

The Impact of a Year-Long Professional Development on Teacher Self-Efficacy in Personal Writing and the Teaching of Writing

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Writing and the teaching of writing are not easy tasks. Although most Americans believe that there is a greater need than ever before to effectively use writing as a communication mode (Brandt, 2009; Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014; Elola & Oskoz, 2017), many students do not receive the necessary instruction, and therefore lack the writing skills needed for either college or career. High-stakes testing may hinder the implementation of writing to learn as many teachers feel they need to prepare students for standardized tests instead of engaging them in writing processes. The pressure placed on teachers to increase test scores by covering prescribed curricula leaves little time for promoting student creativity in writing or teaching with flexibility and innovation (Hoban, 2002; Meier, 2005). Many teachers also believe they lack the ability to focus on writing instruction (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Teachers may lose their existing self-efficacy perception when there is pressure to raise student achievement scores and focus on instruction designed to help students do well on tests (Berkley, 2006; Haskins, 2017).

The teacher's role in writing instruction is essential and should include direct instruction, modeling, and time for active writing practice across content areas (Graham et al., 2013). Quality instruction and sustained practice are especially crucial in elementary grades, where students are just beginning to experiment with writing (Newell, 2006). Teacher modeling at the elementary school level is essential to the development of skills and ensuring that students are proficient writers in later years (Graham et al., 2013). In order to provide effective instruction and modeling that leads to best practice in learning to write, however, teachers need to first develop their own self-efficacy, the self-perception of competence and confidence in their own writing as well as their ability to teach writing (Wood & Liebermann, 2000; Haskins, 2017; Whitacre, 2019). This study attempts to address this gap by investigating the impact of a year-long professional development (PD) initiative on elementary school teachers' sense of self-efficacy in their personal writing and writing instruction.

Literature Review

A self-perception of competence is important for teachers to possess as it influences their actions and performance in the classroom. According to Bandura (1993), self-efficacy, the belief in one's abilities, to accomplish desired teaching objectives in this case, powerfully affects people's behavior, motivation, and, ultimately, their success. It influences teachers' cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. Teachers' confidence level in their teaching skills, knowledge, strategies, and even personality traits will affect their instruction, and in turn, influence student writing and learning (Haskins, 2017). It can also serve as an indicator of how well a teacher will execute courses of action required to deal with different classroom situations (Bandura, 1982).

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Extant research has demonstrated that self-efficacy is an important perception, and is related to many meaningful educational outcomes such as teachers' persistence, enthusiasm, commitment, teaching strategies, and instructional behavior; all of which may lead to increased student motivation and achievement in various subjects (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Several studies reported that building self-efficacy has a positive impact on writing confidence and writing development regardless of the writer's age (Bruning & Kauffman, 2015, 2016; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Pajares & Valiante, 2006). They found that most writers, young and old, struggle with writing tasks and that their challenges are as much related to affective factors such as writing confidence as to their cognitive and linguistic abilities.

Research also suggested that teachers' self-efficacy for writing instruction is critical as it can influence the writing performance of their students (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Fink, 2001; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000; Mohar, Singh, Kepol, Ahmad, & Moneyam, 2017). Studies in all classrooms, from kindergarten to grade 12, have shown that teachers' positive beliefs about writing and their own ability to write, can impact classroom writing instruction and student writing development (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006; Haskins, 2017). Thus, it is crucial for teachers to participate in PD opportunities that help them gain self-efficacy and competence in effective teaching methods. Quality writing instruction is highly related to student learning concepts across the curriculum, and success in writing is a major predictor of student learning achievement (Haskins, 2017). Effective teachers motivate student writing interest and engage students in writing lessons and practice in all content areas. Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) indicated that adequately trained teachers provided students with significantly more writing opportunities than less competent or non-trained teachers. It is, therefore, necessary for all teachers to be competent in integrating writing into their instruction.

Long-term PD has been reported to have an imperative value and impact that broadly help teachers develop self-efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; DeSantis, 2013). Locke, Whitehead, and Dix (2013) found significant positive changes in teachers' self-efficacy as writers and teachers of writing after participating in a two-year PD program. Studies conducted in other content areas other than writing also suggested the pivotal role of long-term PD that exerted a lasting impact on teacher self-efficacy (Blocher et al., 2011; Deal et al., 2010; Kallery, 2017; Lumpe et al., 2012). With the essential role that writing plays in students' overall academic success (Teuscher, Kulinna, & Crooker, 2016), it is crucial to examine means to support teachers' writing and teaching of writing that are sustainable (Cheung, 2013). Supporting teachers' writing and teaching of writing sustainably, however, cannot be achieved in a short PD program as this type of PD is generally inadequate to influence teachers' attitudes and practices (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Dismuke, 2015). Specifically, it is imperative to explore further why and how teachers utilize similar sources of information in different pedagogical strategies as their identity as a writer and teacher of writing evolves over time (Locke et al., 2013), which may take a long-term exploration (Teng, 2016). Teacher PD, following the National Writing Project (NWP) longitudinal model, can have a positive effect on teachers' perception of themselves as writers and teachers of writing, as well as on their confidence in writing instruction, concomitant with changes in their instructional practices, attitude, and writing achievement of their students (Iyengar & Hood, 2016; Pritchard, 1987; Pritchard & Marshall, 1994).

Methods

Purpose of the Study

Responding to the call to examine the effect of a long-term PD program (Dismuke, 2015; Locke et al., 2013), this study investigates whether a year-long PD focusing on writing instruction influences teachers working at a high-need primary school in developing self-efficacy with respect to themselves as writers and writing instructors. Specifically, this study explores the aspects of writing and instructional strategies the teachers believe have affected them in gaining self-efficacy. This study explored the following three research questions:

- (1) To what extent did self-efficacy in personal writing change as a result of the PD?
- (2) To what extent did self-efficacy in the teaching of writing change as a result of the PD?
- (3) In what ways did the PD affect the teachers' self-efficacy in the personal writing and teaching of writing?

Participants

Twenty-one elementary teachers at a metropolitan, high-need elementary school in Eastern Virginia participated in the year-long professional development program. The sample size settled at 19 after two teachers were unable to complete the full year of the PD. Among those 19 participants, 14 held a master's degree (73.68%), four a bachelor's degree (21.05%), and one a graduate certificate (5.26%). Eighteen (94.74%) participants noted reading as one of their teaching subject areas, and one (5.26%) physical education. Seventeen (89.47%) were general teachers at grade levels ranging from kindergarten to grade 6, one (5.26%) a reading specialist, and another (5.26%) a special education teacher. Years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 29 with a mean of 15.71, median of 16.00, and standard deviation of 8.56.

Research Context

The elementary school had a student body of 773, and an instructional faculty of 27 classroom teachers, three special education teachers, two arts related teachers, and one physical education teacher. Approximately 70% of students received free or reduced lunch. The student body consisted of 77% African American, 20% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The majority of students in this district were not meeting the state Standards of Learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2022) in the United States. The majority of students were not meeting the state Standards of Learning (SOL) in the United States.

This year-long PD included a total of ten workshops that lasted 35 hours. The PD was provided by a local site of the National Writing Project (See <http://www.nwp.org>), which has a national reputation for providing essential professional development opportunities to support teacher planning, organizing, and delivering effective writing instruction across the United States. As one of the nearly 200 local sites across the United States affiliated with the National Writing Project, the local Tidewater Writing Project (TWP) site is located at a large public university where the researchers of this paper were affiliated with. The TWP site has been in existence since early in the NWP's history in the 1990s and has provided PD opportunities for more than four decades to teachers in our area. As a part of the NWP network, our site followed the tenets of the NWP during planning and implementing this PD program. The nature of the TWP's PD program is collaborative and inquiry-based, so it is understandable that it is a lengthier process when compared to many other PD workshops. Prior to the start of this year-long PD, participants completed a need-survey and listed

several topics that they were interested in learning more about. To thoroughly address all areas of interest, our site's PD program used a co-construction approach in which both participants and TWP teacher consultants share and build best teaching ideas, model lessons, and theories that have worked for their own students. We directed and expected the participants to read and reflect on reliable research focusing on best writing instruction, allocate time for open discussion and community building activities, view a guest speaker's lesson presentation, as well as design and present a demonstration lesson to the other attendees who would then reflect on both content and delivery skills and provide peer critical feedback. The PD was customized to a) meet the specific needs of the participating high-need school, b) provide needed writing instruction including using informal writing to communicate, and c) teach writing to retell, writing processes, writing descriptively in content areas, grammar, punctuation, mechanics during editing, writing to think about content, persuasive writing, and digital writing apps.

Each PD session consisted of a) the review of a research article with an interactive roundtable discussion, b) a teacher consultant's demonstration of the writing instruction topic and a follow-up whole-group discussion about its classroom implementation, c) a video presentation and debriefing of a volunteer teacher implementing a lesson from the previous meeting, d) a solicitation of one or two new volunteer teacher(s) to practice and video record their implementation of the current learned lesson, e) a reflective quick exit writing, and f) an explanation of upcoming assignments. Throughout the year-long PD, a group of teacher consultants (TCs) of the writing project site who were local classroom teachers, provided participants on-going support to promote their self-efficacy as writers.

Instrumentation

The two constructs, teachers' self-efficacy of writing and self-efficacy of writing instruction were measured using a 5-point Likert scale survey modified from Locke et al. (2013), who also crafted their surveys to examine teacher self-efficacy in a writing PD context. We altered items in the original survey in a way that they became all declarative sentences rather than questions. For example, we changed "Overall, how confident are you as a writer of poetry?" to "Overall, I am confident as a writer of poetry." The items can be found in Table 1 and 2. The reliability coefficient was non-existent in Locke et al. (2013). Self-efficacy of writing survey contained 14 survey items, while Self-efficacy of writing instruction contained eight survey items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated in this present study is as follows: (a) self-efficacy of writing (items 1 - 14) pre-test is .972 and post-test is .952; (b) self-efficacy of writing instruction (items 15 - 22) pre-test is .957 and post-test is .952.

Participants were also asked ten open-ended questions adapted from the Locke et al. (2013) which addressed: (a) self-confidence in personal writing and in writing instruction before and after participating in the project; (b) discoveries about writing and writing types that you are more competent in; (c) some things you are doing differently when you teach writing; and (d) any sense of the PD having an impact on your students learning and motivation.

Data Collection and Analysis

We distributed the teacher self-efficacy survey twice, once before and once after the implementation of the PD program. The qualitative data were gathered from multiple sources to promote the triangulation of data methods (Hays & Singh, 2012), such as through observation of writing lessons, video recordings of participant comments during workshops, open-ended survey questions, as well as semi-structured interviews. For writing lesson observation, volunteers were solicited to take the learned methods back to their classroom and try them out. The teachers' video-recorded their lessons

and shared the recording at the following month's PD session. All participants, together with the TCS, viewed the videoed lessons, and an open format discussion took place about the strengths and weaknesses of the lessons.

Upon completion of the year-long PD, all participants responded to open-ended survey questions. Eight participants participated in an in-person oral interview. The verbiage used by the researchers remained consistent in each interview in hopes of gaining an in-depth look into the true perspectives. Responses were typewritten and verified by another researcher who participated in the PD to ensure they matched the interview forms and notes. Additionally, we conducted member-checks on these interview responses by asking the participants to confirm the typewritten transcript, which promoted the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hays & Singh, 2012). The interviews allowed the researchers to gain a greater understanding of the teachers' self-efficacy. All survey instruments and interview questions can be found in the supplemental materials of this study.

Research question one and two were answered by quantitative data analysis. A repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the change in self-efficacy from the pre-test to the post-test. Research question three was answered by qualitative data obtained from observations, open-ended survey questions, and interviews providing an in-depth description of the development of teacher efficacy (Locke et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Qualitative data were coded using an open-coding approach in which authors identified such themes based on the frequency of responses. A review of the qualitative data consisted of organization, detailed search for patterns, simplified categorization, and synthesis of data to develop themes through the exploration of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). After organizing the raw data by data type, time period for observation notes, open-ended surveys, and interviews, we used an open-coding approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to analyze the data and identify initial codes. We identified codes through group discussion and organized the related codes into categories. We then extracted significant statements that participants emphasized frequently. When we found disagreement or disparity in statements, we engaged in discussions during monthly meetings and further analyzed the data line-by-line until we reached an agreement on common themes found. Based on the frequency of the statements we heard, five common themes emerged: creative personal writing, frequent short writing, confidence building, writing in all classrooms, and evidence-based teaching. To enhance trustworthiness of the themes, triangulation was completed by cross-checking the identified themes with multiple sources of data including exit slips, feedback from school administrators, video recordings, surveys, interviews, and program evaluations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Results

RQ1: Impact of Teacher PD on Self-Efficacy in Personal Writing

The mean scores of self-efficacy of personal writing increased from 39.32 to 44.11 with the standard deviation decreased from 12.00 to 7.18 (See Table 1). The results of the ANOVA test did not suggest a change in self-efficacy of writing after the program participation, $F(1, 18) = 3.61, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .17$.

Descriptive Statistics on Self-Efficacy of Personal Writing

Self-Efficacy of Personal Writing	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall, I am confident as a writer	2.74	1.05	3.16	0.69
Overall, I am confident as a writer of fiction	2.58	0.90	3.11	0.66
Overall, I am confident as a writer of non-fiction	2.68	1.06	3.16	0.60
Overall, I am confident as a writer of poetry	2.05	1.43	2.89	0.88
I am confident in writing a clear, focused essay that stays on Topics	3.00	0.94	3.16	0.60
I am confident in using details to support my ideas when writing	3.05	0.71	3.26	0.45
I am confident that I can write a well-constructed essay with a clear introduction, logically designed body and arresting conclusion	2.84	1.02	3.26	0.45
I am confident in writing well-structured, cohesive paragraphs	2.89	1.05	3.21	0.54
I am confident in writing with an engaging voice or tone	2.79	0.92	3.11	0.74
I am confident that I can use effective words in my writing	2.84	0.96	3.11	0.66
I am confident that I can use well-constructed and varied sentences when writing	2.95	0.97	3.26	0.56
I am confident that I can correctly spell all words when writing	2.68	1.11	3.11	0.88
I am confident that I can correctly use punctuation	3.11	0.88	3.11	0.74
I can write an essay good enough to earn a high grade	3.11	0.88	3.21	0.54

Note. All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale: 0: Strongly disagree; 1: Disagree; 2 Undecided; 3 Agree; 4: Strongly agree.

RQ2: Impact of Teacher PD on Self-Efficacy in Writing Instruction

The mean scores of self-efficacy of writing instruction increased from 21.47 to 25.74 and the standard deviation for these scores decreased from 5.63 to 3.94. (See Table 2). The results of the ANOVA test supported the significant change in self-efficacy of writing instruction after the program participation, $F(1, 18) = 13.46, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .43$.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics on Self-Efficacy of Writing Instruction

Self-Efficacy of Teaching of Writing	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am confident in teaching the pre-writing stage of the writing process (helping students respond to a prompting situation and prepare to write)	2.89	0.81	3.37	0.60
I am confident in teaching the writing stage of the process (helping students to draft, reflect, consult, revise and edit)	2.84	0.77	3.21	0.64
I am confident in teaching the post-writing stage of the writing process (helping students to publish, respond to other writers and reflect on the response to their writing)	2.63	0.90	3.32	0.67
I am confident in teaching, designing, and managing a writing program	2.53	0.91	3.05	0.52
I am confident in using the correct terminology to talk about the writing process	2.68	0.82	3.21	0.54
I am confident in using the correct terminology to talk about the different types of writing genres or forms of writing	2.63	0.83	3.21	0.54
I am confident in using the correct terminology to talk about grammar	2.68	0.67	3.21	0.54
I am confident in assessing writing	2.58	0.69	3.16	0.50

Note. All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale: 0: Strongly disagree; 1: Disagree; 2 Undecided; 3 Agree; 4: Strongly agree.

RQ3: Various Means Suggesting Professional Development Affecting Teachers' Self-Efficacy

Moving outside the constraints of formulaic writing

This was the most predominant theme that the participants believed they improved upon after they participated in the PD. The majority of the participants expressed that the PD provided an opportunity for satisfying experiences in personal writing, which led to an increase in their writing motivation. Participants remarked, “I enjoy writing personal things that mean something to me.” “I would only write if I had to.” “I now share writing prompts with my family during dinner.” “It comes more easily and I should write more often.”

Several teacher responses indicated that, as personal writers, they only wrote informational papers as a means to further their education. One teacher stated, “I enjoyed the freedom that journaling allowed after the years of writing formal college term papers. I didn’t really see journal writing though, where the formal restraints had been removed, as true writing.” Other teachers echoed the comments about journal writing not being considered ‘true writing’ in relation to the teaching and crafting of written language. Similarly, one teacher stated, “I become more competent in writing fiction. I hadn’t written a true fiction in years before this project. I feel I have become a better writer and teacher of writing fiction. I use the different types of writing now.” Several teachers concurred, with statements such as, “An important discovery about writing is that composition is not the only

type of writing and there are engaging ways of getting students to write. Yes, I am confident in using nontraditional methods of writing.”

After completing the program, the participating teachers all agreed, both as writers and teachers of writing, that more creative, free, and fun writing activities such as journaling are, and should be, counted as ‘true writing’. Once they made this connection, they saw creative writing as a valuable tool for the classroom. One teacher stated, “Developing creative and fun writing activities not only fosters an inherited ‘buy in’ for writing, but helps to solicit a passion and motivation for writing not experienced previously.”

Recognizing the value of frequent short informal writing activities

The second theme, recognizing the value of frequent short informal writing activities was mentioned frequently on several levels. One participant said it was “uplifting to learn it is okay to free write where one can write with little to no focus on mechanics.” Another teacher discussed the importance of writing often. She compared it to playing a sport well: “The more you practice the better player you become.” Never before had she seen or understood how important it was to just ‘write.’ She added how easy it was, following the PD program, to develop short writing activities that do not take up a great deal of time, but still help students develop writing ability and enhance learning. The use of low-stakes writing techniques, such as the ‘quick-write,’ ‘5 W summary,’ ‘gallery walk,’ and ‘snowball fight,’ were frequently mentioned during interviews as ways to make use of powerful writing tools in a short amount of time. The common voice regarding a major change in the participants’ writing instruction after the PD was about the value of using informal writing.

Many teachers stated that they did not conduct many writing lessons before this project. However, all participating teacher were experiencing success with writing instruction following the PD: “After using various informal writing techniques given to us by the presenters, our students are more excited about wiring and learning. They are getting better at writing, and their confidence has soared.” “I didn’t know my 2nd graders would enjoy writing so much.” “I learned how to make writing fun for children. I find my children writing when they have free time.” “My students have greatly improved. They went from struggling to write words to writing creative, funny, personal stories in a year!”

After learning and implementing many informal writing techniques, a number of teachers mentioned that an important aspect of learning that can be showcased through writing is including a reflection at the end of lessons or units. When students are summarizing their questions, ideas, and lessons learned, they are focused on the intended meaning and thoughts rather than mechanics. Many asserted that “Don’t worry as much about grammar and sentence structure, as much as getting their thoughts down.” “In the beginning of the year I felt that writing needed to always be formal and graded; now it does not!” “Students are more a part of writing as they write about their own lives and many real life ideas, and they own it.” Several teachers stated they even enjoyed writing more when they freely write their own personal piece without thought to grammar rules, as seen in the statement, “I enjoyed writing, but I’ve always had issues with grammar and mechanics, so sometimes it hindered my writing.”

Gaining confidence through modeling and doing

The third theme, gaining confidence through modeling and doing, was seen both on the levels of personal practice and teaching practice. One teacher reluctantly stated that in a previous basal program training she had attended, there were no examples provided, that she felt lost, and her entire day was

wasted. She, as well as others who attended the basal program training, stated they would never attempt methods where they had not been shown examples, and teachers were not actively participating.

The participants made reference to and agreed that one key strength of this writing project's PD program was that TCs and invited presenters demonstrated teaching methods, practiced together with them giving guidance, and then required the volunteers to try the methods out. Teachers quickly noted they gained confidence when they could see what was expected, and then allowed sufficient time to work in a non-threatening environment and their classroom.

The participants indicated that after seeing lesson plans, teaching materials, and student writing samples showcased in each teacher's demonstration, their confidence began to grow. When teachers viewed what was accomplished by same-aged students in their written work, they could then compare these samples to their own students' work. It was through the acts of peer teacher modeling, practice, lively exchange of ideas, teaching others through demonstration, and seeing the successful application of writing activities in all subjects and grades that they were able to obtain self-efficacy in writing and writing instruction. Several teachers emphasized that they now shared their own personal writing as a model so that their students feel comfortable sharing their writing. They also stated that they ensure time is set aside for students to share what they have written.

During the open forum followed by the volunteers' lesson modeling, the participants debated best applications, praised useful teaching approaches, and provided positive reinforcement on the student writing samples produced after the instruction. At the onset of the peer modeled lesson observation and discussion, however, teachers were reluctant but quickly saw how beneficial a format of this nature could be. The teachers' reluctance seemed to stem from the span of classroom age groups, which ranged from kindergarten to sixth grade. They accepted, however, diverse perspectives received from teachers of multi-grades, which promoted best practice and developed lessons to be potentially adapted to their own classroom by all participants.

Witnessing the implementation of writing activities and writing samples in their peers' classrooms, the participants gained the confidence that they, too, can teach those writing lessons in their own classroom. For example, a few teachers commented that watching 'mystery journal writing' techniques helped them to utilize the technique in the content area writing successfully. They stated it was a fun writing assignment for social studies and helped students learn about the branches of government, the regions of Virginia, and famous Americans. They also stated, "The students are captivated through writing the genre of mystery, and when it is utilized in a game format, their 'hook' to the written work is quite evident." One teacher said, "Writing assignments even became like a game to try and beat and impress their peers." Mentioned by another teacher, "writing in this context is not forced or a burden, but rather comes naturally and solicits learning." Other writings that were repeatedly mentioned and successfully implemented through peer modeling were using mentor texts to facilitate writing, journal writing, pre-writing, free form poetry, the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic), and charts and maps.

Establishing writing activities in all classrooms regardless of content and grade level taught

The fourth theme, establishing writing activities in all classrooms regardless of content and grade level taught, evolved from the previous gaining confidence through a modeling-and-doing theme. As the teachers gained confidence, they began gradually to incorporate more writing activities in all content lessons and grades. They saw that with more frequent opportunities, students became more comfortable with writing, especially when interacting with their peers. Predominant comments

included how the PD provided them with useful writing ideas to learn in all content areas: “What I learned will help me to help students master their knowledge and skills across subjects. “I have a wealth of resources at my fingertips that I can use with all my students.” “Writing in all content areas can give all types of learners the opportunity to become great writers.”

Comments related to using writing after the PD project include, “In the past, writing was taught separate from the other subjects.” “I felt before that the students would not enjoy writing in PE, but I discovered otherwise. I will incorporate writing into my PE lessons more often as students are more intrigued.” “My writing topics are better so my kids are more motivated as I become better at using a variety of activities, and I make time for sharing.” “I have incorporated different genres of writing into every subject.” “I can do better at teaching writing with enthusiasm.” The participants also discussed seeing students delve into higher levels of learning, as they became inspired, not only by seeing what their peers had written, but also by seeing their teacher using writing to teach concepts and having higher expectations clearly set.

To engage the students in writing activities frequently in various content areas and to increase opportunities for practice writing, the participating teachers used low stakes and authentic writing activities in PE, art, music, etc. classes. The teachers realized that interesting writing activities are great ways to reinforce writing skills being taught in English Language Arts classes. For example, students could write about a favorite sport they want to play or want to be better at. When students choose to write about a topic of their choice rather than respond to writing prompts for a grade, they tend to enjoy writing, become more engaged, and feel as though they have power over their own learning. Teachers encouraged the students to write about a personal feeling, such as what they like or dislike about something, what they do well, a list of the weak areas, a plan to improve, or a log to mark progress in playing their favorite sport. It is important for teachers to keep in mind though, if their writing is mocked and requires too many assignments that are additional and unrelated to the subject, the students may be turned off and not engage in literacy tasks in those classes.

Organizing writing instruction through evidence-based activities

This final theme, organizing writing instruction through evidence-based activities, was discussed regularly during professional development workshops. Teachers felt their time was valued and respected as they learned about writing activities that increase their students’ motivation and learning. Several teachers even admitted they had become complacent over the years and were following the “same old routine” and had gotten “lost in the delivery.” One teacher confessed, “I have no more excitement in my routine, and writing instruction has become monotonous.” Similar comments regarding their mundane instruction included, “I was complacent.” “I used to teach traditional methods of formula writing, now I enjoy learning the writing process and guided writing, especially useful applications for digital writing tools that have been tried and proven effective through research.” One teacher stated, “Yes. I am more confident in nontraditional methods of writing. I feel I am a teacher of writing every day. Before the project, I felt that I did not teach writing at all.” Another teacher stated that, concerning digital writing, “I was often afraid to use technology because it was not something that came easily to me. However, during one of the workshops, I had an ‘aha’ moment when it became clear that it was acceptable for me to let the students evolve with the use of technology together.” She was delighted that when her students knew more about digital applications than she, they enjoyed being able to teach her some ‘tricks.’ Students in her class were motivated, writing with confidence, and excited about being allowed to try new ideas. The participants found that once

reluctant to write; students were motivated and eager to participate when teachers were interested in writing and used new writing applications

Discussion

The findings of the quantitative data showed that the long-term PD significantly changed teacher self-efficacy with respect to their teaching of writing, but not so much for considering themselves writers. A plausible explanation is that the participants rated themselves as good writers before beginning the PD, so even though the level of self-efficacy was slightly increased, there was no statistically significant change incurred at the end of the program. This finding is congruent with Locke et al. (2013) that found teachers in their study also rated themselves confident as essay writers and writers of nonfiction at the start of the project. Qualitative evidence overwhelmingly supports that the PD positively affected the participants' sense of self-efficacy with respect to their being both writers and writing teachers. Several comments made on the open-ended survey and interviews drew attention to the connection between professional context and personal experience in writing. The responses indicate that as a result of their participation in the project and experience of engaging in their own writing processes, completing personal writing, and receiving positive reinforcement throughout the project, their self-efficacy increased not only as writers but as writing teachers as well.

Our findings showed that teachers' beliefs about their own ability to write have a large impact on their confidence and enthusiasm as teachers of writing, which is well-aligned with the notion that there are significant similarities between the levels of teacher and student efficacy beliefs (Berkley, 2006). Furthermore, this study adds to the existing literature that teachers' positive beliefs about their own ability to write can impact classroom writing instruction, and subsequently, their students' writing development (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Englert et al., 2006; Haskins, 2017; Mohar et al., 2017). It appears that teacher sense of confidence as a writer is transmittable to self-efficacy as writing teachers (Englert et al., 2006; Haskins, 2017; Pritchard & Marshall, 1994).

Given that self-efficacy is an important perception which has proved to be related to many meaningful educational outcomes (Graham et al., 2013; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Chacón, 2005; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Zee & Koomen, 2016), our study expected an increase in teacher commitment to quality instruction. Participants initiated interesting writing activities and introduced various types of creative writing and writing to learn activities to their students which made an impact on student motivation and performance. This result supports findings that teachers' self-efficacy is critical as it can influence the writing performance of their students (Graham et al., 2001; Lipson et al., 2000; Mohar et al., 2017).

This study also found that teachers gained self-efficacy in writing instruction when learning from modeling where the participants viewed lessons successfully implemented, and actually applied them in their own classrooms. Seeing what other teachers did and how they helped students write and learn, encouraged many participants to use the new writing activities in their own classrooms. In keeping with Bandura's (1993) assertions, the most powerful teacher professional development included an authentic mastery experience embedded in the teacher's classroom. The effect of modeling and actually 'doing' (applying) what they learned on how well teachers can learn has been documented in several studies (Howell, Hunt-Barron, Kaminski, & Sanders 2017; Koster, Bouwer, & van den Bergh, 2017; Moye, Dugger, & Starkweather, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Yager, 2011; Sedlmeier, 2000). The participants who actually applied the writing methods after seeing how to use them, and reflected on specifically, what worked well and what did not during the follow-up discussions affected their gain in self-efficacy for writing instruction. Our findings support the

researchers who documented the power of peer interactions and exchanging different perspectives on teacher learning (Brodahl, Hadjerrouit, & Hansen, 2011; Barab, Kling, & Gray, 2005; Howell et al., 2017; Iyengar & Hood, 2016; Koster et al., 2017; Scott & Mouza, 2007). Participating teachers claimed that they had previously had the feeling of being left to figure it out on their own due to cutbacks in professional development opportunities. The once mundane act of begrudgingly making students write just to put a checkmark in the writing block was now replaced with useful and meaningful writing activities to enhance learning.

Results from this study demonstrated that the participating teachers gained an expansion of their knowledge of what writing is from this project. Their rigid views of what school writing is were modified, and they are now convinced it does not always have to be formulaic and structured writing submitted for grading. Their participation in the PD influenced them to use different genres of writing and short informal writing activities such as quick write and 'exit slip' of key concepts learned from a lesson that enhanced student motivation and learning. This finding is in line with other researchers' (Benedek-Wood, Mason, Wood, Hoffman, & McGuire, 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Mason, Benedek-Wood, & Valasa, 2009; Daniels & Bizar, 2005; Tierney & Dorroh, 2004). One advantage of the quick write is that it provides a non-threatening writing opportunity that encourages students to write about a topic without being concerned about punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

Educators must move beyond the mundane task of structured writing to producing more innovative and creative ways to become active writers, free from the stress of constant attention to mechanics (Locke et al., 2011). Writing is an active process that requires practice and revision. Participating teachers agreed that to be effective writers, it is necessary to set aside time to write each day, and for progressively longer periods of time. As teachers and students alike become more engaged as writers in a real-world context and comfortable with writing, they, in turn, are empowered and transformed into better writers (Bruning & Kauffman, 2016; Haskins, 2017; Medlock, 2012; Pajares et al., 2007; Newell, 2006; Pajares & Valiante, 2006). During lesson observations, it was clear that teachers themselves were becoming more comfortable with writing, and even building confidence from their engagement in the act of writing.

Conclusions

This research emphasized the significant impact teacher involvement in a long-term PD exerted on the development of self-efficacy with respect to themselves as both writers and teachers of writing. The participating teachers at the subject school gained confidence in writing and teaching writing, and their students were supported in using writing to learn in the content areas. Increased writing self-efficacy leads teachers to improve their writing instruction by utilizing frequent informal writing, writing in all content areas, and evidence-based activities, which may promote best writing practices across content areas.

The quantitative data analysis on the pre and post self-efficacy measure scores showed a more positive effect on the teachers' overall self-efficacy through their participation in the year-long PD program, despite that the sample size was small. The analysis of qualitative data overwhelmingly supports that the PD positively affected participants' sense of self-efficacy with respect to their being both writers and writing teachers. Qualitative data provides a more comprehensive examination of evidence that strengthens the findings from the statistical analysis. It allows us to achieve a deeper and more accurate understanding of the participants' perception about the specific aspects of the PD which overwhelmingly impacted their self-efficacy and the personal meaning they took from the experience. The impact of this study is evident as the teachers' self-efficacy translates to them

supporting their students' use of writing as a tool to learn in all subject areas. The participating teachers perceived the year-long PD to be effective in their gaining self-efficacy as writers as well as writing teachers. All participants harmoniously agreed that the interactive PD program, aligned with the tenets of NWP, was an efficient way to ultimately gain self-efficacy through learning about evidence-based writing instruction and receiving suggestions on their implementation of new writing activities that can enhance their students' writing and learning. As teachers and students alike become more engaged as writers in a real-world context and comfortable with writing, they, in turn, are empowered and transformed into better writers.

Given the small sample size, the results may not be generalized to a larger group of teachers. The study was limited in scope to teacher self-efficacy and the participants' interpretation of their students' writing motivation using anecdotal summaries of writing performances. Future studies need to consider the impact of PD on student writing ability by analyzing authentic writing samples, and its correlation to overall student achievement. Furthermore, future studies need to explore the impact PD has on participating teachers' implementation of authentic writing experiences in diverse educational settings across all content areas compared to non-participants.

The study allowed a glimpse into the possible benefits to student writing ability, but the translation into reading and other content areas was not considered. Future research looking into increased student writing ability, and its correlation with student reading and other areas would be beneficial. The limitation of time and resources did not allow for a closer look into the potential benefits obtained in the area of reading and academic achievement. It was not until the final interviews that the possibility arose that students might become more avid readers as a result of greater writing experience. Another limitation of the study was the limited amount of time allocated to engaging teachers in the process of personal writing. Their revisions and editing of personal pieces were completed off-site at their leisure. Future projects could incorporate more systematic peer editing and feedback during workshops on personal writing, which may ensure more significant gains in teacher self-efficacy as writers.

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