THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING ON NORTH TEXAS ELEMENTARY

WRITING TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY IN CONTENT KNOWLEDGE &

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a complex, multi-faceted skill that students begin to learn early in their elementary school years and utilize throughout the rest of their academic, personal, and professional lives. Despite the importance of developing effective writing skills, elementary teachers today often lack the necessary training and preparation to provide high-quality writing instruction in both preservice education and on-the-job professional development. Teachers therefore may not be confident in their writing content knowledge and instructional practices.

At one elementary school in North Texas, students' writing scores on both district and state assessments show less growth than other subjects. To improve writing instruction quality and ultimately increase student writing achievement, this study explored how four weeks of intentional instructional coaching, coupled with traditional professional development, facilitated higher teacher self-efficacy in both content knowledge (the writing process) and instructional practices (conferencing with students about writing). Responses from an open-ended questionnaire and a focus group were used to identify common themes.

This phenomenological qualitative study's findings substantiate those of previous research on instructional coaching and teacher self-efficacy. The five writing teachers in this study overwhelmingly believed that successful professional development should be job-embedded. In addition, they believed that instructional coaching, used alongside traditional training, is the most beneficial way to increase their confidence in the writing process and conferencing with students about writing. Specific to the writing process, these teachers believed instructional coaching and professional development increased their confidence, increased student growth and enthusiasm, and further developed their belief that teaching writing is recursive. Specific to conferencing with students about writing, these teachers believed

instructional coaching and professional development increased the quality of teacher-student interactions, increased their understanding of the effects of students' "aha" moments, and increased students' confidence in their writing.

It is important to understand that the instructional coaching intervention occurred during a worldwide pandemic; therefore, coaching sessions occurred via live video conferencing. Despite the lack of in-person instructional coaching, the study's findings overwhelmingly demonstrate that instructional coaching, when used with professional development, increases writing teachers' self-efficacy in both content knowledge and instructional practices.

DEDICATION

To my son and daughter, Dylan and Kennedy Robert, who are my inspiration in everything I do. I will forever appreciate the patience and understanding you both have given me during my doctoral journey. My hope is that you both understand the value of hard work and commitment. With these two attributes, anything is possible!

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NOMENCLATURE

BES: Best Elementary School

BISD: Best Independent School District

CIT: Campus Improvement Team

CSWA: Common Summative Writing Assessments

IC: Instructional Coaching

PD: Professional Development

PLC: Professional Learning Community

STAAR: State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness

TEA: Texas Education Agency

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a fundamental route to academic attainment, and learning to write is considered an essential milestone in a child's overall literacy development (Harmey & Wilkinson, 2019). Despite writing's importance to a child's overall academic growth and development, student performance is not at an acceptable level. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 28% of fourth-grade students in the United States scored at or above proficient on the last writing assessment (2019a). Research indicates that teacher quality is the leading indicator in schools that influences student writing performance (Goldhaber, 2016). Although research has not coalesced around a complete list of factors influencing teacher quality (Harris & Sass, 2008), instructional quality has been found to be positively correlated with professional training and teacher perceptions of self-efficacy (Buric & Kim, 2020). To improve teacher quality and thus, student performance, elementary writing teachers should engage in meaningful writing training that results in an effective level of teacher self-efficacy concerning writing instructional knowledge and practice.

Background of the Study

How vital is students' formal education to the development of students' writing skills? Scholars have recently begun to examine the independent contributions of different kinds of literacy to overall cognitive development, especially in children's early years (Mackenzie & Hemmings, 2014; Mangen & Balsvik, 2016). For young students, writing incorporates high-level processes, such as generating and organizing ideas, transforming ideas into words, while also incorporating lower-level skills such as spelling and handwriting (Adams & Simmons, 2018).

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Children need to acquire both reading and writing skills, as they are used later during their educational journey to transmit and evaluate knowledge (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). Like intelligence in general, it has been suggested that strong writing skill is an inherited trait that accounts for between 66% and 70% of overall writing skills (Oliver, Dale, & Plomin, 2007). If these findings are reliable and valid, environmental factors such as the classroom may account for as much as one-third of a student's writing skill.

Moreover, as Oliver et al. noted, the genetic basis for writing skills still requires an individual to develop and train in a supportive classroom setting. A study of profoundly gifted mathematics students found that, regardless of whatever inherited skills a child might possess, exposure to appropriate and structured teaching is necessary for the development of skill (Muratori et al., 2006). Therefore, inheriting the trait for a strong writing ability does not negate the importance of teachers' role in nurturing and developing writing skills among elementary students. Multiple studies (Mackenzie & Hemmings, 2014; Mangen & Balsvik, 2016; Yeung et al., 2020) describe teachers as playing a pivotal role in writing development among elementary students.

Given the importance of writing to both literacy and early childhood cognitive development, and given the role of teachers in the development of children's writing skills, the education field needs to learn more about how instructors can function as highly effective writing teachers. While teachers traditionally receive their training in teacher preparation programs, these programs may not provide the necessary courses focused on writing instruction (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Teachers who enter the workforce underprepared to provide quality writing instruction must receive writing training and writing practice through professional development opportunities.

The goal of any professional development should be to improve the quality of the instruction. Research on national, state, and campus professional development and student performance in writing confirms the necessity of further examination into effective ways to improve the quality of writing instruction.

National Context: Professional Development

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. ESSA requires that all students in the United States be held to high academic standards (US Department of Education, 2020a). To support high academic standards, ESSA specifically addresses the need for improved professional development. ESSA's definition specifies that professional development is imperative for all educators, not just classroom teachers. ESSA further states that professional development needs to be "sustained (not stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused" (US Department of Education, 2020b)." ESSA also requires that professional development be evaluated based on student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Mesecar, 2018).

To ensure high academic standards are met, teacher preparation programs must adequately prepare future teachers in writing instruction. Despite the importance of preparing future teachers to be strong writing instructors, teacher preparation programs often neglect writing instruction (Hall & White, 2019). Previous studies reveal that most preservice teachers are not usually required to take writing instruction courses (Troia & Graham, 2016). Myers et al. found that only 25% of preservice teachers take a course focused on writing instruction (as cited in Hodges et al., 2019). While teacher preparation programs are responsible for training teachers

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to use instructional strategies in all curriculum areas, studies reveal that writing instruction tends to take a backseat to reading instruction.

If teacher preparation programs are not adequately training preservice teachers for writing instruction, then preservice teachers may not be developing the level of self-efficacy needed to be effective. One study found that when teacher preparation programs lack a focus on writing instruction, preservice teachers do not value writing in their classrooms (Hodges, Wright, & McTigue, 2019).

Until teacher preparation programs adequately train preservice teachers for writing instruction, schools must make teacher training in writing a priority. Research indicates that quality teaching is a critical factor in determining student achievement (Harris & Sass, 2011); therefore, professional development is imperative for improving teachers' skill sets, instruction, and student learning (Akiba & Liang, 2016). While professional development is crucial for improvement, the federal government does not mandate the number of professional development hours required by teachers. Thus, the required number of professional development hours varies from state-to-state.

National Context: Student Performance in Writing

The ability to write is one of the most critical skills developed by students in K-12 education. It is a lifelong skill that will serve students beyond the classroom, not only in their careers but also in daily interactions with others in their communities. Across the United States, writing skills are measured to determine how well school systems are preparing students for life after school.

The NAEP assessments are used to measure writing performance and skill in students in grades K–12. Data are collected and analyzed to identify concerns and trends and make

predictions about the overall climate and writing programs of schools in the United States. The content of the assessment focuses on three foundational purposes of writing and communication: to persuade, to explain, and to convey experience, real or imagined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b). Under these categories, students are assessed on a scale to determine their overall achievement toward mastery of the knowledge and skill; the scale contains three descriptors of writing proficiency: basic, proficient, and advanced achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b). While many states have separate, specific standardized tests developed to measure academic progress and mastery of their students, NAEP "assesses representative samples of students rather than the entire student population. The sample selection process utilizes a probability sample design" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019c). Thus, the results are representative of national averages.

According to the Nation's Report Card statistics, 86% of 4th-grade students in all participating public and private schools scored at or above basic achievement, 28% of 4th-grade students scored at or above proficient, and just 2% of 4th-grade students scored advanced (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). NAEP has not collected data for writing for elementary school students since 2002.

State Context: Professional Development

In Texas, continuing professional education (CPE) is required for all public school teachers who hold a Texas teaching certificate. Teachers are responsible for updating their certificates every five years. During those five years, teachers are expected to participate in at least 150 professional development hours (Texas Education Agency, 2019a). Professional development opportunities are provided in a variety of contexts, from district offerings to college classes.

In 2016, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) launched Texas Gateway, a content management and delivery system that allows teachers the opportunity to participate and earn CPE hours in an online, self-directed learning environment (Texas Gateway, 2020). Included within Texas Gateway, educators can participate in Texas Lesson Study, job-embedded professional development where teachers collaborate to create, teach, and improve research-based lesson plans (Texas Gateway, 2020).

State Context: Student Performance in Writing

In Texas, writing proficiency is assessed using the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Adopted in 2012, STAAR data are used as a measure of individual student mastery of content. Writing is assessed in 4th grade, 7th grade, and as an end of course assessment at the high school level. In 4th grade, writing skills in revising and editing are assessed using multiple-choice questions and through the creation of an on-demand expository piece (TEA, 2019b). As shown in Table 1.1, 4th-grade STAAR writing scores show minimum, if any, gain over the past five years.

Table 1.1 *Fourth Grade STAAR Writing State Results*

	Level II: Satisfactory	Level III: Advanced	
2015	70%	7%	
2016	69%	15%	
	Approaches	**Meets**	**Masters**
2017	63%	32%	10%
2018	61%	38%	10%
2019	65%	33%	10%

(TEA, 2019c)

Campus Context: Professional Development

For this study, the suburban elementary school in North Texas will be referred to as Best Elementary School (BES), and its school district will be referred to as Best Independent School District (BISD). Elementary writing teachers in BISD have received minimum district-provided professional development in the past few years. Specifically, since the new district writing curriculum was implemented during the 2018–2019 school year, all K-5 writing teachers have received only two required professional development days during the 2018–2019 academic school year dedicated to the new curriculum. In addition to those two days, there were three optional training opportunities for the new writing curriculum during the summer of 2018. Fourth-grade teachers are the only elementary grade to receive six days dedicated to professional development in writing. The additional four training days were devoted to preparing students for the writing portion of the state assessment, which is an on-demand task instead of process writing. Table 1.2 illustrates the required, district-provided professional development in writing offered to BISD teachers from 2018–2020. Table 1.3 shows the required, district-provided professional development in reading and math offered to BISD teachers from 2018–2020. For

elementary teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade from 2018 to 2020, the median number

of writing trainings per grade level is two, the median number of reading trainings per grade

level is eight, and the median number of math trainings is three.

Table 1.2 *2018-2020 Professional Development for K–5 Writing Teachers at BISD*

	Date(s)	Training
Kindergarten	9/26/18	Launching the Writing Workshop
	11/8/18	Writing for Readers
First	9/12/18	Small Moments: Writing with Focus, Detail, and Dialogue
	11/7/18	Writing Reviews
Second	9/11/18	Lessons from the Masters: Improving Narrative Writing
	11/6/18	Poetry
Third	9/6/18	Crafting True Stories
	10/18/18	The Art of Informational Writing
Fourth	1/18/18	Revising and Editing
	9/4/18	The Arc of Story: Writing Realistic Fiction
	10/30/18	Up the Ladder: Information
	12/19/18	Boxes and Bullets
	2/19/19	STAAR Boot camp
	2/28/20	STAAR Boot camp
Fifth	9/5/18	Narrative Craft
	11/1/18	Up the Ladder: Information

Table 1.3 *2018–2020 Professional Development for K–5 Reading & Math Teachers at BISD*

	Date(s)	Reading	Math
Kindergarten	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	10/9/18		X
	10/10/18		X
	12/18/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19		X
	9/10/19	X	
	10/1/19		X
	10/15/19	X	
	11/6/19	X	
First	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	10/2/18		X
	10/3/18		X
	12/12/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19	X	
	9/10/19		X
	9/25/19	X	
	10/16/19		X
	12/10/19	X	
Second	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19	X	
	9/10/19		X
	10/2/19	X	
	10/17/19		X
	11/7/19	X	
	11/12/19	X	
	11/14/19	X	

Table 1.3 *Continued*

	Date(s)	Reading	Math
Third	8/21/18	X	
	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	10/16/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19	X	
	9/10/19		X
	9/26/19	X	
	10/22/19		X
	11/5/19	X	
	12/16/19	X	
Fourth	8/21/18	X	
	9/13/18	X	
	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19	X	
	9/10/19		X
	9/24/19	X	
	10/23/19		X
	10/30/19	X	
Fifth	8/21/18	X	
	9/13/18	X	
	9/18/18	X	
	10/5/18	X	
	2/15/19		X
	2/18/19	X	
	4/22/19	X	
	9/10/19		X
	9/19/19	X	
	10/23/19		X
	10/24/19	X	

Campus Context: Student Performance in Writing

BES has a student population of 555, with 53% being Caucasian and 41% Hispanic. Thirty percent of the students in the school population are identified as special education, and 12% are identified as English Learners. Furthermore, 71% of the students are economically disadvantaged, while 31% are at risk. BES is one of seven elementary schools in a district of about 8,000 students. BES serves pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students and is one of the three district bilingual campuses.

The staff and leadership at BES have worked to improve student learning measured by state assessments over the past three years. Following the 2016–2017 school year, BES worked with a literacy consultant to help implement balanced literacy. Beginning with the 2018–2019 school year, the district-adopted and implemented a writing curriculum for kindergarten through fifth grade. With the new writing curriculum rollout, professional development was provided for all elementary writing teachers (as evidenced above in Table 1.2). Table 1.3 shows that while BES's reading state assessment data have steadily increased, BES's 4th grade writing scores have not seen the same growth. Stagnant growth in writing occurs not only at BES but also throughout the school district and the state of Texas, as illustrated by Table 1.1, Table 1.4, and Table 1.5.

Table 1.4 *BES STAAR Data*

	2017 STAAR	2018 STAAR	2019 STAAR
3rd Reading	69%	75%	84%
4th Reading	47%	62%	70%
4th Writing	42%	54%	55%
5th Reading	69%	81%	88%

(TEA, 2019c)

Table 1.5 *Fourth Grade STAAR Writing BEST Results*

	Approaches	Meets	Masters
2017	53%	25%	6%
2018	50%	26%	5%
2019	62%	30%	7%

(TEA, 2019c)

In addition to state assessment data, BES and its district utilize district benchmarks to assess students' progress on learning standards. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade take four on-demand performance writing assessments throughout the academic school year. The district curriculum and instruction department create the writing assessments. Grade-level assessments cover genres such as informational, narrative, opinion, poetry, and expository. Fifth grade also covers literary essays and memoirs. The assessments are timed, follow the district-adopted writing curriculum, and do not include any multiple-choice questions. The assessment requires students to generate their topics and ideas. Classroom teachers grade their own students' work using a district-provided rubric. As student and campus data are collected, a score of "three" or above on the rubric is considered equivalent to a passing standard on the writing state assessment. Table 1.6 shows the scores of the two years BES has participated in the district Common Summative Writing Assessments (CSWA).

Table 1.6 *BES CSWA Data (score of 3 or higher)*

	2018	2019
1st Writing	48%	45%
2nd Writing	25%	24%
3rd Writing	24%	33%
4th Writing	8%	45%
5th Writing	46%	46%

The Problem of Practice

As data have shown on various instruments, writing skills on expository pieces of state assessments have not shown significant growth. Given the current literacy educational achievement gaps and student retention rate issues (Beckman & Gallo, 2016; Sparks, 2018; Spelman et al., 2016), research is needed to explore how various professional development models may improve teachers' self-efficacy regarding their capabilities, skills, and knowledge in writing instruction to enhance student learning and achievement.

To address the need for additional teacher support, more focus on instructional coaching's effects, coupled with teacher training, is needed. Researchers report a lack of understanding of how instructional coaching, as a form of professional development following initial teacher training, affects teachers' practices in elementary school classrooms (Hoge, 2016). Crawford, Zucker, Van Horne, and Landry (2017) further note that few studies have explored instructional coaching processes in education and how instructional coaching may contribute to teacher instructional improvement in the classroom. The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge relating to education, pedagogy, professional development, academic achievement, literacy gaps, and the interrelated, often mutually influential relationships between

these factors. For student achievement outcomes to improve, teachers must enhance their teaching of writing literacy. Improving literacy and closing these gaps requires the identification of effective approaches to continuing education, training, and instructional coaching.

This study will focus on the self-efficacy of teachers receiving instructional coaching following writing professional development to determine the perceived effectiveness of combining instructional coaching with professional development. Will the addition of instructional coaching to the regular professional development enhance teacher efficacy in teaching writing? Through this exploration, the coaching model following writing training may affect teachers' perceptions of its validity and enhance teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of writing.

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Research Questions

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The overarching research question is how instructional coaching, following traditional professional development, facilitates higher self-efficacy of elementary writing teachers in content knowledge and instructional practices? Specifically, the study will examine the writing teachers' self-efficacy regarding the writing process (content knowledge) and conferring with students about their writing (instructional practice). RQ1 and RQ2 focus on teacher perceptions of their self-efficacy in writing instruction in a classroom.

RQ1 How does instructional coaching combined with professional development facilitate higher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process?

RQ2 How does instructional coaching combined with professional development facilitate higher self-efficacy in conferencing with students about their writing?

Content analysis of focus group sessions, questionnaire responses, and field notes will provide additional information regarding the nature of observed differences and possible sources

by which instructional coaching influences self-efficacy in writing instructional knowledge and practices.

Researcher's Role and Qualifications

The researcher has 20 years of experience in public education, serving as an elementary classroom teacher, middle school assistant principal, and finally, as an elementary school principal. Her current leadership position allows her to conduct a study that utilizes elementary writing teachers and an instructional coach to improve the quality of instruction and learning for both teachers and students.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study's primary purpose is to understand the perceptions of elementary writing teachers who receive the same district-provided professional development in classroom writing instruction, followed by intentional instructional coaching. The study will use an open-ended questionnaire and a focus group to conduct a qualitative exploration of elementary school teacher perceptions of instructional coaching's effect following initial training on the self-efficacy regarding their content knowledge and instructional practices of the teaching of writing. The present study contributes to the literature informing policymakers and educational administrators of one means of improving teacher classroom pedagogical knowledge and practice, thereby improving student learning and institutional outcomes.

Significance

The present study focuses on how instructional coaching (IC) may improve teacher self-efficacy regarding content knowledge and instructional practices in classroom writing instruction. Although not within this study's scope, improvements in these areas show a relationship to student achievement (Garcia, Jones, Holland, & Mundy, 2013). Many educators

are seeking improvement in student writing and are subsequently seeking an increase in student writing state assessment scores. As stated by Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan (2018), teacher IC has recently emerged as a viable alternative form of professional development, apart from more traditional models. Should the present study find that IC increases teachers' self-efficacy regarding content knowledge and instructional skills, this study may serve to encourage additional research aimed at identifying practical ways of implementing IC. Future studies may also explore how IC impacts teacher capacities and students' reading and literacy achievement (Matsumura, Garnier & Spybrook, 2013), thereby connecting new dots in the complex web of educational advancement and improvement. Finally, should this study find IC promotes positive outcomes, it will encourage the use of IC as a model for leading and perpetuating institutional, instructional, and academic change as a means of overcoming current barriers to achievement (Woulfin & Rigby, 2017).

Definition of Terms

Texas Education Agency (TEA): The TEA is responsible for supervising public education throughout Texas. The Commissioner of Education, appointed by the governor of Texas and confirmed by the state Senate, heads the agency with support provided by a variety of additional directors and staff (TEA, 2020a). Its roles and responsibilities are varied, but it primarily functions as an administrative body that distributes funding, assesses accountability, supports curricular development, and ensures state and federal compliance (TEA, 2020a).

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Program (STAAR): The STARR is a statewide testing program developed by TEA (TEA, 2020b). It includes assessments delivered annually for reading (grades 3–8), writing (grades 4 & 7), math (grades 3–8), science (grades 5

& 8), and social studies (grade 8). STAAR's purpose is to promote readiness standards in the most critical academic-outcome areas (TEA, 2020b).

LITERACY: Scholars continue to debate the definition of literacy (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). Literacy is a complex construct consisting of reading, writing, speaking, and understanding (Senechal, 2006). Today, literacy is viewed as a continuum rather than a binary outcome, with a continuum measuring the degree of fluency, competence, and comprehension of phonics, phonemics, and meaning tied to the written and spoken language (Ahmed, 2011).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD): The Glossary of Education Reform (2020) defines PD as a wide range of activities that include formal education, specialized training, and other professional learning opportunities designed to promote continuous learning and improvement for educational professionals. This broad definition is necessary since PD opportunities are usually designed for the needs of specific content areas.

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING (IC): IC is a particular type of PD strategy. Its leading proponent, Jim Knight (2009), defines it as providing "intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they can implement proven practices" (p. 30). An IC relationship is a partnership based on excellent communication and relationship building, which helps coaches motivate and develop their teacher practitioners.

Common Summative Writing Assessments (CSWA): CSWA are locally developed BISD assessments given at specific times throughout the academic year to gather data regarding progress on state learning standards. The writing assessments are administered to kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The assessments were first developed and administered during the 2018–2019 school year.

SELF-EFFICACY: Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). In other words, self-efficacy is the belief that an individual can accomplish a task.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, an exploration into the background of student writing at BES on district and state assessments revealed that there is a need to improve the quality of writing instruction. Research validates the importance of quality writing instruction for student achievement. In the next chapter, an in-depth literature review will examine an overview of professional development, instructional coaching, writing instruction, the potential impact of IC and PD on teacher skills, knowledge, and classroom outcomes, teacher self-efficacy, and theoretical framework. This research will be used in conjunction with a study of elementary writing teachers at BES to determine if IC, when used with traditional professional development, affects the self-efficacy of the teachers in content knowledge and instructional practices.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on the influence of IC on teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy on knowledge and classroom instructional methods was evaluated from a variety of educational journals and sources. Databases were searched using the following search terms: *instructional coaching, professional development, teacher self-efficacy, pedagogy, education, teacher development, classroom instruction, skill, educational outcomes, literacy instruction, writing instruction,* and *educational achievement.* Databases searched included Texas A&M University Libraries, Google Scholar, and online news and media sites highlighting educational reports, reviews, government, and statistical data. Articles were chosen for review based upon their recency (date of publication), credibility, and relevance to the topic. The following literature review provides an overview of professional development, instructional coaching, literacy and writing instruction, and the potential impact of IC and PD on teacher skills, knowledge, classroom outcomes, and teacher self-efficacy. Finally, the literature review will conclude with an in-depth discussion of Vygotsky's framework, followed by a summary transition to chapter three.

History of Professional Development in Education

The term "professional development" (PD) has evolved throughout the years. In the past, the term "in-service education" was used as a follow-up to "preservice education" that future teachers received in college. The term transitioned to "staff development" in the 1970s, and in recent years the term again changed to "professional learning" (Martin, Kragler, Quatroche, Bauserman, & Hargreaves, 2014). However, for the current study, the term "professional

development" will be used. Scholars and educators have widely accepted this term to describe attempts at improving teacher continuing education to elevate teaching quality and teacher capacity. PD has been used to maintain teachers' knowledge and pedagogical currency relative to the surrounding sociocultural context and bureaucratic framework in which teachers are working (Teitel, 2004). Additionally, PD is a term used to describe and encompass a broad scope of continuing educational topics, from pedagogical practices and instructional methods to policy updates and teamwork-building processes. Overall, PD is used to describe any continuing education program aimed at improving the capacity for and efficacy of teachers achieving professional tasks. While PD programs were initially viewed as an extracurricular development, they are often considered essential in instructors' professional lives and achievement (Teitel, 2004).

Various models of PD have been developed and applied during the three-plus decades PD has been a part of educational practices. For instance, some PD models have been created to be highly adaptive to specific campus needs, situations, and student challenges. Other models are highly generalized and may encompass education relating to national policy standards (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015). Within this study's scope, the IC model of PD is both specific and adaptive. IC is adaptable to a situation's circumstances and is often used primarily to address classroom-related knowledge, pedagogical skill, and classroom instructional practices.

Research conducted by Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010) explored the components of effective PD models from teachers' perspectives, focusing on PD referred to as job-embedded professional development. This type of PD is based on research suggesting that the more job-relevant and instructionally relevant a PD or continuing education program is, the more positively perceived and embraced it tends to be by professionals. In other words, PD

programs that are intertwined with a teacher's position, job requirements, and responsibilities are often perceived as more applicable and useful. Consequently, these PD programs may be more successful in increasing optimal and advantageous instructional, skill, and knowledge-based outcomes because instructors can understand the purpose, importance, and relevancy of the PD program (Brown, 2016; Croft et al., 2010).

Research suggests that the most effective PD models are integrated into teachers' everyday lives (Croft et al., 2010; Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016). In other words, the most effective PD models take place on an everyday, micro-, classroom-level, rather than a macro, theoretical level. Teachers should not be expected to get all of the needed PD in just a single session of training; rather, they should be educated through the adaptation of daily instructional and teaching practices based upon concepts taught through PD. Interestingly, Kyndt et al. (2016) also concluded that a primary discrepancy differentiating novice and experienced teachers was teachers' learning attitudes and outcomes. Brown's (2016) exploration of an effective conceptual framework for understanding coaching as a form of PD emphasizes the same need for continuous integration into practice instead of one-time interventions.

Expanding on the topic of teacher perceptions toward PD and effective PD models, Matherson and Windle (2017) explored what core benefits teachers desire to receive from PD and found four themes: interactive activities that are engaging and relevant to students, teacher-promoted learning, practical methods of content delivery, and sustained and ongoing PD. To be more effective in the classroom, teachers want to take an active leadership role in engaging students using interactive learning relevant to everyday life. This finding aligns with Croft et al.'s (2010) work that teachers perceived PD to be more effective when it is regularly integrated into their job duties and sustained over time. Furthermore, Brown (2016), Croft et al. (2010), and

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Matherson and Windle (2017) all support this integrated, ongoing, relevant approach to sustained PD—which also promotes the use of IC as a means of achieving this type of PD. Coaching takes a hands-on approach to teaching based on observation and mimicking. Coaching fosters kinesthetic learning in a way that can be directly integrated and applied using tangible concepts and examples that relate to everyday classroom circumstances (Chien, 2013).

Bayar's (2014) study of teacher perceptions of PD is most relevant to this study's problem focus and purpose. Bayar (2014) reached two conclusions: 1) Teachers' level of preparedness is directly correlated with student achievement. 2) Teachers are often entering the teaching process vastly unprepared. Teacher professional preparedness is an essential factor for improving academic achievement outcomes and closing educational and literacy gaps. The reality that a majority of teachers may be entering the field underprepared and not be receiving the PD they would like and need serves as a direct red flag alerting educational administrators, teachers, and policymakers of the value of PD and the need to use effective PD programs.

Furthermore, Bayar (2014) categorizes PD into two types: traditional and non-traditional. He describes traditional PD programs as those encompassing off-site conferences and workshops that are separate from the classroom. Non-traditional PD programs, on the other hand, are described as those that embrace in-classroom mentoring and demonstrations. Bayar (2014) cites a wealth of empirical evidence concluding that traditional PD programs removed from the classroom and conducted for a set amount of time tend to be a waste of time, money, and personnel. Since PD programs influence teacher efficacy, PD programs indirectly influence student outcomes.

Based on the logic that PD programs influence student achievement outcomes, Minor, Desimone, Lee, and Hochberg (2016) commented on the potential to form and shape effective

PD policy and models. These authors assert that because many US elementary school systems rely on PD to address achievement outcome targets and classroom instructional change. As has been found in other research, the authors suggest that the most effective PD models have been developed to foster individualized teacher learning. This concept capitalizes on and aligns with Vygotsky's SCT learning framework and assumptions. Hence, Minor et al.'s (2016) can also be interpreted to support the potential efficacy of a coaching-based, integrated, and individualized hands-on approach to PD, rather than traditional conferences and workshops.

Placed within the context of this discussion, PD the participants received in this study would be considered very traditional. The PD in writing is provided in an off-site location. It focuses on best practices consistent with the district's curriculum program. Overwhelmingly, communication is one-way from presenter to teacher. Question-and-answer opportunities are provided, but few other interactive opportunities are incorporated into the program.

Instructional Coaching

To understand the implications and meaning of IC fully, it is crucial to understand how *coaching* is used in educational literature. Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) define coaching as being ongoing, job-embedded, and directly correlated with the challenges teachers encounter during day-to-day classroom interaction. Deussen et al.'s (2007) conceptualization seem to align seamlessly with Croft et al.'s (2010) and other scholars' findings regarding effective PD. Simply stated, coaching fits the currently advocated PD mold, and provides a direct educational opportunity for teachers to learn through one-on-one and group instruction, two-way feedback, observation, demonstration, and kinesthetic learning. These IC characteristics are applied concretely to everyday classroom situations, curriculum knowledge, and instructional practices.

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Knight et al. (2015) recommend methodical, research-driven steps for effective coaching, which they summarize in three steps:

1) identifying the teacher's needs, such as literacy gaps and specific literacy coaching needs,

2) educating through demonstration, feedback, observation, and other situationally specified methods, and

3) taking time to foster improvement in instructional skills and teacher self-efficacy.

The last step, improving, is perhaps the most critical step of coaching. Unlike traditional models of PD, the improving phase focuses on the idea that coaching is an ongoing process in which teachers and their coaches continue to improve, adapt, and integrate new instructional knowledge and skills. According to Knight et al. (2015) and other scholars, this improvement focus may make coaching more effective compared to other models of PD. By improving or continually integrating the concepts taught and learned, teachers will integrate them into their instructional practices, thus expanding their accessible instructional knowledge and skills (Reddy, Dudek & Lekwa, 2017).

Researchers Crawford, Zucker, Van Horne, and Landry (2017) also explored the integration of PD and coaching processes through the Texas School Ready Model, an IC model aimed at improving teacher programs, including curriculum content knowledge, instructional skills, and language teaching capacities. In tandem with previous studies, the researchers concluded that IC was effective. Devine, Houseemand, and Meyers (2013) arrived at a similar conclusion when testing the efficacy of different coaching strategies that included intensive colleague support, much like Crawford et al.'s (2017) high-level mentoring. Devine et al. (2013) found IC to be a sustainable way of helping teachers meet instructional demands by employing

classroom practices in alignment with organizational goals and quality standards. These positive outcomes may be due to the development of personalized relationships in the workplace (as evident through IC), which helps teachers feel more valued in their position, resulting in teachers being more loyal and organizationally committed to their teaching responsibilities. The personalized relationship may account for greater adeptness in implementing the program with fidelity, integrity, and quality over time (Morieux & Tollman, 2014).

Additional research supports the notion that IC may be valuable for improving elementary school teacher PD programs. Tanner, Quintis, and Gamboa (2017) affirmed that collaboration is a critical component affecting the efficacy of IC. Administrators and teachers agree that collaboration fosters teachers' collective capacity to improve instructional practices, share valuable feedback, and gather learning resources needed. Tanner et al. (2017) described a case study involving IC in the development of writing instructors' capacities. One participant specifically noted that the IC method of teaching writing and literacy instruction made sense because teachers and coaches could continually engage in constructive, helpful conversation. Teachers were able to sort out real-life examples of how tasks and various scenario outcomes could be improved. This recognition that teaching translated to individualized, tangible terms aligns with Heath and Heath's (2007) assertion that tangibility, relevancy, and concreteness (using stories and examples) are essential characteristics of any message intended to be retained, remembered, and understood. Simply stated, information fails to be retained well if it is abstract, theoretical, and lacks connection to everyday life. Concepts that are taught through demonstration and concrete examples tend to be retained much longer and more accurately (Heath & Heath, 2007). The IC model uses rich, focused discussions on current instructional practices and knowledge, which will help teachers retain this new learning.

Research by Sailors and Price (2015) provides additional evidence that IC may improve instructional practice and student outcomes. They examined responsible and direct coaching models. They concluded that both model variations were successful in improving teachers' skills, instructional capacities, and knowledge. Student reading and literacy scores improved, especially among students who had previously struggled with reading. Sarma (2015) argues that reflexivity may play an essential role in explaining how and why coaching has been found to change teachers' instructional practices. As teachers share feedback with colleagues, it may encourage self-awareness and constructive self-criticism, which results in changed behaviors. This suggests that outcomes depend not only on the coach's behavior but also on the opportunity for teachers to socialize their experiences.

In addition, Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) describe IC relative to consultation, defining IC as providing professional support to teachers by peers and colleagues through formal, structured feedback and learning sessions. The authors note the lack of consensus surrounding IC's efficacy. Their study suggests that the efficacy of different IC implementation models is situationally and individually different, and as a result, suggests that educators and policymakers mandating IC and PD programs should do so on a localized, individualized basis.

Finally, Day's (2015) study evaluated the rationales and effects of using various coaching models. He found there are promising implications for using a variety of coaching models and that like Kurtz et al. (2017), the specific method and design of coaching is often related to its efficacy in each unique situation. Therefore, Day's (2015) study and the literature reviewed thus far on PD and IC programs reveal positive evidence on the use of coaching, and specifically literacy coaching of teachers in elementary school settings.

There have been several IC studies focused on language literacy coaching. Language literacy coaching focuses on improving literacy instruction, writing instruction, and closing current language- and literacy-based achievement gaps. Schachter, Weber-Mayrer, Piasta, and O'Connell (2018) explored the process of literacy instruction associated with optimal literacy-based IC outcomes. The researchers concluded that many successful literacy coaches practiced and integrated coaching methods, focuses, tactics, and tools that fell outside the scope of pre-defined PD model requirements. They suggest that current elementary school PD models may need revision and expansion. Specifically, they recommend that PD models should become more flexible and incorporate coaching models that may be individualized to teachers' needs.

Deussen et al. (2007) also provide additional support for the beneficial effects of IC when applied to the area of literacy. They recommend that the beneficial effects of IC accrue from teachers working collaboratively alongside mentors and peers, developing teaching skills based on feedback, and adapting lesson plans to the individualized teacher, student, and classroom needs.

When applying research-based models of PD and IC to the improvement of literacy teachers' instructional practices, it is vital to understand the relationships between these IC models and students' literacy levels and the teachers' literacy-instruction capacities. Coburn and Woulfin (2012) conducted a longitudinal case study that evaluated these relationships within an elementary school. Results suggested that when IC provided demonstration and feedback, it helped literacy teachers learn new approaches to instructional practices and integrate the practices into the classroom. The coaching program's efficacy was found to be a result of the modeling and instructional teaching methods used and the active role of coaches in counseling teachers regarding the importance of literacy and the literacy program that was used. Therefore,

psychological and sociological components seemed to be critical factors in teachers' motivational and success levels (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012).

While looking at past literacy and writing coaching is imperative for the current study, previous research on teachers' perceptions of IC is also essential. In their study of teacher perceptions and attitudes, Shernoff, Lekwa, Reddy, and Coccaro (2017) identified several enhancers and inhibitors to teachers having a positive perspective toward IC. For instance, Shernoff et al. (2017) recommend encouraging higher levels of teacher engagement. Most importantly, coaching incorporating ongoing, sustained learning, engagement, integration, and collaborative feedback sharing were found to be most important to positive teacher reactions.

Research has also examined the relationship between IC and student achievement. Xu (2016) found a significant positive correlation between teachers' perceptions of IC and schools' state-ranked academic performance. Additionally, Xu concluded that teachers who participated in coaching programs that encouraged them to reflect on their own practice and cultivate self-awareness were positively correlated with student performance. Deussen et al. (2017) also focused on the qualities of effective coaching based on student achievement. Like Xu, they concluded that student achievement was related to how coaches performed their jobs and allocated their time. Although coaches may have similar teaching experiences, variance in how they performed their coaching duties directly affected teacher outcomes. Thus, while the literature demonstrates that the theoretical model of coaching and IC seems to be a more generally effective model of PD than traditional PD models, effective coaching practices should be further considered to most effectively integrate IC into school districts.

From a district perspective, Johnson (2016) suggests that IC may help alleviate the managerial and human resource responsibility of PD requirements. By integrating IC into

schools' professional development programs, school leaders may experience a reduced burden of having to fulfill PD instructional requirements themselves. As colleagues fill the role of teacher-mentor and serve to improve each other's practice, administrators, who are often lacking knowledge in the current and best instructional practices (Crawford et al., 2017), are freed to focus on other administrative tasks, and teachers experience more positive outcomes in their classrooms. From Johnson's (2016) perspective, IC is a more results-oriented and financially efficient method of meeting PD needs and requirements.

In conclusion, there is substantial research support for examining the influence of IC, in combination with traditional PD, on teacher writing instructional practices. Additionally, there is support for focusing on teacher perceptions of their self-efficacy, content knowledge, and instructional practices in classroom writing instruction. This research has also guided the situational characteristics of this research. Specifically, the coach in this study has worked with the writing teachers over the past three years. As a result, coaching-teacher relationships are highly personalized before the current study. The coach will work with the elementary school writing teachers based on teachers' content knowledge and instructional needs. The coach will be able to utilize teachers' perspectives, current content knowledge, and instructional knowledge to guide conversations.

Writing Instruction and Writer's Workshop in Elementary Classrooms

Narrowing the scope of IC and PD discussion to writing and literacy instructional coaching, Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) state that an increasing number of schools realize the priority of teaching writing to teachers. In other words, the need for PD to incorporate literacy coaching on a teacher's level, not *just* an instructional level, is becoming a pressing priority. As

teachers are the examples students learn from in class, teachers need to have a solid grasp of functional and proper literacy.

Scholar and researcher Lucy Calkins executed and implemented the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College to close the widening literacy gap in schools among teachers and students. Calkins is known as one of the nation's most influential literacy educators, the author of multiple literacy and curriculum guidebooks, and the developer of the Reading and Writing Project. This approach to literacy instruction holds teacher modeling and one-on-one and small group, collaborative discussions central to the instruction, learning, and performance improvement process (Rebora, 2016).

Calkins suggests that a greater emphasis should be placed on teaching and equipping instructors to teach a wider variety of writing styles in classrooms (Rebora, 2016). These styles include argumentative writing, formal, informational writing, persuasive writing, and creative writing. Due to the varied ways, students will later need to communicate in a globalizing world, diversifying the styles through which children are taught to write and communicate may be crucial for later academic success.

In responding to Rebora's (2016) question about where literacy teachers can best obtain literacy instructional skills, Calkins answered by emphasizing the need to focus on preservice training. In other words, Calkins asserted that teachers lack adequate training and preparedness from a reading and writing perspective—both in terms of teachers' capacities and pedagogically based instructional capacities. Interestingly, Calkins also comments on the rigor of many schools' assignments that require children to integrate, synthesize, and critically evaluate information from a wide variety of sources at an increasingly younger age. For teachers to fully understand the process of writing and the demands placed upon students, teachers must continually

undertake these same writing tasks themselves. Simply stated, Calkins suggests that to be effective, teachers must be continual literacy students (Rebora, 2016).

Calkins' theory that teachers learn to teach writing by becoming writers themselves is also mirrored in the National Writing Project (NWP). The NWP is a "40-year old professional development network—the longest continuing professional development in existence—that enhances the teaching capacity of all teachers, in any discipline, kindergarten through university" (Tedrow, 2016, p. 25). Teachers in the NWP often contribute to PD through the use of best practices in published writings. In addition to the NWP, the Abydos Learning International, formerly the New Jersey Writing Project, also believes that teachers learn to teach writing through learning to write themselves. As teachers work through the program, they must also publish their work. Both writing programs believe in the importance of writing teachers becoming proficient writers themselves.

In an early commentary, Calkins (2015) discussed her direct interactions with teachers in elementary school environments. She described how she translates abstract concepts into concrete, functional examples for educators, a process Morieux and Tollman (2014) affirmed facilitates instructional effectiveness. By phrasing questions in real terms, Calkins (2015) makes instructional and coaching concepts concrete, a tool and characteristic that is critically important to effective literacy instruction, since literacy is the pillar medium of communication that facilitates education (Calkins, 2015).

Calkins (2015) also notes specific components and conditions of effective literacy instruction. First, teaching effective writing requires allowing students the time to absorb concepts and then practice those concepts. Second, elementary school students need to practice writing for at least an hour every day. As noted earlier, many writing teachers are not giving

optimal time for writing instruction and practice. Third, students should be assigned to write content that applies to the type of writing they will see in the real world, including persuasive letters, fiction, and news articles, rather than only scholarly content. These components are essential for two primary reasons: 1) many students will need to write proficiently in styles other than academic writing in order to be successful in future careers and 2) students who write content that is interesting to them and related to their everyday life will increase their engagement (Calkins, 2015). Additionally, children should be encouraged to choose topics they find interesting and meaningful. This is a critical component in BISD's writing curriculum and local writing assessments. The prompts are open-ended, allowing students to choose and create what they write. Finally, Calkins prizes the value of feedback and practice in the writing process. Calkins suggests that these concepts should be incorporated into any effective IC model that aims at expanding literacy teachers' instructional practices.

For the current study, teachers at BES will receive IC in the writing process and in conferencing with students about their writing. Calkins (2015) describes the writing process as a learned skill. Students should focus on both what they will write and how they will write it well. Even during assessment writing, Calkins believes students need to take the time to collect their thoughts, plan, draft, and revise as they work through their paper (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Calkins defines a writing conference as a time when the teacher talks to and asks the student questions to get to know the student as the writer. The teacher will give a compliment to the student on a writing tool or strategy the student used. The teacher will then teach one tool or strategy that will help make the writing stronger. The teacher may use exemplar texts to share writing strategies. The teacher may also use sticky notes and a tracking sheet to give students directions on the next steps (Calkins, Vanderburg, & Kloss, 2018).

Feinberg (2007) provides an interesting perspective of Calkins' beliefs. Feinberg (2007) notes that from a broad perspective, Calkin's model has faced little objection, except for a handful of scholars, including some New York educators who have implemented her model and faced challenges. As is the case in many newly introduced models, challenges are to be expected. In the case of Calkin's model, challenges included those relating to the model's scalability in the face of the educational system's current evaluation system and methods. In other words, many of Calkins' approaches foster the freedom of the child. This element can be a hindrance to public education's approach that focuses on the use of standardized assessments. Thus, implementing Calkin's model may be more difficult in today's education system. This is a current issue at BES, as writing teachers often feel that students are not prepared for the prompt-driven on-demand expository writing that the state assessment requires. However, it is not just the educational system that struggles with the approaches of Calkins. Nazaryan (2014) believes his students craved instruction far more than freedom in writing. Despite the expectation to allow students' voices on their chosen topics, students' writing still becomes uniform and rigid (Feinberg, 2007). Many teachers do not feel their voice is valued due to the scripted nature of Calkins' approach to writing workshops (Feinberg, 2007). Despite these issues, IC aligns in many ways with Calkin's model. Both approaches to writing instruction and learning foster individualization, and although highly effective, are difficult to scale and may be difficult to measure (Feinberg, 2007; Hopkins, 2016).

To tie these diverse considerations surrounding IC together, House (2017) summarizes coaching and its intent quite succinctly by naming coaching as a positive, healthy process that enables people to find solutions to current issues. In the current educational environment, educators need to be empowered to solve issues of literacy and achievement gaps. Increasing

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teachers' knowledge and self-efficacy regarding writing content knowledge and instructional practices, ultimately closing the achievement gaps and increasing student achievement, is the goal of the current study.

This current thinking concerning writing instruction in elementary classrooms has served to broaden the scope of information gathered in this study. Specifically, participants will be asked to provide information on the training in writing. Additionally, questions regarding teacher perceptions of their self-efficacy in writing have also been included. As suggested by Calkins' theory, information to one's writing training and skills will influence a teacher's instructional approach to writing.

The Impact of PD on Teachers' Knowledge

What is the impact of effective IC and PD programs on teachers' instructional practices? Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan (2018) conducted a literature review of 60 studies on the topic relating to elementary and pre-K education, finding that IC seems to be a helpful tool for integration and use within most PD programs due to its increasing teachers' instructional capacities and thus student outcomes. Once again, Kraft et al. (2018) assert that the rationale behind this finding needs to be further explained. In other words, researchers have found difficulty in describing the mechanisms that make IC work. One logical and straightforward suggestion for this phenomenon may be that scientific rationalization may not be possible. In other words, IC may be effective due to its integrated, multi-faceted, and individualized approach—a characteristic that, if scaled up, may fail to be effective. This implies that the situationally based and individualized variables explaining each IC scenario's efficacy may be too numerous to explain quantitatively. However, they seem effective in most evaluated cases. The effects of IC on teachers' content knowledge, instructional practices, and self-efficacy will be examined utilizing a qualitative study.

Dudek, Reddy, Lekwa, Hua, and Fabiano (2019) explored how teacher instructional practices can be improved using PD and training; specifically, they proposed classroom strategies coaching model. The researchers evaluated over 30 K through 6th-grade teachers who had received a coaching intervention. Interestingly, the results revealed that teachers' instructional practices stayed stable through the baseline period. They speculated that although classroom practices remained relatively stable, perhaps the quality with which the practices were enacted had improved (Dudek et al., 2019).

IC can either leverage or hinder instructional behavioral adaptations in the class. In other words, IC's intent and methods may directly affect teacher instructional practices (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Morieux and Tollman (2014) note that instruction and coaching that is delivered with a negative-reinforcement-style approach often result in a lack of motivation, resulting in poorer behavioral outcomes. Coaching using collaborative interaction, discussion, feedback sharing, and two-way communication helps teachers feel appreciated and valued. This suggests that transformational IC delivery methods in a collaborative rather than dictatorial manner will foster more productive and positive changes in teachers' instructional practices. Mangin and Dunsmore (2015) evaluated a school district's attempt at implementing literacy coaching. They posited that the method and framing of coaching would affect literacy outcomes. The study results supported the conclusion that a transformational, collaborative approach to coaching was successful when applied individually (one-on-one) and systematically (as a group).

A review and synthesis of literature evaluating the impact of IC and PD on instructional practices suggest increasing attention is being devoted to allowing teachers to guide their own learning through collaboration and reflective exercises. Current literature seems to recommend and promote the use of coaching models that value the teacher's engagement, participation,

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feedback, and opinion. For instance, Wang (2017) suggests that for IC to elicit desired outcomes and instructional growth, coaching must be carried out based on all stakeholders' unified commitment to the objective that coaching will benefit everyone involved, including teachers, students, and administrators. Wang (2017) strongly recommends that effective coaching occurs when teachers are given a voice and allowed to express their perceptions, based upon the assumption that the most effective way to cultivate and sustain effective coaching relationships is to leverage an approach that encourages teachers to take an active role in directing their own growth.

This literature points to the importance of how IC is conducted in this study. The person conducting the IC was knowledgeable of the district's PD program and participated in its delivery. She observed the teachers in their classroom as a basis for their IC. The sessions were one hour, once a week, for four weeks. During these sessions, behavior modeling and role-playing exercises were interspersed with two-way communications and feedback sharing.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (1986, p. 389). Sharp, Brandt, Tuft, and Jay (2016) further explain that self-efficacy is not the ability to perform a particular task, but rather the belief in one's ability to do so. Previous studies suggest that when teachers have a strong sense of self-efficacy, it can positively affect their effectiveness in multiples ways (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Teachers with high self-efficacy are more willing to try new teaching techniques in their classroom instruction (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011); experience increased motivation (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011); and translate PD

instruction into classroom instruction and positively influence their students' achievements (Sharp, Brandt, Tuft, & Jay, 2016).

It is important to note that feelings of self-efficacy are not constant over time. According to Sharp et al. (2016), preservice teachers whose sense of confidence was already high further increased their self-efficacy by the completion of their literacy methods courses and their student teaching. The more training that these future teachers received, the more their self-efficacy grew. The act of teaching itself also acts as a reinforcement tool for building self-efficacy. As teachers take the information that they learn from their teacher preparation programs or through PD opportunities and apply it in the classroom, this builds their confidence in their abilities to teach.

Writing teachers must possess many skills to teach writing effectively. The literature (Mackenzie & Hemmings, 2014; Mangen & Balsvik, 2016; Yeung et al., 2020) shows that writing teachers must be educated in writing pedagogy, are committed to writing, and want their students to succeed. Nonetheless, as the literature also suggests, many writing teachers experience mixed success. The construct of self-efficacy suggests that writing teachers might fall short because of their inability to organize and implement the necessary pedagogical, emotional, cognitive, and procedural resources as needed in writing instruction.

Locke, Whitehead, and Dix (2013) found that many writing teachers lack confidence. Timmerman et al. found that many teachers have negative attitudes about writing because of years of receiving red marks on their writing pieces (as cited in Hall & White, 2019). Teachers with a negative outlook about writing tend to project these feelings on to their students. The increase of self-efficacy among writing teachers could improve their ability to successfully apply their writing instruction skills.

Ozder (2011) observed that when teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy encounter problems, they are more likely to remain persistent in finding a solution than teachers with a lower sense of self-efficacy. While higher self-efficacy has consistently been found to translate into higher quality teaching, low self-efficacy has been associated with lower performance. As Yılmaz and Turan (2020) note, teachers who feel that they are not competent in their reading and writing instruction will most likely fail to transfer their knowledge to their students. This is especially important in the early stages of literacy education when students are particularly sensitive to the feedback they receive from their teachers.

While there are various precursors to one's self-efficacy in writing, the literature is consistent that these feelings will be associated with a teacher's instructional writing knowledge and practices. The personalized and concrete nature of the IC in this study is likely to influence self-efficacy beyond that influenced by traditional PD. However, it is essential to note that too high a perception of one's writing self-efficacy may also lead to resistance in accepting and acting on IC suggestions and behaviors. As a result, self-efficacy may also serve as an essential variable concerning the influence of IC on instructional behavior.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT) provides a rich contextual framework guiding the present study's examination of IC's influence on writing instructors' perceptions of content knowledge, instructional practices, and self-efficacy. As previously described, Vygotsky's (1978) SCT suggests that cognitive and behavioral learning and development are socially rooted. In this study, teachers who are also students of IC learn through social interaction, which is delivered through interaction with a coach, a more experienced professional.

As explained in Vygotsky's SCT, a more experienced peer or colleague will be most effective if they encourage, facilitate, and motivate a subordinate teacher to expand his or her abilities and knowledge base through scaffolding. Scaffolding occurs when the learner is pushed into his or her zone of proximal development, which characterizes the edge of the boundaries of that learner's current knowledge or capacity. A slightly more experienced peer provides instructional assistance and guidance to scaffold and helps pull the learner into the next level. A student learning to read may serve as a good illustration of this process. A student who can recite the alphabet but cannot put the letters together to form words will not be ready to learn how to read a book independently because the student does not demonstrate the skills needed to put the letters together to form words and sentences. Alternatively, the student who has learned to put letters together to form words is ready for scaffolding. The student is ready for a peer who has mastered forming words to teach him or her how to read books. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) SCT explains how coaching can assist teachers in learning new levels of instructional practices and refining how those instructional practices are carried out, based upon teachers' preexisting skill levels and initial training.

SCT is well established in education and is increasingly being applied to studies involving adult learning. Traditionally, the SCT was applied to children, but research findings suggest its applicability to a wide range of age groups (Gallucci, Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010). Gallucci et al. (2010), for instance, applied the SCT to a study exploring the role of organizational support in fostering PD and learning among school districts throughout the US. Ippolito (2010) applied SCT in a study evaluating three methods of applying literacy coaching to balance directive versus responsive relationships with instructors.

In a study of how coaching can be made more successful, Haneda, Teemant, and Sherman (2017) examined interactive coaching. Interactive coaching emphasizes social interaction based on the potential efficacy of socially rooted learning over other more isolated forms of learning. Haneda et al. (2017) found that interactive and socially oriented coaching was effective and elicited an increase in similarly oriented instructional practices. Teachers that socially engaged in coaching changed instructional practices to incorporate more interactive, dialogue-centric, and socially oriented teaching methods. Finally, Parsons, Ankrum, and Morewood (2016) translated the SCT into practice by noting that successful PD used adaptive instructional principles, affirming that instructional methods changed to fit individualized situations and needs based on social interactions are often more effective.

Summary and Transition

The literature reviewed for this study included several significant empirical findings characterizing the current research climate of PD, IC, writing instruction, self-efficacy, and theoretical framework. This review has helped in the scope and design of this study. Specifically, preservice instructional foundation in writing may be necessary to understand current practices in teaching writing instruction. Additionally, understanding self-perceptions concerning self-efficacy in writing may also influence teacher response to PD and IC. Most importantly, research supports expecting IC combined with PD to positively influence teachers' writing content knowledge and instructional practices. Specific aspects of the PD that is provided along with IC are also identified and incorporated in the process of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The present study used a phenomenological qualitative approach to determine how the IC of experienced first- through fifth-grade writing instructors influenced teachers' perceptions and teachers' self-efficacy on writing content knowledge and classroom instructional practices. A focus group, an open-ended questionnaire, and field notes from the instructional coach were used to gather data. This chapter describes the present study's methodology, design, procedures, sample size, data collection and analysis methods in greater depth.

Below, Figure 3.1 shows an overview of the methodology, design, data collection, and data analysis used in this study. An in-depth description of each explains how it was used in this study.

Figure 3.1 *Overview of the Methodology, Design, Instrumentation, and Data Analysis*
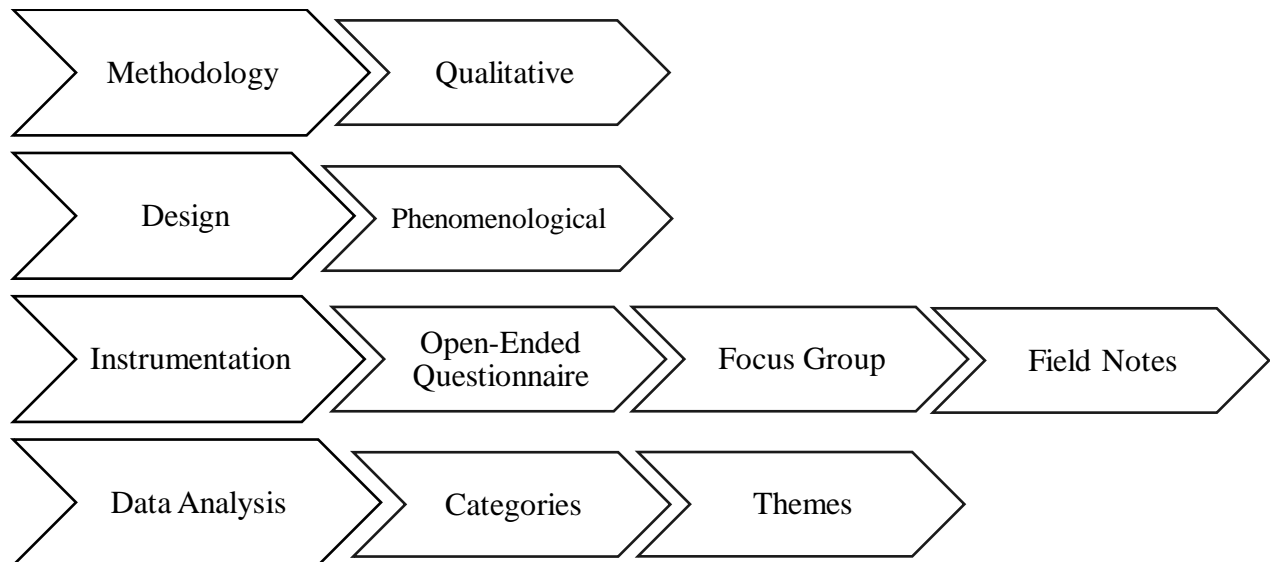
Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen as the present study's methodology because it is the most fitting for a study that seeks to uncover explanatory, rich data informing a *how* question. Research questions that require narrative, layered, complex explanatory information informing quantitative data of other studies are often best suited to qualitative frameworks (Cooley, 2013). Characteristics of qualitative research include collecting data in a natural setting, utilizing the researcher as the key instrument, utilizing multiple sources of data, making inductive and deductive data analysis, focusing on participants' meanings, emerging and shifting the research process during data collection, understanding the researchers' role, biases, and values, and gathering a holistic account of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research emerged during the 20th century as a form of research less revered than quantitative inquiry. However, during the past few decades, researchers across industries, including in the fields of education, psychology, and policymaking, have increasingly recognized the value and importance of qualitative research in informing the *why* and *how* questions that often arise out of an attempt to explain other quantitative, statistical findings (Cooley, 2013). In qualitative research, there are three kinds of data. These include interviews, observations and fieldwork, and documents (Patton, 2015).

The current study utilized a type of group interview called a focus group. Focus groups were first used as a research method in the 1940's (Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Leung & Savithiri, 2009;) as a way to "move away from interviewer-dominated research methods" (Leung & Savithiri, 2009, p. 218). Focus group sizes can vary; however, the optimum size for a group is between six and eight participants (Stewart. Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The object of the focus group is to gather "high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their

own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 2015, p. 475). In the current study, the instructional coach also served as the facilitator of the focus group. The five writing teachers were provided 12 open-ended questions. The facilitator guided the discussion and elicited participation from all five teachers.

Study Design

This study incorporated a phenomenological design, which utilized qualitative data (focus groups and open-ended questionnaires) to explore the research problem. Phenomenological designs are most appropriate for situations in which the researcher is exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of participants (Cooley, 2013). The participants, in this case the writing teachers, described their experiences with teaching writing, writing training, and their self-efficacy regarding writing content knowledge and instructional practices. A phenomenological design is used in the sense that the researcher explored a certain phenomenon—which is the way IC impacts teachers' self-efficacy concerning writing content knowledge and instructional practices. According to Williams and Moser (2019), "Qualitative research provides opportunities to locate the genesis of a phenomenon, explore possible reasons for its occurrence, codify what the experience of the phenomenon meant to those involved, and determine if the experience created a theoretical frame or conceptual understanding associated with the phenomenon" (p. 45).

The study is also considered an action research design as it involves "insider" research and includes the following components: planning the study to address a current concern, acting on the plan, observing the effects of the plan, and reflecting on the data gathered (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). Campus' student writing data is lagging; therefore, there is an immediate need to focus on writing instruction at BES. After examining student writing data, an action plan

was developed to determine if meaningful writing training could result in an effective level of teacher self-efficacy concerning writing instructional knowledge and practices.

The qualitative, phenomenological action research design focused on the following overarching research question, which guided the present study's inquiry. Does IC, following traditional PD, facilitate higher self-efficacy of elementary writing teachers in content knowledge and instructional practices, and if so, how? Specifically, the study examined the self-efficacy of the writing teachers regarding the writing process (content knowledge) and conferencing with students about their writing (instructional practice). The focus of RQ1 and RQ2 are on teacher perceptions of their self-efficacy in writing instruction in a classroom.

RQ1 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process?

RQ2 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in conferencing with students about their writing?

Content analysis of focus group sessions, questionnaire responses, and field notes with provided additional information regarding the nature of observed differences and possible sources by which IC influences self-efficacy in writing content knowledge and instructional practices.

Participant Selection

Five writing teachers were included in this study. These participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1.) Participants must be teachers who have finished their initial teacher training in the district writing curriculum. 2.) Participants must have at least three years of teaching experience. 3.) Participants must be classroom literacy writing instructors. 4.) Participants must be instructors of first through fifth-grade classrooms. These criteria allow one teacher per grade level (first through fifth grade) to participate. Participants were neither

discriminated against nor excluded based on race, age, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

Participants' responses were examined together during the data analysis; that is, this study was not looking at the individual responses of each participant, but instead looked at the group of five as a whole. For that reason, participants were not individually identified throughout the study—responses from the focus group and the open-ended questionnaire were organized by question. Table 3.1 displays the five participants' ages, years of experience teaching, and years of experience teaching writing.

Table 3.1 *Participants' Demographics*

Grade Level	Age	Years of Experience	Years of Experience Teaching- Writing
1	44	21	21
2	51	11	11
3	26	4	3
4	30	7	4
5	41	18	18

Instructional Coach: Background and Coaching Method

The instructional coach utilized for this study has 12 years of experience in public school education. During those years, she served as an elementary teacher, reading interventionist, and as a literacy coach. For the past six years, she has operated as an educational consultant supporting literacy in various districts in North Texas. Not only does she have extensive training in writing instruction that includes, most notably, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project from Columbia University, the New Jersey Writing Project, and Jeff Anderson's Patterns

of Power, she is also phenomenal at connecting with teachers and maintaining healthy, productive working relationships.

For this study, the instructional coach did not follow a specific coaching model, but instead a system of coaching she has developed based on components of effective, research-based practices. These components, such as demonstration and feedback, will be discussed more extensively in this study's literature review. Using a four-week intervention process, the coach pre-planned the coaching sessions based on BEST's writing curriculum. The instructional coach determined that the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing are imperative to improving teacher instructional quality. Before the first coaching session, the coach emailed the participants an agenda an outline and asked for feedback regarding the topics she was planning to cover during the four-week intervention.

The instructional coach had the participants divided into two different coaching groups. The first group consisted of the first and second grade writing teachers. The second group contained the third, fourth, and fifth grade writing teachers. The coach made the decision to split the group of five in this way based on her prior experience working with elementary writing teachers. At times, the coaching needs vary from grade level to grade level, and especially between the lower and upper elementary grades.

Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the IC was provided via live video sessions. As the four-week coaching progressed, the instructional coach provided notes, models, demonstrations (using both live and pre-recorded video), and feedback. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate samples of the notes and models provided to the participants during a coaching session.

Figure 3.2 *The Writing Process*
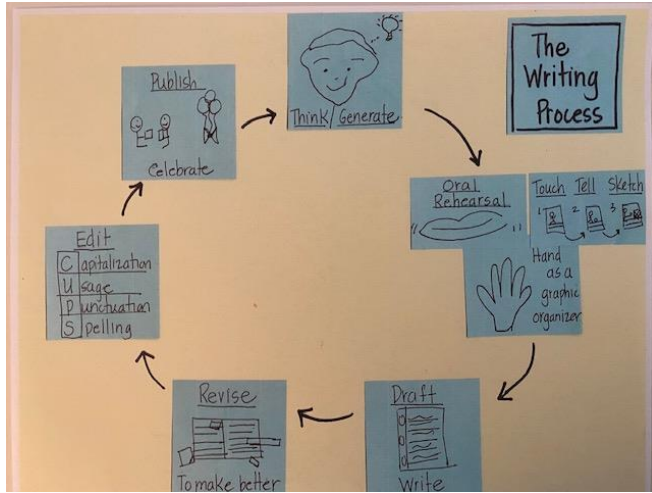
Figure 3.3 *Writing Conference*

Instrumentation

Data collection was based on responses from the open-ended questionnaire and the focus

group. Questionnaires have been used numerous times by researchers in the field of education

and are an appropriate choice for qualitative studies seeking to extract rich, layered, explanatory

narrative responses from participants (Pathak, 2012). The questionnaires required the participants to reflect on their current writing use, their instructional writing content knowledge, their current instructional writing practices, and their self-efficacy in writing content knowledge and instructional practices. The seven open-ended questions given to teachers in an online format were:

1. What do you most enjoy about teaching writing?
2. What aspect of writing instruction is the most difficult for you?
3. What do you most enjoy about teaching the writing process?
4. Describe the part of the writing process that you find most difficult to teach and why.
5. What does a student writing conference look like in your classroom?
6. What you most enjoy about conferencing with students about their writing?
7. Describe the part of conferencing with students about their writing that you find the most difficult and why.

Focus groups were designed to encourage participants to expand on their answers in an open way. In other words, the questions were designed to pinpoint and gather information regarding a specific topic that informs the research question(s), such as teachers' perceptions of how IC influenced their classroom instructional content knowledge and instructional practices. In this way, the questions were not so open-ended that participants lost focus, but also were not so restrictive that they only elicited affirmative answers. The 12 focus group questions used are included below.

Background:
1. What do you consider to be a "successful" professional development experience?
Writing:
2. How do you feel about the writing training you have received in the past two years?
3. How do you feel about teaching writing?
4. How do you feel about your own personal writing ability? Is writing difficult for you or does it flow easily?
5. Which instructional strategy has been most helpful for improving the overall writing skills of your students? Why?
6. Describe your experience using the writing process in your classroom.
7. How do you feel about teaching the writing process?

8. What instructional strategy has been most helpful or do you believe will be the most helpful for teaching the writing process? Why?
9. Describe your experience using conferencing with students about their writing.
10. How do you feel about your student conferences? Do you find them beneficial? If yes, can you describe how you "see" or will "see" the benefits?
11. What instructional strategy has been most helpful or do you believe will the most helpful for improving your student writing conferences? Why?
12. What about instructional coaching was most helpful to you? How has it impacted your teaching behavior? What was the most important thing you learned from the coaching? Would you like to have even more instructional coaching in writing?

Data Collection

The present study used the following step-by-step procedures to identify participants and collect initial data. Once approved by the university chair, the study's proposal was sent to the IRB committee for review and approval. Once approval was granted, the study procedures below were carried out.

1. Potential teacher participants from BES with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience were identified.

2. Teachers were contacted through a letter outlining the study's purpose, significance, procedures, and ethical considerations, including teachers' rights to voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. Teachers were also notified of the prerequisite criteria.

3. The IC intervention took place as follows: Participants met with a writing coach once per week for one hour each, for four weeks. IC methods involving discussion, demonstration, collaboration, and other effective coaching methods described within the present study's literature review were applied as components of the IC intervention design.

4. Data were then transcribed, member-checked, and analyzed using the steps described in the following section.

Data Analysis

The following steps were used to complete the present study's data analysis.

1. Focus groups' recordings were transcribed using transcription software. The researcher then edited for potential errors. Transcribed focus groups' responses were sent back to each corresponding participant, who reviewed the transcription to ensure its accuracy. This member-checking increased the trustworthiness of the data collected.

2. The researcher uploaded all focus group and questionnaire response notes into an Excel document. The researcher critically evaluated the data to identify common themes among teachers' self-efficacy concerning writing instructional knowledge and practices.

3. Where needed, the researcher clarified comments and notes with participants.

4. During open coding, the data was analyzed line-by-line and categories were assigned based on responses. During this phase, selection of specific words and phrases was used for titling purposes.

5. Next, axial coding was used to merge, cluster, and eliminate categories. During this stage, an exploration of patterns and emerging categories occured.

6. Finally, during selective coding new themes were developed when the coding content was compared. Additional merging, clustering, and eliminating of categories was necessary. At this stage, data were interpreted and synthesized for meaning making.

7. The final themes were used for theory development and to construct meaning from the findings. Hence, the present study used a thematic analysis to interpret and analyze the study's results.

8. Digital and hard copy data with any participant identifying information will be kept password protected and in a locked safe box by the researcher for five years following the study's commencement and publication, and terminated thereafter to protect participants' privacy.

Ethical Considerations

IRB standards set forth various guidelines regarding research involving human subjects. These guidelines mandate that such research must consider and ensure the rights of the participants, including privacy, confidentiality, non-discrimination, informed consent, voluntary participation, beneficence, non-maleficence, and anonymity. While the IRB determined that the present study did not qualify as a human subjects' study, to respect participants' anonymity and privacy, participants' names were not used in this dissertation, and all identifying information was kept confidential. With respect to participants' confidentiality, the researcher agreed not to share any identifying information or information shared in the focus groups or the open-ended questionnaires that were confidential in association with identifying information. Additionally, as noted in the participant selection section, participants were not discriminated against based on gender, race, sexual orientation, age and/or religion. Furthermore, to ensure that no physical and/or psychological harm was done to participants, all participants gave their informed consent to participate—that is, they were fully informed of the study's research procedures and intent prior to agreeing to participate. Additionally, it was made clear to participants that they retained the right of voluntary participation and could exit the study at any time, without explanation and for any reason, with no associated penalty. Finally, this study is intended to benefit teachers by understanding how IC may help teachers develop an effective level of self-efficacy concerning

writing content knowledge and instructional practices. The study's findings could also benefit students.

It was important for the researcher to consider and ensure the study's procedures were carried out without bias. One way of accomplishing this was to practice reflexivity as a researcher. By simply becoming aware of and writing down different potentials for bias in interpretation, the researcher was able to clarify and avoid many potential biases during data analysis.

Summary and Transition

As this methodology chapter has articulated, the present qualitative study used a phenomenological, action research design to explore how IC affects teachers' self-efficacy in writing content knowledge and instructional practices of first through fifth-grade writing teachers. Using a focus group and open-ended questionnaire to inform two research questions, the study used a thematic analysis to first use open coding, then axial coding, and finally selective coding to further develop a theory. Finally, a meaning was constructed from the data (Williams & Moser., 2019). Chapter four of this study will present a narrative of the present study's primary findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Writing is a critical skill needed to communicate successfully both in personal and professional contexts. Today, in addition to using traditional media, writers also communicate using text messaging, emails, and social media (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2020). To help develop successful writers, high-quality writing instruction is necessary (De Smedt, Graham, & Van Keer, 2020). Explicit writing instruction delivered in teacher preparation programs can positively influence preservice teachers' understanding and confidence in teaching writing and help shape their classrooms after graduation (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). Despite the importance of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs, many programs do not dedicate the required time, resources, and coursework to writing and writing instruction. In one study, only 38% of respondents reported that their universities offered courses dedicated to writing instruction (Myers & Paulick, 2020). With a lack of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs, it is imperative that elementary writing teachers receive training that results in an effective level of teacher self-efficacy concerning writing content knowledge and practice.

At BES, writing teachers have utilized a district-approved writing curriculum since the 2018–2019 academic school year. At that time, writing teachers participated in two district-required PD trainings. As new elementary writing teachers join BISD, they partake in district-required writing training during new teacher orientation. Student performance data at BES from on-demand writing tasks such as STAAR and CSWA have not significantly improved (except fourth grade on the CSWA) since 2017. To improve writing instruction, further study needs to be done on how various PD models may provide instructional support and improve teachers' self-

efficacy regarding their capabilities, skills, and knowledge in writing instruction. Specifically, a need exists to study the effects of IC following PD to determine its impact on teachers' self-efficacy in the classroom and student learning. Hoge (2016) reported a lack of research on the effect of IC when coupled with initial teacher training on teaching practices in elementary writing classrooms. Thus, this qualitative study examines teacher perceptions of IC, coupled with district-required PD on their confidence in their ability to teach students to write.

The overarching research question of the study is how IC, following traditional PD, facilitates elementary writing teachers' self-efficacy in content knowledge and instructional practices? Specifically, the study will examine the writing teachers' self-efficacy regarding the writing process (content knowledge) and conferring with students about their writing (instructional practice). RQ1 and RQ2 focus on teacher perceptions of their self-efficacy in writing instruction in a classroom.

RQ1 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process?

RQ2 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in conferencing with students about their writing?

Content analysis of focus group responses, open-ended questionnaire responses, and field notes provide the information for examining these research questions in BES writing teachers. After the data were transcribed using a software program, inductive reasoning was utilized as the open coding process began. In open coding, distinct broad categories were identified based on the focus group's questions and answers and the open-ended questionnaire's questions and answers. The categories were then refined and aligned during axial coding. Finally, during selective coding more clustering and reduction lead to thematic specificity. After the coding was complete, theories were developed and meaning was constructed based on the themes (Williams

& Moser, 2019). Overall, after much reduction, the in-depth analysis revealed four categories and eight themes. Deductive reasoning was then used to determine if the categories and themes aligned with the research questions and the open-ended questionnaire's questions and answers and the focus group's questions and answers. The four overarching categories are PD, IC, the writing process, and conferencing with students about their writing. The first theme emerged from the question about PD. The second theme came from responses to IC. The third through fifth themes focused on the writing process itself or content knowledge. The sixth through eighth themes centered on conferencing with students about their writing, an instructional practice.

The eight themes were then compared with the conclusions ascertained from the literature review of PD, IC, writing instruction, the impact of PD on teachers' knowledge, self-efficacy, and the overarching social-cultural (SCT) theoretical framework. Thus, the study's findings support the literature review.

Professional Development

The purpose of PD is to elevate the quality of teaching by enhancing teacher instructional capacity. PD has been used to maintain and enhance teachers' knowledge and pedagogical currency relative to the surrounding sociocultural context and bureaucratic framework in which teachers are working (Teitel, 2004). Exploring the core benefits teachers desire from PD, Matherson and Windle (2017) concluded that teachers want engaging and relevant activities to students and practical to implement in a classroom. Additionally, they want PD that is sustained and ongoing. Similarly, Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010) recommended that PD be job-embedded, which they describe as being job-relevant, intertwined in teachers' daily classrooms, and as useful.

IC, especially involving classroom observation and review in this study, is ideal for addressing teacher desire for job-embedded PD. Chien (2013), for instance, observed that coaching fosters kinesthetic learning in a way that can be directly integrated and applied using tangible concepts and examples that relate to the everyday classroom circumstances. The tangible concepts and examples provide "hands-on" modeling that the teachers can implement in their classrooms. Participant's comments during the focus group further explain why the "hands-on" modeling proves beneficial.

Theme 1: Job-Embedded

Participants were asked to describe successful PD experiences. The overarching theme derived from their responses to this question was that job-embedded PD was the most beneficial because it is "hands-on," easy to implement, and relevant to the writing classroom. Their desire for this sort of PD did not remain generic in the description; instead, teachers were quite specific. Without any prompting by the moderator, teachers could describe specific examples of job-embedded learning that was helpful.

> The PD that you gave us, where you showed us the little mini anchor charts, and we had to practice what [inaudible] would look like and sound like for us. That was really helpful, and it's something that like, I'm excited to implement and take back. So, I think that is successful, in my opinion.
>
> So, over the last few years, when we've been doing the Balanced Literacy Model, all of this has made me a much better teacher. Seeing somebody in that situation, and seeing those conferences modeled, and seeing those mini-lessons modeled, was a much easier way for me to understand what I was supposed to be doing, versus how to be a good writer myself.
>
> I was going to add to what I think was said, or somebody said something about it being modeled, and how much of an impact that makes, versus sitting through something. When I first started teaching, the writing class I took was a week-long thing, and really, and truly, it taught me personally to be a good writer, but I didn't learn how to teach writing.

.

> Seeing somebody in that situation and seeing these conferences modeled…was a much easier way for me to understand what I was supposed to be doing...

These statements sum up why modeling and "hands-on" learning are so powerful. This approach is simply easier when seen in action. Thus, modeling correct behavior seemed instrumental to PD being considered concrete, job-relevant, and engaging.

Participants also described the importance that PD is easily implemented in the writing classroom. Matherson and Windle (2017) substantiated this belief when they found that successful PD utilizes practical content delivery methods. Participants' responses validated that transferring the learning from PD to the actual classroom is more effective when easily accomplished.

> Making it simple, or simplifying it, so it's easy to implement, too. I like the PDs that I go to, that it's modeled for me also, either live, or we get to watch somebody implement it. Even in a real-world or real-life situation, instead of just a potential situation. It makes it easier for me to see it, then, in my classroom.

> Making it simple, or simplifying it, so it's easy to implement, too.

Further expanding on job-embedded PD, participants discussed the importance of relevance to the writing classroom. This belief is also validated throughout the literature review. The most effective PD models are integrated into teachers' everyday lives (Croft et al., 2010; Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016). Further, Brown (2016), Croft et al. (2010), and Matherson and Windle (2017) all support an integrated, ongoing, relevant approach to sustained PD. Participants corroborated the research through their responses.

> I think being able to bring back the ideas to the classroom and use them immediately can change my teaching for the better. It makes a successful professional development experience.

> If it's something that's easy to implement, and it's usable, and it's going to make kiddos better at whatever it is you're working on, then it would be successful.

We can go and be able to use it in our classroom right away, and the resources that you give us, and the files, are something we can use in our tool kit, and be able to go and just take what we learned today, and go and put it in classroom use. It can just work right away, which is nice.

All the training that I've received from you (the coach), I think it's been so beneficial. Because like I said before, not only is it engaging, but it's something that's practical, where everything that you've taught us, or we get from you, you implement in the training where we can see it, and we can hands-on do it. But, we also, like I said, can take it and go right back in the classroom the next day, and be able to pick up right there and go with it.

There is consistent support in all the teachers' statements that job-embeddedness, including modeling specific classroom behaviors, motivated their desire for and acceptance of PD in general and IC in particular. It should be noted that not a single statement contradicted or questioned this conclusion. When analyzing both the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses, it became evident by participants' responses that PD is critical for writing teachers. PD, whether referring to the two days of district-required writing training or the four weeks of IC on writing, indeed increased teachers' beliefs that their instructional knowledge and practices increased. Statements about PD will be analyzed with statements regarding IC, the writing process, and conferencing with students to further explore whether IC, coupled with the writing training, facilitates higher self-efficacy.

Instructional Coaching

Deussen, Coskie, Robinson, and Autio (2007) define coaching as being ongoing, job-embedded, and directly correlated with the challenges teachers encounter during day-to-day classroom interaction. Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) further expand this definition by adding that IC involves peers and colleagues providing professional support to teachers through formal, structured feedback and learning sessions. Coaching provides a direct educational opportunity

for teachers to learn through one-on-one and/or group instruction, two-way feedback, observation, demonstration, and kinesthetic learning applied concretely to everyday classroom situations, curriculum knowledge, and instructional practices. In the current study, participants worked with an instructional coach in a group setting that utilized two-way communication and demonstration. IC sessions were well planned based on participants' needs and notes, videos, and anchor charts were developed and shared with all. For analysis in the current study, it is noteworthy that the participants had prior experience working with the coach. In the past three years, the coach had provided training and coaching on a balanced literacy approach. The IC for the current study was very specific to the newly implemented writing curriculum and the writing teachers' needs.

Theme 2: Interactive

Overall, participants described IC as the most beneficial form of PD for their writing instruction. During the focus group, participants also requested their desire for more IC in writing instruction. This revelation from the participants mirrors research on IC and its effectiveness. Knight et al. (2015) describe the necessary components for effective IC implementation in three steps:

1.) Identifying the teacher's needs, such as literacy gaps and specific literacy coaching needs,

2.) Educating through demonstration, feedback, observation, and other situationally specified methods, and

3.) Taking time to foster improving instructional skills and teacher self-efficacy.

Participants in this study mentioned each of these elements and spoke of their needs in the writing classroom, the value of demonstration, feedback, and observation, and the time spent honing their instructional knowledge and practices.

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Because I know when you [the coach] come in the classroom and you've watched the kids a little bit, you always have a little bit extra to give or to share and help. And I think that's always beneficial is having your eyes in there because whether we're conferencing or doing the whole group lesson and you're able to put your input in, I think that helps me personally a lot.

I think refreshers throughout the year is really good because I get stuck on one way of teaching, and then when you would come in and teach us the [inaudible], it really made a difference having those refreshers, bringing back things to my mind that I should be doing.

For me, I would love more instructional coaching. I think it's awesome whenever you come in, and you show us your brilliant ideas. What I would like is more on revising and editing for STAAR, just because I have that looming over my head and how I can best teach my students to talk a little bit, those portions of the test.

I was thinking; I love it when you bring in a lesson, you bring in a book or a starting point, like when you brought in The Trash Orchestra. I don't remember exactly what that was, but seeing how you composed that lesson and the that you used that story for, I don't know. It just helps me to be able to better see things in books, to see you talking about, or showing all of the different things that you would use a book to teach. So, I would really like more of that.

I think the most helpful thing was you breaking everything apart from each set for us and giving us the resources. So, I took notes, so being able to go in for next year, the next year, and go in and look at each one and figure out how this is what I need to do and change what I've done and be able to set it.

Honestly, I think the day that you put up the pieces of student writing, and we all talked together. So you showed us, this is how I would do a coach or a conference, and this is what I would say to the kid, and then you put up another piece, and we were supposed to answer back with, "Okay, what would your compliment be? And what would your teaching point be?"

I think the most helpful; you're really good at modeling. Even the zoom lessons you modeled the different strategies and the different pieces. You're really good at that.

The breaking down of each step just really, for me, it just helps it because it's simplified. And then, I know each step, what I'm going to do or what I'm going to try first. It makes it easy to understand.

The focus group's transcription reveals how the participants feel about IC in writing instruction. Based on the comments, IC helps the writing teachers improve very specific components of their instructional practices. But IC is more than just performing these functions. It is personal. Participants consistently referenced the importance of the relationship between teacher and coach. According to Morieux and Tollman (2014), the central role of a personalized relationship may be the single most important factor in an IC program's integrity and quality. Based on the transcription, writing teachers participating in this study would certainly agree with these assertions.

> I'd obviously love more instructional coaching in writing because we love you.

> For me, I would love more instructional coaching. I think it's awesome whenever you come in, and you show us your brilliant ideas.

After analyzing the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses, it is evident that while the two district-required days of PD on the overview of the writing curriculum were described as "easy to implement" and "modeled for me," they still were not as impactful as the four-week IC intervention. Statements from participants such as "refreshers throughout the year are really good" illustrate the importance of continuing PD. Teachers need ongoing training so that they are continually honing their instructional practices. In a study by Coburn and Woulfin (2012), literacy coaching provided elementary writing teachers with demonstration and feedback as they learned new instructional practices. By providing demonstration, feedback, modeling, notes, anchor charts, and discussions, IC positively impacted the beliefs teachers had about their instructional knowledge and practices. The next three themes were derived by examining the responses to the writing process. An exploration of focus group

transcription and open-ended questionnaire responses regarding the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing will reveal participants' self-efficacy about their instructional knowledge and practices.

Content Knowledge: The Writing Process

The writing process is incorporated throughout BES's writing curriculum. Beginning in kindergarten, students are introduced to the writing process, and throughout their elementary years, they expand their understanding and use of the writing process in all their writing pieces. Calkins describes the writing process as a learned skill. Students should focus on both what they will write and how they will write. Teachers must allow students to take the time to collect their thoughts, plan, draft, and revise as they work through their papers (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Both the PD provided by BISD for writing teachers and the IC provided for BES writing teachers highlight the importance of the writing process in daily instruction. Will an improved understanding of their writing skills through the PD and IC translate into more confidence in writing process instruction? Field notes from the coach, responses on the open-ended questionnaire, and discussions during the focus group reveal three central themes of the writing process: teacher confidence, student growth and enthusiasm, and the recursive nature of the writing process.

Theme 3: Teacher Confidence

For teachers to fully understand the process of writing and the demands placed on students, they must continually undertake the same writing tasks themselves. Calkins suggests that to be effective, teachers must themselves be continual literacy students (2016). By practicing and honing their writing, teachers' confidence should increase (Knight et al., 2015). Participants in the current study worked on improving their knowledge and instruction in the writing process

throughout their four-week IC intervention. The four-week IC intervention period allowed

enough time for reflection while also building on instructional skills week to week. Research on

effective instructional practices supports the study's IC intervention. By improving and

continually integrating writing concepts, teachers will incorporate those concepts into their

instructional practices (Reddy, Dudek, & Lekwa, 2017).

Further, the study's IC intervention aligned with research on IC and self-efficacy in

teachers. Effective IC should allow time to foster and improve instructional skills and teacher

self-efficacy (Knight et al., 2015). As the participants became more comfortable with the writing

process, their instructional knowledge and confidence in their instructional practices increased.

> I guess, in the past, I didn't feel comfortable teaching it [writing process]. And now, after having [writing] training, and especially if not for this one, for the next year going in step-by-step and having a refresher, it definitely makes my confidence feel better about teaching it and knowing we'll start here, and we'll go from here to here. So, I think the refreshers are nice. And so, I feel more confident now than I probably would've when I first started.

> It's [writing training] made it easier to teach, which makes it feel better and more comfortable. I don't want to stop any more training, though. I want more so that we can keep going with it, but I think it's made it easier. And I think seeing the success in the kids makes it feel better for me as well, because I know we're communicating it the right way, and they're getting it, and they're seeing the process too...

> I definitely plan on being more cognizant of what part of the writing process we're in with Lucy [Calkins] and pointing it out to my kids, because I think there's a lot of power in the kids knowing like, "Oh, okay, I'm revising today." But then tomorrow, they might be going back to drafting, and that's something that they need to know. And it goes back to the whole web idea. We don't want kids to get stuck in the mindset that the process is just linear, and you go from one thing to the next.

> I think getting to the point where you understand that the writing process doesn't necessarily mean that you start in one place and finish in another place, just makes me much more comfortable about teaching the kids. Because it gives me more of an ability to sort of meet them where they are instead of just saying, "Okay. Everybody today is revising," or, "Everybody

today, you should be publishing." So, it makes me feel more confident in my ability to teach the kids individually versus keeping a group of writers on a track to an end position.

I also feel more comfortable and confident in the writing process from the [writing] training.

Based on the transcription from the focus group and the responses to the open-ended questionnaire, participants voiced an increase in their confidence to provide effective writing instruction; in fact, every teacher in the study expressed an increase in her comfort level either in the knowledge of the writing process or in the teaching of the writing process itself. Whether PD with IC is the only means or even the best means to improve one's confidence in teaching the writing process to elementary students is not addressed in this study. However, the results of this study certainly suggest that PD with IC may be an effective way to increase writing teachers' instructional knowledge, instructional practices, and self-efficacy and is worthy of additional research attention.

Theme 4: Student Growth & Enthusiasm

As students work through the writing process, they must be given opportunities to use their voice in their writing, a critical component of BISD's writing curriculum and writing assessments. The prompts are open-ended, allowing students to choose and create what is in their writing. Calkins maintains that students who write content that is interesting to them and related to their everyday life will increase their engagement (2015). Additional research confirms that students enjoy writing more when they have freedom over what they write, in both the topic and the creativity they write (Zumbrunn et al., 2019). This engagement and enjoyment may lead to increased growth. In addition to the self-selected writing topics, participants' responses also support the notion that students enjoy the tools and exemplar texts used in writing.

I think seeing the success in the kids makes it feel better for me as well, because I know we're communicating it the right way, and they're getting it, and they're seeing the process too...

The spider legs and using the different colors and the little sticky notes, something in third grade, they really just love that because it helps color their page a little bit. And it just got them all excited about the planning and the drafting and doing all of that. But then when we go in and revise, and we're editing, it added another level of "aha" to them or ooh, and they loved that. And I think that helped improve them because they love seeing all those different colors and the different things going on their pages, because the more they had on there, the more they felt like they were a better writer. So, I thought that was something that was really helpful with the third grade but also liked the mentor text, where you said like, they'd come to you with a book and be like, "Well, look, they did this here," or, "Look what I have here." So those definitely helped.

The mentor texts are really helpful for my kids, but I think what really turned their writing around was using student exemplars and sticky noting those up and showing what the kid actually did in their writing that I'm looking for. As we progressed throughout the unit, my kids went from zeros and ones to threes and fours within a couple of units. So, I thought that was super powerful to just have them realize what other kids are doing and then try and emulate that in their own writing.

The writing teachers observed student growth and student enthusiasm in using the writing process based on the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses. According to Sharp, Brandt, Tuft, and Jay (2016), teachers with high self-efficacy translate PD instruction into classroom instruction and positively influence their students' achievements. This research validates what *Theme 3: Teacher Confidence* found that the writing teachers experienced higher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process, which led to students feeling success and confidence in their writing.

<center>*Theme 5: Writing is Recursive*</center>

The writing process is not a linear but rather a recursive process. Students need to be given time to gather their thoughts, plan, draft, and revise as they work (Calkins & Ehrenworth,

<center>65</center>

2016), they also need to be given time to revisit stages of the writing process as they work through their pieces. To support this notion, Keen (2017, p. 376) states, "The prewriting—drafting—revising—celebrating process is not meant as a straitjacket and nothing could be further from the spirit of the approach than a forced march through these sub-processes as if they were invariable stages." BISD writing training and BES IC also support the notion that students may not visit all steps of the writing process on every writing piece.

Participant responses validate the research that writing is not always a single step-by-step process.

> I think getting to the point where you understand that the writing process doesn't necessarily mean that you start in one place and finish in another place, just makes me much more comfortable about teaching the kids. Because it gives me more of an ability to sort of meet them where they are instead of just saying, "Okay. Everybody today is revising," or, "Everybody today, you should be publishing." So, it makes me feel more confident in my ability to teach the kids individually versus keeping a group of writers on a track to an end position.

> I definitely plan on being more cognizant of what part of the writing process we're in with Lucy [Calkins] and pointing it out to my kids, because I think there's a lot of power in the kids knowing like, "Oh, okay, I'm revising today." But then tomorrow, they might be going back to drafting, and that's something that they need to know. And it goes back to the whole web idea. We don't want kids to get stuck in the mindset that the process is just linear, and you go from one thing to the next.

> In the past, in my room with the writing, we've done one draft, next draft, next draft, next draft. And then it was you pick your favorite, and you go and revise and edit it. And it's kind of nice. This next year, whenever it'll be, when they go in and write, they can go in to revise any of those pieces. And they're not having to go and publish a final draft every single one. They don't have to go write a brand-new final copy of it. They can use what they've already got. And I think that's nice. And I'm excited for that in the classroom to where it's not just bang, bang, bang, and you're done. It's you can go back, and you can go look through all of them. Or like (Participant 5) said, you don't have to touch one if you don't want to after you finish drafting it, so.

> Well, let me just add one more thing. And I don't know if this goes in this spot or not, but there was one other thing that I thought about, and it was kind of an "aha" for me, but I think it's helped the kids, or maybe it's helped me help the kids. When I started some of these trainings, when the finished piece didn't have to be rewritten and actually finished, that was a huge thing that a huge weight off of me and a huge weight off of the kids. When they're finished piece has all those little editing spider legs, and sticky notes, and things like that. But they feel like it's done. I think that's helped me and helped them, help me communicate to them. It doesn't have to be a drag or rewriting it and finishing it and making it look good.

These comments highlight the importance of revision and improvement, i.e., the recursive nature of writing, but the comments also suggest additional elements in this recursive process. Idiosyncrasy and flexibility are emphasized in the first comment. Throughout the PD and the IC, participants began to understand that teaching the writing process rarely follows a scripted plan. As one teacher pointed out, students may not work on drafting one day, revising one day, and then creating the final draft. Instead, participants understand that each step in the process is very individualized based on the writer's specific needs. Revising is a process and not a linear one. The focus should not be on the finished product or even producing the finished product. The focus should be on the discovery that occurs during the process of writing. That is the real magic in teaching the writing process. After the initial writing PD and the four-week IC intervention, the writing teachers better understood the writing process.

In summary, the teachers participating in the PC with the IC intervention gained a richer and more robust appreciation for the writing process. As a result of this appreciation, they felt that they were in a better position to engage, motivate, and direct their elementary students in the writing process. The study's participants demonstrated that their confidence in their instructional knowledge increased, and as a result, students' confidence and use of the writing process improved.

Findings from the current study prove that PD and IC may positively affect self-efficacy regarding the instructional knowledge and instructional practices of elementary writing teachers. Additionally, participants' comments about teacher confidence, student growth and enthusiasm, and the recursive nature of the writing process have a positive effect on the teachers' self-efficacy. The next three themes will explore the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses on the instructional practice called conferencing with students.

Instructional Strategies: Student Conferencing

Due to the district-required curriculum, all BISD writing teachers have adopted Calkins' approach to the writing workshop. Her approach to literacy instruction holds teacher modeling and one-on-one and small group, collaborative discussions central to the instruction, learning, and performance improvement process (Rebora, 2016). These one-on-one and small group approaches, called conferencing or conferring with students, allow for structured, yet meaningful dialogue between teacher and students.

Calkins defines a writing conference as a time when the teacher talks to and asks questions of the student, a two-way instead of one-way communication, to get to know the student as the writer. What may take place during these conferences? For instance, the teacher may compliment a student on a writing tool or strategy the student has used. The teacher may follow up by describing a tool or strategy to help the student become a stronger writer. Additionally, the teacher may use exemplar texts to share writing strategies. The teacher may also use sticky notes and a tracking sheet to give students directions on the next steps (Calkins, Vanderburg, & Kloss, 2018). The ultimate goal of a writing conference is to provide students with a useful tool or suggestion that a student can immediately use. These student conferences

can be quite dynamic, idiosyncratic, feedback-rich (in both directions), and immediate and serve as one of the most powerful instructional tools available.

Three distinct themes were discovered from the focus groups' transcripts, open-ended questionnaire responses, and field notes from the instructional coach. These themes of student/teacher interactions, student "aha" moments, and student confidence are described below.

Theme 6: Student/Teacher Interaction

Writing teachers in BES have an allotted 30 minutes of the 45 minutes of the writer's workshop to conference with students during the writer's workshop. In one study, Dudek et al. found that after receiving IC, teachers' classroom practices remained relatively stable; however, the researchers speculated that perhaps the quality with which the practices were enacted had improved (2019). With this conjecture in mind, the IC that BES writing teachers received included a significant emphasis on conducting student conferences. In-depth discussions and lessons were provided to assist teachers in conducting these conferences.

In this study, respondents' statements confirm that the IC they received concerning conferences was of high quality. BES writing teachers were already utilizing conferencing with students about their writing, but respondents felt that their student interactions improved following the IC intervention.

> One of the things that I learned to pay attention to as a result of the instructional coaching I received was concerning students who were stuck. When I found a kiddo who was kind of stuck, so to speak, where they were just kind of sitting and not writing, honestly, they didn't necessarily need a new teaching point. They just needed an opportunity to talk about their writing before they could move forward. I think for some kiddos, just having an opportunity to run an idea or having help on how to word an idea moves them forward as writers.

One thing that I was sensitized to from coaching is the importance of establishing a relationship. It is about more than writing. I like talking with them because it builds our relationship and is one-on-one time with each one in my class. I feel like they are more responsive when it's just us, and they are also more apt to ask questions and ask me what I think about how they are writing so far. It's fun to see their pieces progress as we learn more strategies and techniques that they apply from our mini-lessons.

Sometimes I had a hard time before with student conferencing. I think it's gotten better with our training. When you conference with them, they often just want to read the whole piece. They want to go from beginning to end. They just want to share their story. So, I've been trying to help communicate what kind of... (Participant 2) was saying, when you share whole group, just okay, share with me or, or share with the group where you inserted, or where you made something better. Or if we were working on something from Lucy (Calkins), when you compared something to something else, just share that part, or just share your ending, or just share your lead. That's helped with the conferencing part because then you're focused more on just one specific thing.

Conferencing with students about their writing was a crucial component of the IC that teachers received. Focus group transcripts and responses to the open-ended questionnaire provide support for the importance of conferencing and the belief that the IC they received improved their confidence in their ability to conduct student writing conferences. One idea expressed was that writing instruction occurs within the context of a personal relationship. One teacher commented, "I like talking with them because it builds our relationship and is one-on-one time with each one in my class…." Another added, "Instruction is difficult, if not impossible if no meaningful relationship exists…." Building the personal relationship between teacher and student helps in the teaching of writing.

Additionally, teachers expressed ideas indicating that they were sensitized to arriving at erroneous attributions regarding student conduct. The situation in which one teacher mentions observing a student being "stuck" and not writing should not be judged to indicate that the student is not interested in writing or is rebelling. Given the tools for narrowing the writing focus

and helping the student to break through the student's barrier has demonstrated, at least for one teacher, a path for avoiding a self-defeating attribution for student behavior.

The third quote, "sharing alternatives," effectively narrows the writing focus and presents alternative sharing themes to overcome barriers to writing. This teacher now has a variety of sharing questions she can ask in helping students overcome being "stuck." As a result, her class is more engaging. The exercise is less repetitive. Her internal calculations of the probability of this student learning to write better have significantly increased, which will directly influence the teacher/student interaction and the teacher's attitude and behaviors.

Finally, teachers reported that when working with the student individually, they were more apt to be honest in inquiring for help. As one teacher described, "I feel like they are more responsive when it's just us, and they are also more apt to ask questions and ask me what I think about how they are writing so far." Thus, building a personal relationship improves conferencing and increases the likelihood of the student's willingness to engage in the revising process. An increase in understanding how to help students grow in their writing ability through improved relationships is closely mirrored in the next theme associated with student conferencing: the "aha" moment.

Theme 7: Student "Aha" Moments

As the writing teacher moves through the student conference, a mentor text may be used in conjunction with the teaching point to help students understand or improve a specific aspect of their writing (Calkins, Vanderburg, & Kloss, 2018). Mentor texts are texts or literature pieces used as examples to help students improve their writing. Often during conferencing, a student will experience an "aha" moment. This is when a student suddenly understands the teaching point and can transfer the learning into the writing piece. However, this sudden insight does not

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happen randomly and is usually the result of intense, if largely unconscious, thought and ruminating. When it happens, it is most reinforcing for both the student and the teacher.

Focus group transcripts and open-ended question responses provide additional insights into the role and influence of "aha" moments.

> So, when you have a higher writer, you can go in and pick things that they're doing and talk with them and see them grow from it. And I think you see, or you will see, the benefit is when the kid comes to you and she's like, "Look, I fixed this. I did this. Or what do you think of this new change that I've done?" And I think that's where you're able to see the growth or the change that they did after you've conferred with them.
>
> And so, that opportunity to come and sit with them and have a conference and teach them something they needed to make their writing better, but it's just very individualized. And so, I saw a lot of growth within my highest writers because of that, because I could teach them what they were ready for.
>
> Their aha moments when I ask if they can elaborate certain places to stretch ideas. This is usually when they are frustrated; their writing isn't long and gets excited that there's a way to stretch it.
>
> I love watching the lightbulb moment come on when the students really get into a story and use several strategies they have been taught to write the story. Or when they find a strategy an author uses in the book they are reading.
>
> I try and take quick notes whenever I confer with a student just so I can see what we worked on and not give them the same teaching point or reteach, or whatever it is that we need to do that session. But I think it's really beneficial to go back in my notes and see, wow, they were really struggling with capital letters a couple of months ago, but now every single sentence starts with the capital. And so, that's the benefit in conferring is you can really look at the growth from the beginning to where you are now.

It is clear from the quotes above that "aha" moments are a special part of student conferencing for both the student and the teacher. Teachers witness improvement and hear from students that the conferencing that has been provided is helping them. From the responses, it is

obvious that a student "aha" moment is considered a very positive response that is concrete, explicit validation of the teacher's instructional efforts, and motivating experience.

It is interesting to note, however, that the reinforcing rewards of this experience may be a double-edged sword. Witnessing an "aha" moment is very reinforcing for the teacher, but "aha" moments, as mentioned earlier, typically require considerable effort and time. As a result, an "aha" moment may be most likely to occur with stronger students. For instance, this relationship is explicitly mentioned in the first two responses. While two participants specifically discuss their higher students, there is not enough information present to determine how differently the "aha" moments may affect struggling students versus stronger students.

The last teacher quote, "That's the benefit in conferring is you can really look at the growth from the beginning to where you are now" provides a different view of the "aha" moment. Unlike the other teachers, this teacher focuses on the use of a tool, the notes she has taken of an individual student's "aha" moments, to help her see the child's progress. This technique is similar to marking the wall to track a child's growth over time. This approach helps the teacher reinforce the students' efforts and, at the same time, helps her evaluate her teaching efforts by making individual student progress more explicit and concrete.

The "aha" moments, whether obvious or subtle, can lead to an increase in student confidence, which is another important theme in student writing conferences.

Theme 8: Student Confidence

While conferencing, student confidence often increases. This increase happens as the students learn new techniques and improve their current writing skills (the "aha" moments). Research on student self-confidence supports conferencing with students about their writing.

MacLellan (2014) found that one way to foster student confidence is for teachers to engage in dialogic feedback with students to help them take responsibility for their learning. This conversation, that is, feedback given between the teacher and the individual student, is an important factor in a student conference. During the conferences, student confidence should increase, and as a result, writing teachers may see improvement in student writing.

Participants' responses show that as student confidence increases, student academic achievement increases; however, this topic is not in the scope of the study, and more research on student confidence and its relation to student achievement should be undertaken. In this study, increased student confidence in the writing conference may lead to an increase in the writing teachers' self-efficacy, as seen in the following quotes:

> I try and take quick notes whenever I confer with a student just so I can see what we worked on and not give them the same teaching point or reteach, or whatever it is that we need to do that session. But I think it's really beneficial to go back in my notes and see, wow, they were really struggling with capital letters a couple of months ago, but now every single sentence starts with the capital. And so, that's the benefit in conferring is you can really look at the growth from the beginning to where you are now.

> Seeing the things that they are doing well and their confidence to try new strategies.

Student writing conferences are a daily component of the writer's workshop. BISD elementary writing teachers were trained in its implementation two years ago. Since then, the teachers have worked at improving their instructional knowledge and practices in the writing classroom. During this four-week IC intervention, participants received planned and structured guidance in the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing. Based on the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses, the participants believed that PD with the IC intervention positively influenced their self-efficacy in terms of student

conferences. Specifically, the teacher/student interaction increased during the conferences. Additionally, student "aha" moments and student confidence also increased. While the transcription and the responses support a higher self-efficacy for the writing teachers in conferencing with students about their writing, the relationship between the three themes is unknown. For example, it is unknown if an increase in student/teacher interaction directly caused an increase in student "aha" moments and student confidence. Further, it is unknown if those increases caused the writing teachers' higher self-efficacy in conducting writing conferences. Additional research would be necessary to explore these relationships. However, for the current study, the responses support that IC, coupled with PD, facilitates higher self-efficacy in conferencing with students about their writing.

Summary and Transition

In summary, the eight themes that emerged from the open-ended questionnaire and the focus group provide insight into teachers' responses to writing PD and IC at one campus. These themes, while independent from one another, are also interconnected. Job-embedded PD and interactive IC in the writing process increased teacher confidence, student growth, and the understanding that writing is recursive. Job-embedded PD and interactive IC in conferencing with students about their writing increased student confidence, student "Aha" moments, and student/teacher interactions. This concept of PD with IC may prove to be a viable approach for the teaching of writing to elementary students through a broader lens.

In the final chapter, the findings from the in-depth literature review and the findings from the focus group and the open-ended questionnaire will be examined to determine limitations and implications to the study.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Background of the Study

Writing is an important part of a student's literacy acquisition. Writing itself is fundamental and foundational to elementary students' learning. Writing ability will also impact students' successful transition to secondary instruction and into a post-secondary setting. Students must learn to use writing to communicate and demonstrate understanding with ever greater proficiency. Puranik and Lonigan (2014) explain that students write to transmit and evaluate knowledge. To write effectively for various audiences and across multiple disciplines to exhibit understanding, students must learn the basic mechanics of writing and how to use their written voice for expression. Hale states, "Effective writing, of course, encompasses numerous skills, including grammar usage, syntax and sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling in addition to the creation of imagery and description" (2018, p. 651). To best develop effective writers, BISD worked with elementary teachers to create classrooms with a focus on literacy.

Two years ago, BES adopted a writing curriculum for elementary writing teachers. Teachers received two full-day trainings based on the writer's workshop model. For the past two years, writing teachers have had opportunities to engage in additional, optional training; however, teachers did not have any other PD opportunities for the teaching of writing that was required. Throughout the two years, conversations with teachers during professional learning communities (PLCs) and campus improvement team meetings (CIT) revealed a need for PD focused on writing. While BES writing teachers believed the amount of time students spent writing in classrooms had increased in the two years since the curriculum's implementation, the

teachers did not believe the quality of student writing was improving. This belief was based on campus writing data on locally development assessments (CSWAs) and the state assessments (STAAR).

Since research indicates that teacher quality is the leading influencer of student writing performance (Goldhaber, 2016), it became evident that additional PD in writing instruction was necessary. To expand on this idea, research indicates that instructional quality can be positively correlated to professional training and teacher perceptions of self-efficacy (Buric & Kim, 2020). The writing teachers at BES believed that additional training was necessary, and based on a previous working relationship with an instructional coach in balanced literacy, they specifically requested IC in writing instruction. Therefore, additional PD was utilized to believe that quality IC intervention would improve the quality of writing instruction while also increasing teachers' self-efficacy in content knowledge and instructional practices.

Overview of the Study

This study explored how IC, following traditional PD, facilitates higher self-efficacy of elementary writing teachers in content knowledge and instructional practices. Specifically, the study examined the self-efficacy of the writing teachers regarding the writing process (content knowledge) and conferring with students about their writing (instructional practice). To guide this study, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process?

RQ2 How does IC combined with PD facilitate higher self-efficacy in conferencing with students about their writing?

An in-depth content analysis was conducted on the content of a focus group, responses to an open-ended questionnaire, and field notes from IC sessions. Based on these informational

sources, observations were made regarding possible sources by which IC influences teacher self-efficacy in writing content knowledge and instructional practices.

Overview of the Results

The researcher began to find themes based on the components of the content knowledge and instructional practice related to writing instruction through data analysis. For this study, the content knowledge studied was the writing process, and the instructional practice was conferencing with students about their writing. As the process of combining and reducing categories progressed, it became evident that all five writing teachers believed that PD and IC are crucial in their quest to improve their content knowledge and instructional processes.

While satisfaction surveys are completed after finishing a PD session, no other formal follow-up of future needs is gathered at BES. Therefore, the focus group transcription and the open-ended questionnaire responses provided invaluable feedback regarding writing teachers' beliefs about PD and, specifically, IC. Although the two original writing training days provided by BISD were considered "helpful" and "practical" and the instructional practices were "modeled" and "easy to implement," the study's participants' responses revealed a desire for more IC. One participant described how IC instructional practices were "being modeled, and how much of an impact that makes, versus sitting through something," which was more beneficial than traditional, "sit-and-get" PD. However, it is important to note that the current study did not intentionally compare traditional PD to IC.

The study also examined how IC, when coupled with PD, facilitated higher teacher self-efficacy in the writing process (content knowledge) and conferencing with students about their writing (instructional practices). An exploration of the participants' responses revealed eight

major themes. These eight themes fell into four major categories: PD, IC, content knowledge: the writing process, and instructional practice: conferencing with students about their writing.

Professional Development & Instructional Coaching

As mentioned above, the study's participants believed their understanding and use of content knowledge and instructional practices increased as a result of the PD and IC. Specifically, PD was considered beneficial to the writing teachers because it was job-embedded. That is, the PD on the writing curriculum was relevant, easy to implement, and modeled for them. When responding to questions about the IC, writing teachers reported that IC was beneficial because of the discussions, demonstrations, and feedback. The study's findings affirm those in the literature review. PD and IC are effective when they are relevant, job-embedded, and easy to implement. Effective IC provides the opportunity for open dialogue, observation, and feedback between coach and teacher.
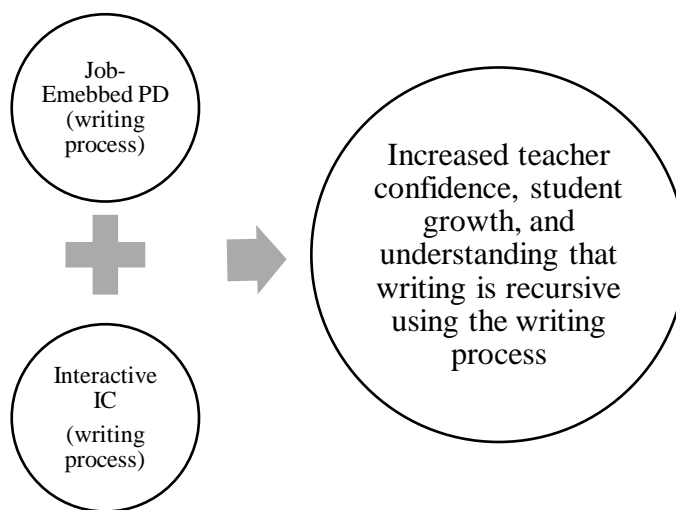
Content Knowledge: The Writing Process

The next three themes involve content knowledge: the writing process. Responses from the focus group, open-ended questionnaire, and field notes from the coach indicate that teacher confidence, student growth and enthusiasm, and an understanding of writing's recursive nature were all reinforced and resulted in greater teacher confidence in understanding following PD and IC. As one participant said, "I guess, in the past, I didn't feel comfortable teaching it (writing process). And now, after having (writing) trainings, and especially if not for this one, for the next year going in step-by-step and having a refresher, it definitely makes my confidence feel better about teaching it…" Based on the responses, the writing teachers believe their self-efficacy and comfortableness in teaching the writing process increased due to the PD and the IC. Also, teachers noticed an increase in student growth and enthusiasm. As the teachers' content

knowledge increased, student growth was also observed. This mirrors the findings by Bayar (2014), which states that teachers' level of preparedness is directly correlated with student achievement. While this study is not specifically examining student achievement, it is the original motive for exploring ways to increase the quality of teacher instructional practices.

The writing process's final theme demonstrates how teachers' beliefs about their understanding of the writing process increased as a result of the PD and the IC. This theme is critical because it shows that there may have been misconceptions about the writing process before the PD and the IC. For example, one participant shared, "I think getting to the point where you understand that the writing process doesn't necessarily mean that you start in one place and finish in another place, just makes me much more comfortable about teaching the kids." Clarifying misconceptions about content knowledge is an important aspect of PD and IC. As the literature review revealed, many elementary writing teachers are underprepared and ill-equipped to teach writing effectively. As illustrated in Figure 5.1, this study's exploration revealed that PD, coupled with IC, increased teacher content knowledge in the writing process.

Figure 5.1 *The Writing Process PD & IC on Teacher Self-Efficacy*

Job-Emebbed PD (writing process)

Interactive IC (writing process)

Increased teacher confidence, student growth, and understanding that writing is recursive using the writing process

## Instructional Practices: Conferencing with Students about Their Writing

The themes for conferencing with students about their writing include student/teacher interactions, student "aha" moments, and student confidence. While the writing teachers had been using student writing conferences for two years, they felt that their conferences increased after IC. One participant stated, "Sometimes I had a hard time before. I think it's gotten better with our training." This increase in the quality of the instructional practice after IC corroborates the findings from the literature review. Dudek, Reddy, Lekwa, Hua, and Fabiano (2019) found that after IC, teachers' instructional practices may remain the same, but the quality of their execution improved.

All participants emphasized the significance and reinforcing nature of student "aha" moments, which may occur during or after student/teacher conferencing, Participants talked extensively about "aha" moments in both their focus group and during the IC sessions. "Aha"

moments are when a student suddenly understands and puts into practice writing principles provided by the teaching point. One teacher proclaimed, "I love watching the lightbulb moment come on when the students really get into a story and use several strategies they have been taught to write the story…." As the students have more and more opportunities for writing practice, and as their number of "aha" moments increase, they may become more confident in their writing ability.

The goal of a writing conference is for students to take one teaching point and apply it in their writing. As students practice this application, their self-efficacy in using this teaching point increases. But it is not just student writing self-efficacy that is relevant in student conferencing, the teacher's self-efficacy in conducting conferences and influencing student writing is also important in successful student conferencing. Responses from the focus group and conversations with the coach indicate teachers felt that their self-efficacy in conducting writing conferences increased following PD and IC. Demonstrated in Figure 5.2, as the teachers' confidence in guiding successful writing conferences increased, teachers saw an increase in the effectiveness of teachers/student interactions, in student "aha" moments, and student confidence.

Figure 5.2 *Conferencing with Students PD & IC on Teacher-Self-Efficacy*
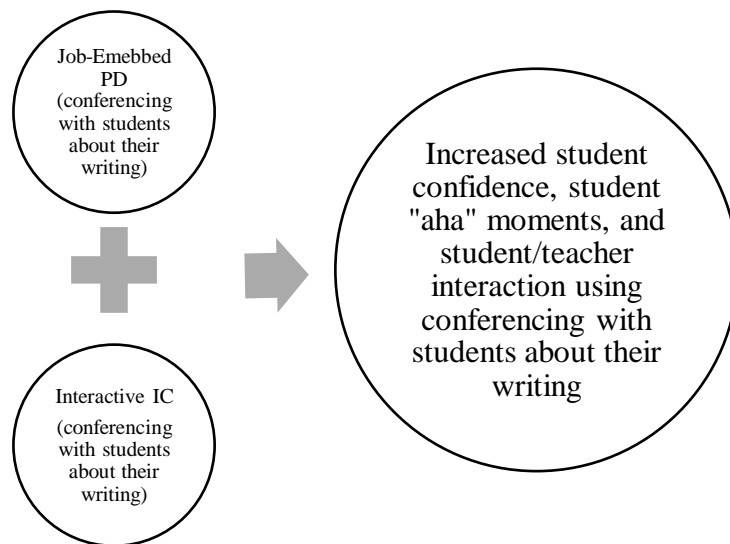
Limitations

This qualitative study explored how IC, coupled with PD, could facilitate higher teacher self-efficacy in teaching the writing process and in using conferencing with students about their writing. The study focused on one elementary school in North Texas. Due to the nature and subject of the study, only five participants were selected to partake in IC. While the exploration revealed that IC, when used in conjunction with traditional PD, does facilitate higher self-efficacy in the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing, a larger population size study will be necessary to validate that the same findings can be expected from all teachers.

As mentioned previously, the instructional coach in this study had a well-developed, positive teacher-coach relationship with the participants. As a result, it is unknown how effective IC was because a trusting relationship had already been developed. Said another way, the

question remains as to the influence of a trusting relationship between teacher and coach on self-efficacy and behavioral reactions to coaching.

Due to a worldwide pandemic, the four-week IC intervention occurred over a live video between the instructional coach and the five participants instead of face-to-face. Since I am both the researcher and the principal of the participants, I did not participate in the intervention. I also did not conduct the focus group. The open-ended questionnaire was delivered to teachers using an online format. However, since the demonstrations and the modeling all occurred without students present, how face-to-face IC may impact teacher in a classroom environment is unknown.

Finally, IC, when used with traditional forms of PD, may facilitate higher self-efficacy of teachers across multiple disciplines; however, speculating on this broader issue is not within the scope of this study's design. Additional research needs to be conducted before generalizations can be made regarding IC related to teacher self-efficacy in other content areas.

Implications

This particular research is based on what happened during a worldwide pandemic. Due to social distancing guidelines, the instructional coach used creativity and her skillset to develop a four-week IC intervention plan that could be completed on a live, video conferencing as opposed to in-person. The results, while specific to coaching in an online environment, could be helpful in further situations where distance training is necessary.

This qualitative study explored how IC, following on and reinforcing PD, facilitates developing teacher self-efficacy in content knowledge and instructional practices. Specifically, this study explored how IC, after a traditional PD event, influences teacher self-efficacy in the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing. Results of an in-depth, multi-

step analysis reveal four major categories and eight themes within those categories. Responses from the focus group indicate that both traditional PD and IC result in greater teacher self-efficacy in content knowledge and instructional practice. These findings are helpful when trying to increase the quality of teaching in all writing classrooms. While this study only looked at two specific content objectives, the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing, results suggest that IC, when combined with traditional PD, may result in an increase in teachers' self-efficacy in other areas of writing as well.

The study's findings are consistent with the research literature on instructional writing. There is considerable research regarding IC as an effective form of PD. In this study, PD was the two-day district-required writing training for all elementary writing teachers. This type of PD is very traditional and mimics a workshop session. While research supports ongoing PD, this study's PD was not ongoing and did not involve any planned follow-up sessions with teachers. Despite this inconsistency with recommended PD practice, the participants in this study still felt that the professional development offered by BISD was beneficial and, based on their comments during the focus group, had a positive impact on their confidence in content knowledge and instructional practices.

The IC the five writing teachers in this study received mirrored the components and practices found in the literature review. The coach did not utilize a specific model but instead incorporated salient aspects from the research literature and included elements on effective dialogue, demonstration, modeling, and observation. It should be noted that the study's participants had a prior relationship with the instructional coach. The coach had been contracted by BES throughout the previous three years to help teachers with balanced literacy acquisition.

Thus, teachers already had a positive teacher-coach relationship established when the four-week writing coaching intervention began.

As previously mentioned, the coach did not use a specific coaching model; however, her coaching structure allowed methods that may prove more beneficial than other coaching models. For example, an examination of participants' responses to participation in IC sessions indicates that modeling is an important aspect of coaching being job-embedded (Theme 1). The study's coach used modeling, or demonstration, after using notes, anchor charts, and visuals to teach processes or concepts to the teachers. For this study, she also used videos and modeling to demonstrate a specific concept, such as conferencing with students about their writing. The coach did not watch the teacher use the classroom concept before the teacher understood and was comfortable with it. This technique helped to create a safe atmosphere for learning for the classroom teachers. They were less likely to feel judged and evaluated when first learning a new concept. In turn, the modeling of the concept first and then teacher practice in the classroom may have helped improve the teachers' self-efficacy, as there is a progression between learning, demonstrating, and applying the new learning.

Responses from the focus group provided rich information regarding PD and IC. All participants and all responses supported the effectiveness, in this case, of both traditional PD and IC. Analyzing responses regarding the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing proved more challenging. Analysis of teachers' responses suggests that they supported the idea that IC does indeed facilitate higher teacher self-efficacy in both the writing process and in conferencing with students about their writing. When describing aspects of the writing process and conferencing with students that were challenging, for instance, the respondents indicated that their self-efficacy had not diminished due to these challenges. Instead,

the areas of difficulty in both the writing process and conferencing with students about their writing provide future PD opportunities. Feedback from the teachers supports the future use of IC; thus, additional coaching may facilitate higher self-efficacy in other areas of writing content knowledge and instructional practices.

Last, it is important to note that the IC experience from this study has been shared with others outside the study. As a result, I have received phone calls from other principals and teachers about using live, video conferencing as a platform for IC. The teachers that called requested online coaching for themselves, while the principals that called wanted more information on how the IC was planned and utilized online. Figure 5.3 illustrates a blueprint of future PD/IC at BES. This blueprint has already been shared with those calling seeking information about the IC experiences. Since the pandemic is ongoing, current traditional PD has been postponed until further notice. This time, while not ideal, does allow for the opportunity to incorporate online PD and IC.

Figure 5.3 *Blueprint of Future PD/IC at BES*
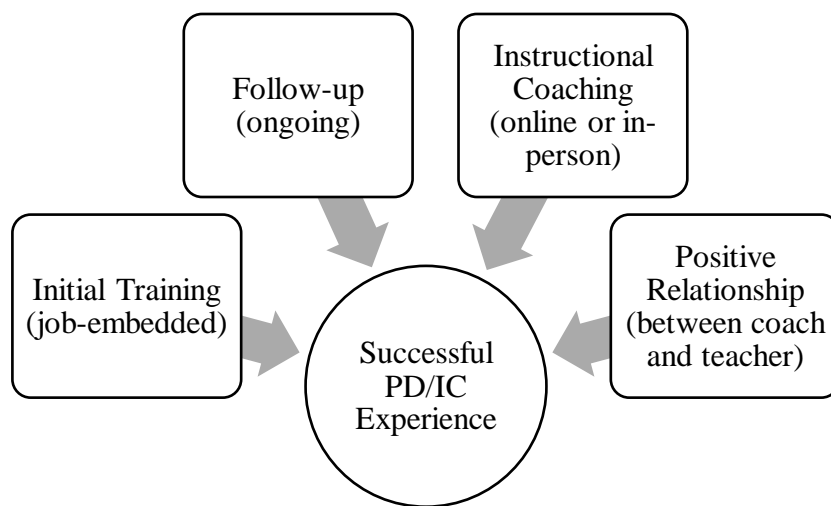
In conclusion, this study found that IC following PD on writing instruction in a public elementary school context resulted in self-reported improved teacher self-efficacy in their ability to teach writing. Teachers reported that embedding IC in their work, modeling teaching strategies, and the IC-based feedback resulted in greater self-confidence in their content knowledge and instructional practices. Teachers also reported that their understanding of the recursive nature of writing and the use of student writing conferences improved with IC coaching. Teachers described student "ahas" occurring during the conferences when the students "got it," as resulting in improved student confidence in their writing ability and, interesting, greater teacher self-efficacy in conferencing as a result of these moments occurring. Through IC after specific PD, educators may be able to enhance teacher self-efficacy as a means of improving writing instruction, resulting in better-educated students.

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OPEN, AXIAL, AND SELECTIVE CODING FOR PD
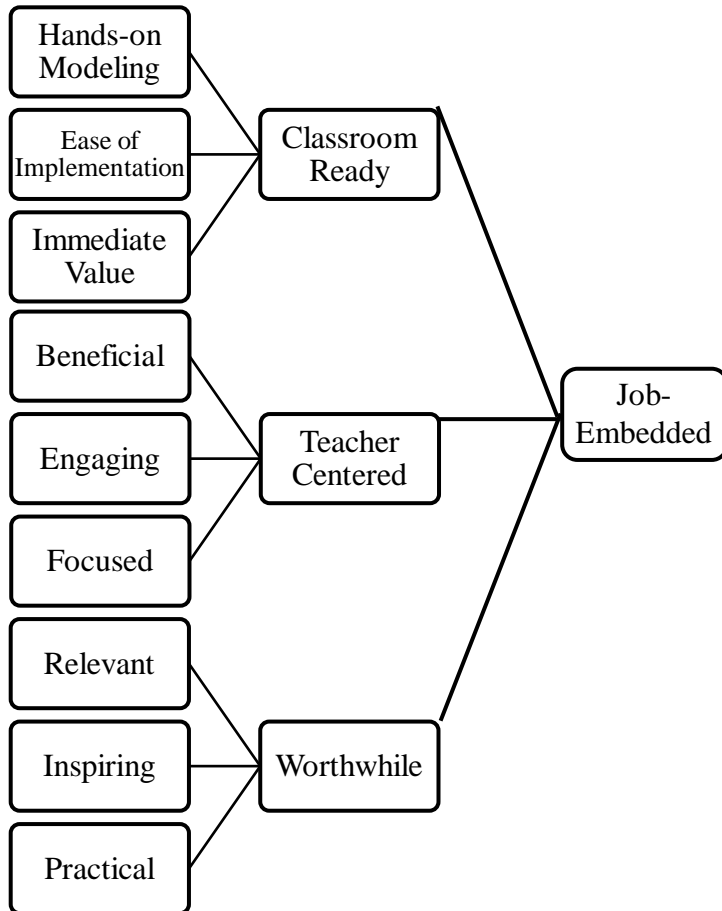
APPENDIX B

OPEN, AXIAL, AND SELECTIVE CODING FOR IC

Additional Training
Most Helpful
Takeaway
→ Direct Assistance → Interactive
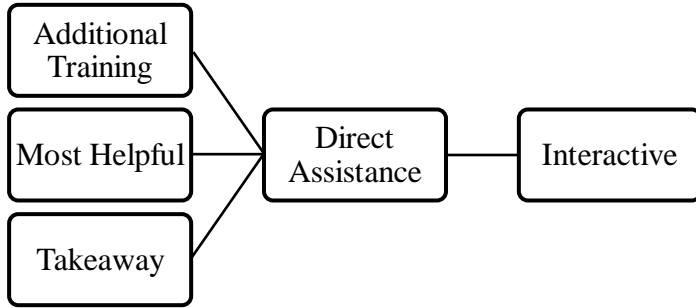
APPENDIX C

OPEN, AXIAL, AND SELECTIVE FOR THE WRITING PROCESS

Open Codes	Axial Code	Selective Code
Increased Teacher Confidence		
More Comfortable	Increased Teacher Knowledge	Teacher Confidence
Continual Professional Development		
Student Growth		
Oral Rehearsal	Tools & Partnerships	Student Growth
Student Writing Partner		
Territories List		
Dynamic v. Static Process		
Visuals		
Graphic Organizers		
Touch, Tell, & Sketch	Multiple Steps	Writing is Recursive
Drafting Process		
Publishing		
Fixed Time Schedules		

OPEN, AXIAL, AND SELECTIVE CODING FOR CONFERENCING WITH STUDENTS

ABOUT THEIR WRITING

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Peer Feedback		
Individual Growth		
Students Find Errors	Student Growth	
Helping High Writers	Student Focused	Student Confidence
Sharing	Student "Aha" Moments	
Student "Aha" Moments	Build Student Confidence	Student "Aha" Moments
Exchange Ideas		
Focus on Pieces		
Toolkits	Teaching	
Planning/ Assessment	Targeted Instruction	
Small Group Interaction	Tools for Students	Student/ Teacher Interaction
One-on-One Interaction	Focused on Growth	
Guiding		
Scheduled		
Teaching Point		