To Will and Stella
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Secondary teachers of writing are not well prepared to teach writing, and the average secondary student is not proficient in writing. Learning to write may be more challenging for secondary students with learning disabilities (LD) than the typical student, as students may experience cognitive, social, or instructional obstacles. Because the majority of students with LD in the US are included in general education classrooms, it is important for secondary teachers of writing to have expertise in teaching writing to a heterogeneous group of students. These teachers must possess a repertoire of knowledge on effective writing strategies and instructional differentiation as well as effective pedagogical strategies to benefit all students in the classroom.

Because there is little consensus on what expert secondary literacy teachers can do to promote positive student outcomes, it is important to learn more about how these teachers enact this knowledge in the classroom. Therefore, empirical data collected from expert middle school language arts teachers were examined for analysis according to a constructivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998) and analyzed according to Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory. Through questionnaires, interviews,
observations, and artifacts of expert middle school language arts teachers, I aimed to understand how these teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing and the nature of their writing instruction for students with LD in their classrooms.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2003), which works to focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing, argued writing needs to be an essential component of the school agenda. With the most recent federal initiative to improve educational outcomes for all children, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the teaching of writing is now central to the school reform movement (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012, p. 879). National attention on the practice of writing in today’s schools is crucial, as the average American student is not proficient in writing (De La Paz & Graham, 2002). This lack of student proficiency in writing is unsatisfactory and may signify inadequate writing instruction.

Most students cannot write well enough to achieve academic or occupational success (NCW, 2003). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas, reported unfavorable findings from the writing assessments administered in 2007 and 2011 with the majority of students in 8th and 12th grades performing at or below basic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). Also, a recent report by ACT (2012), a nonprofit organization whose mission is helping people achieve education and workplace success, revealed that about one-third of ACT-tested high school graduates are not ready for college coursework in college composition. This finding is consistent with results from a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) that revealed
about one-fourth of entering freshman of public 2-year postsecondary institutions enroll in remedial writing courses.

However, it is crucial students learn to write well. Writing well can influence a students’ ability to do well in school (Graham & Perin, 2007b), graduate high school (Center for Education Policy, 2012), enter college (Schumaker & Deshler, 2009), and do well in college (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Writing well can also impact success in the workplace (NCW, 2004) as well as foster social awareness and change (NCW, 2003).

In school, poor writing skills compromise learning in content area classes (Graham & Perin, 2007b), and about 70% of the nation’s students are required to pass a high school exit exam that includes English language arts content in order to graduate (Center for Education Policy, 2012). Additionally, many state college entrance exams have written essays and some require essays on their applications (Schumaker & Deshler, 2009), and poor performance on standardized assessments indicates that students may not be successful in college settings (Graham & Perin, 2007b).

In the workplace, the level of a person’s writing matters for professional opportunity (NCW, 2004). The NCW (2004), from their survey of 120 major American corporations that employ about 8 million people entitled Writing: A Ticket to Work…Or a Ticket Out, reported that strong writing skills could impact whether a person receives an hourly or salaried job. Another important finding is that strong writing skills are often needed to maintain a position in a salaried job without termination due to myriad writing responsibilities, including but not limited to preparing operating procedures, lab safety reports, technical reports, correspondence, and presentations. Writing is also taken into consideration for promotion for salaried employees.
Further, educators can use writing to foster social awareness and change. The NCW (2003) professed, “revolutions have been started by it [writing]. Oppression has been toppled by it. And it has enlightened the human condition” (p. 10). Educators can harness this power to rouse active listeners, risk takers, and advocates at the primary level (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001), secondary level (Singer & Shagoury, 2008), and at the college level (Rosaen, 2003). For instance, Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) examined how second and third grade teachers facilitated student research of the local community and communication with community members and workers to take social action. The research process emphasized real world writing through letter writing, opinion polling, labeling student generated diagrams and drawings, and writing and sending faxes to local authorities in order to gain information on an urban renewal project. Students’ final projects, which included designs on how their local neighborhood might be improved, were shared with project officers and council members of the project. Singer and Shagoury (2008), a teacher education researcher and high school classroom teacher, collaborated to create a curriculum to encourage personal choice and social activism as well as enhance students’ literacy skills, critical thinking skills, and understanding of social activism. Students generated writing, poetry, audio recordings, photographs, and art. The authors reported that the students learned how to use writing to promote activism and developed a sense of personal agency they could use to foster substantive change. Also, Rosaen (2003) used poetry in her college-level teacher preparation courses to support teacher candidates’ learning of curriculum, pedagogy, multicultural competence, and social justice.
Yet, writing is more complex than merely putting a pencil to a page and creating a written product. Writing is comprised of various and complex physical, cognitive, and linguistic processes as well as sociocultural activities (Beard, Myhill, & Nystrand, 2009; Troia & Graham, 2003). Further, these processes and activities likely intermingle to influence how students understand, view, and use writing as well as how teachers may plan for and implement instruction.

According to Troia and Graham (2003), composing texts requires the implementation and coordination of physical, cognitive, and linguistic activities in order to meet purposes related to genre, audience, and expression. Physical operations for writing include negotiating pencil grip, forming letters on a page, handwriting speed and neatness, fine-motor skills, and attending to proper positioning of the paper (Graham, 1999). One prominent model that represents the cognitive processes for writing contains many components, including motivation, affect, social context, the writer’s long-term and short-term memory, and specific writing processes for planning, translating, reviewing, and metacognition (Berninger, Abbott, Whitaker, Sylvester, & Nolen, 1995). Additionally, linguistic processes for writing include the operation and manipulation of the different elements of language structure (e.g., phonology, morphology, orthography, syntax) and are important for an understanding of the proper usage of the English language within text (Beard, Myhill, & Nystrand, 2009). Also, sociocultural activities demonstrate the complex interplay between social and cultural influences in a community of writers wherein writers shape and are shaped by the community in which they write (Beard, Myhill, & Nystrand, 2009). Lindfors (1999) stated that, “there is, in a sense, no such thing as acquiring language, but only acquiring some
community’s ways of language” (p. 2). The school or classroom can act as a community for writing wherein students can develop and practice writing in authentic ways.

**Writing and students with learning disabilities.** Most students with learning disabilities (LD) encounter barriers in school that impede writing success, including difficulty in learning to write and increased challenges at the secondary level. First, although writing is extremely complex and difficult for almost all students (Graham & Harris, 2003), writing is more challenging for students with LD due to a lack of coordinated cognitive processes and strategies leading to deficiencies in planning, organizing, monitoring, evaluating, and revising (Graham & Harris, 2005). As a result, writing products of students with LD are usually short, unorganized, unfocused, and rife with simple sentences and mechanical errors (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Schumaker & Deshler, 2009). Bourassa and Treiman (2001) noted that “children vary in their ability to deal with different types of linguistic information” (p. 3), and children with LD may have difficulties spelling due to deficiencies in phonological, orthographical, and/or morphological skills. Further, students with LD misspell more words than their typically developing peers (Graham, Harris, & Loynachan, 1994). Graham (1999) reported that students with LD also have difficulties with handwriting, and difficulties with spelling and handwriting can “interfere with the execution of other composing processes, constrain writing development, and mark a child as a poor writer” (p. 78).

Secondly, students with LD face increased challenges as they move into secondary education (Swanson & Hoskyn, 2001). Swanson and Hoskyn (2001) stated, “the challenges faced by adolescents with LD increase as they face the curriculum and
learning demands of middle and high school. Further, the gap between academic performance of students with and without LD continues to increase across adolescence” (p. 109). Students must learn to acquire as well as independently apply higher level thinking skills (Kameenui & Carnine, 1998). Students are also expected to use higher level writing skills, such as taking notes, responding to essay tests, writing lab reports, sending correspondence, and complete standardized assessments successfully (Schumaker & Deshler, 2003).

Further, an increasing number of students with disabilities are being served in general education classrooms over time, particularly secondary students with disabilities (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). The most recent Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals of Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) included an analysis of data pertaining to students with disabilities being served under IDEA. Although these data are not disaggregated by grade level, 69% of school age students with specific learning disabilities were taught in regular education classrooms for 80% or more of the day in Fall 2014. However, the inclusion of students with disabilities at the secondary level is considerably challenging for educators largely due to academic complexity, required pace of instruction needed to cover content, teacher attitudes, and potential consequences of high stakes assessment (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). It is also important to note that the number of students identified with LD has been decreasing markedly for over a decade (Boe et al., 2013); so, it may not only be the inclusion of students identified with LD that represent a challenge for educators, but also the inclusion of students who may have been labeled with LD under other circumstances.
As such, teachers need to utilize instruction that meets the needs of the diverse range of students in their classrooms. Improving the writing skills of students with LD becomes increasingly important as students move through school in order to allay later writing difficulties that may lead to myriad deleterious outcomes. However, many general education teachers are not well prepared to implement effective instruction that supports the diverse range of students in their classrooms due to various contextual conditions (e.g., increasing class size, lack of flexibility in prescribed curriculum, inadequate support services and resources, lack of time and support for individual and collaborative planning and assessment; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990). Troia and Graham (2003) reported teachers often disclose they believe that they possess insufficient knowledge, skills, and strategies to enable their students’ emerging writing competency.

There are also concerns about the provision of high quality writing instruction by secondary teachers. For example, national studies have indicated that most teachers do not frequently apply evidence-based practices to teach writing, and teachers at the high school level implement fewer evidence-based practices than those of other grade levels (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Herbert, Morphy, 2014; Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Further, Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) found, from their survey of America’s high school teachers, that many did not make instructional adaptations for their weaker writers. They reported that while high school teachers reported making different adaptations for struggling writers, most were implemented only once or twice per school year. These authors surmised these teachers are not implementing adaptations because they are not familiar with
them. In addition, limited research suggests there is a lack of collaboration between general education and special education teachers to improve writing competency of students with disabilities (Troia & Maddox, 2004). For instance, Troia and Maddox (2004) conducted an analysis of three separate surveys as well as discourse from focus groups of 18 middle school general and special education teachers. They found that the principal barrier to making adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities during writing instruction to be resistance from general education teachers, while middle school general educators reported leaving instruction of composition and students’ assignment completion up to the special educators. These authors also found teachers were unsure of how to enact balanced literacy instruction for “teaching lower level writing skills and higher level composing strategies within a process-oriented framework” (p. 19) and felt restrained by the exigencies of their middle schools.

While the state of writing instruction in secondary settings may seem ominous, it is important to acknowledge that there are expert secondary teachers of writing who are successful teaching to a heterogeneous student population, including students with diverse needs (Parris & Block, 2007; van Kraayenoord, Miller, Moni, & Jobling, 2009). These teachers foster positive student outcomes as well as have a depth of understanding of how writing is learned, what their students need, and how to enact effective pedagogy for writing instruction (Parris & Block, 2007; van Kraayenoord et al., 2009). These teachers may understand that “no single process or program can address the broad and varied goals and needs of all students” (International Reading Association, 2010, p. 3), and the most effective instruction includes differentiation, instruction designed to fit each learner (Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, &
Walker-Dalhouse, 2012). Yet, little is known about the development of their expertise for teaching writing and their knowledge and pedagogy for writing instruction for students with LD in their classrooms.

The Problem Statement

The low achievement of secondary students on nationally recognized writing assessments underscores the need for expert teachers of writing. However, many factors influence the enactment of effective pedagogy for writing instruction at the secondary level. For example, teachers’ institutional contexts can provide “organisational exigencies” (Burns, 1996, p. 162) that impact instructional decisions (Borg, 2003). These exigencies may include but are not limited to school culture, working conditions, curriculum mandates, school policies, standardized tests, and the availability of resources (Borg, 2003; Kennedy, 2010). Additionally, the heterogeneity of students in a classroom and the heterogeneity of intra-individual differences of students with LD must be considered for effective instruction, (Reschly, 2005). Not only may students with LD struggle with the various processes of writing, they may experience other obstacles that hinder their success in writing, including low motivation, maladaptive beliefs about the causes of success and failure, and lower academic self-concepts than their peers (van Kraayenoord et al., 2009).

Factors at the teacher level that may influence the enactment of effective pedagogy for writing instruction at the secondary level include a lack of collaboration between general education and special education teachers (Troia & Maddox, 2004) and instructional adaptations for weaker writers in the classroom (Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, & MacArthur, 2003; Kiuhara et al., 2009). Teachers may also experience instructional obstacles, such as a large number of students in a classroom, multiple
courses at different grade levels to teach, limited instructional time, and time for planning (Kennedy, 2010; King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003). Possibly the most critical factor is the lack of teacher education, including teacher preparation and professional development in teaching writing (Kiuhara et al., 2009). Although challenging and complex, sustained and intensive teacher learning is related to gains in student achievement and promotes positive school change (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Ericsson’s (2008) theory of expertise and Sternberg and Horvath’s (1995) prototype view of expert teaching were used to frame the study. These theories were appropriate for this study because, when combined, they represent approaches to expertise development as well as conceptualizations of teaching expertise. Because there is limited research on teaching expertise and its development, especially in regards to secondary writing instruction, these theories lent a lens from which to view teaching expertise for teaching writing at the secondary level. For teaching writing at the secondary level, components of expertise have been examined (i.e., effective practices, teacher qualities), but there has been limited research on the practice of expertise and no research found to date on the development of teacher expertise for any grade level.

According to Ericsson (2008), expertise is represented by many factors. He noted that, traditionally, expertise has been denoted by experience, reputation, and perceived mastery of knowledge and skill. However, he added that standards for performance, motivation, problem solving, and reproducibly superior performance and outcomes embedded in complex contexts are more likely to denote expertise. Further,
this theory of expertise underscores deliberate practice involving guided coaching as the leading effort for developing expertise. Deliberate practice means having an explicit goal, motivation for improvement, immediate feedback, many opportunities to practice and gradually refine performance, time for problem solving and evaluation, opportunities for reflection, rest, and possibly 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2008).

Sternberg and Horvath’s (1995) theory offers features of expertise that distinguish experts from non-experts, provides a perspective that experts are bound together by a family resemblance, allows for variability in individual expert profiles, and emphasizes the development and operation of expertise in real-world settings. In addition, this theory broadens what it means to be an expert beyond sets of knowledge and skills without connoting that every experienced teacher is also an expert. These authors stressed that domain knowledge, efficiency of problem solving, and insight for creatively solving problems are correlated attributes of experts. They also argued that this conceptualization of the expert as a prototype is not merely description, but also generative in terms of research and practice.

These theories were integrated to provide a framework from which the current study was viewed. Taken together, experience does not connote expertise. Rather, the ability for teachers to effectively and creatively problem solve in complex real-world settings connotes expertise. Further, teachers may be considered experts when they are able to meet particular standards and replicate superior performance over time. So, the framework positioned teacher expertise for teaching writing as a prominent
contributing factor to high quality teaching that ultimately promotes improvements in the writing proficiency of secondary students.

**Research questions.** The average secondary student is not proficient in writing, and learning to write may be more challenging for secondary students with LD than the typical student, as students with LD may experience cognitive, social, or instructional obstacles. Because students with LD are increasingly being included in general education classrooms, it is important for secondary teachers of writing to have expertise in teaching writing to a heterogeneous group of students. Unfortunately, secondary teachers may not be providing high quality writing instruction. Many factors influence the enactment of effective pedagogy for writing instruction, most notably teacher education; however, there is little consensus on what secondary literacy teachers can do to promote positive student outcomes (Grossman et al., 2010).

Thus, this study sought to learn how secondary language arts teachers, the primary source of writing instruction at the secondary level, describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students in their classrooms as well as the nature of their instruction. Specifically, I sought to answer two research questions:

1. How do expert middle school language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms?
2. What is the nature of writing instruction provided by expert middle school language arts teachers to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms?

**Professional Significance**

The findings from this study could potentially be useful to teacher educators, teachers, and researchers. For teacher educators (e.g., university faculty, teacher mentors, district professional development staff) working to develop secondary teachers
of writing at any stage of their careers, utilizing information learned from studying the
superior performance of expert secondary teachers of writing could provide an
important foundation of knowledge from which pedagogical skill can be developed and
practiced. The information learned could be useful for novices to begin a well-founded
continuum of learning as well as in-service teachers to continue to develop their
performance. For researchers, observing and analyzing highly effective secondary
literacy teachers’ pedagogy (Parris & Block, 2007) can serve to further define (a)
teacher expertise and the development of teacher expertise in writing and (b) identify
effective pedagogical practices for writing instruction for students with LD. Overall, this
study would provide a lens to learn what expert secondary writing instruction looks like
for students with LD, which may provide “a gauge for what still needs to be done if
students are to become better writers and meet CCSS objectives” (Graham, Capizzi,
Harris, Herbert, & Morphy, 2014). So, this research could be useful to improve
outcomes for students with LD.

Definition of Terms

Expert Teacher

Palmer, Stough, Burdenski, and Gonzales (2005) proposed guidelines for expert
teacher selection criteria: (1) teachers have at least 3 years of experience in the same
instructional context in which the teacher has been identified as expert, (2) teachers are
independently recognized and nominated as having expertise by at least two different
constituencies, (3) teachers have documented impact on student performance, and (4)
teachers have appropriate certifications and degrees within their fields. For this study,
language arts teachers were considered expert if they met all four criteria above. For
the performance criterion, teachers’ students with LD must have shown gains on state standardized assessments for at least three years in a row.

**Learning Disabilities**

According to the federal definition (U.S. Office Special Education Programs, 2012), a specific learning disability is defined as “a disorder in one or more of the basic learning processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest in significant difficulties affecting the ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematics. Associated conditions may include, but are not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, or developmental aphasia. A specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a visual, hearing, motor, intellectual, or emotional/behavioral disability, limited English proficiency, or environmental, cultural, or economic factors.”

**Struggling Writers**

For purposes of this study, struggling writers can be defined as students who have not been identified for special education services. Further, struggling writers have (a) not received a passing score on previous state writing assessments, (b) not received a passing score on previous standardized or mandated assessments for writing, and/or (c) been identified for supplementary instruction.

**Organization of the Study**

The chapters of this dissertation include the following. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the problem, a statement of the problem, the theoretical framework, and the professional significance. Chapter 2 includes well-researched literature reviews on the topics of professional expertise and teacher expertise, effective instructional practices and teacher competencies for students with LD, and research on writing in
middle school language arts for students with and without LD. Chapter 3 illustrates the methods used in conducting the study, including a discussion of its research design, theoretical perspective, population, participants, data sources, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, methods for establishing trustworthiness, and study limitations and delimitations. The findings are presented in Chapter 4, while a discussion of the findings, including implications and recommendations, are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

Strong writing skills are critical for school and future success of students. Due to the critical importance of strong writing skills, national organizations have addressed the issue of teaching writing in America’s schools. These institutions have promoted not only an increase in writing instruction in the classroom, but also more effective writing instruction. However, today’s students are not proficient in writing, and teachers are not well prepared to teach writing. Writing is comprised of various and complex cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural activities, and teachers need to have an awareness of what it means to learn writing within these theoretical perspectives as well as effective pedagogy to teach writing within these theoretical perspectives.

For students with LD, writing is more challenging due to a lack of coordinated cognitive processes for writing. Moreover, as students with LD move into secondary education, they may face further challenges due to increased curriculum and learning demands. Because an increasing number of students with LD are served in general education classrooms, it is pressing that secondary general education teachers of writing have expertise in teaching writing to heterogeneous groups of students. Expertise in general effective pedagogical practices, principles of differentiated instruction, and evidence-based practices (EBPs) in writing as well as how best to enact that knowledge are essential for fostering positive student outcomes. Because there is a dearth of research on the expertise in effective teaching of writing, particularly with secondary students with LD, this research seeks to learn how expert eighth-grade
language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing as well as the nature of their writing instruction for students with LD in their classrooms.

The following review includes a discussion of (a) professional expertise and teacher expertise, (b) effective instructional practices and teacher competencies for students with LD, and (c) research on writing in middle school language arts for students with and without LD. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to address research on writing in middle school language arts for students with and without LD.

**Professional Expertise and Teacher Expertise**

According to Ropo (2004), it is important to understand expertise for teaching for at least two reasons: (a) concern about the quality of present-day teachers, schools, and teacher education and (b) to understand expertise in order to support its development. However, there is limited research on expertise in education (Brownell & Leko, 2014). Therefore, this review will draw on literature from the domains of professional expertise as well as teacher expertise to attempt to illustrate a comprehensive picture of the state of research.

The history of the study of expertise began in the 1960s when De Groot reported on the playing skills and information processing of professional chess players (Ropo, 2004). Since then, expertise has been studied in a variety of fields (e.g., chess, physics, music, medicine, the military, education, sports; Ropo, 2004). Today, there are various ways to conceptualize expertise and how it develops. Further, scholars have found differences between experts and novices in terms of performance and cognitive processes as well as addressed approaches for analyzing expertise.
There are many ways professional expertise can be defined (Farrington-Darby & Wilson, 2006). Ropo (2004) communicated that, since the early 1970s, expertise has typically been defined as "the ability to successfully execute problem-solving tasks related to one's professional field" (p. 161). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) defined expertise as effortfully acquired abilities "that carry us beyond what nature has specifically prepared us to do" (p. 3). Ericsson (2008) described a definition of professional expertise commonly used in the 1980s based on accumulated knowledge, extensive professional experience, and peer nominations; however, he noted there are numerous empirical studies that have shown this definition of expertise did not actually distinguish experts from nonexperts. He (2008; 2014) stated the importance of moving away from defining social expertise in terms of social recognition and towards the study of reproducibly superior performance in a given field. Farrington-Darby and Wilson (2006) stated that definitions of professional expertise can be described in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, tasks, activities, sport, games, processes (e.g., decision making), outputs (e.g., a decision), psychological characteristics or cognitive mechanisms (e.g., superior memory), characteristics for use in complex and dynamic environments (e.g., encoding new information quickly and completely), and strategies (e.g., willingness to make continual adjustments).

Ropo (2004) conveyed that describing teaching expertise is very different from describing expertise in more socially isolated fields, such as chess or physics, because "expert teachers have to be performers in the problems situated in socially and culturally complex contexts" (p. 162). Additionally, Berliner (2001) noted that because definitions of teacher expertise differ across national cultures or even to a decade in a culture, a
particular teacher might be considered expert in one context but considered terrible in another. For defining teacher expertise, Berliner (2001) conveyed that good teaching is concerned with standards of tasks and professional behavior and successful teaching is concerned with the achievement of ends. He stated that because there are no professional tournaments in education to determine expert teachers (as there are tournaments in chess to determine expert chess players), scores of student achievement tests best define expert teachers. So, best-case scenario, a teacher is good as well as successful. However, using student achievement scores is not without its empirical flaws. He informed that students’ scores on standardized assessments are correlated with student social class, community social capital, peer effects, and other associated factors. Additionally, Ropo (2004) stated that this criterion does not tell enough “about the functions teachers have in student learning and in their test scores” (p. 162).

There are also various ways to conceptualize how expertise develops. One way to conceptualize expertise development is in terms of perspectives (Ericsson, 2014; Ropo, 2004). Ropo (2004) articulated that extant literature on the acquisition of expertise can be divided into at least three perspectives. First, there is the perspective that expertise comes from within an individual, from their giftedness, intelligence, or outstanding abilities. Second, the cognitive view emphasizes the process of acquiring declarative and procedural knowledge. The third perspective emphasizes a “social theory of learning in which the acquisition of knowledge and expertise is typically seen as a kind of side effect of gaining membership of a social network” (p. 171).
Some scholars (Ackerman, 2014; Hambrick et al., 2014) have supported the individual difference approach. These scholars have promoted that experts likely have an innate ability or talent that impact expert performance. On the other hand, Ericsson (2014) has supported the notion that deliberate practice is essential for developing expertise (Ericsson would likely rename Ropo’s cognitive view the expert-performance approach, which highlights reproducibly superior performance as mentioned during the discussion of defining expertise). He stated this perspective was “established with case studies of the acquisition of expert memory with detailed experimental analysis of the mediating mechanisms” (p. 81). Deliberate practice means having an explicit goal, motivation for improvement, immediate feedback, many opportunities to practice and gradually refine performance, time for problem solving and evaluation, opportunities for reflection, rest, and possibly 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice (Ericsson, 2008). In fact, Gruber, Jansen, Marienhagen, and Altenmueller (2010) reported that intensive, domain-specific practice results in physiological and neural adaptations indicating plasticity of the human body and mind. It is important to note, however, that Ericsson (2014) does not deny the idea that innate talent could support expert performance; he merely stated this notion should be supported with evidence.

Research has also addressed the idea of learning within communities and social networks (Gruber et al., 2008; Hammerness et al., 2005; Smith & Strahan, 2004). Gruber, Lehtinen, Palonen, and Degner (2008) argued the importance of deliberate practice as well as an appropriate social context for early expertise development. This social context demands a facilitator (e.g., teacher, coach, parent, trainer, mentor) for deliberate practice who designs the practice activities, who sets the goals, motivates the
novice to practice, provides feedback, and scaffolds learning. Moreover, Ropo (2004) described that acquiring teaching expertise may be different from acquiring expertise in other domains due to socially and culturally situated, complex contexts. Hammerness et al. (2005) discussed teacher development in communities of practice. These authors stated that learning to teach in a community develops teachers’ vision for their practice; understanding about teaching, learning, and children; dispositions about how to use that knowledge; practices that support their intentions and beliefs; and tools that support their practices. In addition, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) supported the perspective that experts and novices work together in collaborative relationships to inform teacher learning. Smith and Strahan (2004) recognized that the idea of community is not only at the teacher or school level, but also the classroom level. From case studies of three expert teachers as defined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, they found these teachers spoke explicitly about classrooms as communities that encourage student ownership and responsibility.

Another way to conceptualize expertise development is in terms of stages that emphasize a transition from novice to expert (Alexander, 2003; Anderson, 1982; Berliner, 2004; Glaser, 1996). In fact, some scholars have characterized expertise as a process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Ericsson & Charness, 1994).

There are various theories of developmental stages of professional expertise; all detail three stages. One scholar, Anderson (1982), reported on a three-stage process theory of skill acquisition: cognitive (initial skill encoding involving verbal mediation and rehearsal of necessary information to carry out a skill), associative (error detection and elimination with a termination of verbal mediation), and autonomous (indefinite
continued improvement in the performance of a skill). Additionally, Glaser (1996) described three stages of expertise development in terms of being externally supported (skill acquisition fostered by commitment, interest, and mentors), transitional (guided practice emphasizing self-monitoring and self-regulating strategies), or self-regulatory (more control over the learning environment, level of challenge, and conditions for deliberate practice). Alexander (2003) discussed a theory of development entitled Model of Domain Learning. She characterized expertise development as acclimation (orientation towards an unfamiliar domain using limited knowledge, interest, and focus), competence (quantitative and qualitative changes in knowledge base with application of surface level and deep processing strategies), and proficiency (broadening and deepening of knowledge base as well as creation of new knowledge with questioning and investigation and that push domain boundaries).

For the development of teacher expertise, Berliner (2004) described a five-stage theory: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. In the novice stage, teachers must gain a basic understanding of the potential environment for teaching, tasks to be performed when teaching, and context-free rules for teaching. The novice is basically a conformist with limited skill. In the advanced beginner stage, experience is integrated with verbal knowledge, and teachers acquire conditional, strategic, and practical knowledge that is action-oriented, obtained independently, and person and context bound. Although teachers in the competent stage still may not be fast or fluid, they make conscious choices and plans, determine what is and is not important, create a thoughtful curriculum, have more control of the events around them, and stop making timing errors. Only a small number of teachers develop to the
proficient level, which is distinguished by intuitive pattern recognition, prediction of student behavior, and a holistic perspective of experiences. Experts, denoted by the final stage of teacher expertise development, are seemingly effortless, nonanalytical, or reflective. They do not make conscious choices; rather, they are intuitive, are fluid, go with the flow, know what to do with ideal timing, and engage in qualitatively different behavior than novice or competent teachers. Berliner (2001) advised, though, that these stages are not linear and experience does not alone connote expertise. Further, Ericsson (2008) argued that it isn’t actually intuition that experts possess because “expert performers are able to report their thought processes and critical aspects of the encountered situations” (p. 992).

As these various stages indicate, experts and novices differ in terms of performance and cognitive processes. Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, and Beckett (2005) communicated experts’ knowledge, ability to organize knowledge, memory, problem-solving skills, efficiency, innovativeness, and adaptability are more developed. Experts have a breadth and depth of rich, contextualized, and domain-specific knowledge (Berliner, 2001), which they are able to connect, prioritize, and integrate more meaningfully than non-experts (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; Brownell & Leko, 2014). According to Ericsson (2008), “superior performance requires the acquisition of complex integrated systems of representations for the execution, monitoring, planning, and analyses of performance” (p. 993). Also, experts spend less energy learning and remembering new information due to processes that have become automatic. Because experts obtain automaticity of repetitive operations, working memory is freed to focus on higher levels of cognitive activity.
(Berliner, 2001). However, automaticity of performance can also lead to arrested development if individuals do not continually seek to exceed their current level of performance through actively setting new goals and higher performance standards (Ericsson, 2008).

Also, how experts solve problems is representative of their rich, integrated knowledge bases (Swanson, Connor, & Cooney, 1990). Experts are more proficient in recognizing and interpreting patterns (Brownell & Leko, 2014), so problem solving becomes more efficient, prompt, and accurate (Bransford et al., 2005). Additionally, whereas novice teachers solve problems by determining possible solutions, expert teachers placed priority on defining and representing the problem as well as determining possible solutions (Swanson, Connor, & Cooney, 1990).

Bransford et al. (2005) also pointed out the difference between a routine and adaptive expert. Routine experts become increasingly efficient at performing core tasks, whereas adaptive experts are more flexible and continually restructure core ideas, beliefs, and competencies. This restructuring may make experts less efficient but improve propensity for innovation (Bransford et al., 2005) and provide agency for the development of rich, integrated knowledge bases that enhance adaptive expertise (Berliner, 2001). However, domain-specific knowledge minus the fluidity required for adaptability could lead to “stereotypic behaviors and rigid adherence to inappropriate methods” (Berliner, 2001, p. 473).

For teacher expertise, Berliner (2001) and Ropo (2004) reported on propositions that differentiate experts from novices. Berliner listed eight propositions: (a) expert teachers excel mainly in their own domain and in particular contexts; (b) expert teachers
develop automaticity for the repetitive operations that are needed to accomplish their goals; (c) expert teachers are more opportunistic and flexible in their teaching than are novices; (d) expert teachers are more sensitive to the task demands and social situations surrounding them when solving problems; (e) expert teachers represent problems in qualitatively different ways than do novices; (f) expert teachers have faster and more accurate pattern recognition capabilities; (g) expert teachers perceive more meaningful patterns in the domain in which they are experienced; and (h) expert teachers may begin to solve problems slower, but they bring richer and more personal sources of information to bear on the problems that they are trying to solve. Ropo listed six propositions: (a) expertise develops in narrow field of knowledge that is tightly bound to a context; (b) experts have automatic ways of reacting to frequently recurring situations; (c) compared to novices, experts are more sensitive to individual students in class situations and the characteristics of task situations; (d) expert teachers are faster and more accurate in their observations; (e) expert teachers take longer to represent a problem to themselves but end up with better representation of it; and (f) compared to novices, expert knowledge is wider concerning levels of abstraction and more hierarchically organized.

Thus far, three important topics have been addressed in regards to professional expertise and teacher expertise: defining expertise, expertise development, and differences between experts and novices in terms of performance and cognitive processes. A final important topic for attention involves approaches for analyzing expertise. Three approaches are considered here: verbal reports, think alouds, and
cognitive task analysis (CTA). Additionally, suggestions for judging expertise will be examined.

Fox, Ericsson, and Best (2011) communicated the importance of “valid methods for studying thoughts and subjective experiences” (p. 316) in order to learn more about the cognitions of experts. Verbal reports (i.e., asking participants to describe or explain their problem solving processes) have been the common method since the inception of psychological study (Ericsson, 2002). During the 1920s, John Watson, the founder of behaviorism, proposed what is now known as the think aloud (Ericsson, 2002). Since the 1980s, Ericsson and colleagues have studied this method further (Ericsson, 2002). Study of these two methods for learning about thoughts and subjective experiences has shown that verbal reports encourage reactivity (Fox, Ericsson, & Best, 2011), meaning that participants may alter their performance on a task due to awareness of observation. On the other hand, the think aloud method typically does not alter performance, and participants’ provision of thought processes during task performance actually improves performance of that task (Fox et al., 2011). One major caveat when using the think aloud method, however, is that participants need more time to complete a task.

Clark, Feldon, van Merrienboer, Yates, and Early (2008) reported that CTA generates information on knowledge and thought processes that experts use while performance of tasks requiring integrated knowledge bases (e.g., automated, conscious). Using a variety of interview and observation strategies with experts who are reliably successful in their performances, CTA yields information on performance objectives and standards, equipment, and conceptual and procedural knowledge. Like the think aloud method, CTA results in more effective performance of a task (Feldon,
In Feldon’s (2007) review of empirical research of expert recall, CTA resulted in more effective instruction. However, experts have difficulty articulating their thought processes (Feldon, 2007), and CTA would not likely be used “to support a constructivist context for learning new skills” (Clark, Feldon, van Merrienboer, Yates, & Early, 2008, p. 591).

When judging expertise, Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely (2007) offered five suggestions. First, they reported that individual accounts of expertise are often unreliable for various reasons (e.g., bias, selective recall, false memory). Secondly, many people are wrongly believed to possess expertise. Ericsson et al. (2007) reminded that expertise is demonstrated by measureable, consistently superior performance. Thirdly, intuition or “trusting your gut” can lead you down the wrong path because expertise cannot come without considerable practice, reflection, and analysis. Fourthly, expertise cannot be improved by improving methods for identification; rather, the key to improvement is consistent and controlled efforts. Finally, expertise is not captured by knowledge management systems, which are merely repositories of images, documents, and routines that people can view as they problem solve. Ericsson et al. concluded there are no shortcuts to gaining genuine expertise.

Summary. The literature on professional expertise and teacher expertise has several strengths. For instance, profound consideration of expertise has persisted for over 50 years. Scholars have studied expertise in various fields (e.g., chess, physics, music, medicine, the military, education, sports), from various theoretical perspectives (e.g., individual difference, expert-performance, social learning), and with participants at various stages of expertise (e.g., novice, expert). Expertise has been defined in various
ways in regards to knowledge, cognitive characteristics and processes, and reproducibly superior performance. The development of expertise has also been conceptualized in various ways (e.g., through facilitation of deliberate practice, in terms of learning within communities of practice, as stages). Additionally, various approaches for the analysis of expertise have been examined (e.g., verbal reports, think aloud, cognitive task analysis). Overall, it has been established that understanding and studying professional expertise and teacher expertise is complex and dynamic, and experts are represented by rich, integrated, domain-oriented, contextual knowledge; extensive professional experience; peer nominations; standards for performance; deliberate practice; motivation; adaptability; and superior outcomes.

However, there are some gaps in the literature. For example, in order to enhance our understanding of expertise, Smith and Strahan (2004) suggested researchers learn prototypes of expertise until it is possible to develop a prototype of the multitude of prototypes. Looking at the costs and benefits of expertise will also expand our understanding of expertise (Sternberg & Frensch, 1992). To learn more about teacher expertise, further research can address factors other than experience that lead to expertise (Swanson et al., 1990). To contribute to our understanding of the development of expertise, researchers should work to determine generalizable characteristics across experts across domains (e.g., individual differences; Ericsson, 2014) and structures mediating performance of individual experts that generalize across domains (e.g., training methods, social factors; Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Further, studies must include more diverse samples of participants in a variety of settings (Feldon, 2007). Additionally, to learn more about procedures for analyzing expertise,
future research could address methods of knowledge elicitation, locate causes for errors in participant self-reports, and carefully specify procedures for participant verbalization (Feldon, 2007; Fox et al., 2011).

In sum, professional expertise and teacher expertise is comprised of more than accumulated knowledge and extensive experience. Although it is possible that experts may possess innate abilities or talents, professional expertise and teacher expertise is likely developed through long-term, domain-specific, facilitated, deliberate practice. Experts think and perform in qualitatively different ways than non-experts, and expert teachers are able to do so in socially and culturally situated, complex contexts.

**Effective Instructional Practices and Teacher Competencies for Students with LD**

Instruction for students with LD is more complex than for students without disabilities, as “students with learning disabilities are a heterogeneous sample, and no single treatment approach can be recommended for these students” (Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998, p. 278). Therefore, it is important for teachers to know and practice effective pedagogy for their students with LD in their classrooms. In order to best serve students with LD during writing instruction, it is best that teachers not only have expertise in writing instruction but also general effective instructional practices and how to implement these practices effectively. Three important topics in regards to general effective instructional practices for students with LD are discussed below: general practices across subject areas, effective differentiated instruction, and teacher competency for teachers of students with LD.

For the academic performance of students with LD, there are general practices that have been shown to be effective across subject areas (Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Vaught, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). In particular, both Swanson (1999)
and Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) promoted the use of a combined direct instruction and strategy instruction model for instruction. These researchers noted that, although these instructional methods are influential when implemented separately, the combined model is the most effective for improving academic outcomes for students with LD.

Additionally, Swanson and Hoskyn (1998), from their meta-analysis of 30 years of research within the field of LD and 180 articles, found sequencing, drill-repetition-practice, controlling task difficulty, segmentation of information, technology, small interactive groups, directed questioning/responding, supplementing teacher instruction (e.g., homework), and strategy cuing to be effective instructional components in order to improve outcomes. Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) communicated three other major findings in their meta-analysis. First, magnitude of change related to treatment was greatest in the domains of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and creativity (the magnitude of change related to treatment for writing was moderate). Second, how researchers defined LD influenced treatment outcome; for example, studies with small discrepancies between intelligence and reading produced the highest effect sizes. Lastly, methodological outcomes had a significant variance on outcome; for example, studies that controlled for variations between treatment and control conditions in terms of setting, teacher, and number of instructional steps yielded higher effect sizes (this weakness did not include significant variance related to treatment, however).

Vaughn, Gersten, and Chard (2000) summarized “the critical findings of recent research syntheses funded by the Office of Special Education Programs and the National Center for Learning Disabilities” (p. 99). In addition to interactive small groups, they noted procedural facilitators, interactive dialogue between teachers and students...
and between students, strategies to enhance task persistence and task difficulty, and making instruction visible and explicit as principles of instruction for students with LD. For reading and writing instruction, they emphasized interactive dialogue as well as ongoing, systematic feedback.

Vaughn, Gersten, and Chard (2000) also highlighted content enhancement strategies. Deshler et al. (2001) expressed these strategies in terms of routines, routines for organizing information, understanding main concepts and ideas, recalling important ideas, and students applying what they learned. Deshler stated that these routines are “based on several validated instructional principles” (p. 83) from research that has shown students learn more when they are actively involved in the learning process; abstract, complex concepts are presented in concrete forms; information is tied to previously learned information; important information is distinguished from unimportant information; the relationships among the pieces of information are made explicit; and students are explicitly shown how to learn specific types of content. (p. 83)

For adolescents with LD, Swanson and Hoskyn (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 93 group design studies from 30 years of research. Some findings echo findings from the aforementioned meta-analyses. Swanson and Hoskyn found that explicit practice and advance organization contributed significant variance to effect size, and explicit practice contributed significant variance. Studies with explicit practice contained a variety of instructional activities, including review and practice, repeated practice, sequenced reviews, daily feedback, and/or weekly reviews. They also found seven other instructional components that were highly represented in the intervention studies: questioning, sequencing and segmentation, explicit skill modeling, small-group setting, indirect teacher activities (e.g., homework), technology, and scaffolding.
In 2003, Swanson and Deshler addressed how to convert this meta-analysis to practice; in other words, they addressed how teachers can apply advance organization and explicit practice in their classrooms. These authors emphasized application in the form of content enhancement routines (e.g., interactive content presentation, identification of key concepts, provision of feedback) and learning strategy instruction (e.g., verbal practice, controlled practice and feedback, advance practice and feedback, generalization of strategies). Deshler (2005) argued that “it’s not simply a matter of teaching validated practices, however. It is also important that instruction be highly intensive” (p. 123). Schumaker and Deshler (2009) agreed instruction for students with LD must be intensive. They revealed that under typical general education conditions students with LD will likely not receive instruction necessary to increase achievement to that of their peers without disabilities. Deshler stated that intensity can be achieved through progressive pacing, frequent question-answer interactions, frequent activities that require a physical response (e.g., pointing, writing), reflective or open-ended questions, and engaging student interest.

Beyond knowledge of effective general instructional practices, expertise in implementing these practices is essential for improving academic outcomes for students with LD. Differentiating instruction may be used to this end. Although there is a dearth of research on the implementation of differentiation in the classroom, there is wide consensus that the most effective instruction including differentiation is instruction designed to meet the learning needs of each learner (Gregory & Chapman, 2007; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013; Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012).
Effective differentiated instruction has several essential tenets. Different authors/researchers present this information in unique ways, but the principles and features are all comparable. After reviewing 14 popular books on differentiated instruction (Bender, 2012; Chapman & King, 2009; Dodge, 2005; Gregory & Chapman, 2007; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004; King-Shaver & Hunter, 2003; Nordlund, 2003; Northey, 2005; O’Brien & Guiney, 2001; Smith & Throne, 2009; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013; Yatvin, 2004), eight essential principles were devised in regards to implementing effective differentiated instruction. A teacher implementing effective differentiated instruction is recommended to have (a) a well-designed plan for teaching the lesson (including lesson chunking), (b) clear lesson objectives, (c) quality assessment (including pre-assessment/activation of background knowledge, ongoing assessment, summative assessment, and student self-assessment), (d) an environment that supports learning (including consideration of the physical environment, leading students and managing lessons and routines, celebration and praise, higher order thinking, and focused and specific feedback), (e) quality practices and activities (e.g., graphic organizers, jigsaw, 4MAT, learning contracts, tic-tac-toe, orbitals), (f) instruction that responds to student variance (including differentiation of environment, grouping, content, process, product, and feedback as well as differentiation according to student readiness, interest, and learning profile), (g) scaffolding, and (h) alignment between objectives, assessment strategies, and instruction responding to student variance.

Planning is integral for putting it all together to create and conduct the most appropriate, suitable, and stimulating lessons. Northey (2005) recommended teachers
ask themselves five questions in regards to planning: (a) what will students learn? (b) how will you determine acceptable evidence? (c) what differentiated instruction activities will maximize learning for all students? (d) what materials will I need to teach the lesson? and (e) how will I present the lesson to students and in what order? Likewise, Gregory and Kuzmich (2004) recommended unit-based planning for data driven differentiation for the standards-based classroom in order to keep the focus on student achievement. This approach consists attention to standards and benchmarks, key concepts for students to remember and use, relevance of the lesson, critical unit questions, meaningful skills, pre-assessment design, ways to pre-assess the gap, chunking or outlining the unit, and description of the final assessment.

For students with LD, differentiated instruction can be valuable (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005). Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, and Reid (2005) argued that because disability “is an enacted, interactional process and not an empirical, stable fact or condition” (p. 194), planning responsive lessons for all students in an inclusive classrooms is more appropriate than modifying one lesson for students with disabilities. One important consideration for the implementation of differentiated instruction for students with LD in this regard is the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and differentiation within a response to intervention (RTI) framework (Bender, 2012). According to Bender (2012), the CCSS will impact how teachers plan to differentiate their instruction in reading and math because any differentiation will have to occur within the CCSS framework. Further, Bender recommended strategies for administration of differentiated assessment practices within an RTI framework. He stated that universal screening and progress monitoring are integral formative
assessments, and gave recommendations for differentiated assessment at Tiers 1, 2, and 3. For Tier 1, he suggested authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, and digital assessment. For Tiers 2 and 3, he suggested criterion-reference assessment and various curriculum-based measurements (e.g., words per minute, maze, EasyCBM).

Additionally, Bender (2012) discussed the benefit of a universal design for learning and the use of technology (e.g., webquests, blogging, wikis, instructional games, social networking, cloud computing) for students with LD. Like Swanson (1999), Swanson and Hoskyn (1998), and Swanson and Deshler (2003), Bender supported the use of instructional support strategies (e.g., scaffolding, content enhancements, advance organizers, peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching) and cognitive strategy instruction that emphasizes self-monitoring and self-regulation with students with LD. Furthermore, Yatvin (2004) recommended collaboration with specialists within the inclusive classroom in order to improve instructional alignment; these specialists can work with groups of students as well as individuals. Yatvin also recommended moving beyond the curriculum by sharing power and control and becoming an advisor and facilitator in order to encourage student leadership, entrepreneurship, and invention.

Finally, respectful grading practices are an important issue for students with LD (Bender, 2012; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). For grading, Tomlinson and Moon (2013) noted two common misconceptions. One common misconception is that differentiation is having different goals for different students or grading students on different goals; rather, differentiation is supporting students to reach the same goals through monitoring and feedback. A second common misconception is differentiated grading is grading
struggling students easier and advanced students harder. Rather, Tomlinson and Moon made five recommendations: (a) basing grades on clearly specified learning goals, (b) using grades that are criterion-based, not comparative or norm-based, (c) not overgrading student work, (d) using only quality assessments, and (e) adjusting the grading system to measure progress and not averaging the mean which is skewed most likely due to outliers (e.g., like zeros given in place of missing work when an incomplete might motivate students to be more accountable for their work).

Thus far, two important topics have been addressed in regards to attending to the needs of students with LD: general effective practices and the effective implementation of those practices through the use of differentiated instruction. A final important topic for attention is teacher competency to teach students with LD. Various professional organizations, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), have developed standards for what teachers should be able to know and do. According to these sets of standards, knowing effective general practice and how best to implement those practices are only pieces of the pie. See Figure 2-1 for a comparison of the standards. Two standards are not represented in this figure: CEC addressed language development and communication, and DLD addressed clinical and field experience.

One organization, the CCSSO, developed The Interstate Assessment and Support Consortium (inTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards in order to provide a resource to set a standard for teaching performance. The CCSSO (2011) stated the purpose of the document was to “serve as a resource for states, districts, professional organizations, teacher education programs, teachers, and others as they develop
policies and programs to prepare, license, support, evaluate, and reward today’s teachers” (p. 5). Teachers could conduct their professional practice according to these standards in order to positively impact the students with LD in their classrooms.

There are 10 standards broken into four categories (i.e., the learner and learning, content knowledge, instructional practice, professional responsibility), and each standard contains criteria for performances, essential knowledge, and critical dispositions of effective teachers. The standards address (a) learner development, (b) learning differences, (c) learning environments, (d) content knowledge, (e) application of content, (f) student assessment, (g) planning for instruction, (h) instructional strategies, (i) professional learning and ethical practice, and (j) leadership and collaboration.

Examples of performances of various standards include teacher creation of access to resources and supports to meet particular learning differences and teacher implementation of supports for learner literacy development across content areas.

Examples of essential knowledge of various standards include teacher understanding of creative thinking process for engaging learners in producing original work and teacher knowledge of how to use learner data to analyze practice and differentiate accordingly.

Examples of critical dispositions of various standards include the teacher embracing the challenge of continuous improvement and change and the teacher taking responsibility for promoting learners’ growth and development. The organization noted, however, that the criteria for performances, essential knowledge, and critical dispositions are not intended to be a checklist but depictions of what a standard may appear when operationalized.
The CEC developed standards specifically for teachers of students with disabilities. These standards are comparable to the inTASC standards (Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, & Leko, 2013). The 10 CEC standards address the knowledge and skills of beginning special education teachers (SETs) regarding (a) foundations of the special education field, (b) the development and characteristics of learners, (c) individual learning differences, (d) instructional strategies, (e) learning environments and social interactions, (f) language development and communication, (g) instructional planning, (h) student assessment, (i) professional and ethical practice, and (j) collaboration with families and other educational professionals.

The CEC tailors these standards for SETs of students with different disabilities (e.g., deafness, emotional and/or behavioral disorders, blindness or visual impairment, developmental disabilities). For SETs of students with LD, knowledge competencies include but are not limited to etiologies of LD, evidence-based practices validated for specific characteristics of learners and settings, effects of cultural and linguistic differences on growth and development, relationships among reading instruction methods and LD, and personal cultural biases and differences that affect one’s teaching. Examples of skills competencies include: articulate personal philosophy of special education, modify the pace of instruction and provide organizational cues, teach self-advocacy, use functional assessments to develop intervention plans, evaluate and modify instructional practices in response to ongoing assessment data, conduct self-evaluation of instruction, and foster respectful and beneficial relationships between families and professionals.
Furthermore, the Division of Learning Disabilities (DLD) of the CEC, which consists of a myriad of educational professionals and others, conducted a survey of 746 university-based and field-based experts in the field of LD with the purpose of developing a list of competencies devised to guide the preparation of teachers of students with LD (Graves, Landers, Lokerson, Luchow, & Horvath, 1993). Like CEC, DLD addressed competencies in regards to knowledge and skills. DLD categorized 209 competencies into 10 categories: (a) nature and needs of students with LD, (b) academic support areas: study skills, consumer skills, and career/vocational skills, (c) curriculum for support areas and modification of school core curriculum, (d) assessment, methods, use, and interpretation, (e) classroom assessment, management, and motivation, (f) collaborative and consultation skills, (g) specialized instructional strategies, technologies, and materials, (h) historical and legal aspects, (i) nontraditional practices and procedures, and (j) clinical/field experiences. Knowledge competencies include but are not limited to knowledge of current research in student management and motivation, language development, the instructional sequence and relationships of the component parts of the writing process, and state and local practices. Examples of skills competencies include skill in designing a learning environment that provides for feedback from peers and adults, evaluating new theories related to LDs as they appear, and interacting with students and demonstrating highest respect for their person. The authors caution, however, that these competencies are not a compilation of discrete skills, but pieces of a whole.

**Summary.** The literature base on general effective instructional practice and teacher competency for students with LD has several strengths. For instance, practices
that enhance academic outcomes for students with LD have been developed to guide instruction (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Rigorous meta-analyses have been conducted (Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Swanson & Hoskyn, 2001), and Swanson & Deshler (2003) addressed how to convert a meta-analysis of intervention studies for adolescents with LD to practice. The Swanson and Deshler publication is a benefit to teachers, as Therrien, Zaman, and Banda (2011) argued that meta-analyses could better benefit teachers when instructional recommendations are provided to guide practice and inform programmatic decisions. Across the literature reviewed, including the literature on DI, practices that enhance academic outcomes for students with LD included intensive instruction, instructional planning, instructional alignment, creating a supportive environment, responding to student variance, collaboration with others, professional learning, and implementing quality practice. Quality practices included advance organization, assessment, direct instruction, explicit instruction, feedback, interactive dialogue, scaffolding, interactive small groups, strategy instruction, and technology. Also, the standards for teacher competency, from three prominent educational organizations dedicated to improving educational outcomes of all students, are largely consistent. This consistency indicates there is professional consensus for what teachers should know and be able to do.

There are some gaps in the literature, however. One gap, which Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) stated as a limitation of their meta-analysis, is researchers should work to operationalize the term LD when conducting research with and for students with LD in order to increase precision in predicting performance outcomes. Additionally, Vaughn, Gersten, and Chard (2000) expressed that educational attainment for students with LD
are not acceptable, so more instructional research needs to be conducted with and for students with LD. Also, as stated earlier, there is a dearth of research on the implementation of DI in the classroom, as most literature on DI is theoretical (this is exemplified in the research on writing in the following section of this chapter). Finally, it might be beneficial to learn how much impact various teacher competencies have on student outcomes as well as which competencies matter most.

In sum, teachers of students with LD require expertise in effective general instructional practices and how to implement them effectively in the classroom. This expertise calls for these teachers to have essential knowledge, skills, and critical dispositions. For writing, teachers of students with LD must also know effective writing instructional practices and practices for implementation that will benefit a heterogeneous group of students.

**Research on Writing in Middle School Language Arts for Students with and without LD**

Empirical research on writing in middle school language arts was located and analyzed for review. In order to gather appropriate information, research studies were identified through searching electronic databases, including (a) searching relevant educational journals, including *Reading and Writing*, *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *Journal of Educational Research*, *Journal of Special Education*, *Exceptional Children*, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, and *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice* and (b) searching electronic databases (i.e., EBSCO and Google Scholar) using approximately 55 variations of the following search terms: expert, expertise, effective, teacher, English, language arts, writing, composition, differentiation, differentiated instruction,
individualized instruction, instruction, pedagogy, special education, learning disabilities, secondary, middle school, and adolescents.

The inclusion criteria for this review were as follows. Chosen literature for review included (a) empirical research from peer-reviewed journals, (b) instruction in general education or inclusive middle school language arts classrooms, and (c) one of two topics: effective pedagogy for writing or expertise for teaching writing. Literature may include participants that included middle school students with learning disabilities or high-incidence reading or writing disabilities. This literature review did not include studies that centered on English language learners, multicultural education, urban education, gifted education, learning in content area classes, teacher education, or students with low-incidence disabilities.

The literature gathered was further examined to determine alignment with inclusion/exclusion criteria. This examination resulted in 52 articles, 12 of which were qualitative studies. Fourteen articles comprised of meta-analyses or literature reviews, while the remaining 40 studies were of varying designs (e.g., experimental, single case, qualitative). See Table 2-1 for an outline of all studies.

In the following subsections, recurring effective practices across research will be discussed, and one meta-analysis (Graham & Perin, 2007a; 2007b) will be utilized as a foundation for the discussion. The findings of this meta-analysis align with many findings across studies, more than any other meta-analysis or review. In addition, Graham and Perin addressed research quality by assigning each study in the meta-analysis a score from 0-9 based on standards set for group experimental and quasi-experimental research in special education established by Gersten et al. (2005); most
studies received an average score. Yet, results of this review indicate additional salient effective practices that are not addressed in the Graham and Perin (2007a; 2007b) meta-analysis. These additional practices will be discussed in a succeeding subsection.

**Meta-analysis of Effective Instructional Practices for Teaching Writing**

The foundational meta-analysis for discussion, by Graham and Perin (2007a) and Graham and Perin (2007b), consisted of 123 experimental and quasi-experimental studies with students with and without disabilities in grades four through 12 with the purpose of identifying “effective instructional practices for teaching writing to adolescents” (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 445). About half of the studies included students with and without disabilities in middle grades. Of the studies with students in middle grades, about two-thirds took place in regular education settings, one-quarter contained both random assignment along with a regular education setting, and two writing genres were included (i.e., narrative, expository). Of the studies that took place in regular education settings, only two included participants who were both representative of “writers in typical classrooms” (p. 452) and learners with special needs. Summary effect sizes were only determined for treatments that contained four or more effect sizes. Each study included a measure of writing quality as well as reliable scores of measurement of writing quality.

The researchers found that studies could be categorized into 14 treatment conditions. The 14 categories are as follows: (a) the process approach to writing instruction; (b) grammar instruction, sentence-combining instruction; (c) strategy instruction in planning, revising, and editing; (d) summarization instruction, (e) text structure instruction; (f) prewriting activities; (g) inquiry activities; (h) procedural facilitation; (i) peer assistance when writing; (j) the study of models; (k) assigning
product goals; (l) feedback; (m) word processing; and (n) extra writing. The researchers concluded 11 practices were identified as effective. These practices, from highest to lowest positive effect size, included (a) writing strategies, (b) summarization, (c) collaborative writing, (d) specific product goals, (e) word processing, (f) sentence combining, (g) prewriting, (h) inquiry activities, (i) process writing approach, (j) study of models, and (k) writing for content learning (Graham & Perin, 2007b).

A Comparison of Identified Key Practices

Each of the eleven practices found effective in the Graham and Perin meta-analysis (2007a; 2007b) will be discussed in relation to the other studies included in this review. Prewriting and the process writing approach will be discussed jointly because prewriting is an integral stage within the writing process.

Per this review, writing strategies was found to be most effective instructional element. In the foundational meta-analysis, writing strategies yielded an effect size of 0.82. Furthermore, writing strategies were addressed in almost half of the studies within this review. Utilizing writing strategies in the classroom provides students with opportunities to engage with explicit and systematic instruction with the goal of independent strategy use (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Across these studies, researchers examined the use of writing strategies planning, drafting, revising, editing, paragraph construction, managing the composing process, and self-regulation of the strategy (De la Paz, 2001; Graham & Harris, 1999; Rogers & Graham, 2008; Sexton, Harris, & Graham, 1998; Steelman, 1994). Additionally, researchers examined the use of writing strategies across writing genre (e.g., narrative, expository, persuasive). In each instance, strategies for writing improved students’ writing quality when students wrote by hand as well as computer. In addition, Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, Hammerness,
Wyckoff, Boyd, & Lankford (2010) found that differences between high value added and low value added teachers are statistically significant for certain practices, including explicit strategy instruction.

Some studies (De La Paz, 2001; Fidalgo, Torrance, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, Alvarez, 2015; Graham & Harris, 1999; Limpo & Alves, 2014; Sexton, Harris, & Graham, 1998) discussed explicit strategy instruction in combination with “an approach for helping students learn specific strategies” (Graham & Perin, 2007b, pg. 15) for writing titled Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). SRSD contains six recursive instructional stages that include self-regulation; interactive learning; and individualized, scaffolded, criterion-based instruction. The six stages include developing background knowledge, discussing the strategy, modeling the strategy, memorizing the strategy, supporting students’ use of the strategy, and independent performance. In research that included an examination of SRSD, the approach improved the writing quality, quantity, and/or self-efficacy of students with and without LD.

Summarization attained an effect size of 0.82. Only one other study within this review discussed summarization (Kaldenberg, Ganzeveld, Hosp, & Rodgers, 2016), a meta-analysis with the purpose of identifying common characteristics of writing interventions in single case research. According to Graham and Perin (2007b), “summarization approaches studies ranged from explicitly teaching summarization strategies to enhancing summarization by progressively ‘fading’ models of a good summary” (pg. 16). Kaldenberg, Ganzeveld, Hosp, and Rodgers (2016) communicated that systematic instruction on the summarization process works to improve the writing of students with disabilities.
Collaborative writing, students working together during each stage of the writing process (i.e., planning, drafting, revising, editing), attained an effect size of 0.75. Collaborative writing benefits students writing quality via peer support. Across studies, collaborative writing was addressed in various ways, including cloud-based collaborative writing (Yim, Warschauer, Zheng, & Lawrence, 2014; Zheng, Lawrence, Warschauer, & Lin, 2015), generative learning (Langer, 2001), interactive work (Hillocks, 1984), and students sharing work during the publishing stage of the writing process (Martin & Lambert, 2015). Extending the definition of collaborative writing offered by Graham and Perin, four studies (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Cohen & Riel, 1989; Nielson, 2002; Werderich, 2006) addressed dialogue as a tool for improving students’ writing. Dialogue, like collaborative writing, includes communication between writers to support writing quality. Dialogue between the teacher and student was also substantiated as an effective practice (Cohen & Riel, 1989) and discussion-based approaches, when coupled with high academic demands, were significantly related to follow-up assessments near the end of the school year (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003).

Graham and Perin (2007b) stated that setting product goals “involves assigning students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete,” (p. 17) and includes establishing the purpose for writing as well as goals for the final product. This effective practice obtained an effect size of 0.70. Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000) noted that “well-specified goals provide clear direction” and “appropriate subgoals motivate efforts to complete learning tasks by making it possible to monitor progress toward the overall goal” (p. 695). Parr and Limbrick (2010) discussed goals in
terms of awareness of purpose, aims for a lesson, alignment between learning aims and activities, and success criteria. Torrance, Fidalgo, and Robledo (2015) found, however, that teaching process strategies, versus teaching setting product goals, also increased student time on-task.

Utilizing a word-processing equipment to create writing products attained an effect size of 0.55. Typing text versus writing text can assist students with deleting or moving text easily as well as spelling and producing neat and legible writing. In three studies across literature (Graham & Perin, 2007a; 2007b; Hetzroni & Shrieber, 2004; Rogers & Graham, 2008), utilizing word processing software improved writing quality, especially among low-achieving writers. Other studies (Hutchison & Woodward, 2014; Martin & Lambert, 2015; Rowley, Carlson, & Miller, 1998; Tanimoto, Thompson, Berninger, Nagy, & Abbott, 2015; Thompson et al., 2016) discussed utilizing technology in more sophisticated ways, including employing digital tools (e.g., iPads, computers) to support multimodal communication, exposure to digital genres (e.g., emails, tweets, reviews, blogs), digital writing, and computer-aided writing instruction. Computer-aided writing incorporates “user-adaptive computer-aided instruction that explicitly models the cognitive processes of composing for developmental writing, and is integrated with classroom composition instruction” (Rowley, Carlson, & Miller, 1998, pg. 259).

Sentence combining, with an effect size of 0.50, “involves teaching students to construct more complex and sophisticated sentences through exercises in which two or more basic sentences are combined into a single sentence” (Graham & Perin, 2007b, pg. 18). According to Graham and Perin (2007b), most studies that address sentence combining do so in comparison with traditional grammar instruction. Across studies,
research of writing at the sentence level discussed sentence construction (Rogers & Graham, 2008) and using computerized writing instruction via iPads to improve sentence composing (Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, & Abbott, 2015).

Process writing involves familiarizing students with each stage of the writing process, including prewriting, through support, interaction, reflection, evaluation, mini-lessons, and extended and systematic instruction, and self-reflection (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Both process writing and prewriting obtained an effect size of 0.32. About one-quarter of the reviewed studies incorporated an examination of process writing in some way. Process writing may be been addressed as Graham and Perin described it, or it may have been addressed in terms of its parts (i.e., planning, prewriting, revision, story mapping, utilizing a computer based graphic organizer; Dinkins, 2014; Evmenova et al., 2016; Kaldenberg, Ganzeveld, Hosp, & Rodgers, 2016; Kang, McKenna, Arden, Ciullo, 2015). Graham and Sandmel (2011) conducted a meta-analysis to learn whether “process writing instruction improves the quality of students’ writing and motivation to write” (p. 396). Findings indicated that the process writing approach resulted in statistically significant improvements in writing quality for average achieving students; however, it did not result in statistically significant improvements in student motivation or writing quality for struggling writers.

Inquiry activities means students participate “in activities that help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task by analyzing immediate, concrete data (comparing and contrasting cases or collecting and evaluating evidence)” (Graham & Perin, 2007b, pg. 19). Like process writing and prewriting, inquiry activities attained an effect size of 0.32. Graham and Perin (2007b) noted that effective inquiry practices
include a clear goal, analysis of concrete and immediate data, use of specific strategies to conduct the analysis, and applying what was learned. Of the reviewed studies, only one other study, a meta-analysis conducted by Hillocks (1984), included discussion of the effectiveness of inquiry. However, this study was a formative report of academic literature.

Studying models of good writing means students are exposed to at least two models of excellent writing for the type of writing being taught (e.g., narrative, argumentative). Studying models was assigned an effect size of 0.25. Studying models benefits students through analysis of key characteristics and emulation of those characteristics. Only two other studies addressed studying models of good writing (Fidalgo, Torrance, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, Alvarez, 2015; Neilson, 2012). Fidalgo, Torrance, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, Alvarez (2015) found that observation and group reflection on a mastery model mattered more for writing quality than direct instruction or peer feedback. Neilson (2012) addressed utilizing good models of writing during self-assessment of a writing product.

Writing for content learning, with an effect size of 0.23, enhances “students’ learning of content material” (Graham & Perin, 2007b, pg. 20) through writing-to-learn activities. Two other studies in this review included discussion of writing in other content areas. Lee, Patall, Cawthon, and Steingut (2014) found drama-based pedagogical interventions had a positive effect on learning in science and ELA classrooms. Further, Foxworth, Mason, and Hughes (2016) found that, with the use of narrative writing strategies and SRSD, students’ narrative writing skills improved and students transferred skills to social studies or history classes.
Additional Salient Practices

Thus far, eleven effective practices for teaching writing to students with and without LD have been discussed. Seven additional practices not delineated in Graham and Perin’s (2007a; 2007b) meta-analysis, however, were recurring throughout the reviewed literature. From most to least observed in the literature, these practices include (a) feedback, (b) differentiation, (c) assessment, (d) modeling, (e) procedural facilitation, (f) spelling, (g) handwriting, (h) utilizing the four levels of language.

Feedback was addressed in nine studies in the reviewed literature, two of which were meta-analyses (Gersten & Baker, 2001; Graham, Herbert, & Harris, 2015). Feedback includes information about a student’s writing performance or conceptual understandings of the writing process and “indicates ways to improve performance or understanding” (Wilson, Olinghouse, & Andrada, 2014, pg. 94). Effective teachers of writing in two studies were found to implement feedback in their classrooms (Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Preus, 2012). Feedback provided by a teacher, peer, or automated feedback via computer software positively impacts writing quality and quantity (Graham, Herbert, & Harris, 2015; Ware, 2014; Wilson, Olinghouse, & Andrada, 2014). Also, Gersten and Baker (2001) found that teachers of students with LD should provide explicit teaching of “structures for providing extensive feedback to students on the quality of their writing from either teachers or peers” (pg. 251). However, feedback via cloud-based collaborative writing was not associated with writing quantity (Zheng, Lawrence, Warschauer, & Lin, 2015).

Differentiation was addressed in four of the reviewed studies (Behizadeh, 2014; Freedman, Delp, & Crawford, 2005; Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Preus, 2012). Effective ELA teachers in the study conducted by Parr and Limbrick (2010) differentiated instruction to
meet students’ varying learning needs. The remaining studies addressed differentiation mainly in terms of authentic instruction, authentic writing, critical and social justice pedagogy, higher order thinking, choice, and opportunity.

Assessment, addressed in four reviewed studies (Andrade, Wang, Du, & Akawi, 2009; Codd, Petscher, & Truckenmiller, 2015; Nielson, 2012), was addressed in terms of student-self assessment as well as teacher assessment. For self-assessment, students should be taught to rate and evaluate their own writing, develop criteria for self-assessment, and utilize holistic and analytic methods for self-assessment (Nielson, 2012). When students engage in rubric-referenced self-assessment, self-efficacy for writing improves (Andrade, Wang, Du, & Akawi, 2009). For teacher instruction of assessment, it is important to motivate students to self-assess, allow sufficient class time for assessment as well as revision, and regularly assess effectiveness of classroom methods (Nielson, 2012). Further, Codd, Petscher, and Truckenmiller (2015) found that CBM indices for writing represented moderate to strong predictive validity to corresponding outcomes on an ELA state test in Northeast America.

However, Graham, Herbert, and Harris (2015) teachers’ monitoring of students’ writing progress or implementation of the 6+1 Trait Writing model did not meaningfully enhance students’ writing.

The instructional practice “modeling” was discussed in four studies (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Preus, 2012; Rowley, Carlson, & Miller, 1998; Wederich, 2006). Across studies, modeling included instruction to make processes for thinking, reading, or writing explicit. Making processes explicit scaffolded instruction utilizing multiple methods (e.g., graphic organizers, think alouds, computer-aided instruction, examples of quality written
Preus (2012) observed that effective teachers of writing frequently modeled various processes for their students. Werderich (2006) found that effective literacy teachers utilized modeling in journal responses. Rowley, Carlson, & Miller (1998) found that computer-aided writing instruction was effective for explicitly modeling cognitive processes of composing. For students with LD, Gillespie and Graham (2015) noted that some treatments were only effective when explicit instruction, scaffolded instruction, modeling, and guided practice were employed.

Three studies addressed procedural facilitation (Flanagan & Bouck, 2014; Montague & Leavell, 1994; Vazquez & Straub, 2016). Montague and Leavell (1994) refer to procedural facilitation as help provided during instruction that supports cognitive processing (e.g., story grammar cue cards). In their study, students’ writing quantity greatly improved, and increases to writing quality were mild to moderate. Flanagan and Bouck (2014) found that when procedural facilitators employ gradual release, students’ written expression significantly improves. Procedural facilitation can be beneficial when writing by hand or writing in online environments. Vazquez and Straub (2016) communicated that online environments may offer support that would be “impossible in a typical face-to-face environment” (pg. 81).

Spelling instruction was addressed via three studies (Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, & Abbott, 2015; Graham & Santangelo, 2014; Hetzroni & Shrieber, 2004). Graham and Santangelo (2014) conducted a meta-analysis on whether spelling instruction improves students’ spelling, reading, and writing. Teaching spelling improved spelling performance, phonological awareness skills, reading skills, and spelling when writing. Further, Hetzroni & Shrieber (2004) found that, when provided a
word processor, students would improve spelling, oral reading, and organization of written work. Handwriting instruction was addressed in two of the reviewed studies (Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, & Abbott, 2015; Santangelo & Graham, 2016). Santangelo and Graham (2014) conducted a meta-analysis to determine if teaching handwriting improves legibility, fluency, and writing performance. Teaching handwriting by hand and via technology significantly improved legibility, while teaching handwriting by hand significantly improved legibility and fluency. Also, handwriting instruction produced statistically significant gains in the quality, length, and fluency of students' writing. Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, & Abbott (2015) addressed both spelling and handwriting via computerized writing instruction using iPads; this instruction improved handwriting, spelling, and written and oral syntax.

Two studies addressed teaching to the four levels of language systems (Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, & Abbott, 2015; Tanimoto, Thompson, Berninger, Nagy, & Abbott, 2015). The four language systems include listening, speaking, reading, and writing (or learning by ear, mouth, eye, or hand). Both studies addressed engagement of these systems via computerized writing instruction. Tanimoto et al. (2015) noted that lessons that included engagement of the four levels “close in time resulted in significant gains in reading and writing” (pg. 671). Berninger et al. (2015) communicated engagement of the four levels close in time matters for skill transfer versus emphasis of an isolated writing skill.

Summary

The literature base on research on writing in middle school language arts for students with and without LD has several strengths. One strength is that practices that enhance outcomes for students with and without LD during writing have been
developed to enhance instruction. Additionally, this research has taken place in a variety of settings (e.g., varying countries and states, suburban, urban), with a variety of student demographics (students without disabilities, students with varying disabilities, student at varying reading and writing levels), and with a variety of study designs (e.g., experimental, single case, qualitative). Researchers addressed the effects of various writing practices on student writing quality, quantity, and/or self-efficacy. Likely, explicit writing strategy instruction (perhaps while implementing SRSD) was the intervention that incurred the highest student gains in writing across reviewed research.

There are gaps in the literature, however. For instance, more research could be conducted on the use of the process writing approach and grammar instruction for students with LD, as meta-analyses have resulted in conflicting findings. Grammar instruction was found to have negative effects on student outcomes except for student participants in single case studies, and process writing instruction was found to have positive effects for students with and without LD except for one meta-analysis (Graham & Sandmel, 2011) found process writing instruction did not produce positive effects for students with LD. Additionally, more research could be conducted to examine the effect of progress monitoring on students’ writing, as Graham, Herbert, and Harris (2015) found that it did not meaningfully enhance student writing. Cihak and Castle (2011) stated additional research should be conducted to determine how generalization of interventions across settings and writing genres can be fostered.

Moreover, practices only addressed scarcely could be further examined. Graham and Perin (2007b) recommended that research should be conducted to develop new effective instructional practices for writing. Grossman et al. (2010)
proposed for the development of new measures of teaching that can identify features of instruction that improve student achievement as well as multiple measures of student outcomes to support the development of a breadth of academic outcomes. Finally, the concept of teacher expertise was rarely addressed in this literature base. Researchers of writing instruction should address with more consistency whether participating teachers in their studies are experts according to valid measures due to probable implications for the effectiveness of classroom instruction as well as defining what it means to be an expert teacher in this content area.

Conclusion

The literature shows that in order to positively influence secondary students with and without disabilities during writing instruction, teachers need expertise in their domain. This expertise includes a consistent demonstration of competency and successful performance within their social contexts as well as a career-long commitment to develop the behaviors and performances necessary to continue to positively influence their students’ outcomes. Further, this expertise includes knowledge of a plethora of general practices and writing practices as well as knowledge of how to effectively implement those practices.

The literature also shows that there has been considerable attention given to the fields of professional expertise and teacher expertise, general instructional practices, and practices for writing instruction. However, more research is needed to define and describe teacher expertise and the development of teacher expertise. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on effective implementation of differentiated instruction as well as effective writing instruction and its differentiation for students with LD.
The present study sought to address these gaps through investigation of how expert language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with LD at the secondary level. This study also sought to learn the nature of expert language arts teachers writing instruction for students with LD at the secondary level. Then, results can be juxtaposed to literature on effective practice to note comparisons. No other existing empirical study addressing these matters was identified. The findings from this study will likely be useful for researchers and teacher educators alike and may be useful to ultimately improve outcomes of secondary students with LD in inclusive classrooms. Chapter 3 will delineate methods used to address the research questions.
Figure 2-1. Conceptual themes of standards for teacher competency between inTASC, CEC, and DLD
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Introduction to the Methods

This qualitative study had two purposes: (a) to learn how expert middle school language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with LD, and (b) to learn the nature of these teachers’ writing instruction for students with LD. Empirical data collected from expert middle school language arts teachers were examined for analysis according to a constructivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). Data sources, including questionnaires, interviews, observations, and artifacts, were collected and analyzed according to Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory.

Research Design

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, a qualitative research methodology was utilized. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) communicated that qualitative research includes an emphasis “on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured” (p. 8). They also communicated, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings” (p. 3) and attempt to capture an individual’s point of view through detailed observation and interview. These authors emphasized the ability of the observer to transform the world by making it visible through interpretive and material practices. In addition to data collection in natural settings, Creswell (2007) underscored a call to action; a necessity for a complex, deep understanding; participant voice; and research reflexivity when conducting qualitative research. Likewise, researcher reflexivity, participant voice, and appropriateness of methods and theories are essential features of qualitative research.
(Flick, 2009). Further, recorded and written documents have value in qualitative methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) stated, “contrasts between elicited written documents and direct observations may tell a poignant tale . . . [written documents] may elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influence the person” (p. 36). Moreover, she described memo-writing as “pivotal” (Charmaz refers to the researcher reflection journal as “memo-writing”). She communicated that memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers . . . Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process. Writing successive memos throughout the research process keeps you involved in the analysis and helps you to increase the level of abstraction of your ideas. (p. 72)

Qualitative methods were appropriate for this investigation as data were collected in a natural setting (i.e., classrooms), participant voice was examined, and an in-depth description comprised of a call to action (i.e., improving the education of students with LD) was constructed. In addition, methods (i.e., observation, interview) were aligned with the design and researcher reflexivity was examined.

**Theoretical Perspective**

This study utilized a constructionism epistemology and constructivist theoretical perspective. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism rejects the notion of an objective truth. Understanding and meaning are not discovered; rather, they are “constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Crotty differentiated constructionism and constructivism by defining constructionism as “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58) and constructivism as “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58).
Further, Charmaz (2006) communicated that constructivism means that both data and analysis are “created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (p. 130).

This theoretical perspective influenced the current study in two primary ways. First, the participating teachers and I constructed meaning individually. How I chose to design the study and collect and analyze data reflected my individual meaning making. Each participating teacher’s writing instruction within a particular social context, responses to interviews and questionnaires, and provision of artifacts reflected her individual meaning making. Second, the participating teachers and I constructed meaning through shared experiences and collected data. Our individual constructions of meaning merged to construct a collective meaning. Also, each participating teacher created meaning through illustrations of their development of expertise for teaching writing and writing instruction, while I constructed meaning from each illustration as well as across illustrations.

**Method**

The teacher selection process, context and participants, data sources, data collection timeline, and data analysis procedures are reported below.

**Teacher Selection Process**

Participants included three expert middle school language arts teachers. In Chapter 1, expert teachers were defined as teachers who (a) have at least 3 years of experience, (b) are independently recognized and nominated as having expertise by at least two different constituencies, (c) have a documented impact on student performance, and (d) have appropriate certifications and degrees within their fields (Palmer et al., 2005). For this study, language arts teachers were considered expert if
they met all four criteria above. For the performance criterion, teachers’ students with LD must have shown gains on state standardized assessments for at least three years in a row. Participating teachers were purposefully selected by the following procedures, which correspond with this definition.

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Florida approved the study, its approval code and corresponding documents (e.g., research application, data agreement to release teacher Florida Writes scores) were submitted to the two districts. The counties’ research managers assisted me in locating schools, principals, relevant county staff, and/or potential participants. I also contacted corresponding principals to assist me with locating potential participants and/or contacting staff members within schools that can assist me in locating expert language arts teachers. Participant nominators (e.g., relevant county and school staff, school administrators, school staff) filled out a questionnaire delineating why they nominated a particular participant. Each nominator was guided in choosing an expert teacher(s) through an operationalized definition of what it means to be an expert teacher of writing.

Of the teachers nominated, I ensured those chosen for participation had at least 3 years of teaching experience, were nominated by at least two constituencies (constituencies for the purposes of this study, are educators serving different professional roles), and had appropriate certifications and degrees within their fields. However, the state was in the process of changing the standardized assessment used for measuring student achievement. This issue led to statewide issues with the state testing computer systems, and research managers expressed they would not have the time, or even ability, to provide me with teachers’ standardized assessment scores. So,
data was not provided to meet this criterion. In lieu of standardized assessment scores, the research manager in Eleanor and Lily's school district was able to provide data on county assessments for progress monitoring. For both teachers, results indicate that student achievement in writing grew over time during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Students were de-identified in the data in order to comply with IRB regulations. Additionally, a leader in the field of teacher education for teaching writing to secondary students endorsed Christina as an expert secondary writing teacher. Each potential participant was provided a description of the study and the informed consent letter. Also, they were notified that they would receive a $50 gift card in appreciation for the time required for participation in the study.

Palmer et al. (2005) noted that, “expert teachers will vary in their ability to effectively promote student performance in all domains” (p. 22). Thus, targeting domains of interest were influential for locating an expert teacher. Following the aforementioned guidelines for participant selection was appropriate not only because expertise can be located through consistent superior performance (Berliner, 2001; Ericsson, 2007; Ericsson & Charness, 1994), but also social nomination reflects the socially and culturally complex contexts inherent in the identification of teacher expertise (Palmer et al., 2005; Ropo, 2004).

**Context and Participants**

Three teachers were sampled for this study: Christina, Eleanor, and Lily (pseudonyms). In this section, pertinent demographic information about the teachers’ districts and schools are reported. District information includes information about square mileage, political learning, approximate population, and school district demographics (e.g., school population, district achievement level, student population
receiving free or reduced-price lunch [FRL] as well as special education services).

School information includes information about student population, school achievement level, and student population receiving reduced or free lunch as well as special education services.

Christina’s district covers about 1,000 square miles, includes metropolitan and rural areas, typically votes democratic, and has a population of about 250,000. The school district serves about 27,000 students and has close ties to a local university. Around the time of data collection, a new superintendent with over 40 years of educational experience was appointed to the school district. This district is comprised of about 20 elementary schools and 15 secondary schools (7 of the secondary schools are middle schools). According to the state’s accountability measure, 60% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in reading and math, 55% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in writing, and 61% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in science. About half of the students served receive FRL. Further, about one-third of the students served receive special education services. Of the students receiving special education services, about one-fifth have been identified with specific learning disability.

Christina’s school is an urban (United States Census Bureau, 2015) K-12 public school affiliated with the local university and has been open about 80 years. At the time of data collection, the teacher population included 24 elementary school teachers, 25 middle school teachers, and 60 high school teachers. The school had 4 administrators and 13 new hires for the 2013-2014 school year. 100% of the school’s teachers were teaching in field and about 85% had advanced degrees. Furthermore, this school had
approximately 300 elementary school students, 330 middle school students, and 500 high school students. According to the state’s department of education (Florida Department of Education, 2005), this school’s student composition was as follows: 49% White, 23% Black, 17% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 7% Multi-racial. Additionally, the following percentages of students who were scoring satisfactory or above on state assessments are as follows: 49% writing percent of students scoring satisfactory and above: 49% writing, 72% reading, 79% math, and 73% science. About 25% of this school’s students were economically disadvantaged.

Eleanor and Lily teach in a rural district (United States Census Bureau, 2015) that covers about 1,600 square miles and has a population of about 250,000. The school district serves about 42,000 students. The superintendent was born and raised in this district, has been an educator in the district for almost 40 years. At the time of data collection, the superintendent had been serving the district as superintendent for three years. This district is comprised of 31 elementary schools and 17 secondary schools (10 of the schools are middle schools). According to the state’s accountability measure, 52% and 53% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in reading and math, 43% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in writing, and 53% of the district’s student population is at least satisfactory in science. The district provides all elementary students free breakfast and lunch, and 62% of secondary students receive FRL. About one-fifth of students in the district receive special education services and about one-third of students receiving services have been identified with specific learning disability.
Eleanor’s school is a “mostly rural” middle school that has been open about 80 years. At the time of data collection, this school has been a Title I school for two years. The teacher population included 38 teachers, 2 administrators and 4 new hires for the 2013-2014 school year. 98% of the school’s teachers were teaching in field and about 28% had advanced degrees. According to the state’s department of education (Florida Department of Education, 2005), this school’s student composition was as follows: 60% White, 8% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 4% Multi-Racial. Additionally, the following percentages of students who were scoring satisfactory or above on state assessments are as follows: 32% writing, 47% reading, 45% math, and 38% science. About 73% of this school’s students were economically disadvantaged. About 100 students attending the school were receiving special education services.

Lily’s school is a “mostly suburban” school founded in 2008 and built with sales tax approved by voters in 2004. At the time of data collection, the teacher population included 65 teachers, 3 administrators, and 11 new hires for the 2013-2014 school year. 82% of the school’s teachers were teaching in field, and about one-third had advanced degrees. Furthermore, this school had approximately 1,100 students. According to this state’s department of education (Florida Department of Education, 2005), this school’s student composition was as follows: 41% white, 21% Black, 27% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 2% Indian, and 6% Multi-Racial. Additionally, the following percentages of students who were scoring satisfactory or above on state assessments are as follows: 52% writing, 53% reading, 50% math, and 40% science. About 65% of this school’s students were economically disadvantaged.
Data Sources

There were four major categories of data collected: observations, interviews, questionnaire, and artifacts. Each method of data collection aligned with the constructivist theoretical perspective according to Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory. Two classroom observations were conducted per participant, and each participated in five interviews: one initial in-depth interview prior to any observations, a pre-observation interview prior to each observation, and one post-observation interview after each observation. Each observation and interview lasted up to one hour. So, at least seven hours were spent with each participant. Further, two questionnaires were administered (i.e., teacher nomination questionnaire, teacher background questionnaire), and three different artifacts were collected throughout the study (i.e., lesson plans, reflections from teachers, and a researcher reflection journal). According to Charmaz, “intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well . . . it complements other methods, such as observations, surveys, and research participants’ written accounts” (p. 28). The subsections below provide a description of each data source in the order each occurred in data collection.

Teacher nomination questionnaire. This questionnaire was sent to each district staff member, school administrator, school staff member, and ELA teacher in both participating counties. Educators who nominated participants completed a short questionnaire using an online data collection mechanism, Qualtrics, to identify and describe participants. See Appendix A for a copy of the teacher nominator questionnaire.

Initial in-depth interview. The initial in-depth interview was a semi-structured interview with the purpose of inquiring about teachers’ expertise development for
teaching writing to students with LD as well as their knowledge and pedagogy of writing instruction. “How did you become a successful writing teacher?” and “What do you do to help your students with learning disabilities succeed?” are examples of questions included in this interview. This type of interview aligns with the theoretical perspective as See Appendix B to view this interview protocol.

**Teacher background questionnaire.** Immediately after the in-depth interview, each participating teacher was given a short questionnaire to fill out containing basic demographic and background information. See Appendix C for a copy of the teacher questionnaire.

**Lesson plans.** Participating teachers’ natural lesson plans that include lesson plans for the days observed were collected to examine how explicit the written plans are, what information is included in the plans, and how plans may address instruction for students with LD. At least one week’s worth of participating teachers’ lesson plans were collected in order to get a sense of a typical lesson.

**Pre-observation interview.** A pre-observation interview took place prior to the each observation. The protocol for this interview was adapted from the Pathwise Classroom Observation System (2002), which includes pre- and post-observation interview protocols designed to examine and stimulate discussion of planning, creating lesson objectives, student grouping, lesson accommodations, lesson differentiation, instructional materials, and evaluation. See Appendix D to view this interview protocol.

**Observation.** For each teacher, two classroom observations utilizing a researcher-developed rubric were conducted. The purpose of the observations was to record the demonstrations of teacher competencies and strength of teacher lessons in
regards to writing instruction for their students with LD. No parental consent was required per IRB regulations.

According to Matsumura, Garnier, Slater, and Boston (2008), as few as two observations yielded a reliable estimate of teaching quality during reading and math instruction. Additionally, the Measuring Effective Teachers (MET) Project conducted a 3-year study with the purpose of “identifying effective teaching while account for differences among teachers’ students, on combining measures into composites, and on assuring reliable classroom observations” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013, “About This Report,” para. 1). Findings from this project indicated that reliability increases when two lessons are observed versus one.

My study utilizes one researcher-made rubric developed based on research on effective instructional practices and teacher competencies for students with LD as well as writing for students with and without LD, topics discussed extensively in Chapter 2. While my study utilizes one researcher-made rubric, it also emphasizes demonstrations of teacher competencies and strength of teacher lessons as represented in the rubrics employed in the studies conducted by Matsumura et al. (2008) and the MET Project. See Appendix E to view this observation rubric.

**Reflections from teachers.** After each observed lesson, each participating teacher was asked to create an audio recording up to three minutes long of reflections of the lesson in order to gain an understanding of the meaning or significance behind his or her pedagogy. These audio recordings were emailed to me and transcribed for analysis.
**Post-observation interview.** A post-observation interview took place after each observation. The protocol for this interview was adapted from the Pathwise Classroom Observation System (2002), which includes pre- and post-observation interview protocols designed to examine and stimulate discussion of planning, creating lesson objectives, student grouping, lesson accommodations, lesson differentiation, instructional materials, and evaluation. Also, I referred to the aforementioned observation rubric as well as used information from prior interviews to assist me in locating important topics for discussion with each participant. For example, if a teacher used a particular assessment practice, I inquired how she came to know that a practice was effective, what experiences she has had trying that approach, or how she tailored that particular practice to ensure access. See Appendix F to view this interview protocol.

**Researcher reflection journal.** After each point of data collection and analysis, I logged in a reflection journal, following Charmaz’s guidelines for memo-writing.

**Data Collection Timeline**

The timeline for data collection included about 9 weeks. See Figure 3-1 for a graphic of the timeline. The first 4 weeks was comprised of requesting the teacher nominators to fill out the teacher nominator questionnaire, locating potential participants from the teacher nominator questionnaire; sending requests for participation in the study, including the description of the study and copies of the informed consent to potential participants; and gathering participants to be included in the study. The following weeks consisted of the initial in-depth interviews, the pre-observation interviews, gathering the teacher background questionnaires, observations, the post-observation interviews, and gathering the teachers’ reflections of the observed lessons.
Also, after each point of data collection and analysis, I logged in a reflection journal; this is not referred to in the table.

Data Analysis

Once all of the data were collected, analysis took place using Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist approach to grounded theory. According to Charmaz, researchers are a part of the data that is collected and the world they study. Moreover, “data nor theories are discovered” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 11); rather, data and analysis are constructed from shared experiences and relationships with participants.

Data analysis consisted of four recursive phases: initial coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, and theory development. All coding was done by hand, and software was not utilized. During initial coding, all of the collected data, including the transcribed data, were examined coding incident-by-incident. Coding incident-by-incident means that you code “through a comparative study of incidents” (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 53). Incident-by-incident coding aids researchers in viewing patterns and contrasts in data, including observational data. This process yielded approximately 3,600 initial codes. A few examples include “acknowledging her students with LD usually need more time,” “giving positive feedback about being silly in poems,” and “using a lot of nonverbal communication with her students.”

During focused coding, data were compared data. The most significant and frequent codes were identified, and data were compared to these codes. Focused coding is significant to refine codes and categorize data. A few examples include “seeking opportunities to learn,” “pedagogical strategies,” and “negotiating external conditions.”

For theoretical coding, Charmaz communicates the following:
Theoretical codes are integrative; they lend form to the focused codes you have collected. These codes may help you tell an analytic story that has coherence. Hence, these codes not only conceptualize how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction. (p. 63)

Hence, tentative definitions were created for each category and possible relationships were specified between the developed categories. At this point, categories included (a) standards for learning and care for others, (b) learn, (c) create, (d) implement, (e) assess, (f) adapt, and (g) expertise for teaching writing to middle school students with LD. Finally, during theory development, a theory grounded in the data was constructed. An illustration was also developed to represent the theory. The theory emphasized understanding of the studied phenomena providing interpretive frames from which to view the data. At this time, I began to write my results based on the constructed theory and relationships specified between developed categories. See Figure 3-2 for a figure representing the progression from initial coding to the grounded theory. See Figure 3-3 for an example of a preliminary grounded theory.

However, the writing felt flawed. So, the process was repeated from the focused coding phase in order to refine my theory. I then reflected on my research questions and theoretical perspective, thought about how each teacher carries out processes in similar and unique ways, compared my theoretical perspective to my collected artifacts, and refined definitions for and relationships among codes. Two external auditors were also consulted. External auditors included a college-level faculty member working in the field of special education at a high-tier research university and a post-doctoral associate working in the field of special education at another high-tier research university. After much deliberation, I finalized theory development and developed a database (e.g., quote page) for each teacher, highlighting quotes that aligned with the results of data
analysis. These pages facilitated writing the analysis. Because I continued to log in my researcher reflection journal after each point of data analysis, this data was continually compared with the codes and integrated into the analysis. So, each segment of analysis would end with logging into my reflection journal; then, when analysis would restart, the log would be juxtaposed with the codes, quotes, and theory. This juxtaposition mattered to confirm, repudiate, or refine analysis.

The transcribed interviews were the primary source of data. The secondary data informed the primary interview data. See Table 3-1 for an organizer depicting what data sources align with which research question.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

Several measures were taken to establish credibility and trustworthiness (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005): triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, consultations with external auditors, and examination of researcher subjectivity. This research was triangulated by collecting data from multiple sources and multiple participants. Member checking, “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), took place at least two times throughout the data analysis process so participants could confirm the analysis and offer feedback. I consulted with the co-chairs of my committee to engage in peer debriefing. I also consulted with external auditors with expertise in teacher education and literacy who have no connection to the study in order to receive feedback on the assigned codes as well as determine whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Creswell, 2007). Finally, I examined my own subjectivity.
**Researcher subjectivity.** It was necessary to examine the intersection of myself as a student, educator, and researcher and what that intersection may have meant for the orchestration of this study. Because “theory depends on the researcher’s view . . . constructivists attempt to become aware of their presuppositions and to grapple with how they affect the research” (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 130-131).

Growing up, I remember always loving to learn. I had many teachers who were passionate about their students’ learning and also many who were not. However, I only had a handful of teachers who actually knew how to teach, who I thought were really great. As a child, I certainly could not conceptualize what it means to be a great teacher the way I can today, but I felt that I knew good teaching when I experienced it. It was teaching that would inspire and make me feel like what I was learning was easy even though it was probably really complex. Looking back, I think what impacted me more than those great teachers was the thought that there were so many more teachers who chose to not take the time to do what the great teachers did. I questioned, “Why do some teachers just sit in their desks, assign dull chapter work, and never interact with their students?” “Why can some teachers make challenging work seem fun and easy, while others make the same content complicated and almost unreachable?” or “How come some teachers can manage a classroom almost seamlessly while others are almost constantly blustering?” Today, these questions still matter to me, as how a teacher approaches her instruction can mean the difference between fostering an independent thinker and inspired problem solver or actively choosing not to have a significant positive effect on a child’s education.
As an educator, my journey began when I was 11 and my little sister was born. The adults in my family dubbed me the “built-in babysitter.” I took care of her a lot over the years until I left for college, and it was a treat to see her grow and learn. It was also confusing. I would often wonder how much of her life was dependent on the choices she made and how much of her life might be dependent on what happened around her or to her. When I was 19, I got a job in a recently opened day care facility. This facility, like most new businesses, had flaws and complications to overcome. I remember having up to 10 infants and toddlers under my care at any given time, which is a violation of teacher-to-student ratio regulations. I kept the infants fed and the toddlers from crying, mostly by watching tapes of Barney episodes. I then worked at a preschool for the rest of my undergraduate schooling (as an English major) and learned how it feels to have 11 two-year-olds as some of your best friends. Next, through parents of a child at the preschool, I became a private English tutor for Korean children and their mothers. It was during this position that I really began to think deeply about pedagogy for reading and writing. I began to not only think about the English language as a user, but as a teacher. After a few years, I began a position as a mathematics teacher’s assistant at a charter school for children with disabilities. In this position, I learned about student differences and the importance of tailoring your instruction to meet your students’ varied needs.

After my position at the charter school, I realized I wanted to be a teacher. I then landed employment as a Reading and Language Arts teacher for middle school youth at risk for school failure. One of the many things I learned during this position, especially due to the lack of a great mentor teacher and formal educator preparation, is that
teaching is hard. To improve my practice, I attended numerous professional
development workshops, received my Reading Endorsement, and completed my
master’s degree in Special Education. After all my hard work I was excited that, finally,
during my seventh year as a teacher, I began to feel like an expert. I felt I had mastered
the context in which I worked, developed routines that supported students, and learned
about acquisition and instruction of reading and writing to meet the needs of my
students.

However, I was not immediately able to utilize that knowledge in the classroom
because I became a full-time doctoral student in Special Education. I was continually
stimulated and challenged in this program. I have learned about research in the fields
of teacher education and writing instruction, how to conduct research quantitatively and
qualitatively, and how to collaborate with other researchers to improve outcomes for all
students. Currently, I am have merged my histories as a student, educator, and
researcher in order to competently fulfill another teaching position as a Reading and
Language Arts teacher for middle school youth at risk for school failure. It has been
quite enlightening to return to the classroom, especially armed with all the knowledge I
gained as a graduate student. I intend for any student I know to benefit from all the
instruction I have received.

Hence, I have attempted to articulate what I believe about great teaching and
how a great teacher develops from all lessons learned. I believe great teaching is
comprised of inspiring and guiding students to be more than they were from the start of
a school year. A great teacher inspires as many students as possible to recognize their
own ability to actively participate in the world around them. Great teachers do need to
know about classroom management and effective practice, but they also need to know how to start with their students’ needs in mind as well as how to make learning interactive and memorable. Further, I believe that a great teacher develops from building relationships with your students, the study of effective practice, and knowing how to gain access to learning more about effective pedagogical practice. In addition, I believe a great teacher develops from great practice, which includes being flexible, breaking out of what feels comfortable, and trying new things. Teaching what you can to other educators also enhances the development of great practice. Overall, it is important to remember what it feels like to be a learner and that each student deserves endless chances to learn and is valuable enough to receive each opportunity to learn.

**Study Delimitations**

This study was purposely delimited to expert teachers, as defined in Chapter 1, in two school districts. This study utilized social nominators in corresponding counties to assist in locating the expert teachers. These teachers were required to have students with LD within middle school language arts classrooms. Of the nominated teachers, three teachers agreed to participate in the study. As it is the nature of qualitative research to have a low sample size, I was able to spend extended time researching and analyzing the data in order to develop a credible grounded theory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
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| 1. How do expert eighth-grade language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms? | • Teacher questionnaire  
• All interview data  
• Reflections from teachers |
| 2. What is the nature of writing instruction provided by expert eighth-grade language arts teachers to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms? | • Teacher nomination questionnaire  
• Teacher lesson plans  
• All interview data  
• All observation data  
• Reflections from teachers  
• Researcher reflection journal |
**All teachers received $50 for participation in the study. Additionally, each interview (a total of five per teacher) and observation (up to four per teacher) lasted up to one hour, and observations did not require any supplementary preparation by the teachers.**
Figure 3-2. Example of Progression from Initial Coding to Grounded Theory:

- **Initial codes**
  - Acknowledging her students with LD usually need more time
  - Giving positive feedback about being silly in poems
  - Using a lot of nonverbal communication with her students

- **Focused codes**
  - Seeking opportunities to learn
  - Providing teacher care
  - Supporting independence through student-centered activities
  - Supporting all learners
  - Connections between written text and self
  - Craving creativity
  - Seeing the curriculum as alive

- **Theoretical codes**
  - Standards for learning and care for others
  - Learn
  - Create
  - Implement
  - Assess
  - Adapt
  - Expertise for teaching writing to middle school students with LD

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Figure 3-3. A Preliminary Grounded Theory
CHAPTER 4
THE GROUNDED THEORY

Introduction to the Grounded Theory

The purpose of this chapter is to present a grounded theory that describes (a) how expert middle school language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms and (b) the nature of writing instruction provided by expert middle school language arts teachers to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Data were analyzed according to Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory. Data included 266 pages of interview transcripts, three teacher background questionnaires, one week’s worth of lesson plans for each teacher, two completed observational rubrics for each teacher, two one-page reflections for each teacher, and 42 pages of the researcher’s reflections.

Analysis yielded descriptions of each participant that highlight three salient themes. Further, themes were synthesized to construct a grounded theory (Figure 4-1) and address the two research questions posed in this study. These three themes include (a) seeking opportunities for teacher learning, (b) planning and implementing opportunities for student learning, and (c) assessing and adapting curricula to meet students’ needs. The grounded theory, as represented in the graphic illustration, is layered and dynamic. Upon analysis, it would not have been appropriate to segregate themes into discrete segments that do not overlap or interact. The overlap and interaction between these themes are significant because teachers’ knowledge and actions could not be dissociated. The themes are synthesized into a three-part Venn diagram, with each circle representing one theme. The overlap of the three themes represents the participating teachers’ nature of instruction for middle school students.
with LD. Further, it is the interaction of the themes that represent the process leading to teachers’ development of expertise for teaching writing to middle school students with LD.

In the following pages, features of each theme are discussed as well as teachers’ similarities and differences regarding each theme. Prior to discussion of the three themes, a brief introduction of each of the three teachers will be presented that highlights teachers’ demographic and professional attributes. See Appendix H for a memo listing of parallels noted across teachers included in the researcher reflection journal.

Meet the Teachers

This introduction includes details about the teachers and their classrooms. Teacher details include general information on teacher demographics; historical background pertaining to teaching and teaching writing instruction (e.g., certification, years of experience, preparation in language arts and special education); teacher appreciation of writing; the observed lessons; and teacher demeanor, attitude, and style. Classroom details include information on student demographics, support staff, and curriculum. See Table 4-1 for participant details according to the teacher selection criteria.

Christina

Christina is a Caucasian female who had been teaching for over 50 years at the time of data collection. She had been teaching reading and writing as well as instructing students with LD for her whole career. She taught at the high school level for about 30 years and middle school level for about 20 years. For the prior 20 years, she taught mostly gifted language arts students. She reported familiarity with teaching
gifted students with disabilities. She stated, “I’m sure I always had such students even before they were ‘tracked.’” She has an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in General Education. She has her English 6-12 certification and a gifted endorsement. She reported that she received no preparation in teaching writing during her undergraduate studies; however, she has received extensive preparation in teaching writing via specialized professional development opportunities.

Christina had been working at her current school for 8 years at the time of data collection. I observed one non-gifted inclusive class with a total of 18 students, including two students with disabilities: one student with LD and one student with an autism spectrum disorder. Christina’s inclusive classroom was indicative of Tier 1 instruction. Based on her informal and formal assessments (e.g., observation, FCAT writing rubric), she reported that 11 of her students are writing on grade level, and seven are writing at least more than one grade level below their current placement. While many of her students are writing below their grade level, she reported 85-90% of her students have benefitted from her writing instruction. Christina reported spending at least 100 minutes per week directly teaching writing skills, processes, or knowledge, and her students spend at least 150 minutes per week planning, drafting, revising, or editing writing. She stated that she does not use commercial programs or curricula as teaching tools. I observed Christina implement a zine (short for magazine) unit. A zine is a self-published, handmade product that contains a message meant for a small community of readers.

Based on my observations, Christina can be described as vivacious and all that that implies. She appeared dichotomous, though, for she was outgoing yet calming,
boisterous yet gentle, messy yet focused, and fast-moving yet methodical. She had a positive attitude that I felt to be contagious that she attributes in large part to her faith. Her teaching style matches her demeanor. Walking closer to her portable and then into her classroom, I felt almost as if I was entering another dimension. I entered a space where literature does not exist flat on a page; rather, literature exists in tangible representations of literature and philosophy in the form of clever and inspired small- and large-scale student projects. I felt inspired by just entering her space even prior to instructional observation. After my observations, I was hooked. I wanted to stay and be her student.

To Christina, writing “means life.” She communicated that she wants people to value accuracy, truth, and communication. Hence, for writing instruction, she intends to get her students to

believe that there’s value in writing, that they can do it, that it doesn’t come easily necessarily but that it is part of life and it’s valuable; it’s valuable not only in the workplace but it’s valuable for just reflection, it’s valuable for putting your thoughts down and seeing them...

She noted that, even in her long career, about “three out of her eight million students” have even taken to writing and revision easily. However, she loves to learn, try new things, see learning, and teach writing. She wished that she “knew how to inspire all the teachers and the parents to see the value in writing and just do a little bit, and I haven’t magically done that yet… I’ve been able to do that at some other schools.”

Eleanor

Eleanor is a Caucasian female who had been teaching for over 17 years at the time of data collection. She had been teaching reading and writing at the middle school level for her entire career, primarily to students with disabilities. Her first seven years as
a teacher were spent serving students with disabilities in a pull-out program. Ten years prior, however, she began serving students in an inclusive context (i.e., she became the general education teacher of record with a mixed-ability class). She holds an undergraduate and master’s degree in Varying Exceptionalities and has four certifications: Exceptional Student Education K-12, English 5-9, ESOL endorsement, and Reading Endorsement. She reported receiving extensive preparation in teaching writing in college as well as after college via professional development opportunities.

Eleanor had been working at her school for the entirety of her career. The class I observed was a first-period inclusive classroom with a total of 24 students and eight students with disabilities, all students with LD. Like Christina, Eleanor’s inclusive classroom was indicative of Tier 1 instruction. Based on her assessments, she reported that one of those students is writing above grade level, three are writing on grade level, and 20 are writing at least more than one grade level below their current placement. Even though most of her students are writing below grade level, she reported 70% of her students’ writing has improved due to her instruction based on her classroom assessments as well as district writing assessments. Eleanor reported spending at least 50 minutes per week directly teaching writing skills, processes, or knowledge, and her students spend at least 75 minutes per week planning, drafting, revising, or editing writing. She incorporates three commercial programs or curricula into her instruction: a Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Collection, Scholastic SCOPE, and Flocabulary (an “online library of educational hip-hop songs and videos for grades K-12”; Flocabulary, 2016). On the days I observed Eleanor, two other certified special education teachers were with her in the classroom. These teachers were not placed in her classroom as co-
teachers; rather, they were placed in her classroom to serve as support facilitators. Support facilitation differs from co-teaching in that planning and instructional times may vary (Florida Inclusion Network, 2006). Neither teacher was with her more than one class period per day. I observed Eleanor implement a unit on citing text evidence.

Based on my observations, Eleanor can be described as efficient and benevolent. She spoke and proceeded with dedication and purpose. She also cared intensely about the impact she has on others, and this care is not isolated to teaching. During the time of data collection, she was involved in the care of her dying mother-in-law (who passed away the day after our final interview), active in hospital homebound for her county, and tutored before and after school. Even with this extensive schedule, she was motivated to take the time to participate in this study with the idea that she could learn more about teaching writing to middle school students with LD, thereby improving her students’ outcomes. Walking into her classroom for the first time right before the first period of the school day, I was greeted with pop music that she plays while students receive tutoring in her classroom. Her classroom was adorned with educational posters, student projects, teacher-made models of current projects, agendas, and organizational tools and supplies. We introduced ourselves quickly (we previously only spoke via email or phone), as the first period bell was drawing near; yet, within those hasty moments I felt welcomed and appreciated due to her personable demeanor.

Eleanor spoke of her enjoyment of writing and teaching writing. She stated that writing is all about practice. Eleanor communicated that writing is a process, and students need to be shown how to write and telling them how to write is not enough.
Further, she wanted her students to be able to understand the writing process, meet her state’s standards, and work to their fullest potential despite challenges she may experience during instruction. Eleanor expressed that she wants her students to feel comfortable with writing and that she works hard to ensure each student has opportunities to practice writing to their best ability while still working to meet her high expectations.

Lily

Lily is a Caucasian female who had been teaching for 10 years at the time of data collection. She had been teaching reading and writing at the middle school level as well as instructing students with LD for her whole career. Throughout her career, she taught mostly intensive reading and language arts. She has an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in English Education. She holds three certifications: English 6-12, Middle Grades Integrated 5-9, and Exceptional Student Education K-12. Lily reported receiving no preparation in teaching writing during her undergraduate studies, extensive preparation in teaching writing during her graduate studies, and extensive preparation outside of college via professional development opportunities.

Lily had been working at her school for over nine years. I observed a 1st-period inclusive class with a total of 25 students with 6 students with disabilities, including 3 students with LD. Lily’s inclusive classroom was demonstrative of Tier 1 instruction as well. Based on her informal assessments (i.e., length and depth of writing) as well as state assessments, she reported that 15 of her students are writing on grade level, and 10 are writing at least more than one grade level below their current placement. Although many of her students are writing below grade level, she reported at least 85%
of her students have benefitted from her writing instruction based on her assessments. Lily reported spending at least 120 minutes per week directly teaching writing skills, processes, or knowledge, and her students spend an “incalculable” time per week planning, drafting, revising, or editing writing (from my analysis, I believe this to mean that her students write a great deal). She stated that she does not use commercial programs or curricula as teaching tools. During the first observation, one other certified general education teacher was with her in the classroom. This teacher was not placed in her classroom as a co-teacher; rather, she was placed in her classroom to serve as a support facilitator. This teacher was typically with her for half of the school day. During the time of data collection, however, this support facilitator was being pulled out of the classroom to assist her school with state- and county-wide testing implementation. I observed Lily implement a unit on poem analysis.

Based on my observations, Lily can be described as whimsical and unconventional, yet enculturated in the educational principles of her state and county. For instance, she was following her county’s curriculum map but with a constructivist approach where she by and large is a facilitator who emphasizes active learning through dialogue, making connections, and problem solving. Lily informed me of her “love and passion for writing since she was little,” and she majored in English during her undergraduate years to nurture her love of writing. Walking into her classroom, I observed her nearly Bohemian style as evidenced by her unique seating arrangement and colorful, translucent mandalas adorning her windows. As I observed her classroom, I sat on an incredibly comfortable floral couch and viewed students interacting with focused eyes, easy demeanors, and grins.
Seeking Opportunities for Teacher Learning

The theme “seeking opportunities for teacher learning” refers to the teachers’ own learning with the goal of improving instruction to meet all students’ needs. Within this theme, the teacher is the learner. For this theme, I drew on multiple data sources: interviews, observations, teacher reflections, lesson plans, and the researcher reflection journal.

Teachers in the study were passionate about learning more about their practice to improve student writing. As such, each actively sought out learning opportunities. These teachers have taken responsibility for their preparation to teach writing through extensive teacher preparation, participation in specialized PD opportunities, and curriculum development. In fact, these teachers’ journeys to expertise for teaching writing began prior to their teacher preparation experiences.

During their undergraduate years, Christina and Lily studied literature. Although each loved to read and write, Christina credits a university Shakespeare professor with teaching her how to write, they noted their undergraduate experiences did not prepare them to teach writing. Christina stated, “I wasn’t a writer when I first started teaching at all; I was the literature English teacher; I believed in the literature reading, and writing wasn’t even a part of it so much.” This point is important because when she began to identify as a writer later in her career, it mattered tremendously for her development as a teacher of writing. She noted,

When I first started teaching English I was pretty much like all the English teachers I had in high school; we didn’t write. We did the obligatory term paper at the end where in my day you had to have two hundred and fifty notecards that hardly anybody ever did.
For teaching writing to students with LD, Eleanor and Lily shared commonalities. Lily’s narrative in terms of working with students with disabilities started as a child. She grew up in a community for people with disabilities. Both her father and her uncle had a form of muscular dystrophy and both used wheelchairs. In addition, she had “lots of aunts and uncles with various disabilities.” She stated that All of them worked very hard during a time when people with disabilities were not accepted at large; they all had careers and goals. And the one thing they told me was that ‘my disability is not a crutch and I was able to achieve the goals I set for myself.’

Lily revealed that her experiences with her family shaped her view of working with students with disabilities. She stated that she looks at students with disabilities as a whole. She also communicated

I look at them as who they are, what they struggle with, and what they don’t struggle with. And I try to encourage them so that when they do have challenges, they will be willing to try and move past them.

Moreover, Lily’s shared that her son is on the autism spectrum. She revealed that much of her instruction for her students with disabilities has been based off of her experiences from working with her son. She experimented with various writing strategies at home and, when relevant, applies those same strategies in the classroom for her students who struggle with writing. As a result, working with her son who struggles with writing helped her hone her expertise for teaching writing. On the other hand, Eleanor originally studied nursing during her undergraduate studies. Then, she “decided that wasn’t for me so I wanted to get into the school system and I started working as a teacher’s assistant within an ESE classroom.”

These teachers believed that their graduate degrees in Education immensely improved their practice. For instance, Lily noted that she learned much about teaching
English at the secondary level during her graduate studies. She said her graduate studies “have been insanely helpful” and have provided her with knowledge and practices that “have been amazing to implement.” Lily was grateful, too, to learn a wealth of research during her program. She shared that her use of literature and dialogue in her class was substantiated as well as enriched by this formal education. Further, she stated that she reads “all the time.” She said, “I try and find out what I can for strategies that are helpful to all students because writing is not a skill that they’ve actually been taught how to do because it’s all been five paragraph essay.” She stated that when her school’s administrators conduct observations in her classroom, she was equipped with research she can provide to support her instructional design and decisions.

Teachers also spoke passionately about their PD experiences. For each teacher, PD experiences can take many forms. These teachers continually learned from their students, work with colleagues, work with educational professionals (e.g., guidance counselors, county language arts coordinators), work with college-level faculty, look at other teachers’ websites, read many books about writing and teaching writing as well as research journals or practitioner briefs, complete all of the writing activities assigned to students, listen to relevant and valuable news radio broadcasts, watch relevant and valuable videos on line.

Christina was eagerly involved in a national professional development organization, the National Writing Project (NWP). She expressed that her participation in professional development provided by the National Writing Project (NWP) “changed her life.” During this seminar, teachers wrote, shared their writings, shared their writing
practices, and read at least four books about writing and shared their understandings about those books. They were

in small writing groups and we critiqued one another’s writing so you get to feel what it feels like to get graded. You see how long it takes, you see the terror and investment of it, you just see that people can help you get better. You just live it; that was the life-changing moment.

In fact, due to the success of participants’ students, the county language arts coordinator developed a roughly two-month long professional development workshop wherein teachers of writing were invited to meet and “do little mini writing projects.” Over a period of ten years, the workshop grew to be a very popular among many teachers of all levels and subjects in the county. However, when that coordinator retired, so did the county’s involvement with the NWP. Christina communicated about the NWP, “I cannot tell you… If that’s all that any teacher ever did that’s all they need; every other thing they’ve put in – that’s how strongly I believe in it.” She admitted that most inservice today is far less helpful to her than the NWP.

Eleanor and Lily also spoke at length about several professional development experiences that exposed her to a breadth and depth of knowledge. For instance, Eleanor discussed a writing program promoted in her county years ago called “Wow, I’m a Writer.” This program could be utilized to teach children how to write a well-structured essay. Also, she participated in voluntary professional learning communities (PLCs) that helped her with her writing instruction. She said that one of the PLCs was 45 minutes away from her home and school and that there was not a “big turnout,” but that it positively impacted her instruction. She stated,

it consisted probably of about fifteen teachers, but I found that really helped a lot because basically we brainstormed and figured out what was working and not working and shared ideas and I found that was a big help this year with all the changes.
She stated the one of the main foci was the new rubric for writing assessment. Each teacher brought in student samples and they scored the samples together and “every activity they gave us to use with our students, we did the activity first.” So, the PLC helped her to better understand new scoring processes for standardized assessments aligned with the Common Core. In addition, Eleanor and Lily were members of the committee that developed a new standards-based curriculum map for language arts for their county. Lily noted she was able to participate in said initiative due to the extensive training she received about standards-based writing. She noted that the lesson plans and templates that were developed by teachers in her county were distributed to other counties in the state. The plans and templates blend dialogue, writing, and literature. She communicated

> We've done the majority of lesson plans for the state. A couple of friends of mine, well we've become friends now because we've done so much curriculum work together, but we've gone to all the different state trainings and here's what's coming for the writing and all that kind of stuff, and we've written plans. Our lesson plans are one of two of the school lessons that they paid us to write and they were the only two out of hundreds of people that were there that were actually posted on the website, so it was kind of cool to see that. We're like, “Yeah! We made a difference!”

The teachers have enjoyed developing curriculum outside of formal PD experiences as well. Christina spoke of starting “from scratch” and assembling and aligning projects and practices that will serve to engage her students in reading, writing, critical thinking, and ethical behavior provides her with enjoyment. Eleanor relayed that she has had to opportunity to develop her instructional expertise through practice, experience, and trial and error. She worked hard to figure out what works and what doesn’t with her students. She shared that when she was a teacher’s assistant her few years, she always kept track of what she would want to do in her own classroom and
what she would make sure not to do. She moved around and worked in different reading and language arts classes, so she “always kept a binder of do's and don'ts.” Lily recounted learning a lot from other teachers she loved “in terms of how they ran their class and how they didn’t run their class.” She also stated that even though she came into teaching “without any formal training and formal methodologies of what it is to be a teacher, I knew my literature and I knew what a literary experience was.” By “literary experience,” Lily meant to engage with literature in sincere and significant ways.

**Planning and Implementing Opportunities for Student Learning**

The theme “planning and implementing opportunities for student learning” refers to the environment created, instructional planning to support learning for all students, and the enactment of knowledge and pedagogy for instruction. These practices served to contribute to classroom culture as well as improve students’ writing. To improve writing, these teachers employed general effective instructional practices as well as effective writing-specific practices (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000; Graham & Perin, 2007a). Features of this theme include “classroom environment,” “lesson activities,” “general practices,” and “writing-specific practices.” For this theme, I drew on multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, teacher reflections, lesson plans, and the researcher reflection journal.

**Classroom Environment**

Each teacher created a learning space and culture that could be described as friendly, positive, and stimulating. Physically, each teacher’s class was a conglomeration of personal and educational items and images intended to teach concepts, build relationships, provide background knowledge, and cultivate a welcoming atmosphere. Their classrooms’ décor also reflected the teachers’ philosophy. To
illustrate, Christina’s classroom was truly a space to stimulate reading, writing, and critical thinking, which are tenets of her philosophy. Eleanor’s classroom was structured, yet welcoming, concepts also visible in her instruction. Also, Lily’s classroom inspired wonder and imagination, concepts visible in her instruction.

Christina’s classroom was just as fantastic on the outside as the inside. On the outside was a fancifully decorated “literary landscape,” a potpourri of color, plants, and a pond, adorned with student-painted quotations from famous poets, authors, philosophers, and literature as well as pictorial representations of places, objects and symbols from classic and modern literature. There was a street sign saying “Birnam woods to Dunsinane,” depicting a misleading prophecy given in MacBeth by William Shakespeare, a pear tree representing Janie’s pear tree in Their Eyes Were Watching God, and another tree with a sign in front reading Oranges by Gary Soto. There was also a garden and a pond; it appeared that the garden and pond were once better maintained. The pond was entitled “Thoreau’s Walden Pond.” Additionally, alluding to Mark Twains’ Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, there was a basketball hoop pole (sans hoop) near the classroom’s door with a hanging sign that read Mississippi River to Cairo, IL.

Inside, the classroom reflected the same spirit. Top to bottom, each wall, backboard, marker board, and bookshelf was covered with creative student work, cut out comics, student Fame and Glory boards, and posters of famous authors, philosophers, and artists. On one part of the far wall was a huge natural wood chest of drawers that she used to house art supplies. She even had a waist high statue of a butler with black and white photos spread out on his tray. The displayed student work
was so inspired: each project was an amalgamation of real items (e.g., shoes, masks), handmade items (e.g., trees, boxes), and quotations or descriptions from literature, and each represented a different story or classic novel. Empty spaces of wall were scant, there was a bookshelf in front of each window, and each window’s vertical blinds are closed. Placed around the classroom were large tables intended for cooperative student groups as well as four individual student desks. In one corner lay a few pillows and beanbags for comfortable reading.

In Eleanor’s classroom, efficiency and structure were ubiquitous. Desks were in rows: five rows with six desks each. The right wall as you enter the exterior door was the front wall that contains a white marker board, a projector screen, bulletin boards with models of the current lesson, a table with a large radio, one student computer, and the interior door. The entire next wall to the right was one long built-in table with six sets of two-door built-in cabinets above. On the table were four different display shelves of high-interest Scholastic novels as well as six bins for each of her six different class periods that contain graded work to be passed back to students. Each set of cabinets above the built-in table is brightly numbered one through six for each of her six different classes. On top of the cabinets were various trinkets and antiques to add a welcoming spirit. Even though efficiency and structure were abundant, the classroom had a friendly atmosphere. Each wall contained posters with motivational posters, motivational writing tips that align with EBPs and RBP s, and teacher-made writing-related posters including important “power words” that align with the new standards (e.g., summarize, analyze, predict, evaluate, support). She also, as aforementioned,
had displayed flowers, personal pictures, greeting cards, a candy jar, and homey antiques and trinkets.

Lily’s creative, bohemian style and love of literature was immediately evident. Her room was adorned with postcards and science fiction and fantasy posters common in popular media and contained a stimulating reading area with a couch set. Desks were set up within the classroom in groups or pairs. Lily also had student computers, student-made art, and inspirational quotes within her room. Lily noted, “Everything in my classroom is directly related to either an interest or passion or something about me if you can figure it out, including a strong and burning desire to just travel and go exploring places and learn exciting things.”

There was an area reminiscent of a living room with a cozy, floral couch set boxing the area in as well as a large red rug. On the wall within the reading area was a wall covered, almost from top to bottom with mainly postcards from her and her friends’ travels around the world (e.g., Washington D.C., various tropical islands, popular European destinations). The postcards were pinned to the wall in one colossal collage. The collage inspired feelings of curiosity and wonder. Within the collage were three small randomly placed posters: a Lightening Thief poster that says, “The Greatest Heroes are Readers,” a cartoon-like poster with an Eleanor Roosevelt quote, and Martin Luther King poster. In other areas of the room, she had Twilight posters, a poster of a popular sitcom (i.e., The Big Bang Theory), over 10 World of Warcraft posters displayed in a circular arrangement, laminated posters representing popular young adult films (e.g., Hunger Games, Monsters, Inc.), another bookshelf containing student workbooks and framed pictures of Lily’s family, and Lily’s cluttered desk area. Almost completely
covering the big window on the left were student colored mandalas (i.e., geometric figures). The mandalas were cut out in circles and pasted to the window in a collage. On each mandala was each of her students’ names nicely written with black marker. The sun shone through the mandalas, contributing to the bohemian style and creating a cool effect.

Moreover, these teachers created a welcoming and positive classroom culture utilizing various key practices. Key practices include nurturing care and praise, balancing high expectations with care, and acting as a guide or mentor. All emphasized care and praise as well as balancing high expectations with care. Christina and Lily spoke about acting as a guide or mentor.

Teachers nurtured care, praised building relationships with students, and promoted an inclusive environment. Eleanor also endeavored to build relationships with her students using encouraging and constructive language. She shared she does “simple things” like saying good morning. She also revealed that she has heard colleagues use dismissive language with students, and…even if she is posed with a behavioral challenge, she “doesn’t want to say anything negative to her students.” When recalling her experience with one student with LD, she shared that even though he exhibits challenging behaviors, she would rather have him be at school than suspended. She expressed, “To be honest, I like him; he’s a smart kid.” This student even felt comfortable enough with Eleanor to confide in her that he felt uncomfortable using a student computer when the other kids were writing with paper and pencil. Lily’s classroom was open, her students “hang out” in her classroom prior to the first bell, and she expressed a desire for her students to feel comfortable in that space. She
mentioned that, “she could write a book, they tell her everything” and “I like middle school because I get 140 presents each year, and I get to unwrap all of them and figure out who they are. And I really do want them to know who I am as a person and as a teacher.” Lily also expressed, “We are a community as a class, and I know what makes them tick, giggle, think, and feel joy.” She noted the mandalas on her windows represent community. She shared with her students, “Even though we are individuals, we are a part of a greater whole, and we are a beautiful picture.”

To promote care and praise, teachers also nurtured an inclusive environment. Eleanor reported that she does not want to bring negative attention to her students by “singling them out” or pointing out her students who are receiving special education services to her other students. She recognized that children in their age group just want to fit in, and she doesn’t “like to have kids feel like they’re on the outside.” She shared her preference to speak individually with all of her students, including her students with disabilities, students who struggle, and students without disabilities. Lily emphasized speaking with students one-on-one many times throughout the data collection process as well. She did not want to single her students out “because they are sensitive middle schoolers and because they don’t want to be signaled out for an accommodation.” She stated, “They know I do things privately because I don’t believe in public humiliation.” She said, “I may play around and joke but there’s a limit to that and if it’s something that’s very serious then they can expect a private conversation with me . . . I am consistent.” Additionally, she wanted her students to know how to advocate for themselves and that it is OK to ask her questions. This strategy aided in her ability to
foster student collaboration and build a classroom community because students ultimately felt comfortable and safe within the classroom.

Each teacher noted the importance of balancing high expectations with care and praise. Christina told her students, “If you work hard in class and follow guidelines you’ll not have trouble keeping up.” She relayed to them, “And I tell them the more you work on it, the more problems you have that you keep fixing the better your folder is.” On her Fame and Glory boards, she placed models of good writing incidentally mostly from her gifted classes. She stated, “I want them [students in her inclusion class] to think this is what’s normal.” She stated her belief that kids can improve their writing based on praise versus making corrections of copious mistakes. She communicated that she focuses on what her students have done well and wants students trusting themselves to write. Eleanor also communicated that she believes in being reasonable. She has told her students, “Don’t get upset if you don’t get everything you want.” She has told them that as long as they are working, not wasting time, and not being off task “because that’s not what extended time is for,” she will not hold it against them if time is up and they are not finished.

Christina and Lily expressed the importance of acting as a guide or mentor. Christina communicated that she gives students a lot of responsibility but also a lot of guidance in terms of how to deal with increasing workloads as they get older, choosing literature for their projects, using problem solving strategies, and having fun learning. During data collection, I witnessed one student with autism spectrum disorder in Lily’s get very frustrated during a class activity that involved collaboration. Lily noticed this
student’s frustration, encouraged her privately, then watched as this student’s group “talked her through it” and told her to write down what she had just told them.

**Lesson Activities**

For these teachers, planning meaningful and interesting lessons was integral to creating a positive environment that supports learning. To that end, they aligned their lessons’ objectives, assessment strategies, and instruction. Rigorous and accessible objectives and step-by-step activities were visible across teachers. Overall, activities were representative of teachers’ deliberate facilitation of student learning via domain-specific innovation, creativity, and practice. In this section, teachers’ lessons will be described in their entirety. Data collected to create the basis for these findings included each classroom observation and pre-observation interview as well as artifact collection.

For Eleanor and Lily, state and county standards and accountability measures were relied on during the planning process. Both noted that while their county has a curriculum map they are encouraged to follow throughout the school year, it leaves room for flexibility towards the end of the school year. So, Eleanor devised her own plan, while Lily infused some creative elements into hers.

For Christina’s unit, students created a paper or electronic zine. A zine, according to one of the articles she provides to her students on the outset of the zine unit (Melnick, 2011), is a self-published, handmade, self-funded product that is only meant for a small community of readers, eschews advertisement, follows its own schedule, can have varied organizational structures, and contains a message. In order for students to be successful, she has designed and created a notebook containing information and directions for each step of the zine. She had “spent hours putting the books together.” She had been working on it for three years; it has “evolved” over that
time. The notebook included articles and blogs about zines, an overview of the unit, an introductory slide show, information about grades, information about the required speeches, poetry editing and revising guidelines, and links to any online information (e.g., her class page, online electronic poetry publishing tools), and 25 pages of various poetry formats. All of this information was not only available in the notebooks in class, but was also online on her class page through her school (her class page also makes visible all announcements, agendas, and due dates).

Of two lessons I observed, both contained four objectives. For the first observed lesson, she stated she would like students to write an excellent poem on the first try if possible, be willing to revise if not, and feel more excited about this week than last week. For the second observed lesson, she stated that she wanted the students learn how to revise referring to the guide sheet, practice patience, and to be able to work independently on the computers. The final objective for both weeks was to follow particular guidelines for poetry writing garnered from an artistic, yet easy to understand TED-Ed video illustrating Gayle Danley’s five guidelines for becoming a slam poet (i.e., write it all down, read it aloud, cut the fat, read it aloud again, give it “flava”).

Christina planned for each student to create a portfolio containing rough and final drafts, a tracking sheet for student self-assessment that also aids in her assessment, and a guide sheet for revision that is also offered in the aforementioned notebook. She communicated that the following school year, she would want students to keep a copy of the poetry editing and revising guidelines in their portfolios. Each week, students chose from a pool of up to 20 new poem formats to create three drafts. Students used the tracking sheet throughout the unit to list the titles and format of each draft; take
notes from articles, speeches, quotations, and pieces found for the zine; and list the titles and formats of three showcase pieces (each student will choose three of his/her best writing to showcase). Students were also able to refer to the tracking sheet to view grades of their work and brief notes reminding them about grading policies.

To begin the unit, Christina showed the TED-Ed video illustrating Gayle Danley’s five guidelines for becoming a slam poet (i.e., write it all down, read it aloud, cut the fat, read it aloud again, give it “flava”). This video portrayed a male student following five guidelines for poetry writing who ends up with a descriptive, humorous poem about his grandmother’s house. She then presented an introductory PowerPoint and students utilized the notebooks and portfolios to write poems, revise drafts, and take notes. At predetermined intervals students also delivered brief speeches called “Stand and Shares” based on the articles and blogs provided to them in their notebooks as well as self-assessments of their poetry writing. The final zine was to contain pages or slides including a collage of pictures, original poetry, and quotations from prominent authors that align to create one message.

In one classroom observation, I witnessed Christina review the Ted-Ed video and informative PowerPoint as well as introduce new poem formats. Students, then, utilized the teacher-made notebook to begin writing new poems either by hand or computer. During my second observation, I witnessed students reviewing written feedback Christina prepared for each student. Next, I viewed Christina coach students on how to use the materials she provided them to revise their drafts.

Eleanor’s lesson plans for the observed lessons centered on a Scholastic resource, SCOPE: The Language Arts Magazine. This resource was available for
students at different grade levels and provides teachers with engaging step-by-step lesson guides emphasizing close reading, critical thinking, and skill building. With this resource, students gained access to high-interest multi-genre content, practiced skills that align with the Common Core standards, and received differentiated instruction. While Eleanor utilized this resource for her lesson plans, she incorporated activities not included in the resource in order to further support her students’ learning.

Eleanor’s lesson centered on SCOPE’s narrative non-fiction article, “Lost in Death Valley: A Story of Courage and Survival in One of the Most Dangerous Places on Earth.” According to the teacher’s guide for this article, there were three essential questions, one learning objective, five key skills, and a particular lesson flow. The essential question of focus for the observed lessons was “How do humans cope with disaster?” The learning objective was “to analyze how descriptive writing adds to the reader’s understanding of the setting and events in a nonfiction text.” The five key skills for the lesson included author’s craft, mood, key details, text structure, and inference. Students prepared to read the article by discussing “what images the name ‘Death Valley’ evokes,” answering discussing questions based on two videos (i.e., one video about three women stranded in Death Valley; one video that “will introduce students to this incredible place and offer insights into the writing process”), and previewing vocabulary. Students were then to read the article, discuss answers to close reading questions, discuss answers to critical thinking questions, and complete a descriptive summary.

However, in lieu of having students complete a descriptive summary, Eleanor incorporated activities for citing evidence and creating a different culminating product.
She wanted her students to be able to know how to connect certain evidence with a particular topic and to be able to do so without just be copying sentences from the videos and article. She wanted her students to summarize and paraphrase utilizing various sentence starters (e.g., according to the text; the author stated; the illustration supports). Additionally, students created a culminating product in the form of a “foldable,” a brochure, advertising Death Valley. Students presented their brochures to the class.

For practicing citing evidence, Eleanor devised two activities. First, Eleanor wanted her students to find three different kinds of evidence (i.e., evidence relating to mood, description, and factors that contributed to the women getting lost) from the introductory videos and article that also related to the five key skills included in the teacher’s guide. Students were provided with three different colors of sticky notes that color-coded to three pieces chart paper located around her classroom that corresponded to the three kinds of evidence. Students filled out sticky notes using aforementioned sentence starters and relevant evidence. During a specified amount of time, students were able to move around the classroom and put their sticky notes on the corresponding piece of chart paper. All sticky notes were then read aloud. These pieces of chart paper were kept visible until the end of the lesson. Next, students made individual graphic organizers based on a teacher model that was divided into four sections: desert colors, descriptive phrases, wildlife events, and weather. Students individually completed this graphic organizer on a piece of construction paper, and then were given time to walk around the room to write down other classmates’ answers. Students kept a personal record of the notes and descriptions from each activity. She
told her students to take as many notes as they could: “I always give them a goal; I gave them a goal of having twenty-five words or more in each section.” I viewed these activities during my first classroom observation, and Eleanor shared her statement about goals during the first pre-observation interview.

For producing the brochure, students made graphic organizers on a piece of construction paper based on a teacher model that was divided into six sections: history, landscape, interesting facts, seasons, things to do, and dangers. Students watched a 10-minute National Geographic video on the Death Valley and took corresponding notes based on the video. Students were also able to fill in this graphic organizer based on knowledge learned from any activity in the entire lesson. Hence, essentially all knowledge gained from the beginning of the lesson up until this point could be utilized to create an intelligible, descriptive, and engaging final product. In the end, students presented their final product to the class for 30 seconds or Eleanor offered to show a student’s brochure on the overhead if they did not want to present. I viewed all activities during my second observation save the students’ 30-second presentation.

Lily’s curriculum map outlined that students should be able to understand how to develop and maintain voice in their writing through narrative by the end of the unit. Students were to know mood, point of view, tone, and dialogue. They analyzed the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone; compared and contrasted the structure of two or more texts; analyzed the connections among individuals, ideas, and events; and wrote a narrative.

Lily followed the curriculum map but with an infusion of her personal teaching style, which immersed dialogue and creativity into the unit. After the infusion of her
teaching style, the essential question stayed the same: How do I develop and maintain my voice in writing? Lily, however, created additional objectives and devised that her students would write a narrative in the form of poetry. For the two lessons I observed, Lily had differing objectives. For the first lesson, Lily communicated her objective involves assessing her students' “comfort levels [with poetry], their enjoyment of the activity, and, in the end, the product they create.” For the second lesson, Lily communicated her objective is for her students to “know the concept of the five senses, that we perceive the world in many different ways, and how to verbalize and write about these perceptions appropriately.” She expressed that she built these lessons around what she knew her students would participate in and enjoy. Ultimately, she wanted to her students to “understand that poems tie to your life and not be afraid of poetry.” She wanted students to connect to writing in a new way.

During the first observed lesson, her students were to write a found poem, which involved taking various but related words from a text and constructing them in a particular way to create a poem about a topic. Students pulled words from the music video Hazel’s Sister by Train. Lily noted, “the music video is phenomenal and I started using it when that song came out years ago with the kids because it has a perfect blend of music and words in it.” Her students watched the videos two times while her students’ desks were in rows. The first time students viewed the video “just to watch it,” and then the second time took notes of words and phrases that stood out to them, “things that they noticed that were repetitive, words that they thought were interesting, things that they noticed about the music video.” She then said

And then they’ll be grouped up and be given a piece of paper and then do what I call a brain splash and they’re each going to have a different color
pen and they’re all going to start writing their top five words or ten words on this paper and from there they will choose twenty words and try and create a poem out of those twenty words.

During the second observed lesson, her students wrote a sensory poem based on the postcards she has collected over the years. Lily reviewed sensory adjectives with her students, had students work in groups to brainstorm sensory words on chart paper (with the chart paper segmented into five sections that represent the senses), and guided her students through a ten-minute visualization activity with the use of a photo of the beach. Throughout the visualization, students had individual papers that mimicked the chart paper segmented into sections representing the senses. To conclude the lesson, students chose a postcard from a collection of postcards to write their own sensory poem to the tune of their favorite song.

These lessons were not intended to take only one class period each to implement. In fact, Lily noted that there were “a lot of what-ifs” about each lesson depending on student interest, reaction, and ability to complete various tasks. She revealed that, “each little lesson in the unit builds toward an end goal, which is an analytical and critical analysis of three different poems.” To this goal, students had to rely on their skills, their ability to pick out adjectives, pick out sensory adjectives, their ability just to understand poetry, poems, formatting, all of that and be able to interpret a poem at the surface level and then hopefully below.

This culminating activity was not observed.

**General Practices**

Across participants, observed general practices included differentiation and scaffolding. While each teacher employed various methods for differentiation, two notable methods incorporated scaffolding and student choice. To scaffold, teachers
provided students with an abundance of content in order to create a final product. Content was often student-created based on lesson objectives and teacher instruction; so, process and product were also differentiated. Additionally, each chunk of content would build on itself (i.e., scaffold) and the lesson would become increasingly complex until the unit concluded with a final product that would illustrate student competency with the objectives. For example, Eleanor provided instruction on setting, descriptive writing, author’s craft, mood, key details, text structure, and inference via various differentiated activities wherein students utilized the products from the activities to create a final product illustrating competency with these concepts, the brochure on Death Valley. Likewise, Lily provided instruction on poetry, voice, sensory details, mood, tone, text structure, and critical analysis via various differentiated activities wherein students utilized the products from the activities to create a final product illustrating competency with these concepts, a sensory poem.

To implement student choice, Christina designed her zine activities with variation in grouping, zine composition, poem format and structure, and the utilization of technology. Christina designed her unit with variation because “no matter how much you [students] feel ready to bang your head against the wall, you will find something that suits you and you don’t have to have it all.” She conveyed,

I think the freedom to explore and try various things; it’s honestly, kids need choices so much. I think every assignment given to a child needs to have at least two or three options to get at the same goal, if teachers would do that along with paying attention to their learning styles.

The same choices were offered to all of her students; however, for students with disabilities, these alternatives served as accommodations. She recounted one previous student with disabilities who “hated writing,” but learned to love it, and she attributed
that to the freedom of choice. She voiced, “I think that’s why, the choice.” Moreover, she expressed frustration that she cannot individually clone herself to meet every student’s needs. “This sort of is like an individual lesson plan for everybody.”

In addition, Eleanor applied principles of UDL in order to benefit her students by offering them choice of expression. Eleanor supported one struggling ELL student utilizing this principle. This struggling ELL student was given the option to practice her speaking skills by reading one or two recognizable words from the sticky note activity versus learning how to cite evidence from a text she could not even read. In fact, these same choices were offered to all of her students. For her students with disabilities, these choices served as accommodations. She communicated that her accommodations are “things I do for all my students, and that is one key thing that works with them.” Even though was a general education teacher at the time of data collection, she stated that she still uses all or most of the strategies she used when she was a special education teacher.

Likewise, Lily offered choices in utilizing basic differentiation techniques (e.g., differentiating grouping, content, process, or product) or varying the length of time students may take to complete an activity. About differentiation, Lily communicated

The biggest and most important thing about differentiating is allowing the kids to have a choice. That’s what differentiation is. Letting them have a choice. People think that differentiation means one solid thing; so, the rest of the kids are doing it this way and this kid only has to write one paragraph. I’ve differentiated. That’s not what the word actually means. And that’s not what comes from the theory behind that term either. And a lot of it comes down to choice and giving that student the freedom of choice and what they are going to do in a project or a thought or whatever and also you’re allowing them to customize their education, and their thoughts, and what they are learning.
Additionally, she admitted that she offers accommodations to all of her students regardless of label. She stated her preference to “offer accommodations to everyone” in order to “make it comfortable so [her students] don’t feel ostracized.” She noted that she typically offers accommodations including small group instruction, preferential seating, and extended time. She shared that “time is like a security blanket” for many of her students, which has served to reduce anxiety when participating in various activities. In fact, Lily recalled moments when she offered individual coaching sessions and, then when students began to ask questions in apprehension, may have said “no buts, finish it tonight, get it done, I believe in you.” She noted, “I have received back every paper that students have taken home for extended time because they feel comfortable bringing it relatively completed, and I’ll coach them and they’ll take it home again.” So, offering choice aided to relieve student anxiety about writing, which led her students to complete activities and products thoughtfully.

**Writing-Specific Practices**

Writing-specific practices utilized across teachers included teaching the writing process, dialogue, and feedback. Further, Christina and Eleanor emphasized modeling writing. For teaching the writing process, Christina emphasized revision. She expressed, “To me writing is always revision just as in life we are always revising, and writing is so important for kids to learn. And, mind you, maybe three out of my eight million students have ever taken to that easily.” Not only is revision an integral part of her lesson plans and objectives, but she provided students with models of writing she believes are excellent (e.g., on her Fame and Glory boards, in her classroom zine notebooks) and guidelines (e.g., in her revision guidelines in the classroom zine notebooks, via humorous video from the start of her lesson, from her introductory
PowerPoint). For one student, who Christina said struggles with writing, she helped print out revisions from his flash drive in order to provide handwritten feedback. She noticed a folder on his flash drive that read “revisions,” so she thought,

Oh, he’s done revision; he listened to me saying that today before they started that that was one of the things I’d written on the board and told them, that I wanted them to be working on their revisions. And so he had two revisions done and so we just hit print . . . it’s awesome, awesome, awesome.”

Eleanor told her students that “writing is a process and we learn by making mistakes and revising them.” She stated that she gives them plenty of class time and makes them write each day. She communicated that her students “understand that writing is something you have to do everyday to get better at it.” Further, she said students “need to grasp one concept before they go on to the next.” For example, she provides instruction on planning prior to drafting. She informed her students that a “planning sheet is like a cheat sheet because you cannot remember everything.” She said that planning sheets “give them a guide like pieces of a puzzle.” Moreover, Eleanor emphasized strategy instruction to teach her students essay writing skills. She has utilized the writing strategy “Wow, I’m a Writer” that she learned through a writing professional development program offered by her county. Eleanor advocated that this program helped her students with disabilities and her students struggling with writing because it provided them with “something concrete” her students could follow. She noted that even though the standards have changed this program is still valuable to use with her students with disabilities “because they need to have something concrete and they need to have a format.” She went on to communicate

And I have just found that it works with my ESE students – honestly it works across the board, and you can step it up for your higher level
students. I’ve taught advanced classes and it has worked with them as well.

Revision was integral in Lily’s classroom. Throughout the school year, Lily said that she worked hard to foster a culture of revision within her classroom. Lily noted that revision is “pretty much a staple in my classroom . . . there will be at least one writing activity each class.” She communicated to her students that they will “never ever write something perfect the first time, you need to keep revising and you’ll be a better writer.” She conveyed that “they need to understand that writing is a revision process no matter what it is that you’re doing and its constant and they need to get used to that because everything in real life requires multiple revisions.” She revealed, “they complained a lot at the beginning of the year about writing, but now they like it.” They used to say, “This is stupid; why does it have to be perfect?” Whereas now they will say, “Omigod, I missed that,” to which Lily will reply, “Right, revision.” Lily went on to say that her students “have gotten so used to revision they don’t expect to turn things in the first time they write it. That has been my life goal this year.”

To encourage dialogue, Christina shared, “I hope I can push them into sharing with each other more, reading their poems to one another and reading together.” She stated for her inclusion classes, she tends to read aloud much more. For students who struggle with writing, she noted she lets them know that she goes fast and it helps to have friends sitting near them to help them keep up and “show each other how it works.” During both of my classroom observations, I witnessed these actions. Further, Eleanor stated that her students “learn better from each other than her.” Consequently, she tried to pick on a variety of students otherwise she would “have the same students dominating the conversation or lesson the whole time,” and that was not what she
wanted. She wanted all of her students to share and learn together, and “they seem to listen and respond and remember what is being said when it’s coming from one of their peers instead of [her].” For writing, she expressed

I really worked extremely hard this year on getting them, as far as writing, where we share together, we correct, we give each other corrective criticism, we discuss it, we resolve… if they don’t know something or they need help on something, I really try to make it with writing where they’re open to ask questions.

Lily relayed, “For me it’s all about talking, and talking and literature are kind of the quintessential pieces of English learning, literature, and understanding and having the experience.” As such, she has provided many opportunities for dialogue as students engage in various activities. She advocated that dialogue “actually provides them with a safety net before they work an assignment that would otherwise be very overwhelming for them.” She also noted that when students work together via dialogue they can (and do) provide each other with encouragement, which Lily advocated is “especially important for students labeled with a disability,” so “students do not feel alone or struggle quietly and independently.” Further, Lily stated her belief that collaboration strengthens lessons. She noted that students may learn more when they engage in academic dialogue with each other versus when she stands up in front of the classroom delivering instruction. She stated, “

I think that any opportunity to work collaboratively strengthens your lessons. I think that it allows the students a bit of privacy to kind of work out their thoughts and to talk to each other . . . I think that collaborative structure allows a lot more learning than me standing up there and talking to them . . . I also think that if the collaborative structure also allows for the students to kind of be in a comfortable situation; they can kind of relax knowing that they have backup in their peers.

She also stated that the opportunities for dialogue embedded within her lessons provided them with the context from which to move forward; it provided them background knowledge; it allowed them to focus their thoughts and
to understand the concept that I was going for and to do so through talking and to do so through writing it while in small groups.

Lily provided an example where one student with autism has had a “very positive experience” working collaboratively. She noted that this student typically did not like working in groups; however, due to Lily’s inclusive instructional approach as well as the opportunities to practice working collaboratively, she learned to work well with others. Lily stated, “it’s been beneficial for her.”

Christina offered feedback to her students in order to support their learning. She noted that she reads each piece her students write and makes comments in pencil based on the most prevalent problems of each piece. Christina mentioned she provides feedback in pencil versus a red pen because the feedback is less threatening and allows her to erase what she has written if she decides to refine it. She has asked them to reread what they have written; refer to the guidelines; think of synonyms for words if one word is repeated too often; correct spelling; address diction, syntax, imagery, and rhythm; or double check line breaks, flow, and punctuation. In spite of the sophisticated points on which she may give feedback, she stated, “I try to make the feedback very not formal, very informal. I walk around lots of times and just talk in their ear, point.” She noted, “If I see they’ve used the same word five times in a short thing. I’ll just say let’s think of some other words that mean the same thing. And I won’t do it for them but I’ll just tell them what I want done.” Overall, she wanted “them to use their voices but also be clear and have good grammar.”

Eleanor communicated her preference to offer her students immediate feedback during class. She stated that she may walk around, look at what they have, and conference with them, and provide suggestions to students while they are writing. She
shared that for students with disabilities the most difficult thing is understanding the prompt, but if they misread the prompt their whole essay is wrong. Therefore, she stated that walking around the classroom and providing immediate feedback on summarizing the prompt and preplanning is key.

She recalled times walking around providing immediate feedback when working on summarizing and paraphrasing an essay prompt. She has reminded students, “Don’t look at the article. Look at me and tell me what it said.” She has said, “Don’t just read it or copy it word for word. Use your knowledge as well.” She recalled that many times she has helped her students with LD when they “are lost or not understanding something” when writing essays. In the moment, she has asked a struggling student to read the prompt to her, and then she has asked the student to tell her in his or her own words what it is asking. Then, she has written what they said on paper and jotted down the ideas they had for answering the prompt. She noted that students had suddenly realized they just engaged in preplanning.

Lily provided feedback to her students in order to improve their writing. Like Eleanor, Lily provided mostly immediate feedback during writing activities. Lily’s immediate feedback may be encouraging or constructive in nature. Lily has observed that when she provides immediate feedback, her students appear to be more encouraged and motivated to move forward with difficult writing tasks, including revision. Lily recalled providing encouraging feedback motivated students who have become distracted during writing due to academic or behavioral challenges. She has also observed that when she provides immediate feedback, her students “begin to take [their work] more seriously." She recounted a moment during data collection when one
student with LD was attempting to draft her poem. The student was frustrated, relying too heavily on what was already written on her paper unsure how to improve it. Lily covered up what was already written and said, “Tell me what you want to describe.” The student was ultimately able to proceed writing her poem more confidently and effectively. Moreover, Lily conveyed that her feedback may be verbal or nonverbal; in fact, she noted, “There is a lot in my classroom you can miss.”

Christina and Eleanor supported their students through modeling writing. For instance, Eleanor has shown her students how to do what she wants them to do, not just tell them. She revealed that “when they are completely starting a task from the beginning and they’ve never done it before,” she has always gone through the task with them first. Moreover, Christina stated that she begins any unit or lesson by “frontloading,” showing them many options and giving “the big picture first.” Frontloading, she reported, gives students a lot of options, and it forces them to go back and review and think. She described to her students “here is how you do this, here is how to do that. [Frontloading] takes us through the journey. And they love modeling.” Christina conveyed,

I don’t think you should assign anything for a kid to do unless you give them some sort of model to show them because personally I have to have that. It just makes you so secure. You’ve got to model.

She showed them myriad outstanding poems, read some aloud in class, and allowed some of the better readers in class read some aloud. Christina shared, “I hope I can push them into sharing with each other more, reading their poems to one another and reading together.” She stated for her inclusion classes, she tends to read aloud much more. For students who struggle with writing, she noted she lets them know that
she goes fast and it helps to have friends sitting near them to help them keep up and “show each other how it works.”

Assessing and Adapting Curricula to Meet Students’ Needs

The theme “assessing and adapting curricula to meet students’ needs” portrays how each teacher adjusts what she thinks and does based on knowledge gained from what she has learned, created, implemented, and assessed. Critical sub-themes include “assessing instruction,” “assessing student learning,” and “adapting lessons.” These sub-themes are valuable. It could be argued that the sub-themes “assessing instruction” and “assessing student learning” fit into the category “creating opportunities for teacher and student learning.” However, these sub-themes were ultimately placed under the current theme using the particular logic that just because a teacher may have engaged in teacher preparation or PD does not mean she will think about her own instruction and figure out new ways to integrate learned knowledge into her repertoire to foster student growth. Assessment of instruction and student growth combine with “adapting lessons” due to their unique potency to foster growth and improvement. For this theme, I also drew on five data sources, including interviews, observations, teacher reflections, lesson plans, and the researcher reflection journal.

Assessing Instruction

Each expert teacher engaged in assessment of their own instruction, of student behavior and lesson flow, in order to benefit their students’ learning. Christina, for instance, did not assign permanent seats because she likes “to see where they put themselves because I can learn a lot about them.” Moreover, she reported consistently “reading their faces, reading their frustrations, reading the way they sit, the way they move. Just like you realize when you need to say ok, brain break.” She has said during
a lesson, “Ok, let’s get up and walk around the classroom for a couple of minutes.” She noticed that students were frustrated about the lack of computers in her classroom. Due to the lack of computers, students could not always work completely at their own pace, as the lesson would allow, especially during frontloading. So, students who could be working at a faster pace have needed to wait while Christina assisted others who needed more assistance. During both observations, she noticed students volunteering to read aloud, sharing their writing in whole and small groups, and responding positively when she inquired about their attitude towards the unit and writing in general. She viewed, too, students working comfortably with each other and assembling their folders correctly. Students appeared calm and engaged in the activities she intended.

Eleanor also continually assessed the implementation of her lessons to ensure she was meeting the standards, following her county’s curriculum guide, and addressing students’ needs and interests. She relayed that sometimes she will ask her students questions to “assess whether students understand what she is saying” and “check on their progress.” She also relayed observing whether they make eye contact with her after she poses a question. She noted that if students do not make eye contact with her after she poses a question, they likely do not know the answer. Further, she said she may stand near students she knows typically repeat answers of other students, so she may compare what they say to what they have on their paper. She noted that, “sometimes these students just repeat what they heard because they don’t want to be wrong.” Of the observed lessons, she revealed that her sticky note method was even more effective than other methods she has implemented. She stated that the structure of color coding and the fact that the sticky notes “narrowed down” the task was helpful,
especially for her students with disabilities. She noted that because the task was shortened, in effect, her students who needed more time where able to take more time considering their responses. Eleanor communicated,

They asked me today are we going to do something like that again? Yeah, so I think it worked, and I think it’s a lot easier for them… they don’t feel overwhelmed and it’s a lot easier just to write one sentence on a sticky note than to have a sheet of paper and for them to think they’re going to have to write a bunch. And so I feel that really helped my ESE students because they were like oh, we just have to write one thing on a sticky note.

She also communicated that the majority of her students recorded a significant amount of descriptive notes and were engaged in creating the brochure.

To assess her lesson implementation, Lily utilized dialogue to continually assess the implementation of her lessons. Lily shared that she heard her students delight in the activity during casual conversation in class and the hallways after class as well as before class the days following the lessons. For instance, during the lesson, students were playing with words they had written. After class, she heard one student with LD say, “You are exuding an odor, you’re very fragrant today.” These types of comments let her know that the lesson worked to improve their vocabulary and understanding of sensory description. The day following the first lesson, students walked in motivated to engage in the day’s new lesson. One student with LD expressed, “I can’t wait to come to class tomorrow.” Lily expressed that the observed class “took the lesson further than any of the other classes in terms of their excitement and engagement.” Further, Lily noted, “When I say ok we’re going to write a poem now, they don’t all groan; they go, ‘Ok, I got it. Sure, bring it on; let’s do it.’” Notably, Lily revealed her students with LD were most engaged and participatory in the unit. She stated that they had the most written on any paper and the most interaction with their groups.
Assessing Student Learning

Each teacher assessed her students’ writing and her students’ writing progress. All teachers activated students’ background knowledge as well as utilized formative assessment and summative assessment to these ends. Teachers began units and lessons with ideas and concepts they believed would engage their students, something with which they could relate. When utilizing formative assessment, teachers engaged in dialogue with students, monitored student collaboration and engagement, employed writing rubrics, and monitored application of the writing process. When monitoring student collaboration and engagement to assess student progress and instruction, each teacher observed whether students appear comfortable, calm, and happy. While each teacher also engaged in summative assessment, they communicated that summative assessment should be authentic.

To implement formative assessment, Eleanor’s engaged in standards-based assessment. She utilized the Common Core State Standards, her state’s official writing rubric, and her county’s curriculum map to prepare her students for her state’s standardized tests. She provided her students with a plethora of opportunities and resources to engage in the writing process while emphasizing supporting claims with relevant evidence as well as clarity. For example, she provided instruction on various methods for prewriting, a strategy for providing evidence, and a student-friendly version of the state writing rubric, and opportunities to practice scoring essays using the student-friendly rubric. Throughout the school year until implementation of the statewide assessments, she prioritized expository and argumentative writing. During data collection, which took place after implementation of the statewide assessments,
Eleanor took time to practice and evaluate descriptive writing because students’ descriptive writing “is something that they are not necessarily tested on.”

She reported that evaluation of her students’ writing occurs during class time. She noted, “I walk around and check to see what they’re doing . . . it’s right then.” She expressed that this method is time-friendly for her as well as her students: she does not have to take all her students writing home to grade, but her students receive immediate feedback versus waiting “a few days” to get their work back. She continued, “I have found that it’s more effective for them because next week they’re not going to think about what they did this week.” Further, she stated her evaluations are typically not in the form of tests. Although Eleanor did not overtly state that she does not give tests to her students, she also did not discuss tests except in reference to state assessments. From my estimation, Eleanor typically evaluated her students writing during class time but also in authentic ways; so, students’ writing was evaluated based on writings or projects students created during class.

Additionally, students were provided opportunities for self-assessment. Eleanor’s students used classroom dialogue to self-assess: they see what they have written aloud and correct each other. Eleanor stated, “I really worked extremely hard this year on getting them, as far as writing, where we share together, we correct, we give each other corrective criticism, we discuss it, we resolve it.” Students also had the opportunity to self-assess by comparing their work to the models of writing (e.g., Wow, I’m a Writer) that Eleanor provides. Eleanor stated, “I model what can be done so that students are able to learn what they need to accomplish, to self-assess.”
About her perspective on the assessment of writing, Lily mostly discussed her views on mandatory testing. Her predominant thought was, “One test does not define who a person is.” She noted how her previous principal provided her faculty with a poem called “I’m Not a Test Score” by educator motivator Dr. Joe Martin. She stated that even though she now teaches Honors classes as well as intensive reading and language arts courses, she has shared this poem with all of her students. She believed in the poem’s ability to inspire students in her intensive courses to understand success beyond a test score. On the other hand, she stated that reading the poem to her Honors students reminds them that achieving a good test score is not the ultimate goal in intellectual development. She said,

I read it to my kids every single year whether they’re in upper- or lower-level courses because they all need to realize that one test score does not define who you are, and we have to develop everything else. I’m glad you’re a good test taker; now it’s time to work on everything else, being able to have a real conversation and thought in your brain.

In fact, Lily prompted her former principal to recognize students in her intensive course, students who scored a Level I or II on her state’s standardized assessment, as “more than a test score.” She recalled when this principal observed her teach a lesson on the novel The Giver, one of Lily’s favorite novels. Following the observation Lily remembered her principal inquiring, “Why aren’t these kids in Honors classes? They have amazing thoughts.” This observation affected real change, a scheduling change that led to a course that includes students with varying achievement levels. Likewise, Lily shared that she reminds her colleagues that they are valuable beyond the labels “effective” or “highly effective” designated by the county, as she does not want to be defined by test scores either. She stated, “Just like they’re not defined by a test score, I’m not defined by a VAM [value-added modeling] score either.”
To assess her students, Lily indicated, “the first thing is to understand where your students are and meet them there. That is where it starts. I have to know where they stand.” To this end, she discussed consistent engagement in ongoing, frequent formative assessment “through observation and conversation.” She discussed that evaluates her students as they walk through her classroom door at the beginning of each class period. She said that she assesses their body language, their nonverbal communication, a skill she attributes to her communication with her father and uncle with muscular dystrophy. During class time, she discussing building in opportunities for dialogue in order to “tell what they understand by the conversations that we’re having” as well as student self-assessment.

To encourage authentic assessment, these teachers discussed their opposition “drill and practice.” To use Lily’s words, they believed their students are “more than a test score.” Christina stated that even though “middle school kids see writing as an assignment that you do, it’s over, you turn it in, writing is not like that, it just stays with you and stays with you and stays with you.” She revealed, “I never give tests; I don’t believe in tests; I believe in projects; I believe in showing what you’ve learned in real life situations.” Indeed, during data collection, Christina did not discuss or ever give a test to assess her students. Furthermore, Christina discussed her perspective of mandatory testing. Overall, she stated that she disagrees with it. She expressed educators should focus more on providing compelling material versus practice testing “ad nauseam.” In reference to students who struggle with writing, she expressed

I think a lot of it’s the material, and when I taught basic skills they studied exactly what my regular kids were studying and I did a lot more reading aloud to them. That’s what I believe in profoundly. So many of these kids who come from challenging environments are not dumb; they are
streetwise, smart, and know when you’re giving them nonsense and they think you don’t respect them. These kids don’t thrive on test practice ad nauseum they appreciate compelling literature, something to read that just knocks your head off. They read it and they love it and they remember it.

She admitted that even though so much about teaching has changed, she does not overtly teach to the standards or take accountability measures into consideration when she plans her instruction: the standards are woven into the curriculum and lesson plans rather than drilled and tested. Christina reported, however, using her state’s rubric to assess her students’ writing at times. She stated she used it more often in the past, but now has “become more of a rebel.” Altogether, Christina conveyed she utilizes her state’s rubric as well as her own expertise in writing to assess her students’ writing progress.

And I have what they call je ne sais quoi . . . which is “a quality that cannot be described easily.” It’s just sort of part of that mystery. I share with all the kids that there’s just a mystery to good writing. Although building blocks are taught and guidelines provided, sometimes you can’t even tell why the end product is good; you just know it; you know it when you read it.

Lily utilized summative assessment upon completion of a lesson unit. She stated that typically she has culminating activities that require synthesis from multiple sources wherein students respond to an open-ended higher order question. So, like the creation of a positive classroom culture, these teachers worked to support students both emotionally and academically.

**Adapting Lessons**

Overall, participating teachers utilized adaptivity in meaningful and creative ways to diversify and evolve to increasingly meet their students’ varying needs. Teaching is complex, and these teachers embraced this complexity: they worked with it, went with the flow, grew, developed, changed, responded to variation, problem solved, analyzed
critically, reflected, imagined, loved, accommodated, and had faith. They were resilient and flexible. Christina, for instance, referred to a teaching “magic.” Eleanor touted being “flexible.” Lily referred to curriculum being “alive.” These words denote dynamic conditions and conduct. In the following section, how teachers adapt over time as well as how they reacted to immediate unexpected circumstances is addressed.

Christina expressed that, over time, the only “magic” she has found to actually teaching reading and writing to students with and without LD “is love and positive encouragement and the child needs to try to do it.” She stated that learning and observing student learning matter greatly to her, and she has vowed to continue to learn more for the extent of her career. She conveyed, “I so believe in education. I just… just the energy… just the energy I get from seeing people understand things and do things. I love learning myself; I love to try new things.”

Nonetheless, based on my analysis of all collected data for Christina, she has much more magic: she has shown the ability to adapt. When Christina believed she did not have the pedagogical knowledge to serve her students, she adapted. For example, Christina admitted that towards the beginning of her career, she was not trained to teach reading. She did begin master’s level courses at the university for teaching reading but stated her learning of reading instruction was moving slowly. Until the point when she learned an appropriate amount of domain-specific pedagogy, she said she implemented “a lot of crazy [Christina] things.” In other words, she engaged the students in authentic project-based lessons that resulted in a final published product. The final published product was a history scrapbook of her school’s community. She
would drive them around, and they would take notes for the scrapbook (she noted that in the 1960s and 1970s, teachers could just “drive kids anywhere”).

We went to the graveyard and they were terrified but we took some and we found and we did grave rubbings and stuff, then we went around and interviewed some of the oldest people and we did research on some of the names and oh what else did they do? They wrote some little kind of stories and when I said wrote them they told me the stories and I typed them on a typewriter – we didn’t have computers then – and then I would sit with them and I would read what they had written and show them the words and a lot of them learned like that. Some of them wanted to learn how to type and you could put the word, the word list or whatever they… here, type these words, say these words, and that’s what I did and they just sort of learned.

Then, they made their book, visited the woodshop class to make the book covers, and she contacted a local fraternity where the students would present the scrapbook. The students were introduced as special guests and “some of the girls were wearing semi-formal dresses. They were so excited.” Other projects included setting up a clothes closet and visiting parents as “sort of social workers” and doing “a lot food things” where events were catered, like a “Valentine banquet and the king and queen and we wrote proclamations; just anything we could write, a proclamation, love poems and we would read them…”

Christina also spoke at length about simplifying. She relayed that simplifying helps her “to stay at the essence of what it is to be a writer and to be a communicator and just get the nonsense out of the way.” She said completing all of the assignments she gives to her students has helped her simplify because she may try it and think it is a “ridiculous” assignment. She also said she has changed her zine unit over the years. She has made it more writing-focused, added more poem structures, used the class page more “even though that made the page bigger and less simplified,” gotten hardcover notebooks and reinforcers, and added a basket up front with magazine
pages, textbook pages, and old notebooks from kids “way, way back.” Christina also
simplified by teaching poetry writing to emphasize revision instead of essay writing.

You’d carry around those two hundred essays all on the same topic and
you would just be ready to throw up by the time you got to the end of
them. But poetry when it’s all the different... it’s like I love to read every
one of them and I can comment and the kids can revise.

She expressed with poetry you can still teach main idea, imagery, compression of
ideas, focus, word choice, and strong endings; except the students “do not feel so
daunted.”

When certain changes transpired, Eleanor decided to “change with the new
ways.” Eleanor’s county adopted new textbooks to align with her state’s adoption of the
Common Core State Standards. About this issue, she stated that “you have two
choices: not to change and your students won’t be successful with the tasks you’ve
assigned to them or you go with the flow and you teach them what they need to know.”

For instance, Eleanor “got rid of eight years of lessons with her old textbook.” She said,
“If I’m expecting to teach new ways and new ways of writing to them I cannot have the
old ways there. Now I can integrate some of them but I need to be willing to change and
learn with them.” Eleanor learned new ways of writing herself due to these changes in
order to improve her students’ learning. Eleanor relayed that one teacher at her school
refused to change and continued to use the old textbooks and his old lessons; as a
result, she revealed that his assessment scores were really low. Overall, Eleanor is
“OK with changing.” She conveyed, “I’m not stuck. Things change. So, as a teacher
you just can’t totally wipe out everything you’ve done and totally change everything, but
you have to be willing to progress and go on.”
She noted that with these systems changes, “basically things went from narrative and literature-based writing to informational- and argumentative-based writing.” Accordingly, she chose to focus on descriptive writing at the end of the school year “because it is not something that students are necessarily tested on; that is more your expository or argumentative, and I decided to focus on it at the end because of all the drastic changes we’ve had with the standards.” Further, she communicated some students believe that everything they have learned previously is no longer useful and become frustrated with these “new” ways of writing. However, Eleanor revealed that she strives to show her students “it’s not that what you learned about writing was wrong, there’s different ways of writing.” Thus, Eleanor sought to learn new ways of writing, stay flexible with the changes by creating new lessons, adjust her lesson implementation timeline to encourage student success on state and county assessments, and encourage her students to be amenable to the changes.

For Lily, adapting meant thriving off of witnessing her students’ grow. She voiced that many of her students have “been so beaten down in terms of testing and the labels they know are ascribed to them.” No matter the label ascribed to them, Lily vowed to raise their confidence and ability in reading and writing. She communicated

It’s been brilliant to watch the growth and this is not just a this year thing; I love watching my students grow every single year and become different people than when they first walked through my door and knowing that love me, hate me, I’ve left some kind of impact on your life that will make you think about things.

Lily also spoke specifically about her students with LD, saying that she has seen them grow a sense of pride over the school year. She has witnessed her students with LD grow from “writing very elementary three-sentence paragraphs to be able to write by
themselves sentences and paragraphs that are progressive in thought and supported by
the text.” She said she “feels impressed by her students to no end.”

Lily has capitalized on her creative prowess in order to encourage her students’
growth. She stated that “going on her own love of reading and writing” has worked to
encourage growth. She communicated that due to their lack of success on
standardized assessments as well as having an understanding that their label may
make them “different,” she has to be creative because “they’ve never engaged with a
book before and that kind of blew my mind.” She noted,

So I had to be creative because above all I wanted my students to
question everything that comes from their personal background, don’t take
everything that’s handed to you. I used a novel and talk and discussion
and questions to help them get their critical thinking analytical thinking that
kind of stuff working. I got real serious with analyzing a text and going
deeper than the surface.

She also shared, “If I can get them to have that [positive] reaction with a text, why can’t I
do the same with writing?” About writing, she expressed

I have this big picture especially when it comes to writing and it’s hard for
me to pull writing out from anything else in my class as a component
because it’s kind of a whole package thing in how I look at my classroom
and how I teach, they’re all kind of blended together. My kids write all the
time. Everything we do is interwoven with writing.

Lily stated that she “tries to engage them creatively as much as possible because
they don’t get that very often.” She “lets kids play with imagination and creativity
because they don’t get to do that a lot.” She revealed, “I take every chance I get. I
think they crave those opportunities, and that is the method behind my madness.” She
said that

I never really stop being creative, like my coworkers and my family would
hear me I would have an idea in the shower and I would be like oh my
gosh, I think that they should do this and they’d ask, ‘What are you talking
about?’ Oh, I just came up with my lesson plans, like I am ditching
everything I was going to do tomorrow, and we’re going to do this instead. And that’s why the kids love you, and that’s why the kids always do well. Being flexible and being creative is kind of how I ended up where I am.

To have experiences that are “not always negative,” Lily provided examples of her creativity. For instance, she reported, “I am one of those rare birds that love poetry,” so she loves to teach it. She relayed loves to read poetry aloud to her students because, “they very rarely even had poems read aloud to them, which makes me sad.” She also communicated the importance of working creatively with poems versus only teaching poetry for the sake of learning poetic devices (e.g., symbolism, mood).

In addition, Lily relayed that in the past she has read her students a fairytale (while employing cliffhangers) with a twisted ending. She recounted that her students reacted passionately to the surprise ending, as they were expecting a typical fairy tale ending. Due to her students’ passionate reaction, she thought “on the spot” to have students write their own fairytales. She was elated to receive “all kinds of crazy stories with plot twists and psychotic-ness.” Her students “rewrote Disney stories to have some pretty tragic and chaotic endings,” she recounted, “the one that made me laugh the most was the Frozen II rendition which was basically Elsa kills everybody.” Lily revealed that she appreciates the “organized chaos,” and “tries not to squash their off the wall thoughts.”

Christina has also adapted to an unexpected or unfavorable circumstance that occurs during lesson implementation. During my observations, lessons did not always go as planned due only to the state’s testing schedule. She could not bring her students to the library to work on their poems because students were using that space for testing. It seemed that she would not know day-to-day if the computers would be
available to her. So, she would have to change her lessons “on the spot.” She adapted and worked with her colleagues and students to find a solution.

Adapting was also sudden for Eleanor. As aforementioned, Eleanor’s county provided a curriculum map that teachers were required to follow. However, she admitted she considers her students’ needs as she follows the curriculum map. She stated, “I’m not going to move on to get this done on Monday because tomorrow is Tuesday. I’m very flexible with that.” During class time, she conveyed that she may quickly “jot down” which parts of the lesson did not work, and other times she may make adjustments while she is teaching. During data collection, she changed her lesson plan from one day to the next. She noticed that her students were interested in the stories and descriptions of Death Valley; hence, she opted to assign a project to further engage her students in the topic (i.e., the brochure) versus assign what she had previously planned (i.e., the descriptive summary). She said it was as if “the brochure idea just came off the top of her head” and thought her students would appreciate the potential competition in completing the project.

Additionally, she revealed that she appreciates having her inclusive classes earlier in the school day. She stated that even though her instructional and classroom management approaches may differ some for her inclusive and higher level classes, if she can get her inclusive classes to understand a lesson then the rest of her classes will probably understand the lesson. She also, after assessing her students’ reaction to her questions (e.g., students not making eye contact with her after questioning), has changed the trajectory of her original lesson plan. She has implemented a change on the spot (e.g., extend or shorten time to complete the task or activity) or from one day to
the next, like how she changed the observed lesson plan from the descriptive summary to the brochure. She communicated, “It’s very important to observe and look at how they’re reacting and what they’re doing.”

Lily stated that, because she knows her students’ abilities, needs, and interests, she is sure to adjust lessons to meet their needs. Further, Lily stated that she gets very excited about certain activities in her lesson plan. She has moved forward to a particular activity if students are demonstrating proficiency with the lesson objectives. Finally, she noted having to bend to unexpected circumstances, like testing or realizing a certain part of lesson was unsuccessful. She said, “I am able to accept when I am wrong, I am willing to change and self-reflect.” Lily “constantly” engages in reflection. She communicated that she will “not stick with the status quo because it’s a lesson plan she’s created and used for years in a row. I am willing to change and be with each group of students each year.” Lily stated she has a bag that says, “Keep calm and pretend it’s on the lesson plan.”

From my estimation, the following quotation encapsulates Lily’s finesse in regards to her adaptive competence:

“I’ve always been told that I’m a black sheep, that I don’t follow the grain, that I don’t teach the way an English teacher is supposed to teach and you’re supposed to stand there and lecture and be the talking head. I never learned well in classes like that, and I doubt that the students of today’s day and age would learn well either. So, I’ve never been that person and I love coming up with new ideas. To me curriculum it’s alive; you have to play with it and change it and you don’t get stuck doing the same thing.

Lily expressed that, to her, the curriculum is alive: it is living, it is animated, and it can evolve and inspire. And, while Lily has worked to align her instruction with her state’s
standards and her county’s curriculum map, she has resolved to infuse the love of the written word into her instruction.

**Summary**

Each participant expertly engaged in creating, implementing, and adapting; however, each carried out actions in her own ways. It could be said that these teachers indeed shared a “family resemblance” (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995) while varying individually. They all had a different systems and techniques but approached instruction with similar ideals, practices, and processes.

Each of the three themes (i.e., seeking opportunities for teacher learning, planning and implementing opportunities for student learning, and assessing and adapting curricula to meet students’ needs) carries its own significance. Participating teachers sought effective opportunities to learn. Additionally, these expert teachers created an environment as well as planned and implemented lessons to engage students and strengthen their writing. Further, they assessed their instruction and student learning in order to meaningfully adapt their instruction to meet their students’ needs. When integrated, these themes become more powerful than when isolated, as they work together to learn (a) how expert middle school language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms and (b) the nature of writing instruction provided by expert middle school language arts teachers to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms. It is at the heart of these themes that these teachers’ development of expertise resides. According to the results of this study, one theme cannot be removed if teachers intend to cultivate expertise.
Additionally, elements described within one theme may overlap with elements of another. For example, many implemented practices that provide academic support may also work to create a positive classroom culture. As lesson accommodations are provided to support students’ learning, they may also allow for students to approach writing tasks with less apprehension and stress, thereby enhancing classroom culture. Correspondingly, when students utilize dialogue, students gain access to thought processes related to writing, but this dialogue may also be observed by teachers and utilized for formative assessment.

While the findings of this qualitative study may appear confirmatory, some findings were inconsistent with my expectations. First, each teacher discussed their approach to teaching writing to students with LD in the same way as they discuss their approach to teaching students without disabilities. For students with LD, teachers utilized accommodations to promote writing improvement. Indeed, all implemented lesson plans included space for any student to utilize various accommodations (e.g., small group instruction, preferential seating, extended time). However, each teacher revealed that they offer accommodations to all of their students. Each teacher echoed that what works for students with LD, works for all students. For example, Christina’s students were able to work at their own pace and ability level. So, gifted and struggling writers alike could personalize their zines to their interests and ability levels while still meeting her objectives.

Likewise, I expected to hear teachers discuss specific strategies for improving writing for students with LD, strategies other than dialogue, process writing, and feedback. For instance, I expected to hear more than one teacher (i.e., Eleanor)
discuss explicit writing strategies for improving writing length and quality. While these findings were unexpected, the teachers’ approach to inclusivity was honorable, and their approach has worked to motivate students and encourage students to see writing as malleable.

The following chapter compares the findings of this study with extant research relayed in Chapter 2. This comparison notes the extent to which teachers’ practices align with research leading to implications for teacher preparation and development as well as implications for future research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Education and Experience</th>
<th>Certifications</th>
<th>Documented Impact on Student Performance</th>
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</table>
| Christina | • B.A. English  
• M.Ed. General Education  
• 50 years teaching at the secondary level  
• Extensive PD in teaching writing | • English 6-12 certification  
• Gifted Endorsement | • A leader in the field of teacher education for teaching writing to secondary students endorsed Christina as an expert secondary writing teacher |
| Eleanor | • B.Ed. and M.Ed. in Varying Exceptionalities  
• 17 years teaching at the middle school level  
• Extensive preparation and PD in teaching writing | • English 5-9 certification  
• Exceptional Student Education K-12 certification  
• ESOL Endorsement  
• Reading Endorsement | • Results from county writing assessment data during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years show student growth |
| Lily | • B.A. English  
• M.Ed. English Education  
• 10 years teaching at the middle school level  
• Extensive preparation and PD in teaching writing | • English 6-12 certification  
• Middle Grades Integrated 5-9 certification  
• Exceptional Student Education K-12 certification | • Results from county writing assessment data during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years show student growth |
Figure 4-1. The Grounded Theory: Expertise for Teaching Writing to Middle Students with LD
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

Because many secondary teachers of writing are not well prepared to teach writing, the average secondary student is not proficient in writing. In addition, classrooms are becoming more inclusive (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Therefore, it is important to learn what expert secondary literacy teachers do to promote positive student outcomes for a heterogeneous group of students. Empirical data collected from expert middle school language arts teachers were analyzed according to a constructivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998) and analyzed according to Charmaz’s (2006) approach to grounded theory. Through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and artifacts of expert middle school language arts teachers, I aimed to understand how these teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing and the nature of their writing instruction for students with LD in their classrooms. Two research questions were considered: (a) How do expert middle school language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms? (b) What is the nature of writing instruction provided by expert middle school language arts teachers to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms?

In this chapter, I juxtapose my findings with extant literature on the development of expertise and writing instruction for secondary students with LD. This juxtaposition will be addressed through responses to the research questions. Study limitations, implications for teacher development, and directions for future research area also discussed.
Juxtaposition with Extant Literature

According to extant literature, teachers need expertise in their domain (Berliner, 2004). For teachers of writing, knowledge in general classroom practices and writing practices are necessary to improve student outcomes. However, no research study addressed how expert secondary language arts teachers view the development of their expertise. Further, very little existing research addresses how expert secondary language arts teachers approach their instruction (e.g., Grossman Loeb, Cohen, Hammerness, Wyckoff, Boyd, & Lankford, 2010; Parr & Limbrick, 2010; Preus, 2012). Hence, new ideas can be learned from this study, which contribute to the current body of research. First, because no study has addressed how expert secondary language arts teachers view the development of their expertise, the findings are novel within the study of expertise. Also, “assessing and adapting” are emphasized to a greater extent, particularly for students with disabilities. The claim can be made from results of this study that teacher assessment and adaptation are vital to student improvement in writing as well as the development of individual teacher expertise.

The Development of Expertise for Secondary Language Arts Teachers

Participating teachers’ development of expertise is consistent with existing research. For example, professional expertise has been defined in various ways (Farrington-Darby & Wilson, 2006), and the various definitions denote expertise as successful problem-solving (Ropo, 2004); deliberate practice or peer nominations (Ericsson, 2008); cognitive process and mechanisms or characteristics for use in complex and dynamic environments (Farrington-Darby & Wilson, 2006); or abilities that take us beyond what nature has trained us to do (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993). In education, expertise is defined as highly contextual with a breadth and depth of rich,
domain-specific knowledge (Berliner, 2001) as well as collaborative (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Each teacher aligns well with any of these conceptualizations of expertise. On the other hand, while some research illustrated educational expertise in terms of stages (Berliner, 2004), these teachers did not conceptualize their journey to expertise using the words “stage” or “phase.” Although, they did begin discussion of their journeys linearly denoting their road to expertise as a process (Ericsson & Charness, 1994).

Furthermore, Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, and Beckett (2005) addressed adaptive expertise. Adaptive expertise represents innovativeness, integration of knowledge, accuracy, problem solving, and fluidity. The ability of participating teachers to adapt to various circumstances and student need was a major finding in this research. Additionally, the grounded theory represented in the findings align with a study that utilized Sternberg and Horvath’s (1995) framework for expertise outlined in the theoretical framework. Smith and Strahan (2004) found, from their case study of three National Board certified teachers, six central tendencies across participants. These expert teachers (a) had confidence in their profession, (b) talked about class as community, (c) maximized the importance of developing relationships with their students, (d) demonstrated a student-centered approach to teaching, (e) contributed to the profession through leadership and service, and (f) showed evidence they are masters of their content areas. Once more, participating teachers’ development of expertise corroborates this research.

It is important to note that among professional standards for teacher competency for students with and without disabilities (i.e., inTASC, CEC, DLD), professional
learning, collaboration, and knowledge enactment are all represented (e.g., NWP participation). These aspects of the standards for competency are represented in this research.

The Nature of Writing Instruction of Middle School Language Arts

Participating teachers’ nature of writing instruction aligns with existing research on effective instructional practices for students with LD and research on writing in middle school language arts for students with and without disabilities. Notable parallels can be made across findings. Of the roughly 25 general practices for LD discussed and 19 practices for teaching middle school writing, 10 instructional practices appear most prominent. These 10 practices include (a) creating safe, inclusive environments wherein teachers know their learners, (b) goals for learning, (c) modeling writing, (d) scaffolding learning, (e) collaborative dialogue at the teacher and student level, (f) process writing instruction, highlighting prewriting and revision, (g) differentiated instruction, (h) explicit writing instruction, conceivably utilizing writing strategies, (i) ongoing, systematic feedback, and (j) assessment.

Likely, utilizing these instructional practices and approaches will positively influence middle students’ writing in regards to writing quantity, quality, and/or self-efficacy. It is important to note that among professional standards for teacher competency for students with and without disabilities, learners’ development and characteristics, instructional strategies, learning environments, student assessment, collaboration are all represented (i.e., inTASC, CEC, DLD). These aspects of the standards for competency are represented in this research as well. On the other hand, for students with LD, teachers in this study stated that what they do, they do for all students. Participating teachers do provide explicit instruction including differentiation
and accommodations, but the collected data revealed that direct instruction or specific writing strategies are not often employed.

Although some findings may appear non-writing related, these findings are specific to writing instruction. For example, it is likely explicit instruction or scaffolding would benefit students within any content area. Moreover, knowing how to be a writer, pedagogical content knowledge for writing, or how to effectively provide feedback, for instance, are decisively valuable.

**Limitations**

As with all inquiry, this study has several limitations. First, I was not able to use the complete criteria established to identify expert teachers due to lack of standardized assessment data. Data collection for this study took place during the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which affected the different kinds of participating teachers’ demographic data I could collect. Much state-level standardized assessment data were no longer available to county research managers. Second, data collection took place at the end of a school year, which may have only provided a snapshot of the various kinds of engaging and standards-focused lessons these teachers may be providing to their students. Possibly, data collection at various points throughout a school year may have provided information from a different angle(s). For example, my data collection occurred following the state assessment on writing, which is why I was likely not able to observe any extended student writing (although, revision was still prominent). Also, due to the study’s research methodology, it cannot be determined with causality whether any specific piece of the participants’ history, demeanor, or approach to instruction have led to their students’ success.
Further, student work samples were not collected nor were student interviews conducted. So, alignment between participating expert teachers’ instruction and specific improvements in their students’ writing were not examined, and the functions middle school teachers of writing have in their students’ growth and success were not established. Likewise, student voice was not captured in order to deepen the examination of the participating teachers’ expertise and instruction. In addition, although Fox, Ericsson, and Best (2011) found that thinking aloud does not typically alter participant provision of thought processes, verbal reports encourage reactivity. So, it is possible that mere inclusion in the study may have altered participant behavior or response during observations or interviews, especially because visits were scheduled.

**Implications for Teacher Preparation and Development**

According to my analysis, to grow into an expert writing teacher, it is not enough for teachers to participate in the required PD for the sole purpose of certificate renewal and then continue teaching and behaving in static ways. Teachers need to seek out new and diverse paths for learning, continue cultivating spaces for learning, utilize research-based and authentic practices, and continually assess students and instruction. As such, this study has resulted in multiple implications for teacher educators, county and school administrators, and teachers. However, some cautions will be discussed following those implications.

For teacher preparation, this study has implications for what preservice teachers may need to learn. Although two of the three teachers reported they received an extensive amount of preparation for teaching writing from their graduate teacher preparation programs, all three teachers emphasized past writing experiences and professional development during the interviews as a key to the development of their
expertise. Further, even though seeking learning opportunities were instrumental for these teachers’ development of their expertise, there was no indication they learned from their preparation programs how to continue to improve their practice throughout their careers. Also, assessing student learning, assessing their own instruction, and adapting curricula to meet students’ needs were valuable findings in this study. These findings may indicate that teachers benefit from learning about teaching writing in real-world settings (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995) and complex contexts (Ericsson, 2004) as well as theory and research for teaching writing. Learning to teach in real-world and complex settings may work to improve teachers’ adaptability and ability to solve problems efficiently and creatively to refine their instruction over time. It is important teachers know how to continually improve their practice over time.

For county and school administrators, support for learning provided to teachers matters. Two out of three participating teachers communicated that a county and/or school administrator either stimulated or impeded their classroom instruction. So, administrators should seek to learn various approaches and methods for teaching writing to all students as well as teacher evaluation in order to best support teachers and identify true areas of need. Likewise, professional development opportunities matter. The teachers in this study viewed extended, collaborative professional development programs as valuable. According to results of this study, it is also important for teachers of writing to be writers themselves, so opportunities to facilitate this process should be made available. Moreover, each participating teacher discussed teaching to state standards and how testing can interfere with classroom instruction; it
could be beneficial to devise professional development opportunities to promote standards-based writing instruction.

Even with their expertise for teaching writing, participating teachers relied heavily on what they think about writing as well as what they liked about how they were taught to write. For these reasons, it is important for teachers to seek out research-based, and possibly standards-based, professional learning opportunities designed to shape or expand their personal view of writing. Additionally, to develop expertise, teachers need to utilize knowledge learned from those opportunities to improve their instruction. Teachers should stay flexible and always try new things with the goal of assessing and learning from what has been implemented.

Teachers should know that implementation is the link between research and practice. A particular combination of effective practices does not make up a curriculum (Cook & Odom, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007b), as promoting student competency in writing is contextually situated (Santangelo, 2014). For students with LD, beliefs on inclusion and how best to serve and accommodate matter. For students with disabilities, instruction from a constructivist or sociocultural perspective is not enough, as students with disabilities need explicit, direct, and systematic instruction (Graham & Harris, 1994).

Some caveats must be noted. The participating teachers provided instruction in their general education classrooms that were indicative of Tier 1 instruction. Tier 1 instruction is typically provided in a whole group setting, while Tiers 2 and 3 are typically represented by small groups and individualized instruction (although, all 3 tiers require the use of evidence-based practices as well as accommodations or modifications to
instruction). If the teachers in this study had been providing instruction in Tiers 2 or 3, different lesson activities and practices may have been observed. So, the results of this study contain a description of instruction and expertise development only for general education teachers providing Tier 1 writing instruction to their secondary students with LD. The grounded theory presented in this study may not be appropriate for teachers provided secondary students with LD with Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction.

**Implications for Future Research**

Based on extant research and the present study, multiple suggestions for future research can be made. For this study, 51 articles met the criteria for inclusion in the comprehensive literature to learn about expertise for teaching writing or effective pedagogy for writing in inclusive middle school language arts classrooms. Forty-five of those studies were published on or after 2000. Thirty-three of those studies were published at least one year after the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (although, a few studies were not conducted in the United States). Clearly, research on effective writing practices for secondary students is on the rise.

Nevertheless, more quality studies should be conducted to investigate expertise and the nature of instruction for teaching writing to all secondary students. Studies with similar goals to this one should be conducted with teachers in different contexts and across settings (e.g., resource classrooms, urban contexts) to juxtapose findings. Studies of classrooms and teachers should be conducted across settings (e.g., resource classrooms) and contexts (e.g., large urban districts). These kinds of studies would allow researchers to create expert profiles (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995) for teaching writing to various secondary students. Also, research could provide a model for what various stages of teacher expertise (Berliner, 2004) for teaching writing to
secondary students may look like. A model could also be designed for teachers of LD to compare differences. Because adaptive expertise was a major finding in this research, further examination of adaptive expertise for secondary writing instruction could extend findings. Additionally, research across contexts could mean learning whether any expert teachers of writing are addressing specific needs of students with LD in different ways or differentiation and accommodations are typically provided to all students.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine effects of expert instruction over time. Students should be included in further research with different groups of participating students, including students with disabilities (including students with LD) and from different backgrounds (e.g., students in poverty, ELL students) to juxtapose findings. Including students may serve to link instruction to specific improvements in student writing as well as provide students with a voice to deepen understanding. Administration could also be included to deepen understanding of supporting the development of expertise and instruction for secondary teachers of writing.

Moreover, more research could be conducted utilizing different research designs and theoretical perspectives. While this study’s constructivist perspective examined participants’ perspectives, experiences, and meaning-making processes (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, Hayes, 2009), other designs or perspectives may lead to equally meaningful results (e.g., socially constructed views, sociopolitical views, correlated or causal effects). In addition, improved observation measures could be developed in order to examine teacher effectiveness and nuance for teaching writing to
secondary students with and without LD keeping in mind that observation protocols
developed for general education may not easily apply to special education (Benedict,
Thomas, Kimerling, & Leko, 2013). Finally, much of the existing writing research
addressing genre focused on narrative, expository, or persuasive writing. However,
implementation of the Common Core has shifted focus to argumentative over
persuasive writing. Hence, research could be conducted addressing explicit instruction
for argumentative writing.

Conclusion

With the aim to examine secondary teacher expertise and instruction for students
with LD in Language Arts, the findings of this study corroborate with extant research.
The results indicate these teachers have varied but comparable backgrounds and
attitudes regarding writing and writing instruction. Also, these teachers have different
approaches to teaching writing but with comparable classroom and student goals.
These teachers consistently seek out new knowledge to implement in their classrooms
with the goal of learning from what they implement. Possibly the most important finding
is these teachers’ ability to contextually situate their instructional behaviors; in other
words, they demonstrated adaptive expertise. For students with LD, results indicated
that limited instructional adaptations are made; rather, what is offered to students with
LD is offered to all students. Therefore, additional research should be conducted to
further investigate expertise for teaching writing to secondary students with LD.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Andrade, Wang, Du, &amp; Akawi (2009)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>Relationship between short-term and long-term rubric-referenced self-assessment and self-efficacy for writing</td>
<td>All students’ self-efficacy increased throughout writing process regardless of condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, &amp; Gamoran (2003)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>Relationship between discussion-based approaches and high academic demands to the development of literacy performance</td>
<td>Discussion-based approaches and high academic demands were significantly related to spring performance and were effective across a range of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behizadeh (2014)</td>
<td>low-achieving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>How the student articulates factors of choice, expression, and impact in regards to his needs for authentic writing and how factors interrelate</td>
<td>Factors interrelation to create unique contexts for writing and a student’s take on authenticity will likely differ due to unique lived experiences as well as writing genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berninger, Nagy, Tanimoto, Thompson, &amp; Abbott (2015)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Whether computerized writing instruction via iPads would improve handwriting, spelling, and sentence composing through engagement of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.</td>
<td>“Results showed that the sample as a whole improved significantly from pretest to posttest in three handwriting measures, four spelling measures, and both written and oral syntax construction measures” (pg. 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cihak &amp; Castle (2011)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Whether students with and without LD would improve their expository writing skills when provided with explicit strategy instruction using a commercially produced writing program, Step Up to Writing, for expository writing.</td>
<td>Although all students as a group demonstrated significant growth from pretest to midtest and from midtest to posttest, students without disabilities did not demonstrate significant growth from midtest to posttest. However, after the writing intervention, nearly all demonstrated expository writing competency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coddington, Petscher, &amp; Truckenmiller (2015)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>Relationship between curriculum-based measurement (CBM) indices as well as predictive validity to a high-stakes state test</td>
<td>Indices were moderately to strongly related and indices were moderately to strongly related to corresponding outcomes of state test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohen &amp; Riel (1989)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Relationship between quality of students’ writing when addressing a teacher or a distant peer audience</td>
<td>Quality of writing was better when students were addressing their peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De La Paz (2001)</td>
<td>VD</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Whether students with disabilities would improve the quality of their expository essays when provided with a strategy for planning and writing expository essays using SRSD</td>
<td>All students improved their writing according to 5 writing measures (i.e., functional essay elements, planning maturity, essay length, vocabulary, and overall quality). Majority of improvements were maintained 4 weeks later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

163
### Table A-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dinkins (2014)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learn experiences of students during strategy instruction to engender autonomous revision</td>
<td>“Findings revealed that specific strategy instruction might provide a foundation for students and teachers to understand the revision process and create a starting point for additional learning” (pg. 75).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evmenova et al. (2016)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Whether a computer-based graphic organizer containing self-regulated learning strategies and emphasizing planning for essay writing will improve persuasive essay quantity and quality</td>
<td>Most students increased the quantity of their writing, while all improved writing quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>Whether students with and without LD would improve the quality of their persuasive essays when provided with an elaborated goal</td>
<td>Students in the elaborated goal condition wrote more persuasive essays although students with LD were wrote less persuasively than students without LD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidalgo, Torrance, Rijlaardsdam, van den Bergh, Alvarez (2015)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Three groups of students were provided writing strategies (i.e., observation and group reflection on a mastery model, direct instruction, and peer feedback, solo practice) in varying sequences.</td>
<td>Each treatment group engaged in more structured and goal-focused planning processes as well as improved in the quality of their writing products. These effects were predominantly associated with one strategy: observation and group reflection on a mastery model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanagan &amp; Bouck (2014)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Whether three procedural facilitators would improve students' written expression. Facilitators provided support for writing a five-paragraph essay; each facilitator provided less support than the previous one. Facilitators were organized via task analysis for essay writing.</td>
<td>Facilitators significantly supported students' writing. “When the amount of support was gradually reduced, students maintained their improved written expression” (pg. 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxworth, Mason, &amp; Hughes (2016)</td>
<td>VD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Examine effects of Self-Regulated Strategy Development for the Pick my genre then idea, Organize my notes, Write (POW) + Setting, Tension, rising Action, Climax, Solution (STACS) strategy on narrative essay-writing skills” (pg. 1).</td>
<td>Students' narrative writing skills improved and students transferred skills to social studies or history classes. All students expect to use the strategy again in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Participants*</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedman, Delp, &amp; Crawford (2005)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Examine expert classroom teacher’s provision of classroom opportunities to learn to analyze and write about literature as well as response to varying needs of her students</td>
<td>Opportunities to learn included reliance on whole-group, multimodal activities and one-on-one teacher-student interactions during group activities. Also, the expert teacher was relentless when working to meet her students’ needs and provided explicit social justice pedagogy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gersten &amp; Baker (2001)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Learn effective writing interventions for teaching expressive writing to students with LD</td>
<td>Results indicate any comprehensive instructional program should include “explicit teaching of (a) the steps of the writing process, (b) the critical dimensions of different writing genres, and (c) structures for providing extensive feedback to students on the quality of their writing from either teachers or peers” (pg. 251). Also, most interventions produced strong effects on students’ quality of writing, sense of efficacy for writing, and understanding of the writing process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillespie &amp; Graham (2014)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Learn effective writing interventions for teaching writing to students with LD</td>
<td>Results indicate that strategy instruction, dictation, goal setting, and process writing were statistically significant interventions. Other treatments to enhance writing (e.g., planning, revising) were only effective when students were provided with explicit and scaffolded instruction, modeling, and guided practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham &amp; Harris (1999)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Whether the student would improve the quality of his writing when provided with strategies for planning, revising, and managing the composing process utilizing SRSD</td>
<td>The student successfully learned to plan, revise, and manage his composing process. His extended writings are now three-times longer, better organized, more complete, and easier to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham &amp; Santangelo (2014)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Learn whether spelling instruction makes K-12 students better spellers, readers, and writers</td>
<td>Regardless of grade or level of literacy skills, results provided strong and consistent support that teaching spelling improved spelling performance. Gains were maintained over time and generalized to spelling while writing. Learning spelling also improved phonological awareness and reading skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graham, Herbert, &amp; Harris (2015)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>“Determine whether formative writing assessments that are directly tied to everyday classroom teaching and learning enhance students’ writing performance” (pg. 523).</td>
<td>Feedback in any form (i.e., teachers, peers, self, computers) statistically enhanced writing quality. Teacher monitoring of writing progress or the implementation of the 6+1 Trait Writing model did not meaningfully enhance students' writing. Eleven elements were found to be effective: writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, the process writing approach, a study of models, and writing for content learning. However, the authors note that these elements do not comprise a comprehensive writing curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham &amp; Perin (2007a; 2007b)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Determine “elements of current writing instruction that are effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well” (2007b, pg. 4).</td>
<td>Results indicate that the process writing approach improved the quality of writing products by students in general education classes but did not enhance students' motivation or improve the quality of writing products by students with disabilities. The researchers also concluded that, when compared to findings from Graham and Perin (2007a; 2007b), the process writing approach can be viewed as effective, but not especially powerful for improving writing of all students in general education classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham &amp; Sandmel (2011)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Whether process writing instruction improves the student writing quality as well as motivation for writing</td>
<td>Results indicate that the process writing approach improved the quality of writing products by students in general education classes but did not enhance students' motivation or improve the quality of writing products by students with disabilities. The researchers also concluded that, when compared to findings from Graham and Perin (2007a; 2007b), the process writing approach can be viewed as effective, but not especially powerful for improving writing of all students in general education classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, Hammerness, Wyckoff, Boyd, &amp; Lankford (2010)</td>
<td>ELA teachers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Learn classroom practices that differentiate teachers with high impact on student achievement in middle school English Language Arts from those with lower impact. This study further explores the extent to which value-added measures signal differences in instructional quality” (pg. iii).</td>
<td>Results indicate that high value added teachers employ different instructional practices, including explicit strategy instruction, and score higher on measures of effective instruction than do low value-added teachers. Students decreased spelling and oral reading errors and improved structure and organization of written work when using a word processor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetzroni &amp; Shrieber (2004)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Whether students with LD would improve the quality of their writing when provided with a word processor</td>
<td>Students decreased spelling and oral reading errors and improved structure and organization of written work when using a word processor.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillocks (1984)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Identify effective instructional practices of written composition</td>
<td>Results indicate that treatments including sentence combining, scales, inquiry, and/or interactive work were found to engage students in their writing and improve their writing. Studies with grammar and mechanics treatments obtained a negative effect size.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutchison &amp; Woodward (2014)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Learn how a teacher’s literacy instruction incorporating computers and iPads was empowering as well as constraining</td>
<td>The use of the iPad was empowering to accomplish instructional tasks, digital tools supported multimodal communication, and combining digital tools created new instructional possibilities. On the other hand, inadequate technical knowledge, limited understandings and authentic uses for technology, and teacher expectations impeded instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaldenberg, Ganzeveld, Hosp, &amp; Rodgers (2016)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Identify common characteristics of writing interventions in single case research</td>
<td>Results indicate effective instructional practices, including self-regulated strategy instruction, direct instruction, assistive technology, and systematic instruction (e.g., story mapping, summarization process, sentence-combining strategy). The studies also examined effective components of practices across studies: sequencing, drill-repetition, practice, segmentation of teaching instruction, directed questioning and responses, controlling for task difficulty, technology, and strategy cues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang, McKenna, Arden, Ciullo (2015)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Identify effective integrated reading and writing interventions for students with LD</td>
<td>Results indicated a relationship with previous research that investigated standalone reading and writing interventions. Effective interventions included explicit instruction in cognitive strategies (e.g., self-questioning, comprehension strategy training) that utilize SRSD as well as the use of graphic organizers (e.g., for prewriting and planning).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langer (2000)**</td>
<td>ELA teachers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Investigate which characteristics of middle and high school teachers’ professional context accompany student achievement in reading and writing</td>
<td>Results indicate all the successful schools exhibited six features: coordinating efforts to improve achievement, fostering teacher participation in professional communities, creating activities that provide teachers with agency, valuing commitment to professionalism, engendering caring attitudes, and fostering respect for learning. These features can only be acquired over time and maintained through persistence, and that the success of the teachers in the high performing schools might be due to their school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langer (2001)**</td>
<td>ELA teachers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Investigate which characteristics of middle and high school teachers’ instruction accompany student achievement in reading and writing</td>
<td>Results indicate six features that were all present in the instruction of higher performing schools: skills and knowledge are taught in multiple types of lessons; tests are deconstructed to inform curriculum and instruction; within curriculum and instruction, connections are made across content and structure to ensure coherence; strategies for thinking and doing are emphasized; generative learning is encouraged; and classrooms are organized to foster collaboration and shared cognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Patall, Cawthon, &amp; Steingut (2014)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>In PreK through college, learn the impact of drama-based pedagogy (DBP) on student outcomes, including academic and social outcomes as well as 21st-century skills. Also, to learn whether any characteristics influence the effect of DBP.</td>
<td>Results indicate DBP interventions used in ELA and science curriculum have the largest impact. Strongest effects occurred when the classroom teacher or researcher rather than a teaching artist led the intervention and included more than five lessons. Positive effects across social outcomes also were found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpo &amp; Alves (2014)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>“Develop a scale to measure students’ implicit theories of writing (pilot study) and to test whether these beliefs influence SRSD strategy-instruction effectiveness (intervention study)” (pg. 571).</td>
<td>Measurement of students’ implicit theories of writing supported and intervention students wrote longer and better texts. Also, the more the intervention students understood writing skills as pliable, the more their writing improved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin &amp; Lambert (2015)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Learn experiences of students participating in an intensive program for digital writing. The program included large-group, small-group, and individual instruction; visits from professional digital writers; publishing and sharing digital texts; and multi-genre and multi-format instruction.</td>
<td>Exposure to specific digital writing tools may help students learn to write digital texts when also considering students' prior technology experiences and exposure to digital genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midgette &amp; Haria (2016)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Learn effects of two argumentative writing interventions on “students’ ability to compose convincing essays that include structural elements of argumentative discourse” (pg. 1043).</td>
<td>In terms of overall persuasiveness and structural elements of argumentative discourse, participants improved significantly across conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montague &amp; Leavell (1994)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Whether procedural and substantive facilitation would improve the quality and length of written narratives. Procedural facilitation took the form of a story grammar cue card, and substantive facilitation took the form of small-group instruction in character development.</td>
<td>Students made “substantial increases in the amount they wrote and mild to moderate increases in the quality of stories produced”(pg. 21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nielson (2012)**</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Create a clear understanding of self-assessment practices in literature addressing reading and writing from middle school to adult learners in general education classrooms</td>
<td>Synthesis yields 12 strategies for self-assessment: implement, explicit instruction, teach students to rate and evaluate their own writing, use writing models, students to develop criteria for self-assessment, motivate students to self-assess, self-assess formatively rather than summatively, allow sufficient class time for self-assessment, support students through teacher-student dialogue, utilize holistic and analytic methods for self-assessment, encourage students' self-efficacy and self-esteem, allow for frequent practice and time for revision, regular teacher assessment of effectiveness of classroom methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Participants*</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parr &amp; Limbrick</td>
<td>ELA teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Identify practices of six effective teachers of writing in New Zealand</td>
<td>Ten practices were identified across effective teachers: learning aims for the lessons, explicitness and clarification of success criteria for students, alignment of learning activities with learning aims, deliberate acts of teaching, feedback, student awareness of purpose of lessons, prompting, differentiation, and fostering a rich classroom environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preus (2012)</td>
<td>English and science teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>How higher order thinking for students with and without disabilities was fostered in an inclusive school that successfully implements authentic instruction</td>
<td>Culture of respect as well as consistent and systematic use of higher-order questioning, metacognitive strategies, modeling, specific feedback, connections to prior learning, critical pedagogy, elaborated writing tasks, and assignments that connected to students’ lives outside of school were prominent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rogers &amp; Graham (2008)</td>
<td>VD NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn effective writing interventions for students with disabilities from single case research</td>
<td>Nine interventions were found to be effective: strategy instruction for planning and drafting, grammar instruction, setting clear and specific goals, strategy instruction for editing, word processing, reinforcing students for writing productivity, engaging students in prewriting activities, teaching sentence construction, and strategy instruction for paragraph construction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowley, Carlson, &amp; Miller (1998)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>up to 1,277</td>
<td>“Four studies examined the effectiveness of user-adapted computer-aided instruction that explicitly models the cognitive processes of composing for developmental writers. The four school-year studies were designed to build on each other” (pg. 259). The number of participants varied from year to year.</td>
<td>For the four studies, the treatment groups made significant gains on most holistic and analytical measures of writing quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santangelo &amp; Graham (2016)</td>
<td>full range NA</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Determine if teaching handwriting enhanced legibility and fluency and resulted in better writing performance” (pg. 225).</td>
<td>Handwriting instruction resulted in statistically significant legibility and fluency, while individualizing handwriting instruction and writing via technology resulted in statistically significant improvements in legibility. Motor instruction did not improve handwriting skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexton, Harris, &amp; Graham (1998)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Whether students would improve the quality of their writing when provided with strategies “for planning and writing essays, self-regulation of the strategy and the writing process, and positive attributions regarding effort and strategy use” (pg. 295) while utilizing SRSD</td>
<td>Across settings and teachers, instruction had a positive effect on students’ planning, essay quality, and attributions for writing. Maintenance data varied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steelman (1994)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Examine the effectiveness of an intervention utilizing revision strategies and writing with computers.</td>
<td>“The types of revision strategies reported by experimental groups differed significantly from those in the control group” (pg. 141).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanimoto, Thompson, Berninger, Nagy, &amp; Abbott (2015)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Whether computerized writing instruction would impact letter formation through engagement of listening, speaking, reading, and writing for students with LD.</td>
<td>Teaching letter formation through engagement of listening, speaking, reading, and writing close in time resulted in significant gains in reading and writing skills for students with LD. Results revealed effectiveness of computerized writing instruction on input and output modes as well as related writing tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson et al. (2016)</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Whether computerized writing instruction would impact input modes (e.g., reading), output modes (e.g., letter production), and task (i.e., note-taking).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrance, Fidalgo, &amp; Robledo (2015)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Whether teaching process strategies or setting product goals improves students’ writing quality</td>
<td>Both conditions resulted in significant improvements students’ writing; however, teaching process strategies also considerably increased students’ time on-task. Students in all feedback groups improved writing length and quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ware (2014)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Whether different types of feedback (i.e., pen-and-paper, electronic, automated feedback via software) would impact essay writing.</td>
<td>Teachers’ knowledge, experience, and theoretical base as well as instructional stance influenced response process. Instructional guidance was ongoing while utilizing various response facilitators (i.e., visual aids, modeling, feedback, and questioning).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werderich (2006)</td>
<td>literacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>How utilized journal writing as well as methods for responding to students’ written responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Olinghouse, &amp; Andrada (2014)</td>
<td>full range</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>Whether automated feedback improves writing quality across revisions.</td>
<td>“Writing quality improved across revisions, though growth decelerated over time” (pg. 93).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vasquez &amp; Straub** (2016)</td>
<td>VD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Review literature of online writing instruction for children with disabilities</td>
<td>Results include only four peer-reviewed articles. The unique characteristics of the online environment afforded opportunities for embedded learning strategy activities, procedural facilitation cue sheets, and embedded text structure supports that would have otherwise been impossible in a typical face-to-face environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yim, Warschauer, Zheng, &amp; Lawrence (2014)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>Whether cloud-based collaborative writing utilizing a one-to-one laptop program could help K-12 students meet the writing demands of the Common Core.</td>
<td>Teachers and students perceived utilization of Google Docs as positive. Cloud-based collaboration can work to promote writing skills addressed in the Common Core ELA domains (i.e., text types and purposes, ranges of writing, focus on language).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zheng, Lawrence, Warschauer, &amp; Lin (2015)</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>Examine how Google Docs was used to write and exchange feedback in K-12 classrooms.</td>
<td>Teachers and students perceived utilization of Google Docs as positive. Even though students' writing quantity and types of feedback were not associated with writing achievement, use of cloud-based collaborative writing could improve interactions between readers and writers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants may either be students or teachers. When participants are teachers, there will be explicit indication. A description of student participants includes low achieving; average, high achieving, full range, VD [varying disabilities]; LD. NA will be recorded for meta-analyses or literature reviews.

**Qualitative studies
APPENDIX B
TEACHER NOMINATOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Default Question Block

Thank you for taking part in this short, four question survey.

I am Rachel Thomas, a doctoral candidate studying special education at UF. I am seeking to gather teacher participants for my dissertation study. Please read the below Informed Consent carefully before you decide to participate in this study. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at UF as well as the research office in your county.

Informed Consent

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Protocol Title: Writing Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Grounded Theory of Expert Language Arts Teachers

Purpose of the research study: This study is designed to investigate how exemplary language arts teachers describe the development of their expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities in their classrooms as well as the nature of their instruction for students with learning disabilities in their classrooms.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked to help me locate exemplary teachers of writing. You will be asked to fill out a short survey in regards to your recommendations.

Time required: The survey will likely take less than 30 minutes.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks or benefits for participating in the study.

Compensation: There is no compensation to you for participating in the study.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a file on a personal hard drive and given a private passcode that only I have access to. Your name will not be used in any report. Additionally, use of an online data collection mechanism and password will help to maintain participant confidentiality. I will not track your computer’s IP address.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During participation, you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Further, there is no penalty for not participating. If you choose to participate and decide at any point you wish to discontinue participation your inclusion will be terminated.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:
Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study: IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 392-0433.

Agreement: I have read the procedure described above, and I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure.

☐ Yes, I have read the procedure described above, and I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure.

☐ Yes, I have read the procedure described above, and I do not agree to participate in the procedure.

1. What is your name and current position within your county?

2. What is your view of good writing instruction?

3. On what are you basing that view?

4. Please identify at least five of the best language arts teachers in your county that you presently supervise and/or have observed teaching writing students with learning disabilities.
The teachers you nominate may be invited to participate in a voluntary academic research study that includes some interview and observation of natural classroom instruction, $50.00 for participation in the study, confidentiality, and no risk.

These teachers must have the following qualifications…

a. Appropriate certification(s) and degrees for the domain in which they teach (i.e., the teaching writing)
b. At least three years of experience
c. Documented impact on student performance (e.g., FCAT Writing, grades, meeting IEP goals)

d. Demonstrated his or her exceptionality through significantly higher student test scores in literacy than other teachers in their same schools and socioeconomic environments
e. High expectations for all of their students
f. High self-efficacy for teaching writing
g. Respect from colleagues, administrators, and parents
h. Teaching awards and/or professional group membership(s)
i. The desire to continually improve their professional competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name teacher and his/her school</th>
<th>Please tell in what way(s) you know each teacher has a documented impact on student performance (e.g., FCAT Writing, grades, meeting IEP goals).</th>
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<td>Teacher 1</td>
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<td>Teacher 9</td>
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<td>Teacher 10</td>
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Thank you for your participation in this survey! Have a great day!
APPENDIX C
INITIAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

During points in the interview, I may inquire about anecdotes, stories, experiences, incidents, and/or examples.

1. Tell me about what guided you to be in your current position.
2. What does good writing instruction mean to you?
3. What brought you to think that?
4. Tell me about how your expertise for teaching writing has developed over the years.
5. Tell me about how your expertise for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities has developed over the years.
6. How did you become a successful writing teacher?
7. What enables you to be successful?
8. What brought you to think that?
9. Tell me about your strengths for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities.
10. Tell me about your struggles for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities.
11. What do you do to help your students with learning disabilities succeed?
12. What about your struggles for teaching writing to your students with learning disabilities?
13. How do you differentiate your writing instruction for your students with learning disabilities?
14. How do you plan for your students with learning disabilities?
15. Is there anything about writing instruction or differentiation we haven't discussed that you would like to share with me?

Notes for researcher:

Did participant discuss these areas of differentiation in depth?

1. Assessment (pre-assessment, ongoing, summative, student self-assessment)
2. Environment (physical, management, celebration and praise, higher order thinking, focused and specific feedback)
3. Quality writing practices/activities
4. Instruction that responds to student variance (grouping, content, process, product, student readiness, student interest, learning profile, feedback, accommodations/modifications)
5. Alignment between objectives, assessment strategies, and instruction responding to student variance
Teacher Background Questionnaire

1. Teacher name and school ________________________________
2. Contact information (address, phone, and email) __________________

3. What is your gender? __________
4. What is your ethnicity?
   - African American
   - American Indian
   - Asian American
   - Caucasian
   - Hispanic
   - Other __________________
5. How many years have you taught total? __________________
6. How many years have you taught at the secondary level? __________
7. How many years have you been teaching at your school? _______________
8. How many years have you taught writing? __________________
9. How many years have you taught students with learning disabilities? ________
10. How much formal preparation in teaching writing did you receive during college (e.g., teacher education courses, practicum experiences, internship experiences)?
    - None
    - Minimal
    - Adequate
    - Extensive
11. Please explain/describe your formal preparation experiences in teaching writing that you received during college (e.g., teacher education courses, practicum experiences, internship experiences). ________________________________
    ________________________________
    ________________________________
12. How much formal preparation in teaching writing have you received after college (e.g., assistance from another teacher, in-service preparation at your school, and so forth?)
   None
   Minimal
   Adequate
   Extensive

13. Please describe your formal preparation in teaching writing have you received after college (e.g., assistance from another teacher, in-service preparation at your school, and so forth?): ______________________________________
    ______________________________________
    ______________________________________

14. Please indicate which degrees you hold.
   Bachelor’s in __________ from __________ in the year ______
   Master’s in __________ from __________ in the year ______
   Specialist’s in __________ from __________ in the year ______
   Doctorate in __________ from __________ in the year ______

15. Please indicate your certifications.
   Certification 1 _________________
   Certification 2 _________________
   Certification 3 _________________
   Certification 4 _________________

16. My school is mostly
   Urban
   Suburban
   Rural

17. Please write the total number of students at your school. _______________

18. I currently teach grades...
   6th
   7th
   8th
19. Please write the subjects you currently teach.
   Subject 1
   Subject 2
   Subject 3
   Subject 4

20. How many students total are in your class that I am going to observe? ______

21. How many students with disabilities are in your class that I am going to observe? ______

22. How many students with learning disabilities are in your class that I am going to observe? ______

23. How many students in this class receive free or reduced lunch? ______

24. How many students are Hispanic? ______

25. How many students are White? ______

26. How many students are African-American? ______

27. How many students are Asian? ______

28. How many are Other Ethnicity? ______

29. Please list any commercial programs/curriculum you use to teach writing, handwriting, spelling, or any other aspect of composing.
   Program 1
   Program 2
   Program 3
   Program 4

30. What is your assessment of the overall writing achievement level of all students in your classroom? Write the percentage of students who fit within each classification. The combination of your answers should total 100%.
   Students who are above average writers (writing more than 1 grade level above their current grade placement) ______
   Students who are average writers (writing at their grade level or within 1 grade level plus or minus their current grade placement) ______
   Students who are below average writers (writing more than 1 grade level below their current grade placement) ______
31. During an average week, how many minutes do you spend teaching writing?
   (This only includes time where you directly teach writing skills, processes, or knowledge.) ________________

32. During an average week, how many minutes do your children spend writing?
   (This does not include instruction. It does include time spent planning, drafting, revising, and editing text that is paragraph length or longer.) ________________

33. What percentage of your writing lessons have been highly successful (all of your students benefited from the lesson)? ________________

34. During an average month, how often do you ask students to complete writing assignments where they are expected to write more than a single paragraph?
   Never
   Less than Once a Month
   Once a Month
   2-3 Times a Month
   Once a Week
   2-3 Times a Week
   Daily

35. I am a good writer.
   Strongly Agree
   Moderately Agree
   Agree Slightly
   Disagree Slightly
   Moderately Disagree
   Strongly Disagree

36. Writing is a subject that I enjoy teaching
   Strongly Agree
   Moderately Agree
   Agree Slightly
   Disagree Slightly
   Moderately Disagree
   Strongly Disagree
37. Please write any additional information about your opinions about writing and/or teaching writing you would like to share. 

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you have any questions, please contact [contact information redacted].
1. How does the content of this lesson build on what students have already learned, and relate to what they will be learning in the future? In answering this question, link the content in this lesson to the organization of content in this subject area or discipline.

2. What are your objectives for student learning in this lesson? That is, what do you intend students to learn? What will students be able to do as a result of this lesson?

3. What are the pieces of your lesson that are essential for your students to understand?

4. In all your planning for this lesson, how have you addressed the needs of the students with LD in your classroom? (Responses might consider gender, culture, language proficiency, exceptionalities, economic status, and skill level of individual concerns.)

5. How will you group students for instruction? Why have you chosen this grouping? How have individual students affected your grouping decision?

6. What teaching method(s) will you use for this lesson? Why have you chosen these methods? What individual students affected these methods decisions?

7. Have you planned for any specific accommodations or differentiation to meet students’ needs for the lesson(s) I will observe?

8. What activities have you planned for this lesson?

9. What instructional materials will you use, if any? Why have you chosen these specific materials? How have your students affected your materials decisions?

10. How and when do you plan to evaluate student learning on the content of this lesson? Why have you chosen this approach to evaluation?

11. Is there anything else about your lesson that I will observe that we didn’t go over?
APPENDIX F
OBSERVATION RUBRIC: DEMONSTRATION OF TEACHER COMPETENCE
Lesson Elements | Were the elements included in the lesson? | Were the elements administered responsibly? | Notes
---|---|---|---
1 | Well-designed plan for teaching the lesson (including lesson chunking) |  |  
2 | Clear objectives (including rigor of and student access to teacher expectations**) |  |  
3 | Quality assessment (4) | Pre-assessment/activation of background knowledge |  
| | Ongoing assessment |  
| | Summative assessment |  
| | Student self-assessment |  
4 | Environment that encourages and supports learning (5) | Physical environment |  
<p>| | Leading students and managing lessons and routines |<br />
| | Celebration and praise | If so, how often? |</p>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Higher order thinking</th>
<th>If so, how often?**</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused and specific feedback</td>
<td>If so, how often?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Quality writing practices/activities</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Instruction that responds to student variance (9)</td>
<td>Differentiation of grouping</td>
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<td>Differentiation of content (difference in learning goals)</td>
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<td>Differentiation of process (difference in how to take in and make sense of the information)</td>
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<td>Differentiation of product (difference in how students show what they know, understand, and can do)</td>
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<td>Differentiate according to student readiness (proximity to specified learning goals)</td>
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<td>Differentiate according to student interest (passions and kinships that motivate learning)</td>
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<td>Differentiate according to student learning profile</td>
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<td>(preferred approaches to learning)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Differentiated feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accommodations or modifications made that are specific to writing</td>
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7 Scaffold

8 Alignment between objectives, assessment strategies, and instruction responding to student variance

*Used Gregory & Chapman (2007), Gregory & Kuzmich (2004), and Tomlinson & Moon (2013) to guide creation of rubric

** Matsumura, Garnier, Slater, and Boston (2008) discussed rigor of and student access to teacher expectations and the level of cognitive demand of a task
APPENDIX G
POST-OBSERVATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Did you depart from anything you planned for today? If so, why? Did you make any modifications/adjustments to your plan during the lesson? If so, what were they, and what motivated these changes?

2. In general, how successful was the lesson?

3. To what extent did your students with LD learn what was intended? How do you know?
   a. In what ways were your lesson goals and objectives appropriate for your students? How do you know?
   b. In what ways were your teaching methods effective? How do you know?
   c. In what ways were your activities effective? How do you know?
   d. In what ways were the instructional materials effective? How do you know?
   e. In what ways were the different aspects of your instructional delivery effective? How do you know?
   f. How did any special considerations of accommodations or differentiation effect the lesson?

4. Please comment on your classroom procedures, your use of physical space, and the student’s conduct. To what extent did the classroom environment contribute to student learning?

5. Identify an individual or group of students who had difficulty in today’s lesson. How do you account for this performance? How will you help this (these) student(s) achieve the learning objectives? In what ways did you attempt to support this (these) student(s) learning? What might you do in the future to further support his/her (their) learning?

6. Identify an individual or group of students who did especially well in this lesson. How do you account for this performance?

7. To what extent was your feedback to students accurate, substantive, constructive, specific, and/or timely? How might you have responded differently? Please describe an instance in which your feedback positively affected a student’s learning.

8. If you were going to teach this lesson again to the same group of students, what would you do differently? (Consider grouping, methods, materials, evaluation, and activities.) Why? What would you do the same? Why?

9. Based on what happened in this lesson, what do you plan to teach next to this class?

10. What areas of the lesson do you feel may need improvement or modification in order for the students to better reach the learning goals?

11. What parts of the lesson do you feel were successful? Why? (Probe for clear and specific explanations. Ask the teacher to identify a specific example from today’s lesson that supports his/her explanation.)

12. Has anything happened during this lesson that influenced your evaluation plan? If so, how and why?

13. Is there anything else about the lesson that I observed that you feel would be important to share?
APPENDIX H
PARALLELS ACROSS TEACHERS

1. All have graduate degrees.
2. All have crazy physical classrooms.
3. Having posters, images, and set ups that reflect the teachers’ philosophy
4. Videos to activate background knowledge
5. Getting to know everything about a student/each student/your students
6. Moving away from the 5 paragraph essay. They all thought they had to teach it that way, now they do not.
7. Reading aloud to students.
8. Funny videos about kids struggling with writing
9. Moving around
10. Describing, word choice, what else about writing.
11. Differentiation
12. A lot of reminding
13. Working with peers.
14. Always starting with something to engage them and activate background knowledge, something they can relate to.
15. They all embrace the complexity of teaching.
16. Take a look at that list of stuff in my reflections.
17. High expectations. Having them work to their best ability. BUT with low pressure.
18. As far as lesson success, each addresses student (happiness; emotional well-being; engagement??)
19. Much care
20. Did I address scaffolding and alignment thoroughly in the profiles or should I talk about it here?
21. Giving students a ton of information to work with. So they can pull from a lot to create stuff. And it is likely stuff that the students created along the way. So, stuff builds, too.
22. For students with disabilities and LD…accommodations for everyone…what works for ESE, works for all.
23. Addressing stuff privately.
24. Who takes standards or accountability measures into consideration during planning and implementation
25. Alignment
26. Why they scaffold: make feel comfortable, a lot are brow beaten.
27. All did what they said they were going to do. They were able to discuss their decisions as if they were intuitive but they were able to talk about the reasoning of it.
28. On adapting. Is not enough just to learn something and then it is over. What are going to do with it? What else do you need to know? How are you going to take the new standards and your students’ needs into consideration? That is problem solving. That is adapting.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

She has always felt passionately that the education of children should be taken seriously and handled with great care. So, after graduating from the University of Florida (UF) with her bachelor’s in English, she worked as a preschool teacher for four years, an ESOL tutor for four years, and a teacher’s assistant at a charter school for children with disabilities. She subsequently held a position as a middle school reading and language arts teacher for the next six years for which she became licensed in special education and English 6-12, attended numerous professional development workshops, and received her reading endorsement. In 2008, she was awarded a place in Project PRESS (Preparing Reading Endorsed Secondary Special Educators) at UF, a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education to earn a master’s degree in special education.

Upon completion of her master’s, she was offered an opportunity to return to school full-time to work on my doctorate in special education through Project ReQuEST (Research on Quality in Education Special education Teachers), a grant funded by the Office of Special Education designed to prepare leaders committed to contributing to the existing teacher quality research base. Throughout her doctoral studies, her research interests included teacher quality, teacher education, writing instruction, and issues of diversity and social justice. She took advantage of her position as a doctoral student by presenting research analyses and findings myriad times at national and local conferences, publishing reviews and research findings in several educational journals or handbooks (e.g., Teaching Exceptional Children, Remedial and Special Education), providing service to the research community through membership of educational
organizations (i.e., Council for Exceptional Children, American Education Research Association), and working as a teacher’s assistant and an adjunct professor.

She received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the spring of 2017. Upon graduation, she has continued research within these areas. She used her knowledge from researching and teaching to have a positive impact on teachers’ instruction as well as student learning. As a teacher, she utilizes what she has learned to seek out further learning opportunities as well as benefit from a positive “it’s my job” attitude, propensity towards resilience, and value for children from different backgrounds and varying abilities. As a researcher, she plans to further the field of education by creating new knowledge on teacher education and writing instruction for all students. Overall, she intends to make a difference in the lives of all children.