicking the multi-voice technique she had seen in the movie Inside Out. She identifies this writing activity as taking a risk because she knew it would be different than any of her classmates’ essays. Additionally, the potential for failure was high as this assignment was a midterm grade. Although this writing felt “nerve-racking” and she was “really scared I would get a bad grade,” she also recalls it being “so enjoyable to try something I had never done before.”

As the only case-study participant to maintain a fixed writing mindset, Lauren’s responses to risk-taking and potential failure are particularly interesting, as this theme may be...
inhibiting Lauren from moving towards greater growth mindset practices. While Lauren enjoys writing and is able to incorporate her own perspective into her essays, she recognized that “I am a writer who is a rule follower.” Although Lauren’s surveys did not indicate a shift from fixed to growth mindset beliefs, her second set of responses scored lower, still showing a measurable difference throughout the semester.

Lauren’s interview responses are consistent with her survey results. Prior to the College English course, she explained her writing style as “trying to sound smart, use big words and follow the rules.” However, Mr. J. caused her to think about writing “in a new way, by encouraging me to wrestle with my topic, consider my own opinion, and add something new to the discussion.” Furthermore, he challenged her to be adventurous and gave her the freedom to branch out into new styles of writing to communicate with her audience. By the end of the course, Lauren felt her beliefs had changed somewhat, as she recognized that some risk-taking can be good. However, she still maintains her discomfort: “I don’t like to take risks in my writing, even though sometimes that is encouraged.”

Theme #3: The impact of effort

Finally, students with a growth writing mindset recognize the important role their effort played in their success or failure. While this understanding may seem simplistic at first, it runs contrary to what our students are often taught. In society, we value quick accomplishments and effortless perfection. We believe that effort is for those who don’t have the ability. A fixed mindset tells us, “If you have to work at something, you must not be good at it.” (Dweck, 2006, p 40). Students with the fixed mindset told Dweck that their main goal in school-- aside from looking smart-- was to exert as little effort as possible.
While fixed mindsets believe working hard shows weakness, growth mindsets believe it allows you to reach your potential. They understand that their abilities are constantly changing based on effort and persistence. This understanding helps to foster greater resilience in the face of setbacks or struggles. Rather than giving up, growth mindset students thrive off the challenge, often seeking out or utilizing available resources like peers, teachers or Internet aids. Throughout the learning process, they gain encouragement and a greater sense of agency from seeing how their effort and hard work can eventually pay off in a successful outcome.

As Mr. J. implemented his writing mindset pedagogy, the case study students were able to articulate the importance of their own effort. Additionally, they demonstrated growth writing mindsets by identifying struggle during the writing process and the resources that helped them overcome the challenges.

After receiving the grade on his first paper, Austin knew that College English would be more difficult than he expected. Rather than give up, however, he “knew I needed to work even harder.” By the end of the course, he could see the impact his effort played in his success: “The more work I put in, the more effort I gave, well, the more I did really well as I really got into the paper.” When Austin struggled to revise his paper, he turned to Mr. J. for feedback: “His comments and feedback helped a lot because he saw things that I didn’t. He pointed out where I could put more work into the paper. His comments on my writing were very helpful, and, after I worked more in those areas of my paper, I felt a lot better about what I had written.”

Similar to Austin, the other case study students recognized the importance of their effort. Erin explained, “The majority of my success in writing is controlled by me. I need to put a lot of work into writing, and take time to go through the whole process, both thinking and writing.” Similar to an athlete training with a coach, Erin sought out those with more experience in order
to increase her ability: “I used a lot of feedback from Mr. J. and I also used my sister for help. She has done a lot of writing in college, and she has helped me be successful.”

Both Lauren and Emma echoed the importance of effort. For Lauren, the amount of effort she put into her revision process had the greatest impact on her success. In addition, Emma felt her effort was not only connected to success, but to her confidence as well. She became more confident as a writer once she believed that “working harder could lead to doing better.” If given the necessary resources, Emma is certain that she has the potential to be as successful as her classmates: “If I put in the effort and I work hard, I can get the same grades as the best writers in my class.” In addition, Emma grew as a self-directed learner, gaining a better sense of appropriate resources when she “got stuck” while writing. When she sought out feedback from others or accessed online writing tips, the resources gave her confidence and provided direction for future efforts. These tools played an important role in her success and learning process.

Additional Research Questions

The above analysis of the three themes outlines the impact of writing mindsets on student writers. As students come to understand their writing ability through the lens of growth, they develop a willingness to accept new challenges, a healthier reaction to failure, and a greater persistence when encountering obstacles.

*Question 1. How do writing mindsets impact the writing habits and processes of twelfth-grade student writers?*

While it can be helpful for teachers to identify student mindsets and their impact on students’ beliefs about writing, it is also important to recognize the ways in which these belief systems affect the writing process. After reviewing the interview transcripts and student writing samples, the writing mindset pedagogy appears to have the most impact on two areas within the
students’ writing processes: drafting and revision.

As a result of the writing mindset pedagogy, the case study participants reported significant changes to the ways they approached writing initial drafts. During the College English course, Mr. J. encouraged the students to write “down drafts.” In the essay “Shitty First Drafts,” Anne Lamott describes this approach to the writing process:

> Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something -- anything -- down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft -- you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft -- you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy.

To create their down drafts, Mr. J.’s class wrote freely, allowing all of their uncensored thoughts to spill out onto paper. They ignored the voice of their inner-editor and kept writing regardless of spelling or grammar mistakes. They only focus on generating ideas-- no matter how silly, wrong, or disconnected those ideas came out. Rather than critiquing, the initial writing triggered a flow of creativity and created space for students to discover their thoughts.

Within a writing mindset pedagogical approach, the down draft becomes a part of the writing process where students are able to take risks, try new approaches and learn from failure. To encourage growth writing mindsets, Sieben recommends that “teachers should allow for many low-stakes writing situations during which students are given the opportunity to see the benefits of attempts that do not always meet with optimal successes initially but ultimately have long term gains in the way of writing skills mastery” (Sieben, 2018, p 50). Since a down draft is not evaluated by the teacher, students feel free to experiment without the pressure or anxiety that comes with grades.

Approaching an assignment with a down draft has changed Erin’s writing process.
significantly, increasing her motivation and reducing anxiety:

My biggest change is not needing to write the really good first draft anymore. I always tried to make my first draft perfect, but now I let myself write something that isn’t very good. I used to drag my feet at getting started, even if I was excited about the topic. I got stuck at the introduction because it wasn’t good enough. Now I have the freedom to write, because I know I can make it better. That makes me more motivated. Now, even if I don’t care about the topic or get stuck, I know how to use the down draft, which means there’s a lot less anxiety within the process too.

Emma shared similar changes, as the freedom to generate a lot of ideas gave her more confidence and helped motivate her to continue in the writing process. Additionally, the down draft provided a space to try new and unfamiliar structures, rather than just sticking to a 5 paragraph format.

As the case study participants began to believe that their writing skills could grow over time with effort, feedback, and help, they became more invested in the revision process as well. Since Mr. J.’s separated the revision sessions from editing for a polished draft, the students saw greater value in revision, and the process encouraged their growth mindset thinking. Rather than a time to “fix mistakes,” Erin now views revision as a stage where “I can continue to work towards the outcome I want.” Rather than a cursory glance at grammar, revision is now the stage when their effort has the greatest impact on their achievement. Using the feedback from others, their writing evolves from a down draft to a polished product.

All four case study participants felt that the feedback they received and emphasis on revision significantly impacted their growth and writing achievement. Erin believes that “using feedback to fix my essays helped me get a lot better.” Similarly, Austin became more confident after spending more time on revision: “My teacher and classmates saw things that I don’t see in my writing. Their comments were very helpful, and putting time into my revision made me feel a
lot better about what I had written.” Emma also felt that Mr. J.’s feedback “played a big role in my success, especially because I could work hard at revising after my conference with him.” Throughout the study, Mr. J.’s thoughtful feedback reassured students of their potential for growth and motivated them to give more attention to the revision process.

Writing mindsets provide an important foundation for a valuable writing process. If students possess fixed writing mindsets, not believing that they can grow their writing abilities, they will have little motivation to engage in the processes of drafting and revising. If they do not have the capacity to grow, why continue working after the first draft? Fixed mindset writers would merely be going through the motions to appease the teacher or earn a grade. On the other hand, a writing mindset intervention shows students the value of the process, rather than product. As students adopt growth writing mindsets, they understand drafting and revision as meaningful parts of the learning experience and necessary to growing their skills as writers.

Question 2. How do writing mindsets impact the efficacy and attitudes of twelfth-grade student writers?

Three of the case study participants-- Erin, Lauren, and Emma-- reported an increase in confidence and a more positive attitude towards writing in general at the end of the course. However, after reviewing the data collected during this study, the students’ efficacy and attitude varied during the course, as did their engagement and motivation in the various writing tasks. The variations in these four areas (efficacy, attitude, engagement, motivation) appeared to be influenced by the genre of the assignment, more than any other factor.

Throughout the individual interviews, all four of the students spoke about four different writing assignments: narrative, persuasive argument, poetry analysis and mythology reflection.
For each of the case study participants, the student’s confidence and engagement in the genre impacted his or her attitude, motivation, effort and willingness to take risks.

When Austin detailed his writing process for the poetry analysis paper, he described his struggle with motivation & investment: “I was just relieved to finish the paper, although I certainly knew it wasn’t best my work. I just felt ready to move on to next paper.” Viewing the writing assignment as “an inconvenience,” he procrastinated and had a negative attitude. He felt the assignment had little value, as he couldn’t relate to the content and he would not use the skills of poetry analysis after his College English course. According to Austin, the poetry analysis was just another “typical paper we have to write in an English class, requiring the tedious task of analyzing.”

In contrast, Austin felt quite different about writing the narrative and persuasive essays. He “loved” writing the narrative, and being able to tell his own story. For the persuasive essay, he was able to choose a scientific topic. By choosing topics that mattered to him, Austin felt personally invested in the writing assignments and saw higher value in the tasks. Additionally, his ease with the genres raised his confidence and engagement, which increased his motivation as well.

Emma also felt that her attitude and confidence depends on the genre. Although she has never really enjoyed writing, she “had a lot of fun writing the narrative” and her attitude became more positive as she gained confidence. However, she lacked confidence when writing the poetry analysis. Since she had little experience with poetry analysis, she did not feel confident in her ability to be successful. Struggling to make personal connections, she dreaded the writing, and procrastinated due to low motivation. Unlike her narrative essay, Emma did not take risks in the writing or give her full effort, because “I wasn’t into it, and I just kept putting it off.”
Since Erin had not written many analysis papers, she tried to approach the poetry assignment with an open mind. Soon, her attitude became more negative, as she “didn’t know what I was doing… I didn’t know if I was doing it correctly, so I assumed that I was not.” Similar to the other students, she commented on enjoying the narrative writing and feeling more confident: “It’s easier to write about my own experience, rather than explain what someone else meant.” In addition, she felt that she could break more “rules,” given the freedom of narrative writing, rather than the certain conventions of formal writing. With the poetry analysis, she continued with her normal writing process. Since she was already struggling with the genre, she did not take any chances, believing “even if I screw up the analysis, I won’t mess up the entire paper.”

While Lauren was not as confident with the poetry analysis as the other class writings, she did report a more positive attitude than her classmates. Because Mr. J. allowed the students to choose the poem that they would analyze, Lauren selected a poem that she could relate to her own experiences: “I have a better attitude about writing when I am able to connect with the poem. It helps me think about it more and apply it my life.” Although she still felt less motivated with the poetry analysis than the narrative essay, she did feel engaged and confident in her ability to succeed in the writing assignment.

Self-Efficacy, Attitudes, and Mindset Beliefs

The student interviews showed that effort and attitude were tied to self-efficacy and engagement with the writing activity, regardless of mindset beliefs. Students were less willing to exert effort when self-efficacy was low, even if they knew that the effort would make their paper better. They were also less willing to take risks or expend effort when they were not engaged with the assignment or had negative attitudes. The case study participants were also less willing
to take risks when their confidence was low, because the risk could jeopardize their grade even more, especially when writing within unfamiliar genres. Perhaps, the students felt as though the genre itself was the risk. This seems to be supported by Erin’s comment: “Since I had never written a poetry analysis before, I had to try something completely new to me. This challenged me because I don’t like stepping out of my comfort zone when I write.” In Chapter 6, I encourage future research to consider the possible connections between mindset beliefs and specific writing genres or skills.

While mindsets are foundational for increasing efficacy and altering attitudes towards writing, they are not the only factor to consider. The mindset beliefs must be reinforced with low-stakes writing activities, in order to scaffold the learning of new skills, and ongoing feedback, which will allow students to gain confidence in an unfamiliar writing task. Furthermore, teachers should continue to consider offering students choice and authentic writing opportunities to foster engagement and perceived value in the task. If the students are engaged and confident in the writing tasks, they will be more likely to apply growth writing mindset beliefs when encountering new challenges in unfamiliar genres.

Conclusion

The final chapter of this project will focus on the following: 1) review the findings of the case study; 2) consider the project’s implications for teachers of writing; 3) recommend potential “next steps” and extensions of this project for future research.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Study in Review

Through this study, I set out to investigate the impact of a mindset pedagogy on twelfth grade writers. My original interest in this research topic arose when I participated in a professional book study of Mindset, by Dr. Carol Dweck. Dweck’s research on mindsets, particularly in educational settings, helped me make sense of a frequent frustration in my writing classrooms. Just as many of Dweck’s subjects viewed their intelligence as static and innate, my student writers often spoke of their writing ability in fixed terms as well, in comments like “I am a terrible writer,” or “I hate writing since I am not a good writer.” This correlation prompted me to begin asking questions about the role of student mindsets in the writing process, and how mindset theory might offer a new lens for understanding effective writing instruction. After some initial research, I learned that I was not alone in considering discipline-specific implications for mindset theory, as teacher-researchers were publishing on the importance of mindsets in math, reading, computer science, second language learning, and many more. While no research had yet been conducted on mindsets and writing instruction, I began to notice questions similar to my own at professional conferences and on educational blogs. Other educators were wondering how growth mindsets could help our students become stronger and more confident writers.

In preparing for this research study, I worked collaboratively with the secondary English teachers to create a growth writing mindset pedagogical framework, which would encourage students to view their writing ability as malleable, rather than fixed. My study then followed the twelfth-grade teacher Mr. J., as he implemented that framework through his choice of instructional strategies and classroom activities for the College English course. In order to
examine the impact of the writing mindset pedagogy, I collected data from four student case study participants through multiple individual interviews, surveys, and writing samples. The data coding revealed a number of changes in the students’ beliefs about writing. However, three of these were selected as common themes (the malleability of writing ability, the value of failure, and the impact of effort) as they could be directly tied to the increases in growth mindset thinking for all four case study participants.

Although this study cannot offer generalized conclusions about writing mindsets, it does offer a writing pedagogy that communicates the importance of growth throughout the writing process. Through time, attention, and especially assessment, teachers communicate implicit messages about writing. This particular pedagogy may be a way for teachers to consider which mindset messages are present in their instructional strategies, writing activities and classroom procedures. Does the teachers’ feedback reflect the belief that all writers have potential to grow? Do the grading policies value growth? How are students supported as they take risks and learn from failure? While Mr. J.’s teaching approach doesn’t answer all of these questions, it does offer a model for considering growth mindset writing practices.

After a thorough review of the data, I concluded that the writing mindset pedagogy impacted the students’ beliefs about their writing ability and encouraged them to use growth mindset thinking throughout the writing process. The intentional shifts in Mr. J.’s feedback to the students’ writing emphasized the potential for growth, which was reflected in the ways the students spoke about their own abilities. Furthermore, the students became more invested in the writing process, as they came to see drafting and revision as opportunities to grow as writers.

While my research offers new understandings about writing mindsets, this study does not support all of Dweck’s claims about the benefits of mindsets. First, this study did not consider
the relationship between writing mindsets and writing achievement. While Dweck claims that growth mindsets are necessary for success, this study shows that the same is not true for writing mindsets. All four of the students continue to be successful writers, although they indicate a variety of writing mindset beliefs. Furthermore, gains in growth mindset thinking did not always benefit the students, as I will discuss my findings concerning Austin later in this chapter. While the research on mindset theory is robust, this study should only be viewed as an exploratory inquiry into the new construct of writing mindsets.

Implications for Teachers of Writing

Because of the limited size and location of data collection, no generalizations about writing teachers or writing education can be made from this case study. The size is one limitation of this study, and hopefully, this gap will prompt additional studies with diverse groups of teachers, students, and research sites.

However, this study does offer a particular pedagogy to help teachers disrupt the writing mindset mantras in which students say, “I am just not a good writer,” “I’m bad at writing,” or “I am a naturally gifted writer.” Furthermore, the study’s findings can both initiate and further discussion about writing mindsets, their role in the writing process, and how writing teachers can harness the power of mindsets to encourage student success.

Using a growth mindset lens, teachers can reevaluate and revise their teaching practices and feedback language to intentionally promote effort and growth, rather than reinforce fixed beliefs about writing. Furthermore, writing teachers can utilize a mindset intervention to provide students with a strategic way of thinking and overcoming the obstacles in their writing process. Fixed mindset beliefs cause limitations for students who feel that there is a cap to their writing ability. For the moment they encounter struggle signals that they have reached their potential and
they should give up. In writing situations when the task is difficult and high levels of effort and practice are required to succeed, growth mindset thinking can be especially important. In these circumstances, teachers trained in a writing mindset pedagogy can nurture the inner monologues of students to respond differently to challenges, and open struggling writers to possibilities they previously felt were out of reach.

In addition, I am hopeful that future research into writing mindsets will help inform the field of writing teacher education, by offering ways to train future English teachers (1) to create a classroom culture of growth, (2) to identify students who possess fixed mindsets about their writing abilities, and (3) to respond with mindset interventions that reframe the role of effort and failure. It is also notable that many aspects of a growth writing mindset pedagogy overlap with “best practices” in the teaching of writing (i.e., recursive and process-oriented, values revision, feedback, metacognition). In future research, it may be helpful to identify iterations of growth mindset already embedded in the current pedagogies of English Education.

Directions for Future Research

Ultimately, this study illuminated the impact of a writing mindset pedagogy on four twelfth grade student writers. Future studies in writing mindsets should continue to solicit the voices of students and teachers of writing. However, given this study’s limitations from sample size and research site, the “next steps” in mindset research should be to gather a more diverse understanding of writing mindsets from studies that vary in the age, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, and school environment of the student participants. In addition, another extension for this study might be to reconsider the ways I have chosen to code the data. For this dissertation, I selected three themes that emerged from the case study interviews, surveys, and writing samples; however, given the plethora of data I have gathered, I am considering other
ways I could code the data for a future publication. Finally, throughout my background readings, data collection, and conversations with colleagues, four significant questions about writing mindsets have repeatedly been raised. Research into each of these strands would expand our understanding of mindsets and their benefits in the writing classroom.

*What is the Role of the Teacher’s Writing Mindset?*

While this study focuses on student mindsets, Dweck and colleagues have spent considerable time on the mindsets of teachers as well. As we continue learning about writing mindsets, it is important to recognize that a growth mindset classroom culture requires a team effort. While the student must believe in their own ability to grow and be willing to reevaluate their own behaviors, the teacher must also embrace a growth-oriented approach to assessment, feedback, and instruction.

According to Brock and Hudley (2016), teachers who strive to develop a growth mindset look much different than teachers who operate under a fixed mindset. When classroom teachers publicly rank, label, or track their students’ current ability, they increase student anxiety about making mistakes and looking stupid, which only reinforces fixed mindset thinking. When teacher comments focus on limits and ceilings, informing a parent that the AP class is above their child’s potential, or telling a student that they are obviously “just not a math or science person,” communicates that abilities are fixed and innate.

In contrast, the growth-mindset teacher has the ability to positively influence student performance. Growth mindset teachers push and challenge, reframe setbacks as opportunities for growth instead of failure, while valuing the process of learning. Yet, in order to foster a growth-oriented environment and convince students to change their beliefs, the teacher must believe that students have the ability to grow their abilities.
Further research into writing mindsets should evaluate the teacher’s mindset about writing, and the impact of these beliefs on the student mindsets. Additionally, it would be helpful to consider which of our instructional practices for teaching writing are conducive for developing a growth writing mindset, and which strategies reinforce fixed mindset thinking. While this study focused mostly on teacher feedback, other studies might consider using goal setting, metacognitive writing, or assessment changes impact the students’ writing mindsets.

*Can Writing Mindsets Change with Genre?*

Given the fact that mindset beliefs can be domain-specific, researchers should also consider to what extent writing mindset beliefs can be genre-specific as well. The interview responses from the case study participants clearly highlight the importance of genre when examining writing motivation, efficacy, and engagement. Considering the influence of genre on many affective factors, it would be valuable to better understand the relationship between genre and mindsets within the writing process. The goal of mindset interventions is to increase student effort and persistence when facing writing challenges. However, when the case study students encountered unfamiliar genres, they gave up quickly, *even though* most of them claim growth-oriented beliefs about writing. While we currently understand mindset beliefs to be domain-specific, could they be genre-specific as well? Might some students believe in their ability to grow as narrative writers, but not to analyze poetry? Could a student believe that they can improve their creative writing abilities, but not their skills in academic writing? Perhaps, mindsets could even vary with writing tasks, such as the student who claims, “I can’t write thesis sentences,” but recognizes their growing ability to structure their essay.
Is There A Time and Place for Growth Writing Mindsets?

Rather than just making blanket assumptions about the benefits of growth mindset thinking, additional research should be gathered to demonstrate which situations or what types of students benefit most from writing mindset interventions. When is it appropriate to encourage students to take writing risks and try new approaches? How can students know when more effort will be effective and when they should abandon their approach and try a new strategy?

For example, Austin responded that both his confidence and attitude were lower overall after completing the College English course, although his survey and interview responses indicate his growth writing mindset beliefs. Austin explained his feelings by saying, “I am less confident, because now I know that the standard is so high. I know I have improved, but I also know that there is a lot more for me to improve. My attitude is also worse. It’s just overwhelming to think about the amount of work that you have to keep putting in.”

Austin’s comments raise questions about using a writing mindset pedagogy with students who are perfectionists or over-achievers. From the mindset interventions, they learn that their writing ability can continue to improve with their effort. Rather than hearing that message as reassuring, these students may feel overwhelmed by the notion that they can always do better by giving more effort. In his final interview, Mr. J. voiced his own questions: “Can mindset pedagogy be damaging for perfectionists?” and “How do we help them to know when to accept a ‘good enough’?”

Following personal conversations with Dweck, John Hattie (2017) points out that there are many situations when growth mindset thinking is unnecessary, not efficient, and can get in the way of effective living. When working with students, a key question might be: "When is the appropriate situation for thinking in a growth manner over a fixed manner?"
How Does Assessment Impact Writing Mindsets?

Traditionally, the assessment of student writing occurs at the end of the unit, after the learning has occurred, with no chance of revision. Given that teachers need time to grade the papers, the teacher’s feedback for the learner is delayed and is seldom used for revision of the piece. Finally, the summative assessment scores only provide a snapshot of each learner at that moment in time, rather than a full look at their writing process.

Clearly, the values communicated through this type of assessment are not aligned with writing mindset pedagogy. While I recognize the importance of assessing student learning, traditional assessment practices can be problematic for a growth mindset classroom. Rather than sabotaging the system by downplaying “assessments,” we should work towards a better understanding of how assessment impacts student mindsets. How can writing assessment emphasize the values of growth, risk and effort? Is it possible to maintain rigor while allowing for mistakes? How do we reframe failure for our students while still assigning low scores to their work?
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APPENDICES

A. Teacher Information Letter

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve
Title of Study: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Using Growth Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Motivation and Self-Efficacy in Student Writers.” This project will serve as Sara Hoeve’s dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in English Education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
This overarching aim of this research project is to examine how a mindset pedagogy impacts the writing processes of secondary students, addressing the question: “How does a writing mindset pedagogy impact the self-beliefs of student writers?” A writing mindset pedagogy is defined as an instructional paradigm that directs each student to believe in their own ability to grow as a writer.

Who can participate in this study?
In order to be a part of this study, teacher-participants must be Grandville Calvin Christian ELA teachers in a secondary classroom during the 2017-18 school year. The student-participants must be enrolled as secondary students during the 2017-18 school year, and a member of one teacher-participant’s first semester ELA class.

Where will this study take place?
The data collection will occur at Grandville Calvin Christian Schools at 3750 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to participate in a 2-day workshop during July of 2017. Each workshop will run from 9am-3pm, with a 30-minute break for lunch. The researchers will contact teacher-participants by June 1 to select July dates that are compatible with summer schedules. During first semester of the 2017-18 school year (August-December 2017), the researchers will observe your ELA class period, and conduct a follow up interview. During the 18 weeks of first semester, the study will require 30-90 minutes per week beyond your regular instructional time.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

- **June:** Following your consent, the researchers will provide you with one educational text, which must be completed prior to the July workshop.

- **July Workshop:** If you participate in this study, you will be asked to attend a 2-day workshop during July of 2017. The workshop will run from 9am-3pm, with a 30-minute break for lunch.

  - The workshop time will have three aims:
    - All researchers and participants will discuss the educational text, and its implication for writing education ELA teachers, and ELA students will benefit if this research demonstrates ways to enhance the quality of secondary writing instruction.
    - Next, participants will join researchers in creating an instructional framework for a writing mindset pedagogy, based on mindset theory and research-based practices in writing instruction.
    - After the framework has been established, researchers will introduce the central task for teacher-participants: to develop writing mindset communities in their ELA classes during 1st semester of the 2017-18 school year (August-December 2017). The remaining workshop time will be dedicated to collaborative planning and design of writing activities, classroom materials and teaching strategies that intentionally promote a growth writing mindset.

- **The first week of the semester,** you will administer writing mindset surveys to students in one ELA class. Once the surveys are reviewed, the researchers will ask you to recommend individual students for case study participation.

- **During first semester of the 2017-18 school year (August-December 2017),** the researchers will observe your ELA class period, and conduct a debriefing interview. During the 18 weeks of first semester, the study will require 30-90 minutes per week beyond your regular instructional time.

**What information is being measured during this study?**
Data will be collected from observation notes (from the July workshop and the class observations) and interview transcripts to understand the ways in which teacher interpret and implement a writing mindset pedagogy. Additionally, data will be collected from student surveys, writing samples and interview transcripts to understand the impact of a writing mindset pedagogy on student self-beliefs and disposition.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
The only risks anticipated are minor discomforts experienced by educators when they alter their lesson plans or instructional strategies (e.g. loss of time, slight anxiety, embarrassment or frustration from poor student reaction).

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
This project could contribute to our understanding of how teachers can positively influence student mindsets about writing. Throughout the study, participants may gain clarity and insight into writing mindsets, as well as acquire new instructional methods from the collaborative workshop. This new knowledge could impact instruction, increase their student engagement and achievement. Additionally, other ELA teachers, and ELA students will benefit if this research demonstrates ways to enhance the quality of secondary writing instruction.

What will be the compensation for participating in this study?
Per agreement with Mrs. Thelma Ensink, you will be awarded 10 District Provided Professional Development hours (DPPD), which can be used towards your professional certificate renewal. Additionally, you will receive research materials at no additional cost.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no monetary costs for participants.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
The data from interviews and observations will remain confidential. After the data are collected and analyzed, the data will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office. Transcripts, digital observation notes and writing samples will be stored on a flash drive, also kept by PI and stored in the locked office cabinet. Recordings will be deleted after transcription is complete. Pseudonyms will be used if the results are published or reported at a professional meeting.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Jonathan Bush at (6269) 387-2607 or jonathan.bush@wmich.edu. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the vice president for research (269) 387-9298 with any concerns that you have.
B. Teacher Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve
Title of Study: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

---------------------------------------------
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

______________________________________________
Please Print Your Name

______________________________________________  ___________________________
Participant’s Signature                            Date
C. Parent Information Letter- General

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve

Dear parent or legal guardian,

Your child has been invited to be a participant in a research project entitled “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers.” The purpose of the research study is to examine how a mindset pedagogy impacts the writing processes of secondary students. A “writing mindset pedagogy” means a teaching approach that encourages each student to believe in their own ability to grow as a writer. This project is being conducted to fulfill Sara Hoeve’s dissertation requirement.

Your permission for your child to participate in this project means that your child will be invited to complete a Writing Mindset Survey, which includes five questions about the student’s beliefs about their writing ability. The surveys will be administered in September and again in November of 2017 by your child’s ELA teacher. Additionally, Sara Hoeve will observe your child’s ELA class period two to three times per month. The researcher’s observation notes will only record the teaching strategies used by the classroom teacher, not your child’s behavior or comments. Although there may be no immediate benefits to your child for participating, there may eventually be benefits to the school district, and subsequently to students in ELA classrooms.

Your child’s teacher will provide the researchers with the completed surveys, and the data will remain confidential. After the data are collected and analyzed, the surveys and observation notes will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office. Pseudonyms will be used if the results are published or reported at a professional meeting.

The only risks anticipated are minor discomforts experienced by children when they complete a survey and observation (e.g. boredom, slight anxiety from observer).

You may withdraw your child from this study at any time without any negative effect on his/her school programming. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Sara Hoeve at (616) 706-2196 or Dr. Jonathan Bush at (269) 501-1680. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the vice president for research (269) 387-9298 with any concerns that you have.

Sincerely,
Sara Hoeve
D. Writing Mindset Scale

**Student Survey**

Read each sentence below and mark the choice that shows how much you agree with it. There are no right or wrong answers.

You can learn new things, but you can’t change your basic writing ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your writing ability is something that you can’t change very much.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have a certain level of writing ability and you really can’t do much to change it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please describe yourself as a writer.
### E. Writing Attitudes Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Cartoon Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How would you feel if you wrote about something you have heard or seen?</td>
<td>![Thumbs Up] ![Thumbs Down] ![Neutral] ![Disappointed] ![Angry]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How would you feel writing a letter to a store asking about something you might buy there?</td>
<td>![Thumbs Up] ![Thumbs Down] ![Neutral] ![Disappointed] ![Angry]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How would you feel telling in writing why something happened?</td>
<td>![Thumbs Up] ![Thumbs Down] ![Neutral] ![Disappointed] ![Angry]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. How would you feel writing to someone to change their opinion?

6. How would you feel keeping a diary?

7. How would you feel writing poetry for fun?

8. How would you feel writing a letter stating your opinion about a topic?

9. How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?
10. How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?

11. How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?

12. How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?

13. How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?

14. How would you feel writing about something you did in science?
15. How would you feel writing about something you did in social studies?

16. How would you feel if you could write more in school?

17. How would you feel about writing down the important things your teacher says about a new topic?

18. How would you feel writing a long story or report at school?

19. How would you feel writing answers to questions in science or social studies?
20. How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?

21. How would you feel if your classmates talked to you about making your writing better?

22. How would you feel writing an advertisement for something people can buy?

23. How would you feel keeping a journal for class?

24. How would you feel writing about things that have happened in your life?
25. How would you feel writing about something from another person's point of view?

26. How would you feel about checking your writing to make sure the words you have written are spelled correctly?

27. How would you feel if your classmates read something you wrote?

28. How would you feel if you didn’t write as much in school?
F. Parent Consent Form - General

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve
Title of Study: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

This permission document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not permit your child to participate if the stamped date is more than one year old.

Your signature below indicates that you, as parent or guardian, can and do give your permission for

________________________________________________________________________________________

Child’s name

• to be given the Writing Mindset Student Survey
• for these surveys to be released to the researchers
• for the researchers to observe an ELA class period in which your child is present

________________________________________________________________________________________

Signature of parent or guardian                  Date

Consent obtained by: ___________________________ __________________________

Initials of researcher                              Date
G. Student Information Letter - General

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve

Project Title: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

We are doing a research study. A research study is a special way to find out about something. We want to find out how people’s beliefs about their own writing impact how they write. In order to find that out, we will be asking for your opinions about writing, and some new activities your teacher will use in class.

You can be in this study if you want to. If you want to be in this study, you will be asked to take a Writing Mindset Survey, which includes five questions about your opinions. Your teacher will give this survey in September and again in November of 2017. Additionally, Sara Hoeve will observe your class period two to three times per month.

We want to tell you about some things that might happen to you if you are in this study. You could feel some small discomforts when you complete the survey or during the observations. For example, you may feel bored or a little nervous when we are observing your class.

If you decide to be in this study, some good things might happen to you. You could learn more about writing, and become more confident. However, we don’t know for sure that those things will happen. We might also find out things that will help other children someday.

When we are done with the study, we will write a report about what we found out. We will not use your name anywhere in the report.

You don’t have to be in this study. You can say “no” and nothing bad will happen. If you say “yes” now, but you want to stop later, that’s okay too. No one will be mad at you, or punish you if you want to stop. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Sara Hoeve at (616) 706-2196 or Dr. Jonathan Bush at (269) 501-1680. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the vice president for research (269) 387-9298 with any concerns that you have.

Sincerely,
Sara Hoeve
H. Student Assent Form- General

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve
Title of Study: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

This permission document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate if the stamped date is more than one year old.

If you want to be in this study, please sign your name

I, ____________________________, want to be in this research study.

Write your name here

______________________________________________
Investigator Signature

____________________
Date
I. Parent Information Letter- Case Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve

Dear parent or legal guardian,

Your child has been invited to be a case study participant in a research project entitled “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers.” This project was outlined in a previous letter, to which you provided consent for your child to be present during classroom observations and complete two brief surveys. To review, the purpose of the research study is to examine how a mindset pedagogy impacts the writing processes of secondary students. A “writing mindset pedagogy” means a teaching approach that encourages each student to believe in their own ability to grow as a writer. This project is being conducted to fulfill Sara Hoeve’s dissertation requirement.

Your permission for your child to be a case study participant in this project means that your child will be sharing their writing and reflecting on their writing process in an interview setting. The interview will be conducted by Sara Hoeve and last no more than 20 minutes. Two to four total interviews will be administered, from September through November 2017. Additionally, the classroom teacher will provide the researchers with writing samples from your child student 1-3 times per month, from September through November 2017. Although there may be no immediate benefits to your child for participating, there may eventually be benefits to the school district, and subsequently to students in ELA classrooms.

The data from interviews and student writing will remain confidential. After the data is collected and analyzed, the data will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office. Transcripts, observation notes and digital writing samples will be stored on a flash drive, also kept by PI and stored in the locked office cabinet. Recordings will be deleted after transcription is complete. Pseudonyms will be used if the results are published or reported at a professional meeting.

The only risks anticipated are minor discomforts experienced by children when they participate in an interview or observation (e.g. boredom, slight anxiety from the experience).

You may withdraw your child from this study at any time without any negative effect on his/her school programming. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Sara Hoeve at (616) 706-2196 or Dr. Jonathan Bush at (269) 501-1680. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the vice president for research (269) 387-9298 with any concerns that you have.

Sincerely,

Sara Hoeve
J. Parent Consent Form- Case Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve
Title of Study: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

This permission document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not permit your child to participate if the stamped date is more than one year old.

Your signature below indicates that you, as parent or guardian, can and do give your permission for

______________________________________________
Child’s name

• to be interviewed by the researchers
• for writing samples to be released to the researchers

______________________________________________
Signature of parent or guardian  Date

Consent obtained by: __________________________

Initials of researcher  Date
K. Student Information Letter & Assent Form - Case Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Bush
Student Investigator: Mrs. Sara Hoeve

Project Title: “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers”

You are invited to be a case study participant in a study, which was explained in a previous letter. You agreed to be a part of the study by completing two surveys and allowing us to observe your class.

Now, you can be a case study participant if you want to. If you want to be a case study participant, we will ask you some interview questions, separate from your class. We will do 2-4 interviews and they will not last longer than 20 minutes. Additionally, your teacher will let us see some of the work you have handed in during 1st semester.

We want to tell you about some things that might happen to you if you are in this case study. You could feel some small discomforts during the interviews or when we read your writing. For example, you may feel bored or a little nervous.

If you decide to be in this study, some good things might happen to you. You could learn more about writing, and become more confident. However, we don’t know for sure that those things will happen. We might also find out things that will help other children someday.

When we are done with the study, we will write a report about what we found out. We will not use your name anywhere in the report.

You don’t have to be in this study. You can say “no” and nothing bad will happen. If you say “yes” now, but you want to stop later, that’s okay too. No One will be mad at you, or punish you if you want to stop. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Sara Hoeve at (616) 706-2196 or Dr. Jonathan Bush at (269) 501-1680. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the vice president for research (269) 387-9298 with any concerns that you have.

Sincerely,
Sara Hoeve
L. Site Approval

Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board
Kalamazoo, MI

I formally authorize Mrs. Sara Hoeve, doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University at Grandville Calvin Christian Middle & High School for her study, “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers.” This project will serve as Sara Hoeve’s dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in English Education.

Ms. Hoeve may come to our school building beginning on July 1, 2017 and conduct research during working hours until her project end date of July 1, 2018. She will collect surveys, observation, and interviews with students and teachers who agree to be part of the study. Ms. Hoeve will contact employees to recruit them via email.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Signed,

______________________________________________  __________________
Thelma Ensink                                      Date
Principal, Grandville Calvin Christian Schools
M. HSIRB Approval

Date: June 1, 2017

To: Jonathan Bush, Principal Investigator  
   Sara Hoeve, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 17-05-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Using Mindset Pedagogy to Promote Growth and Increase Efficacy in Student Writers” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 31, 2018