

WRITING INSTRUCTION AT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEVEL: TEACHERS' USE OF  
INDIVIDUAL STUDENT WRITING CONFERENCES AND OTHER STRATEGIES TO  
MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO WRITE

A Dissertation

by

JEANNETTE OTTO ELLIOTT

BS, Corpus Christi State University, 1990  
MS, Corpus Christi State University, 1997

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, Texas

August 2014

© Jeannette Otto Elliott

All Rights Reserved

August 2014

WRITING INSTRUCTION AT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEVEL: TEACHERS' USE OF  
INDIVIDUAL STUDENT WRITING CONFERENCES AND OTHER STRATEGIES TO  
MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO WRITE

A Dissertation

by

JEANNETTE OTTO ELLIOTT

This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Corinne Valadez, PhD  
Chair

Sherrye Garrett, EdD  
Committee Member

Catherine Quick, PhD  
Committee Member

Susan Garza, PhD  
Graduate Faculty Representative

JoAnn Canales, PhD  
Dean, College of Graduate Studies

August 2014

## ABSTRACT

The quality of students' writing in kindergarten has a great effect on their future writing ability during the elementary years (Kissel, 2008). Because students begin kindergarten at various levels of writing ability, more knowledge on kindergarten writing instruction is necessary in order to meet the needs of all kindergarten students and to provide quality writing instruction at the kindergarten level. Thus, the purpose of the qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions regarding the use of individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies in five kindergarten classrooms using a collective case study approach.

A purposeful sample of five kindergarten teachers from a South Texas suburban public school pre-kindergarten and kindergarten campus were the participants for the multiple case study. The researcher explored teachers' writing instruction in the kindergarten classroom through pre and post teacher interviews and two open-ended classroom observations over a seven-week period.

The results of the interview data yielded six themes: social interaction, effective learning environment, student writing abilities, student progress toward independent writing, student motivation through praise, teacher self-efficacy. Findings from the observations supported the themes that emerged from the interviews. The findings of the study provide a deeper insight into how to effectively produce writers in the kindergarten classroom and can inform other teachers of ways to meet the individual student needs within a classroom of diverse emergent writers at varying levels of abilities.

The descriptions presented in this study regarding writing instruction at the kindergarten level have implications for providing effective instruction to kindergarten students in order to empower their writing success during the elementary years. One recommendation for future research would be a similar study with teacher reflection included, with teachers thinking about their instructional practices, thinking about their desired goals, and thinking about how to adjust their instruction in order for those goals to happen. A second recommendation for future research is to conduct the study allowing for more than seven weeks. One last recommendation for future research would be a similar study using a quantitative research design in order to report on student growth in writing.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers everywhere.

Providing children with a strong foundation and a great beginning to their educational life is an important and tremendous task. As a former early childhood teacher of 23 years, 19 of them being in kindergarten, I know how challenging and demanding it is to provide a class of twenty two five year olds the instruction they need in order to be successful for the rest of their school years. Being a kindergarten teacher is a rewarding profession, but also a profession that requires hard work and many sacrifices. Kindergarten teachers provide students the foundation they will rely on throughout their school years. When children get off to a great beginning in kindergarten, they will have a stronger education as they progress to higher grades and they will become life-long learners.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all my family members who have supported me, encouraged me and helped me accomplish this tremendous task. I could not have accomplished this dissertation without their support and understanding throughout this process. I would also like to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Corinne Valadez for her guidance, her patience, and her wisdom. Without her reassurance in my ability to complete this dissertation, I truly do not believe it could have happened. She encouraged to me to persevere and to get the job done.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents, my father Walter Joseph Otto, Jr. and my mother Anita Variale Otto Curry, as well as my husband, John David Elliott. Through their high expectations during my school years, my parents raised me to value education and always to do my best in any educational endeavor. My husband has been supportive and encouraging toward my education since my very first day in college. I truly believe the main reasons why this dissertation was even started is because my parents raised me to value and take pride in my education and my husband supported all my educational endeavors and encouraged me to set such high goals related to education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
Theoretical Framework .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Research Questions .....	4
Procedures .....	5
Significance of the Study .....	6
High quality writing instruction. ....	8
Individual student writing conferences.....	8
High expectations. ....	10
Motivation. ....	10
Summary .....	12
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	14
Social Interaction and Learning .....	14
Environmental Influence on Literacy.....	15
Motivation Within the Learning Process .....	17
Emergent Literacy .....	19
Reading and Writing Development.....	21
Oral Language and Writing Ability .....	24
Emergent Writing Instruction-Teaching Writing .....	26
Daily Writing and Modeling .....	28
Individual Student Writing Conferences.....	30
Teacher Self-Efficacy.....	33
Summary .....	34
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	36

Context of the Study.....	36
Research Setting.....	38
Participants .....	38
Researcher Subjectivity and Rapport with Participants .....	40
Research Questions and Data Collection Processes.....	41
Data Analysis .....	42
Summary .....	43
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS OF THE STUDY .....	44
Data Collection.....	45
Teacher participants .....	45
Amanda.....	46
Bailey.....	47
Chloe.....	48
Danielle.....	50
Ellie.....	51
Focus Topics and Themes .....	53
First Research Question .....	55
Theme One: Social Interaction.....	55
Theme Two: Effective Learning Environment .....	59
Second Research Question .....	77
Theme Three: Student Writing Abilities .....	77
Theme Four: Student Progress toward Independent Writing.....	88
Third Research Question .....	97
Theme Five: Motivation through Praise .....	97
Fourth Research Question .....	100
Theme Six: Teacher Self-Efficacy .....	100
Conclusion.....	107
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS.....	109
Findings .....	109
Focus Topics and Themes .....	110
First Research Question .....	111

Theme One: Social Interaction.....	112
Theme Two: Effective Learning Environment .....	114
Second Research Question.....	115
Theme Three: Student Writing Abilities .....	115
Theme Four: Student Progress toward Independent Writing.....	117
Third Research Question.....	118
Theme Five: Motivation through Praise .....	119
Fourth Research Question .....	119
Theme Six: Teacher Self-Efficacy .....	120
Implications for Practice .....	122
Limitations .....	123
Implication for Future Research.....	124
Summary .....	124
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>APPENDIX A - PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORMS.....</b>	<b>138</b>
Participant Interview Protocol Form: First Interview .....	139
Participant Interview Protocol Form: Second Interview .....	142
<b>APPENDIX B – INTERVIEWS WITH AMANDA .....</b>	<b>145</b>
Participant Interview One with Amanda.....	146
Participant Interview Two with Amanda .....	155
<b>APPENDIX C – INTERVIEWS WITH BAILEY.....</b>	<b>163</b>
Participant Interview One with Bailey .....	164
Participant Interview Two with Bailey .....	170
<b>APPENDIX D – INTERVIEWS WITH CHLOE.....</b>	<b>175</b>
Participant Interview One with Chloe .....	176
Participant Interview Two with Chloe .....	184
<b>APPENDIX E– INTERVIEWS WITH DANIELLE.....</b>	<b>190</b>
Participant Interview One with Danielle .....	191
Participant Interview Two with Danielle .....	198
<b>APPENDIX F – INTERVIEWS WITH ELLIE.....</b>	<b>207</b>
Participant Interview One with Ellie .....	208

Participant Interview Two with Ellie ..... 217

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	PAGE
Table 3.1 Interview and Observation Timeline.....	42
Table 4.1 Research Questions, Focus Topics and Themes.....	54
Table 5.1 Research Questions, Focus Topics and Themes.....	110
Table 5.2 Student Writing Abilities .....	116
Table 5.3 Student Independent Writing Skills.....	118
Table 5.4 Feelings about Writing and Perception of Ability to Teach Writing .....	121

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

The early childhood years play an important role in children's literacy understanding and development (Kissel, 2008). In order to be successful at the elementary level in writing, students must possess the ability to think while writing quality papers for various real world purposes. The quality of students' writing instruction in kindergarten has a great effect on their future writing ability during the elementary years. To become strong writers during the elementary years and beyond, children need a strong literacy foundation during their early childhood years (Kissel, 2008). For many years, researchers have paid much attention to early reading development, while giving limited attention to early writing development (Clay, 2001; DeFord, 2001; Dobson, 1988; Gomert & Fayol, 1992). The ability to write during the early childhood years can be a difficult and challenging task (Lienemann et al, 2006). In the early childhood classroom, teachers ask students to write, and teachers tell students that writing is easiest when writing about personal experiences. Most children at this level have little or no experience in writing and have limited life experiences from which to choose a writing topic. This combination of limited life and writing experiences makes writing a very complex task. The task of writing involves the combination of many skills along with the ability to control one's thoughts while attempting to create meaningful pieces of writing (Graham & Harris, 2003).

Combining one's life experiences with the ability to record one's thoughts in writing while using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation is a difficult task (Graham & Harris, 2003). As such, learning support is essential, especially at the beginning learning stages of writing development. The main source of learning support for young children is their teacher, however, very little research on how teachers can best support early childhood writing development exists today. There has been much research on the importance of the emergent writing stage for children and the growth of writing development children undergo as emergent

writers (Calkins, 2003, Freeman & Sanders 1989, McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997, Morrow & Sharkey, 1993, Bus et al, 2001). The study examined individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies used at the emergent level. The researcher has found minimal research in these two areas.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for the research study is based on the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky (1978), which emphasized the need for social interaction in the learning process. Children begin to learn concepts through social interaction and then complete the learning process on an individual level (Vygotsky, 1978). Social interaction when learning a new concept is necessary in order for the learning process to begin. Only after someone else introduces, models, and discusses the new concept can learning develop on an individual basis. As children interact with others during their writing development, they construct meaning about the writing process. The focus of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory is that social interaction is essential for children's cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level" (p. 57). Learners demonstrate new learning around others before later internalizing their new learning. The ability to perform difficult tasks is only possible because of previous social interaction related to each task (Vygotsky, 1978). Social interaction when learning a new concept is necessary in order for the learning process to begin. Only after another individual introduces, models, or discusses a new concept can learning of the concept develop on an individual basis. The social interaction components of the study are learner interaction with an adult during one-on-one teacher-student individual writing conferences, and learner interaction during whole group instruction. Individual student writing conferences provide the

necessary social interaction for the learning of a new concept before the learner can internalize it on an individual level.

A second feature of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory is the "zone of proximal development." Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" (p. 86) is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Each student has his or her own potential area of learning, which falls in the area between what a learner already knows and what he or she learns from others. When teachers provide guidance in learning to individual students, they are instructing each student within the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers provide support or assistance needed to help the student perform at his or her level of potential development. When teachers are conducting individual student writing conferences, they are instructing each student within his or her potential area of learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This researcher has conducted a qualitative collective case study exploring the experience of individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies used in five kindergarten classrooms throughout a seven-week period. The study explored individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies in kindergarten classrooms through kindergarten teacher descriptions and researcher observations of the individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies used in kindergarten classrooms to motivate kindergarten students to write and improve individual writing abilities. Through one-on-one teacher-participant interviews, the researcher explored teachers' perceptions of their individual student writing conferences and the writing strategies they use to motivate their students and to

meet their students' individual needs in writing. The researcher also conducted observations in the classrooms of each teacher participant as part of the study. Each classroom observation took place during each teacher's normal writing instruction time. The primary focus during each observation was on individual student writing conferences that occurred in the kindergarten classroom and the various other writing strategies in use in kindergarten classrooms based on the needs of the individual students. Because of writing expectations at the elementary level and the varying writing abilities of students at the kindergarten level, this researcher believed it was necessary to examine individual student writing conferences and the writing strategies used to motivate writers, to build and support the varying writing abilities of early childhood level students, and to meet students' individual needs in writing.

### **Research Questions**

In today's world, writing is a critical skill in school as well as throughout life (Graham, 2008). For future success, a strong foundation in all areas of learning is necessary (Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003; Juel, 1988). A strong learning foundation built during the early childhood years enables students to be successful in later life (Kissel, 2008, Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). If children are successful at writing and enjoy it at an early age, they will continue along this path in future school years (Routman, 2005). For kindergarten students to establish a strong foundation in writing, they must have teachers who deliver high quality writing instruction.

The main topic of this qualitative study was individual student writing conferencing and writing instruction at the early childhood level. Through case studies, the researcher explored teachers' descriptions of their individual student writing conferences based on the needs of their individual students and the writing strategies they use to meet their students' individual writing

needs. Developing a writing ability during the early childhood years can be a difficult and challenging task (Lienemann et al, 2006). Writing is a difficult process to begin with and when students—even at the kindergarten level—first learn to write independently, learner frustration can occur. Even when teachers provide quality whole group writing instruction and a supportive environment, there is still a need for individual instruction at the emergent level. More knowledge on the best strategies is necessary to provide kindergarten students the opportunity to be successful in writing.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?
2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?
3. How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?
4. What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?

## **Procedures**

Qualitative research was the method used for the study in order to explore individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction efforts in the normal setting of five kindergarten classrooms. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as a method of research that explores a topic through investigation in order to provide a comprehensive description of that given topic. Qualitative research is used to gain meaning and understanding of a topic through its participants' meaning and understanding of the same topic (Creswell, 1998). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher creates a comprehensive understanding and an accurate description of a topic through research conducted in its normal setting.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction efforts in five kindergarten classrooms throughout a seven-week period. This exploration of kindergarten writing instruction was conducted through a collective case study.. Creswell (2007) describes a collective case study as a study through which the researcher chooses multiple cases that are suitable to explore the one topic researched through the study. In the study, multiple cases were explored that demonstrated the one research topic: writing in the kindergarten classroom. The multiple case participants were five kindergarten teachers at a South Texas suburban public school campus that houses kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students.

For the study, data collection occurred through teacher interviews and classroom observations. The main collection instrument for the study was the researcher. While collecting and analyzing data, the researcher made every effort not to interfere with the natural setting of the kindergarten classrooms nor with the practices and viewpoints of each teacher. This was particularly important because this researcher is a former kindergarten teacher and has over 20 years' experience at the early childhood level. The role of researcher was taken on while in the process of collecting and analyzing data throughout the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Many kindergarten students enter school without the necessary language opportunities to ensure future learning success (Assel, Landry, Swank, & Gunnewig, 2007). Because they have missed opportunities for language development during the preschool years, these students begin school already behind their peers. When kindergarten classroom instruction begins, a learning gap already exists for these students. If this gap is not addressed, these students will remain behind and likely struggle in upcoming grades.

Considering the expectations placed upon students in the elementary grades as well as the necessity of learning a meaningful writing ability throughout one's schooling and continuing throughout life, a crucial need exists to provide developmentally appropriate effective instruction at the early childhood level that is delivered in the form of individual conferencing. Early childhood educators are aware of the need to provide developmentally appropriate effective instruction and are continually in search of instructional strategies to put into practice that can help lessen the language development gap. Kindergarten teachers perpetually explore the best strategies to provide their students the opportunity to be successful in reading and writing in kindergarten as well as later in their school years. The sooner individual instruction is started in children's educational years, the greater the chance that students who are behind might catch up to their peers (Clay, 1967). For kindergarten students to develop the ability to think while writing quality papers for various real-world purposes when they reach the elementary years, they need teachers with a variety of strategies who provide high-quality writing instruction in a supportive environment. When young children are successful writers in their kindergarten year, they will continue their love of writing in future school years (Routman, 2005).

For this reason, early-childhood educators are always in search of instructional strategies that can help decrease the language development gap to give students an opportunity to be successful in reading and writing in their academic future. Clay (1967) has agreed that children who struggle and receive early intervention or individual instruction have a better chance of catching up to their peers and achieving success throughout their school years. Struggling writers at the early childhood level must receive high-quality instruction in a supportive environment as soon as their struggling is evident.

**High quality writing instruction.** High quality writing instruction focuses on the process of writing rather than on the final product (Willis 2001). At the early childhood level, high quality writing instruction provides students with the fundamental steps they will take throughout the writing process. When teachers focus on the process of writing, the emphasis is on instruction and assisting students throughout the writing process (Calkins 1986; Graves, 1983). When students receive needed assistance, they develop into stronger writers. When the writing focus is on instruction, teachers assist students in areas such as brainstorming topics, answering questions about writing, and revisions (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Willis, 2001). Providing students instruction and assistance throughout the writing process empowers students with the necessary tools to create written products. When the emphasis of writing is on the process, students receive repeated instruction as needed in addition to countless opportunities to develop strong writing capabilities (Wong-Kam & Vasquez, 2003). At the early childhood level, this is very important because students are taking their first steps in many areas of learning and thus recurring instruction and frequent practice is necessary.

In addition to an emphasis on instruction, a student-centered approach to writing instruction at the early childhood level leads to success in writing in future academic years (Calkins, 1986). It is more likely student learning will occur if student-centered instruction is provided. In addition to repeated instruction and many application opportunities, a student-centered approach includes extensive teacher modeling, guidance, and feedback (Calkins, 1986, Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Teachers can provide this type of support for writing through whole-group instruction and individual student writing instruction.

**Individual student writing conferences.** High quality writing instruction includes whole-group instruction and individual student instruction (Calkins, 1986). Individual instruction

is one-on-one teacher-student conferencing and whole-group instruction includes short, focused mini- lessons on the writing process (Calkins, 1986). During whole-group writing instruction, teachers provide the instruction the majority of the students require. Teachers determine instruction for the whole group by examining students' writing samples and deciding what writing instruction the majority of the class needs (Calkins, 1986). After whole-group writing instruction, some students will apply the concepts taught while others will still need more instruction. Teachers can provide necessary additional instruction during future whole-group lessons or during one-on-one teacher-student conferencing (Calkins, 1986).

Individual student writing conferencing is an opportunity for teachers to observe students' writing on a one-on-one basis and individually instruct them based on their individual writing needs (Calkins, 1986). An individual student writing conference consists of a teacher observing students' writing, a teacher listening to students talk about their writing, a student asking questions about writing, and a teacher helping a student to expand on what they already know about writing (Atwell, 1987). Individual student writing conferencing is an opportunity to focus on each student on a one-on-one basis and provide each student with the instruction they require depending upon their level of meaning and understanding in writing.

In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher levels of ability and independence. During individual student writing conferences, a teacher is instructing individual students at their individual levels and is providing them with the instruction needed to progress to the next level (Gentry, 2005). While one-on-one conferencing with individual students, the teacher comments on the student's writing abilities, provides support to the student based on the student's strengths, and addresses the student's needs in writing. Teachers provide instructional support to help the student move to a higher level of

writing and to become a more independent writer. The teacher is providing individual students the instruction needed based on their current level of performance to assist them in reaching their potential.

**High expectations.** Another aspect of high-quality writing instruction is high expectations. In addition to providing students individual instruction and support in writing, high expectations must be set in order for students to move to higher levels (Behymer, 2003). In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher levels of ability and independence. Setting high expectations fosters growth by providing students motivation to progress. When teachers treat kindergartners as writers and expect them to write from the first day of kindergarten, students then believe they are writers (Freeman, 2003). If kindergarten teachers expect their students to consider themselves writers from the very first day of school, they will have a greater chance of performing as writers throughout the school year and it will most likely be instilled in them throughout the school year.

**Motivation.** Writing is a complex task that involves the combination of a variety of difficult skills (Graham & Harris, 2003). In addition to putting one's thoughts into words, the ability to write involves being able to spell, constructing complete sentences, and using correct grammar (Juel, 1988). For kindergarten students, it can be even more difficult because they are trying to master the skill of writing while integrating other skills (Edwards, 2003; Juel, 1988; Saddler et al., 2004). Writing is a problem-solving activity involving organizing or integrating a combination of skills into one activity (Hayes & Flower, 1980). To accomplish this difficult task, motivation is required (Lienemann et al., 2006) as well as high expectations and individual support. At the kindergarten level, research has shown that teacher direction is what motivates students to learn and engage in writing activities (Mitchell, 2009). During individual student

writing conferences, students receive the instruction and support they require for the complex skill of writing and their motivation to write increases because of this individual attention and direction.

Most kindergarten students realize how hard writing can be even before beginning school (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Kindergarten teachers have the tremendous task of building their students' confidence in writing. Students need encouragement to meet the challenges they face in all areas of learning, especially writing (Kersey & Malley, 2005). Kindergarten teachers must not only teach students how to write but also guide them to be positive in relation to their ability and provide inspiration to achieve higher levels of writing skill (Gentry, 2005). When teachers conference with their students on writing one-on-one they have the perfect opportunity to provide individual encouragement, which all students need to keep an optimistic outlook and progress in learning.

Writing ability involves the integration of many skills and processes along with the command of one's thoughts while attempting to create meaningful work (Graham & Harris, 2003). Providing instruction through one-on-one writing conferences is an opportunity to give each student the individual instruction and support needed for motivation and the knowledge necessary to accomplish the difficult task of writing.

When teachers provide students the instruction needed based on their needs and level of understanding, the complex task of writing is easier to conquer. For this to be possible, researchers must explore individual student writing conferences and other writing-instruction strategies at the early childhood level. A deeper insight is required to address the varying abilities of emergent writers in the early childhood classroom and produce successful writers.

## **Summary**

As writing is such an important skill required throughout life, building a strong foundation for it is imperative (Graham, 2008; Ritchey, 2008). When students build a strong learning foundation during early childhood years, it enables them to be successful learners later in life (Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003; Juel, 1988; Kissel, 2008; Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Writing during these emergent years helps build students' strong foundation in learning and enables them to be successful later in higher grades during their schooling as well as even later when in the workplace (Juel, 1988; Kissel, 2008).

The primary focus of this qualitative study was to explore individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies at the early childhood level. The study explored teachers' descriptions of their individual student writing conferences based on the needs of their individual students and the writing strategies they use to meet their students' individual needs in writing through case studies. The importance of a strong learning foundation in literacy, the writing expectations placed on students at the elementary level, the varying writing abilities of students at the kindergarten level, and the lack of research in the area of emergent writing instruction are the reasons the researcher chose to conduct research on this topic.

The study will provide early childhood level educators knowledge of individual student writing conferences and other emergent writing instructional strategies already in use. A deeper insight into how to address the varying abilities of emergent writers in the kindergarten classroom through whole group or individual student writing instruction is necessary to effectively produce successful writers. When early childhood teachers begin classroom instruction, they discover that some students already have a learning gap that has not been previously addressed (Assel, Landry, Swank, & Gunnewig, 2007). To provide all students the opportunity to be successful in writing in kindergarten and in future academic years, a deeper

insight into high quality writing instruction at the early childhood level is necessary. The study will provide a deeper insight into how to address the varying abilities of emergent writers in the classroom through individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies. In order to produce successful writers in the kindergarten classroom and later in life, this insight is critically important. A strong foundation in writing during the early childhood years will lead to success later in life (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Effective writing instruction during the emergent years helps to build a student's strong learning foundation and enables future success in school and in the workplace (Juel, 1988; Kissel, 2008).

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The areas of importance to the study relate to providing students quality early childhood writing instruction. As such, the researcher will review the following areas of literature: social interaction, environment, motivation, emergent learning, and writing instruction. The emergent learning topics reviewed include: emergent literacy, reading and writing development, and oral language. The writing instruction topics reviewed include: emergent writing instruction, daily writing, modeling, individual student writing conferences and teacher self-efficacy.

### **Social Interaction and Learning**

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory emphasized the need for social interaction in the learning process. Children construct meaning and gain knowledge in new concepts during social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). They begin to learn skills through exposure to those skills during social interaction. Listening to and observing others are a major part of learning new concepts. For learning to take place, instruction must first occur through social interaction before a learner internalizes and individualizes it (Vygotsky, 1978). The first steps to learning a new concept occur around others and then later this concept becomes individualized by the learner. As children interact with others in relation to new concepts, such as during their writing development, learning takes place and meaning is constructed.

The social interaction component regarding this particular study relates to kindergarten students interacting with an adult during individual student writing conferences conducted by the teacher. When this particular interaction occurs, the teacher is instructing the child within his or her "zone of proximal development," defined by Vygotsky's (1978) as "the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

While instructing students during individual student writing conferences, teachers provide one-on-one instruction in the area between what a learner already knows and what the learner can be taught by others (Vygotsky, 1978). During individual student writing conferences, the teacher is teaching the student within his or her potential area of learning and helping to move the student to a higher level of learning (Gentry, 2005). While one-on-one conferencing, the teacher is providing individual students the instruction needed based on their current level of performance in order to assist them in reaching their individual potential. In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher levels of ability and independence. When teachers provide support in the form of instruction during an individual student writing conference, they make it possible for the student to achieve more challenging skills than he or she would achieve independently (Bruner, 1966). When teachers provide students one-on-one instruction, they are empowering their students to achieve at higher ability levels.

### **Environmental Influence on Literacy**

Literacy development begins as young children are exposed to it through their environment and surroundings (Teale, 1998). The developmental process of listening, speaking, reading, and writing all begin through everyday interactions with people and the environment. This can be very early in the life of a child. During preschool years, the basic components of reading develop in the course of everyday interactions with others and the environment. “Children learn to read and write in the context of their everyday lives,” (Swan, 2008, p 107). Everyday interactions with others and the environment significantly affect the development of emergent literacy concepts during children’s preschool years. Routine home activities with adults such as conversations, stories, and drawing activities also expose children to literacy. A high quality home literacy environment increases emergent literacy growth (Swan, 2008). Emergent

literacy skills of preschool children will develop quicker if such things as books and writing materials are available to preschool children and if literacy is valued in the home beginning at a very young age.

Because literacy development begins so early in life and depends upon exposure, many children unfortunately miss essential language opportunities through this important phase of development by the time they enter kindergarten (Clements, 2007). Some children have not had many literacy experiences during the preschool years so their literacy development is not as strong as it would be if they had more literacy experiences. Because their literacy development is not as strong as it could be, these children will most likely struggle in reading development as soon as they begin school (Clements, 2007). To strengthen their literacy development, these students need an abundance of experiences with print and text. Very early in reading development, students who have reading difficulties will continue to struggle because they are exposed to less text than more capable readers due to their difficulties (Stanovich, 1986).

Students who come to kindergarten with low literacy development will have a hard time catching up to their peers in reading development because they will continually be exposed to less text due to their lack of reading skills, their level of literacy development and their home environment. This is why it is imperative for kindergarten teachers to know strategies and teaching techniques to help fill this literacy gap. Attempting to close the gap at the kindergarten level will lead to reading and writing success in the years to follow. For this to happen, more research is needed in the area of instructional strategies for writing at the early childhood level. We know what needs to be done in kindergarten in literacy, but more research is needed on how to accomplish it.

## **Motivation Within the Learning Process**

Weber (1994) defines motivation as something that causes a person to perform a certain behavior or action. In relation to learning, motivation has been described as a learner's readiness, willingness, and desire to learn and to be successful in learning (Bomia et al., 1997). Motivation related to learning is one's self provoked commitment and ambition to acquire new knowledge. Woolfolk (1987) describes motivation originating from external forces, or from outside a person, or originating intrinsically, or from within a person. Different definitions and interpretations of motivation exist but what they all have in common is positive behavior toward accomplishing an objective or a goal.

Even at a young age, children realize the difficulty of writing (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). When many children enter kindergarten, their motivation toward writing is not very high (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Many children enter kindergarten with the impression that writing is difficult, so their interest level in writing is very low (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007).

Many aspects have an influence on students' motivation in a classroom. In relation to writing, Anderson (2008) states that when selecting a topic for writing, students are motivated by choice. Part of Anderson's (2008) study was to determine if students are more motivated or engaged in writing when given a choice of what to write. The research examined three scenarios: no choice of writing prompts, multiple choice of writing prompts, and free choice of writing prompts. Of the three scenarios, multiple choice of writing prompts led to the highest student engagement levels (Anderson, 2008). Anderson (2008) suggests giving students a list of topics to choose from in order to motivate them to begin writing on a topic. The use of multiple-choice writing prompts leads to higher motivation in writing (Anderson, 2008). Anderson's research dealt with elementary students. Other studies have also shown that student choice leads to higher

motivation, however, at the kindergarten level, teacher direction is what motivates students to learn and engage in writing activities (Mitchell, 2009). When kindergarten students' motivation was compared in relation to two scenarios, student choice of instructional mode or teacher directed instruction, kindergarten students were more motivated when teacher directed instruction took place (Mitchell, 2009).

Clark and Kragler (2005) researched how access to writing materials affected students' writing production. The authors found that when students were provided more writing opportunities and materials, their quantity increased but the quality did not improve. More time and materials led to an increase in quantity but quality remained the same. Clark and Kragler (2005) concluded that providing students more opportunity and more materials for writing does not improve writing performance. Jones and Christensen (1999) conducted an experimental study to determine how handwriting instruction affects the amount of writing students produce as well as the quality of the writing. The authors (1999) concluded that handwriting instruction as an intervention does increase the quantity of student writing but not necessarily the quality. In a related study, Graham, Harris, and Fink (2000) concluded that handwriting did affect the writing ability of first graders when direct teacher phonological awareness instruction was included. Motivation to write in the elementary years is increased when students are provided more instruction, opportunities, and materials for writing.

When many students enter kindergarten, they are already aware that writing is difficult (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Kindergarten teachers have the tremendous charge of building their students' confidence in writing. Students need encouragement to meet the challenges they face in writing (Kersey & Malley, 2005). Teachers can provide this encouragement through a positive learning environment and by being caring and concerned about students' learning.

Kindergarten teachers are tasked with not only teaching students how to write but also guiding them to be positive in relation to their ability to write and inspiring them to higher writing-skill levels (Gentry, 2005).

### **Emergent Literacy**

In 1966, Clay, as cited in Ramsburg (1998), introduced the term “emergent literacy” to describe the observed behaviors of young children who cannot yet read and write but they imitate the actions of reading and writing as they interact with written materials such as books. These imitations are the beginning stages of literacy development and can occur long before any schooling (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Emergent literacy has been described as a phase in which children begin to understand that symbols carry meaning and that people communicate ideas through the use of symbols (Koenig, 1992). Some believe emergent literacy to be the phase that falls between when children are born and when they become conventional readers and show their developing knowledge of the written language (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Emergent literacy has been referred to as the acquisition of language related skills before formal instruction in reading and writing (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Literacy development in children begins much earlier than when they enter school (Clay, 1991; Hall & Moats, 1999; Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Children’s literacy development in the early years is fostered through social interactions with adults and exposure to written texts (Sulzby, 1991). Children begin to acquire reading and writing knowledge while learning to speak and while observing others reading and writing. Some expand the term “emergent literacy” to include reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking (Cooper, 1997). Emergent literacy development is ongoing and occurs throughout everyday life and actions at home and in the community (Morrow, 1997). Emergent literacy has been described to include all the reading and

writing behaviors that will eventually develop into conventional reading and writing (Sulzby, 1989). During the emergent literacy phase, reading and writing concepts develop because of interactions with readers and writers and through experiences of attempting to read and to write (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Emergent literacy includes the years from birth to kindergarten as children learn about the world around them through literacy experiences such as having conversations, being read to, observing labels, noticing environmental print and listening to others (May, 1998). Emergent literacy has also been explained as the behaviors young children carry out when beginning the basic learning stages of reading and writing or when imitating real reading and writing while interacting with various reading and writing materials (May, 1998). When children are in the foundational learning stage of reading and writing, they imitate real reading and writing. Emergent literacy has also been described as an interactive and constructive developmental process built around meaning (Clay, 1991).

During the emergent-literacy phase, children's literacy develops through interactions with books and other written materials and during conversations with others. Swan (2008) described emergent literacy development as a combined collection of abilities occurring throughout the first four years of life. The author (2008) reported emergent literacy as a pattern of increasing development from the age of nine months to age four "suggesting that most children become more sophisticated regarding their facility with language and with print as they approach the age of entry into formal schooling" (p. 107). Most children better understand language and print the closer they get to school age. This researcher would define emergent literacy as a period of learning during the early years within which children build their knowledge and understanding of oral and written language. It is the period when children develop their beginning literacy skills, realize print carries a message, and that print can also be used to relay messages.

## **Reading and Writing Development**

Children's reading and writing development originate long before they enter school. This development is supported by conversations and experiences with others along with literacy materials. Children much younger than kindergarten age show an interest in writing and in writing instruments such as crayons, markers, or pencils (Gibson & Levin, 1975). Before most children are two years old they are aware that certain items, such as pencils and crayons, make marks, and they scribble on paper and other materials. Between the ages of two and four years old, most children know the difference between drawing and scribbling and begin to develop motor control (Brenneman, Massey, Machado, & Gelman, 1996). Most children by the age of three know the difference between drawing and scribbling, and they can do both. By the time most children are five, they realize that marks on a paper mean something (Marie Clay 2001). Children's beginning of understanding of letters and sounds and the connection of sounds to spoken and written words is acquired through informal adult interaction and instruction (Anbar 1986). By kindergarten, most children realize print carries meaning and writing on paper is a way of communicating. They are now at the point where they realize spoken words can be written on paper and symbols written on paper represent the spoken words.

Reading and writing are reciprocal processes—they go hand-in-hand for learners, especially at the emergent-learning level (Birnbaum and Emig, 1983). When students read, they are attempting to decode a writer's message and when they write, they are attempting to convey a message to a reader. While reading and writing, students use a combination of the alphabetic principle, word analysis skills, spelling skills, and concepts of print (McCardle et al, 2008; Birnbaum and Emig, 1983). The necessary level of understanding of each of these skills is different depending upon whether a student is reading or writing (McCardle et al, 2008;

Birnbaum and Emig, 1983). Simply because a student can spell a particular word does not mean he or she can read that same word.

Ehri (1999) believes children learn to read words in four phases: the pre-alphabetic phase, the partial-alphabetic phase, the full-alphabetic phase, and the consolidated-alphabetic phase. These phases begin as memorizing or guessing and then progress to using letter and sound knowledge and sight word knowledge and finally transition into conventional reading using knowledge of reoccurring spelling patterns (Ehri, 1999). The pre-alphabetic phase occurs before a child is able to make any letter-to-sound connections but has memorized certain words due to repeated exposure in the environment (Ehri, 1999). For example, a child can read the word “EXIT” because they have seen the word repeatedly and have been told what the word means. If the word was written differently, such as “exit” they might not recognize it (Ehri, 1999). During the partial-alphabetic phase, readers use their knowledge of some letters or sounds in words to attempt to pronounce certain written words (Ehri, 1999). It is common for readers to use beginning or ending sounds during this phase (Ehri, 1999). During the full-alphabetic phase, the reader is able to make alphabetic connections, blend certain sounds, and read certain words that have been memorized because of repeated exposure (Ehri, 1999). During the consolidated-alphabetic phase the reader has had continuous practice in reading and repeated exposure to many letter patterns so that their memory bank for word processing can be used for letter combinations rather than sounds for single letters and two-letter combinations (Ehri, 1999). For instance instead of memorizing the word “fleet” as four units, “f” “l” “ee” “t,” they now have the ability and knowledge to memorize it as only two units, “fl” “eet.”

These stages of reading can also be applied to learning to write. Students move from writing random letters while guessing how words are spelled to using invented spelling and

common words they have memorized (Ruddell, 2002). Students then finally evolve to conventional spellings of words using known reoccurring spelling patterns and their knowledge of sight words. When children are using invented spelling, they are applying their understanding of the connections between what we say and what we write along with their understanding of spelling principles (Ruddell, 2002).

Writing development has been described as a difficult and complex process of symbolic representation that develops through combinations of talking, drawing, and playing (Brindley & Schneider, 2002). Children begin experimenting with the writing process through conversations, role-playing of writing actions, and drawing pictures to tell a story or represent an event. They then start to scribble and make letter-like forms and perhaps wavy scribbles to imitate cursive writing. Eventually, they progress and their scribbles and letter-like forms develop into normal letters and then into random-letter strings. They are trying to communicate with others and create meaning through their emergent writing. When children are first learning to write they spell words by writing the sounds or letters they think are in the words they want to write (Schlagal, 1989). Children use what they know about letters and sounds to invent or create spellings of words. How children spell or misspell words through invented spelling is an indication of their understanding of words, sounds, and letters (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

An essential component in quality early childhood surroundings is providing activities that involve writing (Love et al., 2007). Children in early childhood years need activities that involve writing to obtain the highest possible background in literacy. During these years, students are in the emergent phase of writing wherein they are developing the crucial foundational skills necessary for future writing development (Kissel, 2008; Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). It is a time when children require and deserve quality, effective instruction as well

as instruction based on their individual needs as emergent writers. Effective emergent literacy instruction also requires necessary, appropriate intervention that must be based on individualized and developmental data in order to be worthwhile. Every effort should be made to ensure that students get the best instruction during this crucial phase of writing development. Emergent-writing instruction is a task that requires effort, energy, and expertise. If students are provided high-quality instruction at the beginning of their writing development, they will have a higher chance of accomplishment later.

### **Oral Language and Writing Ability**

Writing development for emergent writers occurs alongside oral language development (Calkins, 1994; Freeman & Hatch, 1989). As oral language is developing, foundational skills related to writing ability are also developing. Oral language development occurs within one's natural environment without any formal instruction. Preschool children are exposed to language from infancy and they imitate this language. Adults encourage these initial language attempts and respond in a way to promote more language attempts. Children's first attempts at oral language are nowhere near perfect and are not expected to be. Their language will develop through repeated attempts in a supportive environment in which they will go through various stages of development. Language development has been described as taking place through the following five stages of acquisition: the pre-production stage, the early production stage, the speech-emergent stage, the intermediate phase, and the fluency phase (McDonald, 1997). During the pre-production stage, children have few oral skills and typically respond through facial expressions, random sounds, repeated syllables, pointing, nodding or waving (McDonald, 1997). During the early production stage, children have acquired more understanding of language and can say some words, phrases, and maybe short sentences related to repeated actions (McDonald, 1997). They also understand simple questions and can name certain objects (McDonald, 1997).

During the speech-emergent stage, children can read written words when presented in combination with pictures or other context clues. During this phase, personal experiences help children understand new concepts and a child's vocabulary and verbal communication increases greatly (McDonald, 1997). During the intermediate phase, children demonstrate higher levels of accuracy when expressing thoughts (McDonald, 1997). During this phase children express their needs, ask questions, understand humor, and participate in conversations. They can memorize songs and rhymes and retell familiar stories using some proper grammar and a more sophisticated vocabulary (McDonald, 1997). During the fluency stage, children have a greater understanding of grammar, language structure, and vocabulary (McDonald, 1997). They can tell longer stories, sequence events, and experiment with language in order to entertain or surprise others (McDonald, 1997). During these preschool years, foundational writing skills are also developing. Just as reading development originates way before children enter school, writing development follows the same path. Preschool children are learning that writing is a form of language. This learning takes place as they are exposed to adults and their writing. Preschool children begin to imitate written language much as they once imitated oral language.

A child's language abilities and success in school are both related to the quality of the words they were exposed to during the early years (Kalamar, 2008). Children's language experiences before entering kindergarten affect their performance during the upcoming school years. Some children will come to kindergarten with a rich oral language background while others will arrive with limited oral language experiences. Children raised in lower income environments will most likely have had fewer words spoken to them during their early years (Cooter, 2006; Darling, 2005). Children require many opportunities to use language with others in order to develop their own oral language (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). To assist students at

the lower levels of writing performance in kindergarten, teachers must provide them with rich oral language experiences. The study by Dodici, Draper, and Peterson (2003) showed that a child's early oral language environment is related to their vocabulary, their understanding of alphabetic principles, and their phonemic awareness skills during the first school years. This longitudinal study showed that parent-child interaction during the infant and toddler years is related to children's early literacy skills such as understanding vocabulary and phonemic awareness (Dodici, Draper, and Peterson, 2003). Children whose families are economically disadvantaged have difficulty in writing because of a lack of parent interaction (Dodici, Draper, and Peterson, 2003). Their study confirms a need for strong early literacy programs and interventions in order to address the needs of economically disadvantaged children (Dodici, Draper, and Peterson, 2003).

Oral language development is a crucial component of the early childhood curriculum. According to Strickland and Shanahan, (2004) quality oral language experiences during the preschool years are an important prerequisite for literacy success in later years. Since many kindergarten students are not provided the necessary oral language experiences before entering school, these oral language opportunities must be provided within the classroom to help these students reach an independent writing level before entering first grade. Research shows early environment and language exposure affects literacy development in later years. More research is needed in the area of instruction of kindergarten students in order to meet their needs based on their preschool experiences.

### **Emergent Writing Instruction-Teaching Writing**

The National Reading Panel (2000) reported a five-component model of reading instruction that identified valuable areas of instruction for reading success. The components

included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Moreover, three of these areas are also of high importance in writing instruction in the early years: phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. Writing is a complex skill comprised of many different smaller skills including spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation (Berninger & Amtmann, 2003). Writing also involves creativity along with other abilities such as turning thoughts into written words and revising what one has already written (Shapiro, 2004).

Literacy has changed much in the last three decades, especially in the area of writing. Thirty years ago, Graves (1978) could find nothing to confirm that students were writing in elementary classrooms. Today's elementary classrooms are quite different. Because of the concern of older students' writing abilities, schools have implemented writing instructional strategies beginning in kindergarten.

The ability to express thoughts through writing is a fundamental skill necessary for a literate life. Children begin their journey of writing through scribbles that imitate writing, moving on to letter strings, and eventually writing words and sentences (Graves, 1975). The scribbles and strings of letters children write represent their attempts to express themselves through writing. They require guidance and support as they progress through the stages in the development of the writing process. Educators must guide students through these stages by nurturing, encouraging and supporting their students' interest and individual development in the written language. Instruction in writing at the early childhood level begins with the writing of one's name and the names of other family members.

Teachers attempt to provide effective instruction to every student based on their individual needs. A kindergarten classroom contains a diverse group of students. Some students have been exposed to a great amount of print and informal indirect instruction in reading and

writing. When varying levels exist within a classroom, small group and individual instruction are the only solution to providing students effective instruction. Furthermore, some students require small group and individual instruction when early signs of struggle appear.

Considering the wide variety of children's reading and writing experiences, teachers need a variety of methods of instruction to reach the needs of their students. One teaching strategy cannot be considered the most effective for all children (Strickland 1994).

### **Daily Writing and Modeling**

Instruction in writing at the emergent level is an interactive activity in which modeling and observation are essential for development. Daily teacher modeling of writing along with daily writing opportunities are crucial in a supportive writing environment (Behymer, 2003). To construct and promote a supportive writing environment, kindergarten teachers should provide daily writing instruction along with daily opportunities for students to write. Students who participate in daily planned writing sessions will write twice as much and have twice the amount of ideas as students who only write when they want to write (Routman, 2005). Given the possibility for twice as much student-generated writing and twice as many ideas, daily writing is necessary in the kindergarten classroom. In order for children to make growth in writing, they must be given many writing opportunities (Mayer, 2007). Growth in writing is the goal in kindergarten, so providing many opportunities along with communicated expectations, strategy instruction, and modeling of writing must be present and plentiful.

Based on their study of providing more opportunities and materials for writing, Clark and Kragler (2005) concluded that teacher modeling is needed for any chance of student improvement in writing performance. Besides writing opportunities and instruction, students also require an abundant amount of writing modeled by the teacher. Teacher modeling provides the

scaffolding required for students to learn within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In order to progress from one level to another, a learner requires samples of what is expected in writing along with demonstrations of how those expectations are achieved. Modeling of writing as well as daily writing opportunities provide students the chance to perform or practice carrying out these writing expectations. Modeling provides a road map to writing skills desired.

In addition to daily writing, children require writing support (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teacher conferencing during writing instruction provides this necessary support. Children's writing will develop more when it is part of a supportive learning environment (Mayer, 2007) In addition to providing writing support, teachers should set high expectations for their students in writing in order for students to move to higher levels (Behymer, 2003). High expectations foster growth. Dyson (1985) researched how copying of text affects student development and concluded that the practice helped to improve students' letter formation but did not affect growth in the writing process or comprehension. When kindergartners are treated as writers and expected to write from the first day, they then believe they are writers (Freeman, 2003).

In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher levels of ability and independence. When teachers provide support alongside their instruction, they make it possible for children to achieve more challenging skills than they can achieve independently (Bruner, 1966). This support can be in the form of conversations, modeling, and feedback related to the instruction. When learning to write, the most important form of support children require is modeling (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Observing others perform a difficult task provides the learner the first steps to understanding it. When students are provided the

opportunity to observe others in the writing process, they are more likely to have the ability to perform the same task independently.

### **Individual Student Writing Conferences**

In addition to daily writing, children require writing support (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children's writing will develop more when part of a supportive learning environment (Mayer, 2007). Teacher guidance in the form of individual student conferencing and teacher modeling provides this necessary support. Individual student-writing conferencing is an opportunity for teachers to instruct students on a one-on-one basis based on their individual needs in writing (Calkins, 1986). An individual student-writing conference consists of a teacher observing a student's writing, a teacher listening to a student talk about his or her writing, a student asking questions about writing and a teacher helping a student to expand on what he or she already knows about writing (Atwell, 1987). An individual student writing conference is an opportunity for a teacher to focus on each student on a one-on-one basis and provide each student with the instruction he or she requires depending upon his or her level of meaning and understanding in writing.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept is defined as the difference between what a learner already knows and what the learner can be taught by others (1978). When kindergarten teachers are conferencing with their individual students about writing, each kindergartener is being instructed within his or her area of potential learning, or zone of proximal development. In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher ability levels and to levels that are more independent. During individual student writing conferences, a teacher is instructing individual students at their individual levels and is providing them the instruction they need to progress to the next level (Gentry, 2005). Individual instruction

in the form of one-on-one teacher student conferencing on the writing process is needed in addition to any whole group writing instruction already provided (Calkins, 1986). While one-on-one conferencing with individual students, the teacher comments on each student's writing ability and provides support based on his or her abilities. The support is provided in order to help the student move to a higher level of writing and to become more independent. The teacher is providing individual students the instruction needed based on their current level of performance in order to assist them in reaching their individual potential. During individual student writing conferences a teacher is instructing students at their individual levels and is providing students the instruction they need to progress to the next level (Gentry, 2005). Individual student writing conferencing is an opportunity to focus on each student on a one-on-one basis and provide each student with the instruction they require depending upon their level of meaning and understanding in writing. At the kindergarten level, during individual student writing conferences a teacher presents strategies and resources students can use independently to help them write letters, words, and sentences. Some strategies kindergarten students use in writing include saying words slowly to hear individual sounds, using chunks of familiar words to spell other words, and using known spelling patterns to spell words. Some resources kindergarten students use include a name chart, a word wall, and a letter sound-linking chart. A name chart is a class-made chart listing all students' names grouped by beginning letter. A word wall is a list of words on a wall that begin with each letter of the alphabet. A letter-sound linking chart is a chart that shows each letter of the alphabet with a picture that begins with the sound of each letter.

During individual student writing conferences, a teacher helps students to expand on what they already know about writing (Atwell, 1987). During the conferences, teachers reinforce

writing strategies taught previously during the whole group as well as those strategies discussed previously with that particular student. In addition, the teacher comments on each student's individual writing abilities and provides support based on the student's abilities, which helps the student move to a higher level of writing and to become more independent. The teacher is providing individual students the instruction needed based on their current level of performance in order to assist them in reaching their individual potential.

To prepare for an individual writing conference, a teacher will look at student's recent writing samples. Routman believes examining students' writing on an individual basis is necessary in order to confirm the needs of students, the growth of students, and the range of students all in relation to writing (Routman, 2005). Examining samples of previous writing is a way of determining individual student growth as well as providing evidence of individual needs being met as well as current individual needs. Samples of students' writing are documentation of their individual abilities and ideas and when compared to previous samples can be used to determine growth (Gammill, 2006).

As emphasized in the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky (1978), the need for social interaction in the learning process is provided during individual student writing conferences. As children interact with others during their writing development, meaning is constructed about the writing process. Children learn concepts through social interaction and then absorb the concepts on an individual level (Vygotsky, 1978). Social interaction when learning a new concept is necessary in order for the learning process to begin. Only after the concept is introduced, modeled, and discussed can the learning of the concept continue to develop on an individual basis. Learning a concept must first be demonstrated around others for it to be later internalized.

Individual student writing conferences provide the social interaction necessary for the learning of a new concept before it can be internalized on an individual level.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

In 1977, Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy, which he defined as “belief in one’s capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1977, p3). Self-efficacy is a person’s attitude about their potential to perform to desired levels of achievement. These attitudes affect experiences in their everyday life. A person’s self-efficacy can affect their self-motivation as well as how they think, feel, and act. A person with a strong sense of efficacy will handle complicated tasks as challenges to be accomplished rather than obstacles to avoid (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy is not the same as confidence. Confidence refers to how strong a person’s belief is, but self-efficacy is more specific. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s level of capability as well as how strong that belief is (Bandura, 1997). Since Bandura’s introduction of this concept, many researchers have confirmed that strong self-efficacy positively affects learning and motivation (Goddard, Hoy and Hoy, 2004). Studies have shown that strong efficacy is directly related to academic success and achievement and that student success can be affected by teacher self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, Hoy, 2004). A teacher’s belief in their ability to succeed affects their students’ achievement. Teacher self-efficacy is a belief in his or her ability to successfully instruct his or her students and lead them to success (Bandura, 1995).

When teachers are knowledgeable in the instructional strategies related to subjects they teach, they have the tools necessary to foster their belief in their ability to succeed in positively affecting their students’ achievement. Teachers require instructional strategy knowledge in order to possess self-efficacy or the belief in their ability to successfully instruct their students and lead

them to success. Knowledge of writing instructional strategies is a necessary field for emergent level teachers in order to be successful in instructing students in writing.

Writing is a complex task to do and to teach (Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, & Reid, 2006). Both teachers and students require efficacy, or a belief in their “capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1977, p3). Both students and teachers of writing require a belief in their abilities, or a positive attitude about their potential to perform to the desired levels of achievement. The many smaller skills involved in writing such as spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and imagination make it such a complex task. When many students enter kindergarten they are already aware of how difficult writing can be (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Kindergarten teachers have the tremendous charge of building their students’ confidence in writing as well as students’ belief that they can write at the level the teacher expects. Kindergarten teachers also need the confidence in teaching writing and the belief that they can instruct their students to write at the level the school curriculum or administrators expect.

## **Summary**

In today’s world, writing is a critical skill (Graham, 2008). Success in later years is dependent upon a strong foundation being built during the early childhood years (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Being a strong writer during the emergent years supports the constructing of a well-built foundation in literacy and other areas of learning (Juel, 1988). A strong learning foundation in literacy built during the early childhood years leads to success later in school and in life (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). At the beginning of kindergarten, many students have already missed essential language opportunities during their early years, which comprise a critical stage of language development (Clements, 2007). At the age of five, children already

know that writing is a hard skill (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006). For these reasons, kindergarten teachers must be well informed of strategies or best practices for literacy instruction, including writing instruction. Kindergarten teachers must be well educated in writing instruction strategies to provide their students the best instruction possible in writing and the strong foundation necessary to be successful in writing later in life. Knowledge of the importance of a good emergent literacy foundation exists along with what students need in order to be successful in writing. The study provides information on how writing instruction looks and what five teachers' perceptions are of their writing instruction at the kindergarten level.

In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher ability levels and to levels that are more independent. Attempting at the kindergarten level to close the gap present when students begin their school years will lead to reading and writing success in the years to follow. To achieve this goal, more research must be done in the area of instructional strategies for writing. We know what needs to be done in kindergarten in the area of literacy but more research is needed on how to accomplish it.

Through a qualitative study, individual student writing conferences and writing instruction in kindergarten classrooms were explored. Five kindergarten teacher participants were interviewed and asked to describe their individual student writing conferences based on the needs of their individual students along with the writing instruction strategies they currently use. The importance of a strong learning foundation in literacy, the writing expectations at the elementary level, the varying writing abilities of students at the kindergarten level, and the lack of research in the area of emergent writing instruction are the main reasons this researcher chose to conduct a study on this topic.

## **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In kindergarten, the sooner a student's areas of need are addressed, the sooner the student is on the road to success (Clay, 1967). In addition to large group-writing instruction, many kindergarten students also need small group and one-on-one instruction to reach their highest writing potential. Many kindergarten students are reluctant writers in need of teacher support in order to be successful in writing. For many kindergarten students, motivation to write is due to focused attention received during one-on-one writing instruction, in addition to whole group writing instruction. The earlier this additional instruction or writing intervention begins, the sooner the motivation will occur. The study examined large group and one-on-one writing instruction practices currently used in five kindergarten classrooms.

The remainder of this chapter provides a description of the methods and procedures used to carry out the study. The study examined the individual student writing conferences of five kindergarten teachers and the writing strategies these same teachers used to instruct their students in writing and motivate them to write. This was accomplished through a qualitative study that implemented a collective case method. The methods of data collection that were used for the study included teacher interviews and classroom observations. The remainder of this chapter will discuss research methodology, research setting, research participants, research questions, data collection processes, and data analysis.

### **Context of the Study**

In order to explore the writing instruction efforts in the normal setting of five kindergarten classrooms, the method of research used for the study was qualitative. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as a method that explores a topic through investigation in order to provide a comprehensive description of that given topic. Researchers have used qualitative research to gain meaning and understanding of a topic through its participants'

meaning and understanding of the same topic (Creswell, 1998). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher creates a comprehensive understanding and an accurate description of a topic through research conducted in its normal setting.

This qualitative study explored writing instruction in five kindergarten classrooms during a seven-week period using a collective case study approach. Creswell (2007) described collective case study as a method in which the researcher chooses multiple cases that are suitable to explore the one topic being researched by the study. Case studies are descriptions of real-life experiences related to the topic being researched. For the study, case studies were developed through teacher interviews related to their own real-life classroom experiences involving writing instruction along with classroom observations of the same teachers during their regularly scheduled writing instruction times.

The multiple case participants were five kindergarten teachers at a South Texas suburban public school campus that housed kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students. In order to explore individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies in kindergarten classrooms, the researcher interviewed each of the five participants a total of two times during a seven-week period and also observed each teacher participant two times during the same seven-week period.

Data collection occurred through teacher interviews and classroom observations. The main collection instrument for the study was the researcher. While collecting and analyzing data, the researcher made every effort not to interfere with the natural setting of the kindergarten classrooms, nor with the practices and viewpoints of each teacher. This was particularly important because this researcher is a former kindergarten teacher and has over 20 years'

experience at the early childhood level. The exclusive role of a researcher was taken on while in the process of collecting and analyzing data.

## **Research Setting**

This research study was conducted at a South Texas suburban public school campus that housed approximately 450 kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students. This public school campus was part of an independent Texas school district that contained six campuses and supported over 5,600 students. The community for this public school campus has a population of over 23,000 with over 22% of the population below poverty level. The student population that attended school in this district was slightly over 50% Caucasian and almost 40% Hispanic, with over 44% of the students considered economically disadvantaged. Over 38% of the students were considered at-risk of not graduating from high school and almost 3% of the students were limited-English proficient. The particular campus for the study included 8 pre-kindergarten classrooms and 18 kindergarten classrooms.

## **Participants**

Five kindergarten teachers from a South Texas suburban public school kindergarten and pre-kindergarten campus were the participants for the study. This was a purposeful sample based on the purpose of the study, to examine individual student writing conferences and other writing instructional strategies at the kindergarten level. The teacher participants were given pseudonyms. The pseudonyms used for the five teachers in the study were Amanda, Bailey, Chloe, Danielle, and Ellie. These five participants were of different experience levels: Amanda taught for 15 years with 11 years in kindergarten; Bailey taught for 10 years with 8 years in kindergarten; Chloe taught a total of 13 years with 6 years in kindergarten; Danielle taught a total of 14 years with 12 years in kindergarten; and Ellie taught a total of 7 years with 4 of those years

in kindergarten. The selection process for the participants in the study was strictly voluntary. All participants understood they were to be interviewed and observed in their classroom during the study and had the option to drop out of the study at any time. All participants signed a consent form prior to participating in the study.

On this particular campus, students are randomly placed in each kindergarten classroom, creating classes that are heterogeneous with regard to learning ability. This school's kindergarten writing curriculum was determined at the district level but based primarily on the Texas state educational guidelines, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or the TEKS. At the classroom level, curriculum for instruction was based on district and state curriculum guidelines, but teacher presentation of curriculum was customized to meet the needs of the class and the individual students through large group and one-on-one instruction. Each kindergarten teacher on this particular campus provided daily writing instruction for 45 to 60 minutes a day. During writing instruction time, the whole group was provided writing instruction that was needed for the majority of the students. Each teacher determined what was taught during the whole group instruction based on students' needs determined by their previous writing samples. After a few minutes of whole group instruction, teachers then had students write independently. While students wrote independently, each teacher conducted individual student writing conferences.

The writing instruction that occurred on this campus was the main reason the researcher chose it for the study. Writing instruction at the kindergarten level was a priority in this district and students are expected to be successful, independent writers by the end of the kindergarten year. Every kindergarten teacher on this campus provided daily writing instruction along with daily individual student writing conferences. During the individual student writing conferences, the teachers individually instructed students based on each student's writing needs. They focused

on each student on a one-on-one basis and provided the required instruction depending upon each student's level of meaning and understanding in writing.

### **Researcher Subjectivity and Rapport with Participants**

Data collection occurred through teacher interviews and classroom observations. The main collection instrument for the study was the researcher. The researcher made every effort not to interfere with the natural setting of the kindergarten classrooms, nor with the practices or viewpoints of each kindergarten teacher. This was particularly important because this researcher was a former kindergarten teacher and has over twenty years' experience at the early childhood level. Throughout the study, the researcher took on the exclusive role of researcher while in the process of collecting and analyzing data. All interviews took place in each kindergarten teacher's classroom at convenient times for each participant. Each classroom observation took place during each kindergarten teacher's regularly scheduled writing instruction time. The researcher had established rapport with each teacher participant because of the researcher's previous years on the same campus.

Knowledge of the curriculum and instruction that occurs on this campus was an advantage for the researcher. Developing strong writers in kindergarten is a campus level initiative and the curriculum writers on this campus are continually in search of writing instruction methods. In the last 10 to 15 years, writing instruction methods have changed in the district but research has not kept up with these changes; thus, more study is needed in the area of writing instruction at the kindergarten level.

Individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction used in five different kindergarten classrooms were examined during a seven-week period. The researcher collected data through the sources of teacher interviews and classroom observations. The observations

carried out were conducted in the regular classroom setting during each teacher's regularly scheduled writing instruction time to maintain a natural environment. The researcher kept notes during each observation. Two observations of each teacher participant were conducted during the study as well as two interviews with each teacher, one at the beginning of the study and one at the end.

### **Research Questions and Data Collection Processes**

The study described the instructional strategies teachers used to meet their students' needs in writing. The data collected was used to answer the four research questions that guided the study:

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?
2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?
3. How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?
4. What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?

The researcher conducted all the data collection for the study through one-on-one interviews and classroom observations with each teacher participant during their writing instructional time. The researcher conducted the interviews with a focus on individual student writing conferences and writing instruction in each of the five kindergarten classrooms. The observations in each of the five classrooms were conducted during large group writing instruction and while each teacher conducted individual student writing conferences.

The collection of data occurred over a seven-week period. Each of the five participants was interviewed once during the first two weeks of the study and then once again during the last

two weeks of the study. The researcher observed each teacher twice during the study, once during week three and once during week five. Table 3.1 represents the study's timeline of the interviews and observations.

**Table 3.1**  
*Interview and Observation Timeline*

Week	Data Collection Processes
Weeks one and two	First interviews
Week three	Observation #1
Week five	Observation #2
Weeks six and seven	Second interviews

The researcher developed two separate interview protocols for each participant for the study (see Appendix A). The observations during weeks three and five of the study took place during writing instruction that occurred in each participant's classroom. This writing instruction time included whole group instruction and one-on-one writing conferencing between the teacher and individual students.

## **Data Analysis**

All data for this research study was analyzed using content analysis. The researcher conducted data analysis to present the new information gained. The method of data analysis used was narrative data analysis and interpretation (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). In order for the researcher to be familiar with the data for the study, all interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the researcher before data analysis began (Reissman, 1993). Member checks of the interview transcriptions were conducted to eliminate transcribing errors and increase the accuracy, credibility, and validity of this qualitative study. Each teacher participant was provided their transcribed interviews and asked to confirm accuracy. While analyzing the data, the researcher determined the focus of the analysis, which was done by determining focus topics related to each

research question. The researcher then examined teacher responses to interview questions and coded the responses according to emerging themes. The researcher then correlated the emerged themes to the focus topics (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Analysis of data was verified by another qualified, qualitative researcher in order to establish inter-rater reliability.

## **Summary**

The focus of the study related to individual student writing conferences and writing instruction occurring at the early childhood level in different classrooms based on the needs of the individual students. Because of elementary level writing expectations and students' varying writing abilities at the kindergarten level, this researcher believed it was necessary to examine current writing instructional strategies at the early childhood level through teacher descriptions of the strategies they use to build and support their students' varying writing abilities. The next chapter discusses the results of this qualitative research study on writing instruction at the kindergarten level.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

Early childhood educators are charged with providing effective writing instruction that is also developmentally appropriate to prepare their students for challenges they will face in their academic future. Elementary school children are expected to have the ability to think while writing quality papers for various real-world purposes. To develop these abilities, elementary school children need high quality writing instruction in a supportive environment throughout their emergent writing years (Kissel, 2008). Spending preschool years in a literacy-rich environment that fosters language is essential. There has been much research conducted regarding the importance of the emergent-writing stage for children and the growth of writing development children undergo as emergent writers (Clay, 2001; DeFord, 2001; Dobson, 1988; Gomert & Fayol, 1992). The need for students to receive effective instruction during the early childhood years in order to be successful writers during their elementary years is what prompted this researcher to conduct this particular study. The study examined individual student writing conferences and other writing instructional strategies at the kindergarten level, both of which have been found to be minimal by this researcher. To learn more about writing instructional strategies at the emergent level and individual writing instruction, the study focused on the individual student writing conferences and other writing instructional strategies taking place in five kindergarten classrooms.

The results of the data will be presented in this chapter, which also include a section on data collection and teacher-participant information. In addition, there is a discussion of the focus topics related to the research questions guiding the study as well as the themes that emerged during data analysis.

## **Data Collection**

The study explored teacher individual student writing conferencing along with writing instruction at the kindergarten level. In order to address the research questions that guided the study, five kindergarten teachers were interviewed two times during a seven-week period. These interviews were transcribed, reviewed, coded and analyzed. All transcribing, reviewing, coding and analyzing were done by the researcher.

Classroom observations were also conducted in order to triangulate the data collected through the interviews and to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' descriptions of their individual student writing conferences and other writing strategies they currently use. Each classroom observation lasted approximately 45 minutes. During the observations, the teachers conducted a few minutes of whole group instruction and then students were instructed to write independently. While students wrote independently, each teacher conducted individual student writing conferences.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?
2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?
3. How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?
4. What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?

## **Teacher participants**

Five kindergarten teachers volunteered to participate in this research study. The following is a description of each teacher, which includes their years of teaching experience, their explanations of how they became a kindergarten teacher, and their individual thoughts on

how children learn to write. Also included is a discussion of two events each teacher considered memorable teaching experiences, one event from a previous school year and one event from this school year. For the purpose of the study, each teacher has been given a pseudonym.

The teacher descriptions are presented in alphabetical order by each teacher's pseudonym. The pseudonyms used for the five teachers in the study were Amanda, Bailey, Chloe, Danielle and Ellie. In order to gain more information about each teacher participant, each was asked to describe how they became a kindergarten teacher, their thoughts on how children learn to write, and their most successful or rewarding teaching experiences in writing. A discussion related to each participant's responses to the three areas listed above will follow.

**Amanda.** Amanda was asked how she became a kindergarten teacher. She stated that she had been a second-grade teacher at another district and wanted to teach kindergarten. She saw an opening at this particular school district, applied, and obtained the position.

When asked how children learn to write in her first interview, Amanda stated that she believes children learn to write through modeling. She was then asked, "Is that the only way?" Her response was, "I think it is the most important way." Her response remained consistent during the second interview by saying, "Through modeling, lots of modeling."

Amanda was asked to describe her most successful or rewarding teaching experiences in writing. She said, "It was a long time ago . . . I had a little girl write a letter to me that said 'Thank you for helping me stretch out hard words' and I said, 'You got this, oh my God! You wrote and you told me what you're talking about in your writing!'" Amanda said it is great when you have "those moments when they recognize that I'm helping them be a good writer." She added, "I still have it. I keep it in my file cabinet somewhere." She later showed it to me. Stretching out words is a spelling strategy some teachers use with their emergent writers. When a

student stretches out words, they say the words slowly in order to hear each sound in isolation. This helps the students spell unknown words phonetically.

During her second interview, Amanda described one of her most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year as, "When a kid can take a simple sentence that we have done like 'I like dogs' and expand on it or they change it." She continued by saying, "That is like a huge step when they quit writing, just writing 'I like flowers,' 'I like rainbows.' When they can realize it, that just opens writing for them." Amanda concluded with, "I think that shows that I am successful in teaching writing, in writing instruction, in my instruction."

**Bailey.** Bailey became a kindergarten teacher because she loves kids and has always wanted to work with them. She had been teaching pre-kindergarten at another school and noticed that this particular district had an opening for a kindergarten teacher. She applied for the kindergarten opening and was hired.

During her first interview, Bailey was asked how she thinks children learn to write. She said, "I think children learn how to write by talking about their experiences and learning how to stretch words and recognizing sight words." She added, "Learning how to take their experiences and put them on paper and by modeling." During her second interview she was again asked how she thinks children learn to write. Bailey said, "I think by watching, by seeing someone model, by having experiences and learning how to put it on paper."

During her first interview Bailey was asked to describe her most successful or rewarding teaching experience in writing, Bailey shared the following:

I guess it would be last year when one of my little girls, her mom got cancer and she was able to write her a letter about how she felt, you know telling her mom she was

scared and she wished she would get better. But she really learned to write, and she wrote her mom that letter, and I was crying, and I was helping her write. But, I mean, I guess that would have to be it. Like that's her way to express her feelings of her mom's cancer was her writing and she used that writing. That would have to be it.

When asked during her second interview to describe one of her most successful or personally rewarding teaching experience in writing so far this school year, Bailey said, "I have one that is hearing sounds and she did not know any letters or sounds and now she is hearing sounds, and she is amazing." "Hearing sounds" refers to a student saying words slowly, or stretching out words and being able to hear the individual sounds in the words. Bailey added, "I can read her writing. She wrote a sentence, and I can read it just by her sounds. So yes, that was mine this year."

**Chloe.** When Chloe was asked how she became a kindergarten teacher she shared the following story:

My mom always said, "Don't be a kindergarten teacher!" So, I was going to be a lawyer, and she always, she was a teacher for many years, she retired this year, and she said, "Don't be a teacher! We don't make enough money." So she always discouraged me to be a teacher, however, I think watching her and seeing what a great teacher she was, it just really, that it really rubs off on me. That made me want to be a great teacher and I started teaching about 14 years ago.

During her first interview Chloe was asked how she thought children learn to write. Chloe said, "I think by modeling, seeing the teacher model writing." Chloe added, "I really believe in modeling for the kids as much as you can and giving them that exposure and that interest in it and writing, it creates motivation for them." When asked during her second

interview how she thinks children learn to write, Chloe said, “I feel like students learn how to write from a lot of modeling, from being exposed to a lot of modeling, letters and sounds and interactive writing.”

When asked about her most successful or rewarding teaching experience in writing, Chloe shared this story:

You’re going to laugh, and I don’t know why. I don’t know why she said this. I think of this and it is hilarious that I was just helping her. I was conferencing with a student and we were writing. And she was getting it, and she turned to look at me and she goes, “You’re better than God.” “What?” I said, “What? You think I’m better than God? I could never be better than God.” Well, to this day I don’t know what made her say that. I just think she was so proud of herself and so she wanted to let me know how wonderful she thought it was because she can write and that I did a good job teaching. So, yeah, we had a talk about that, but that was like, that was like the highest compliment anyone ever gave me but I do not deserve that high of a compliment. So we talked about it.

During her second interview Chloe was asked to describe one of her most successful or personally rewarding teaching experience in writing so far this school year. Chloe said, “I think seeing the growth of one of my students, and she was very reluctant to write. And now I just noticed like today she just wrote a letter to her family, her cousin.” Chloe added, “Just seeing that growth, it just feels like while, because I didn’t help her today, and she just did it. So, I, just seeing that growth from where they used to be to where they are; that is rewarding....” She concluded by saying “I’d tell them ‘you know what, something happens, because like magic, when you come back from Thanksgiving you are going to be so much smarter,’ and, it’s happened. They have grown so much.”

**Danielle.** Danielle was asked how she became a kindergarten teacher. She said, “This is my 13<sup>th</sup> year to teach, 11<sup>th</sup> year to teach kindergarten. And I actually went through the alternative certification program.” She added, “I had a background majoring in psychology, so I still wanted to work with kids. And then I ended up in Corpus because of my husband’s job.”

During her first interview Danielle was asked how she thinks children learn to write. She said “I think they learn how to write by seeing somebody else do it and model it for them.” Danielle added, “I think that they have to. For some of these babies, they have to be shown that they can be writers because they do not feel that they are, or they don’t believe that they are.” Danielle concluded by saying, “I think they don’t feel confident in themselves and so a lot of it is building their confidence.” During her second interview Danielle was asked how she thinks children learn to write. Danielle said, “I feel they learn how to write through observing others, observing their moms and dads and seeing what sort of writing others are doing first and then obviously through experience in the classroom.”

Danielle was asked to describe her most successful or rewarding teaching experience in writing. Danielle described a little boy who struggles a lot in writing and had an opportunity for some extra one-on-one time and as a result, “he had written a complete sentence.” She added, “I praised him. I was very, very proud of him.”

During her second interview Danielle was asked to describe one of her most successful or personally rewarding teaching experience in writing so far this school year. Danielle shared the following story:

Well, I had a student from last year come visit me. He had a note that he had written and a card he wanted to show me. And how he thought I was the best teacher and he had a little gift for me. And he had written his little note to me. So, that made me feel good, like

I did a good job and now he can do things like that and write a note to his last year's teacher. He was one of my higher kids, but still he had also written a thank you letter and it was very detailed. And that made me feel good and he brought it to me. And just seeing that progress and that he makes a connection with writing not just during writing instruction time but just in writing and thanking his teacher from last year and things like that.

**Ellie.** When Ellie was asked during her first interview how she became a kindergarten teacher, she explained that being around children is something that she had always wanted.

I've always grown up with the want to be around little kids. I've always liked teaching. I've always thought it was fun. I have babysat since I was young and then right after school my parents told me I needed to get a job to pay for, you know, like my phone, my car, and just naturally went to a daycare. And then, I went into teaching school and it kind of just, it gradually happened because I always just gravitated toward that. But I didn't have any teachers in my background. So that was kind of different because I didn't have anybody to follow into that. I just knew that I liked being around kids. So it kind of just happened like that.

During her first interview Ellie was asked how she thinks children learn to write. In her response she referred to "repetition" and "modeling."

Just a lot of repetition and ... I think writing is just one of the hardest things to do, even for me to teach. But I think that repetition is probably the best thing and showing by example and modeling and trying to have the kids connect that reading and writing is the same and if they can sound a word out they can write it and if they practice the strokes.

During her second interview when she was asked how she thinks children learn to write, Ellie stated, “By practice and samples and just being exposed to it and continually doing it.”

Ellie was asked to describe her most successful or rewarding teaching experience in writing.

I cannot remember who it was but I think it was when I was teaching kindergarten. There was a kid, who, it was my first or second year in teaching kindergarten too, and he'd really struggled all year long and he finally was getting it. I remember he finally started to get his letters and sounds and he was able to label things. It's really cool when you see a kid go from not knowing how to hold a pencil to even if it takes until March and then you see him or her being able to do this and they don't need a linking chart anymore, they don't need the word wall anymore and they are able to figure some things out. And even though it's not a perfect sentence, you can read it and you can see their little letters all smashed together. There's no spacing, but you can still see their thoughts. You can read it, and you can understand it, even if the parents say, “That's not a sentence.” You can tell them “Well, yes it is,” and you can read it to them. And then, they will know that it is a sentence. “Your child can write sentences, can write a sentence.” That's pretty cool.

During her second interview Ellie was asked to describe one of her most successful or personally rewarding teaching experience in writing so far this school year. Ellie shared the following story:

I have a girl this year that was getting really frustrated with writing. And she came in not knowing anything, but she is already like improved a lot, but she started crying. I was asking her when I was working with her one day, I was conferencing with her, and I asked her “what sound” and I don't know what she was saying and she did not know

what it was so...and I knew she knew the letters and sounds because when I tested her she knows her letters and sounds. So we got the linking chart out and I showed her, I explained to her how to do it but she was crying. So I calmed her down and then I had her do the next letter and she used the linking chart and I was looking over her shoulder and I said "Oh yeah!" and I praised her "Yes, good job!" And she just got a really big smile on her face and she realized "I can do it" and she has been doing so much better in writing since then. So that was pretty cool because that happened this year and I remember that but she hasn't gotten frustrated since then and she has not cried since that day.

### **Focus Topics and Themes**

For the study, the primary sources of data were two interviews of five teacher participants along with classroom observations. Interviews were conducted that focused on individual student writing conferences and writing instruction in the kindergarten classroom. Each interview was recorded on a portable tape recorder and then transcribed. Observations were conducted during large group writing instruction in the classroom as well as while each teacher conducted individual student writing conferences. The transcribed interviews and observation notes were analyzed through narrative data analysis and interpretation (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The steps the researcher took while conducting narrative analysis and interpretation of the collected data were as follows: determining focus topics, examining interview question responses and observation notes, identifying emerging themes related to each focus topic, and coding key narrative phrases, sentences, and passages related to each emerging theme (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The first step in the analysis process was to examine the data and determine focus topics related to the research questions guiding the study (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The researcher examined how the teacher participants responded to interview questions related to

each focus topic (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The collected data was then coded by reoccurring themes or categories that emerged (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The researcher coded key narrative phrases, sentences, and passages related to each theme and then related the coding to each focus topic. The themes related to each focus topic were organized into a table. Table 4.1 shows the organization of the research questions, how the focus topics related to each research question, and the emerged themes related to each focus topic. The focus topics, the reoccurring themes related to the focus topics, and the significant pieces of data related to the reoccurring themes are all discussed in the upcoming sections of this chapter. All teacher interviews can be found in Appendices B–F.

**Table 4.1**

*Research Questions, Focus Topics and Themes*

Research Questions	Focus Topics	Themes
1 How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?	-Individual student writing conferences -Writing strategies	<i>-Social interaction</i> <i>-Effective learning environment</i>
2 How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?	-Student writing behaviors	<i>-Student writing abilities</i> <i>-Student progress toward independent writing</i>
3 How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?	-Student motivation	<i>-Motivation through praise</i>
4 What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?	-Personal feelings about writing	<i>-Teacher efficacy</i>

## **First Research Question**

What follows in this section is a discussion related to the first research question: How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write? The first step the researcher took while analyzing the data for the study was determining focus topics (See Table 4.1). Each of the focus topics was related to one of the research questions guiding the study. The focus topics related to the first research question were individual student writing conferences and writing strategies. The interview questions and the teacher responses to these questions that were connected to these two focus topics related to individual student writing conferences and the writing instruction strategies used in the kindergarten classroom. The researcher determined themes that emerged from the data related to each focus topic (See Table 4.1). The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of individual student writing conferences was *social interaction*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of writing instruction strategies was *effective learning environment*. The teacher responses to the interview questions related to the themes of *social interaction* and *effective learning environment* will now be discussed. This discussion will be organized by themes.

### **Theme One: Social Interaction**

The first theme related to the focus topic of individual student writing conferences was *social interaction*. In the context of the study, the theme of *social interaction* is defined as the interaction that takes place between a teacher and a student while the teacher is individually instructing that student in writing. This *social interaction* includes a teacher basing their instruction on the needs of the individual student during the interaction. Each teacher described conversations they have had with their students and the skills they worked on during the one-on-

one conferences. The theme of one-on-one *social interaction* while being instructed was evident in each teacher's description. Amanda described what happens during a typical individual student writing conference.

We would talk about what they're writing that day. I would pick one thing to work on, like their spacing or their stretching out a word or adding a new word... So I would pick one thing this early on to work on and not which is hard.

The theme of *social interaction* was evident in Amanda's description of a typical individual student writing conference as she mentioned talking with her students about their writing and working with them individually on one skill. The theme of one-on-one *social interaction* was evident during her second interview five weeks later as well. Amanda described interacting with her students on a one-on-one basis while providing them the instruction they need individually. Amanda focuses on one teaching point during each one-on-one conference. She has her students tell her about their writing and then she decides "on a teaching point depending on where they are at that point."

Bailey described one of her typical individual writing conferences as a time when she provides her students instruction based on their individual needs.

I usually start out asking what they're writing about and then, depending upon where their needs are ... I talk to them about "write what you know" and "move on," maybe using the linking chart in their writing. It depends on what their needs are.

Bailey instructs her students one-on-one during writing conferences giving each student one-on-one verbal interaction while being instructed. Bailey stressed as Amanda did that she conferences with her students on skills based on their needs. Bailey also interacts with her students on a one-on-one basis while providing them the instruction they need individually.

Chloe described her individual student writing conferences as a time when she works on one skill with each student.

I start out by asking them what they are writing about and then I try to find something to compliment them on before I start working with them. I find a skill that they need to work on and we work on it together.

Just like Amanda and Bailey, Chloe instructs her students one-on-one during writing conferences giving each student one-on-one verbal interaction while being instructed.

Danielle described a typical individual student writing conference as a time when she might encourage a student to decide upon a topic for writing.

I would have them tell me about their piece that they are writing. I would ask them to tell me what they're writing about. I do that if they have started, but if they are struggling to get started on paper I would try to encourage them to get started and to decide what they want to write about.

Danielle has her students tell her about their writing. If they are having a hard time getting started with their writing, she assists them in choosing a topic.

Ellie described a typical individual student writing conference as a time when she tries to encourage her students to do more by instructing each student at their level.

Depending upon the kid, I get to them at their level; just try to get them to do more. Like if they are able to, I will talk about spacing or capitalizing or punctuation or hearing the correct sounds. If they are lower, I will talk to them about labeling or writing a sentence with just the beginning sounds, "What sound do you hear first in each word?" "How many words are you writing?" I usually start out by asking them "What are you writing today?" I give them a compliment and I choose one skill at their level to work on.

The theme of one-on-one *social interaction* was evident as Ellie described how she engages with each student during each writing conference. Ellie provides instruction through one-on-one *social interaction* while working on individualized teaching points for which each student is ready. Ellie interacted with her students on a one-on-one basis while providing them the instruction they are in need of individually.

As all five of the teacher participants in the study described their individual writing conferences, one-on-one *social interaction* while instructing their students was evident. During their individual writing conferences, they instructed their students on writing skills that each student was ready to learn. During each of the teacher participant's classroom observations, *social interaction* while instructing their students was evident through the act of individual writing conferences. The researcher observed each of the five teacher participants verbally instructing their students one-on-one and providing each student they instructed with *social interaction* in the form of one-on-one individual writing conferences. Vygotsky (1978) believed social interaction to be an important part of learning. In order for learning to take place, instruction must first occur through social interaction before it can later become internalized and individualized (Vygotsky, 1978). The first steps to learning a new concept occur around other people and then later become individualized by the learner. During individual student writing conferences, each student receives one-on-one *social interaction* with an adult while receiving one-on-one instruction in writing. As children interact with others during their writing instruction, meaning is constructed about the writing process and when receiving one-on-one instruction, the meaning constructed is even stronger and more powerful. Each of these teacher participants is providing meaningful instruction in writing to each of their students when they are carrying out their individual writing conferences.

## **Theme Two: Effective Learning Environment**

The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of writing instruction strategies was *effective learning environment*. In the context of the study, the theme of *effective learning environment* is defined as an environment that encourages students to complete given tasks and allows for student concentration and motivation to work independently. An *effective learning environment* also provides the necessary support students need to be successful. The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as each teacher described the writing instruction time in her classroom.

Amanda described her writing instruction time as a quiet time when students have plenty of space to work.

Soft music, everyone has their writing folder, sometimes you might see all the boys sitting at their tables and all the girls on the carpet or vice versa or other days just random choosing to lessen the amount of students at the tables. So I let them choose a quiet place.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Amanda described her writing time as a quiet time with soft music. Amanda tries to situate her students in a manner in order to create little noise and distraction potential. When she lets her students choose a place, they must choose a quiet place. Amanda provides her students an *effective learning environment* for writing by expecting her students to work quietly during their writing time. It is evident by Amanda's response that a quiet *effective learning environment* is major consideration during her writing instruction time.

Bailey also described her writing instruction time as a quiet time when all students are busy and she conferences with students.

We usually have the lights dim, it is quiet. There's usually music on and the students are working at their individual seats at their desks usually and I'm usually moving around the room table to table working with one student conferencing.

When asked to describe how writing instruction looks in her classroom on a typical day, Bailey described her writing time as a quiet time with music playing, “the students are working at their individual seats” and Bailey is “usually moving around the room table to table working with one student conferencing.” A quiet *effective learning environment* where everyone is working seems to be an important aspect of Bailey’s writing instruction time.

I start off with a model for them, some sort of a story. I will do a model lesson. I will usually write about my family or something that has to do with me, something that relates to me. So, for instance, I will write about that my daughter was sick today. I will focus on one thing, like spacing. So I will talk out loud while writing about how I leave spaces between my words … Sometimes it is more guided and I will tell them “I want you to write about this today.” For instance, “We’re going to write about what you see. You see things all around.” And they can add their own ideas. So it will be a little bit more structured so they will have an idea of what to start writing and a model of what to write. If we write together what they should write, then we talk about the words on the word wall they can use in their sentences. I can even hang up a sentence starter, “I see blank,” on the word wall and they will fill in the blank as they write and have the pattern of writing to start with and a model to follow.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Chloe said she starts off with some sort of modeling and focuses on one skill at a time such as spacing. Chloe said sometimes she gives them a sentence starter, or a model of writing, just to get them started writing and she

displays the words in the sentence starter on the word wall. This gives them an opportunity to have modeling of something available to get them started writing and they are still able to put in their own ideas as they fill in the blank of the sentence starter. Chloe said, “They can add their own ideas so it will be a little bit more structured so they will have an idea of what to start writing and a model of what to write.” Chloe provides her students an *effective learning environment* by providing modeling of what is expected in writing.

During Danielle’s interview, when asked to describe how writing instruction looks in her classroom on a typical day, the theme of *effective learning environment* once again was evident. Danielle said she does modeling for the class as they provide input of what to write.

It may just be me writing something or shared writing, maybe making a list of something like that. We would be doing something where they came up with ideas like of who the community helpers are. So we would come up with ideas together and we would write those down together... So we do a short little mini lesson. I model writing for them and we go over the procedures of what they are supposed to do when I send them off to write on their own.

Danielle models writing with her students in a large group before sending them off to write on their own.

During Ellie’s interview when asked to describe how writing instruction looks in her classroom she describes how she stretches words out with her students and how they work on sight words together.

I would usually do a lesson with them on the board and I will talk about my weekend or something I did the night before and I will write about it. I’ll have the kids come up and

help me stretching the words out and putting down the letters to the sounds that they hear.

Then I might focus on a sight word. Maybe write about it on my board.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Ellie described how she models writing for her students by writing about something in front of her students, and she even has her students help model writing with her.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was also evident as the teachers described how their students would describe writing instruction in their classroom. When asked during her first interview how her students would describe the writing instruction time in her classroom, this is what Amanda said.

It has to be a quiet time because I repeat that all the time. “Writing time is quiet time.”

They definitely know that writing time is quiet and the music is soft. If you finish a story you can start a new one. I’m still working on a handful of those that way and if we’re quiet we can pick a quiet place on the carpet or at our table.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident once again as Amanda explained how she believes her students would describe writing instruction time in her classroom. Amanda feels when her students describe the writing instruction time that the word “quiet” would be part of their description. When asked during her first interview how she thinks her students would describe the writing instruction time in her classroom, Amanda said they would say that it is a quiet time. They would say, “It has to be a quiet time” and, “They definitely know that writing time is quiet and the music is soft.” She also said her students would say, “If we’re quiet we can pick a quiet place.” During her second interview, Amanda was asked how her students would describe the writing instruction time in her classroom.

We get our folders, it is a quiet time, the teacher puts music on, we line up at her your table and we ask questions. There's something on the easel. The main thing they would remember is that there's music on and it is a quiet time. **It's really quiet and** they would remember that I always say writing is a quiet time.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident once again when Danielle described the writing time in her classroom.

I hope that they have fun while they're learning and enjoy doing activities that are hands-on. I know that I try to keep the routine pretty much the same everyday so that they know what to expect. If there's a change, I kind of make sure that they are aware of it ahead of time so that they're; you know I just know how kids are with routines.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Danielle described her writing time as fun and routine. It is apparent that Danielle believes a quiet *effective learning environment* is best during independent writing time. In addition, it was apparent that Danielle believes the same daily routine to be best for learning. She also feels fun is also important.

Danielle was once again asked during her second interview to describe the writing instruction time in her classroom.

That it's the quiet time for them to be able to kind of sit and work and to kind of be on their own and use their own ideas and not have, I guess, and not have, I mean, I kind of try to limit the distractions. They especially love the sharing time. I will say that. They really enjoyed that part and I try to incorporate the different affirmations and things like that to make it fun.

Once again, Danielle described her writing time as a quiet time of the day in order for her students to think and come up with ideas for writing without being distracted.

As Ellie described her writing instruction time, the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as she used descriptions such as fun, enjoyable and safe.

I think that they have fun. I think that I am a fun teacher but I also am a strict teacher because I expect them to do certain things that I know that they can do, I know that they are able to do but I also, I just expect, I have rules and I think that they know that there's rules in here but they have fun also. They say they enjoy it and they say that they feel safe with me so that's good.

As Ellie described her writing instruction time is was apparent that she feels learning should be enjoyable and safe. In addition, Ellie feels setting expectations is important in learning.

Ellie was once again asked during her second interview to describe the writing instruction time in her classroom.

They have a level one in their mouth and they are supposed to be concentrating on writing and they are allowed to talk to their friends if they're talking about their story. If they are looking at the sight word wall they can have a friend ask a friend "How would you say this word?" or they would say, "How do you spell this word?" "What is that first sound?" They can get up and go to my writing words. I have some writing words they can go and look at for that month and see if they can spell words that way and they are just working on their stories and they're coloring with detail and they are writing with detail. They did used to think that it is too long but they are getting better with the time. They are able to write a little longer they are doing better they do get restless but they are getting better.

During her second interview the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Ellie described her writing instruction time as a time when her students know they are to be working

quietly. It is evident that Ellie feels during her writing instruction time when students are writing independently and she is conferencing with students individually a quiet *effective learning environment* is best.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in teacher descriptions of the individual student writing conferences. The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Amanda described her writing conferences.

I would pick one thing to work on with the student, like their spacing or their stretching out a word or adding a new word or listening for beginning sounds... So I would pick one thing this early on to work on and not which is hard.

Once again, during Amanda's second interview, the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as she described how she works with her students during her one-on-one conferencing.

During her second interview when asked to describe a typical individual student writing conference, Amanda stated, "I decide on a teaching point depending on where they are at that point." Amanda focuses on one teaching point to work on during a conference and that one teaching point is based on student needs as shown in their writing at that very moment.

During Bailey's first and second interview the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as she described her individual student conferences. During her first interview, Bailey described how she works with each student at his or her level.

I usually start out asking what they're writing about and then, depending upon where their needs are, sometimes some of them will have trouble thinking of an idea. Other students may be having trouble stretching a word they're stuck on it, so I talk to them about "write what you know," and "move on," maybe using the linking chart in their

writing. It depends on what their needs are. We work on spacing, keep spacing between the words, spacing while they're writing.

During her second interview Bailey described the various skills she works on with some of her students.

Most of them are working on stretching words and maybe writing a sentence. Some of them I am still working on drawing a picture because they don't know any sounds yet so they that cannot hear the sounds to stretch words and then I have some that are almost writing complete sentences with periods and putting spaces so we are working on adding details and what else can you tell me.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in Bailey's description as she described how she starts out her conferences by "asking what they're writing about, then, depending upon where their needs are" she decides what to work on with that particular student. Bailey stated, "Sometimes some of them will have trouble thinking of an idea. Others may be having trouble stretching a word." She said she would discuss with students what they are stuck on with their writing, such as the spelling of a word, and she will tell them "write what you know and move on." She reminds them of the tools they have such as their linking chart of letters and pictures that start with each letter along with the word wall. Like Amanda, Bailey stressed she conferences with her students on skills based on their needs. If a student needs help with spacing between words then she would work on that skill with that student.

When asked to discuss her conferences during her second interview, Bailey said that currently some of the areas she is working on with her students include writing a complete sentence, stretching out words, drawing a picture that tells something, hearing and recording

sounds, knowing what sounds letters make, hearing beginning sounds, using spaces between words, and adding details to their writing or pictures.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in Chloe's description of her individual student writing conferences.

I go to my student and I ask them what they are writing about today and they'll tell me and then I say "aw, that's great" and I'll look for things that they might need to work on and they will start over and I'll work with them and help them meet some of the needs of where they are in writing and what they need to work on.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Chloe mentioned she looks for things her students need to work on during their one-on-one writing conferences. She stated, "I'll work with them and help them meet some of the needs of where they are in writing and what they need to work on." Chloe was asked once again during her second interview to describe a typical individual student writing conference.

I start out by asking them what they are writing about and then I try to find something to compliment them on before I start working with them. I find a skill that they need to work on and we work on it together.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident once again as Chloe stressed she determines a skill that each individual student needs to work on during their one-on-one writing conferences.

During Danielle's first and second interview, the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as she discussed how she determines the content of each individual writing conference based on each student's needs at that exact time. Danielle responded during her first interview when asked to describe a typical individual student writing conference.

I would first make sure I understand what they are trying to write and see if there is anything that I can work with them to correct, maybe that they have spelled incorrectly or discuss with them what could we do to make it look better. Like today, I had one girl, she had, I am working with the paper that has one box with two lines and she had written "I like" on the first line and "I like" again on the second line. So we read it together and I said "Does that make sense? Does that explain what it is that you like?" She said "No." I said "OK, so what it is that you like?" She said "I like trick or treating." So I worked with her and we just fixed it. So a lot of it right now is kind of fixing their writing and she had good spaces so I complemented her on that and I pointed out what she was doing. So a lot of it is just fixing what we can do to fix it or to make it look better.

Danielle bases the content of her conferences on what is needed in each student's writing at that exact moment.

Danielle responded once again during her second interview when asked to describe a typical individual student writing conference.

I would have them tell me about their piece that they are writing. I would ask them to tell me what their writing about.... If they are struggling to get started on paper I would try to encourage them to get started and to decide what they want to write about....The lower students would write maybe the label, maybe label one thing, so I'd say tell me more about that one thing. "What else can you label?" "What else can you tell me?" "What else do you see?" "What else are you going to draw?" The higher students, I will let them read their sentence and talk about it and tell them "OK, what else can you tell me?" or "What else happened? Tell me more. Tell me more." "What else could you write?" and then depending if I see something that's, that they need. Let's say they wrote a sentence

down and there's no spacing then I might say, "OK, let's look at this and let's read it together," and we'll read it together and then "Is there anything we can do to fix it?" "Is there anything that needs to be fixed?" So I work on expanding on what they have already written and then maybe fixing something that needs to be fixed.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Ellie described her individual student writing conferences during her first interview.

Depending upon the kid, I get to them at their level; just try to get them to do more. Like if they are able to, I will talk about spacing or capitalizing or punctuation or hearing the correct sounds. If they are lower, I will talk to them about labeling or writing a sentence with just the beginning sounds, "What sound do you hear first in each word?" "How many words are you writing?"

She does her best to "get to them at their level." The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Ellie described how she instructs her students at their level providing them the instruction they need. The instruction Ellie provides during each individual writing conference depends upon the student's specific needs.

During her second interview, the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident once again as Ellie described how she works with each student on what they want to write and the skills they need at that moment to accomplish their goal.

I sit down with them. I have them read what they are writing to me and if they can't read it to me then I say "Well if you can't read it then how am I supposed to read it?" And then we will start over and I will tell them "OK, what do you want to write?" Then they will tell me their sentence that they want to write and then we will go through it one word of the time, sound by sound and we will work through it together. If it is a higher one,

then I have them read it to me and we'll kind of do some editing and extending it then asking them to add some detail to it. So getting it from the kids depending on what level they're at.

As each of these teachers conference with their students, they provide an *effective learning environment* and focus on student needs on an individual basis. They work with students on skills the students are individually ready to learn. When describing skills that need work, the teachers make choices based on each student's writing. The teachers worked with their individual students based on their individual needs and worked on skills that each student was individually ready to be taught and practice with teacher guidance.

When Amanda discussed her struggling students, the theme of *effective learning environment* once again was evident. In her first interview, Amanda was asked about instructing her struggling students.

...just looking at each individual because there's going to be so many different levels; praising the small and you've got to know your kids. You know the ones that keep writing "I see a cat," make sure they're putting the period at the end of "I see a cat." That would be a goal for him versus the other one getting the first letter of his name. So just knowing the levels and what each one needs.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as Amanda described her student needs and how she believes she has to know which of her students need to work on putting periods at the end of their sentences and which ones need to work on the first letter of their name. When asked about her lowest student, Amanda said she is working on fine motor skills such as holding a pencil correctly. She said her lowest student does not recognize letters in his name, has a very hard time holding a pencil or crayon, and scribbles when he writes anything

or draws a picture. She said, “He is convinced that just scribbling something is his name.” He is at the stage in which during their conference, Amanda just lets him tell her the story he is trying to tell and guides him in telling a story that makes sense. Amanda says, “I pretty much have just kind of let him draw until we get that letters belong to names.” Five weeks later when Amanda was asked how she helps one of her most challenging students reach success in writing she said, “Basically I am just working with him on telling a story from his picture.” She also referred to her struggling students during her second interview. “My goal was not even about fixing up writing but more about where do we start writing.” This is one of the areas in which she worked with the struggling student because she felt this is where the student’s need was.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was also evident as Bailey described how she instructs her students that struggle.

I think just getting them excited about writing and motivated to write and then having them write about what they know. I have them write about themselves and encourage them to stretch their words using the linking chart or just working with that and getting them so they can see they can do it. I think once they can see that they can do it, they are more able to write.

With her lower students, Bailey realizes she has to work on getting them interested and motivated to write. She does this by guiding them into making choices of what to write about and by encouraging them to try and eventually they will realize they are capable of writing. Bailey knows their needs are motivation and confidence. During her second interview when asked about her lowest, Bailey said “I am still working on drawing a picture because they don’t know any sounds yet so they that cannot hear the sounds to stretch words.”

Once again during her second interview, Bailey was asked about instructing her lower students.

I think just modeling, modeling and conferencing with them, taking their stories, what they want to say, and helping them to get in on paper, because sometimes if they can just see it once, even if it's with your help, and you're helping them stretch the words and stuff then they're more excited to get another story the next time.

During her second interview when discussing one of her lower students, Bailey brought up a success story.

One was writing. He is smart and he can do it but when he would write he would write words all over the place. He would add in words he didn't need. He would write the same words twice. So we talked about reading his work and so as he's writing, he's reading it and he's going back and he's reading it as he's writing it and it's helped. His sentences are starting to make sense. His stories are starting to make sense where before he was adding in all kinds of stuff.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in Bailey's description of working with this particular student on his individual needs, he was able to progress from writing, "words all over the place" to "his sentences are starting to make sense; his stories are starting to make sense where before he was adding in all kinds of stuff."

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident as teachers responded when asked about working with their more capable students.

Amanda was asked to describe what a typical conference looks like with her highest student.

Adding details, because he's, because I praised him for writing "I see a cat." Right now that's all he'll do and he wants to write a new story "I see a dog" and write a new story "I see a toy" instead of adding to what color is it, what color is the cat, how big is the cat, so yeah adding details... We've got to dig deeper, we've got to make it exciting.

During her first interview, Amanda stated that with her more capable students she focuses on having them add details to their writing, such as describing words. She said she challenges her higher students "...just by adding the details. We've got to dig deeper, we've got to make it exciting." Five weeks later when asked how she has challenged her higher students in writing, Amanda said, "I have challenged them by continuing to encourage them to add details, to change those simple sentences into more complex sentences or even just adding details by adding more sentences." She added, "I am also working with them on spacing when they are writing. We're not even working on capitalization yet, just spacing and adding another sentence."

During Bailey's first interview, she was asked about how she challenges her higher students.

...adding more detail, talking about...talking about their feelings, talking about putting more in their writing than 'I went to the store,' or 'I went home,' or 'the end,' ...having them put more details in their writing.

Once again during Bailey's second interview she was asked about working with her higher students. Bailey said she challenges her higher students "...by having them add more detail, having them write more sentences, having them add in humor or describing words, things that make them sad, writing more emotion and describing words and things like that." The theme of *effective learning environment* emerged as Bailey discussed the necessity of knowing those students that need to work on basic writing skills those that need to work on higher writing skills,

such as adding details and emotions. During her first interview, when asked how she challenges her higher students in writing, Bailey said she expects them to add more details, to write about their feelings and to “put more in their writing then I went to the store, I went home, the end.”

During her second interview when discussing her higher students, Bailey said she challenges her higher students in writing “by having them add more detail, having them write more sentences, having them add in humor or describing words, things that make them sad, writing more emotion and describing words and things like that.”

The theme of *effective learning environment* also emerged as Amanda described her writing instruction strategies. Amanda was asked to describe the writing instruction methods or teaching strategies she uses in her classroom to instruct her students in writing. Amanda stated “Modeling, using books...we have an inspiration tree ...we have seasonal words on it and then we just have some random words that they got to pick out- mall, cat, bike...a lot more books.” Amanda says the class created a chart listing seasonal words or topics. The chart helps if students are having trouble thinking of a topic to write about. As the students created the chart, they have input and feel ownership, which creates more interest in the topics.

The theme of *effective learning environment* once again was evident in Bailey’s response when asked to describe the writing instruction methods or the teaching strategies she uses in her classroom.

Sometimes we use the chart paper and we write a story together. Like today, we went to the pumpkin patch so we wrote everything we did at the pumpkin patch. We wrote the story together. Other times maybe we’re working on spacing and where you use linking cubes to put spaces in between words using the projector so all the students can see.

Other times we're thinking about what we could write about. I'm telling them what I've seen them writing in the past and what I'm looking for. But most of it I think is modeling.

...My students would probably describe it that they usually start out on the carpet and usually we write about something they know about. The students usually get to share. Two to three students usually get to share. They write about experiences they have and they usually know that their thinking of ideas of what they want to write about, what they care about. They know they have to use details. They know they have to use more than one color. They know they have to stretch words.

Bailey said she usually chooses a topic and they do a write aloud together. A write aloud is a teacher modeling writing for students and talking as they write each word. As she is writing, she is modeling, thinking aloud about the writing process, and models spelling words, spacing, and brainstorming what to write. Bailey said most of her instruction in writing is modeling. Bailey provides an *effective learning environment* as she models writing for her students.

During her second interview, Bailey was asked to describe the writing-instruction methods or teaching strategies she uses in her classroom. Bailey stated, "A lot of times I am modeling." She added, "It is a lot of modeling."

The theme of *effective learning environment* once again was evident as Ellie described her writing instruction strategies.

Well I model my own writing, but sometimes I will model some of their things that they are writing that has what I want to see. I will put it on the projector so they can see what other kids did that they are supposed to do, so samples of what other kids did that showed the things we talked about. The other day we did spacing I had them come up and I got four kids because I think the sentence was "the cat can jump" with four words. I smushed

the words together, all four words, all four kids together and then I spread them apart. So I got the kids and I smushed them together, the kids together, and I said “he is the word ‘I,’ he is the word ‘cat,’ he is the word ‘can’ and he is the word ‘jump’” or whatever I said. And then I smushed the words together or the kids physically together and I show them. That was really cool. I have never done that before and I showed them that and then I spread them apart and I said “what is this part in between?” “Like” “If they are spread, out what is the part between them called? That is space. The words need space and the kids need space like that.” I thought that was really cool. The kids really got it with that. It is hard teaching space. Because I would have kids like put a line between words, but what that one the kids did good on spacing between words.

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in Ellie’s response when she said she usually decides on a topic related to one of her own personal experiences and models to her students writing about it. She also has her students assist her in writing by “stretching the words out and putting down the letters to the sounds that they hear.”

When Amanda was asked about how children learn to write, the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in her response. Amanda said she believes children learn to write through “modeling.”

Once again during Amanda’s second interview the theme of *effective learning environment* emerged in relation to how children learn to write. When Amanda was asked to describe her thoughts on how students learn to write she said “through modeling, lots of modeling.”

The theme of *effective learning environment* was evident in each teacher’s description of how she instructs her students in writing. The theme of *effective learning environment* was also

evident during each teacher observation. All five of the teacher participants modeled writing for their students during whole group instruction prior to having their students write independently.

As teacher interview responses related to the focus topic of writing instruction strategies were analyzed, the theme of *effective learning environment* emerged. During the teacher participant interviews the theme of *effective learning environment* was evident through descriptors such as quiet, routine, safe and fun. It was apparent that each teacher considers an *effective learning environment* an important aspect when reflecting on the writing instruction time in their classroom.

### **Second Research Question**

What follows in this section is a discussion related to the second research question: How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students? During the first step of data analysis, the researcher determined the focus topic related to the second research question as student writing behaviors. The themes that emerged related to this focus topic were *student writing abilities* and *student progress toward independence*. The teacher responses to the interview questions related to the focus topic of student writing behaviors and the emerged themes of *student writing abilities* and *student progress toward independent writing* will now be discussed.

### **Theme Three: Student Writing Abilities**

The theme of *student writing abilities* emerged as the researcher examined the responses to the interview question regarding student writing habits and the range of student abilities. For the purpose of the study, *student writing abilities* refers to the various skills students are able to perform when writing. *Student writing abilities* are the skills teachers observe their students performing while observing them in the process of writing and as seen in their previous writing

Each teacher described *student writing abilities* that would fall in the categories of methods of writing, letters and words, phonics, and writing conventions.

Amanda described the writing habits of her students and their instructional needs for writing.

Yes, right now I have a lot that of just copying whatever I write. They write exactly what I write. I don't really discourage that because the ones that are doing that, that's still good practice. They are understanding the structure. Eventually I will have to avoid that and I'll have to kind of hide my samples so they will have to do their own and be a more independent writer.

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident in Amanda's response. She mentioned that some students copy what she writes but they are getting "good practice and are understanding the structure of writing."

During her second interview, just five weeks later, when Amanda was asked how she would describe the writing habits of her students and their instruction needs for writing, the theme of *student writing abilities* once again was evident in her response.

The students are not needing my writing as much as they used to. Some of the ones, they're still copying, that's what they need. They need a little bit of copying just to get them started. That's where they are, the ones that just copy what I wrote that's where they are. The other day we wrote 'an.' We just did the 'an' family and some of them just wrote the 'an' family or just 'an' words because they're not there yet where they can write sounds that they hear. That's exactly what they need. That's where they're at right now.

Amanda described how her students are exhibiting certain writing behaviors because “that’s where they are.” Some copy her modeled writing while others use her modeled writing to create their own piece of writing.

In Amanda’s descriptions of her students’ range of abilities, the theme of *student writing abilities* once again was evident. Amanda was asked to describe the range of abilities of her students.

Well I still have some that can’t even write their names so they’re not writing anything. They’re still drawing very basic drawings. Then I have a few that can take my mini lesson and change one word so if I’ve written “I love the” and I put a blank they can finish it and do two or three stories and that in a day and then everything in between. I have some that are still just copying. I still have some writing right to left, copying the word. So I have a lot of different levels… I do have some that are just scribbling… I do have some that are just doing strings of letters; yes, lots, today I had a lot of strings of letters but we just had a lesson about what is a letter, what is a word, what is a sentence, so I know that they’re at least getting “a big string of letters are in a sentence.” So now I am getting strings of letters but not a whole lot of spacing. That is another lesson.

Amanda described *student writing abilities* as some students “that can’t even write their names so they’re not writing anything,” some students are “still drawing very basic drawings,” some students “that are still just copying,” “some writing right to left,” some students are copying words, some students “that are just scribbling,” “some that are just doing strings of letters’ and “not a whole lot of spacing” between words with any of her students.

During her second interview when asked about the range of abilities of her students, the theme of *student writing abilities* was evident as Amanda mentioned some of her students are writing sentences and some are still scribbling.

I do have some generating long sentences but they're very basic. I do not have any real high writers and I do have one that's still scribbling and can't even tell me what they tried to draw. He has no story and still no writing. So we are working on being able to tell a story from his picture. This student loves writing time though. He loves to draw, that is.

Bailey was asked how she would describe the writing habits of her students and their writing instruction needs along with their range of abilities.

Most of my kids are doing a pretty good job. They're starting to stretch. They're stretching out the words. Their words are starting, you know, they are getting them on paper and we've been working on the road map where they're putting the lines, where they write lines for how many words they're going to write. They're all able to think of stories and they're starting to even, some of the ones that can't stretch the words, some of the ones that can't write, they're getting the picture and at least writing a few sounds.

That's what we're working on now, stretching their words and...Some of them are stretching words. I have one that, I have a couple that are basically just drawing the pictures and do not know any sounds yet. I have one, he can write one letter, the "a" in his name. But then the other students will get almost every sound and they are stretching and then are actually writing sentences. So there is a wide range, but most of them are stretching and starting to hear some sounds. They're not hearing every sound in every word, but they are at least hear the beginning sound.

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident in Bailey's response. She mentioned students stretching out words, drawing pictures, students not knowing any sounds, some students knowing some sounds, some knowing all their sounds and some being able to think of stories.

Bailey said, "Most of them are stretching and starting to hear some sounds. They're not hearing every sound in every word but they are at least hear the beginning sound." She also said, "I have a couple that are basically just drawing the pictures and do not know any sounds yet."

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident throughout Bailey's descriptions of her students' writing habits and range of abilities.

During her second interview, Bailey was once again asked how she would describe the writing habits of her students and what their instructional needs are for writing along with their range of writing abilities.

Most of them are able to think about a story and they are stretching words. Most of them are able to write; at least some of them are able to stretch words. Most of them are able to write a sentence. But then I have some that can draw a picture that don't know any sounds yet so they that cannot hear the sounds to stretch words and then I have some that are almost writing complete sentences with periods and putting spaces...I have some that are still only able to draw a picture and some writing sentences and then everything in between.

In her response once again the theme of *student writing abilities* was evident. She said, "Most of them are able to think about a story and they are stretching words," and some "are almost writing complete sentences with periods and putting spaces." She added "then I have some that can draw a picture that don't know any sounds yet so they that cannot hear the sounds to stretch words." When asked about the range of abilities of her students, Bailey said, "I have some that are still

only able to draw a picture and some writing sentences and then everything in between.”

As the researcher examined Chloe’s response to interview questions related to the writing habits of her students and their range of writing abilities, the theme of *student writing abilities* continually was evident.

I feel like right now it’s the transition phase. Now they’re realizing that print carries a message and now they’re starting to figure that, they’re trying to actually form sentences and things like that. So it’s been like a big ‘aha’ for them and I feel like that right now we’re really working on adding spaces to our words because like right now a lot of them are just doing letter blocks or blocks of letters and stretching and just getting in those first letters. I’m noticing that we really need to work on spacing. So I am focusing on spacing. I have some with the ability where one is writing paragraphs and then I have some where their writing skills are beginning writing, still in the beginning writing, that there in the novice stage in the beginning stages of writing. So they’re kind of a little, they’re still I would say in basic in the writing ability... Some are forming sentences and some of the ones writing sentences are leaving space between their words, some are not. A few are adding spaces between their sounds which are just beginning sounds. Most are writing beginning sounds and one is writing paragraphs and one that just writes random letters.

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident in Chloe’s response as she said, “Some are forming sentences and some of the ones writing sentences are leaving space between their words, some are not.” She added “A few are adding spaces between their sounds which are just beginning sounds most are writing beginning sounds and one is writing paragraphs and I have one that just writes random letters.” During her first interview, the theme of *student writing abilities* once again emerged when Chloe was asked how she would describe the writing habits

of her students and their instructional writing needs. Chloe said, “They’re realizing that print carries a message and … they’re trying to actually form sentences.” She added, “Right now we’re really working on adding spaces to our words because like right now a lot of them are just doing letter blocks or blocks of letters and stretching and just getting in those first letters.” She added that one of her students is writing paragraphs while others are still “in the beginning stages of writing.”

Within her second interview response, the theme of *student writing abilities* once again was evident when asked about her students’ writing habits and range of writing abilities.

Right now we are focusing on writing, the many writing possibilities for writing. So they are learning about writing letters, lists, and also just writing about their events. It is really interesting to see the ones that will write about what you were teaching and then sometimes they choose to write something different about something that is important to them. Like a little boy, one day had to write about his upcoming birthday party … Right now I do have levels like one of my higher writers, she’s really producing a lot more and she’s using the spaces and other writing skills we have. Then I have some of my lower ones that, the ones still that aren’t producing, maybe they’re just writing a string of letters and so there still kind of in their basic stage where my higher student is pretty much level four a number which is the highest..

When Chloe was asked about the range of abilities of her students, she said, “One of my higher writers she’s really producing a lot,” and “then I have some of my lower ones that still, that aren’t producing. Maybe they’re just writing a string of letters and so there still kind of in their basic stage.” When Chloe was asked how she would describe the writing habits of her students and what their instructional needs are for writing Chloe said, “They are learning about

writing letters, lists, and also just writing about their events.” She also said, “It is really interesting to see the ones that will write about what you were teaching and then sometimes they choose to write something different about something that is important to them.” She added, “A little boy one day had to write about his upcoming birthday party.”

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident as Danielle responded when asked how she would describe the writing habits of her students and their writing needs.

Right now, I know that a lot of them are still writing in all capitals because that’s just kind of what they know to write right now. And I have tried to, you know, like today our goal was capital letters at the beginning and spacing. Spacing is a big one too. And I have seen a lot of improvement over the last few weeks with that … A lot of them are still writing in all capital letters and I have a few that are still just drawing. I sometimes give them a writing prompt and usually it’s just words with eight words that we are working on. Right now, I am just trying to get them to write one sentence. And I do have some that are writing sentences. I have a few that are writing on their own and do not need any sort of visual prompts or anything like that from me. And for them, their need is punctuation and all of them are still phonetically spelling words and we are working on that, stretching the word out, and that is what I’m mostly work on with them when I conference with them and help them out with what they need.

Danielle mentioned students writing in all capital letters, not using spacing and just drawing rather than writing. She also mentioned some students writing sentences from prompts and others writing sentences independently without the use of a prompt. Danielle brought up other various *student writing abilities* such as not using correct punctuation and spelling words phonetically.

During Danielle's second interview when asked about the writing habits of her students and her students' needs for writing, the theme of *student writing abilities* was evident in her response.

I still have some that are struggling to write. Most of them actually can write their names completely with a few letters here and there. A lot of them are just, I feel like if I can model or give maybe a sentence starter maybe for some of those that it really helps them because I try to tie in sight words and words they would already know because I think that they are wanting, they are still so dependent upon me on how to spell things. They want to spell things correctly and I'm trying to teach them. It's okay to be stretching out and put down what you hear. Some of them are still writing a lot of capitals, just some of them, and most need work on spacing. Even some of the better writers still need to work on spacing ... So some are still just writing strings of letters, no words, and beginning to tell a story from their picture and some are attempting or writing complete sentences.

Once again the theme of *student writing abilities* was evident. Danielle described some of her students' abilities as "struggling to write," dependent on her to spell words because "they want to spell things correctly," "still writing a lot of capitals," "just writing strings of letters, no words," "beginning to tell a story from their picture" and "attempting or writing complete sentences." Danielle also described most of her *student's writing abilities* as being able to write their name correctly, being able to write from a prompt or "a sentence starter," and most needing to work on spacing between words.

The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident in Ellie's response as she described the writing habits of her students and their instructional writing needs.

They are just, they are getting the thought out but it's not, it doesn't sound correctly when they read it back. So we are working on that with kiddos. I am trying to say 'OK, do we write it, do we say it like that?' and trying to have them read it when they write it. My younger, my little ones, I am trying to get them practicing with their sounds and matching the letters to the sounds that they write and hearing when they are stretching it out and putting the right sounds down. So that's what they're doing ... Brand new beginning to kids who have picked it up wonderfully and they're doing really good. I've got kiddos all, like on all spectrums. I have kids that cannot write at all and so will put just letter strings or strands down and then kids that are trying to now, they can put their first sound but they're not writing as like when we speak ... I don't have any that are writing complete sentences yet but we are working on spacing like with my highest group we are working on spacing and we're working on making sure we have a capital and making sure that it sounds correct ... I know they are all pretty much at least writing letter strings now.

Ellie said, "I've got kiddos all, like on all spectrums...kids that cannot write at all and so will put just letter strings or strands down and then kids that are trying to... put their first sound." She added, "They're not writing as like when we speak." Instead, she said, "they are getting the thought out but it's not, it doesn't sound correctly when they read it back." She feels her students are not writing in complete sentences. Therefore, she works on having her students write what they want to write by telling them to write exactly as they would say it. This is something that was observed by the researcher during the classroom observation in Ellie's classroom during her writing instruction. Ellie also mentioned with her less capable writers she is "trying to get them practicing with their sounds and matching the letters to the sounds that they write and hearing

when they are stretching it out and putting the right sounds down." She also stated, "I have kids that cannot write at all and so will put just letter strings or strands down and then kids that are trying to now they can put their first sound but they're not writing as like when we speak." Once again, the theme of *student writing abilities* was evident as Ellie stated, "I don't have any that are writing complete sentences yet but we are working on spacing ... and we're working on making sure we have a capital and making sure that it sounds correct."

Once again, in Ellie's response during her second interview when asked about students' writing habits and their writing instruction needs theme of *student writing abilities* was evident.

Well at least everyone is doing letter strands but some are putting sentences together. I have kids that are able to sound everything out. Some they can get their thoughts down but not write complete thoughts so we're trying to make sure it makes sense. Everyone seems to be progressing ... My higher kids are working on using capital letters in the correct spots and lowercase letters everywhere else. Like I said earlier, some are getting their thoughts down but they are not writing complete thoughts so it's not making sense. We're trying to make sure it makes sense. What they write maybe makes sense but it's not how they talk. I am trying to get them you know how they say it that's what, that's how you would write it. I'm telling them "Write it the way you would say it, the exact way you would say it. Write the words that come out of your mouth, the exact words that come out of your mouth." Because they have their idea in there and they know what they want to say but when they are writing it ... it gets, you know, it's hard. I am also working on periods with them. With my lower kids I'm trying to get them to just hear, basically hearing the main sounds, where they can hear the main sounds and trying to get like CVC words and things like that with them. But everyone, as long as I am working with them,

even my lowest students are able to start writing CVC words. That's good so they're getting their letters and sounds and we're still working on word wall words and the linking chart with the kids, the linking chart with the lower ones. Every one they are improving, they have improved quite a bit. I'm glad. I hope it keeps up.

Ellie described the writing habits and instructional writing needs of her students. She said her students range from some "doing letter strands" to others "putting sentences together." She added she has "kids that are able to sound everything out" and some that are getting their thoughts down on paper but they are not making sense when the sentences are read later. She concluded by saying, "Everyone seems to be progressing." The theme of *student writing abilities* was evident as Ellie described the range of abilities of her students and she said, "My higher kids are working on using capital letters in the correct spots and lowercase letters everywhere else." She also said, "Some are getting their thoughts down but they are not writing complete thoughts so it's not making sense. We're trying to make sure it makes sense." Ellie said they are not writing complete sentences because they are not writing the exact way they would say it aloud. She added, "With my lower kids I'm trying to get them ... basically hearing the main sounds." She concluded by saying, all of her students "Have improved quite a bit. I'm glad I hope it keeps up."

When asked about student writing habits and writing abilities, each teacher participant mentioned or described various *student writing abilities* they felt were important to note when determining student abilities.

#### **Theme Four: Student Progress toward Independent Writing**

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* emerged as each teacher was asked about measuring student growth in writing along with end of the year writing goals for

their students. *Student progress toward independent writing* in the context of the study is defined as expectations of student progress consisting of independent writing skills such as complete sentences, correct spacing, capitalization, and punctuation.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in Amanda's response when asked to describe how she measures student growth in writing.

By when we meet with them individually, which is very hard at our level. I can measure growth for each kid, you know, if someone is just stringing letters together but by the next six weeks, they are at least leaving spaces. That is huge for that student versus the one that was writing "I see a cat" as they progress to an independent sentence. So yeah a lot of teacher observation teacher notes.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Amanda mentioned, "You have to think about each kid individually," and "measure growth for each kid." "If someone is just stringing letters together but by the next six weeks they are at least leaving spaces that is huge for that student versus the one that was writing I see a cat as they progress to an independent sentence."

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* once again was evident as Amanda responded when asked about end of the year writing goals for her students. Amanda was asked what her goals are for her students in writing and in which areas she would like to see them progress by the end of the year.

I want them to understand sentence structure, even if it's a very basic sentence. By the end of the year I want them to be able to write a sentence and be an independent thinker. I guess to be able to write on their own, what they want to write about. I'd love to have them know how to write a sentence.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Amanda said she hoped her students would be able to “write a sentence and be an independent thinker” by the end of the year.

During her second interview, Amanda was asked again what her goals were for her students in writing and in which areas she would like to see them progress by the end of the year.

I want them to be confident. I don’t want them to keep saying, “how do you spell that,” “how you spell this.” I don’t want them to be stuck on how you spell words. I really just really just want them to be confident to just write, even invented spelling just to see if they have accomplished writing what they want to write. It drives me crazy when they come to me and say “what did I write right here?” I want them to be able to read their own writing and know what they wrote. “I don’t know what you wrote” is what I say when they ask me “what did I write here?” “If you don’t know, how am I supposed to know what you wrote?” Of course for my lowest student I would love just to have him write his name.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Amanda stated, “I really just really just want them to be confident to just write, even invented spelling just to see if they have accomplished writing what they want to write … I want them to be able to read their own writing and know what they wrote.” Amanda wants her students to have *student progress toward independent writing*, be confident in their writing and their spelling, and to be able to read their own writing.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in Bailey’s response when asked how she measures student growth in writing.

By their samples and by their beginning samples and each six weeks and by what you see them do in your anecdotal notes.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident during Bailey's first interview when she was asked about measuring student growth in writing. Bailey said she measures student growth in writing by the individual *student progress toward independent writing* she observes in her students' individual writing.

Once again during Bailey's second interview, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in Bailey's response when asked how she measures student growth in writing. Bailey said she measures student growth "by conferencing with them and looking at their writing samples and talking with them and looking at their previous work samples from each six weeks and looking back to see the progress they've made." The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* once again was evident as Bailey described how she measures student growth in writing during her second interview. Bailey stated she measures *student progress toward independent writing* by "looking at their writing samples and talking with them and looking at their previous work, a sample from each six weeks, and looking back to see the progress they've made."

As Bailey responded when asked about end of the year writing goals for her students, the theme that was evident was *student progress toward independent writing*. Bailey stated "I think for them all to be able to write a story by the end of the year and for them all to be able to hear sounds and write great stories and think of ideas." The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Bailey stated that she wants her students to be able to "hear sounds and write great stories and think of ideas."

During her second interview, Bailey was once again asked what her goals are for her students in writing and in which areas she would like to see them progress by the end of the year.

My goals for my students are for them to write a story, to be able to stretch all the sounds, or at least most sounds and leave spaces between words and write sentences and tell a story and to, of course, to love writing or like writing

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Bailey said she wants her students to be able to “write a story, to be able to stretch all the sounds or at least most sounds and leave spaces between words and write sentences and tell a story and to of course, to love writing or like writing.”

As Chloe responded when asked about end of the year writing goals for her students, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident.

Well, I want them to be writing as much as they can and I want them to be using their spaces and using their periods and their uppercase letters.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Chloe said she wants her students to be “writing as much as they can and using their spaces and using their periods and their uppercase letters.”

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in Danielle’s response when asked about measuring student growth during her first interview.

Really just by their different pieces that they have in their folders, so by looking at their writing, seeing improvement even when we do like a shared writing piece or an interactive writing piece, even with some of them with their names, even, you know, I have seen such a big improvement with that from the beginning of the year. Some of

them struggle so much. So really just looking through their work and even their station work or anything that they have, any writing that they do.

During her first interview when asked about measuring student growth in writing the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Danielle said she measures *student progress toward independent writing* “by their different pieces that they have in their folders, so by looking at their writing, seeing improvement.”

Danielle was once again asked about measuring student growth during her second interview and the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in her response.

I measure growth by looking at their pieces from previous weeks and by comparing how they are writing today or a few days ago and seeing that growth is made that way.

Whether they are putting down a complete sentence compared to before when maybe they’re just writing a word or labeling their picture or something like that. So looking at their previous writing and seeing the changes and the progress that they have made, what they’re doing now and what they were doing before. The rubric that we use to evaluate their writing, I feel like I only use that only when it is time to do the report card. I really don’t use the rubric when I’m thinking about where they are and what they need in writing.

During her second interview, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Danielle stated, “I measure growth by looking at their pieces from previous weeks and by comparing how they are writing today or a few days ago and seeing that growth is made.” She added, “So looking at their previous writing and seeing the changes and the progress that they have made, what they’re doing now they were doing before.”

As Danielle responded when asked about end of the year writing goals for her students, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was once again evident.

As a whole I would want all kids to be able to write a complete sentence with correct spacing, with correct punctuation, and correct letter formation. For my students who are able to, I would hope that they would be able to produce up to three sentences and be able to have a beginning middle and end to their writing.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Danielle said, “I would want all kids to be able to write a complete sentence with correct spacing with correct punctuation correct letter formation.” The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was also evident as she concluded by saying “For my students who are able to I would hope that they would be able to produce up to three sentences and be able to have a beginning middle and end to their writing.”

Danielle was once again asked during her second interview what her goals are for her students and the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in her response.

My ultimate goal would be for every student to write at least two sentences; of course, I would want them to be perfect and have spacing and correct punctuation and capitalization and then everything like that. For some of them if they can at least get one sentence for some of them it’s going to be a struggle just to get a complete thought, one complete sentence down. That would be my ultimate goal, for all of them, for them to get at least one complete thought written down or even two sentences.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Danielle stated, “My ultimate goal would be for every student to write at least two sentences. Of course I would want them to be perfect and have spacing and correct punctuation and capitalization.”

In Ellie’s response when asked about measuring student growth during her first interview the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident.

...observation, just by watching and comparing their, well, we keep that rubric, you know, we mark their levels each six weeks but like physically holding onto papers and looking at them, especially with my lower ones. I will document them a little bit more and keep more of their papers, of their work, to see when they started off and to see the progress they’re making and because I’m pulling them more so I can show their parents growth that way and show them what skill we are working on.

During her first interview when asked about measuring student growth in writing, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Ellie stated she measures growth through “observation, just by watching and comparing.” Ellie measures *student progress toward independent writing* by observing the changes in their writing over time.

During her second interview, Ellie was once again asked how she measures student growth in writing. Ellie’s response was “...just by looking at samples and compare and where they were and what they can do now.” The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was once again evident as Ellie stated that she measures student growth by examining her students’ current writing samples and deciding “where they were and what they can do.”

As Ellie responded when asked about end of the year writing goals for her students, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was once again evident.

I think just writing a complete thought down. For me, I would be happy if every one of my kids could write a complete thought down even if the spelling obviously wasn't correct. I personally, right now, that's why if they are hearing the sounds, to me, well, that's good, that's great because we're taking them from nothing to writing. So if I could get every single student, if they are able to write a complete thought down or maybe even three thoughts down that make sense with some beginning, middle, and end, that would be wonderful. So, if I can get every single student writing at least three thoughts that would be wonderful.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Ellie stated, "I would be happy if every one of my kids could write a complete thought down even if the spelling obviously wasn't correct." Ellie added, "If they are able to write a complete thought down or maybe even three thoughts down that make sense with some beginning, middle, and end. That would be wonderful."

During Ellie's second interview, when asked what her goals are for your students in writing and where she wants them to be in writing by the end of the year, the theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident in Danielle's response.

By the end of the year, I hope that they are writing complete sentences, expanding beginning, middle and end, being able to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end. To me that is pretty good to be doing those things by the end of the year. If they can add details, that would be amazing. So adding details with a beginning, middle, and end, periods, and capitals in the right place, just basically the foundations, I guess.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* was evident as Ellie said, “I hope that they are writing complete sentences,” and “being able to tell a story with a beginning middle and end.”

### **Third Research Question**

What follows in this section is a discussion related to the third research question: How do kindergarten teachers describe their students’ motivation to write? During the first step of data analysis, the researcher determined the focus topic related to the third research question as student motivation. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of student motivation was *motivation through praise*.

### **Theme Five: Motivation through Praise**

As the teacher participant interviews were analyzed, the theme of *motivation through praise* emerged in relation to student writing abilities, conferencing with students, student motivation to write, and teacher strengths in writing instruction. For the purpose of the study, *motivation through praise* refers to students being driven to write because of the praise they receive for their efforts.

Amanda was asked about her students’ writing abilities during her first interview. She stated that some of her students are writing basic phrases that they have written in the past.

Yes, very basic, “I love mommy,” a lot of things that we’ve already done and I’ve written before. A lot of them are doing this because they were successful with that once so they write it every day because they got the praise for that once. So I get a lot of “I love mommy” or “I see a cat” because it’s still on the word wall. So I get a lot of those.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident as Amanda said some of her students get in a pattern of writing the same thing every day because they received praise, “they got the praise for that once.” They seem to be motivated by success and praise.

During Amanda’s first interview she was asked to describe how she conferences with her highest student.

We work on adding details, because he’s, because I praised him for writing “I see a cat.” Right now that’s all he’ll do and he wants to write a new story, “I see a dog” and write a new story, “I see a toy” instead of adding to what color is it, what color is the cat, how big is the cat, so yeah adding details.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident in Amanda’s response as she mentioned a student continuing to write the same thing because he received praise for it in the past.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident as Amanda described her students’ motivation to write. Amanda was asked during her first interview if she thought her students are motivated to write and if they like to write.

At this point of the year there’s such...they’re at mixed levels. Some do love it and I’ve got strugglers that know it’s a chore. The ones that I know love to write are lined up at my table to show me what they’ve written every day so I try to praise them. So it’s a mixed bag, which it will be all year.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident as Amanda said her students line up at her table to receive praise for their writing. Amanda stated “The ones that I know love to write are lined up at my table to show me what they’ve written every day so I try to praise them.”

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident in Bailey’s first interview response when asked if she thought her students are motivated to write and if they like to write.

Most of them are motivated especially if they get to go to the chair. They're sort of, I tell them "you know if you do a really good job, I am going to choose someone to go tell a story or go to the office or to the counselor." They get extra motivated and they like being told they did a good job on their writing.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident in Bailey's response. Bailey said, "They get extra motivated and they like being told they did a good job on their writing."

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident in Danielle's response during her first interview when asked if she thought her students are motivated to write and if they like to write.

I feel like they are motivated to write because they get excited about what they want to share with their stories and they like to share and show the kids what they feel they have accomplished when they have written something. But, yeah they enjoy it because they get to share what they have done and they get praised for their writing by me or by the other students when they share their writing with the class.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident as Danielle said, "they enjoy it because they get to share what they have done and they get praised for their writing by me or by the other students when they share their writing with the class."

During Ellie's second interview the theme of *motivation through praise* emerged as Ellie described her strengths in writing instruction.

This is hard because I'm so critical on myself about teaching writing. I guess I try to break it down for them to make it as easy as possible for them even though sometimes I don't but I try to break it down and when there is a, when there is a kid that's struggling and he or she can finally get something then I really try to praise them and tell them,

“That’s great!” because it’s hard when kids keep getting “No, that’s not right, no that’s not right,” all the time. You know, however it’s worded it hurts their self-esteem. So when they do something amazing and they get it, I feel like I try to make it into real, into a really big deal—that way they can see that they can do it. They are able to do it and keep up with it.

The theme of *motivation through praise* was evident in Ellie’s response as she discussed praising her students for their little accomplishments in writing to increase their self-esteem.

#### **Fourth Research Question**

What follows in this section is a discussion related to the fourth research question: What are kindergarten teachers’ personal feelings about writing? The focus topic determined for this fourth research was personal feelings about writing. The theme that emerged related to this focus topic was *teacher self-efficacy*.

#### **Theme Six: Teacher Self-Efficacy**

In the context of the study, *teacher self-efficacy* refers to a teacher’s belief in her ability to successfully instruct her kindergarten students in writing. The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident in teacher participant responses when asked about their feelings toward writing.

During Amanda’s first interview she was asked to describe how she feels about writing and to describe herself as a writer.

I love to write for all different purposes. I learned that when I wrote notes and could reread them I couldn’t just hear it. I had to write it. I rewrite my grocery list to organize my thoughts. I sort it, like I write my list, and then I sort it according to the grocery store—by what I need first and then the cold stuff last. I don’t think that I’m a good creative writer. I’m good at, what’s the word, writing for a purpose but not good as a

creative writer, maybe informational. I was great in college and I was in writing classes at A & M.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Amanda said she loves to write but she does not think she is good at creative writing. She does, however, feel she is good at writing for a purpose. Amanda said, “I love to write for all different purposes.”

During Bailey’s second interview she was asked to describe how she feels about writing and to describe herself as a writer. The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Bailey said, “I love to write and I wish I had more time to write.”

Chloe was asked during her first interview to describe how she feels about writing and to describe herself as a writer.

I love writing. I love teaching writing and the kids, getting them excited about writing and getting them to have enthusiasm. It depends on the teacher, the teacher’s perception of writing, how they see the teacher. Like if they see the teacher excited about writing then it really looks exciting and so they are excited about writing too. I think I do that for my students. I loved writing. I love teaching writing and I think it does rub off on the students because one of the moms said one of the students left early and he said to his mom “aw, mom, I missed writing time,” and I was like “aw, that’s so good.” Yes, she emailed me. She’s said he was really upset because he missed writing time and I feel like your perception of something really rubs off on the kids and that’s important that they see how important it is and they’re going to use it in their everyday life. I always like to write about my kids, my own kids, because like my daughters here she’s already five and she’s in kindergarten, and so I write about her all the time and they just get a connection from it and they are interested and they want to know what she’s doing now, what is she getting

herself into. So I use my own personal experiences to write and in that way they can use that and do it as well.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Chloe said, “I love writing. I love teaching writing and the kids, getting them excited about writing and getting them to have enthusiasm.”

Chloe was once again asked about her feelings toward writing and how she feels about herself as a writer during her second interview.

I love to write and try to instill that in my students and I think I have transferred that love and interest because I always write about myself or things related to me. I always write about something connected to me so they see my interest in writing about myself and because I have high expectations. I expect them to reach high levels in writing and the reason why is because I think writing ability is so important and having an interest in writing is so important too.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Chloe said, “I love to write and try to instill that in my students and I think I have transferred that love and interest because I always write about myself or things related to me.”

Danielle was asked during her first interview to describe her personal feelings about writing.

The only writing I have probably done has been in the classroom the last several years other than writing papers in college. I didn’t mind it when I was in school or in college. I know I enjoyed the process I guess of writing a story, not necessarily a paper for a class, but if it was like a persuasive story, something like that, I enjoyed doing that, but not a research paper.

Danielle stated she enjoyed writing for persuasive reasons but not for research.

Ellie was asked during her first interview to describe her personal feelings about writing.

She stated that she feels writing “is one of the hardest things to do...”

All I think writing is just like essays and things like that. I struggle with that. I have always been kind of real critical on myself with that because I am real judgmental on myself, I guess, or critical. I think writing is hard. I think it is one of the hardest things to do and I do not necessarily like it. I really wish I could do better at it, in writing.

Ellie was asked once again during her second interview to describe her personal feelings about writing. Ellie stated, “I don’t like writing that much because I don’t think I am good at it.”

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as each teacher participant responded when asked to describe her ability to teach writing.

Amanda was asked how she feels about her ability to teach writing. She said, “Confident, I think we’ve got lots of resources and I’ve had lots of practice.” The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Amanda described her feelings as being confident due to the many resources her school has provided her along with her years of experience in teaching writing at the kindergarten level.

Amanda was once again asked during her second interview about her feelings toward her ability to teach writing.

I’m confident that I can teach writing but I am not, I don’t think I am a miracle worker.

I’m still doing prompt writing, for instance, I wrote “I am thankful” and they have to finish that because I do not want them getting stuck on the not important part and I think that really helps. It helps them get started and it helps me to see the ones that are not getting it because they will just be copying the “I am thankful” part. So I know that they need extra help.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Amanda described her feelings toward her ability to teach writing. Amanda stated, “I’m confident that I can teach writing but I am not, I don’t think I am a miracle worker.”

Bailey was asked during her first interview about her feelings toward her ability to teach writing.

I think my abilities to teach writing are pretty good. I think we have a lot of resources; we have the main source we use and we have that website. I think we have a lot of resources and I like teaching writing so I think I do a pretty good job.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Bailey described her feelings toward her ability to teach writing. When asked during her first interview to describe her ability to teach writing, Bailey said, “I think my abilities to teach writing are pretty good.” The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was also evident as Bailey added, “I like teaching writing so I think I do a pretty good job.”

Bailey was once again asked during her second interview about her ability to teach writing. Bailey stated, “I feel pretty good. I’ve been doing it a few years now and I think we have a lot of resources to help and I like teaching writing.”

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Bailey described her feelings toward her ability to teach writing. The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Bailey said, “I feel pretty good. I’ve been doing it a few years now and I think we have a lot of resources to help and I like teaching writing.”

Chloe was asked during her first interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing. Chloe stated “I feel like what helps my ability is that I love to do it, so I mean I think how I feel … I love to do it.” The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Chloe

described her feelings toward her ability to teach writing by saying she feels what helps her ability is that she loves teaching writing.

Chloe was asked again during her second interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing.

I feel fine. I love writing and I try to make sure my students, my kids, love writing. My ability to teach, I think using the resources that we have, I think that helps us a lot to be better writing teachers.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Chloe described her feelings toward her ability to teach writing. Chloe said, “I feel fine. I love writing and I try to make sure my students, my kids love writing.”

Danielle was also asked during her first interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing.

Sometimes I feel like it is one of my weaker areas because I think in the last couple of years I just felt like a lot of the things that we were wanting our kids to do, the majority of them couldn’t do it. But this year I feel better because we’ve slowed down our curriculum because it was above their level except for last year I had a couple of them that were way above. We now have access to a web site that we’re using to supplement our writing curriculum and so I feel like more comfortable with it. I would say because I think in past years I just felt like “Why am I doing this? I don’t think they can do it.” Some of that, maybe I’m just not confident of them, but I don’t know, this year I feel more comfortable with it and it seems to be going better.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Danielle described teacher writing as one of her “weaker areas.”

Danielle was asked again during her second interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing. Once again Danielle described writing instructions as one of her “weaker areas.”

I feel like I am able to teach it and I feel like it’s one of my weaker areas for some reason out of all of the components that we teach. I don’t know what it is. It’s something. It’s not that I am uncomfortable with it but I guess if it was like the one subject that I had to pick as my weakest it would be writing and I don’t know if that’s because I’m not a writer myself or what.

Ellie was asked during her first interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing.

That has been much of a struggle. I have said that from after my first year when I requested to get into like writing workshops and it just hasn’t happened I haven’t been able to go and do it. I think it’s hard because especially in kindergarten it’s hard. They don’t even know how to hold a pencil and so trying to teach somebody something that, well I am 30 or 31 and teaching somebody something that you have done your whole life is kind of hard to break down and you have to find those steps and break them down to the kids. I struggle with it. I do.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Ellie described the difficulties of instructing students in writing.

Ellie was asked again during her second interview to describe her feelings about her ability to teach writing.

I still feel like it’s the hardest thing for me to teach. I struggle with it just because I’m real critical on myself. So I guess with writing, I think writing is a hard thing. I guess at

this level especially because you don't know, they're learning how to write and read at the same time, which is which all goes together but it's frustrating for them so I feel that I feel for them but it's really neat to see at the end because I think I am doing a good job but I can see a kid a kid's progress throughout the end of the year, taking kids who have never written anything before and doesn't know the letters and sounds. So that is the part of it, the best part of it, that even when I don't think I am doing a good job that its really cool to see the outcome at the end of the year.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident as Ellie once again described the difficulties of writing instruction.

As each teacher described her feelings about writing and her feelings toward her ability to teach writing the theme of *teacher self-efficacy* was evident. Three of the teacher participants had positive *teacher self-efficacy* regarding their ability to teach writing while two of the teacher participants had negative *teacher self-efficacy* regarding their ability to teach writing. Being efficacious as a teacher is a definite advantage and students benefit when taught by a teacher that believes they have the capability to successfully instruct students. Studies have shown that student success can be affected by teacher self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, Hoy, 2004). Teachers' self-efficacy can affect their instruction and how they think and feel toward their teaching abilities (Bandura, 1995). A teacher's belief in their ability to succeed affects their students' learning success.

## **Conclusion**

The researcher used teacher participant interviews and classroom observations in order to answer four research questions related to writing instruction at the kindergarten level. The focus topics related to these research questions were individual student writing conferences, writing

instruction strategies, student writing behaviors, student motivation, and personal feelings about writing. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic individual student writing conferences was *social interaction*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic writing instruction strategies was *effective learning environment*. The themes that emerged related to the focus topic student writing behaviors were *student writing abilities* and *student progress toward independence*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of student motivation was *motivation through praise*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic personal feelings about writing was *teacher self-efficacy*. The next chapter will provide a summary of the findings of the study, recommendations for further research related to the study, and a summary of the study.

## **CHAPTER V: FINDINGS**

This collective case study explored individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies in kindergarten classrooms using kindergarten teacher descriptions. In addition, the researcher conducted observations of individual student writing conferences and writing strategies used in these kindergarten classrooms to motivate students to write and to improve students' individual writing abilities. The descriptions provided through the study will provide early childhood educators deeper insight into how to effectively produce successful writers in the kindergarten classroom even when faced with a classroom full of emergent writers at varying levels of ability.

Because of writing expectations at the elementary level and the varying writing abilities of kindergarten students, it was necessary to examine individual student writing conferences and the strategies used to motivate writers, to build and support the varying writing abilities of early childhood-level students as well as meeting students' individual writing needs.

### **Findings**

Kindergarten teachers often find themselves in a classroom with students of varying writing abilities. This makes it difficult to meet the writing needs of each individual student (Dorr, 2006). In these scenarios, kindergarten teachers need examples of instructional strategies to teach a classroom of students with varying writing abilities. As a former kindergarten teacher, this researcher was aware of how writing instruction has changed at the kindergarten level in the recent past but research has not kept up with these changes; thus, more research is needed in the area of writing instruction at the kindergarten level. For this reason, the researcher conducted the study and interviewed kindergarten teachers about their writing instructional strategies. The researcher also conducted observations of these teachers carrying out the described writing instructional strategies to inform other teachers of ways of meeting the individual needs of

students with varying writing levels within a classroom. Findings based on themes and patterns that emerged throughout the study provide information related to how five kindergarten teachers instruct and meet the individual writing needs of their students.

### **Focus Topics and Themes**

The first step the researcher took in the study analysis process was to examine the data and determine focus topics related to each research question guiding the study (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The second step was to examine the data and find themes that emerged related to each focus topic. Table 5.1 shows the research questions, focus topics related to each research question, and emerged themes related to each focus topic.

**Table 5.1**

*Research Questions, Focus Topics and Themes*

Research Questions	Focus Topics	Themes
1 How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?	-Individual student writing conferences -Writing strategies	<i>-Social interaction</i> <i>-Effective learning environment</i>
2 How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?	-Student writing behaviors	<i>-Student writing abilities</i> <i>-Student progress toward independent writing</i>
3 How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?	-Student motivation	<i>-Motivation through praise</i>
4 What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?	-Personal feelings about writing	<i>-Teacher efficacy</i>

The focus topics related to the first research question were individual student writing conferences and writing strategies. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of individual student writing conferences was *social interaction*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of writing instruction strategies was *effective learning environment*. The focus topic related to the second research question was student writing behaviors. The themes that emerged related to the focus topic of student writing behaviors were *student writing abilities* and *student progress toward independent writing*. The focus topic related to the third research question was student motivation. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of student motivation was *motivation through praise*. The focus topic related to the fourth research question was personal feelings about writing. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of personal feelings about writing was *teacher self-efficacy*.

### **First Research Question**

The first research question in the study addressed how kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and the other writing strategies used to improve their students' writing abilities as well as increase their students' motivation to write. The interview questions related to the first research question focused on teacher's descriptions of their individual student writing conferences, teachers' descriptions of their writing instruction strategies and teachers' perceptions of their students' descriptions of writing instruction. The focus topics related to the first research question were individual student writing conferences and writing strategies. The theme that emerged in the study related to the focus topic of individual student writing conferences was *social interaction*. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of writing instruction strategies was *effective learning environment*.

## **Theme One: Social Interaction**

Teacher participants described their individual writing conferences as a method of writing instruction involving one-on-one *social interaction*. Vygotsky (1978) defined *social interaction* as connections that occur in the form of shared communication and experiences between people. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of *social interaction* within the learning process and, according to each teacher participant, *social interaction* within the learning process occurs during each individual writing conference that each teacher participant conducts. Along with *social interaction*, the "zone of proximal development" was introduced and defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). A student's zone of proximal development is the area of learning within which a teacher is instructing the student while working with them one-on-one or during individual student writing conferences. In the study, the teachers' actions support Vygotsky in that when each of these teachers was conferencing with their students, they were keeping *social interaction* within the learning process as well as working with each student within their "zone of proximal development."

A teacher must know each of their student's needs in order for individual conferencing to be effective when working within a student's "zone of proximal development," (Vygotsky, 1978). The use of *social interaction* was evident while teachers conducted their individual student writing conferences. When the five teacher participants described the *social interaction* that takes place during their individual student writing conferences, they referred to knowledge of student needs and of each student's writing abilities. When these teachers used *social interaction* while conducting their individual student writing conferences, they considered knowing student needs and student writing abilities to be important for the individual student

writing conferences to make an impact on their students' learning. Bailey said during individual student writing conferences, she must get her students to do something with her that they are unable to do independently. During individual student writing conferences, Chloe identifies writing skills for each student and works on those skills with her students one-on-one. All five teachers described their individual student writing conferences as a time of *social interaction* while providing one-on-one instruction within each student's area of potential learning based on individual student needs. Each teacher instructs their individual students within their potential areas of learning and therefore attempts to assist each student to move to a higher level of potential learning (Gentry, 2005). While one-on-one conferencing with individual students, each teacher provided each student the instruction needed based on their current level of performance to assist them in reaching their potential. In writing, as in all areas of learning, teachers want their students to progress to higher levels of ability and independence. By providing support in the form of instruction during individual student writing conferences, teachers make it possible for their students to achieve more challenging skills than they would achieve independently (Bruner, 1966).

The use of *social interaction* was evident during individual student writing conferences teachers conducted to scaffold their students' learning. Teachers should base the content of individual student writing conferences on the needs of the individual students. While providing teacher support in the form of instruction during an individual student writing conference, teachers are providing their students the support necessary to make progress in areas they may not otherwise be able to do independently (Bruner, 1966). The use of *social interaction* through one-on-one instruction empowers students to achieve at higher levels of ability.

## **Theme Two: Effective Learning Environment**

Kindergartners have the potential of becoming enthusiastic writers when part of an *effective learning environment* that includes frequent modeling and individual instruction (Fu, Johnson, Lamme & Savage, 2002). When each of these teachers described conferences and writing instruction, they repeatedly referred to modeling. Furthermore, during each teacher's observation, modeling occurred as well as individual instruction through one-on-one conferencing. Students are able to construct knowledge about the act of writing when teachers model for their students (Mayer, 2007). When students interactively observe someone writing who is more proficient, their knowledge of writing is constructed and learning occurs. Graves (2004) believes students need to hear their teacher thinking aloud while they write, talking through the steps of their own writing. Modeling helps students understand how a writer thinks about their writing and makes it easier for students to incorporate this process into their own writing. When teachers demonstrate and describe writing strategies they expect their students to perform, students are more likely to practice the writing strategies on their own (Calkins, 2001).

All five of the teacher participants referred to modeling when they described how they instruct their students in writing. This was evident in the observation as they each demonstrated modeling of writing for their students. Three out of the five teacher participants, Amanda and Bailey and Danielle, described an *effective learning environment* during writing instruction as being a quiet environment. While observing Bailey and Chloe, the researcher noticed they each stressed to their students that writing time is a quiet time and that they expected quiet voices only. All five of the teacher participants referred to modeling when they described how they instruct their students in writing. During the classroom observations, each teacher provided an *effective learning environment* through modeling, individual instruction, praise and encouragement. According to Behymer (2003), daily teacher modeling of writing is crucial in an

*effective learning environment.* After conducting their study on writing, Clark and Kragler (2005) concluded that teacher modeling is needed if there is to be any chance of student improvement in writing performance. An *effective learning environment* that includes modeling, individual instruction, praise, and encouragement, fosters growth of students in writing.

### **Second Research Question**

The second research question addressed in the study was how kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students. The focus topic related to the second research question was student writing behaviors. The interview questions related to this second research question focused on student writing abilities, student writing growth, and teachers' goals for student writing. The themes that emerged in the study related to the focus topic of student writing behaviors were *student writing abilities* and *student progress toward independent writing.*

### **Theme Three: Student Writing Abilities**

Graves (2003) believed that while most children demonstrate the same writing abilities or writing principles as their writing development progresses, not all children necessarily follow the same path nor do they all exhibit the same abilities in the same order. Each child progresses at their own pace and not all children follow the same path of writing development. With this in mind, kindergarten teachers should be aware of the different possible *student writing abilities* present in their classroom as well as which students possess particular *student writing abilities* in order to keep instruction based on student needs. Clay (1975) described emergent level children's writing development as a collection of various writing principles or abilities that occur not in specific stages of development, but rather simultaneously as part of the process of making sense of written language. Clay (1975) and Graves (2003) both agree that most children

demonstrate certain writing abilities or writing principles but there is not one particular order of writing stages. Each child develops skill in writing individually. Table 5.2 shows the student writing abilities mentioned when the participants described their students' writing habits and writing abilities. In Table 5.2, the student writing abilities are grouped into four categories: methods of writing, letters and words, phonics and writing conventions. Many of the emergent writing principles or abilities that Clay (1978) and Graves (2003) described were also mentioned by the teacher participants as they each described their students' writing habits and abilities.

**Table 5.2**

*Student Writing Abilities*

Methods of writing	Letters and words	Phonics	Writing Conventions
Using a model of writing	Writing blocks or strings of letters	Phonetic spelling	Writing complete sentences
Getting thoughts on paper	Writing random letters	Beginning sounds	Writing one sentence
Writing left to right	Writing in all capitals	Hearing and writing sounds in words	Writing multiple sentences
Scribbling	Writing one's name	Matching letters to sounds	Writing words exactly as they are spoken
Telling a story	Writing sight words		Spaces between words
Drawing pictures	Writing known words		Using capital letters at the beginning of sentences
Prompt writing			Using periods
Word writing			Using punctuation
Sentence writing			
Paragraph writing			

The teacher participants of the study were very aware of the varying *student writing abilities* their students may possess as well as the actual *student writing abilities* within their classrooms. During individual student writing conferences, each teacher instructed their individual students based on the particular *student writing abilities* each individual student possessed at that time. Knowing each student's ability is important in determining what that student may be ready for as well as writing expectations for that student. Individual student goals

in writing ability can be set based on current individual student writing abilities and strengths and weakness in writing abilities.

#### **Theme Four: Student Progress toward Independent Writing**

The common theme of *student progress toward independent writing* emerged as the teacher participants answered questions related to the writing habits of their students. Some of the topics discussed related to *student progress toward independent writing* were student writing samples, individual growth, and teacher observation. The teacher participants mentioned student writing samples and teacher observation as approaches used to measure writing growth. In addition, during classroom observations the researcher observed teachers keeping anecdotal notes on student writing progress. When using student writing samples and teacher observation as methods of determining student growth in writing, teachers measured individual student growth or *student progress toward independent writing*. The teachers measured individual student growth or individual *student progress toward independent writing* not by comparing students to each other but by comparing each student to their previous ability. Individual student progress is determined based on whether or not each individual student has made growth. Clay (1975) and Graves (2003) both refer to writing development during the emergent years as a process of development in which there is not one particular order of writing stages that all students undergo. Each child develops writing skills individually. If each child develops the skills in writing individually, it makes sense to measure their growth on an individual basis. Teachers use the information gathered from looking at their students writing samples and their anecdotal notes in order to determine student abilities and growth and to drive their instruction.

The theme of *student progress toward independent writing* emerged when the researcher asked the teacher participants about end of the year writing goals for their students. The teacher

participants felt it was important that their students leave kindergarten as independent writers with the ability to apply basic foundational writing skills. The teacher participants wanted their students to apply independently all the writing skills they have been taught throughout the school year. Table 5.3 shows the skills each teacher mentioned during their interview. When teachers measured *student progress toward independent writing* they were looking at each student as an individual and comparing the student's current writing development level to his or her previous levels. Teachers were also setting individual student writing goals based on student writing development.

**Table 5.3**

*Student Independent Writing Skills*

Teacher	Student Independent Writing Skills
Amanda	Understand sentence structure; know how to write a sentence; be an independent thinker; be able to write on their own; spell independently; read their own writing
Bailey	Write great stories; story; hear sounds; think of ideas; stretch all the sounds; leave spaces between words; write sentences; tell a story
Chloe	Writing as much as they can; using spaces between words; using periods and capital letters
Danielle	Write a complete sentence; use correct spacing; use correct punctuation; use correct letter formation; have a beginning, middle, and end in their writing; write up to three sentences if able; use capital letters correctly
Ellie	Write one to three complete sentences; hear the sounds in words; make sense in their writing; have a beginning, middle, and an end in their writing; have details in their writing; use periods and capital letters correctly

**Third Research Question**

The third research question addressed in the study was how kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write. The focus topic related to the third research question was student motivation. The theme that emerged related to the focus topic of student motivation was *motivation through praise*.

### **Theme Five: Motivation through Praise**

When asked if their students were motivated to write and if they like to write, the one common theme that emerged from the teacher participants was *motivation through praise*. All five of the teacher participants either referred to praise during their interview or exhibited giving their students praise during their classroom observation. Individual writing conferences should always begin with the teacher praising the student for something they did well (Calkins, Hartman & White, 2005; Routman, 2005). Furthermore, when teachers praise students for writing behaviors, students will repeat those writing behaviors (Routman, 2005).

Students enter kindergarten aware that writing is something that is difficult to do (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Kindergarten students need encouragement in order to meet the challenges they face in writing (Kersey & Malley, 2005). Kindergarten teachers have the tremendous task of providing encouragement to their students and building their students' confidence in writing. This encouragement occurs in a positive learning environment with a caring teacher who is concerned about the learning of students. Kindergarten teachers have the task of not only teaching students how to write but also guiding them to be positive in relation to their writing ability and moving them to higher skill levels in writing (Gentry, 2005). Teachers offering praise for the small efforts students make in writing helps to build their interest and skill. Students' confidence in what they are currently doing facilitates the drive to continue trying and accomplishing higher levels of achievement.

### **Fourth Research Question**

The fourth research question addressed in the study was regarding kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing. The focus topic related to the fourth research question was personal feeling about writing. The theme that emerged related to this focus topic was *teacher efficacy*.

## **Theme Six: Teacher Self-Efficacy**

One theme that emerged related to the five teachers' feelings about writing was *teacher self-efficacy*. Bandura defined self-efficacy as an individual's belief in his or her ability to carry out a given task or endeavor (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is a person's attitude about their potential to perform to desired levels of achievement. A person's self-efficacy can affect their self-motivation as well as how they think, feel and act. A person with a strong sense of efficacy will handle complicated tasks as challenges to accomplish rather than obstacles to avoid (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy is not the same as confidence. Confidence refers to how strong a person's belief is, but self-efficacy is more specific. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's level of capability as well as how strong that belief is (Bandura, 1997). Studies have shown that strong efficacy is directly related to academic success and achievement (Goddard, Hoy and Hoy, 2004). Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in his or her ability to successfully instruct students and lead them to success (Bandura, 1995). Studies have shown that teacher self-efficacy affects student success (Goddard, Hoy, Hoy, 2004). A teacher's belief in their ability to succeed affects their students' achievement.

Teaching writing is a complex task (Lienemann, Graham, Leader-Janssen, & Reid, 2006). To be successful, teachers require self-efficacy or a belief in their abilities to instruct their students (Bandura, 1977). Teachers of writing will benefit from a belief in their own writing and teaching abilities, or a positive attitude about their potential to write and to teach students to write. The many smaller skills involved in writing such as spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and imagination make it such a complex task. When many students enter kindergarten they are already aware of how difficult a task writing can be (Love, Burns, & Buell, 2007). Kindergarten teachers have the tremendous task of building their students' confidence in writing as well as their belief that they can write at the level the teacher expects. Kindergarten

teachers also need confidence in teaching writing and the belief that they can instruct their students in such a way that their students will write at the level the school curriculum or administrators expect.

When teachers are knowledgeable on instructional strategies related to the subjects they teach, they have the tools necessary to foster their belief in their ability to positively affect student achievement. Teachers require instructional strategy knowledge to possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* or the belief in their ability to successfully instruct their students and lead them to success. Understanding writing instructional strategies is necessary for emergent level teachers to succeed in instructing their students in writing.

The theme of *teacher self-efficacy* emerged in the form of teacher interest in writing and the perception of ability to teach writing. Teacher interest in writing ranged from loving writing to not liking writing. The topics that emerged related to the five teachers' abilities to teach writing were confidence, enjoying teaching, and teaching difficulty. Table 5.4 illustrates each teacher's feelings about writing and their perceptions of their ability to teach writing.

**Table 5.4**

*Feelings about Writing and Perception of Ability to Teach Writing*

Feelings About Writing	Perception of Ability To Teach Writing	Years Experience in Teaching Kindergarten	
Loves writing	Confident in ability	Amanda	11
Loves writing	Confident in ability	Bailey	8
Loves writing	Confident in ability	Chloe	6
Enjoys writing	Not confident confidence builds everyday	Danielle	12
Does not like to write	Not confident in ability difficult to teach	Ellie	4

Three of the five teacher participants possessed positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward their ability to teach writing. These same three teachers said they loved writing. One of the other two teacher participants said writing was one of her weaker areas of instruction and her feelings of *teacher self-efficacy* in her ability to teach writing has increased the more she has taught it. The same teacher also said she enjoyed writing. The last teacher participant felt that writing is difficult to teach and she did not possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward her ability to teach it. Ironically, though, she enjoyed teaching writing. When asked how she felt about writing, this same teacher said she did not like to write. When looking at these findings, it is evident that participants' *teacher self-efficacy* toward their ability to teach writing and their feelings toward writing do not necessarily go hand in hand; however, three out of four of the teacher participants with positive feelings toward writing also possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward their ability to teach writing. The fourth teacher participant had positive self-efficacy toward writing but not positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward her ability to teach writing. However, she did feel that her *teacher self-efficacy* increases every day the more she instructs her students in writing. The one teacher that did not like to write also did not possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward teaching writing and feels writing is difficult to teach.

### **Implications for Practice**

The use of *social interaction* during individual student writing conferences along with a *effective learning environment* and a focus on the varying *student writing abilities* within kindergarten classroom facilitated scaffolded writing instruction. In addition, setting of goals and measuring *student progress toward independent writing* based on each individual student's growth in writing empowered teachers to instruct students in a classroom with varying *student writing abilities*. Acknowledging students' *motivation through praise* and providing student

support and encouragement throughout their writing development helped to keep students motivated and interested in writing. Possessing positive *teacher self-efficacy* or the belief in the ability to successfully instruct students and lead them to success is a benefit when a teacher is facing a classroom of students at varying levels of writing development.

As a result of the study, it is the researcher's recommendation that when instructing pre-service teachers one should stress the importance of knowing the needs and the abilities of their students when teaching children to write. Ongoing informal assessments and observations of students in the process of writing would be a way to determine students' current writing needs and abilities. In addition, daily modeling of writing along with daily student writing opportunities are both highly recommended for student success.

A recommendation related to *teacher self-efficacy* is to provide a new or novice teacher a mentor that possesses positive *teacher self-efficacy*. In the study, the two teachers with negative *teacher self-efficacy* were a part of the campus for the shortest amount of time. The positive self-efficacy of a group can positively affect the self-efficacy and performance of an individual of that same group (Bandura, 1986). Grouping these two teachers that possess negative *teacher self-efficacy* with teachers that possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* would positively affect their *teacher self-efficacy*.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of the study was researcher bias. As a former kindergarten teacher, the researcher for the study had over 20 years of teaching experience and had previously worked as a kindergarten teacher at the research site where this particular study was conducted. The researcher had established rapport with each teacher participant because of the researcher's previous years as a kindergarten teacher on the same campus. Another limitation of the study

was time. The length of time for the study was a seven-week period. A longer study would have provided the researcher more time to observe in the participants' classrooms to gather more data on teacher conferencing.

### **Implication for Future Research**

One recommendation for future research is a related study with the addition of teacher reflection to include teachers' thinking about their instructional practices, the desired goals related to that instruction, and then continuing the reflective process on how instruction should be adjusted for goals to occur. Another recommendation for future research is a duplicate study conducted in another school setting. An additional recommendation for future research is a study addressing group-teacher self-efficacy and how this affects the self-efficacy of new teachers that join the group. One last recommendation for future research would be a similar study with a quantitative component in order to report on student growth in writing ability.

### **Summary**

The main emphasis of the study was individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies occurring in kindergarten classrooms. This researcher conducted a qualitative collective case study exploring the experience of individual student writing conferences and other writing instruction strategies used in five kindergarten classrooms throughout a seven-week period

The study explored writing instruction in the kindergarten classroom with the purpose of describing teachers' perceptions of their individual student writing conferences and the writing strategies they currently use to meet their students' individual needs in writing and to motivate them to write. The insight gained from this research will provide early childhood level educators increased knowledge of individual student writing conferences and other writing strategies that

early childhood level educators may use to instruct and motivate emergent level writers. The descriptions presented through the study will provide early childhood level educators deeper insight into how to effectively produce successful writers in the kindergarten classroom even when faced with a classroom full of emergent writers at varying levels of writing ability.

The main collection instrument for the study was the researcher, which is typical of most qualitative research. As a former kindergarten teacher with over 20 years experience at the early childhood level, this researcher knew the importance of not interfering with the natural setting of the research environment. For this reason, while data for the study was collected and analyzed, the researcher did not interfere with the kindergarten classrooms or with the practices and viewpoints of each kindergarten teacher. Throughout the study the researcher took on the role of researcher while in the process of collecting and analyzing data. The sources of data for the study were the transcriptions of five teacher participant interviews and notes from classroom observations of the same five teacher participants during their writing instruction.

Through interviews and observations, six themes emerged related to writing instruction, writing development, writing motivation, and writing self-efficacy. *Social interaction* emerged as a theme related to writing instruction. The use of *social interaction* was evident as the teacher participants described their individual student writing conferences as well as when each teacher was observed during their writing instruction time. Each of the teacher participants described and used one-on- one *social interaction* in order to provide scaffolded writing instruction to their students. Each teacher participant described and demonstrated providing their students the support necessary to progress in areas they may not be able to do progress in independently (Bruner, 1966). These teachers used *social interaction* to empower their students to achieve at higher ability levels.

The theme of *effective learning environment* emerged in relation to writing instruction. In each teacher participant's classroom, student progress in writing was fostered through an *effective learning environment*. An *effective learning environment* that fosters writing development includes modeling, individual instruction, praise, and encouragement (Fu, Johnson, Lamme & Savage, 2002). Through interviews and observations, the existence of an *effective learning environment* was evident in each of the teacher participant's classrooms.

*Student writing abilities* emerged as a theme in relation to student writing behaviors. It was evident throughout the study that the teacher participants were aware of the varying *student writing abilities* within their classroom. Through *social interaction* and an *effective learning environment* each of the teachers addressed the needs of their students by focusing on *student writing abilities*. Awareness of *student writing abilities* is necessary in order to determine student instructional needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

In relation to writing habits, the common theme of *student progress toward independent writing* emerged. Each teacher participant measured their *student progress toward independent writing* based on each individual student's abilities and growth. When measuring student growth, the teachers compared each student to their own previous ability rather than to other students' ability. The teachers also set *student progress toward independent writing* goals based on each of their students' growth in writing development throughout the year. They set individual student writing goals based on individual student writing development.

As each teacher was interviewed and observed, the theme of *motivation through praise* emerged in relation to student motivation. Each teacher described and exhibited giving their students praise for writing accomplishments. The teachers either mentioned or were observed

giving praise during individual student writing conferences in order to motivate their students to continue working hard at writing.

When the teachers were asked about their feelings toward writing and their ability to teach writing, the theme that emerged was *teacher self-efficacy*. Three of the five teachers had positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward teaching writing and they did love to write. One of the teachers did not possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward teaching writing but she did enjoy writing. One of the teachers did not possess positive *teacher self-efficacy* toward teaching writing and she did not like to write.

Through *social interaction* and an *effective learning environment* these teachers instruct their students in writing focusing on the varying *student writing abilities* within their classrooms. They set goals and measure *student progress toward independent writing* based on each individual student's growth in writing. They recognize their students' *motivation through praise* and provide the support and encouragement their students require in order to stay motivated in writing. The *teacher self-efficacy* these teachers possess helps them to be successful at teaching writing and to empower their students to reach higher levels of development in writing as the year progresses.

## REFERENCES

- Allington, R. L. & Cunningham, P. M. (1996). *Schools that work: Where all children read and write*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Anbar, A. (1986). Reading acquisition of preschool children without systematic instruction. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 1*, 69-9.
- Anderson, M. (2008). *The correlation between choices, motivation, and writing scores in elementary school*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest.
- Assel, M., Landry, S. H., Swank, P. R. & Gunnewig, S. (2007). An evaluation of curriculum, setting, and mentoring on the performance of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten, *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 20*, 468-494.
- Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*, 191-215.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *The social foundations of thoughts and action*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall
- Bandura, A. (Ed.) (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Behymer, A. (2003). Kindergarten writing workshop. *Reading Teacher, 57*(1), 85-88.
- Berninger, V., & Amtmann, D. (2003). Preventing written expression disabilities through early and continuing assessment and intervention for handwriting and/or spelling problems: Research into practice. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of learning disabilities* (pp. 345–363). New York: Guilford Press

- Birnbaum, J., & Emig, J. (1983). *Creating minds: Creating texts*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2006). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*. Boston: Prentice Hall.
- Bomia, L., Beluzo, L., Demeester, D., Elander, K., Johnson, M. , & Sheldon, B. (1997). *The impact of teaching strategies on intrinsic motivation* . Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ED 418925.
- Brenneman, K., Massey, C., Machado, S. and Gelman, R. (1996). Young children's plans differ for "writing" and drawing. *Cognitive Development*, 11, 397-419.
- Brindley, R. & Schneider, J. (2002). Writing instruction or destruction: Lessons to be learned from fourth grade teachers' perspectives on teaching writing. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 328-341.
- Bruner, J. S. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Burns, M. S., Griffin, P., & Snow, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Bus, A. G., Both-de Vries, A., de Jong, M., Sulzby, E., de Jong, W., & de Jong, E. (2001). *Conceptualizations underlying emergent readers' story writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.
- Calkins, L. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Calkins, L. (2003). *The nuts and bolts of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L., Hartman, A., & White, Z. (2005). *The conferring handbook*. Portsmouth, NH:

Heinemann.

- Clark, P., & Kragler, S. (2005). The impact of including writing materials in early childhood classrooms. *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(4), 285-301.
- Clay, M. (1967). The reading behaviour of five year old children: a research report. *Journal of Educational Studies* 2, 2(1), 11-31.
- Clay, M. (1975). *What did I write?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. (2001). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clements, S. J. (2007). *Writing conferences in kindergarten: Using feedback to enhance student writing*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest.
- Cooper, J., D. (1997). *Literacy: Helping children construct meaning* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cooter, K. (2006). When mama can't read: Counteracting intergenerational illiteracy. *Reading Teacher*, 59(7), 698-702.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darling, S. (2005). Strategies for engaging parents in home support of reading acquisition. *Reading Teacher*, 58(5), 476-479.
- DeFord, D.E. (2001). Young children and their writing. *Theory into Practice*, 19(3), 157-161.

- Dobson, L. N. (1988). *Connections in learning to write and read: A study of children's development through kindergarten and grade one*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.
- Dodici, B., Draper, D., & Peterson, C. (2003). Early parent-child interactions and early literacy development. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 23(3), 124-136.
- Dorr, R. (2006) Something old is new again: Revisiting language experience. *Reading Teacher*. 60(2) 138-146.
- Dyson, A.H. (1985). Individual differences in emerging writing. In M. Farr (Ed.), *Advances in writing research: Vol. 1. Children's early writing development* (pp. 59-125), Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Edwards, L. (2003). Writing instruction in kindergarten: Examining an emerging area of research for children with writing and reading difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 36(2), 136-148.
- Ehri, L. (1999). Phases of development in learning to read words. In J. Oakhill & R. Beard (Eds.), *Reading development and the teaching of reading: A psychological perspective*, 79-108. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Farrell, T. (2004). *Reflective practice in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Ferriero, E., & Teberosky, A. (1982). *Literacy before schooling*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Freeman, E. B. & Hatch, J. A. (1989). Emergent literacy: Re-conceptualizing kindergarten practice. *Childhood Education* , 66(1), 21-24.
- Freeman, E., & T. Sanders. 1989 Kindergarten children's emergent concepts of writing functions in the community. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 4: 331-38.
- Freeman, M. S. (2003). *Teaching the youngest writers: A practical guide*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House Publishing, Inc.

- Gammill, D. M. (2006). Learning the "write" way. *Reading Teacher*, v59 n8 p754-762.
- Gentry, J. (2005). Instructional techniques for emerging writers and special needs students at kindergarten and grade 1 levels. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 21(2), 113-134.
- Gibson, E. J., & Levin, H. (1975). *The psychology of reading*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher*. 33, 3-13.
- Gombert, J.E., & Fayol, M. (1992). Writing in preliterate children. *Learning and Instruction*, 2, 23-41.
- Graham, S. (2008). Research on writing development, practice, instruction, and assessment. *Reading & Writing*, 21(1/2), 1-2.
- Graham, S. K., Harris, R., & Fink, B. (2000). Is handwriting causally related to learning to write? Treatment of handwriting problems in beginning writers. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 92 (4): 620–633.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2003). Students with learning disabilities and the process of writing: A meta-analysis of srsd studies. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of learning disabilities*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005). Improving the writing performance of young struggling writers: Theoretical and programmatic research from the center on accelerating student learning. *Journal of Special Education*, 39(1), 19-33.
- Graves, D. H. (1975). An examination of the writing process of seven year old children. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9, 227-241.
- Graves, D. H. (1978). *Balance the basics: Let them write*. New York: Ford Foundation

- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Graves, D. H. (2003). *Writing: Teachers and children at work 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Graves, D. H. (2004). *Teaching day by day: 180 stories to help along the way*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Hall, S. & Moats, L.C. (1999). *Straight talk about reading: How parents can make a difference in the early years*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hayes, J., & Flower, L. (1980). Identifying the organization of writing processes. In L. Gregg & E. Steinberg (Eds.), *Cognitive processes in writing: An interdisciplinary approach* (3-30). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Holdaway, D. (1979). *The foundations of literacy*. New York: Scholastic.
- Horn, E., & Banerjee, R. (2009). Understanding curriculum modifications and embedded learning opportunities in the context of supporting all children's success. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 40, 406-415.
- Jones, D., & Christensen, C. (1999). The relationship between automaticity in handwriting and students' ability to generate written text. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91, 44-49.
- Juel, C. (1988). Learning to read and write: A longitudinal study of 54 children from first grade through fourth grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80(4), 437-447.
- Kalmar, K. (2008). Let's give children something to talk about! Oral language and preschool literacy. *Young Children*, 63(1), 88-92.
- Kersey, K. C. & Malley, C. R. (2005). Helping children develop resiliency: Providing

- supportive relationships. *Young Children*, 60(1), 53-58.
- Kissel, B. (2008). Promoting writing and preventing writing failure in young children. *Preventing School Failure*, 52(4), 53-56.
- Koenig, A. J. (1992). A framework for understanding the literacy of individuals with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 86, 277-284.
- Lamme, L., Fu, D., Johnson, J., & Savage, D. (2002). Helping kindergarten writers move toward independence. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 30 (2), 74-79.
- Lienemann, T. O., Graham, S., Leader-Janssen, B., & Reid, R. (2006). Improving the writing performance of struggling writers in second grade. *The Journal of Special Education*, 40(2), 66-78.
- Love, A., Burns, M., & Buell, M. (2007). Writing: Empowering literacy. *Young Children*, 62(1), 12-20.
- McCardle, P., Chhabra, V., & Kapinus, B., (2008) *Reading research in action: A teacher's guide for student success*. Baltimore: Brooks Publishing.
- McDonald, Janet (1997) Language Acquisition: The Acquisition of Linguistic Structure in the Normal and Special Population. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48, 215-41.
- McGee, L. & Purcell-Gates, V. (1997). So what's going on in research on emergent literacy? *Reading Research Quarterly* 32 (3): 310-18.
- Mathers, B., Benson, S., & Newton, E. (2006). The teacher said my story was excellent: Preservice teachers reflect on the role of the external in writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(4), 290-297.
- May, F. B. (1998). *Reading as communication—To help children read and write* (5th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

- Mayer, K. (2007). Research in review: Emerging knowledge about emergent writing. *Young Children*, 62(1), 34-40.
- Mitchell, C. (2009). *Effect of preferred learning styles on motivation and achievement*. (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest database
- Morrow, L.M. & Sharkey, E. (1993). Motivating independent reading and writing in the primary grades through social cooperative literacy experiences. *The Reading Teacher* 47 (2): 162-65
- Morrow, L. M. (1997). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Myers, D. G. (1996). *Exploring psychology*. New York: Freeman & Co
- National Reading Panel (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*: Retrieved from <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/report.cfm>.
- Pinnell, G. S., & Fountas, I. C. (1998). *Word matters: Teaching phonics and spelling in the reading/writing classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Ramsburg, D. (1998). Understanding literacy development in young children. *NPIN Parent News*.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ritchey, K. (2008). The building blocks of writing: Learning to write letters and spell words. *Reading & Writing*, 21(1/2), 27-47.
- Routman, R. (2005). *Writing essentials: Raising expectations and results while simplifying teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Ruddell, R. B. (2002). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an effective literacy teacher*. Boston, MA: A Pearson Education Company.
- Schlagal, R. (1989). Constancy and change in spelling development. *Reading Psychology*, 10, 207-232.
- Saddler, B., Moran, S., Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2004). Preventing writing difficulties: The effects of planning strategy instruction on the writing performance of struggling writers. *Exceptionality*, 2(1), 3-17.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shapiro, E. S. (2004). *Academic skills problems: Direct assessment and intervention*. New York: Guilford Press
- Shapiro, E. S. (1984). Self-monitoring procedures. In T. H. Ollendick & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Child behavior assessment: Principles and procedures* (pp. 148–165). New York: Pergamon.
- Stanovich, Keith E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22, 360-407.
- Strickland, D. (1994). Reinventing our literacy programs: Books, basics, balance. *The Reading Teacher*, 48, 294-302.
- Strickland, D., & Shanahan, T. (2004). Laying the groundwork for literacy. *Educational Leadership*, 61(6), 74-77.
- Sulzby, E. (1989). Assessment of writing and of children's language while writing. In L. Morrow & J. Smith (Eds.), *The role of assessment and measurement in early literacy instruction* (pp. 83-109). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sulzby, E. (1991). The development of the young child and the emergence of literacy. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching*

- the language arts* (pp. 273–285). New York: Macmillan.
- Sulzby, E., & Teale, W. H. (1991). Emergent literacy. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*, Vol. 2, (pp. 727-757). New York: Longman.
- Swan, D. W. (2008). *Emerging paths to literacy: Modeling individual and environmental contributions to growth in children's emergent literacy skills*. Georgia State University (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest.
- Taylor-Powell, E., & Renner, M. (2003). Analyzing qualitative data. *Learning Store*. Retrieved from <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-12.pdf>
- Teale, W. H. (1998). Developmentally appropriate assessment of reading and writing in the early childhood classroom. *The Elementary School Journal*, 89(2), 173-183.
- Teale, W. H, & Sulzby, E. (Eds.). (1986). *Emergent literacy: Reading and writing*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weber, C. (Ed.). (1984) *Webster's new world dictionary* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Webster Press.
- Willis, S. (2001). Teaching young writers feedback and coaching help students hone skills. In C. Jago (Ed.), *Language Arts: A chapter of the curriculum handbook* (pp. 125–129). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wong-Kam, J., & Vasquez, V. (2003). Writing today: Between the ideal and the real world of teaching. *School Talk*, 9(1), 1–7.
- Woolfolk, A. (1987). *Educational psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

**APPENDIX A - PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORMS**

## **Participant Interview Protocol Form: First Interview**

**Name of Study:** Writing Instruction at the Kindergarten Level: How Kindergarten Teachers Describe Their Individual Writing Conferences and Writing Strategies They Currently Use to Motivate Their Students to Write

**Location:** Flour Bluff Early Childhood Center

**Participant Position:** Kindergarten Teacher

**Principal Researcher/Interviewer:** Jeannette Elliott

### **Research Questions Guiding the study:**

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?
2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?
3. How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?
4. What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?

**Topics to be discussed:** writing conferences; student writing habits; student writing motivation; personal feelings of teachers about writing

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of my research study. You were offered the opportunity to volunteer for this interview because you teach kindergarten, you teach writing and you have useful information about writing instruction and intervention strategies to help students succeed in writing. To help with my note-taking, I will audio tape our conversations today. When you sign the consent form to participate in the study you also agreed to be audio taped. As the interviewer and the main researcher for this research study, I will be the only person with access to this audio recording. As stated on the consent form you signed all personal information will remain confidential.

The purpose of this research study is to describe teachers' perceptions of their individual writing conferences and the writing strategies they currently utilize to motivate their students to write and to meet their students' individual needs in writing. This research project as a whole focuses on the improvement of writing instruction and student success in writing at the kindergarten level. My objective is not to evaluate your writing-instruction strategies but rather to learn more about writing instruction at the kindergarten level.

## Interview Questions for First Interview

### A. Participant Background

1. Please start by telling me a little about yourself. How did you get here? Why did you become a kindergarten teacher?
2. Tell me about your classroom. What is it like to be a student in your classroom?
3. What are your thoughts on how children learn to write?

### B. Teacher's personal feelings about writing

4. Tell me about your personal feelings toward writing. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

### C. Student motivation to write

5. Describe your students' feelings about writing. How do your students feel about writing?

### D. Writing habits of students

6. How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs?
7. Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at the current time? Without mentioning any names, describe the various levels of the students in your classroom?
8. How do you measure student growth in writing?
9. What are your goals for your students?
10. What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?

### E. Writing Conferences and Other Writing Strategies

11. If I came in to your classroom describe for me how writing instruction would look during your writing instruction time. What exactly would I see? What does writing instruction look like in your classroom on a typical day?
12. How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?

13. How would your students describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?
14. How would you describe a typical individual student writing conference?
15. What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?
16. What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?
17. Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing.
18. How do you challenge your higher students in writing?
19. Think about students that experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instruct those students? How do you help your struggling students reach success in writing?

## **Participant Interview Protocol Form: Second Interview**

**Name of Study:** Writing Instruction at the Kindergarten Level: How Kindergarten Teachers Describe Their Individual Writing Conferences and Writing Strategies They Currently Use to Motivate Their Students to Write

**Location:** Flour Bluff Early Childhood Center

**Participant Position:** Kindergarten Teacher

**Principal Researcher/Interviewer:** Jeannette Elliott

### **Research Questions Guiding the study:**

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their individual student writing conferences and writing strategies they implement to improve their students' writing abilities and to increase their students' motivation to write?
2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the writing habits of their students?
3. How do kindergarten teachers describe their students' motivation to write?
4. What are kindergarten teachers' personal feelings about writing?

**Topics to be discussed:** writing conferences; student writing habits; student writing motivation; personal feelings of teachers about writing

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of my research study. You were offered the opportunity to volunteer for this interview because you teach kindergarten, you teach writing and you have useful information about writing instruction and intervention strategies to help students succeed in writing. To help with my note-taking, I will audio tape our conversations today. When you sign the consent form to participate in the study you also agreed to be audio taped. As the interviewer and the main researcher for this research study, I will be the only person with access to this audio recording. As stated on the consent form you signed all personal information will remain confidential.

The purpose of this research study is to describe teachers' perceptions of their individual writing conferences and the writing strategies they currently utilize to motivate their students to write and to meet their students' individual needs in writing. This research project as a whole focuses on the improvement of writing instruction and student success in writing at the kindergarten level. My objective is not to evaluate your writing instruction strategies but rather to learn more about writing instruction at the kindergarten level.

## Interview Questions for Second Interview

Some questions asked during the second interview will be repeated from the first interview. During the second interview, after the participant is asked a question that is repeated from the first interview the researcher will show the participant what their response was during the first interview to the same question.

### A. Participant Background

1. During our last interview, you described your thoughts on how students learn to write. Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? How do children learn to write?

### B. Teacher's personal feelings about writing

2. During our last interview, you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Do you think you would describe yourself as a writer differently now or in the same way as during our last interview? How would you describe yourself as a writer?
3. Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?

### C. Student Motivation to Write

4. During our last interview you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think your students are motivated to write? Do you think your students like to write? How do you know?

### D. Writing habits of students

5. During our last interview, you described the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs. How would you now describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs?
6. During our last interview, you described the range of writing abilities of your students. How would you now describe the range of writing abilities of your students?
7. During our last interview you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? How do you measure student growth in writing?

8. What are your goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?

E. Writing Conferences and Other Writing Strategies

9. Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview.
10. During our last interview, you described how your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How would a student describe writing instruction time in your classroom?
11. How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference?
12. Since our last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write?
13. Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed?
14. Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year.
15. Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview?
16. Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing?
17. Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing?
18. Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student.

## **APPENDIX B – INTERVIEWS WITH AMANDA**

**Participant Interview One with Amanda  
Interviewer**

Participant

**1 First, tell me how you got here. Why did you become a kindergarten teacher? How did you become a kindergarten teacher?**

I wanted to be a teacher. I was a second grade teacher to begin with. I wanted to get to Flour Bluff district and this is what the opening was 11 years ago.

**2 Tell me about your classroom. Tell me what is it like to be a student in your classroom?  
How would a student describe being in your class?**

Crazy

**Why do you think crazy?**

....because 22 is a lot of five year olds.

**So you have 22 students**

Yes 22

**How many boys and how many girls**

12 boys and 10 girls

**Ok, do you want to tell me anything else about your class?**

I have a very active class, lots of boys, active boys

**3 What are your thoughts on how children learn how to write? How do you think children learn to write?**

Modeling

**Do you think that that's the only way?**

I think that's the most important way.

**4 I'm going to ask you now about your personal feelings about writing. Tell me about how you feel about writing. How would you describe yourself as a writer?**

I love to write for all different purposes. I learned that when I wrote notes and could reread them I couldn't just hear it. I had to write it. I rewrite my grocery list to organize my thoughts. I sort it, like I write my list and then I sort it according to the grocery store by what I need first and then the cold stuff last. I don't think that I'm a good creative writer. I'm good at, what's the word, writing for a purpose but not good as a creative writer, maybe informational. I was great in college and I was in writing classes at A & M.

**Do you think you would have been better if you would have had the same kind of writing instruction that you give your students, if you would have been taught that way that you would have been a better creative writer?**

Yes, because all I ever remember from school is prompt writing that's all I remember. I don't ever remember write about what you want.

**5 How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**

Confident, I think we've got lots of resources and I've had lots of practice. I do think we go a little too fast in our approach when our resources and when our resources is a K-2 resource and were kind of forced to go through the whole thing. I think it's a little too much for our level, but this year we have really slowed it down

**You've slowed it down?**

Yeah

**Are you using more of the other resources not just the main one?**

Yes, and we found a great website. It's awesome and I can show you. She has mini lessons like a week at a time. She has a read aloud that goes with each lesson. It's awesome and it's more

purposeful writing. Like one of the lessons was write from your heart and there was a part about write about something special and then how everyone has a story in your heart. It's really good.

## **Wow**

I like it a lot and I like that it's connected to the read aloud. It's not just a let's stop what we're doing, writing time, drop everything. It doesn't really apply to anything else we've done in the day.

## **6 Ok now I want you to think about your students. Do you think your students are motivated to write and if you think they are motivated to write, how do you know that?**

At this point of the year there's such....they're at mixed levels. Some do love it and I've got strugglers that know it's a chore. The ones that I know love to write are lined up at my table to show me what they've written everyday so I try to praise them. So it's a mixed bag, which it will be all year.

## **7 How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing and what they need, what their instruction needs are for writing? You already said a little bit about it that you have some that....**

Yes, right now I have a lot that of just copying whatever I write. They write exactly what I write. I don't really discourage that because the ones that are doing that, that's still good practice. They are understanding the structure. Eventually I will have to avoid that and I'll have to kind of hide my samples so they will have to do their own and be a more independent writer.

## **So your instruction will help them get there.**

Yes

**8 Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time. Without mentioning any names, just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels. You said some are copying.**

Well I still have some that can't even write their names so they're not writing anything. They're still drawing very basic drawings. Then I have a few that can take my mini lesson and change one word so if I've written "I love the" and I put a blank they can finish it and do two or three stories and that in a day and then everything in between. I have some that are still just copying. I still have some writing right to left, copying the word. So I have a lot of different levels.

**Do you have any that are just scribbling?**

Yes, I do have some that are just scribbling

**And do you have some that are just doing strings of letters?**

Yes, I do have some that are just doing strings of letters, yes lots today I had a lot of strings of letters but we just had a lesson about what is a letter, what is a word, what is a sentence, so I know that they're at least getting "a big string of letters are in a sentence." So now I am getting strings of letters but not a whole lot of spacing. That is another lesson.

**You said you have some that are finishing what you're writing so you have some that are writing their own original sentences?**

Yes, very basic, "I love mommy," a lot of things that we've already done and I've written before. A lot of them are doing this because they were successful with that once so they write it every day because they got the praise for that once. So I get a lot of "I love mommy" or "I see a cat" because it's still on the word wall. So I get a lot of those.

**9 Ok, how do you measure student growth in writing?**

We have a rubric umm.....and it's so subjective because you have to think about each kid individually but at the same time they have to meet certain criteria but we really need to rely on our rubric.

**so do you use any other way in just your classroom or do you just measure their growth through the rubric?**

Yes, by when we meet with them individually, which is very hard at our level. I can measure growth for each kid, you know, if someone is just stringing letters together but by the next six weeks they are at least leaving spaces. That is huge for that student versus the one that was writing "I see a cat" as they progress to an independent sentence. So yeah a lot of teacher observation teacher notes.

**10 OK, what are your goals for your students in writing? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?**

I want them to understand sentence structure, even if it's a very basic sentence. By the end of the year I want them to be able to write a sentence and be an independent thinker. I guess to be able to write on their own, what they want to write about. I'd love to have them know how to write a sentence.

**11 Alright, if I came in to your classroom during your writing instruction what exactly would I see? Describe for me how writing instruction looks in your classroom on a typical day?**

Soft music everyone has their writing folder sometimes you might see all the boys sitting at their tables and all the girls on the carpet or vice versa or other days just random choosing to lessen the amount of students at the tables. So I let them choose a quiet place. They have to have their writing folder with them. If I've done some kind of prompt the far table gets get a clipboard and

comes to the carpet so they're closer. If they move up sometimes, if they move up I'll turn one of the lights off but it gets a little dark on that side of the room so that's.....

**And you mentioned that you conference with your students and you do it at your table and they come to you?**

Not yet, right now I'm focusing on walking around and right now I still have a little trail of kids trying to follow me so I'm trying to break that habit. Later in the year I usually do a conference at my table. They bring their writing things to my table because it's less disruptive to the other writers but right now I'm still trying to break the habit of bringing their papers because they got their name on it. So once we get past that then I can go out to them when I'm ready to conference.

**12 Now describe some of your strategies you use to teach writing. How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?**

Modeling using books....my favorite book is *Rocket Writes a Story* and we have an inspiration tree just like the book. We have seasonal words on it and then we just have some random words that they got to pick out- mall cat bike...a lot more books. I like to tie my read aloud to my writing time instead of it just being its own and that website, and I actually printed the entire thing from that website that has plans for a year. So it's awesome

**13 How do you think your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?**

It has to be a quiet time because I repeat that all the time. "Writing time is quiet time." They definitely know that writing time is quiet and the music is soft. If you finish a story you can start

a new one. I'm still working on a handful of those that way and if we're quiet we can pick a quiet place on the carpet or at our table.

**14 How would you describe a typical writing conference, an individual student writing conference?**

This early on I probably would only conference with something that they're working on at that moment because they don't have the recall to pull up an old story. So we would talk about what they're writing that day. I would pick one thing to work on with the student, like their spacing or their stretching out a word or adding a new word or listening for beginning sounds we actually ...the curriculum team wrote lessons for writing a road map which I've always used but I didn't know that I really could. You.... it's just the lines, like if you're wanting to say "I see a cat," start by drawing four lines for "I see a cat" then you kind of have a plan, you know. You're filling in four lines. **But maybe if you have a higher student you might....**

A higher student?

**Think of your highest student in your classroom what do you, how do you conference with them right now?**

We work on adding details, because he's, because I praised him for writing "I see a cat." Right now that's all he'll do and he wants to write a new story "I see a dog" and write a new story "I see a toy" instead of adding to what color is it, what color is the cat, how big is the cat, so yeah adding details.

**And what about your lowest? When you're conferencing what does it look like?**

The lowest is literally me holding his hand with his pencil trying to.....

**That's the range that you have?**

Yeah, like he doesn't recognize letters in his name. He can't write but still thinking that scribble lines are his name, he is convinced that just scribbling something is his name.

**When you have a conference with this student do you ever like write words for him to trace?**

Yes, I say that because I just went through and got this practice for him. I'm really concerned; it's tricky because he doesn't even recognize his name. I don't think we're there yet to start writing stories. We're still kind of working on "you have a name, we write your name." So I pretty much have just kind of let him draw until we get that letters belong to names.

**15 What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?**

I refer back to the books, wait what was the other one, *Rocket Writes a Story* we do all the time and I let somebody else borrow the other one...*The Best Story Ever*. Do you know that one? The little girl has to write a story and so she asks first she asks her mom to write a story or ask her mom for the story and then she doesn't like how that story is and then she asks her dad and then she asks the crazy aunt and then she asks the big brother and the story ends out just horrible until she sits down and writes her own story. It's about you have to write what you feel, what you think instead of writing someone else's ideas or writing. I refer to that one a lot when they write exactly what I write. "Oh remember the best story ever. Remember the one that you have inside." It's a tough one because I mean those that struggle especially with like fine motor. So at our level drawing is writing so if they're just drawing we are really trying to work on the "not just a scribble and then get a new paper." If you're just going to draw you still have to add your details to your picture. You can't just get a new piece of paper and then scribble something else

but you know sometimes I don't catch those then when I clean out folders I see ten scribbled pages and nothing else.

**So at the beginning of the year do you go through a lot of paper?**

Yes, we go through a lot more paper at the beginning of the year than we do later.

**16 What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?**

My strengths.....a tricky question.....writing about current events. I was in a fishing tournament so I wrote about that and my kids wrote about it a couple more days, even drew the redfish and drew the trout and boats. But I think having a connection to what they know, to what they like. When it was raining we wrote about the rain. We'll start writing about Halloween. I think just keeping it relevant to them.

**17 Describe one of your most successful or most rewarding teaching experiences in writing.**

It was a long time ago but I had a little girl write a letter to me that said "thank you for helping me stretch out hard words" and I said "you got this! Oh my God, you wrote and you told me what you're talking about in your writing!" So those moments, those when they recognize that I'm helping them be a good writer I still have it. I keep it in my file cabinet somewhere.

**18 How do you challenge your higher students in writing?**

Just by adding the details..... we've got to dig deeper, we've got to make it exciting.

**19 Think about your students that struggle in writing or experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instructor help your struggling students reach success in writing?**

....just looking at each individual because there's going to be so many different levels; praising the small and you've got to know your kids. You know the ones that keep writing "I see a cat," make sure they're putting the period at the end of "I see a cat." That would be a goal for him versus the other one getting the first letter of his name. So just knowing the levels and what each one needs.

**Participant Interview Two with Amanda  
Interviewer**

Participant

**During our last interview you described your thoughts on how students learn to write.**

**Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? 1**

....through modeling lots of modeling

**During our last interview this is how you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Would you describe yourself as a writer differently now, or in the same way as you did during our last interview? 2**

I only write down lists of things that I need to do, I need to get. I do not really do any other kind of writing.

**Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? Now, how do you feel about your ability to teach writing? 3**

I'm confident that I can teach writing but I am not, I don't think I am a miracle worker. I'm still doing prompt writing, for instance I wrote "I am thankful" and they have to finish that because I do not want them getting stuck on the not important part and I think that really helps. It helps them get started and it helps me to see the ones that are not getting it because they will just be copying the "I am thankful" part. So I know that they need extra help.

**During our last interview this is how you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think your students like to write? 4**

Now I also have some of the low students not just the a high students coming up to my table and showing me their writing because they want to spell everything correctly, they want to write more. So we made a list for Santa letters, we read a story about Santa, we made a list of some of the most popular toys so they can feel a little bit more confident when they are getting at least those words correct. So I have more students who are more interested in being accurate in their writing.

**At this time, do you think your students like to write? How do you know? 5**

For the most part I think they like to write and for the reason that....the reason why I think that is because they are so interested in sharing. They really want to show me what they are writing and how they are doing in their writing and this makes me think they like to write and they are motivated to write.

**How have the writing habits of your students And their writing instruction needs changed since our last interview? 6**

The students are not needing my writing as much as they used to. Some of the ones, they're still copying, that's what they need. They need a little bit of copying just to get them started. That's where they are, the ones that just copy what I wrote that's where they are. The other day we wrote "an." We just did the "an" family and some of them just wrote the "an" family or just an words because they're not there yet where they can write sounds that they hear. That's exactly what they need. That's where they're at right now.

**During our last interview, this is how you described the range of writing abilities of your students? How have your students writing abilities developed since our last interview?**

**Describe any changes in your students writing abilities since our last interview. 7**

I do have some generating long sentences but they are very basic. I do not have any real high writers and I do have one that's still scribbling and can't even tell me what they tried to draw. They have no story.

So we are working on being able to tell a story from their picture. This student loves writing time though. He loves to draw that is.

**During our last interview this how you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? 8**

While we have the rubric that we I also measure their growth through teacher observation. I don't walk around saying "this is a one, this is a two" but I keep track of what they're doing, what's the next step for them, what I want them to work on, this one needs help with this, this one is doing this on their own. I usually know who is still a beginner or a novice and who is needing what. Like my student who is a 3 on the rubric, he is already writing three sentences.

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year? 9**

I want them to be confident. I don't want them to keep saying "how do you spell that," "how you spell this." I don't want them to be stuck on how you spell words. I really just really just want them to be confident to just write, even invented spelling just to see if they have accomplished writing what they want to write. It drives me crazy when they come to me and say "what did I write right here?" I want them to be able to read their own writing and know what they wrote. "I don't know what you wrote" is what I say when they ask me "what did I write here?" "If you don't know, how am I supposed to know what you wrote?" Of course for my lowest student I would love just to have him write his name.

**Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview? 10**

I don't think I have made any major changes. I put on quiet music and they write about maybe they will be writing using a prompt I have given them or they will write about something that we have talked about. While they are writing I conference with students at my table.

**During our last interview, this is how you said your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How do you think your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom? 11**

We get our folders, it is a quiet time, the teacher puts music on, we line up at her table and we ask questions. There's something on the easel. The main thing they would remember is that there's music on and it is a quiet time it's really quiet and they would remember that I always say writing is a quiet time. Some will say they get to come to the carpet because when I have something on the easel they cannot see the easel so that table gets to come to the carpet and others can go anywhere they want as long as they're quiet. Sometimes I say all girls can find a quiet place in room. I kind of put a buffer in between people at their tables to keep it quiet or quieter.

**How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference? 12**

I prefer to conference them at my table. I like for them to bring their folder to me and I don't always just look at what they are working on at that moment, on that day. I will say "is there something in your folder you want to show me?" So sometimes I let them choose what they want me to look at because when they come to you there's something they want to show you. So

I give them an opportunity to show me what they want to show, something that they have done. So when I do that they, if they have an old one that they really really want to show me, that they really want me to see, there is their opportunity to show me what they wanted me to see. So they choose what they want to show me and I ask them to tell me what were they writing about. I say “tell me what you were writing about.” And hopefully they remember or hopefully they can read what they wrote and then we talk about the words. Then I decide I decide on a teaching point depending on where they are at that point. Even if they were not able to read it and they were able to tell me a story about it I feel like that is a sense of accomplishment. If their pictures are telling a story that they can remember that is part of the process.

**Since our last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write? 13**

Well, right now I motivate them by something that is related to Christmas since it is December. For instance right now I motivate them by having them write dear Santa letters. I think it is a good motivation to have them write, to work with them and writing something that they like to do, something that they have a high interest in. Adding to what I said before, we keep an inspiration tree. In the writing center we have an inspiration tree in which it comes from *Rocket Writes a Story*. They have like a real tree. They have a real tree we have a pocket chart tree. They have words on their tree in the book. The tree changes where we might have seasonal words or we might have everyday words. There's a simple picture of a book and a cat and a dog. But like right now our tree has all Christmas words on it, Santa, ornament, caroling. Just to spark stories, to spark writing.

**Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed? If so, explain. 14**

I have high expectations, maybe they are too high but I think having high expectations for students is good. I think it helps me to be successful by having high expectations.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year. 15**

Just when a kid can take a simple sentence that we have done like “I like dogs” and expand on it or they change it and say “oh I can write ‘I like cats’” or changed it like they might say “oh I can write ‘I like cats’ or ‘my cat is fluffy.’” When they take a strategy and expand their writing that is like a huge step. I think that shows that I am successful in teaching writing, in my writing instruction. That is like a huge step when they quit just writing “I like flowers,” “I like rainbows.” When they can realize it that just opens writing for them.

**Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview? 16**

Getting them to expand.....I have one where I said “oh I like that you said ‘I see a pumpkin.’ Tell me more about that pumpkin.” So he went back and said ‘it is big.’ So when they start adding details but not many are doing that yet. But I am happy with simple sentences still right now.

**Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing? 17**

I have challenged them by continuing to encourage them to add details, to change those simple sentences into more complex sentences or even just to add details by adding more sentences. I am also working with them on spacing when they are writing. We’re not even working on capitalization yet, just spacing and adding another sentence.

**Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing? 18**

I have by asking my lowest student to tell me about his picture. But I do know that one day he'll tell me one story and another day he will tell me a totally different story for the same picture. So basically I am just having him telling a story from his picture. But the students a little bit above him I am working on adding, talking to them about adding to the story, like when they share I will say "do you think you are finished with this story?" or "do you think you are going to work on it some more?" We can add to this.

**Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student? 19**

Well the student I am thinking about wrote everything backwards so my goal is to say "OK let's take this word and put it here." I don't even think it was three words that make sense but my goal was now when we write, this is the side of the paper that we start on and that picture was even a mess but my goal was we start where we write are our name. We start on this side. So my goal was not even about fixing up writing but more about where do we start writing? We start on the left side of the paper. This is the side of the paper we start on every time we write.

Writing is not always just in writer's workshop. My writing station is one of my most popular stations. And it is not writing stories always but it is they love to get a clipboard and make a list of like who's coming to their party and that is writing. Even though it is not the writing instruction time they love the magna doodles were they are word writing. Even though it is tracing there are so many different aspects of the writing process. And it is always refreshing that it is the first thing they go to on free choice Friday. Even though it is still a job, they still like to go to writing and that makes me feel good. And they love to mail letters. That's how we keep it interesting. We have envelopes there and we have little books that are different shapes

and they're writing. Sometimes I do have to remind them it is not the drawing center, it is the writing center but for the most part of it, they are writing.

## **APPENDIX C – INTERVIEWS WITH BAILEY**

**Participant Interview One with Bailey**

**Interviewer**

Participant

**Please start by telling me a little about yourself. How did you get here? Why did you become a kindergarten teacher?**

I heard there was a position and I interviewed and...is that what you were looking for?

**But also why did you apply?**

I love kids and I wanted to work with kids and I was doing Pre-K and there was a position here and that's how.

**Alright tell me about your classroom tell me what is it like to be a student in your classroom? How would a student describe being in your class?**

Hopefully they would like it and ....

**Just say what you think, its okay. If they went home and described it, what would they say?**

Most of my kids like writing so I think and they like writers workshop and they like they like the words on the wall. They like that we change out the vocabulary words and stuff. They like telling their stories and sharing.

**So that's how they would describe what they do in writing**

I think so.

**Tell me what your thoughts are on how children learn how to write**

I think children learn how to write by talking about their experiences and learning how to stretch words and recognizing sight words, learning how to stretch the sounds, learning how to..taking their experiences and putting them on paper and by modeling.

**Now think about yourself as a writer. Tell me about your personal feelings toward writing.**

**How would you describe yourself as a writer?**

I used to love to write and now I hardly ever write except for needs, you know things I need to write like lists and everything else but I used to love to write stories. I loved writing when I wrote stories and because now I don't have time to do anything else because, you know. But yeah, I like writing. I don't do it now but like when we had to take that training class where we had to keep a journal, I loved it. I loved writing and writing down things. I enjoyed that.

**How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**

I think my abilities to teach writing are pretty good. I think we have a lot of resources we have the main source we use and we have that website. I think we have a lot of resources and I like teaching writing so I think i do a pretty good job.

**Describe your students' motivation toward writing. Do you feel your students are motivated to write? How do you know?**

Most of them are motivated especially if they get to go to the chair. They're sort of, I tell them "you know if you do a really good job, I am going to choose someone to go tell a story or go to the office or to the counselor." They get extra motivated and they like being told they did a good job on their writing.

**Do you think your students like to write? How do you know?**

Yes, I think knowing that they get to share and that their work is going to be put up, that I'm going to read their work, I think that makes them a lot more motivated to write and it makes them like writing. They like to write.

**How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing and what they need, what their instruction needs are for writing?**

Most of my kids are doing a pretty good job. They're starting to stretch. They're stretching out the words. Their words are starting, you know, they are getting them on paper and we've been

working on the road map where they're putting the lines, where they write lines for how many words they're going to write. They're all able to think of stories and they're starting to even, some of the ones that can't stretch the words, some of the ones that can't write, they're getting the picture and at least writing a few sounds. That's what we're working on now, stretching their words and.....

**So you kind of said that, you described more of the range of the abilities of your students right now but don't mention any names and describe the levels that the students are at and you said that most of them are stretching out words. What else can you tell me?**

Some of them are stretching words. I have one that, I have a couple that are basically just drawing the pictures and do not know any sounds yet. I have one, he can write one letter, the "a" in his name. But then the other students will get almost every sound and they are stretching and then are actually writing sentences. So there is a wide range, but most of them are stretching and starting to hear some sounds. They're not hearing every sound in every word, but they are at least hear the beginning sound.

**How do you measure student growth in writing?**

By their samples and by their beginning samples and each six weeks and by what you see them do in your anecdotal notes.

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?**

I think for them all to be able to write a story by the end of the year and for them all to be able to hear sounds and write great stories and think of ideas.

**If I came in to your classroom during your writing instruction, what exactly would I see?**

**Describe for me how writing instruction looks in your classroom on a typical day?**

We usually have the lights dim, it is quiet. There's usually music on and the students are working at their individual seats at their desks usually and I'm usually moving around the room table to table working with one student conferencing.

**How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?**

Sometimes we use the chart paper and we write a story together. Like today we went to the pumpkin patch so we wrote everything we did at the pumpkin patch. We wrote the story together. Other times maybe we're working on spacing and where you use linking cubes to put spaces in between words using the projector so all the students can see. Other times we're thinking about what we could write about. I'm telling them what I've seen them writing in the past and what I'm looking for. But most of it I think is modeling.

**How would your students describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?**

My students would probably describe it that they usually start out on the carpet and usually we write about something they know about. The students usually get to share. Two to three students usually get to share. They write about experiences they have and they usually know that their thinking of ideas of what they want to write about, what they care about. They know they have to use details. They know they have to use more than one color. They know they have to stretch words.

**....more than one color?**

Oh, more than one color in their picture.

**Oh when they're drawing their picture**

Yes, when they're drawing their picture.

**How would you describe a typical individual student writing conference?**

I usually start out asking what they're writing about and then, depending upon where their needs are, sometimes some of them will have trouble thinking of an idea, other students may be having trouble stretching a word they're stuck on it, so I talk to them about "write what you know" and "move on" maybe "using the linking chart" in they're writing. It depends on what their needs are. We work on spacing, keep spacing between the words, spacing while they're writing.

**What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?**

I talk about what they can write about to get them thinking about something they would actually want to write about. I talk to them about sharing their stories with other people whether it be someone in the school or their parents or a friend in another class or maybe another teacher.

**What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?**

I think I have been pretty good at modeling this year, modeling the stories for them and just using the different.... like taking them from where they are and to where they need to go.

**Think about all the years you have been teaching writing. Think about you most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing. Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing.**

I guess it would be last year when one of my little girl's, her mom got cancer and she was able to write her a letter about how she felt, you know. Telling her mom she was scared and she wished she would get better. But she really learned to write and she wrote her mom that letter and I was crying and I was helping her write. But, I mean, I guess that would have to be it. Like that's her way to express her feelings of her mom's cancer, was her writing and she used that writing. That would have to be it.

**How do you challenge your higher students in writing?**

...adding more detail, talking about talking about feelings, talking about, you know, about more, having them put more in their writing than "I went to the store," "I went home," "the end," ....having them put more details in their writing

**Think about your students that struggle in writing, the students that experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instruct those students? How do you help your struggling students reach success in writing?**

I think just getting them excited about writing and motivated to write and then having them write about what they know, having them write about themselves and then encouraging them to stretch their words using the linking chart or just working with that and getting them so they can see they can do it. I think once they can see that they can do it, then they are more able to write

**Participant Interview Two with Bailey**

**Interviewer**

**Participant**

**During our last interview, you described your thoughts on how students learn to write.**

**Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? How do children learn to write?**      1

I think by watching, by seeing someone model, by having experiences and learning how to put it on paper.

**During our last interview you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Would you describe yourself as a writer differently now, or in the same way as during our last interview? How would you describe yourself as a writer?**      2

I love to write and I wish I had more time to write.

**Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**      3

I feel pretty good. I've been doing it a few years now and I think we have a lot of resources to help and I like teaching writing.

**During our last interview you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think your students are motivated to write? Do you think your students like to write? How do you know?** 4 5

They like to write. They get upset if we miss writing time one day. They like to write, they are motivated to write and they like to write for others to read. If they get to share with somebody

else in the building they are excited to get to do that. They're excited to get to share their stories on paper.

I know they like to write especially because they get upset if we miss writing time once. They like to write to share with others especially others around the building.

**How have the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs changed since our last interview? Describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs? 6**

Most of them are able to think about a story and they are stretching words. Most of them are able to write; at least some of them are able to stretch words. Most of them are able to write a sentence. But then I have some that can draw a picture that don't know any sounds yet so they that cannot hear the sounds to stretch words and then I have some that are almost writing complete sentences with periods and putting spaces.

**During our last interview, you described the range of writing abilities of your students?**

**How have your students writing abilities developed since our last interview? Describe any changes in your students writing abilities since our last interview. Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names. Just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels. 7**

I have some that are still only able to draw a picture and some writing sentences and then everything in between.

**During our last interview you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? How do you measure student growth in writing?**

by conferencing with them and looking at their writing samples and talking with them and looking at their previous work sample from each six weeks and looking back to see the progress they've made

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year? 9**

My goals for my students are for them to write a story, to be able to stretch all the sounds or at least most sounds and leave spaces between words and write sentences and tell a story and to, of course, to love writing or like writing

**Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview? 10**

A lot of times I am modeling and sometimes I pick their writing samples that they are writing and use theirs for modeling. It is a lot of modeling.

**During our last interview, you told me how your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How would a student describe writing instruction time in your classroom, being in your class? 11**

They would say that they get to write about something they know about and they need to write sentences and leave spaces between their words and use periods and sometimes they get to share their writing.

**How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference? 12**

Most of them are working on stretching words and maybe writing a sentence. Some of them I am still working on drawing a picture because they don't know any sounds yet so they that cannot

hear the sounds to stretch words and then I have some that are almost writing complete sentences with periods and putting spaces so we are working on adding details and what else can you tell me.

**Since our last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write? 13**

talk to them about what they want to say or about what they want to write about, offer to have them share....Most of the time it's because they just think they can't do it and so maybe help them a bit and see if you can show them that they can do it is by sitting with them and conferencing with them.

**Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed? 14**

I don't know. We do a lot of having them talk about stories before they go write so I guess we do a lot of getting the story down that they want to write about so we do a lot with that. This year we did a lot with them spacing by using the road map and things like that to teach spacing. So I guess that would be a lesson that's a strong lesson or something that I'm good at.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year. 15**

I have one that was not hearing sounds and she did not know any letters or sounds and now she is hearing sounds and she is amazing. I can read her writing. She wrote a sentence and I can read it just by her sounds. So yes, that was mine this year.

**Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview? 16**

...maybe by having them say what they are going to write about before they go to start writing and by sitting down with them and working on spacing and hearing the sounds in words

**Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing? 17**

...by having them add more detail, having them write more sentences, having them add in humor or describing words, things that make them sad, writing more emotion and describing words and things like that

**Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing? 18**

I think just modeling, modeling and conferencing with them, taking their stories, what they want to say, and helping them to get in on paper, because sometimes if they can just see it once, even if it's with your help, and you're helping them stretch the words and stuff then they're more excited to get another story the next time.

**Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student? 19**

One was writing. He is smart and he can do it but when he would write he would write words all over the place. He would add in words he didn't need. He would write the same words twice. So we talked about reading his work and so as he's writing, he's reading it and he's going back and he's reading it as he's writing it and it's helped. His sentences are starting to make sense. His stories are starting to make sense where before he was adding in all kinds of stuff.

#### **APPENDIX D – INTERVIEWS WITH CHLOE**

**Participant Interview One with Chloe**

**Interviewer**

**Participant**

**First tell me how you got here why did you become a kindergarten teacher? Or how did you become a kindergarten teacher?**

My mom always said “Don’t be a kindergarten teacher!” So I was going to be a lawyer and she always, she was a teacher for many years, she retired this year, and she said “Don’t be a teacher! We don’t make enough money.” So she always discouraged me to be a teacher, however, I think watching her and seeing what a great teacher she was, it just really, that it really rubs off on me. That made me want to be a great teacher and I started teaching about 14 years ago. I guess I’ve been teaching 14 years and I was, well I’ve been here for seven years and all seven years in kindergarten. I’ve been here all seven years and I actually, it was funny because I actually got my start as the bilingual teacher so I taught in Spanish then PreK for seven years and so when I came here I was excited because I got to speak English teaching English.

**Tell me about your classroom. Tell me what is it like to be a student in your classroom.**

**How would a student describe being in your class?**

Well, what I hope is the like it. I think they like it because I have a very musical classroom. I love incorporating music into everything we do. Plus, I have an ESL class, so we use a lot of visuals, a lot of hands-on activities, a lot of music and I’ve developed moves with the music. So, I would hope that the students are having a great time and having fun learning and being engaged and interested.

**What are your thoughts are on how children learn how to write. How do you think children learn to write?**

I think by modeling, seeing the teacher model writing and also interacting with me and the other students and if they actively practice writing. I really believe in modeling for the kids as much as you can and having them, giving them that exposure and that interest in it and by writing. It creates motivation for them.

**I'm going to ask you now about your personal feelings about writing. Tell about how you feel about writing. How would you describe yourself as a writer?**

I love writing. I love teaching writing and the kids, getting them excited about writing and getting them to have enthusiasm. It depends on the teacher, the teacher's perception of writing, how they see the teacher. Like if they see the teacher excited about writing then it really looks exciting and so they are excited about writing too. I think I do that for my students. I loved writing. I love teaching writing and I think it does rub off on the students because one of the moms said one of the students left early and he said to his mom "aw mom, I missed writing time," and I was like "aw, that's so good." Yes, she emailed me. She's said he was really upset because he missed writing time and I feel like your perception of something really rubs off on the kids and that's important that they see how important it is and they're going to use it in their everyday life. I always like to write about my kids, my own kids, because like my daughters here she's already five and she's in kindergarten, and so I write about her all the time and they just get a connection from it and they are interested and they want to know what she's doing now, what is she getting herself in to. So I use my own personal experiences to write and in that way they can use that and do it as well.

**How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**

My ability to teach writing.....I use the district curriculum methods and my own method. I feel like what helps my ability is that I love to do it, so I mean I think how I feel....I love to do it.

**Ok now I want you to think about your students do you think your students are motivated to write and if you think they're motivated to write how do you know that?**

For example, I have here is an e-mail to me from a parent about her son was really upset because he had to leave early and missed writing time. If we do happen to miss it, they are upset and asking if we can have our writing time and so I know that they are motivated to write because they want writing time every day and they want to write.

**How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs?**

I feel like right now it's the transition phase. Now they're realizing that print carries a message and now they're starting to figure that, they're trying to actually form sentences and things like that. So it's been like a big aha for them and I feel like that right now we're really working on adding spaces to our words because like right now a lot of them are just doing letter blocks or blocks of letters and stretching and just getting in those first letters. I'm noticing that we really need to work on spacing. So I am focusing on spacing. I have some with the ability where one is writing paragraphs and then I have some where their writing skills are beginning writing, still in the beginning writing, that there in the novice stage in the beginning stages of writing. So they're kind of a little, they're still I would say in basic in the writing ability.

**Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names. Just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels.**

Some are forming sentences and some of the ones writing sentences are leaving space between their words, some are not. A few are adding spaces between their sounds which are just beginning sounds. Most are writing beginning sounds and one is writing paragraphs and one that just writes random letters.

### **How do you measure student growth in writing?**

We have a writing checklist that is used and that's how we measure their growth in writing and through teacher conferencing as well when a conference with them.

### **What are your goals for your students in writing goals? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?**

Well, I want them to be writing as much as they can and I want them to be using their spaces and using their periods and their uppercase letters. So basically I want them all to better than proficient on our writing checklist.

### **Alright If I came in to your classroom during your writing instruction, what exactly would I see? Describe for me how writing instruction looks in your classroom on a typical day?**

I start off with a model for them, some sort of a story. I will do a model lesson. I will usually write about my family or something that has to do with me, something that relates to me. So, for instance, I will write about that my daughter was sick today. I will focus on one thing, like spacing. So I will talk out loud while writing about how I leave spaces between my words. They'll go to their spots, their tables, and then they write about what they want to write about and sometimes they need more, they need it to be more guided. So, sometimes it is more guided and I will tell them "I want you to write about this today." For instance, "We're going to write about what you see. You see things all around." And they can add their own ideas. So it will be a little bit more structured so they will have an idea of what to start writing and a model of what to write. If we write together what they should write, then we talk about the words on the word wall they can use in their sentences. I can even hang up a sentence starter, "I see \_\_\_\_\_," on the word wall and they will fill in the blank as they write and have the pattern of writing to start with and a model to follow. But for the most part I will let them write about whatever they want to

write, whatever they choose to. At the end of our writing time I choose at least two people to share and we will have a celebration. We will praise the students that share and we will also talk about how they can improve their writing and what good things they are doing with their writing. Then we will close it out by talking about what we learned today.

**Now describe some of your strategies you use to teach writing. How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?**

We have been using a new website that we have been focusing on a lot on the internet that incorporates a lot of literature. What I really like about it is that it incorporates a lot of literature into writing time and I think that's really great. They know and they realize authors are using the same strategies that we are and how they can write and I think that's a really important component as well earlier he described.

Sometimes I do sticker stories. So like sometimes they don't know what they want to write about so if they take a sticker and they can write about the sticker. So now they have an idea of what to write about on that day. They can write about things like, they can select events or an alligator. So if it's a sticker of an alligator, they can write about an alligator. They can write about anything they like. Sometimes they do not know what to write about so if we're talking about nouns, people places and things, I tell them "well as authors you can also write about people places and things." So I will say "you can write about a person." So we can do things like that, do the kind of things that help them in their writing so that they have a purpose for writing.

**How do you think your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?**

Important, hopefully fun

**How would you describe a typical writing conference, an individual student writing conference?**

I go to my student and I ask them what they are writing about today and they'll tell me and then I say "aw that's great" and I'll look for things that they might need to work on and they will start over and I'll work with them and help them meet some of the needs of where they are in writing and what they need to work on.

**Think of your highest student in your classroom. What do you how do you conference with them right now?**

Well, I would look at their writing and have them tell about their writing and maybe work on spacing or other areas in writing that they are ready for. I work with them on some of their needs. I work with them on what they need to work on.

**What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?**

Luckily, I haven't really had that problem. They're really good. They really like to write. But if I did, I would conference with them and we would talk about "what could you write about," "what do you want to write about," "why don't you write about what happened at recess," and "remember when someone..." ... So, kind of giving them ideas of what to write about, something to connect with and using that. That kind of brings them out of their shell, ready to go and ready to get started writing and what to work on in writing.

**What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?**

Modeling I would say and I would say high expectations for all students in writing. I try to always get them to do their best and I think that encourages them a lot of times and so that know

the importance of writing because you're going to use it your whole life and it's fun and you can say anything you want when you're writing.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing.**

You're going to laugh and I don't know why, I don't know why she said this. I think of this and it is hilarious that I was just helping her. I was conferencing with a student and we were writing and she was getting it and she turned to look at me and she goes "You're better than God." "What?" I said, "what, you think I'm better than God? I could never be better than God." Well, to this day I don't know what made her say that. I just think she was so proud of herself and so she wanted to let me know how wonderful she thought it was because she can write and that I did a good job teaching. So, yeah, we had a talk about that, but that was like, that was like the highest compliment anyone ever gave me but I do not deserve that high of a compliment. So we talked about it.

**How do you challenge your higher students in writing?**

Challenging the higher students, those they just take off. I have one right now who's just ready to write some paragraphs and I always tell them "when you think you're done that we're not done. You can always add to what you've written, add to your picture, add at your words or start a new piece." So that way she knows already well if I finish that, I can always go back and add more details to my picture or to my writing or start a new story. I really like to focus on their progress and show the students their progress because I think that it motivates them to reach further and achieve and strive to do better as well and they are like "Wow, if I did that then I can do even more and I can do this and I can do this too."

**Think about your students that struggle in writing, the students that experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instruct those students? How do you help your struggling students reach success in writing?**

I feel like I do have to work more with them one-on-one even beyond conferencing because they need to be taught at a slower pace than most of the students. When I am working with my struggling students, I just take it one step at a time and we focus on using our sight words and our word wall. We focus on stretching the words, stretching out the sounds they hear. We also do something, I forgot what is called, it is with a path or something like that where you draw out lines so you can count the words in your sentence before you start writing and draw lines for each word. If I want to write “I see a dog then” I write blanks for each word, so four blanks. They count how many words and then they put the lines down for them so they know you’re going to have a word on every line on each line. Then they will start from the beginning, “what was your first word? Where can I find the word I want to write? I can stretch it out or I can look at the word wall,” and then we look at the word wall. I work with them on remembering their resources, the work wall the linking chart, other things we have around the room. There are many things around the room to you know make that connection and see exactly what they need to do so we spend a lot of time doing that in the beginning and just try to be encouraging and celebrating everything that the two they do.

**Participant Interview Two with Chloe**

**Interviewer**

**Participant**

**During our last interview, you described your thoughts on how students learn to write.**

**Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? How do children learn to write?**        **1**

I feel like students learn how to write from a lot of modeling, from being exposed to a lot of modeling, letters and sounds and interactive writing.

**During our last interview you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Would you describe yourself as a writer differently now, or in the same way as during our last interview? How would you describe yourself as a writer?**        **2**

I love to write and try to instill that in my students and I think I have transferred that love and interest because I always write about myself or things related to me. I always write about something connected to me so they see my interest in writing about myself and because I have high expectations. I expect them to reach high levels in writing and the reason why is because I think writing ability is so important and having an interest in writing is so important too.

**Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**        **3**

I feel fine. I love writing and I try to make sure my students, my kids, love writing. My ability to teach, I think using the resources that we have, I think that helps us a lot to be better writing teachers.

**During our last interview you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think**

**your students are motivated to write? Do you think your students like to write? How do you know? 4 5**

I do, I do. I think because a lot of times we're not done yet and they still want to finish and if we ever don't do writing they are upset that we missed our writing time. They're like "we did not do our writing time today." And it can be a big drama. So, I always try to make it important so that they know that they can use it all the time and so that they love it.

**How have the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs changed since our last interview? Describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs? 6**

Right now we are focusing on writing, the many writing possibilities for writing. so they are learning about writing letters, lists, and also just writing about their events. It is really interesting to see the ones that will write about what you were teaching and then sometimes they choose to write something different about something that is important to them. Like a little boy, one day had to write about his upcoming birthday party.

**During our last interview, you described the range of writing abilities of your students?**

**How have your students writing abilities developed since our last interview? Describe any changes in your students writing abilities since our last interview. Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names. Just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels. 7**

Right now I do have levels like one of my higher writers, she's really producing a lot more and she's using the spaces and other writing skills we have. Then I have some of my lower ones that, the ones still that aren't producing, maybe they're just writing a string of letters and so there still

kind of in their basic stage where my higher student is pretty much level four a number which is the highest..

**During our last interview you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? How do you measure student growth in writing?**

**8**

I measure student growth through the writing checklist and also through anecdotal notes and also just by observing what they're doing.

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year? 9**

I would love for them to be writing at level four, the highest level on our rubric which is beyond proficient. The four levels are beginner, novice, proficient and advanced. So better than proficient would be would be advanced. These are high expectations.

**Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview? 10**

The students who were a little bit more dependent on me and I think that's gotten better so I think that's one major change that has occurred in a classroom. I have been trying to move them away from that dependency and to become more independent and I think I've been working on that is a teacher trying to instill more independence.

**During our last interview, you told me how your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How would a student describe writing instruction time in your classroom being in your class? 11**

They would say we write and I would hope that they say that that is their favorite time of the day. I think it is their favorite time of day from what I gather because they love to do it and they love that writing time and they love when we celebrate and they feel that accomplishment.

**How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference? 12**

I start out by asking them what they are writing about and then I try to find something to compliment them on before I start working with them. I find a skill that they need to work on and we work on it together.

**Since out last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write? 13**

I'd try to encourage them. I will conference with them. I try to make it fun and I do have several students at this time I am doing that with. Sometimes they're not motivated sometimes they'll sit there and play with their crayons and things like that. So I'd remind them.

**Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed? If so, explain. 14**

The fact that I love to write and I try to model that for them and I always relate it to my life so that they take interest in it. I remember that my first year when I would do that I remember that it would really spark their interest and they're like "we want to see what your daughter did today." "What did your son do today?" So they kind of got that interest and then they were learning at the same time about writing. I think that is really important. And also I think what I said last time is that I have high expectations.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year. 15**

I think seeing the growth of one of my students and she was very reluctant to write and now I just noticed like today she just wrote off a letter to her family, her cousin. So, just seeing that growth, it just feels like while, because I didn't help her today and she just did it. So I, just seeing that growth from where they used to be to where they are, that is rewarding. And I'd tell them you know that something happens because like magic. When you come back from thanksgiving you are going to be so much smarter. And it's happened they have grown so much.

**Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview? 16**

I don't know, maybe modeling, maybe modeling using my life experiences and making them see the importance of writing. Also a lot of it is me having faith in them because I notice that if I, once I, when I have been conferencing with them they are kind of like "I can't" and I tell them "yes you can ,you can do this." I will help you and then and I think that by them getting that self confidence they know I can take risks and I can take chances and it's ok if it is not right but I am stretching and I'm using my word wall and I'm doing what I am supposed to be doing. I really don't know if I have done anything different than just encouraging them so that they can get that confidence.

**Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing? 17**

When I think about my higher students, I encourage them to add a little bit more to their piece or ask them to add details that you know what did they see what did they feel. I encourage them to add their inner voice. So I always get them to try to produce more.

**Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing? 18**

....encouraging them like I said earlier by finding something that interests them to write about, something that they are really familiar with, making sure that they are strong with their letters and sounds, making sure that they can have those tools to stretch out the sounds that they hear and other things, modeling and just working with them one-on-one through conferences, getting them to start giving them that chance to start producing and stretching and writing words.

**Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student? 19**

I am thinking of one student. He has also has problems writing, fine motor problems. His challenge was a lot more like feeling like I can't really hold my pencil right, I can't really write and so I can't really do it. I gave him the motivation. I told him "you know what you are the boss of that pencil." And you should have seen his face light up and he realized "yeah I am." So then he started producing for me and so that was a moment for me that I celebrated being a teacher because I connected with him and I made him feel like he could. I made him feel he could when he thought maybe he couldn't.

## **APPENDIX E– INTERVIEWS WITH DANIELLE**

**Participant Interview One with Danielle  
Interviewer**

Participant

**First tell me how you got here. Why did you become a kindergarten teacher? How did you become a kindergarten teacher?**

This is my 13<sup>th</sup> year to teach, 11<sup>th</sup> year to teach kindergarten and I actually went through the alternative certification program but I had a background majoring in psychology. So I still wanted to work with kids and then I ended up in Corpus Christi because of my husband's job.

**Tell me about your classroom. Tell me what is it like to be a student in your classroom.**

**How would a student describe being in your class?**

I hope that they have fun while they're learning and enjoy doing activities that are hands-on. I know that I try to keep the routine pretty much the same everyday so that they know what to expect. If there's a change, I kind of make sure that they are aware of it ahead of time so that they're; you know I just know how kids are with routines.

**What are your thoughts are on how children learn how to write. How do you think children learn to write?**

I think they learn how to write by seeing somebody else do it and model it for them. I think that they have to, for some of these babies, they have to be shown that they can be writers because they do not feel that they are or they don't believe that they are. So, it's really you know even with shared writing or interactive writing a lot of them feel like they can't do, they can't make a certain letter or something like that and I will model and show them and then they'll be like "oh yeah, I can do that." So it's a lot of, I think they don't feel confident in themselves, and so a lot of it is building their confidence.

**I'm going to ask you now about your personal feelings about writing. Tell about how you feel about writing. How would you describe yourself as a writer?**

The only writing I have probably done has been in the classroom the last several years other than writing papers in college. I didn't mind it when I was in school or in college. I know I enjoyed the process I guess of writing a story, not necessarily a paper for a class, but if it was like a persuasive story, something like that, I enjoyed doing that, but not a research paper.

**How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**

Sometimes I feel like it is one of my weaker areas because I think in the last couple of years I just felt like a lot of the things that we were wanting our kids to do, the majority of them couldn't do it. But this year I feel better because we've slowed down our curriculum because it was above their level except for last year I had a couple of them that were way above. We now have access to a web site that we're using to supplement our writing curriculum and so I feel like more comfortable with it. I would say because I think in past years I just felt like "Why am I doing this? I don't think they can do it." Some of that, maybe I'm just not confident of them, but I don't know, this year I feel more comfortable with it and it seems to be going better.

**Ok now I want you to think about your students. Do you think your students are motivated to write and, if you think they're motivated to write, how do you know that?**

I feel like they are motivated to write because they get excited about what they want to share with their stories and they like to share and show the kids what they feel they have accomplished when they have written something. But, yeah they enjoy it because they get to share what they have done and they get praised for their writing by me or by the other students when they share their writing with the class.... and I think a lot, for some of them, if I don't give them a topic to write about, if it's just what they want write about, I think they have lots of stories to share so

they come up with some good ideas and things that we talk about that are personal experiences you can write about.

**How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs?**

Like right now, I know that a lot of them are still writing in all capitals because that's just kind of what they know to write right now. And I have tried to, you know, like today our goal was capital letters at the beginning and spacing. Spacing is a big one too. And I have seen a lot of improvement over the last few weeks with that.

**Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels**

A lot of them are still writing in all capital letters and I have a few that are still just drawing. I sometimes give them a writing prompt and usually it's just words with sight words that we are working on. Right now, I am just trying to get them to write one sentence. And I do have some that are writing sentences. I have a few that are writing on their own and do not need any sort of visual prompts or anything like that from me. And for them, their need is punctuation and all of them are still phonetically spelling words and we are working on that, stretching the word out and that is what I'm mostly work on with them when I conference with them and help them out with what they need.

**How do you measure student growth in writing?**

Really just by their different pieces that they have in their folders, so by looking at their writing, seeing improvement even when we do like a shared writing piece or an interactive writing piece, even with some of them with their names, even, you know, I have seen such a big improvement with that from the beginning of the year. Some of them struggle so much. So really just looking

through their work and even their station work or anything that they have, any writing that they do.

**What are your goals for your students in writing goals? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?**

As a whole I would want all kids to be able to write a complete sentence with correct spacing with correct punctuation and correct letter formation. For my students who are able to, I would hope that they would be able to produce up to three sentences and be able to have a beginning middle and end to their writing.

**Alright If I came in to your classroom during your writing instruction, what exactly would I see? Describe for me how writing instruction looks in your classroom on a typical day?**

It may just be me writing something or shared writing, maybe making a list of something like that. We would be doing something where they came up with ideas like of who the community helpers are. So we would come up with ideas together and we would write those down together. Like today we are just creating lists and then during writers workshop time, like today, we were talking about fall and pumpkins and things like that and we read a story and then I wanted them to write about the story or about what they like about the fall season. So we do a short little mini lesson. I model writing for them and we go over the procedures of what they are supposed to do when I send them off to write on their own. We discuss their ideas, what they would like to write about and then they go write. I usually have a couple people that I just go have them pass out the paper and then I pass out the folders and they go to their spots and begin to work.

**Now describe some of your strategies you use to teach writing. How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?**

Besides doing some modeling or making lists or shared or interactive writing, some of our phonics lessons like stretching words out and blending words. I feel like that kind of comes into play with them being able to spell words out, sound words out or even be able to know how to spell words that they've learned from a rhyming lesson or something like that. So I guess that's some of the other methods

**How do you think your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?**

That it's the quiet time for them to be able to kind of sit and work and to kind of be on their own and use their own ideas and not have, I guess and not have, I mean I kind of try to limit the distractions. They especially love the sharing time. I will say that. They really enjoyed that part and I try to incorporate the different affirmations and things like that to make it fun.

**How would you describe a typical writing conference, an individual student writing conference?**

I would first make sure I understand what they are trying to write and see if there is anything that I can work with them to correct, maybe that they have spelled incorrectly or discuss with them what could we do to make it look better. Like today, I had one girl, she had, I am a working with the paper that has one box with two lines and she had written "I like" on the first line and "I like" again on the second line. So we read it together and I said "Does that make sense? Does that explain what it is that you like?" She said "No." I said "OK, so what it is that you like?" She said "I like trick or treating." So I worked with her and we just fixed it. So a lot of it right now is kind of fixing their writing and she had good spaces so I complemented her on that and I pointed out what she was doing. So a lot of it is just fixing what we can do to fix it or to make it look better.

**Think of your highest student in your classroom. What do you, how do you conference with them right now?**

The same way, I work with them on fixing up anything they need to fix and telling them or complimenting them, talking to them about what they are doing correctly.

**What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?**

I'd try to get them to at least put a picture down and then if they can do that and then if they, it kind of gets them out of the thought of "I have to write, I have to write I have to write." So if they get the picture and down, then I will give them a little time and I will come back to them maybe later and say "OK, now what is that?" and they will tell me what it is. "OK, well let's label your picture." I can kind of do something like that. Take baby steps and try to get them writing something down that way.

**What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?**

Gee, I don't know. It's hard to say. I don't know right now. I don't know, that's a hard question to answer. I guess modeling and I'd try to always set the goal for them for the day whether it's one or two goals and then I'll model that and show them what it should look like and then also I always tried to show them writing that is messed up, maybe with no spacing between the words or something like that and then we try to fix it and see what's wrong with it.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing.**

Are you serious? That's a hard one. Oh my gosh, that's a hard one. It could be today, actually.

It wasn't strictly from me because the kid that goes to see our reading lab teacher and in his writing he is lucky to get a picture or a drawing on his paper and his name is hard to make out sometimes. A lot of his work and stuff and stations is scribbling. He went with the reading lab teacher. I have two other kids that usually go with them but they were absent so she worked with him one-on-one and it was amazing what he did just working one-on-one and how easily he is distracted. He came back and he was so proud to show me that he had written a complete sentence. Of course she helped him you know how she had the words for him and things like that, but comparing it to other times that he is with her. I praised him! I was very very proud of him! So that you know, shows you how, you know.

**How do you challenge your higher students in writing?**

I'd try to get them to write three, at least three sentences and try to get them to tell me "a beginning to your story, and the middle to your story and what happen and then an ending to your story." I try to get them to have more descriptive words and they're not just "I like pumpkins" but will write about pumpkins and tell me about pumpkins, describe the pumpkins, have them be more descriptive in their writing.

**Think about your students that struggle in writing, the students that experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instruct those students? How do you help your struggling students reach success in writing?**

I pull them one-on-one and just kind of work with them one-on-one so that they can have that one-on-one individual time and not be distracted with other kids around them.

**Participant Interview Two with Danielle**

**Interviewer**

Participant

**During our last interview you described your thoughts on how students learn to write.**

**Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? How do children learn to write? 1**

I feel they learn how to write through observing others, observing their moms and dads and seeing what sort of writing others are doing first and then obviously through experiences in the classroom whether it's in stations or practicing writing their name, different things like that.

**During our last interview this is how you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Would you describe yourself as a writer differently now, or in the same way as during our last interview? How would you describe yourself as a writer? 2**

I don't really write creatively. I just write emails and texts and things like that and lists and I write lists of things. There is just not time. So I mostly write grocery lists and to do lists and things like that because there's no time to do any other kind of writing.

**Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing? 3**

I feel like I am able to teach it and I feel like it's one of my weaker areas for some reason out of all of the components that we teach. I don't know what it is. It's something. It's not that I am uncomfortable with it but I guess if it was like the one subject that I had to pick as my weakest it would be writing and I don't know if that's because I'm not a writer myself or what.

**During our last interview you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think**

**your students are motivated to write? Do you think your students like to write? How do you know? 4 5**

I think that they are motivated because I try to encourage them to write about personal experiences or things that matter to them or mean something to them. Maybe if they are writing about their puppy or their favorite toy or what they like to eat, something that they can make a connection to a connection with personally, then that's what motivates them to write that and that gets them to like writing.

I think they like to write especially because they enjoyed sharing their work because they like to share what they have written about their personal experiences.

**How have the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs changed since our last interview? Describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs? 6**

I still have some that are struggling to write. Most of them actually can write their names completely with a few letters here and there. A lot of them are just, I feel like if I can model or give maybe a sentence starter maybe for some of those that it really helps them because I try to tie in sight words and words they would already know because I think that they are wanting, they are still so dependent upon me on how to spell things. They want to spell things correctly and I'm trying to teach them. It's okay to be stretching out and put down what you hear. Some of them are still writing a lot of capitals, just some of them, and most need work on spacing. Even some of the better writers still need to work on spacing.

**During our last interview, you described the range of writing abilities of your students?**

**How have your students writing abilities developed since our last interview? Describe the**

**range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names. Just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels.** 7

So some are still just writing strings of letters, no words, and beginning to tell a story from their picture and some are attempting or writing complete sentences.

**During our last interview you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? How do you measure student growth in writing?** 8

I measure growth by looking at their pieces from previous weeks and by comparing how they are writing today or a few days ago and seeing that growth is made that way, whether they are putting down a complete sentence compared to before when maybe they're just writing a word or labeling their picture or something like that. So looking at their previous writing and seeing the changes and the progress that they have made, what they're doing now and what they were doing before. The rubric that we use to evaluate their writing, I feel like I only use that only when it is time to do the report card. I really don't use the rubric when I'm thinking about where they are and what they need in writing.

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?** 9

My ultimate goal would be for every student to write at least two sentences, of course I would want them to be perfect and have spacing and correct punctuation and capitalization and then everything like that. For some of them if they can at least get one sentence for some of them it's going to be a struggle just to get a complete thought, one complete sentence down. That would be my ultimate goal, for all of them, for them to get at least one complete thought written down or even two sentences.

**Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview? 10**

Well we might be working on writing lists, how to write a list. So I might be introducing how to write lists. So I would tell them what we use a list for, why do you write a list and I would be, I would start at the beginning of how to do it. So I would start with what we are focusing on and I would either be introducing something or would be reviewing something we already talked about and then take it one step further but that's not really any different that's just what I'm doing now.

We would generate ideas of what we can write depending upon what we are working on. So we would generate some ideas on what we can write a list for and reasons why we would write a list like for grocery shopping and for Santa and things like that. We would talk about what to use a list for and then I would try to get them to think of what they're going to write a list about.

Whatever I talk about I try to encourage them to do that at their table by themselves. They don't have to but that's what I prefer that they do. So like when they go to their table, I would hope that they would make a list of at least three things and I encourage them to do that while they're working by praising the ones that are doing it, praising them for all to hear. I do tell them "this is what we are working on and this is what I want you to do" but it is impossible to get all of them to do what we talk about that day because I can't keep an eye on all of them and with their writing.

Sometimes I do focus on mechanics of writing, spacing and try to use capitals at the beginning of the sentence only and punctuation. And I might work on writing a complete sentence. "How do you do that?" "How do you write a complete sentence?" It starts with teaching them how to label a picture. "You drew a dog, now label it with the word dog. OK now maybe write the dog's name" and then from there I'd try to get them to say "now tell me something else about your

dog.” So basically by getting them to tell you their thoughts and then helping them with getting them on paper try to like build it up from the word to the sentence, so finally they can say “My dog is playing outside.” So I might get them to write a complete sentence and getting them to expand on one little thing that they drew starting with labeling, moving on to tell me something else and then to the sentence and helping them get that sentence on paper.

**During our last interview, you described how your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How would your students describe the writing instruction time in your classroom? 11**

Well right now they’re very noisy. They’re not supposed to be but they are. But they would probably say, they would probably say what they are writing about so I think if you ask them what we do during our writing time they would say something like “This is what I write about and when I am done then I can write about anything else.” They would say that sometimes they can write anything they want other times they have to write what we’re working on and when they finish that then they can write whatever they want.

**How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference? 12**

I would have them tell me about their piece that they are writing. I would ask them to tell me what their writing about. I do that if they have started, but if they are struggling to get started on paper I would try to encourage them to get started and to decide what they want to write about. But if I’m basing it on something we have to write, if I want them to write a list then I would ask them questions like “What can you write a list about?” If I want them to, if we are doing a letter, then I would say “Who can you write a letter to?” I would just try to get them to be more or give

more detail than usual because they'll usually just want to say very little like "Well, I will write about this," and they will tell you one thing so I'd tell them to tell me more about it. The lower students would write maybe the label, maybe label one thing, so I'd say tell me more about that one thing. "What else can you label?" "What else can you tell me?" "What else do you see?" "What else are you going to draw?" The higher students, I will let them read their sentence and talk about it and tell them "OK, what else can you tell me?" or "What else happened? Tell me more. Tell me more." "What else could you write?" and then depending if I see something that's, that they need, let's say they wrote a sentence down and there's no spacing then I might say, "OK, let's look at this and let's that's read it together," and we'll read it together and then "Is there anything we can do to fix it?" "Is there anything that needs to be fixed?" So I work on expanding on what they have already written and then maybe fixing something that needs to be fixed. Even with some of my highest writers I am working on things like capitalizing or not capitalizing everything. So I'm working on things like that, fixing things like that and I don't know why they do that. I don't know if that's because they are more comfortable in writing capital letters but that's what they're doing.

**Since our last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write? 13**

I might try to just go over to the student and talk to them and see why they don't want to write and try to go from there and see if I can help them generate ideas and maybe try to connect it personally to something maybe that they did at home last night or over the weekend. It's kind of easy to start motivating them with something that they can make a connection to. With a higher student I might motivate them by probably the same way. If they're not writing, to spark their

interest by talking about things that they might want to write about. So even if they are a higher writer, I would still try to motivate them by making a personal connection.

**Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed? What are your strengths in writing instruction? 14**

I guess I'm good at the routine of the writing lesson, so starting out with a mini lesson, explaining to the students what we're going to focus on today for writing for the day, model what our focus is or writing strategy for them. So kind of show them something to focus on. So maybe if we are working on a lesson writing a list and I am modeling and I might model not using capital letters and where you should use a capital letter. So my mini lesson would focus on writing a list but I would also focus on when or where we use lowercase letters, really focus on that to get that through to them. I really would try to get that in their writing to stay with them so they can take it to their table. So maybe my strength is modeling for them.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year. 15**

Well, I had a student from last year come visit me. And he had a note that he had written and a card he wanted to show me and how he thought I was the best teacher and he had a little gift for me and he had written his little note to me. So that made me feel good like I did a good job and now he can do things like that and write a note to his last year's teacher. He was one of my higher kids but still he had also written a thank you letter and it was very detailed and that made me feel good and he brought it to me and just seeing that progress and that he makes a connection with writing not just during writing instruction time but just in writing and thanking his teacher from last year and things like that.

**Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview? 16**

I guess that I model for them and try to focus on something every time I model that I want them to remember when they are writing, to take it to their table when they go write. I guess modeling for them helps them get to higher levels than where they were.

**Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing? 17**

I would just try to get them to add more detail so if they're only writing a sentence or something like that I would get them to try to tell me more about it, to expand on what they're writing about.

**Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing? Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student? 19**

I have some kids that they get frustrated because they feel like they cannot spell and so just in helping them stretch words out with them and kind of helping them to write down a word. I feel like sometimes that's what frustrates kids just because they want to be able to spell it and they want you help them spell it. They say "I don't know how to spell it. " "I don't know how to spell this word and to spell this word," and so even just the smallest things like helping them spell one word. So I sit down with them and say "OK, so if we are going to write this word what are we going to do first? What is the first thing you hear? You write the first sound you hear. What sound you hear when you say this word slowly?" So, just helping them with that one word, it

kind of gets them to start moving on. It gets them over that just drawing on what they can spell, gets them to move on.

## **APPENDIX F – INTERVIEWS WITH ELLIE**

**Participant Interview One with Ellie  
Interviewer**

Participant

**First tell me how you got here why did you become a kindergarten teacher? Or how did you become a kindergarten teacher?**

I've always grown up with the want to be around little kids. I've always liked teaching. I've always thought it was fun. I have baby sat since I was young and then right after school my parents told me I needed to get a job to pay for you know like my phone, my car and just naturally went to a daycare and then I went into teaching school and it kind of just, it gradually happened because I always just gravitated toward that but I didn't have any teachers in my background so that was kind of different because I didn't have anybody to follow into that. I just knew that I liked being around kids. So it kind of just happened like that

**Tell me about your classroom tell me what is it like to be a student in your classroom? How would a student describe being in your class?**

I think that they have fun. I think that I am a fun teacher but I also am a strict teacher because I expect them to do certain things that I know that they can do, I know that they are able to do but I also, I just expect, I have rules and I think that they know that there's rules in here but they have fun also. They say they enjoy it and they say that they feel safe with me so that's good.

**What are your thoughts are on how children learn how to write. How do you think children learn to write?**

Just a lot of repetition and..... I think writing is just one of the hardest things to do even for me to teach but I think that repetition is probably the best thing and showing by example and modeling and trying to have the kids connect that reading and writing is the same and if they can sound a word out, they can write it and if they practice the strokes.

**I'm going to ask you now about your personal feelings about writing. Tell about how you feel about writing. How would you describe yourself as a writer?**

All I think writing is just like essays and things like that. I struggle with that. I have always been kind of real critical on myself with that because I am real judgmental on myself, I guess, or critical. I think writing is hard. I think it is one of the hardest things to do and I do not necessarily like it. I really wish I could do better at it, in writing.

**How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**

That has been much of a struggle. I have said that from after my first year when I requested to get into like writing workshops and it just hasn't happened I haven't been able to go and do it. I think it's hard because especially in kindergarten it's hard. They don't even know how to hold a pencil and so trying to teach somebody something that, well I am 30 or 31 and teaching somebody something that you have done your whole life is kind of hard to break down and you have to find those steps and break them down to the kids. I struggle with it. I do.

**Ok now I want you to think about your students. Do you think your students are motivated to write, and if you think they're motivated to write how do you know that?**

As a whole, I think they like writing. But at this level, they don't have a lot of experiences because they are allowed to write about whatever they want so they have a little bit of trouble thinking about things to write about. They don't. at five, they have a hard time thinking outside the box, expanding their thoughts. So they get a few words down and they are excited about that but then we ask them to stretch it out and put more into it, I think that they get overwhelmed with that, especially this early in the year.

**How would you describe the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs?**

They are just, they are getting the thought out but it's not, it doesn't sound correctly when they read it back. So we are working on that with kiddos. I am trying to say "OK, do we write it, do we say it like that?" and trying to have them read it when they write it. My younger, my little ones, I am trying to get them practicing with their sounds and matching the letters to the sounds that they write and hearing when they are stretching it out and putting the right sounds down. So that's what they're doing.

**Describe the range of writing abilities of your students at this time without mentioning any names, just think about what levels they're at and describe the levels.**

Brand new beginning to kids who have picked it up wonderfully and they're doing really good. I've got kiddos all, like on all spectrums. I have kids that cannot write at all and so will put just letter strings or strands down and then kids that are trying to now they can put their first sound but they're not writing as like when we speak.

**So you kind of already answered this question, but let me ask you this: describe your higher students. Do you have any higher students in what you just described?**

I don't have any that are writing complete sentences yet but we are working on spacing like with my highest group we are working on spacing and we're working on making sure we have a capital and making sure that it sounds correct.

**You talk about some that are just writing letter strings. Do you have any lower than that?**

I know they are all pretty much at least writing letter strings now.

**How do you measure student growth in writing?**

Observation, just by watching and comparing their, well we keep that rubric, you know, we mark their levels each six weeks but like physically holding onto papers and looking at them, especially with my lower ones. I will document them a little bit more and keep more of their

papers, of their work, to see when they started off and to see the progress their making and because I'm pulling them more so I can show their parents growth that way and show them what skill we are working on.

**What are your goals for your students in writing goals? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year?**

I think just writing a complete thought down. For me, I would be happy if every one of my kids could write a complete thought down even if the spelling obviously wasn't correct. I personally, right now, that's why if they are hearing the sounds, to me well that's good, that's great because we're taking them from nothing to writing. So if I could get every single student, if they are able to write a complete thought down or maybe even three thoughts down that make sense with some beginning middle and end, that would be wonderful. So, if I can get every single student writing at least three thoughts that would be wonderful.

**Alright, if I came in to your classroom during your writing instruction, what exactly would I see? Describe for me how writing instruction looks in your classroom on a typical day?**

I would usually do a lesson with them on the board and I will talk about my weekend or something I did the night before and I will write about it. I'll have the kids come up and help me stretching the words out and putting down the letters to the sounds that they hear. Then I might focus on a sight word, maybe write about it on my board and then I will have ask them to tell me about what they want to write about today. They will go to their desk and they will start writing their words and then I will meet with students. I will meet either here at my desk or I will go to them and then we will come over to the carpet and we will share, only a few of them.

**Now describe some of your strategies you use to teach writing. How would you describe your writing instruction methods? Which teaching strategies do you use in your classroom to instruct your students in writing?**

Well I model my own writing, but sometimes I will model some of their things that they are writing that has what I want to see. I will put it on the projector so they can see what other kids did that they are supposed to do, so samples of what other kids did that showed the things we talked about. The other day we did spacing I had them come up and I got four kids because I think the sentence was “the cat can jump” with four words. I smushed the words together, all four words, all four kids together and then I spread them apart. So I got the kids and I smushed them together, the kids together, and I said “he is the word ‘I,’ he is the word ‘cat,’ he is the word ‘can’ and he is the word ‘jump’” or whatever I said. And then I smushed the words together or the kids physically together and I show them. That was really cool. I have never done that before and I showed them that and then I spread them apart and I said “what is this part in between?” “Like” “If they are spread, out what is the part between them called? That is space. The words need space and the kids need space like that.” I thought that was really cool. The kids really got it with that. It is hard teaching space. Because I would have kids like put a line between words, but what that one the kids did good on spacing between words.

**How do you think your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom?**

That they don’t like it....no I think they would say that they like it but that it is too long. Well I think they like it but, like I said, the motivation, they got it for about 10 minutes and then after that they are like, they are done. They can only write for so long and then their motivation is gone and they don’t want to do it anymore and I’m trying to get them to stretch their sentences

and put more things and label more things and work on their illustrations and they like it and for like 10, like right now this time of the year, 10 15 minutes and then they are done.

**How would you describe a typical writing conference, an individual student writing conference?**

Depending upon the kid, I get to them at their level, just try to get them to do more. Like if they are able to, I will talk about spacing or capitalizing or punctuation or hearing the correct sounds. If they are lower, I will talk to them about labeling or writing a sentence with just the beginning sounds, “What sound do you hear first in each word?” “How many words are you writing?” I usually start out by asking them “What you writing today?” I give them a compliment and I choose one skill at their level to work on, one or two because maybe if a more, if I pick something like capitalization and punctuation or spacing. I will also work on something with words like adding more to sentences or adding details or using descriptive words or, if they’re lower, just working on one thing, only one thing and then I will come back. I will move onto somebody else and then I’ll come back to them later to see how they’re doing. Of course, the higher students I will not have to come back to because they will come to me and they want me to see what they are or have written. With the lower kids that is another thing that I will work on. “Are you writing neatly?” “Can you read what you have written?” “Can someone else read with you have written?” With the lower students I might work on the first sound, labeling, maybe they can write a sentence but maybe they’re not able to. So they can just write a word or maybe they can write a sentence that they can work on labeling their picture. So I will work that with them and try to teach them a specific skill that they are lacking, that they are ready to learn or need help with because they’re struggling with or struggling to understand. So, teaching them something more they need, teaching them something or teaching it a different way and if they

are not getting it with me I also might get a peer, a kid to work with them another kid that understands that skill and have them come and talk to that student to them all about it. So then they can work together that way it's a different way of them being taught and sometimes it works better with kids to help.

**Think of your highest student in your classroom what do you how do you conference with them right now**

Well I decide what they need to work on in their writing and that is what we work on together. Like I said I probably do not have to go to them because they will come to me and they tell me what they need help with.

**What do you do when you have students that are reluctant to write? How do you motivate your students to write when they are reluctant to write?**

I'd try to get them like I'd tell them that they can write about anything that they want first off because I am told that that motivates them to write. That helps them with something if they have something they want to write about. If they still don't want to do it then, if they are reluctant to do it, then I will give them topics like "OK, you can write about dinosaurs" or "What did you do this weekend?" or "What did you do last night?" "Did you go to the store?" "What did you do?" And they'll be like, "Oh yeah, I did that" and I'd try to get them to, to write something that way. So if they don't want to write, I try to get them to write but helping them find something that interests them, that they can write about and then they will write about it and if they say they are done, which they always do, I say "Well, okay, let's put this paper away and start a new story." So I'd try to get them interested and try to get their little minds going and I'd try to get them to label things and it depends on the level of the student because if it's a kid that can write for me I will say to them to "Write more" or "You need to go back and make sure we have spacing make,

sure we have periods and capital letters at the beginning.” And with a lower kid, I will say things like “Let’s try and label something.” “What is the beginning sound?” “Let’s try and label that with a beginning sound” and then maybe the ending sound.” If they are able to, the middle sounds, which most of them are not at that level. It kind of depends on the kid.

**What do you consider to be your strengths in writing instruction?**

I think that I always expect more out of the kids and I think that’s because I’ve taught a higher grade or level so going from a higher level and coming down to a lower level I always want them to do a little more than what they can, then what is the expected. I guess in some way because I have taught at a higher level and now at a lower level I kind of expect more than what’s expected at the lower level.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing.**

I cannot remember who it was but I think it was when I was teaching kindergarten. There was a kid who, it was my first or second year in teaching kindergarten too, and he’d really struggled all year long and he finally was getting it. I remember he finally started to get his letters and sounds and he was able to label things. It’s really cool when you see a kid go from not knowing how to hold a pencil to even if it takes until March and then you see him or her being able to do this and they don’t need a linking chart anymore, they don’t need the word wall anymore and they are able to figure some things out. And even though it’s not a perfect sentence, you can read it and you can see their little letters all smashed together. There’s no spacing, but you can still see their thoughts. You can read it and you can understand it, even if the parents say “That’s not a sentence” you can tell them “Well yes it is” and you can read it to them and then they will know that it is a sentence. “Your child can write sentences, can write a sentence.” That’s pretty cool.

### **How do you challenge your higher students in writing?**

Trying to make sure that they are basically editing their papers at the higher-level, making sure that they are editing and doing all those things at their level that we talk about and editing and expanding their writing, making sure that they have details, adding details to their writing, making sure they can read what they wrote, making sure that it makes sense, that it is in sequential order.

### **Think about your students that struggle in writing, the students that experience major difficulty in writing. How do you instruct those students? How do you help your struggling students reach success in writing?**

Just a lot of repetition, a lot of praise when they do something or when they understand something because they are so low and they to beat themselves up. They are so hard on themselves and because they feel like everyone is doing it. Like I had a little girl yesterday or the day before and she knows how to do it but she is having a hard time of connecting. Like she knows her letters and sounds and that she's having a hard time putting it down on paper. She started crying at my table and I told her "Don't cry. You know this." I was talking to her and I was trying to be real, trying to praise her and trying to work with her and make her know that she can do it and we don't say the word can't in my classroom. I don't let them say that word because everybody can do it if you try and I always tell them "Practice makes perfect just like in sports" because they usually can they can relate it to some type of sport or I will say "Practice makes what?" and they say "Perfect" and it's just like reading. The more we write, the better we will be at it. I always tried to keep it positive with them and I always try to point out when they do something and I think that helps them.

**Participant Interview Two with Ellie**

**Interviewer**

**Participant**

**During our last interview you described your thoughts on how students learn to write.**

**Have your thoughts about how children learn to write changed in any way since our last interview? How do you think children learn how to write?**      1

..by practice and samples and just being exposed to it and continually doing it

**During our last interview you described yourself as a writer. Have your personal feelings about writing changed in any way since our last interview? Describe yourself as a writer.**

**What are your personal feelings about writing?**      2

I don't like writing that much because I don't think I am good at it.

**Have your feelings changed about your ability to teach writing? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing?**      3

I still feel like it's the hardest thing for me to teach. I struggle with it just because I'm real critical on myself. So I guess with writing, I think writing is a hard thing. I guess at this level especially because you don't know, they're learning how to write and read at the same time which is which all goes together but it's frustrating for them so I feel that I feel for them but it's really neat to see at the end because I think I am doing a good job but I can see a kid a kid's progress throughout the end of the year, taking kids who have never written anything before and doesn't know the letters and sounds. So that is the part of it, the best part of it, that even when I don't think I am doing a good job that its really cool to see the outcome at the end of the year.

**During our last interview you described your students' motivation toward writing. Has your students' motivation toward writing changed since our last interview? Do you think**

**your students are motivated to write? At this time, do you think your students like to write? How do you know? 4 5**

I think for the most part they like to write if I give them ideas. You have to make them interested in it and once they are interested they will pretty much do anything but if they are not interested they're not motivated. You kind of have to find....the majority of the kids get interested but there's always those one or two that were not interested and you have to try to get to bring them out of their shell and how to get them interested you have to figure out how to get them interested in a topic that they like. I think they do like to write because I try to give them that interest and to help them in thinking of what to write about what they want to tell others about what they like to write about.

**How have the writing habits of your students and their writing instruction needs changed since our last interview? 6**

Well at least everyone is doing letter strands but some are putting sentences together. I have kids that are able to sound everything out. Some they can get their thoughts down but not write complete thoughts so we're trying to make sure it makes sense. Everyone seems to be progressing.

**During our last interview, you described the range of writing abilities of your students?**

**How have your students writing abilities developed since our last interview? Describe any changes in your students writing abilities since our last interview. 7**

My higher kids are working on using capital letters in the correct spots and lowercase letters everywhere else. Like I said earlier some are getting their thoughts down but they are not writing complete thoughts so it's not making sense. We're trying to make sure it makes sense. What they write maybe makes sense but it's not how they talk. I am trying to get them you know how

they say it that's what, that's how you would write it. I'm telling them "Write it the way you would say it, the exact way you would say it. Write the words that come out of your mouth, the exact words that come out of your mouth." Because they have their idea in there and they know what they want to say but when they are writing it it gets, you know, it's hard. I am also working on periods with them. With my lower kids I'm trying to get them to just hear, basically hearing the main sounds, where they can hear the main sounds and trying to get like CVC words and things like that with them. But everyone, as long as I am working with them, even my lowest students are able to start writing CVC words. That's good so they're getting their letters and sounds and we're still working on word wall words and the linking chart with the kids, the linking chart with the lower ones. Every one they are improving, they have improved quite a bit. I'm glad. I hope it keeps up.

**During our last interview you described how you measure student growth in writing. Has that changed since our last interview? How do you measure student growth? 8**

...just by looking at samples and compare and where they were and what they can do now

**What are your writing goals for your students? Where do you want them to be in writing by the end of the year? 9**

By the end of the year I hope that they are writing complete sentences, expanding beginning middle and end, being able to tell a story with a beginning middle and end. To me that is pretty good to be doing those things by the end of the year. If they can add details, that would be amazing. So adding details with a beginning middle and end, periods and capitals in the right place just basically the foundations I guess.

**Describe any major changes you have made in your writing instruction practices since our last interview? 10**

I get on the Smartboard, I have them go up there and write sentences or write words. I have them help each other. I have them come to my table and we can write things together on the carpet with dry erase boards we will get like cut out sentences and will put things like manipulate them into the correct order you know like “I see the cat” and things like that, cut it out like on index cards or whatever and say like “How do you say this?” “How would this make sense?” and have them physically get up and one person hold this card and one person hold this card and then we would put them in order. So I do things like that.

**During our last interview, you described how your students would describe the writing instruction time in your classroom. Would they describe writing instruction time in your classroom the same today? How would your students describe the writing instruction in your classroom today? 11**

They have a level one in their mouth and they are supposed to be concentrating on writing and they are allowed to talk to their friends if they’re talking about their story. If they are looking at the sight word wall they can have a friend ask a friend “How would you say this word” or they would say “How do you spell this word?” “What is that first sound?” They can get up and go to my writing words. I have some writing words they can go and look at for like that month and see if they can spell words that way and they are just working on their stories and they’re coloring with detail and they are writing with detail.

They did use to think that it is too long but they are getting better with the time. They are able to write a little longer they are doing better they do get restless but they are getting better.

**How have your writing conferences evolved since our last interview? How would you now describe a typical individual student writing conference? 12**

I sit down with them. I have them read what they are writing to me and if they can't read it to me then I say "Well if you can't read it then how am I supposed to read it?" And then we will start over and I will tell them "OK, what do you want to write?" Then they will tell me their sentence that they want to write and then we will go through it one word at a time, sound by sound and we will work through it together. If it is a higher one, then I have them read it to me and we'll kind of do some editing and extending it then asking them to add some detail to it so getting it from the kids depending on what level they're at.

**Since our last interview, how have you motivated your students to write when they were reluctant to write? 13**

I'd try to get them interested in something. I remind them that they can write about anything they want to, whatever they would like. They can write about whatever makes it fun, whatever they are interested in like things that happened over the weekend or as if it's Christmastime and I will talk about Christmas what is your favorite thing about Christmas. I would try to relate to the kids because they're so little they don't have a lot of life experiences so I would try to get things that they like to do or something that happened today that's cool at school, something that was fun or something that happened at recess or PE or something they learned today. So I'd try to relate to them as good as I can.

**Since our last interview, do you think what you consider being your strengths in writing instruction have changed? What do you think your strengths in writing are today? 14**

This is hard because I'm so critical on myself about teaching writing. I guess I try to break it down for them to make it as easy as possible for them even though sometimes I don't but I try to break it down and when there is a, when there is a kid that's struggling and he or she can finally get something then I really try to praise them and tell them "That's great!" because it's hard

when kids keep getting “No that’s not right, no that’s not right,” all the time. You know however it’s worded it hurts their self esteem. So when they do something amazing and they get it, I feel like I try to make it into real, into a really big deal that way they can see that they can do it. They are able to do it and keep up with it.

**Describe one of your most successful or most personally rewarding teaching experiences in writing so far this school year. 15**

I have a girl this year that was getting really frustrated with writing and she came in not knowing anything but she is already like improved a lot but she started crying. I was asking her when I was working with her one day, I was conferencing with her and I asked her what sound and I don’t know what she was saying and she did not know what it was so and I knew she knew the letters and sounds because when I tested her she knows her letters and sounds. So we got the linking chart out and I showed her, I explained to her how to do it but she was crying. So I calmed her down and then I had her do the next letter and she used the linking chart and I was looking over her shoulder and I said “Oh yeah!” and I praised her “Yes, good job!” and she just got a really big smile on her face and she realized “I can do it” and she has been doing so much better in writing since then. So that was pretty cool because that happened this year and I remember that but she hasn’t gotten frustrated since then and she has not cried since that day.

**Thinking about the progress your students have made in writing this year, describe for me how a few of your specific writing instruction strategies have brought some of your students to a higher level in writing since our last interview? 16**

I think just like with the little girl I just told you about just reminding them of what they can do and reminding them of the tools like the linking chart and the word wall and the word lists we have, just reminding them of all those things.

**Since our last interview, how have you challenged your higher students in writing? 17**

I challenge my higher students by expanding and writing details and editing and revising because they should be able to do that because they know how to write so now it is just doing it correctly and getting that editing and revising in. I also like to have them as mentors to my other kids so I don't want them to do it for them but if there is somebody next to them that needs a little bit of help I will tell them "Sound it out for them and see if they can get the letters by hearing the sounds slowly the way I sounded out for you and see if they can do it." And besides editing and revising they should also at this point be making sure that their writing is readable.

**Since our last interview, how have you helped your most challenging students reach success in writing? 18**

I help them through a ton of repetition, a ton of time with them with me and with my higher kids.

**Think about a specific encounter since our last interview with a student who experienced major difficulty in writing. Describe for me how you instructed that student? 19**

Well like I just said I help them by giving them a lot of time with me helping them or another student, a higher, student helping them. Also, calling mom and dad and letting them know at home the more they practice at home the better they're going to get and letting them know just to work with them and to let the parents know even though that they're not spelling it correctly if their writing the sounds that they hear that's what we want them to do right now and getting them into our tutoring program are getting them extra tutoring and getting them as much time with a teacher as possible and giving them positive reinforcement.