Self-Directed Learning And The Development Of Self-Efficacy In Basic Writing

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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-EFFICACY IN BASIC WRITING

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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2016

MAJOR: ENGLISH (Rhetoric and Composition)

Approved By:

___________________________________
Advisor

___________________________________
Date
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband, who had the guts to date me (twice) and marry me all while I pursued this degree, and to Grandma and Papa who lovingly accepted their punk rock granddaughter, let her sleep under their roof and drive their car so that she could continue asking questions about the world.

Thank you. I love you.
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CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALIZING THIS PROJECT THROUGH A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE “COGNITIVE TURN,” KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, DISPOSITIONS, AND BASIC WRITING

This chapter offers a detailed gloss of the recent history of Writing Studies borne out of an interest in cognition and transfer research. Through this discussion, I will address the specific gap in current research on knowledge transfer that this project seeks to fill. This literature review will show how the interest in knowledge transfer developed, how it has progressed from contextual considerations to dispositional ones, and where this project – which investigates the relationship between student self-efficacy and motivation and knowledge transfer – is situated within this growing body of scholarship.

The project, which grew out of an anecdotal discovery of the perceived impact of student self-efficacy and success in basic writing courses, is the result of several semesters of personal observation and reflection, and one semester of formal classroom research. This research speaks to questions regarding the role of dispositions and their potential effect on knowledge transfer: what it is, what it might look like, whether it is possible, and if so, how we might teach toward it both in the field at large and in the local context of the writing program at Urban University, a Midwestern research university.

In the sections below I will provide a gloss of the major arguments in Writing Studies that lead to this moment in the field. The first section, on the scholarship of the “cognitive turn,” outlines this work (beginning in the late 70s and early 80s) which sought to examine students’ cognitive writing processes. Within this section I will address the various arguments that developed through the short-lived so-called “cognitive turn,” drawing particular attention to the theories in cognitive psychology used by Writing Studies scholars in these early examinations of cognition and writing. This section also addresses the existing critiques of the “cognitivist
movement,” calling attention to popular arguments which lead to the field’s “social turn.” Ultimately, this literature review will help form a bridge between what is commonly understood as the “cognitive” and the “social” view of writing.

The second section, on knowledge transfer scholarship, outlines work in Writing Studies over the past ten years in response to studies in the fields of educational and cognitive psychology. This scholarship shows the role of the writing classroom in relation to the University writ large as well as the theoretical rationale behind the study of teaching and learning in the field.

From there, I will outline the history of the discipline of Writing Studies’ relationship with dispositions, specifically those of “motivation” and “self-efficacy,” showing the relevance of this work to provide compelling evidence and explanation of developing pedagogy that supports student learning in basic writing classrooms. I will also show how work on dispositions from the fields of cognitive and educational psychology provide a strong framework through which to consider these dispositions as they may appear in student writing and subsequently, writing studies research. Finally, I briefly consider the scholarship/history of Basic Writing theory and pedagogy that inspired the exigency of this project. This literature review will set the stage for the description of my study, a semester-long classroom of self-directed learning in two sections of basic writing and whether and how it impacted students to both develop the dispositions of self-efficacy and motivation and whether those dispositions encouraged students to transfer writing skills to other simultaneous contexts.

Cognition and Writing Studies

As a discipline, Writing Studies is no stranger to witnessing trends or “phases” of its own scholarship. Perhaps one of the most notable of these phases and transitions is the cognitive turn
of the late 1970s and early 1980s and its subsequent (and rather rapid) shift into the social turn shortly thereafter. There are many theories as to why our field abandoned the work of cognitive psychology as it relates to students’ writing processes. Ultimately, though, in this abandonment we found ourselves placing value on the social aspects of how people write, drawing a clear line in the sand between what occurs on the cognitive level and what writers experience on the social level (and how it impacts that writing).

In order to understand how the field of Writing Studies is at a prime moment in which to pursue questions that bridge the gap between the cognitive and the social, it is important to revisit the history of the field’s cognitivist movement. After a brief overview of this moment in the history of the field, I will then examine the ways in which this work became buried. From there, I will show how through the erasure of empirical/cognitive research in the field of Writing Studies, we unwittingly abandoned productive questions that potentially lead us to understanding more about students’ writing practices. Through a gloss of research in the field of Cognitive Psychology (beginning around the time of empirical erasure in Writing Studies), I will revisit the “question of the cognitive” in a way that seeks to answer a different set of questions through the pursuit of rigorous, empirical classroom research. This research – like that of the work in my dissertation – will show how the very legitimate concerns regarding cognitivist queries in the 1980s did not address the entirety of what the field of cognitive psychology can offer those of us who teach, research, and theorize the writing classroom.

Through this chapter I will determine what is to be gained by revisiting the question of cognition as it relates to the social as understood through research on dispositions in cognitive and educational psychology. It is my hope that this work will provide an avenue through which
we may bridge the long-held gap between the “cognitive” and the “social” in the field of Writing Studies.

What the field refers to as the “cognitivist” movement in writing research began as a result of early questions raised about the writing process. Lester Faigley traces this history back to Janet Emig’s work on the composing processes of writers in which she called attention to the fact that students do not compose in a “linear” fashion – instead, students were “recursive” in their writing and many of their processes varied depending on the student and the writing context. As Faigley notes:

Emig provided not only a new methodology but an agenda for subsequent research, raising issues such as pausing during composing, the role of rereading in revision, and the paucity of substantial revision in student writing. Her monograph led to numerous observational studies of writers' composing behavior during the next decade. The main ingredient Emig did not give researchers was a cognitive theory of composing (Faigley 532).

Since Emig’s work, multiple well-researched cognitive theories have been developed. In the field of Writing Studies, the most notable exploration into the question of writers’ cognitive processes is Flower and Hayes’ “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.” In their study, Flower and Hayes mapped the cognitive processes of experienced writers in order to create a visual of what occurs on the cognitive level as students are writing. The conclusions of this study revolve around two main points: students utilized varied processes during composing – these processes differ from student to student based on factors such as experience; and that experienced writers have particularly different composing processes than those of novice writers. Flower and Hayes (and later, Hayes) place emphasis on the composing processes of experienced writers, attributing their processes to an ability to call upon a longer-term memory and experience with writing tasks.
Later critics of the Cognitivist view of writing were also interested in similar questions of how cognition affected students’ writing processes. Mike Rose wrote (close to the time that Flower and Hayes published their findings), his observations about what he called “rigid rules” in students’ writing processes. Rose’s article concluded that the reason some students have writer’s block is because they are operating with rules that are too “rigid” and other students who do not experience “block” are using rules that are more flexible (Rose 1980). His conclusions (and those of Flower and Hayes) regarding cognition were drawn by analyzing what he referred to as students’ “problem-solving processes,” thus highlighting that early investigations into cognition and writing most commonly focused on how students “problem solve” during a writing task.

What I will refer to here as the “problem solving cognitive model” deals with stages—that is, Rose breaks down students’ writing habits into individual moments they report while composing. Each of these stages deals with the present moment of composing. Therefore, cognition as it relates to writing is (for Rose) understood as habits enacted in a present writing situation. While Rose frames students’ cognitive stages as a response to their use (or lack) of rules of composing they carry with them from previous writing experiences, this does not address any possible reasons some students “hang on” to “rigid rules and plans” while others do not. Instead, Rose merely represents students’ cognitive processes during writing as a potential result of the rules they do or do not carry with them to present writing situations.

Rose approached cognition primarily from a problem-solving framework. The early empirical work on cognition and writing sought to determine intellectual functioning in light of the adherence to and use of rules and planning. According to educational psychologist R.M. Gagne, “rules are probably the major organizing factor, and quite possibly the primary one, in
intellectual functioning” (Gagne in Rose 391). Rose’s reliance on Gagne for his definition of
cognition in writing does indeed lend substance to his observations of students’ use of rules and
plans.

And while that is the case, a main critique of the cognitive model overall is rooted in the
idea that cognitivist models of the writing process are an attempt to “universalize” the writing
process and, thus, to assert that we can develop universal “laws” for the writing process (Giroux;
Rose; Bizzell). This critique of the cognitivist model rests, in part, on the assumption that the
cognitive and the social are distinct and unrelated. In other words, critics of the cognitivist view
often noted that writers (people) are social beings whose various writing situations are fluid and
influenced by their circumstances and surroundings – and thus, there is no set of rules we can
determine or develop based on the measure of a cognitive process.

In Writing Studies, it is widely regarded that the “social” turn of writing is an argument
against the cognitive nature of writing – or those “internal,” seemingly “rigid” writing processes.
This is emphasized by Henry Giroux, who along with other scholars (notably James Berlin),
pushed for the recognition that writing is a social and cultural process. Scholars like Giroux see
the writing process as a “part of a whole” – the whole being the social context(s) in which a
person writes. But, the question remains whether we must see these two things (the cognitive and
the social) as distinctly unrelated in terms of research and pedagogy.

Indeed Rose’s early conclusion that writers do have sets of rules and plans during their
writing processes can be understood as a rigid, internal view of writing. But a broader
understanding of cognition – instead of a full-on critique of it – could reveal the reason for the
perceived differences between the cognitive and the social. Specifically, questions that seek to
determine students’ dispositions (which I will elaborate on later) upon entering the writing
classroom might offer more insight into why (in our present example) students adhere to certain rules and why others are more flexible in their writing practices. Through these questions, we address the root causes of what Rose observed in his students’ writing practices and whether and how as teachers we may foster the dispositions necessary for successful writing processes and practices.

But questions regarding students’ cognition did not end with rules and plans. The field continued to pursue questions about student cognition and writing and these questions evolved, including perspectives on how the cognitive could be a productive issue alongside consideration of students’ social contexts. In Patricia Bizzell’s “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty,” she accepts the arguments made by scholars like Flower and Hayes – that writing can be considered a cognitive problem-solving activity – but suggests that we can’t rely solely on that.

Bizzell suggests that the field should look to a blend of two approaches to student writing (cognitive and social) but her argument hinges on rhetoric and discourse communities as the reason to regard writing as both social and cognitive. While Bizzell makes salient points about the complexities of composing processes, she did not broaden our understanding of what Cognitive Psychology could tell us about our students’ writing lives. I will argue that revisiting and reconsidering psychology’s theories of cognition as they relate to Writing Studies pedagogy can enhance our understanding of whether and how students approach the rhetorical techniques and new discourse communities discussed by Bizzell or why they might be “rigid” or “flexible” in their writing as observed by Rose. I will argue that we need to see the connection between the cognitive and the social if we want to understand and intervene in the development of students as writers.
Through empirical evidence in Cognitive Psychology, Writing Studies can use the framework of student dispositions (which I will define below) to investigate this relationship, and seek to determine not just what constitutes “good” writing and what the practices are of “good” writers, but instead, we can address the root causes of these practices and products. Addressing the root cause of our students’ development as writers offers more opportunities for a flexible pedagogy and a classroom in which reflection is foregrounded. The incorporation of reflection provides the opportunity to highlight the metacognitive practices that can assist in students’ exploration of their own dispositions as they relate to writing. Contemporary work in cognitive and educational psychology shows clear links between student dispositions and success all of which can relate to the writing classroom (Zimmerman; Schunk).

The move to turn back to cognitive psychology is also gesturing back to the erasure of research on cognition in writing studies. As mentioned above, this project is, in part, a call to revisit the reasons for this erasure and make a case for a new approach to cognition and writing. In our history, perhaps the most illustrative example of a need for this is Andrea Lunsford’s approach to the cognitive question in her article “Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer.” Here, the question of cognition fell victim to what Mike Rose later called “cognitive reductionism.” Through the lens of various frameworks of cognitive development, Lunsford concludes that her basic writers cannot perform what she refers to as “complex intellectual tasks” like synthesizing and analyzing information. But as Rose notes in “Narrowing the Mind and the Page,” these conclusions are drawn upon the application of broad theoretical claims that have important implications when applied to students – especially basic writers. These broad

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1 Not a decade earlier, Rose himself cautiously explored questions of cognition as it related to his own students’ writing (Rose 1980).
2 Lunsford utilizes several theories of cognitive development to make her claim: Vygotsky’s “three phases of concept formation,” Piaget’s “four stages of mental development,” and Noam Chomsky’s distinction between “knowing and doing” and “competence and performance.”
applications of theories from another discipline are seen as reductive because, as Rose points out, the theories themselves have larger contextual frameworks that are lost when applied to a simple observation of a student’s writing.

What Rose is ultimately showing is the field’s lack of empirical research when it relates to its pursuit of questioning cognition. Rose’s examples point to a gap between the conclusions drawn from empirical research that lead to theories of cognitive function in psychology and how those theories lose potency when loosely applied to (in this case, remedial) students in a writing classroom. In the example of Andrea Lunsford’s conclusions about her basic writers, for instance, the application of prior research in an attempt to understand her students is not the kind of systematic research originally designed and used to develop the same theories in educational and cognitive psychology.

By all means, Rose is correct in his assessment of broad cognitive theoretical applications to students’ writing products and processes. However, it is that “narrowing” which occurs when theories are “borrowed” and applied to Writing Studies – a practice that differs from rigorous, well-designed research studies within the writing classroom. Scholars like Andrea Lunsford made pragmatic observations in an attempt to better-understand her students. But, the fields of Cognitive and Educational Psychology have much more to offer when it comes to designing empirical research studies for students of writing. Additionally, research using cognitive and educational psychology can move beyond assessing student writing quality.

Furthermore, Rose cautions us by indicating that “…human cognition-even at its most stymied, bungled moments, is rich and varied. It is against this assumption that we should test our theories and research methods and classroom assessments” (Rose 297). It is precisely this sentiment which research into dispositions seeks to address – and the complexities of human
cognition are becoming clearer as the research continues. What we must do is invite this research back into our discipline and back into our classrooms in order to use it to our advantage.

Rose continues on in his pursuit of pointing us toward a better future for queries into the cognitive development of our students by asking “…do our practices work against classification that encourages single, monolithic explanations of cognitive activity?” Rose also warns us, rightly so, against “systems that drive broad cognitive wedges between those who do well in our schools and those who don’t” (Rose 297). What this project seeks to do, in part, is offer a response to these issues – to pick up where Rose left off, and to revive the investigation into students’ cognition to see where it might go had it not been erased soon after this poignant critique of what was then the common practice in questioning the cognitive.³

As a field we can look to Cognitive and Educational Psychology for existing theories and research that assist us not in determining students’ writing quality, but potentially identifying and explaining student dispositions that may affect/impact their performance in a writing classroom.⁴ What I will argue here is 1) that the majority of the research on dispositions from Cognitive Psychology detailed later in this chapter are not the same theories used in earlier cognitive work done in the field of Writing Studies; 2) this research in Cognitive and Educational Psychology is comprised of empirical studies that offer useful terms with which to examine a broad range of students’ work in the writing classroom (from in-class activities and practices to students’ written texts); 3) The research questions of this project are not geared toward determining

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³ The moment of erasure of research into cognition and writing is largely marked in our history by Rose’s critique of “cognitive reductionism” – essentially, that applying theories from other disciplines to the writing classroom reduces our students to broad definitions and stifles what it is we can teach them and what they can learn. This history can be seen in numerous academic blogs and syntheses of Composition history. While scholars are quick to point to empirical work like Flower and Hayes’ landmark study on cognition, when asked to give an account of the “social turn,” scholars often call upon cognitive reductionism, which was not a critique of well-designed, rigorous empirical studies of elements of student cognition in the writing classroom.
⁴ Some of this work is already underway as scholars have looked to the work of dispositions in cognitive psychology in order to better-understand whether and how students transfer knowledge from composition classrooms to other writing contexts (Driscoll and Wells 2012).
students’ writing abilities, internal writing processes, or the quality of their written projects as it relates to broad ideas about what constitutes “good writing” and “successful writing processes and practices.” Instead, this project seeks to determine whether and how pedagogy can influence and foster the dispositions necessary for students to adopt writing practices that lead to success inside (and outside) of the writing classroom.

Recent research in Educational and Cognitive Psychology can offer teachers and scholars of Writing Studies a way to visualize, research, and determine a strong connection between the dispositions of our students when they enter the classroom and how they approach the work they are asked to do. Though I pursue a different set of questions than previous scholarship on student cognition and writing, these questions are not completely divorced from broader concerns of students’ understanding of the rhetorical elements of writing. Nor are these questions regarding student dispositions devoid of other “social” elements of writing such as their understanding of discourse communities (both their own and those they may encounter and be asked to take on through their academic lives).

Instead, this project’s research questions draw attention to a moment “erased\(^5\)” from our field’s history: that of rigorous, empirical classroom research informed by recent theories in cognitive psychology – a type of research social turn critics have presumed to be an endeavor divorced from understanding students’ writing as socially-situated and rhetorical. As alluded to above, in many ways, the field regards the work of cognition in the writing classroom as one-fold. Questions into cognition are largely described as concerned with the reasons why students choose the processes they do while composing and this is commonly positioned against social and environmental factors that are known to impact students’ choices during writing. What I

\(^5\) Footnote about Bob Connors’ erasure piece instead of drawing that out in the body of the text
hope to do here is to contribute to an existing body of work emphasizing the relationship between the cognitive and the social.

As Lester Faigley notes, it’s important to remember when thinking about the “social movement” in writing, that “the focus of a social view of writing, therefore, is not on how the social situation influences the individual, but on how the individual is a constituent of a culture” (Faigley 535). It is precisely that point which I intend to expand upon in positioning this project within the field of Writing Studies. Despite the main critiques of the cognitivist model, each one of these “social critiques” focuses on the cultural and discursive elements of writing. While these points are well taken – that writing is indeed a cultural and discursive process in which writers are influenced by and always considering an audience – none of the existing critiques of the cognitivist model move to discuss the “social” as also part of students’ cognition. That is, existing critiques that favor the “social” over the “cognitive” do not incorporate research on dispositions as it relates to social contexts in which students write. While critiques of the cognitive do suggest that the social shapes the individual’s thinking, it does not address the more specific concern about a person’s dispositions and how that may impact their writing practices/processes. Furthermore, existing conceptions of the “social” as differentiated from the “cognitive” provide little to no attention to the extent to which students’ cognitive processes are functional (rather than the fact that cognitive processes are merely impacted by social circumstances).

As I will argue, this dichotomy does not allow for research that seeks to investigate the relationship between the social and the cognitive. In other words, if we continue to understand the “cognitive” and the “social” as two distinct “movements” or areas of research, we are ignoring all of the possible ways in which cognition is affected by social circumstances and
experiences. When we measure the cognition of writers and determine something about what occurs cognitively when students write, that does not necessarily mean we are failing to acknowledge all of the social elements that occur which may affect their cognition. Because of the existence of research into cognition and writing, we are even more open and uniquely situated to the possibilities of investigating pedagogy that might make interventions in these cognitive processes, especially if those processes are not positive and productive for the students’ writing.

As detailed above, this project, in part, seeks to expand on what Flower and Hayes and others began some 30 years ago, but to do so in a way that circles back to these moments, calling into question what we might find if we ask questions that seek to determine how socially-influenced dispositions might affect a student’s cognitive processes in writing.

**Dispositions, Cognitive and Educational Psychology**

In an earlier section of this chapter, I referred to research in the fields of cognitive and educational psychology as a means for Writing Studies to frame empirical research into student dispositions in the writing classroom. What I refer to here as “recent” research is published work in these fields that appeared after the commonly accepted “end” of the “cognitive turn.” Framing this work in cognitive and educational psychology as an era of research in relation to Writing Studies helps to highlight ongoing work in the field of psychology since claims of cognitive reductionism affected empirical research into cognition in Writing Studies’ classrooms.

However, before moving specifically to psychology’s work, it’s important to note that Writing Studies did take up, briefly, some of the concepts I will detail here. The most notable example of this work is the 1985 article “Self-Efficacy and Writing: A Different View of Self-Evaluation.” In this article, Patricia McCarthy, Scott Meier, and Regina Rinderer investigated the

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6 The “Cognitive turn” is commonly thought of as ending around ...
relationship between “writers’ evaluation of their own general writing skill and the overall quality of their written products (McCarthy 465). According to the authors, they “defined self-evaluation as assessment of ‘self-efficacy,’ a construct described and studied by social learning theorist Albert Bandura” (465). In this article, the researchers use Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy to link what a writer believes to what a writer produces. Here, again, is the use of theory to determine something about the quality of student writing.

While McCarthy et al do move beyond the primary issue of cognitive critique that led to erasure (that of Rose’s “cognitive reductionism”), their conclusions still seek to make a link between personal belief and finished product (rather than belief and just the motivation to learn a skill such as writing). What the researchers move to do is draw a distinction between what earlier researchers (Perl; Sommers; Flowers and Hayes) referred to as “situation-specific” self-evaluation (that was based upon a set of standards of effective writing) and what they see as self-evaluation of “one’s ability to write effectively” (465).  

McCarthy’s work was integral in bridging Writing Studies research with concepts in cognitive and educational psychology, however, the spirit of this inquiry did not last within Writing Studies. In the years following McCarthy et al’s work, Psychology continued to study Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy, yielding a number of studies that gave further insight into people’s perceptions of their abilities to perform a task. I argue that this body of work, which I will review briefly here, is even more relevant to Writing Studies research today than ever, especially given a burgeoning interest in student dispositions and the effects of such in the writing classroom.

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7 It is important to note that this is still in relation to a written product intended for evaluation in a writing classroom. The way I will take up the term self-efficacy is in relation to motivation in the writing classroom rather than just perceived ability to write well.
In the early 1990s, psychologist Dale Schunk published a study on the relationship between self-efficacy and (what he referred to as) “academic motivation.” Research into the connection between self-efficacy and motivation as it relates to academic success is crucial to this project as it seeks to address a gap in Writing Studies’ consideration of self-efficacy in the classroom: that is, that it has been connected primarily to students’ perception of their ability to write well/effectively, not their perceptions as it relates to motivation to learn or complete a task. In other words, the perception a student has of his *ability to learn* differs from the perception a student has of his *ability to write well* – the former being in relation to an overall developmental process, not necessarily focusing on an already-determined desired outcome (e.g. the teacher tells me that *this* constitutes ‘writing well’).

The distinction between these two seemingly identical understandings of self-efficacy is crucial to this project (one as a product/result, one as a process/uptake). In many respects, we may see a student’s perception of his ability to “write well” as the same as the student’s motivation to learn or complete a task. However, these two understandings of perceived self-efficacy do differ as one concept of efficacy deals with the perception of *one’s ability to produce a flawless written product*, and the other deals with *one’s ability to set a goal and follow through on that goal*.

Schunk’s study, “Self-Efficacy and Academic Motivation,” discusses academic motivation in terms of self-efficacy. Within his study, he details “an individual's judgments of his or her capabilities to perform given actions” (Schunk). This perspective differs from that of most writing studies scholars for two reasons: First, Schunk’s definitions are more detailed and specific to the performance of actions versus the perceived capability to produce a product – here, I draw a distinction between examining actions and examining ability to produce a final
product with a particular set of expectations (e.g. “good” and/or “flawless” writing). Secondly, Schunk proceeds to “contrast self-efficacy with related constructs (perceived control, outcome expectations, perceived value of outcomes, attributions, and self-concept) and discuss some efficacy research relevant to academic motivation” (Schunk).

Most notable in Schunk’s work is his investigation into what he terms the “utility of self-efficacy for predicting motivational outcomes” (Schunk). In a later chapter of this project, I will detail the codes developed to examine my students’ classroom discourse and their written work – codes which draw upon the relationship between perceived self-efficacy (Bandura) and motivation (Schunk). It is my hope that the results from this study can provide more insight into what it means to assess students in Basic Writing (beyond the work they produce and their formal processes). But in order to pursue the link between motivation and self-efficacy, it is first important to revisit Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy as it relates to writing and how it has evolved since the early 1980s.

Albert Bandura’s work on the concept of self-efficacy has been revisited in several studies since its introduction to the field of psychology in the late 1970s. Bandura himself explored the concept of self-efficacy in a number of his own empirical studies and other researchers in the field of psychology have also taken up his theories and explored them in multiple contexts and with a variety of research questions/topics. A brief review of Bandura’s work reveals a progression of work that ranges from the development of the theory of self-efficacy itself, to investigations into its effects on cognitive development and functioning, to self-efficacy’s role in the regulation of cognitive processes. And more recently, the explorations into

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8 This may lead to future work in writing assessment research that can help address concerns of diverse student populations and needs within a writing classroom and how we can account for students’ unique contexts within the realm of programmatic assessment.
self-efficacy moved into considerations of self-efficacy’s role in motivation (Bandura; Locke; Zimmerman, Martinez-Pons).

In the original development of the theory of self-efficacy, Albert Bandura determined that a person’s successes in certain domains of knowledge had a direct correlation with their perceived self-efficacy. Bandura further suggests that “psychological changes can be produced through other means than performance accomplishments” (Bandura 191). In other words, changes in a person’s dispositions were then discovered to be affected more so by perceived self-efficacy than by past performance (this has obvious connections to students within the writing classroom).⁹

Later, Bandura discovered that perceived self-efficacy as it related to cognitive processes determined whether a person would make goals and stick to them. Several strains of research showed that goal-setting directly affected motivation and students who lacked self-efficacy would be hesitant to set goals especially if they had failures in performance of certain tasks in the past. This builds on the earlier research insofar as it shows a strong connection between goal-setting and past experiences. If students experienced failures in past experiences (let’s say in this case, writing classrooms), then it is suggested that increases in self-efficacy can be an intervening factor in a student’s ability to set goals for himself and remain motivated to achieve those goals.

Building on the body of research into self-efficacy, perceived abilities, and goal-setting, is the later work on its relationship to the regulation of cognitive processes. In this later research, Bandura emphasizes the relationship between self-beliefs of efficacy and “their effects on

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⁹ Meaning, that if we understand self-efficacy as something affecting students different than their past performances (which may or may not have led to their self-efficacy) – and further, if self-efficacy is something that can be improved upon within the writing classroom, this can lead to students’ development of positive practices in their writing processes.
cognitive, affective, and motivational intervening processes” (Bandura 733). Here, the consideration of the affective and the motivational is further explored in relation to self-efficacy, resulting in a series of investigations that place emphasis on the following assertion:

There is a difference between possessing skills and being able to use them effectively and consistently under varied circumstances. Development of self-regulatory capabilities requires instilling a resilient sense of efficacy as well as imparting knowledge and skills. If people are not convinced of their personal efficacy, they rapidly abandon the skills they have been taught when they fail to get quick results or it requires bothersome effort (emphasis mine; Bandura 733)

Often times in the writing (or any) classroom, students who “fail to get quick results” or must employ (what is referred to above as) “bothersome effort” are indeed quick to abandon a skill regardless of how well it is modeled and taught.¹⁰

It is because of this that I designed the pedagogy I describe in Chapter Two in an attempt to foster an environment in which students were given the space to develop goals, and through that goal-setting to develop self-regulatory capabilities. It is the hope of this project that (as prior research in other fields suggests) those self-regulatory capabilities might then lead to an increase in self-efficacy. This development of/increase in self-efficacy is then positioned to (as research suggests) override students’ past performances and experiences (in this case with writing and writing skills/knowledge), thus positively impacting students’ motivation toward tasks in the writing classroom (rather than studying their ability to “write well”).

With this information I argue, in part, that existing considerations of self-efficacy in the writing classroom do not account for all of the nuances of the concept of self-efficacy. Furthermore, I argue that these nuances and the development of the concept of self-efficacy (and other) concept(s) over the past 20 years provides a new way to approach the teaching of writing especially as it relates to basic writers.

¹⁰ In fact, the “abandonment of skills” can also be understood as an issue at the heart of Knowledge Transfer – whether and how students are able to “transfer” skills from one context to another.
As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this body of work within the fields of Educational and Cognitive Psychology grew simultaneously alongside Writing Studies despite the overall abandonment of cognitive empirical work considered within writing classroom research. It is my hope that these theories of self-efficacy, motivation, and goal-setting can provide a way in which to investigate elements of students’ classroom experiences in Writing Studies that we may not have yet considered.

**Cognition, Writing Studies, and Dispositions (Recently)**

If we are going to turn back to Cognitive Psychology and its influence on/use within Writing Studies research, it is important to consider another direction that Writing Studies research has taken (not just in the past 30 years, but more recently). Just as early work on cognition and writing asked questions that sought to expand on Janet Emig’s assertions that students have varied writing processes which include contextual and timing issues, recent scholarship has sought to expand these ideas in light of several areas of concern within the field. One of these areas (of multiple) is that of the assessment of writing (on the programmatic and individual level).

As the assessment of writing continues to be a practical focal point of many writing programs, scholars continue to pursue the theoretical questions regarding the “what” and the “how” of assessing student writing. One of these theories takes up a growing problem in writing assessment as it aligns itself with renewed concerns about students’ development. In his article “Challenges in Assessing the Development of Writing Ability: Theories, Constructs and Methods,” David Slomp points out that

…as the scope of writing assessment expands to include a developmental focus, a number of historic problems with writing assessment become amplified. These challenges include the following: Challenges in defining a theory that accounts for the complex array of factors that influence development; challenges in defining a workable construct to
measure the development of writing ability; and methodological challenges involved in assessing writing through the lens of complex developmental theories and their associated constructs (Slomp 82).

Indeed the “complex array of factors” influencing student development have been of interest to the field before. In 1997, Marilyn Sternglass’s *A Time to Know Them* was the first longitudinal study to examine students’ development in light of factors external to academe (in conjunction with academic work). This landmark study gave the field its first look into the ways in which personal lives affect students’ academic lives. As Sternglass notes,

…the students’ subjective lives are shown to be essential components of their objective lives, so that it is impossible to comprehend the nature of their academic experience or to contemplate educational approaches that will meet their needs without understanding how integrated these aspects of their experiences are (Sternglass xi-xii).

With Slomp’s language of “complex array of factors” and Sternglass’s language of students “subjective and objective lives,” there is a clear history of Writing Studies’ attention to students as contexts outside of their academic lives and how this may affect their writing and our ability to theorize, teach, and assess it.

This is further emphasized not just in the practical questions of programmatic and individual assessment, but in another recent strain of research in Writing Studies – that of questions investigating the nature and existence of knowledge transfer. Most notably Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells’ study investigating the role of student dispositions in knowledge transfer. In their study, “Beyond Knowledge and Skills,” Driscoll and Wells review the work in writing studies that has sought to determine how social contexts (Slomp and Sternglass, for instance) and curricula affect student learning in writing classrooms. In addition, the authors review existing research into whether and how students transfer knowledge. Through this research they determine there exists a gap in our understanding – that of the role of student dispositions that may influence knowledge transfer.
These dispositions that Driscoll and Wells describe\textsuperscript{11} are evidence that the field of Writing Studies is poised to continue pursuit of these queries not into whether and how students employ “best practices” to produce “good writing” – but instead, questions about how students’ dispositions influence their ability to learn their own best practices for writing. Furthermore, these questions also lead to determining how pedagogy might affect/foster these dispositions.

It is in the spirit of addressing the complexities that impact student learning in the writing classroom that this project wishes to move forward – adding to the various ways in which we might consider students’ contexts for composing, but this time, including more cognitive elements in order to determine what more we may learn about students’ writing processes and progress.

**Basic Writing and the “Conditions for Transfer”**

As mentioned earlier, there existed a gap in the research investigating various elements/aspects of knowledge transfer. Earlier, I described the gap in that work as it related to dispositions and student contexts. In this section, I will briefly detail another gap in this research in transfer studies – the investigation into knowledge transfer specifically when it pertains to basic writers. Not only is this a gap in research into basic writers and basic writing classrooms, but (in the case of this study and student population) it is a gap in research that examines students from historically marginalized communities and who are subject to challenges in accessing higher education. This project, in part, is one that addresses a brief history of basic writing within Writing Studies and why questions of knowledge transfer are important in basic writing, especially at an urban research institution (regarding its mission of serving its own local population/demographic).

\textsuperscript{11} In their study specifically those dispositions are value, self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulation.
Much pedagogical scholarship is at its core – a pursuit to best prepare students for other (often times future) learning contexts (transfer). This is particularly true with the history of scholarship on Basic Writing classrooms. As a teacher of basic writing, I am concerned with a student’s ability to carry knowledge away from the classroom and this is the hallmark of transfer theory. However, these questions have existed for decades, sometimes albeit implicitly.

As early as 1979, Andrea Lunsford’s “Cognitive Development of the Basic Writer” concluded that basic writing students lacked the ability to abstract principles of the writing classroom and reproduce them in other contexts. While Lunsford never uses the term “transfer” in her work, her claims about basic writers suggests that scholars have, for many years, been concerned about what Writing Studies is able to do in order to prepare students for future learning/outside writing contexts. It is worth mentioning, also, that Lunsford’s work is only a small part of a larger conversation during the late 70s and early 80s surrounding the various takes on students’ individual writing processes and the pedagogies and theories developed (see earlier sections of this chapter in which the field’s history with the Cognitive Model is detailed) with the hope of better understanding the ways students compose, their motivations, and how we might tap into those in order to better educate them in writing.

More recently, these questions regarding whether and how students are using their knowledge from writing classrooms has been couched in questions of knowledge transfer more explicitly. The pursuit of whether knowledge transfer occurs within and without the writing classroom has become explicit within the past 10 years or so (Smit; Beaufort; Yancey). Recent work on transfer is being executed in longitudinal, empirical research studies (Wardle; Roozen) and it is also gaining ground in its theory as much as its praxis (Yancey). As scholars collect more data for various studies about transfer – from questions regarding first-year
writers, to intermediate writers and to disciplinary contexts, scholars are also asking questions regarding the theoretical implications of terminology used, not just the practice of how to execute transfer and whether and how it is possible. This trend makes an evaluation of the “who” of transfer studies even more important in our current time.

But what’s been missing until recently are the discussions not just of “who” transfers knowledge and “when” and “where,” but of what the conditions are that might best facilitate knowledge transfer. And even though we can understand much of basic writing scholarship to be implicitly concerned with transfer, the current explicit investigations into transfer have yet to examine whether and how the population of basic writers might require different/varied approaches to teaching toward/facilitating knowledge transfer.

In the next chapter, I will discuss at length the classroom design of my study which addresses the question into the conditions of transfer. Within that chapter, I detail the scholarship within Cognitive and Educational Psychology which supports the self-directed (also often referred to as “self-regulated”) learning what I believe might help us answer questions about the conditions that best facilitate knowledge transfer. The concept of self-directed learning as applied in the Basic Writing classroom is intended to build upon (previously discussed in this chapter) current work within Writing Studies that turns to dispositions as a precursor for knowledge uptake/learning.

Additionally (and in closing this section), it’s important to note that this project seeks not only to just contribute to the question of “what is the ideal environment for transfer?” This project notably attempts to, in part, determine the answer to that question for Basic Writers – an
at-risk population of students who are (in many contexts) in danger of losing their place within higher education.\footnote{12 This is an important implication for a project of this nature.}

**Theoretical Frame**

The theoretical framework for this project draws on research from Cognitive and Educational Psychology as it relates specifically to students’ perceived ability to learn literacy-related skills. These distinct bodies of knowledge are drawn upon specifically for definitions and discussions of the dispositions of motivation and self-efficacy. The dispositions of motivation and self-efficacy are then linked to the history of questions of cognition within Writing Studies (specifically as it relates to knowledge transfer).

As mentioned earlier, this project’s consideration of the terms “motivation” and “self-efficacy” is derived from existing work in the field of cognitive psychology, most notably the work of Albert Bandura and Dale Schunk. The term “self-efficacy” utilized in this project refers to students’ perception of their ability to learn – not their ability to “write well.” This definition is important given the way the concept of self-efficacy has been utilized within Writing Studies in the past – both limited and in pursuit of a different question regarding students in the writing classroom. Writing Studies’ previous occupation with students’ perceptions of their ability to write well (in terms of specific guidelines of what constitutes “good writing”) does not address what we can gain from the pursuit of alternate questions about student self-efficacy – specifically those that involve first, self-efficacy defined as students’ perception of their ability to learn which can then lead to questions into the ways in which this self-efficacy affects motivation within the classroom.

The term “motivation” here used is adopted from Dale Schunk’s work investigating how motivation (specifically as it relates to goal-setting) affects student self-efficacy. In other words,
research suggests that students who are given the opportunity to set goals (as I suggest in my study, within the classroom) and follow through on them are likely to increase their motivation which (as Schunk suggests) will increase their self-efficacy. It is this increase in self-efficacy that can be achieved within the writing classroom that, I argue, can be a condition for knowledge transfer which can increase the likelihood that students will transfer knowledge and skills from the writing classroom to other contexts (simultaneous and/or future).

These terms inform my project for two reasons: 1) as a discipline, Writing Studies effectively erased much of the investigations into “the cognitive” before these terms were extensively developed within Cognitive and Educational Psychology, and 2) these terms (as I detailed earlier in this chapter) can help writing researchers ask different questions about student learning: questions that investigate student dispositions that affect learning rather than questions regarding what the cognitive processes are that students employ when executing “good writing.”

The aforementioned questions are also a part of the larger question of knowledge transfer in Writing Studies – the move from considering the future contexts and curricula for transfer to the question of the idea conditions for transfer (in this case, whether and how student dispositions affect their learning and ability to transfer that learning). These “conditions for transfer” as I describe them earlier in this chapter will contribute to our understanding of both the role of Cognitive science in Writing Studies as well as provide a new way of thinking about transfer studies (in a more immediate way).

A theoretical framework grounded in Cognitive and Education Psychology allows me to highlight an opportunity for Writing Studies to pursue different questions regarding student learning and knowledge transfer. This framework also allows me to present a pedagogy that might address the practical classroom design that implements these concepts addressing the
outcomes for learning in the writing classroom. This framework also addresses a gap in transfer studies as it relates to the conditions ideal for knowledge transfer.

**Study Rationale**

In recent years, the field of Writing Studies has explored several avenues of research as it pertains to the ways in which students transfer (or do not transfer) skills from the writing classroom to other outside writing contexts. This push for research into knowledge transfer is in part due to the field’s overall interest in assessing student learning. The interest in assessment can be seen as related in part to scholarly work that calls into question the role of Writing Studies in preparing students for future writing contexts. Over the past decade, the concern has been raised as to whether Writing Studies pedagogy actually prepares students for the writing they’ll need to do in subsequent academic, professional, and civic contexts (Smit; Beaufort; Yancey).

The question of knowledge transfer is at the heart of many of these investigations into the role and purpose of writing at the university on both the programmatic and classroom level (Yancey; Nowacek; Downs and Wardle). Whether and how students transfer knowledge from one context to another has been (and continues to be) at the heart of robust empirical studies, providing useful data with which to address a broad range of issues, most notably curricular revision and development (Wardle; Wells; Nowacek; Yancey). Specific areas of interest include students’ use of prior genre knowledge (Reiff and Bawarshi) as well as students’ use of discursive resources in First Year Writing (Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi).

While conversations about genre knowledge and rhetorical skills may seem enough to promote transfer, the field is beginning to explore the layers of complexity involved in the transfer of knowledge from one context to another (Wardle; Bergman and Zeppernick). This
exploration addresses recent assertions that knowledge transfer is not only a question of the educational context (e.g. in what course students are writing). For example, students’ broader social context(s) have provided an insight into development that is crucial to understanding why transfer may not work. In one case, it has been argued that the multiple elements involved in the social dynamic of student development are the missing link in Writing Studies transfer research (Slomp). And now, the conversation has evolved from classroom context to broader social contexts, to a more specified and focused consideration of each student’s individual context as it relates to his/her ability to achieve knowledge transfer (Driscoll and Wells; Wells).

Specifically, these complexities are highlighted through research into individual student dispositions. These queries seek to extend the broader models of student development (e.g. David Slomp’s “bio-ecological” model that seeks to consider multiple aspects of a student’s life situation and contexts of learning). The focus on individual dispositions will add to what the field already understands about knowledge transfer across contextual boundaries.

The core of this intervention in the current research on transfer is the belief that the nature of a student’s “dispositional traits” can affect whether and how students transfer knowledge regardless of the context or the rhetorical skills taught (Driscoll and Wells). In their article “Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Dispositions,” Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells give a clear and succinct picture of the field of Writing Studies and its work to address transfer over the past decade. Their history details strong examples of transfer studies but points out that these studies have all focused in some way on the contextual elements of a student’s ability to transfer knowledge.

As one of the first articles to address this shift in the discipline – not to eliminate the question of context – but instead to match it equally with student dispositions, it opens the door
to the further pursuit of dispositions as related to student success in the writing classroom and beyond. The authors note, however, that this assertion must include a strong elaboration on which specific dispositions are contributing to student success in knowledge transfer. Based on empirical data from their studies, Driscoll and Wells identify four specific student dispositions, “value, self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulation,” that they claim are important to consider when questioning the success of knowledge transfer (Driscoll and Wells).

The dispositions referenced in Driscoll and Wells’ research are only a few that can be addressed when pursuing questions of students’ individual contexts. Furthermore, the authors remind us that “dispositions are not intellectual traits like knowledge, skills, or aptitude, but rather determine how those intellectual traits are used or applied.” Because of the wide range of questions we can ask regarding dispositions and because of the nature of their flexibility (e.g. they can be context-specific, they can be related to goals and motivation but can also be independent of them, they can impact a situation positively or negatively), it is important that the field continue to pursue questions that seek to determine the many ways in which students’ dispositions (not just their goals and motivations) affect their learning.

Student goals and motivations might be understood as implicit in empirical Writing Studies research insofar as questions about how students write have historically dealt with cognitive and social issues. However, as previously noted, much investigation into knowledge transfer is gauged through studies that do little to acknowledge students’ “detail-rich contexts” (Nowacek). Additionally, the nature of some studies of student learning privilege the transfer of knowledge over time – in other words, as a field we have valued a student’s ability to transfer concepts and skills to different contexts, and their ability to do this across at least two semesters. Recent scholarship points toward these efforts as important but limited, noting that, “to rely
solely on longitudinal studies for our understanding of transfer would be problematic, then, because the traces of the phenomenon of transfer are often subtle and hard to identify” (Nowacek 3).

Longitudinal studies are undoubtedly valuable and have given us much data to explore as well as various pedagogical approaches to enhance the potential of knowledge transfer. These studies offer valuable long-term perspective, but we also need an additional detail-rich look into students’ thinking and learning processes especially within their immediate contexts. This concern about the nature of knowledge transfer is echoed by recent scholarship in Educational Psychology noting in particular that the socially-situated nature and the contextual complexities of student learning call for additional approaches to studying knowledge transfer (Lobato).

This project seeks to extend Lobato’s call for contextual complexity specifically as it relates to studies of writing and knowledge transfer with respect to students’ dispositions. I address, in particular, whether and how any student transfers knowledge to his or her simultaneous writing contexts. The simultaneous nature of the knowledge transfer addresses the need for research into a more “detail-rich” student context. Thus, with a consideration of Lobato’s methods, this project contributes to the recent work in Writing Studies on student dispositions as they relate to learning and knowledge transfer.

In order to determine the potential for this, the basic writing classroom is identified as the space in which to best explore both student dispositions as well as the importance of these dispositions when contextual complexities are considered. I argue here that a study of transfer with attention to dispositions also points to the need to examine concurrent transfer specifically. Consideration of knowledge transfer that occurs in simultaneous, immediate contexts will better highlight the relationship between a basic writer’s disposition and his ability to see the skills and
knowledge of the writing classroom as immediately valuable to him. That is, this study will reveal whether and to what extent a basic writer’s view of knowledge as immediately relevant is tied to particular dispositions. In doing so, it will provide insight into whether and how the (in)ability to transfer writing knowledge impacts basic writers’ learning.

As yet, there are no examples of knowledge transfer occurring in the specific student population of basic writers. Basic Writers are long considered to be an “at-risk” population who are most affected by their social contexts and developmental complexities. Much scholarship in Writing Studies deals with the question of basic writing as a part of the University curriculum. The question of how and where to education basic writers has long been a strain of discourse in the field, most significantly seen in the topic of how to design and approach the course and its students (Bartholomae). And while the specific “at-risk” nature of our basic writers changes depending on where we teach them, ultimately the risks can be understood best as “their unfamiliarity with the academic discourse community, combined, perhaps, with such limited experience outside their native discourse communities (so much so) that they are unaware that there is such a thing as a discourse community with conventions to be mastered” (Bizzell 230). There are a number of reasons why students might feel the way Bizzell characterizes it: socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural just to name a few.

Scholars have worked to address these issues of basic writers’ access to discourse and the power that comes from asking students to engage with big ideas and concepts in our field and others (Bird). And while we have had success with such curricular changes, there remains one common strain which can be seen throughout all of the reasons contributing to an “at-risk” status: whatever the reason, it affects the disposition(s) students bring into our classrooms. And while scholars of writing are now peering into how to identify and discuss dispositions as they
relate to learning and transfer, none of these current studies focus solely on identifying dispositions of basic writers and the impact pedagogy can have on them. I will argue here that this study marks a crucial intervention in a budding interest in dispositions in the writing classroom: what they are, how we identify them, and how our pedagogy can affect them.

**Methods**

For this project, I will examine self-directed teaching strategies in two sections of my Basic Writing (ENG 1010) course: a developmental course that (at the time of this study) nearly half of freshmen students were placed into before enrolling in ENG 1020 to fulfill Urban University’s basic composition requirement. This study draws on recent research on transfer and dispositions to examine student work in Basic Writing. For this study, I designed a pedagogy that uses teaching strategies developed from bodies of literature that detail the principles of self-directed learning and self-efficacy as it relates to student writing. I will examine whether and how these teaching strategies help students increase their self-efficacy and motivation – two key factors identified as integral to the transfer of knowledge in writing (Driscoll and Wells). Specifically of interest to this project is the transfer of knowledge to simultaneous courses in which students are enrolled. This specific type of knowledge transfer is of particular interest given the potential of students to transfer knowledge if and when they see it immediately useful to them in other areas of study. In light of this, my project seeks to determine whether there is an increase in self-efficacy and motivation as evidenced through reflection and self-directed learning objectives/outcomes and if so, whether that increase encourages students to practice the skills and principles of the writing classroom in other concurrent introductory courses and/or contexts.
Identifying students’ perceptions of their writing in other concurrent introductory courses addresses the importance of collateral knowledge transfer (Beach) – a principle I argue is important for students to exercise early on in their academic writing. Beach describes collateral transfer as involving “individuals' relatively simultaneous participation in two or more historically related activities” (Beach 115). According to Beach, collateral transitions occur frequently in life and the more common examples deal with students’ simultaneous educational contexts (e.g. students moving between English and Science courses).

While the study will focus on the student’s perceptions of their other courses, all student work collected will be from ENG 1010 only. It is the ENG 1010 basic writing course that plays a pivotal role in Wayne State’s general education curriculum foremost because at the time of the data collection for this project, almost half of entering WSU freshmen were placed into Basic Writing.13 Because of this important detail, the study attempts to determine if self-directed teaching strategies might encourage/facilitate motivation and self-efficacy in a student who sees a clear connection between the knowledge of the writing classroom and the overall first-year academic experience.

The effort to broaden our perspective on how we understand students’ interest in and use of writing studies knowledge stems from recent investigations into student dispositions as their role in learning and transfer (Driscoll and Wells). This work is largely informed by research on self-efficacy that suggests successful students display confidence in their own learning abilities (Bandura). As successful students display a positive perception of their own learning, these principles of confidence also apply to motivation in the writing classroom (Pajares). Thus, to determine the pedagogy that best supports successful Basic Writing students, it is crucial to investigate students’ perceptions of their own learning as it relates to Basic Writing and other

13 As of F ’13, enrollment in basic writing is down to about 1/3 (36%).
concurrent introductory courses during their first semester of college. In order to determine these perceptions, I collected ethnographic data on classroom participation throughout the course of the semester. The data collected will provide insight into students’ views of their own writing processes and learning experiences in and outside of the writing classroom. Specifically, my research will identify the impact of my pedagogy on students’ self-efficacy and thus their potential to transfer knowledge from one context to another.

Research questions for this project include:

- How do students respond to the process of self-identifying those skills they wish to transfer? Does this process affect student behaviors that contribute to transfer? If so, how?
- Do reflection and self-efficacy play a significant role in whether or not students see writing studies as useful in outside contexts? If so, what is this role?
- Do students’ written reflections suggest that they are achieving collateral transfer? If so, what do these reflections suggest about the development of self-efficacy and motivation and their role in collateral transfer?

Through the pursuit of these questions, my dissertation will contribute to necessary and ongoing research at the intersections of writing theory, knowledge transfer, and the rapidly growing interest in student self-efficacy and motivation (dispositions) as it relates to success in transferring writing knowledge to other contexts. My pedagogy asks students to identify their own personal learning objectives/goals. I developed this pedagogy based on scholarship in Educational Psychology (Bandura; Pajares) and Writing Studies (Yancey) which suggests students’ articulation of and reflection on their own learning can give them a better connection to the concepts of the classroom. Asking students to enact this by articulating their own personal
learning objectives, speaks to the literature on student engagement and self-efficacy as well as the scholarship on reflection in the writing classroom. In other words, it is my hope that this pedagogy will prompt students to see their own personal objectives as related to/part of the objectives mandated by the classroom and that this will lead to the utilization of writing skills in other current contexts. Studying this pedagogy will further our understanding of the roles of self-efficacy and motivation in transfer. What’s more, it will also contribute to the conversation about pedagogies that may facilitate the dispositions integral to the transfer of knowledge.

My project also contributes to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning which is important here as the pedagogy I developed is the one I studied. This scholarship involves the pursuit of inquiry via systematic qualitative methods, including field notes, text analysis, and other data collection, with a goal of revising or shaping pedagogical practice (Ray; Bishop-Clark and Deitz-Uhler). Ultimately, the revision of this practice will lead to more understanding of how these principles will improve current and future student outcomes.

Following recommendations for participant-observer study (Merriam; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw), and teacher research (Ray), I took detailed field notes immediately following each class session. These field notes contain my observations and documentation of what happened in each class, including the interactions between myself and my students, the students and the methods/content of the course, and between the students themselves. The field notes also contain my reflections on the class activities and student behaviors that will assist me in deciding how to structure each subsequent class session and its activities.

Teacher-research is a crucial methodology for a study of student self-efficacy. The use of teacher-research allows me to see first-hand the ways in which the pedagogy I developed for this research project affects my students both in their written assignments as well as in their
classroom interactions. This method of research provides a means to investigate whether and how students find writing skills useful in other classes/contexts.

As students are prompted during class to discuss various issues relating to the Basic Writing classroom including but not limited to complete and in-progress writing assignments, writing processes, learning objectives, classroom experiences, and outside learning and writing experiences/contexts, all of this is recorded by audio as well as in my detail field notes. In addition to these discussions, I conducted three focus groups with students in order to gauge their perspective on the course and their work. These audio recordings will be coded inductively from the data in order to develop codes indicating students’ references to their motivation and self-efficacy as it relates to the course, other courses they are enrolled in, and their learning.

In addition to classroom interactions and student focus groups, all student work for the course has been collected for text analysis. This includes reflective writing, informal writing (in notebooks/journals, for example), and formal, academic writing (projects and essays). Texts will be analyzed for evidence of developing motivation and self-efficacy through reflective behaviors/practices. They will also be analyzed for any specific references to work completed in other concurrent courses. A coding process will be developed for this analysis, following standard qualitative procedures in which codes are developed inductively from the data (Merriam).

Crucial to this project is the analysis of activities designed to see whether and how students develop habits like self-directed learning and reflection. First, through an analysis of student texts, I will explore whether and how writing activities like reflection help students develop strategies for articulating and following-through on individual and University learning objectives. Texts will also be analyzed for evidence of students’ articulation of their personal
learning objectives in relationship to the genres of our writing classroom: summarization, incorporation of an original response to sources, analyzing textual features, and formation of a reflective argument. I will also analyze students’ comments about their own learning in reflective assignments throughout the semester as well as a final reflective argument to understand whether and how reflective writing assignments specifically designed to prompt students to think about their own self-directed learning objectives help them understand if and how they find writing skills useful in other concurrent classes.

My analysis of students’ written reflections will enable me to show any description of collateral knowledge transfer. These descriptions are a form of self-report data which is often considered suspect because it is, by nature, subjective. However, it is arguably a very important form of data in some qualitative studies. In this study in particular, self-efficacy is inherently subjective and is entirely rooted in the research participant’s subjective experience. Because of this, I argue that self-report data is crucial to investigating student self-efficacy. Furthermore, self-report data can be coded and weighted in terms of its specificity thus increasing the validity of the self-reporting. Additionally, my analyses of student reflections, field notes, audio recorded class sessions, and student focus groups will allow me to explain how students respond to the process of identifying the skills they wish to transfer.

Overview

To recap, in this chapter I outlined the overall project and the claims for its need within the field of Writing Studies. First, I address the various arguments that developed through the short-lived so-called cognitive turn in Writing Studies with attention to the theories in Cognitive Psychology used by Writing Studies scholars in these early examinations of cognition and writing. I argue that the field of Writing Studies should turn back to concepts within Cognitive
Psychology but with a different focus. Secondly, I argue that there exists a gap in the research on knowledge transfer that considers the role of basic writing. Thirdly, I argue that the research into basic writing and transfer is important when considering the “conditions for transfer,” especially when investigating first year students who are considered to be “at risk.” Finally, I argue that whether and how basic writers transfer their knowledge is directly related to their dispositions (specifically those of motivation and self-efficacy).

Chapter Two:

In Chapter two, I discuss the theory behind the design of this project’s assignment sequence. I detail the theory of self-directed learning (in Education) and the principles abstracted from this theory. I discuss in detail how and why these abstracted principles were utilized to design reading and writing assignments that focused on content related to self-efficacy and self-directed learning.

Additionally, I discuss how assignments in this sequence were scaffolded in order to help students see the ways in which writing genres build upon one another and are integrated within other genres (e.g. summary is a part of a response, and a response is part of what it means to analyze). I then describe the writing-about-writing design element of the course and provide detail about how my students read theories and practices in Writing Studies and in other disciplines dealing with concerns that students often have about self-efficacy (in general) and writing (specifically). I conclude this chapter with a description of the research study’s context and its participants to emphasize the impact of this project on basic writers at the urban research university.

Chapter Three:
In Chapter three, I detail the methods of the study that describes codes revealing whether and how students show evidence of the existence and development of the disposition of self-efficacy as it relates to their writing and learning. I show the inductive development of codes based on the scholarship from Educational and Cognitive Psychology that inspired this project’s focus on student dispositions – specifically self-efficacy. I focus on the students’ written reflections that were completed after each major writing project in the course (post-project reflections). The reflective writing is coded for evidence of students’ unprompted discussion of their own personal learning objectives and their connection of those personal learning objectives to any instance of self-efficacy.

In this chapter I also define and describe multicausality – a construct discovered in students’ written reflections through open coding procedures. Also described is the coding procedure for students’ reflective writing in order to identify any discussion of self-efficacy in relation to the course content and design. For this, I utilized an open coding approach using Bandura’s existing codes for self-efficacy as a starting point. I then modified these existing codes as my data demanded. Ultimately, chapter three describes and discusses the methodological contribution of this project to current and future qualitative and mixed methods studies of dispositions in the writing classroom.

Chapter Four:

In Chapter four, I detail the results and discussion of this study. I discuss data from the project – in particular, any patterns that emerged in which students discussed the course structure – that revealed whether and how students engaged with the topics of the course. Chapter four analyzes the data, showing relationship between students’ use of personal learning objectives, course objectives, multi-causal descriptions, and self-efficacy language.
This discussion focuses on the potential usefulness of including personal learning objectives as part of a classroom pedagogy in addition to whether these PLOs are an important factor in fostering an environment for students to develop and progress with task-based self-efficacy as evidenced in their writing. The results also provide insight into whether students utilized intrinsic or extrinsic drives based on their view of the course (i.e. whether students attribute achievement to the mechanisms of a writing course – peer review, instructor feedback – or whether they identify the broader, overall purpose of the section – self-directed learning strategies).

Chapter Five:

In Chapter five, I discuss implications for my project. First, I discuss the relationship between self-directed learning, literacy, and student agency through the lens of the translingual theory of literacy. In this section, I show how the pedagogy of this study affords for students’ use of multi-causal descriptions of their learning objectives and how this emphasizes students’ own perceptions of success instead of privileging of a particular type of discourse used in the writing classroom.

Secondly, I discuss the implications for the teaching and assessment of writing. Specifically, I detail how the pedagogy and results of this study may be useful for individual classroom evaluation as well as programmatic assessment as it can provide insight into successful teaching strategies in basic writing classrooms leading to stronger connections between writing courses in a program’s sequence. Then, I discuss a call from the field of Writing Studies that asks for our assessments to continue to find ways to know students’ individual complexities and contexts. I then provide the ways in which this study and its results contribute to that need.
Thirdly, the fifth chapter discusses the contribution of this study (methodologically and theoretically) to current and future studies of dispositions in the writing classroom. Specifically, the chapter details the discovery of the multi-causal construct of students’ reflective writing practices which can lead to more reliable ways to qualitatively identify and measure student self-efficacy in their reflective writing.
CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCING SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING INTO THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the field of Writing Studies to investigate the relationship between student dispositions and their learning. For a long time, student dispositions were thought to be something that students arrived with to our college classrooms and that needed to be grappled with in their current state. Arguably, this is the case with post-secondary education in general: that students arrive to our classrooms with a specific set of knowledge (and attitudes) that we then regard as either teachable or not.

It is not uncommon to find articles and books on pedagogy that address the teaching, evaluation, and assessment of classrooms with diverse student populations in terms of backgrounds and abilities (Powell; Poe; Inoue). Rarely, though, can one find work on post-secondary pedagogy that addresses student diversity in terms of dispositions and whether and how those dispositions can be affected through modifications to our pedagogy. Furthermore, few pedagogical endeavors on the post-secondary level view student dispositions as anything other than a fixed element to navigate in the classroom.

In this chapter I examine scholarship from Education and Educational Psychology that describes the specific definition of and pedagogical approach to Self-Directed Learning (sometimes referred to as Self-Regulated Learning). Through this scholarship, I will emphasize two points: first, that Self-Regulated Learning has been widely studied in students who range from 3rd grade to 11th grade and therefore written primarily for an audience of K-12 teachers. I argue that regardless of the popular research subjects for these studies, the principles of SRL (which I will detail later in this chapter) are more than relevant for college freshman (most notably students who are considered to be at-risk) and that there exists a missed opportunity –
despite our emphasis on active learning and student-centered learning – within the field of Writing Studies as it relates to designing classrooms to promote Self-Regulated Learning. Secondly, I will emphasize that SRL is uniquely positioned to attend to the dispositions of freshman students who are often only weeks removed from their high school educational contexts and are, as I will argue here, still the prime audience for classrooms that utilize SRL principles for learning.

As I begin this chapter with a review of the literature in Education and Educational Psychology as it relates to the development of and research into the definition of Self-Regulated Learning, I will show the relationship between Self-Regulated Learning, motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy. Specifically, I will show how motivation, autonomy, and self-efficacy are key components of Self-Regulated Learning. I will also explain how the aforementioned concepts compare with a well-known theoretical approach explored and utilized in Writing Studies over the past several decades.

I will then discuss in detail how and why I utilized the principles of Self-Regulated Learning to design formal and informal reading and writing assignments, as well as to facilitate classroom activities and discourse. Finally, following a thorough description of and rationale for Self-Regulated Learning, I will present the course design of the study.

**Self-Directed (Regulated) Learning**

According to Sharan Merriam, the theory of Self-Directed Learning emerged from a desire to develop a knowledge base unique to adult education. Indeed it is true that the earliest theories of self-regulation were focused on determining if adults learn differently and therefore should be taught differently than children. From there emerged two camps of research regarding Self-Regulated Learning: theories focusing on adults and theories focusing on adolescents. In the
early 1960s, Malcolm Knowles coined the term “andragogy” in order to make a specific distinction between the ways that adults learn (andragogy) and how children learn (pedagogy). As we now know, these distinctions never held water in many academic circles, and so Knowles himself revised his own thinking to consider that there was, instead, a continuum of learning which acknowledged the fact that both children and adults could occupy characteristics of “pedagogy” and “andragogy” – specifically, that students of any age could be motivated by external or internal factors and could be self-directed or teacher-dependent (Merriam, emphasis mine).

But Knowles continued to publish widely on the topic of adult learning (despite abandoning the contested term of andragogy). While he is regarded as having authored much of the seminal work on self-regulation in the classroom, Knowles’ research did not investigate solely the topic of self-directed learning and learners, but instead focused primarily on the topic of adult education and the adult learner. What Knowles found in his research he then put into practice by authoring various texts designed to “package” the concepts of adult learning and self-directed learning in a way that teachers could develop classroom activities to foster the development of these learners.

While the definition of a “self-directed learner” has changed over the decades since his early work on the subject, a commonly used definition still describes self-directed learning as an activity or process in which “…individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles). Later in this chapter I will describe why I argue the
importance of understanding this definition as independent of age (e.g. if a student is 18 years old, they are considered to be an “adult learner”).

In much of the early theorizing, self-directed learners are “diagnosed” – in other words, researchers would determine the aforementioned characteristics of a self-directed learning and, from there, determine who can be considered to match these characteristics. This early approach suggests that researchers viewed these characteristics are merely there as an intrinsic, unmoving part of a person rather than examining how they are developed and whether they can be changed. Based on this approach, Knowles and others developed their definition of self-direction by examining the above described behaviors in successful students. Knowles’ texts (and my contention with their methods and primary audience) served as the impetus for my own questions into how to design a classroom in a way that might better attend to how students learn as it relates to their motivation and their dispositions toward learning in general.

As Barry Zimmerman notes in his overview of Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement, our American educational system has long been concerned with the importance of personal responsibility. Furthermore, it can be said that the primary goal of our education system is for the individual to take on the burden of pursuing his education (Zimmerman). In the spirit of this ideology, researchers have worked to provide empirical evidence about the ways in which students “become masters of their own learning.” According to Zimmerman, these researchers have “begun to identify and study some of the key processes by which students direct their acquisition of academic knowledge” (Zimmerman).

At its core, the principles of Self-Regulated Learning can point toward implications for the writing classroom, specifically as it relates to how teachers should interact with students. The key processes (which I will detail below) identified by Zimmerman and others denote a shift in
our perspective of the students in our classrooms from individuals who are “fixed” entities with a set learning ability to individuals who are able to improve their learning ability via their “personally initiated processes” and learning environments” (Zimmerman). This is particularly important for post-secondary educational contexts in which students are often regarded as either able to acquire knowledge or not – rarely in post-secondary education are classrooms designed with the simultaneous goals of knowledge mastery (i.e. handing down knowledge for retention by whatever means) in addition to processes that allow/afford for students the ability to examine their own learning strategies and the effectiveness of them.

The key processes referred to above are crucial to the development of definitions of Self-Regulated Learners over the years. Initially, we know that students who self-regulate in their learning are those who display broadly defined qualities of confidence and awareness. The qualities of self-regulation are also understood as the difference between “passive” and “active” students as it relates to approaches to learning/teacher interaction. And while these broadly-defined categories are generally agreed upon by all researchers of self-regulated learning, Zimmerman notes that “…definitions of self-regulated learning involving specific processes often differ on the basis of researchers’ theoretical orientations.”

Despite differences in theoretical approaches, researchers agree that three core principles can be examined in self-regulated learners: metacognition, motivation, and behavior. Metacognitive processes include planning, goal-setting, organization, and self-evaluation (both prompted and unprompted). Motivational processes include self-reports of high self-efficacy and “intrinsic task interest” (Schunk and Zimmerman), persistence, and effort. Behavioral processes include students’ ability to structure and select optimal learning environments as well as seek out advice and information for a learning task/goal (Zimmerman).
All of the aforementioned processes are active in self-regulated students’ participation in their learning (Zimmerman). Furthermore, the three core principles (Motivation, Behavior, and Metacognition) are condensed into two primary features of self-regulated learners: the ability of students to be active participants in their own learning (e.g. planning, awareness of learning in relation to objectives), and students’ ability to use a “self-oriented feedback loop” (Carver & Scheirer; Zimmerman). It is widely agreed upon in Educational Psychology research that self-regulation is ultimately dependent upon a student’s ability to actively participate in their own learning while monitoring and interpreting outcomes in a continuing feedback loop that measures effectiveness of his or her learning strategies.

The importance of the two key processes of self-monitoring and utilization of the feedback loop are integral to student self-regulation. It is crucial to emphasize that the aforementioned “feedback-loop” is a students’ focus on the monitoring and interpretation of learning effectiveness. This stands in opposition to a student’s interpretation of the evaluation of their work on any given written project (in terms of what constitutes “good writing”). This is a key difference for this project as existing Writing Studies research investigating student self-efficacy focuses on the student’s belief in himself as a “good writer” insofar as he is able to write in a way that earns a positive grade/feedback from an instructor (McCarthy et al). The aforementioned example stands in comparison to a student who possesses self-efficacy in regards to his ability to learn a skill he does not already possess (e.g. “I can write an analysis even though I haven’t been able to do it before”). In other words, learning effectiveness (repeated monitoring of progress) is not the same as a student’s interpretation of why he got a “good grade” on an assignment (final evaluations).
In Chapter three, I will discuss in detail the relationship between Self-Regulated Learning and perceptions of self-efficacy – the latter which is instrumental in the behavioral and motivational aspects of self-regulated learners. Self-efficacy will also be discussed as an element of students’ behavior and motivation which can be improved upon through strategies implemented within the writing classroom.14

Ultimately, understanding and considering Self-Regulated Learning is only helpful insofar as we are not just observing whether students are in fact self-regulated in their approach to learning, but that we are investigating the processes by which they become and sustain self-regulation in their learning. Furthermore, I argue that our understanding of Self-Regulated Learning processes should lead to classrooms that are designed to simultaneously foster these processes while delivering content knowledge about writing within the writing classroom.15

**Autonomy and Motivation in the Self-Regulated Basic Writing Classroom:**

In this section I will discuss in detail how and why the principles of Autonomy and Motivation (as processes integral to self-directed learning) were utilized to design reading and writing assignments within my Basic Writing courses.

When I first began to design a Basic Writing course around the principles of Self-Directed Learning, I was under the impression that the majority of what had been written about so-called “self-directed” classrooms was directed toward K-12 teachers. In fact, I had difficulty finding books that were written to an audience of college instructors. After an initial reading in this subject, I came to find many theories that were applicable to adult learners (Knowles, etc), but then came to find that these theories were later widely contested (as they began as an effort to distinguish between how to instruct adults in a different way than instructing children). While

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14 These strategies are modified from existing research on strategies for Self-Regulated Learning.
15 Please see my section on my specific classroom design
Knowles and others revised their theories to address the understandable criticisms of their work (e.g. that adults have a universally different educational need in terms of learning environments and teaching styles), I still struggled to find any text geared toward a self-directed pedagogy for college students. From here, I decided that not only were the principles of self-regulation/self-direction applicable to college freshman specifically, but that it would be uniquely positioned to work with my population of basic writers.

I came to this conclusion for two reasons: 1) in my anecdotal experience teaching basic writers at Urban University, I often noticed that many students struggled with writing not because of an inability, but because of the lack of any environment that provided them the opportunity to be involved in their own learning – in other words, many basic writers have long-since given up on their abilities to write as they have been in traditional pedagogical situations in which they are expected to produce a final product rather than practice strategies which work to produce that product.

The second reason I believed freshman basic writers would benefit specifically from the principles of self-regulation has more to do with the discipline of Writing Studies than it does with the students in the writing classroom. In my experience, the discipline of Writing Studies has only scratched the surface of the possibilities when incorporating the principles of self-direction into the writing classroom. In other words, because of long-held assumptions about cognitive science and its use when working with and studying writers, many theories exist that have not yet been implemented in conjunction with work in our own field. Also, the existing work in Writing Studies that does address these concepts (discussed in chapter one) does not include vulnerable populations like basic writers who could benefit most from these principles implemented in the writing classroom.
When I began teaching basic writers at Urban University five years ago, I noticed that one of the greatest challenges of teaching my students came not in teaching them how to write in academe, but rather, in motivating them to want to learn how to write in an academic environment. And while many would suggest that it is not the job of a college instructor to motivate students to learn in a post-secondary classroom, I would say that if we can construct a classroom that incorporates well-developed theories through which to introduce and coach writing skills, this is an opportunity that we should pursue.

In fact, this study is by no means the first venture into challenging a top-down approach to pedagogy (e.g. in which an instructor holds all the knowledge and simply introduces/passes it down to the student). As Wallace and Ewald detail in *Mutuality in the Rhetoric and Writing Classroom*, theorists have for many years strived for a pedagogy that “invites students to take subjective positions as co-constructors of knowledge” (2). In fact, there have been decades of calls for a need to change the American Educational system and this project joins the echo of this old and troubling sentiment. But, as many of us already know, breaking old teacher-student relationships is a difficult enterprise.

We face this challenge not only when we suggest that students should challenge the power relationships in the classroom (Freire; Giroux; hooks; etc.) and take charge of constructing their own knowledge. We also face this challenge when suggesting that principles from other disciplines such as Psychology and Educational Psychology be incorporated in the writing classroom. But it is not just within Writing Studies that these concepts are contended with. The notion that teachers and scholars of writing focus too much on “pedagogy” and not enough on “psychology” is an idea that is gaining ground not only in the discipline of Writing Studies, but

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16 I detail this in Chapter One.
also in popular media and the largest organization for English teachers in the United States (NCTE).\(^\text{17}\)

In addition to this, author Alfie Kohn (recognized nationally for his thoroughly researched and well-written perspectives on American Education) has written widely on Education in the United States, particularly in criticism of rewards-based curriculum – in other words, the detriment of classrooms that teach students to work for rewards rather than intrinsic value. Intrinsic value is understood as the desire to participate in a class/activity because of a reported interest in (value in) the task/work.\(^\text{18}\) This “intrinsic value” referred to here – and its relationship to student self-regulation and self-efficacy – is substantiated by several studies across multiple Education journals (Schunk; Pintrich and DeGroot; Zimmerman; Reeve; Jang; Isen).

The aforementioned studies focus primarily on gauging the relationship between rewards and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation through increasing a teacher’s “autonomy support.” In this context, “autonomy support” is akin to what Writing Studies scholars refer to as “student-centered learning.” Here, the operative term is “engagement:

Researchers measure engagement either through a person’s active involvement such as effort and positive emotion or through a person’s voice and initiative in trying to take personal responsibility for their behavior. For example, in one line of research, engaged people express their active task involvement by being goal-directed, focused, intense, persistent, and interested (Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wellborn, 1991). Disengaged people, in contrast, show their passivity by being apathetic, distracted, half-hearted, helpless, or burned out. In a second line of research, engaged people express their voice and take initiative in trying to produce changes in their environment (deCharms, 1976; Fiedler, 1975; Koenig et al., 1977). Disengaged people, in contrast, show passivity by allowing external forces outside their personal control to regulate their task involvement.

\(^{17}\)http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting

\(^{18}\)For what it’s worth, this is reminiscent of the question on SET forms that asks students to gauge their interest in the content of the class prior to registering for it.
In the research on engagement, researchers measure students’ classroom behaviors, coding them based on their “task involvement.” The research on engagement is an important supplement to research on self-regulation and motivation as similar dispositional tendencies have the same outcomes in the classroom. The authors explain this, indicating that…

In school settings, engagement is important because it functions as a behavioral pathway by which students’ motivational processes contribute to their subsequent learning and development (Wellborn, 1991). For instance, engagement predicts students’ achievement (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998) and eventual completion of school (vs. dropping out; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). Engagement is further important because teachers (e.g., practitioners) rely on it as an observable indicator of their students’ underlying motivation during instruction (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Thus, engagement is important both because it predicts important outcomes (e.g., learning, development) and because it reveals underlying motivation. (Reeve, Jang, et al. 2004, emphasis mine)

This extensive body of knowledge indicates that researchers have been interested in and identifying student engagement and motivation for quite some time. This particular research study utilizes the phrase “autonomy support” to specifically measure student engagement, and that concept of student autonomy is at the heart of Self-Regulation within the classroom.

According to Legault and Inzlicht,

Human autonomy plays a pivotal role in self-regulation and performance. Whatever the behavioral domain, feelings of engagement, diligence, and vitality are higher when the motivation underlying a goal or behavior is autonomous or self-endorsed rather than pressured or controlled. As a result, goal-related performance tends to be better. Researchers attribute the effect of autonomy on goal-regulation to the fact that autonomy represents volition and cohesion in action. In other words, feelings of choice, interest, deep personal relevance, and internal causality underlie the experience of autonomous behavior, which energizes and sustains goal-striving (Legault and Inzlicht 2013, emphasis mine).
As I will describe in detail later in this chapter, within a classroom designed to foster student self-regulation, choice (autonomy) is a substantial component of the design and enactment of activities and assignments.\(^{19}\)

But first, it is important to address the relationship between the concepts of self-regulation, autonomy, and key concepts already parsed out within Writing Studies. Readers may recognize much of these ideas (e.g. the notion that students who have a degree of choice/autonomy in the classroom yield a particular result in their work/learning) as already in existence within the discipline of Writing Studies. This is, of course, true – the field has indeed explored these concepts in various ways and for various reasons. Below, I will address the relationship between Self-Regulated Learning and our field’s own Student-Centered Learning (the term widely used by Writing Studies scholars).

**Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) and Student-Centered Learning (SCL)**

In the field of Writing Studies, there exists much research into the concept of Student-Centered Learning. It is seen as a general consensus that in the writing classroom, teachers prefer a student-centered approach as opposed to a teacher-centered one. This belief in student-centeredness comes from two segments of the discipline referred to as “progressive pedagogy” and “critical pedagogy.” Scholars within these areas of our discipline have written at length (albeit from different angles) about the importance and advantages of placing students at the center of their own learning – in other words, placing the power of knowledge-making (construction) in the hands of students rather than teachers. It is widely believed to be more advantageous for students (in the writing classroom) to be at the center of their own learning (Giroux; Freire; hooks; Wallace and Ewald).

\(^{19}\) Of course, an emphasis on engagement also exists within Writing Studies (as seen in the WPA Framework for Post-Secondary Student Success and the AAC&U’s High Impact Practices).
Of course, given the fact that student-centeredness is often part of “critical” and “progressive” subsets of our field, the student-centered approach to learning is in opposition to the more “traditional” approach to teacher – that of the teacher being the point of authority and sole decision maker in what constitutes knowledge, how it is carried out, and how it is evaluated. Much of our understanding of student-centered classrooms comes from the Constructivist theory of education (Piaget; Edwards and Mercer; Bereiter) which asks students to (as the name suggest) construct knowledge based on their own observations of and assessment of real problems and issues that they face. In the writing classroom, this theory of Constructivism plays out in student-centered pedagogy – in other words, students in a writing classroom are often asked to engage with and at times even develop activities that they are most invested and interested in.

In the field of Writing Studies, student-centeredness is implemented/theorized in different ways. One of the most common ways we as a field have understood student-centered pedagogy is through collaborative activities in which students are given agency over their own learning and evaluation (of themselves and each other). John Trimbur wrote extensively about this pedagogy in his article “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning.” Within his text, Trimbur argues that while competing perspectives exist regarding collaboration in the classroom, ultimately the activity benefits students as it relates to their ability to grasp concepts taught in the writing classroom.

Trimbur details at length the perception of education that positions teachers as experts and members of their knowledge communities who merely serve to usher students into those communities. And while Trimbur presents this position (about the role of a teacher within a
student-centered classroom) through a discussion of the role of collaboration, his description of a teacher’s role is relevant to most student-centered classrooms, collaborative or not:

Insofar as collaborative learning inducts students into established knowledge communities and teaches them the normal discourse of those communities, we derive our authority as teachers from being certified representatives of the communities of knowledgeable peers that students aspire to join, and that we, as members of our chosen disciplines and also members of the community of the liberally educated public at large, invite and encourage them to join. Teachers are defined in this instance as those members of a knowledge community who accept the responsibility for inducting new members into the community (Trimbur).

The description of teachers as “certified representatives” of our knowledge communities is at the heart of not only the discourse of collaborative learning, but also student-centered learning. Therefore, even though student-centered classrooms do not necessarily need to be collaborative, they are certainly driven by the input of students through various generative exercises in which students socially construct the knowledge of the classroom.20

Socially-constructing classroom knowledge is, of course, a primary tenant of critical pedagogy (Freire; Shor; Giroux). In one of the most potent examples of addressing the issue of power and knowledge construction in the classroom, When Students Have Power, Ira Shor provides a detailed account of the need for students’ to understand knowledge as socially-constructed in order to subvert the traditional power relationships within a classroom. Shor’s contribution to critical pedagogy specifically addresses the authority of a teacher over the students in her classroom which he believes, if it were to persist, results in perpetuating the culture of passive transformation of knowledge. Actively working to reverse this passive knowledge transfer then, according to Shor, invites students to “alternative ways of being.”

In his classroom, Shor turned all decisions in his classroom over to his students in a collaborative fashion (even to the extent of negotiating the syllabus together). The Self-

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20 I will detail these later in this chapter.
Regulated classroom does something much similar, but the primary difference is that the self-regulated classroom does not seek to argue for creating a student who is an active participant in society beyond the classroom. While I cannot say that the self-regulated classroom would not encourage a student to see education (overall) and his or her role in society differently as a result of participating in self-regulation (which includes participating actively in his or her own learning), my project differs from Shor’s in two important ways.

The first way is the way choice/agency/autonomy is exercised in the self-regulated classroom. Much like Shor did with his students and his classroom, I too looked out to see students who were in need of something different within the writing classroom. While this Self-Regulated classrooms do not necessarily seek to disrupt or reverse traditional power relationships (there are several reasons for this), it does want for a change in classroom practice that involves students in the choices made during classroom practice. As Shor invited students in to every choice within his classroom – even negotiating the syllabus – agency and choice in the self-regulated classroom is primarily exercised by two factors: the incorporation of students’ own personal goals as a purpose for completing assignments, and the incorporation of reflective writing that allows students the opportunity to employ metacognition in relation to all elements of the classroom (as defined by the student himself).

The second major difference between student-centered learning in Shor’s example from that of the self-regulated classroom is that Shor’s focus is primarily on breaking down traditional power relationships between teacher and student. As mentioned earlier, self-regulated classrooms focus on the development of motivation and self-efficacy for students as it relates to task-oriented learning. This goal within the SRL classroom is focused and specific for the classroom itself and the content of that classroom (in this case, writing). While this dispositional goal in the
writing classroom as it relates to writing could certainly have longitudinal effects (e.g. student transfer of skills as a result of dispositional changes; long-term changes in student self-efficacy more generally), these are not the goals of self-regulated classrooms. So, whereas Shor hoped that transforming his classroom to turn power over to students so they may change their understanding of their role in society, the self-regulated classroom seeks to invite students to create goals, to understand their progress in those goals, and to gauge their motivation and self-efficacy within the writing classroom as a result of those changes in the classroom.

In addition to this relationship/comparison to Shor’s text, self-regulated learning shares some of the broader principles that we commonly use/discuss within Writing Studies. As Jim Berlin reminded us 20 years ago, all writing instructors are, in fact, teaching the process of writing to our students – but what truly matters is something altogether different:

The numerous recommendations of the "process"-centered approaches to writing instruction as superior to the "product"-centered approaches are not very useful. Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the same process. The test of one's competence as a composition instructor, it seems to me, resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all of its significance for the student (Berlin, emphasis mine).

Within this same argument, Berlin also reminds us that the most effective teaching of the composing process is one that (moving away from the Current-Traditional) enables students to “become effective persons as they become effective writers” (Berlin). This is impactful for understanding self-regulated learning (SRL) as it relates to the field of Writing Studies precisely because of the call to think of our pedagogy as what best prepares students (i.e. what is significant for students) to be, as Berlin calls them, “effective persons.”

Much in the way that Shor’s ideologies differ from those of the Self-Regulated classroom, Berlin’s notion of students as “effective persons” is markedly different as much as it is in the same vein as the principles of SRL. While Berlin’s “effectiveness” is in relation to
students’ use of writing in order to grapple with and make sense of the world around them, Self-Regulated Learning regards the “effectiveness” of students as those who exercise agency/autonomy over their own learning. In this sense, to be effective is, as Berlin wants, an end to the means of writing instruction – but, in the Self-Regulated classroom, it is specifically describing the ways in which students approach their learning. In other words, Self-Regulated learning can be seen as a more pragmatic approach to what our field understands as student-centeredness.

As Berlin calls for “effective persons” and Shor calls for students who see themselves as active participants and socially-aware beings, this range of perspectives on student centeredness shows a strong culture of care for students within and beyond the writing classroom. Though, as Wallace and Ewald note, breaking old teaching-student relations is a tough endeavor. And, in their own study, Wallace and Ewald do remind us that “student agency operates in a middle space between students’ own experiences and the expectations of the discourse communities in which they have to achieve voice” (Wallace and Ewald). What I take from Wallace and Ewald’s words here is a balanced approach to student agency in which the pedagogy seeks to incorporate student experiences while operating within the parameters of what the classroom is designed to do – instruct students and impart them with content knowledge that they need to succeed in the discourse communities they are participating in now and in the future.

All in all, the field of Writing Studies has for many years theorized, and tested, various versions of what we term “student-centeredness.” Self-Regulated learning implemented in the writing classroom is not only part of the tenets of the student-centered learning described above, but I argue that implementing principles of self-directed learning explicitly within a writing
classroom serves to enhance the student-centeredness that most teachers of writing already value (and have valued) for decades.

Understanding self-regulation as something that can be affected – and taught- alongside the skills and practices of the writing classroom is something that we have yet to measure within our field. As I have shown, the way we understand student-centeredness varies depending upon the underlying theory in which we are writing (e.g. progressive pedagogy, critical pedagogy, etc). What I hope to show in this project is how the theory of self-regulation is, simultaneously, different from what we already understand as student-centered learning in Writing Studies, and a theory and praxis that fits within the scope of student-centered learning as detailed/reviewed above.

As mentioned above, the understandings of student-centeredness in the field of Writing Studies vary depending on a scholar’s foundational theoretical frame. However, as I have shown, regardless of the theoretical approach (e.g. Shor’s critical pedagogy; Wallace and Ewald’s progressive pedagogy), their commonalities are far more important than their differences. Despite their differences, these scholars all share a set of underlying values related to students’ position at the center of their own learning. This commonality shows a strong through line in the field which provides a lens through which to see the strength of self-regulated learning as it is positioned within Writing Studies (as opposed to the fields outside of it for years).

It is important to see the commonalities in this history of student-centeredness for two reasons: the first reason is to show how the concept of self-regulation, while at first blush seems like a hard psychological term that does not belong in Writing Studies research is, in fact, very much in the same vein as the work we have lauded in our field for decades. The second reason these commonalities are so crucial is to highlight how incorporating the specific concept of self-
regulation enhances the work the field has already done on student-centered learning – and further, how it builds on concepts like those of Wallace and Ewald as it relates to agency as a “middle-space” between students’ experiences and the goals of the classroom instruction. Self-Regulation gives us a new window of observation into classroom behaviors and instruction that both extends and enhances the broader concept of student-centeredness as well as provides the most pragmatic way to regard student-centeredness in a classroom. In other words, self-regulation is the concept that will help the field of Writing Studies think more specifically and clearly about student-centeredness.

**Rationale for Integrating SRL and WS Concepts in a BW Course Design**

As you can imagine, the concept of self-regulation/autonomy is simultaneously an alluring idea (who doesn’t want students to use intrinsic motivation and see intrinsic value in the topics of our classrooms?) and an incredibly difficult idea to “sell” when top-down teacher-lead pedagogical approaches have such deep roots in our educational system. Yet, the majority of research and commentary on the concept of placing control into students’ hands within the classroom lies within K-12 classrooms. It is this gap in the post-secondary education research in Writing Studies that this project seeks to address. This project seeks to bring the conversation about self-regulation – the combination of pedagogy and psychology – to the writing classroom, specifically for the population of freshman basic writers.

And while these two words – pedagogy and psychology – are often discussed as two different areas/disciplines/concentrations, my project seeks to show how these terms can and should be combined to view the pedagogy I have developed and studied first as a Writing Studies pedagogy but as informed by principles in psychology. I argue that this approach is important for two very critical reasons: the first reason being that it challenges long-held
stereotypes about how cognitive and educational sciences have been viewed in the history of Writing Studies, and secondly, it brings a conversation about teaching practices that has been primarily housed within K-12 education into post-secondary classrooms. What’s more, this vision of post-secondary pedagogy in Writing Studies brings to the fore the fact that college freshman are mere months (sometimes only weeks) divorced from their High School educational contexts, and are, what I would refer to as “minds-in-transit” very much still impacted by classroom practices that address those things that we commonly find as acceptable only in a high school classroom.

It is worth mentioning that there are some moves being made to examine the success of self-directed pedagogies in higher education. In a recent issue of Teaching English in the Two-Year College, researchers examine whether and how honors students responded to projects they both “proposed and complete” within the subject of British Literature (2013). While there are not many explorations into this concept as of yet, major organizations (National Council of Teachers of English; National Writing Project; Council of Writing Program Administrators; National Education Association; American Educational Research Association) appear to have a pulse on self-regulated learning and broader concepts that are at the center of self-regulated pedagogies.

Specifically, the National Council of Teachers of English have, since 2011, established a Framework for Student Success in Post-Secondary Writing that emphasizes eight Habits of Mind which are referred to as “ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical” (NCTE Framework 2011). Generally, the development of this framework has given credence to the ways in which teachers of writing regard student-centeredness more practically (in addition to the intellectual explorations of these concepts) as it specifies that these eight habits of mind are “essential for student success in college writing.” It does so by foregrounding behaviors
which are directly relevant to the principles of self-regulation. In particular, five of the habits of mind: Responsibility, Engagement, Persistence, Metacognition, and Openness are all related to what a self-regulated classroom seeks to foster in student writers. What’s more, the concepts of Engagement and Metacognition are specifically referenced in the literature on self-regulation (as described earlier in this chapter).

**Course Design**

At that time of this course, Urban University’s English department was undergoing a large scale assessment of its general education writing courses – of which Basic Writing was the final course in the writing sequence to be assessed. At the time of my study, the basic writing course’s learning objectives were to undergo a revision as part of the assessment (they had not yet been revised). The objectives for the course at the time have since been revised based on the overall revisions to the course composition sequence at Urban University (for reference, the current objectives for Basic Writing are: Reading, Writing, Technology Use, and Reflection). These revised learning objectives were modeled largely on learning objectives piloted in other courses in the writing sequence (e.g. ENG 1020 – first year writing, and ENG 3010 – Intermediate college writing).

The context of the impending (and subsequent) revision of learning objectives and course assignments/genres is important in order to highlight the “cluttered” nature of the old learning objectives (which were still required for my students at the time of this course/study). 21 At various times during the course, students needed to interpret these various learning objectives in a focused way, often times leading to overlap in their articulation of the course and their learning. The learning objectives of the course at the time of my study were as follows:

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21 I mention this simply to emphasize the importance of the course learning objectives to the departmental goals overall as well as to emphasize the importance of students’ personal learning objectives as they relate to the course objectives.
• read college-level texts for information and for an understanding of multiple perspectives
• integrate ideas and information from sources with their own ideas in order to fulfill the requirements of specific assignments, using genres that include summary, response, analysis, and argument
• write with a clear and well-articulated thesis statement in a well-organized essay, providing supporting evidence in a clear and logical development
• write in well-developed paragraphs, with consistent focus, sufficient development, and logical order of sentences
• write using a flexible writing process that includes generating ideas, writing, revising, and providing/responding to feedback in multiple drafts
• edit and proofread for grammar, mechanics, and style, generating texts relatively free of surface errors
• avoid plagiarism by correctly citing and documenting sources in MLA style
• write and research using basic technologies, including word processing and the Undergraduate Library website

In the two sections of my course included in this study, students were to interpret these objectives within and through all of the assignments (written and otherwise) throughout the duration of the course. At several times during the course, I prompted students to think about an assignment as it related to these objectives as well as their own personal learning objectives (which I will explain in detail later in this chapter). Students’ responses to these prompts implemented the self-regulatory principle(s) of metacognition/reflection.

Since instructors of the basic writing course took varied approaches to addressing the learning objectives of the course, I was able to design a course assignment sequence that both met the course learning objectives and combined the concepts of self-regulated learning detailed earlier in this chapter. I implemented this Self-Regulated approach in order to determine whether and how the combination of this approach with the course learning objectives and assignment sequence affected student self-efficacy and motivation. In particular, I wanted to determine if students self-reported (reflection and metacognition) an increase in their self-efficacy and motivation (through engagement and autonomy) as it related not only to the writing assignments,
but also for their learning in general (as they would detail in reflective assignments, class
discussions detailed in my field notes, and focus groups during the course).

The section description for my course highlights the principles of self-directed
(regulated) learning as it was communicated to students in the course. Students were instructed
to revisit this description as needed throughout the course when reviewing the course and their
learning. The section description for the syllabi for the course is as follows:

This section of English 1010 will set out to achieve the learning objectives for the course
through the principles of self-directed learning. The definition of self-directed learning is
as follows:

“*In its broadest meaning, ‘self-directed learning’ describes a process by which
individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing
their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material
resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and
evaluating learning outcomes*” (Knowles 1972).

For the purposes of our course, assignments and instruction will be approached with these
principles in mind. In other words, at several points throughout the course you will be
asked to produce and reflect on work that involves *you* in planning and collaboration
efforts to determine how the goals of English 1010 meet *your* needs as a student and
individual both inside and outside of the classroom.

With this section description as part of students’ syllabi, they were equipped with the language of
self-regulation for the duration of the course. This passage in the syllabus allowed students to
reference the definition of self-regulation throughout the course as they (re)considered the
learning objective(s) they developed at the beginning of the course and continually discussed
their assignments in relation to that objective as well as the course learning objectives as set by
the English department.

**Assignments throughout the Course Sequence**

The assignment sequence for the self-regulated classroom is designed to give students the
opportunity to practice the basic (or what I term, foundational) genres of college writing. These
assignments are designed to provide basic writers not only additional practice in their writing, but to also introduce them to concepts and practices that will transfer to the First Year Writing course at Urban University. The assignments are designed to scaffold not only within the course, but across the Composition sequence at the University. Therefore, the purpose of the assignments in basic writing is two-fold: 1) to provide additional needed practice in writing for college, and 2) to provide students with skills and knowledge necessary for success in their next writing course.

All of the assignments within this course sequence reflect, in part and in whole, the earlier distinction between the way student-centeredness has been theorized by others’ in the field (e.g. Shor’s students who obtained complete power within the course), and how it is understood in this course (e.g. students are in what Wallace and Ewald referred to as the “middle-space” between agency and experience and the instruction of the writing classroom which provides access to the discourse communities in which students seek membership). Along with what these specific assignments afford for students as writers in the university, they also provide an opportunity for students to explore concepts that support the section description/pedagogical aim of the course itself. Below I will describe each assignment and its affordances as mentioned above.

Summary

One of the most foundational genres of post-secondary writing is the summary genre. Despite the fact that many Writing Studies scholars have debated the function and purpose of general education writing courses at the university (Smit; Beaufort; Bartholomae), the basic writing course remains the gateway for college writing for many students.\textsuperscript{22} That said, the course

\textsuperscript{22} This is especially the case for Urban University in which nearly half of freshman students tested into the basic writing classroom at the time of this study.
that introduces students to college writing is one that should also familiarize students with a genre of writing that is common not only in writing courses, but in other disciplines both academic and professional. The summary assignment in this basic writing course is designed to give students the ability to not only summarize a text and author an abstract, but also to learn how to read summaries and abstracts in order to navigate the whole text for which it is written.

In addition to the scaffolding of the genres in the course, students were given a measure of autonomy (agency) in what to read for their summary assignment. While students were given a list of texts to choose from, they were encouraged to examine each text for content and features which interested them. Students were given a measure of control in the texts in order to maintain the topics of the course that students were to explore (those within the discipline of Writing Studies and Educational Psychology).

As students worked with complex academic texts, they applied reading strategies learned prior to the introduction of the summary assignment. These reading skills included but were not limited to various methods for annotation: underlining, defining terms in the margins, connecting ideas with mapping techniques, and developing codes with which to return to the text for additional readings.

While the students’ agency in choosing the text to read for this unit of the course is a clear implementation of self-regulation and autonomy, the other core component of this assignment described in the previous paragraph also implements elements of self-regulation. Namely, the steps in the assignment described above (e.g. students’ choices of how to approach their reading of the text – underlining, writing various notes in the margins, defining terms,

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23 Students were also given the opportunity to reflect on these choices in the post-assignment reflection prompt after finished their summaries and workshops.

24 The development of “codes” for reading the texts were done solely by students in the classroom. These codes/annotation strategies will be described in detail in chapter 3.
connecting ideas with mapping techniques, developing codes, etc) relate to self-regulation as the students’ individual approaches, their reasons for doing so, and their reflection on those reasons and the effectiveness of them teach students how to find and build their interest and motivation through note-taking, links to other texts and experiences, and to possible future writing projects.

These activities then scaffold other genres in the course, namely the Response genre that students also completed during the course of the class/study.

**Response**

The response assignment is geared toward introducing students to the ways in which writers “enter a conversation” in an academic environment. As Charles Bazerman has argued, our field has long regarded the relationship between reading and writing as a “truism,” leaving us to neglect not only discussing it, but discussing *how to teach it* (Bazerman). As students worked in-depth in the previous assignment on how to read an academic text and how to summarize it, they then worked to apply and expand on those skills as they responded to those texts. The key to self-regulation in this response assignment is students’ choice of reading/annotation strategies in order to be able to write effectively. Students need to choose the most effective strategy, employ it, and identify (through reflection) how and why the particular strategy allowed them to response effectively to a text.

The principles of self-directed learning within the Response assignment are not limited to the aforementioned reading strategies. This genre of Response itself fosters self-efficacy insofar as it introduces students to academic discourse via encouraging students to understand that their viewpoints, reactions, and perspectives are important and can and do belong within academic discourse. Often times, students initially react to the direction of responding to a text by indicating that they do not feel that they have the authority to respond to what a published author
has written (student reflections). However, when students are given the opportunity to develop these ideas and practice how to write about them (as a response to an author through incorporating that author’s words in conversation with their own), they become more confident in their own voice as writers.

The genre of response also affords students the opportunity to use first-person narrative voice in an academic environment. This is important for basic writers, many of whom enter college writing having been given a strict formula of what writing is (see: five-paragraph essays; teaching for the test). Providing students the opportunity to explore various genres of writing in academe gives them the ability to see that writing is not heavily structured, but instead, that writing can and does change based on the audience and purpose and that change also involves the student making a choice (being self-regulated for that choice) as they move forward in their academic writing.

These three examples are indicative of how the SRL framework adds to the field’s existing understanding of the aforementioned student agency. The application of the Self-Regulated Learning framework to these assignments not only allows us to understand them as something other than rhetorical, but it gives us a more comprehensive vision of student choice. For example, when a student makes a choice in her writing assignment based on the knowledge that writing can differ based on the audience and purpose (e.g. a student uses the first-person narrative format when writing a response because she wants to the reader to know that her perspectives are joining the conversation), the student is exercising a behavioral principle of autonomy. This is an important distinction because as our field can acknowledge this choice as rhetorical (i.e. the student has made a rhetorical/persuasive choice to reach her audience), applying the SRL framework allows us to see the same student action as one which has an
impact on her disposition as a writer, and therefore provides a perspective on the student’s writing that extends beyond its product.  

**Analysis**

The analysis assignment is designed to scaffold with the Response assignment specifically to help students practice shifting narrative voice when the genre requires it. In this case specifically, students use the first person narrative genre in their responses to “join the academic conversation” (Bazerman). Following this assignment with an analytical genre allows students to think critically about whether the first-person narrative is the best approach to provide an objective analysis of either a text or a visual medium. In this semester particularly, students work on analyzing a visual text – in this case, students choose their own visual text (utilizing the self-directed principle of autonomy within this assignment).

According to the principle of autonomy as it relates to self-regulation and motivation “Human autonomy plays a pivotal role in self-regulation and performance. Whatever the behavioral domain, feelings of engagement, diligence, and vitality are higher when the motivation underlying a goal or behavior is autonomous or self-endorsed rather than pressured or controlled” (Legault and Inzlicht). In this context, students exercise autonomy by not only acting within an environment in which their own learning objectives (goals) are part of the overall purpose of the course, but individual assignments are also designed with a measure of autonomy to foster the assignment. Those assignments are, in part, self-endorsed, which in turn develops the feeling of engagement.

The classroom exercises continue to incorporate the aforementioned principles of autonomy, specifically those of self-endorsement. Following students’ choice of a visual text

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25 As mentioned in an earlier chapter, one of the contentions in early application of cognitive science in writing studies classrooms is that there was a consistent focus on the “good product” of student writing and not students’ willingness to complete the task of writing and for what reasons they choose to do so.
(music video, commercial, billboard advertisement, etc.) for the assignment, they worked together with peers in collaborative workshops to discuss their choices based on earlier discussions of how to analyze visual media and for what purpose to do so. In this activity, the students’ own determination of purpose for the use of analysis scaffolds the principles of autonomy. When students have the opportunity to work through their own reasons for utilizing analysis, they provide their own “stamp of approval” so-to-speak, thus learning to see it as useful.

Often times in a traditional classroom environment, students will read a text that provides them with a rationale and a directive (e.g. this is how to analyze a text and this is why we do it). Research on self-regulation indicates that this kind of approach is not likely to engage students with the material or the purpose, and hence, students will be less motivated to complete the assignment.

**Reflective Argument**

The final assignment in the course sequence is the Reflective Argument. Adapted from Ed White’s “The Scoring of Writing Portfolios: Phase II,” this assignment required students to write a longer reflective letter (4-5 pages) which incorporated claims and evidence about the students’ perceptions of their learning. Specifically, students in my course were asked to make claims for their achievement of the departmental learning objectives outlined in their syllabus (and discussed throughout the semester). In addition to the course learning objectives, my students were invited (via the assignment prompt) to reflect on their personal learning objective (PLO) which they wrote at the beginning of the semester and kept in their personal notebook throughout the course.  

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26 Some students turned this in to me at the beginning of the term. I kept those students PLOs and reminded students of them when requested to throughout the semester.
Reflective Argument assignment is an assignment that was, at this point, not required for basic writers in the English department at Urban University. However, as the department was undergoing an assessment of the Intermediate Writing course within our Composition sequence which, in part, included the implementation of a final Reflective Argument and Portfolio for that course, I decided to use the same assignment with my students. This decision was made for two reasons: first, at the same time this course was underway, I was in the process of revising the learning objectives for the ENG 1010 course (to be implemented in my course in the following semester and in all ENG 1010 courses at Urban University in the following academic year). The revision of these objectives would eventually lead to a more condensed, clear list of objectives for students to reference and argue for in the portfolio assignment. The second reason I chose to use the Reflective Argument assignment was an effort to introduce basic writers to the argument genre (a central focus of the Introductory Writing course at Urban University), as well as provide them the opportunity to make a final reflection on their Personal learning objective for the course.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Self-Regulated classroom seeks to provide students with a means to explore their own goals, direct and reflect on their own writing and reading strategies and choices, while maintaining and working within the overall objectives of the classroom. This approach to the Reflective Argument assignment, while seemingly a minor change/addition to the prompt, was a core component of the course and the goals of SRL. Providing students the opportunity to incorporate their objective(s) alongside the objectives outlined for them allows students to see their own values and goals are just as important as those that academe have determined for them. While students in the course were given earlier opportunities to reflect on this throughout the semester, emphasis on the final portfolio project as
it relates to their learning is, arguably, the most impactful moment for students in terms of seeing their autonomy and self-direction within academic success.

While it may be difficult to imagine how autonomy manifests within an assignment with a clear prompt, I return here to Wallace and Ewalds’ “co-construction of knowledge” as means to provide students with the “autonomy support” necessary to remain engaged in what might otherwise be considered a rote task to be done in order to achieve a passing grade in the course. When students were first asked to develop their own personal learning objectives, they understood (through classroom discussion and written reflection) that their objective(s) were just as important as those set out for the classroom by the instructor. In the Reflective Argument, students chose when and how to address those objectives within the overall reflective letter – that choice further emphasizing the importance of students’ perspectives on their learning, how to address it, and how to organize it.

**Reflection assignments**

Reflection was a main component of the two sections of my basic writing course. Students in my sections not only completed the final Reflective Argument described above, but also smaller formal reflections after each major writing assignment in the course. These reflections provide students the opportunity to reflect immediately on the processes they used to compose each major assignment (and any other issue or concept they chose to make note of in the reflection). In formal reflective assignments, students were prompted to reflect not only on the assignment itself, but also the learning objectives of the course including their own personal learning objectives developed at the beginning of the course. These reflections support the learning objectives of the English department as well as support a core principle of Self-Regulated Learning as implemented in my classroom.
Reflection is included in the number of concepts and ideas scaffolded throughout the assignments and activities during this semester. There are two reasons supporting the rationale for scaffolding reflective assignments throughout this course: the first reason is to support student success in the final Reflective Argument. In order for students to feel comfortable with the concept of reflection as a genre near the end of the course, it is recommended that they have the opportunity to practice reflection multiple times before the major assignment. The second reason for scaffolding reflection throughout the course is to support what researchers refer to as “experience-based learning.” This concept is supported within Writing Studies as well as Education and Educational Psychology.

When students are given the opportunity to engage in experience-based learning, they are provided the opportunity to personally engage with the concepts and skills taught within the course – often times, experience-based learning asks students to apply the skills and concepts of the classroom into their own lives and contexts. However, students who learn within experience-based environments are also given the opportunity to demonstrate and explain what it is they bring to and take away from the learning process (in terms of prior learning and application of concepts into current and future situations).

In addition to general principles of experience-based learning, the CWPA Framework for Student Success in Postsecondary Writing details the eight “Habits of Mind” which support what the CWPA refers to as “ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines” (CWPA Framework). In particular, the habit of mind Metacognition specifically points to students’ abilities to use reflection to construct knowledge. As noted throughout this chapter, students’ reflections provide for the practical application of self-regulated learning.
Conclusion

The concepts detailed throughout this chapter are not only integral for understanding the classroom design and overall pedagogy of this study, but they are key principles that will inform the methods and analyses contained within the following two chapters. Specifically, the components of self-regulated learning detailed here – autonomy and motivation – provide a foundation for the third key component of self-regulation (self-efficacy) which will be detailed in chapter three. In subsequent chapters (three and four), all three components of self-regulation will be coded for and identified in the analyses of students’ written texts.

Throughout this chapter I also detailed the history of Self-Regulated learning (also known as self-directed learning) within Education and Educational Psychology. Through this background, I noted that the majority of existing research investigating the relationship between student dispositions (specifically motivation and self-efficacy) and the principles of self-regulation focuses on K-12 students and teachers. These studies are not only limited in their scope of participants, but also limited in their audience. I argued that the limits of this research identifies a gap not only in research investigating Self-Regulated Learning strategies more generally, but specifically as it relates to freshman students in post-secondary classrooms.

Finally, this chapter addressed the target population of college freshman through a rationale for implementing my course design in a basic writing classroom. This rationale focuses on the local context of basic writers at Urban University as well as the broader national context in which educators are increasingly concerned about the impact of students’ dispositions on their ability to learn within current classroom designs and common pedagogical approaches. While the course design for this project is detailed throughout this chapter, subsequent chapters will expand on that pedagogy to show whether and how it had an impact on students’ dispositions.
CHAPTER 3: MEASURING AND IDENTIFYING SELF-EFFICACY IN STUDENT WRITING

Introduction

Within Writing Studies, there exists a growing desire to understand how dispositions – internal characteristics of a person, in this case self-efficacy and motivation – may affect students’ writing and writing processes. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I detailed early work on dispositions and student writing (McCarthy et al) in order to give a broad positioning of this project within the history of the field specifically as it related to the so-called “cognitive turn.” This work largely focused on definitions laid out in the fields of Cognitive and Educational Psychology that describe dispositions and how they affect people in various situations in their lives. Much of the research in that field, as well as that of this project, addresses dispositions as they are affected within the context of learning environments. Specifically, this project has a goal of determining how to best define how students in our writing classrooms approach writing tasks and what beliefs they have about their ability to do so. Similar studies within the fields of cognitive and educational psychology show success in measuring the dispositions of self-efficacy and motivation (among others) in a range of specific focus areas (sports, education, etc.). However, those successful measurements are based upon definitions of self-efficacy which do not necessarily translate to the writing classroom. And while these definitions might still be useful for surveying students in a writing classroom, the existing definitions do not translate well to measuring student dispositions in their writing.

Chapter three will extend my discussion of the earlier, broader history of dispositions research in Writing Studies. Because dispositions are important to study within the writing classroom, I will extend by magnifying a sub-set of current work in the field that examines, theorizes, and problematizes the endeavor of measuring student dispositions in the writing
classroom. As the queries into the ways in which dispositions affect student writing continue to grow, researchers are discovering that there is much work to be done when it comes to how to reliably measure dispositions in the writing classroom. According to Driscoll and Gorzelsky:

Given the important role of student dispositions in initial learning and transfer, empirical investigation of how these dispositions operate in writing instruction is crucial to understanding how to design effective writing curricula and pedagogies (Slomp, Bronfenbrenner, Driscoll and Wells). However, writing studies scholars have not yet developed valid, reliable methods for tracking dispositions and their role in students’ processes of learning how to write in academic settings (Driscoll et al). Following Driscoll and Gorzelsky’s assertion, this project contributes to questions about what methods are best suited for identifying student dispositions toward writing within the classroom.

Defining Dispositions

As I’ve mentioned before, other writing studies researchers have taken up student dispositions as a topic of study. This interest has expanded the lenses through which we view student dispositions as related to how students approach their work in our classrooms. Recently, Mary Tripp has shown that self-efficacy is indeed a highly contextualized occurrence that, in her conclusion, is best measured through the lens of activity theory – as, according to her, students develop their dispositions within complex activity systems. Tripp’s approach to measuring dispositions leads her to see that whether and how students draw upon the resources available to them (i.e. within the contextualized activity system of their writing classroom and support) is a crucial factor in how they feel about their ability to execute their writing for class (i.e. their self-efficacy). In fact, her title “Re-imagining self-efficacy in writing” suggests her intention to see self-efficacy differently than has traditionally been understood in the fields of educational and cognitive psychology. Tripp writes:

Students who enter First-Year Composition (FYC) are often unaware of the writing challenges that lie ahead, and many educational psychologists posit that self-efficacy
beliefs are the most important factor in meeting these writing challenges. While socio-cognitive theory shapes views of self-efficacy in education literature, to date, measures of self-efficacy in writing have focused only on the individual cognitive beliefs as they influence writing performance outcomes. However, current research in writing studies as well as posthuman theories of agency point to a broader, more contextually-bound view of agency for writing as emergent and enacted in socially constructed systems (Tripp 2012).

I agree with Tripp’s response to the limited nature of individual cognitive beliefs as the sole measure of self-efficacy. For Tripp’s study, activity theory is a valuable way to think through how students use various resources available to them in order to develop their writing skills. However, for this project, socio-cognitive theory (the theory that learning occurs in a social context and learning is gained via observation) is important for its emphasis on motivation, action, and self-regulatory processes. So, instead of turning to another theory in which to understand efficacy beliefs, this project maintains that socio-cognitive theory is an adequate theoretical framework through which to study dispositions; however, limitations do exist. I argue that the limitation is not a theoretical one, but a methodological one.

As mentioned earlier, thus far, research methods for measuring dispositions focus largely on how students feel about overall outcomes of their work (i.e. final grade evaluations or final evaluations of their writing) (McCarthy; Tripp). Common survey methods of measuring self-efficacy also focus on specific language which points to evidence of self-efficacy (e.g. students who indicate they “can do” something vs. “will do” something). As this chapter will demonstrate, there is a distinct difference in what a student may self-report when prompted to specifically and what a student may indicate about her efficacy beliefs organically throughout the course of a semester. This project attempts to, in part, identify how students self-report their efficacy beliefs in their reflective writing. Understanding the various ways in which students may identify their efficacy beliefs and whether and how the existence of those efficacy beliefs
correlates with pedagogical interventions can lead to best practices for the basic writing classroom and further solidify the importance of scaffolded reflection in the writing classroom. Socio-cognitive theory currently lays the groundwork for understanding the relationship between students’ dispositions toward writing and the potential influences of our pedagogy, so from there we must expand our methodological framework for identifying and understanding how students express these individual beliefs in writing.

Crucial to the methodological framework of this project is the way efficacy beliefs are defined. Mary Tripp indicates that her argument “suggests that self-efficacy beliefs are not bound inside the head as beliefs about performing certain rules for writing, but instead self-efficacy beliefs about writing are emergent and enacted and bound to particular writing systems” (Tripp 2012). My dissertation, however, asserts that viewing dispositions as an either/or – in the case of Tripp – is not a productive view of the nature of dispositions, especially as they relate to students performance in writing classrooms. Instead, my research looks at dispositions as both internalized beliefs which are also influenced by social contexts. In other words, both the internalized nature of the belief as well as its influence by social contexts are important to understanding the impact of dispositions on students’ writing processes and knowledge.

I argue that focusing on dispositions as both internal and socially-influenced is especially important for the population of basic writers at Urban University. Instructors at urban institutions with a mission to serve their local population often have merely a strong intuition that their students’ negative experiences with writing (and education in general) impact the ability to reach these students with effective instruction. This dissertation looks to cognitive psychology in part to better-understand if these internal dispositions can be affected during their freshman basic writing class.
In particular, I will detail and challenge a common definition of self-efficacy as it relates to student writing within a writing classroom. I will then provide examples of how self-efficacy appeared in student writing. I will also explain how research in Education and Educational psychology shows a strong connection between principles of self-regulated teaching and learning and the development of self-efficacy – specifically how the personal learning objective (PLO) facilitated the development of multicausal language in student writing, providing several opportunities for students to demonstrate and increase self-efficacy in their written reflections. This chapter will then detail the methods of the study. The definitions and explanations offered in this chapter challenge existing practices within Psychology for identifying and measuring students’ dispositions toward writing knowledge and skills. These definitions will also help to understand whether and how we can impact basic writers’ dispositions.

The Specificity Measurement vs. Generalization

One of the biggest critiques of self-efficacy measurements is its generalization in both its definition as well as its measurements (Zimmerman). Typical measurements do not account for task-based work nor do they account for the socially-constructed nature of students’ dispositions (in addition to the internalized nature of beliefs about the self). So, as writing studies scholars are increasingly concerned with their students’ dispositions, instead of turning away from self-efficacy because of these observed issues of limited definition, the field remains true to this term and finds ways in which it will “fit” into how we understand writing and learning to write. For example as mentioned earlier, Mary Tripp moved to re-purpose self-efficacy through a different theoretical lens that shows efficacy beliefs as (only) highly contextualized (rather than internalized) when it comes to students’ perceptions of learning to write.
The methodological approach I describe here addresses the critiques of self-efficacy as a generalized construct, rather than as specific to particular task types. I agree that we need to think of self-efficacy as a highly contextualized construct. However, instead of modifying the theoretical lens from socio-cognitive dispositions theory to activity theory, this project suggests that in order to understand self-efficacy in writing, we need to first acknowledge that self-efficacy is both internal (in part because it is shaped by prior experiences) as well as affected by environmental circumstances (e.g. classroom pedagogy). When it comes to gauging self-efficacy in student writing utilizing an approach that addresses both elements of its complexity, we must begin by considering the particular types of tasks involved in writing and the intersections among these tasks. We then need to look at students’ assessment of their capacity to perform the tasks individually and to integrate them into larger projects (e.g., writing a 5-page analysis paper that requires them to integrate reading strategies, note-taking strategies, summary, responses, and analysis).

My approach to measuring self-efficacy does not suggest that dispositions are merely internal (as previous critiques of self-efficacy studies have indicated) nor does it suggest that the internal nature of a disposition is without its influences from a student’s environment. Ultimately, a complex internal and external view of dispositions (like self-efficacy) does respond to long-existing critiques of commonly used tests that sought to decontextualize self-efficacy into a “generalized personality trait.” As Frank Pajares asserts:

Omnibus tests that aim to assess general self-efficacy, for example, provide global scores that decontextualize the self-efficacy/behavior correspondence and transform self-efficacy into a generalized personality trait rather than the context-specific judgment Bandura (1986) suggests it is. After all, generalized self-efficacy instruments basically assess "people's general belief that they can make things happen without specifying what [these things] are" (Bandura, in press).
The specificity measurement reference here is important to this project as the measurement of student self-efficacy in the writing classroom is nothing if not context-specific. In order to make valid, reliable claims, we must be sure that when we define, discuss, and attempt to identify students’ self-efficacy and the development of it, that our instruments/method of study reaches beyond what Bandura refers to as a “general belief that [a person] can make things happen” (Bandura). After all, as Pajares reminds us above, the measurement of self-efficacy has always been intended as a context-specific one (Bandura). If this research study were to ignore context, the writing classroom would cease to be a site in which students are able to develop these behaviors and dispositions – instead, we would be looking only to identify students general beliefs that they can “do things” in the writing classroom, but without asking students to focus on what exactly those things are that they can/are able to do.

In order to think about how to break down generalizations, three approaches describe existing ways to approach measuring dispositions. In these assessments, researchers outline three varied approaches to measuring this self-efficacy (all of which are quantitative in nature as they deal with students’ rating of themselves on scales). These three approaches are omnibus (the most general), domain-specific (e.g. writing ability) and task-specific (e.g. the ability to write a clear thesis statement and organize one’s written work based on that statement). As Pajares reminds us, “Domain-specific assessments, such as asking students to provide their confidence to learn mathematics or writing, are more explanatory and predictive than omnibus measures and preferable to general academic judgments, but they are inferior to task-specific judgments because the subdomains differ markedly in the skills required.” This project takes a task-specific approach to measuring students’ self-efficacy in their written reflections. Therefore, the measurements of self-efficacy in this project are the most specific measurements of self-efficacy
possible so as to distinguish itself as much as possible from the generalized “confidence” reporting students may be inclined to give.

Research looking to determine predictive outcomes based on upon students’ reporting of their ability to perform in domain-specific situations has been shown to be successful (Lent, et al). However, the measurement of task-related self-efficacy within a specific domain has yet to be thoroughly researched despite the suggestion that this level of specificity is ultimately necessary to determine reliable self-efficacy measurements (Pajares). This project in particular addresses that significant gap in task-based specificity within the domain of writing in two important ways: 1) the identification of students’ self-efficacy will be qualitative instead of relying on a quantitative self-efficacy scale which is often decontextualized and highly generalized in terms of self-reporting efficacy beliefs and 2) students’ qualitative written work is not work in which they were prompted specifically to report their self-efficacy or any other disposition. Therefore, any causal relationship students see between the class/instructions/concepts and their self-efficacy are solely derived from the students themselves.

**Defining Self-Efficacy**

Existing definitions of self-efficacy are highly specific as to how efficacy items should appear. According to Albert Bandura, “Efficacy items should accurately reflect the construct. Self-efficacy is concerned with perceived capability. The items should be phrased in terms of can do rather than will do. Can is a judgment of capability; will is a statement of intention.” Bandura sees this distinction as important because the statement of intention is not reflective of whether a person believes they are truly able to accomplish any particular task. Ultimately, research shows that it is relatively common for a student to feel generally positive about their intentions for a
course (i.e. we may all register for a course with the intention that we will do what we need to do in order to pass and/or do well. Otherwise, why enroll at all?). However, when a person (in this case a student) instead says they can, this is indicative of the person’s inherent feeling of ability instead of only their intention. The belief of ability (i.e. efficacy belief) is the key distinction that shows how self-efficacy differs from a more generalized idea of what will happen/what an outcome will be – it shows more than intention, it shows ability.

While this distinction makes sense, utilizing Bandura’s construct of self-efficacy (e.g. self-efficacy as evidenced by “can-do” vs. “will-do”) did not prove useful or insightful for qualitative coding in this study. I believe the reason for this may be because the original definitions were commonly used with quantitative methods (primarily surveys) which introduce the language of self-efficacy to students in order to gauge their responses to this language as it relates to their performances in the classroom. However, when I attempted to identify self-efficacy in students’ reflective writing – especially the progression and potential increase of this language – I realized that it may be important for qualitative researchers to expand the vocabulary of self-efficacy. In other words, it’s important to acknowledge that students might have varying ways of indicating their self-efficacy in relation to their writing. Identifying this need within the data lead me to code for a wide variety of language that appeared to show a student’s indication that his or her belief in their ability had increased based on a part(s) of their writing process at various moments throughout the semester.

The following are examples of how self-efficacy was demonstrated in my students’ writing as opposed to a more generalized claim of confidence.
Self-Efficacy

**Definition:** Student makes a statement of belief and/or ability to perform a writing-related task now or in the future.

**Examples:** “I used to consistently second guess myself and not feel confident in my writings, however I now take the important steps in writing a paper or response and feel much more self-assured and capable when I am finished simply because I took the time and didn’t jump into something until I felt my standpoint was strong and supported.”

“I believe that the more we continue to write papers, the stronger my skills will be.”

“Reflecting on these past assignments has showed me that my goal is not accomplished but it can be.”

“I discovered that even though I’m not the best writer, I see myself improving and getting better each and everyday. As I reflect, I realize that when I’m focused I get a lot more things accomplished.”

“I would have to say that out of all writing assignments that we had this was the most complicating but also the best essay that I wrote. It also helped me achieve another goal which was being able to read and write about something that I had little or no interest in. After reading a couple of articles throughout my English course I find it easier for me to read things that don’t interest me. I thought that I couldn’t do it but I can and I did.”

General Confidence

**Definition:** Student refers to his/her overall confidence as a person (unrelated to a task-specific part of the course).

**Textual example:** “I am confident I will get good grades.”
The decision to challenge the existing definition and construct of self-efficacy is also due in part to the pedagogical approach taken in the classrooms in which the study took place. As chapter four will show, data from students’ written reflections detail a relationship between principles of self-regulated and self-directed learning (as impacted by teaching strategies and concepts within the classroom) and its potential impact on students’ dispositions as evidenced in their writing and classroom activity/discussion. The following will detail the relationship between the disposition self-efficacy and the PLO – a core principle of the self-directed course design.

The Classroom and the PLO

Traditional self-directed learning environments can often appear as if they lack any structure and oversight from an instructor. The nature of self-direction itself suggests that the students have a great deal of control in the content and design of a classroom. While this is not necessarily a false assumption, and while there are many strengths to self-directed classrooms, it is understandable that an instructor might feel the need to have clear deliverables in her classroom which may seem challenged by a pedagogy of self-direction. And while college writing classrooms often still have their own objectives mandated by the university, and instructional goals that teachers know to be successful for students, the PLO is a simple pedagogical tool that can serve as a bridge between self-direction and structured writing environments without compromising the nature of any learning space.

For this study, students were asked to develop their personal learning objectives (PLOs) at the beginning of the semester (the first day of class, to be specific).

Self-Directed Learning and Self-Efficacy: The Multi-causal Connection
As mentioned in Chapter Two, the principles of self-direction are directly related to student self-efficacy and motivation (as evidence through research in Cognitive and Educational Psychology). Despite the varied theories and approaches to self-regulated learning (including operant and phenomenological, as well as behavioral and cognitive), this project focuses solely on the social cognitive approach to Self-Regulation.\footnote{This distinction is important as the social cognitive approach to dispositions is most closely related to how our own field understands students’ behaviors and approaches in the writing classroom.} I open with this distinction as a way to transition into yet another distinction that is crucial to understanding how this project utilizes self-regulation (and self-direction) as it relates to self-efficacy.

Within the literature, Self-Regulated and Self-Directed Learning are, in fact, distinct from one another when it comes to how a student learns within an educational context (e.g. a classroom). While these two concepts are at times referred to interchangeably, here I would like to parse the differences between these two conceptually and theoretically in order to show the importance of these concepts as they relate to the pedagogy utilized in this study. According to Cosenfroy and Carre:

Due to its origins in educational psychology’s studies of learning efforts of youth within the school system, SRL primarily investigates strategies, skills and attitudes favorable to an effective learning activity in constrained academic situations where the wider goals do not belong to the learners themselves. In contrast, investigations of SDL have been carried out by adult education specialists who, following the tradition of Tough’s notion of learning projects, have been mostly concerned with out-of-school, independent learners as the prime decisionmakers of self-determined educational endeavors. The difference lies in the ownership of the learning project, which rests, almost by definition, with the learner in SDL; while it could be controlled externally in SRL. In other words, while agency is at the core of both concepts, it applies to the larger distal goals in SDL but is restricted to proximal learning goals in SRL. The self-directed learner controls the learning trajectory as a whole, whereas the self-regulated learner’s control is restricted to the learning activity.

This distinction between SRL and SDL is crucial to the pedagogy of this study for two reasons:

The first reason is that a primary argument of the study is that freshmen in college are at a
“transitional stage” in their lives as students as they are only so far removed from their high school educational/learning contexts. This is important because research into student learning is often classified by the stage in which students are learning – high school or college. The latter in this case is often classified as “adult learning” which brings with it its own set of ideologies (Pajares, Knowles) about how students should learn and perform. However, the typical freshman student is often unprepared for a dramatic shift in his/her learning environment and expectations and is often thrust into this situation in a “hazing” fashion, with a sink-or-swim attitude about adaptation. This “hazing” (a harsh term, but we’ll let it stand-in for now) is seen in freshman writing classrooms when the learning environment demands self-regulation from students (e.g. students are expected to orient themselves completely around the learning expectations of the classroom/institution – in other words, to regulate themselves accordingly without necessarily addressing or teaching toward self-regulation). As noted above, self-directed learning is the learning strategy that is directed by the student himself outside of the context of an institution’s objectives. Therefore, within the freshman writing classroom, the inclusion/honoring of both of these ways of learning/being allows for the student to be that “mind-in-transition” that is all-too-often ignored within higher education.

The second reason this distinction is important to this project is because the pedagogy of this study (designed for the purpose of affecting student dispositions and fostering self-regulation and self-direction) addresses the difference between the two approaches. In this writing classroom, students were asked to take into consideration the learning objectives set by the University in which they were studying (SRL), however, students were also asked to develop their own personal learning objectives and guided to understand these objectives as no more or less important than those set out by the University (SDL). I designed the classroom in this way in
order to determine if students would identify any difference between their objectives (personal vs. classroom) or make any causal relationships between the varied objectives and their abilities to complete various tasks in the writing classroom (writing self-efficacy).

In order to parse out the complexities of self-efficacy as a construct, I addressed the fact that there may be several factors within one “domain” of self-efficacy – in this case, writing. The identification and consideration of these factors did impact the code for self-efficacy especially as it related to the students’ personal learning objectives (PLOs). Within this study, I refer to these factors within the writing domain as students’ use of “multicausal language,” or simply, “multicausality.”

For example, the “domain” of student self-efficacy in question here is the perceived ability to write well. As we know, many students in basic writing and even first year writing often do not believe they can do this. So the ability to write well might include the tasks of 1) the ability to manage one’s time, 2) the ability to commit to the drafting process and utilize feedback appropriately, and 3) the ability to use word processing and course management technologies. Therefore, coding for what Bandura refers to as “multicausality” is an important part of my coding process.

Multi-causality as it is appears in this dissertation describes instances of students who, in their reflective writing, break down the path to achievement of their personal learning objective(s) into one or more nuanced, narrow goal(s) (e.g. success and/or the learning of parts of their writing process). In chapter four, I provide the results for the study that show how students in these two courses who broke down larger goals of success in writing (e.g. receiving positive feedback/good grades on a writing assignment) into more nuanced, component parts of that
larger goal demonstrate self-efficacy in their written reflections. Below is a textual example of multi-causality and self-efficacy appearing in a student’s reflective writing assignment:

Lastly, is my learning objective to be able to adapt to different topics. To be perfectly honest I don’t feel like this assignment helped me get any closer to this goal, but it did give me a chance to adapt to different writing skills. For instance, citations, I’ve never actually grasped that concept. Whether it was putting them in the right place, entering the right information or explaining them properly, I just couldn’t get it. We had to do a quote response assignment that asked me to respond to them in 500 words. A couple of years ago it might have been hard, but now I think I have it together because I actually had a chance to plan out how I would actually respond to it.

At the end of the project, I actually realized a lot. The smallest things, like doing a quote response, a peer review, and starting an outline can actually help with a lot of major problems that most college and high school students go through in their basic or advanced English classes (Cameron, SA2).

Identifying the multicausal framework in students’ reflective writing can help teachers and researchers move away from generalized approaches to teaching toward and identifying self-efficacy – the “can do vs. will do” (or even more broadly, the survey model of gauging self-efficacy). This is aligned with other attempts at modifying how we think of self-efficacy as a construct, I think, most notably Mary Tripp’s approach of viewing self-efficacy as developing within activity systems. This contribution, however, is a methodological one – upholding the socio-cognitive nature of disposition studies more broadly.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Many quantitative measures of self-efficacy over the years have been useful and enlightening in its own contexts and to answer its own research questions. For instance, measuring occupational self-efficacy in students and employees has yielded great results in assessing career paths as well as comparing occupational self-efficacy differences across multiple countries (Rigotti, Schyns, and Mohr). The qualitative approach to data is useful because it allows us to move beyond highly generalized understandings of students’ efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis provides for a more contextualized
understanding of student self-efficacy – something that speaks to the nature of writing instruction as contextualized and task-specific. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the field of writing studies is in need of broader coding schemes for the investigation of writing self-efficacy and motivation (something that this project hopes to deliver via qualitative, open coding methods).

Qualitative content analysis is a flexible tool for researchers as it allows for multiple approaches to a data set depending upon the interests and focus of the researcher and the issue being studied (Hsieh and Shannon). This project utilizes a directed approach to qualitative content analysis. According to Hseigh and Shannon, “the goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory.” In this case, the existence of theories about self-efficacy and various studies to investigate it allowed me to utilize a directed approach as I move to extend conceptually the definition of self-efficacy as it relates to self-directed teaching strategies in a post-secondary writing classroom.

**Self-Efficacy and Multicausality**

There are doubts in the field as to whether self-report data from students holds up in terms of its validity. Critics of self-report data suggest that students’ written reflections will be “teacher-pleasers” – in other words, they will write the thing that they believe a teacher will want to hear regardless of its truth. As Thomas Newkirk also argued in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, students’ reflective writings are ways in which students make sense of the world and if we are able to shift away from judging the content and to understanding it, we might better-utilize this narrative style of writing in our classrooms.

What the common critique of this students’ reflective writing as a method of inquiry does not consider is that the writing classroom is a dynamic space that offers an educational experience that is unique in terms of its intimacy (especially for students at larger institutions
where other general education classes are often large and alienating). Because of this, time can be (and is often) spent in class emphasizing the nature and purpose of written reflection. In other words, students are given the space within a writing classroom to read about and receive feedback on their reflections/self-assessments which often leads them to feel comfortable expressing honest accounts of their abilities (Moore Howard; Yancey and Smith).

In addition to the rich experiences of our students in writing classes being a prime place to measure their perspectives on their own learning, Psychology and Educational Psychology have been using self-report and behavioral indicators for 20 years to identify things like intrinsic motivation and develop scales for the measurement of such (Reeve and Sickenius). Arguments against this method of identifying student learning typically focus on the fact that measuring intrinsic motivation presumes an essential self rather than a socially constructed self. This project in particular argues that students’ efficacy beliefs are something that are both intrinsic (existing when they arrive in the classroom) and socially constructed. Despite the contested nature of self-reported data, there is no reason why writing studies should not seek to investigate the same in their own students. Self-report data is an important way of learning about people’s perceptions and it is those perceptions that shape constructs like self-efficacy and motivation.

Coding mechanisms for this project were developed in order to add to our field’s qualitative approach to dispositions – particularly the dispositions of self-efficacy and motivation. Originally, I intended to use Bandura’s “Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales” as a way to think about the language of my students’ various reflections composed throughout the course of the semester (mid-semester reflections, post-project reflections, and final reflective arguments) and to apply those existing definitions to my students’ own writing. This humble beginning led to the eventual development of my own definitions and codes which
indicated that students’ descriptions of their efficacy beliefs were far more complex and varied than I originally imagined they would be.

**Methods: The journey to discover coding procedures**

This study began with the purpose of gauging whether and how students in basic writing classroom geared toward self-directed learning practices transferred skills and knowledge from the writing classroom to other simultaneous (concurrent) contexts. This study was also interested in whether students’ dispositions (specifically those of self-efficacy and motivation) were a factor in the transfer of that knowledge.

The research methods for this study, while originally intended to gauge transfer in students’ written reflections and their classroom discourse, proved useful for discovering other elements of students’ written reflections – notably the ways in which students express/articulate their development of the dispositions of motivation and self-efficacy. That discovery was not, however, made through the original methodological approach to the data. In other words, when first applying a previous methodology to the data set, dispositions like self-efficacy did not appear in student writing. Despite the fact that strong theoretical models of self-efficacy measurements have been successful in measuring self-efficacy in multiple studies (e.g. Bandura’s language of self-efficacy), these methods were not operative for discovering whether and how basic writers’ discussed their dispositions regarding writing as it related to the classroom. Even though dispositions have been measured and identified via the use of self-efficacy scales and pre-existing language of self-efficacy, the application of these methods did not work for the data set of this study. After the first attempt at coding the data set with Bandura’s language of self-efficacy, I returned to the data set with a classic qualitative approach.
In the following sections I will provide a detailed account of the methodology of this study and how I arrived at these methods as effective for this study. Because identifying and measuring dispositions have proven time and again to be a complex endeavor, this project contributes to the ongoing investigation into this important element of determining how best to understand the impact of our pedagogy on whether and how students’ dispositions affect their learning.

Furthermore, this chapter will detail the development of a coding scheme specifically to identify evidence of student self-efficacy across two sections of basic writing. Ultimately, this chapter will result in an emphasis on and analysis of how self-directed teaching strategies (specifically the personal learning objective) impacted student self-efficacy as evidenced in their reflective writing. As I will detail later in the chapter, the pedagogy of self-directed learning – specifically the development of the personal learning objective (PLO) – correlates with the development of and increase in students’ reporting of self-efficacy in their written reflections because the PLO provided students with the ability to demonstrate the multicausal nature of writing goals, thus expanding the number of opportunities for students to see their own progress toward a larger writing goal.

Original Research Questions and Study Goals

The original goals of the study were to identify the development of student dispositions (self-efficacy and motivation specifically) and determine whether and how this development correlated with collateral knowledge transfer. As is evident from the original research questions, the study sought to highlight the relationship between whether and how students identified the transfer of knowledge in relation to the course design.
How do students respond to the process of self-identifying those skills they wish to transfer? Does this process affect student behaviors that contribute to transfer? If so, how?

Do reflection and self-efficacy play a role in whether or not students see writing studies as useful in outside contexts? If so, what is this role?

Do students’ written reflections suggest that they are achieving collateral transfer? If so, what do these reflections suggest about the development of self-efficacy and motivation and their role in collateral transfer?

After initial passes at coding the data for this project, it became clear that new research questions would be necessary in order to address the patterns that were emerging from students’ writing. Instead of noticing patterns that related to students’ discussions of transferring skills and knowledge, instead I began to realize that students did, in fact, respond to self-identifying the skills they valued (i.e. their PLOs), but that response came in the form of the language students were using the discuss their perceived achievement and progress in those skills, not their transfer of them. Therefore, revised questions for the project were as follows:

- How do students respond to the process of self-identifying their personal learning objectives? Does this process affect student dispositions like self-efficacy and motivation? If so, how?
- Do reflection and multi-causal descriptions of learning objectives play a role in whether or not students develop self-efficacy? If so, what is this role?
- Do students’ written reflections suggest that they are building self-efficacy beliefs about their writing tasks? If so, what do these reflections suggest about the development of self-efficacy and motivation?

**Original Dataset**

This project covered two sections of basic writing during one semester in the Fall of 2012. Both classes were comprised of freshmen students who tested into the basic writing course at Urban University. Data collected from 23 participants across both sections included:

- Post-project reflections: students completed reflections after each major project in the class (3 total: named in the data as SA1; SA2; SA3 where SA stands for Self-Assessment). Students were prompted to reflect on whether and how the project completed helped them reach the learning objectives of the course (and/or their own personal learning objective(s)).
• Final reflective argument: Students completed a final reflective argument portfolio for the course in which they were to reflect on their learning in the overall course using evidence from the course (assignments, classroom activities, etc), arguing for their success and preparedness for the first-year writing course.

• Field notes: detailed field notes were written immediately following each class session for both sections during the semester.

• Focus groups: Two focus group sessions were conducted with student volunteers from each course (4-5 students per focus group).

The study included reflective writing from all 23 student participants, however, not all participants submitted each reflective assignment (i.e. some student participants missed reflective assignments during the course of the semester). A total of 76 student papers were submitted and coded for the study.

*Original Code Development*

This project began with 3 sets of codes (a parent code of dispositions; sub codes of self-efficacy and motivation; and a code for students’ expressions of general confidence). The original codes were developed from Bandura’s language of self-efficacy where self-efficacy is defined as when a student identifies ability (e.g. “can do”) instead of intention (e.g. “will do”). General confidence was coded as moments when a student would identify him/herself as a confident person. This code was originally included to further differentiate between the specific disposition of self-efficacy from a broader discussion of confidence which students might often express (but that has little to do with a specific task in the classroom).

The original definitions derived from Psychology research studies proved to be non-operational for this study. In my first pass at coding, I identified only one instance of a student using the exact phrasing of “can do” in regards to their learning in the course. It was at this moment that I realized that Bandura’s language – originally used in survey instruments in which students were prompted to talk about self-efficacy in this specific way – would not work for the
ways in which students discussed their self-efficacy in reflective writing (a different context in which they were not being prompted to discuss self-efficacy beliefs specifically).

Because I was looking to determine whether and how the design of the course prompted students to develop self-efficacy – and, furthermore, I wanted this development to be unprompted – I realized that I would need to approach the codes with a classic qualitative approach instead of applying an existing methodology to the data set. This approach allowed me to see (in subsequent passes at coding the data) the various ways in which students discussed their efficacy beliefs, the development of them, and any patterns that emerged throughout the course of the semester. From there, I was able to determine a theory about the varied ways that students define their efficacy beliefs about writing and writing-related tasks.

*Defining Self-efficacy through grounded-theory*

In this section I will describe in detail the rationale for using pre-existing definitions derived from self-efficacy scales in an initial attempt to measure self-efficacy quantitatively in students’ reflective writing and how this approach did not register key evidence of self-efficacy surfaced by the qualitative analysis. This section will illustrate the coding procedure that followed and show its importance for developing task-specific definitions of self-efficacy components in writing.

As mentioned earlier, the original self-efficacy definition was derived from studies in which the language appeared in a set of surveys administered to participants in those studies. Considering this study did not include a survey instrument, students were not introduced to this language of self-efficacy. This issue arose because this study seeks to identify evidence of self-efficacy in reflective writing, and after the first pass at coding for existing definitions; it became difficult to imagine that students would have the identical vocabulary suggested to demonstrate
evidence of self-beliefs about their writing abilities. I eventually realized that unless my students were prompted to (given the language of) report specifically on their self-beliefs, I may not ever see the perceived “language of self-efficacy” in their writing. Furthermore, if I wanted to determine whether and how I was able to foster, unprompted, a student’s self-efficacy and measure it across a semester, it was important to – in subsequent passes at coding – focus on how to define it – or, more pointedly, how the students themselves express it.

In the second and third passes at coding, I approached the data set only looking to identify whether students were discussing successes (of any degree and in any particular task or overall goal in the classroom). This lead to a revision of the previous codes wherein new codes were created:

- **Disposition** referred to any reference to a student's feelings of efficacy, ability, or motivation.
- **Self-efficacy** referred to moments in which students discuss their abilities to perform a task related to writing, feelings of achievement in a specific task, and any self-belief about whether they are able to perform the task in the future.
- **General confidence** referred to a student’s general expression of his/her feelings of confidence in themselves (not task-specific).
- **Attribution (originally coded as “outsourcing”)** referred to a student attributing his or her achievement to the assignment, a peer, or to the teacher (e.g. "because of my teacher/peer's comments..." or "this project made me realize...")

The new sub-code of self-efficacy was given a broader definition that allowed for a range of students’ expressions of efficacy beliefs which were noticed in the 2nd and 3rd rounds of coding. In these subsequent rounds of coding students’ writing, I looked to determine how students talked about self-efficacy specifically thinking about how students in these courses did not have any language (of self-efficacy e.g. “can do”) imposed on them and were not being prompted to use any specific language in their written reflections. During this coding, I found many different examples of students making a statement of belief and/or ability to perform a writing-related task now or in the future. Below are some examples of the varying ways in which
basic writers expressed self-efficacy in my classroom (emphasis mine). These examples also provide insight into how students used their personal learning objectives to develop self-efficacy, as these efficacy belief statements also include multi-causal language which I will discuss below.

**Trish:** Conquering procrastination, staying focused, and learning to put my thoughts out on paper properly will be hard issues to beat down, but with time and the right projects and teachers *I feel they can be achieved.*

**Victoria:** Next, was analyzing rather than summarizing. I found myself at times not stating rhetorical techniques which are required in an analysis, and summarizing the information that I had read. I found that difficult because I am so used to summarizing, and never really worked with analysis until this year and being enrolled in this writing course. *Though it may take a few papers to practice on, the more I work with them the more I am learning.* One thing that I found extremely helpful was highlighting the important parts of the articles, and learning to separate the information that did matter and could be used from the information that was thrown in for the extra detail, or to simply confuse me.

**Brie:** When registering for this class there were two things I wanted to gain from this English course. Building a strong thesis statement, creating a catchy opening statement, and expanding my vocabulary. Believing that now I have improved the skills I needed help with all the learning objectives listed above. *This writing experience gave me more than just practice but it helped me gain more confidence in my writing.* Which encourages me to *keep setting new goals for my writing because my job isn’t ever done when it comes to learning.* Writing to me is more of a challenge now because I know that my writing can become even better than it is now. I wouldn’t have though that just three assignments could help me teach myself how to improve my own work. Taking the initiative to find ways to help me become not just a better writer but also a better thinker. Even though this assignment stressed me out for a while it was well worth it in the long run.

As mentioned above, this approach to coding for self-efficacy also allows us to think about this disposition within the framework of the students’ use of the core component of self-directed learning: the personal learning objective (PLO).

Within the reflective writing prompts for the course, students were asked to draw upon their original personal learning objective they created at the beginning of the course. Students were, however, given the choice of whether to reflect on that objective (students were asked to reflect on the course learning objectives mandated by the department in addition to their own if they chose to). The core element of the course – self-directed learning – is the rationale used to
give students the choice of what to reflect upon and how to frame it (e.g. whether they chose the course learning objectives and/or their own PLO).

As students were prompted to reflect on their PLOs throughout the duration of the course, I was then able to track their language used to discuss their learning (i.e. self-efficacious language) throughout the course of the semester across multiple students and/or across a students’ scaffolded reflection assignments.

The PLO and the discovery of the multi-causal framework for self-efficacy

The original rationale for coding for students’ multi-causal descriptions within their writing came from the original coding procedure (i.e. the use of Bandura’s language of self-efficacy). While Bandura did not provide a specific “language” for multi-causality, his theory suggests that the construct of self-efficacy is often found in this multi-causal framework (as defined earlier in this chapter). While students writing within these courses did not show Bandura’s prescriptive language for obvious reasons, his theory that efficacy items (his term) are complex insofar as there may be several factors within one “domain” of self-efficacy held true for students across both basic writing classes in this study.

As a broad example – but one related to student writing – one “domain” of student self-efficacy may be the perceived ability to complete a “lengthy writing assignment” of say, 5 pages. So, in this case the student’s multicausal description of his ability to write a lengthy paper might be 1) the ability to manage one’s time, 2) the ability to commit to the drafting process and utilize feedback appropriately, and 3) the ability to use word processing and course management technologies. It is important to note that though this example lists three “causes” for a domain of self-efficacy, students do not need to have a specific number of “causes” that contribute to the larger domain of efficacy (i.e. a student might identify two causes for their feeling of efficacy in
achieving a goal in the writing classroom). Therefore, in later passes at coding (after the initial pass at identifying only Bandura’s language failed), I looked for what Bandura refers to as “multicausality.” In this study, the multicausal framework became an important indicator of students’ efficacy language.

*Attribution*

In addition to the aforementioned distinction, the coding procedure also accounted for moments in which students might attribute their success (or failures) to circumstances beyond their control. Because of the student population of this study, students are likely to write (within reflection assignments) about issues dealing with what Bandura refers to as locus of control (beliefs about outcomes and whether they are under the students’ control). Bandura notes “For example, students may believe that high academic grades are entirely dependent on their performance (high locus of control) but feel despondent because they believe they lack the efficacy to produce those superior academic performances” (Bandura 309). In the same way, students might also believe that academic success could be entirely independent of their performance and, rather, something they might never achieve no matter how hard they perceive themselves to work. In my coding, I originally referred to this as “outsourcing.” Later, however, I changed this code to “attribution” which more accurately described what students were doing in those parts of their written reflections.

Overall, when students refer to their success as based on the teacher’s feedback and/or other circumstances beyond their control, they also lack the language of self-efficacy and motivation in their writing. This result is consistent with literature on dispositions and self-efficacy most notably indicating students’ efficacy beliefs can be and often are independent of their locus of control (Bandura).
Conclusion

This chapter focused on the nature of self-efficacy as a construct, specifically how we define it and how that definition may affect our identification of and teaching toward self-efficacy in the writing classroom. Ultimately, a long-time common approach to identifying self-efficacy (e.g. Bandura’s suggestion that identify when and if students articulate that they “can do” something – in other words, they have an ability to write well, for example) is not effective for measuring how basic writers discuss their experiences with their own writing and learning processes – a discovery that will be thoroughly detailed in coding procedures described in this chapter.

As the PLO is a product of a self-regulated course design, it may be that when PLOs are built into the design of a basic writing course, the self-direction inspired by objectives which are not bound to the institution – where institutional objectives may include language that is unfamiliar to a basic writer – can provide more opportunities for students to articulate self-efficacy in their writing and writing processes. Specifically, this study focused on students’ identification of what Bandura refers to as multi-causality in student writing. This multi-causal description of students’ goals can be an avenue in to discovering how students break down broader objectives into more nuanced goals that yield multiple opportunities to identify and articulate success in their writing rather than just waiting to see the results of (evaluation of) a larger writing project. In other words, with personal learning objectives (PLOs) and the multicausality that stems from them, students may be more apt to identify, express, and increase their self-efficacy in the writing classroom.

In other words, it is possible that the context determines the language a student uses to express his or her self-efficacy and the language we want to apply to students’ moments of
efficacy might be preventing us from identifying it at all. What this chapter does is to highlight a problem within the field in the way we define and discuss student self-efficacy in writing classrooms. The next chapter will detail the results of the study which will provide greater insight as to how a new definition of self-efficacy for student writing – especially in the basic writing classroom – will help us in future investigations of dispositions in the writing classroom.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Within the study, two (2) sections of basic writing were examined in the Fall semester of 2012. Each section of basic writing contained 22 students (44 total) with 24 of those students consenting to participate in the study. Both sections of basic writing received the same classroom instruction and assignment sequence. Results detailed below are analyzed from a total of (76) student reflections.

I. Frequency of Codes Applied

Within the study, a total of 9 codes were used. Of the 9 total codes, only 7 codes were analyzed in the results of the study. Note here that the Personal Learning Objective (PLO) code appeared most frequently of all the codes. Also note that of the dispositions, self-efficacy appeared the most in students writing. The frequency of those codes is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Application Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition total</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Confidence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicausality</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Frequency of Codes Applied

II. Instances of Self-Efficacy
Within the study, there were 44 total instances of self-efficacy throughout the semester. Instances of self-efficacy occurred at about the same rate throughout the semester but increased at the end of the semester in the final reflective assignment. Some students demonstrated instances of self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester as indicated in the chart below (where SA refers to Self-Assessment and RA refers to the final reflective argument assignment; each SA was written after a major project). Each instance of self-efficacy is demonstrated in students’ post-project reflective writing assignments across the semester as well as their final reflective argument.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Instances</th>
<th>SA1</th>
<th>SA2</th>
<th>SA3</th>
<th>RA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Instances of Self-Efficacy Across Assignments

III. Co-occurrences

While the overall instances of self-efficacy across the semester do not appear remarkable, looking at those instances as they co-occur with other codes is more illuminating. Code co-occurrence patterns overall are the key element of this study’s results. As I will describe in the discussion section of this chapter, these patterns are indicative of the relationship between multi-causal descriptions of students’ personal goal achievement and whether those goals and the way students write about them co-occur with statements of self-efficacy beliefs. Table 2 below shows the overall co-occurrence patterns for all codes in the study. Self-efficacy co-occurs most often with the personal learning objective (PLO) with a total of 22 occurrences across all assignments.
Table 3: Co-occurrence patterns

As seen in Table 2, across all assignments, the personal learning objective (PLO) had a high number of occurrences with self-efficacy language. With only one less co-occurrence, multi-causal language (MC) and self-efficacy (SE) co-occur 21 times. Students who demonstrated self-efficacy had a high co-occurrence of multi-causal language. With a lower number of occurrences than the PLO and SE (22) and the SE and MC (21), the PLO occurred with multi-causal language (MC) – independent of demonstrations of self-efficacy – 17 times across all assignments.

As I will explain below, these co-occurrence patterns suggest that multi-causal language might be the key to identifying the language of self-efficacy in reflective writing (as multi-causal descriptions do co-occur with instances of self-efficacy language). Also covered in this chapter is the potential usefulness of students’ articulation of PLO’s to prompt the development of self-efficacy. As explained in earlier chapters, the personal learning objective (PLO) is at the core of self-regulated learning in these basic writing classrooms. Therefore, these co-occurrence results might suggest students’ use of this strategy could be one way to lead to positively affecting students’ dispositions most specifically self-efficacy as demonstrated in reflective writing.

IV. Co-occurrence examples in student writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of SRL</th>
<th>Attribution</th>
<th>Attribution of success to course design</th>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Self Efficacy</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicausality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, students who reference their personal learning objectives in their reflective writing assignments were more likely to also show self-efficacy in the same writing (as evidenced in the co-occurrence patterns). Interestingly, almost the same number of co-occurrences exist for students who used multi-causal language but did not articulate their PLO specifically along with that language. And yet, students who did not use multi-causal language but did articulate their PLO had almost the same number of co-occurrences. Students who referenced their PLOs had a high occurrence of self-efficacy language (22 instances across assignments), students who demonstrated self-efficacy in their written reflections also showed instances of multi-causal language. Ultimately, students who used PLOs and multi-causal descriptions of those PLOs without any self-efficacy language were lower overall (17 times). While there is a difference, it appears to be small – only 5 more co-occurrences were found between the PLO and demonstrations of self-efficacy than were the PLO and the students’ use of multi-causal language without demonstrating self-efficacy (See Table 2).

Ultimately, these co-occurrence patterns suggest a relationship between learning objectives, multi-causal language, and statements of self-efficacy beliefs. As I will detail in the discussion section below, these results suggest the potential usefulness of articulating learning objectives to prompt the development of self-efficacy. The co-occurrence patterns noted above suggests that some students who utilized the personal learning objectives were likely to also break those objectives down into multi-causal descriptions of their broader learning goal in the course. As we can see in Emma’s third reflection, she articulates her PLO, and she then breaks down what goes in to addressing that goal of making a “transition from one assignment to the other” when describing her grasping the concepts of the assignment and addressing ongoing issues with word count. Emma writes:
As far as my learning objective of being able to transition from one assignment to another, I think I had a pretty easy time doing that. The last paper I felt was more difficult, so actually fully grasping the concept and expectations of this particular assignment helped me to transition in a more graceful manner. Lastly, word count is something that I’ve struggled with throughout this paper and even semester. I always seem to plan out what I want to say pretty good, but when it comes down to evening out paragraphs and making them similarly packed with information is where I have a hard time. Unless I go very elementary and have the same number of lead-offs and follow-ups within each paragraph, I think I will always run into some difficulty when it comes to word count and having pretty even paragraphs (Emma SA3).

Notice that Emma’s use of multi-causality after her discussion of her broader personal learning objective shows that she sees the “even paragraphs” and “fully grasping the concept and expectations of (a) particular assignment” as part of her overall goal. Important to note here is that Emma’s multi-causal language and identification of her PLO does not lead to a feeling of having achieved all of those parts of the whole. Emma’s reflection here is a case of multi-causality in relation to their personal learning objectives without evidence of self-efficacy language. Though Emma’s third reflection here does not demonstrate efficacy, she may yet develop that efficacy in a later assignment.

As shown in Table 2, some students like Emma show multi-causal descriptions of their writing along with indicating their PLOs. In this study, as evidenced by the lower number of times the PLO appears with multi-causal language (17 times), it appears that a student’s use of multi-causal descriptions of goal progress does not always have to be coupled with statements of self-efficacy – at times, students like Emma describe their goals without feeling as if they have achieved them or made any positive progress toward them.

While that is the case, it might still be that a student’s opportunity to articulate a PLO eventually leads to instances of self-efficacy in students’ writing independent of whether they demonstrate multi-causal language along with the articulation of their PLO(s). This may be evidenced by a higher number of instances of self-efficacy language co-occurring with the
articulation of PLOs (22) than did multi-causal language and PLO alone (17). Possible implications of these co-occurrences will be explored in the discussion section later in this chapter.

Instances of PLOs in student writing

Out of the total number of students who utilized the PLO in their reflective writing, some students had higher instances of articulating their PLO than others. A total of 8 students or 33% of total students (Paige, Daniel, Milena, Mickie, Matt, Becky, Arianna, and Alicia) referenced their PLOs more often than other students.

In looking at these 8 students, it is clear that a high number of instances of PLO usage in reflective writing did not always indicate the development of self-efficacy. For example, of those 8 students mentioned above who had higher instances of PLO references in their writing throughout the semester, three of them demonstrated self-efficacy from the beginning of their reflective writing which would indicate that the course and the use of PLO had little to no bearing on the development of their self-efficacy (despite the high instances of PLOs).

Interestingly enough, one student – Daniel – who had 9 (the highest number) instances of PLO use (7 of which occurred in his final reflective assignment) demonstrated no increase in or development of self-efficacy language. Daniel’s first reflective assignment for the course articulated his personal learning objective as well as one instance of self-efficacy language. As Daniel began the course with efficacy beliefs, throughout the course’s reflective assignments he also did not increase his self-efficacy language or his multi-causal descriptions of his goals (one instance of each in both the first [SA1] and the last reflective assignment [RA]). As I will explain later in this chapter, Daniel’s case may be an interesting example of what might happen with a student who enters this course with an established sense of self-efficacy. These implications are
important when considering how self-directed pedagogy might affect a student with strong self-efficacy.

Overall, a total of 29% of those students who showed an increase in the use of PLOs in their reflection assignments (meaning they increased in the number of times they referenced their PLO throughout the semester) also demonstrated an increase in their self-efficacy (7 out of 24 total students increased their PLOs and their self-efficacy language simultaneously). This might mean that there are limitations to the effectiveness of the PLO itself though it might be a step in the development of self-efficacy in writing. In the discussion section below, I will detail what this might mean for the majority of students who did not show this progression across the semester and future research.

*Multicausality in student writing:*

Out of the number of total students (24), a high proportion of students used multi-causal descriptions to break down their personal learning objectives within their written reflections. A total of 87% of students used, at some point in the course of the semester, a multicausal description of their writing.

![Multi-Causality](image.png)

**Figure 1: MC users vs. non-users**
As seen in Figure 1, a high number of total students used multi-causal language to describe/break down those objectives into parts. If we remember from Emma’s example above, her goal of transitioning better in her writing related to the “balance” of information in her individual paragraphs as well as her ability to grasp the concepts of the particular assignment. A high number of students who use this language to talk about the achievement (or lack thereof) of their goals may indicate that, for basic writers, the course design and the PLO could be a key for students to develop multicausal language in post-project reflective writing. Multi-causality (multi-causal descriptions of goals), while not always leading to self-efficacy language, is what seems to have helped the students in the study who did increase their self-efficacy language.

An important finding here is that it appears multi-causal descriptions (of goals – not always the student’s PLO) support the development of self-efficacy language as much as the students’ use of PLOs alone (without multi-causal language). Later in the discussion section of this chapter, I will elaborate on the possibility that there could be more than one avenue to elicit multi-causal descriptors in students’ writing – a PLO could be simply one of many ways to encourage this in students’ reflective writing.

While a high number of students used multi-causal descriptions of their writing overall, some students used this writing from the beginning of the semester while others developed the multi-causality as the semester progressed. Of the number of students who began with no use of multi-causal language (20), 11 students increased by at least one instance across all projects. So, more than half (55%) of students showed an increase in their use of multicausal descriptions across the semester. This percentage reflects students who did not begin using these descriptions in their first assignment, but used them in subsequent reflective assignments, including the final reflective letter).
Out of the 11 students who increased their instances of multi-causal descriptions in their reflective writing, 9 students also increased their instances of self-efficacy language throughout the semester. It is also important to note that not only did these nine students increase their self-efficacy, but they did not begin their semester using self-efficacy language, instead, they developed that language along with the development of multi-causal language as the semester progressed. So, out of the students who increased their multi-causal descriptions within their written reflections, a striking 82% of those students also increased in their self-efficacy language.

On the other hand, it is important to identify the percentage of students who increased their self-efficacy independent of any increase in multi-causality. Only 2 out of 24 (less than 10%) students showed any increase in self-efficacy language independent of an increase in multi-causality. The small number of students who increase their self-efficacy without showing an increase in multi-causal language could point to a significant role for multi-causality in the development of and increase in self-efficacy. Interestingly enough, one of those two students – Milena – also increased her use of her personal learning objective throughout the course. Milena had an increase in self-efficacy (SE) language and articulation of her PLO by her final reflection, with only one instance of multi-causal (MC) language throughout all of her course reflections (4 total). Considering that less than 10% of students increased their self-efficacy without an increase in their use of multi-causal language, it might be that this emphasizes the importance of the multi-causal descriptions of students’ goal achievements. In other words, if a student does not use multi-causal language when discussing their goals, they might not be as likely to increase their self-efficacy in their written reflections.
The other student who increased self-efficacy language (SE) without increasing multi-causal language (MC) – Natalya – only increased her SE by one instance of SE language total. This is not considered to be a significant increase in self-efficacy language overall.

V. Discussion

The results above show an interesting development in co-occurrence patterns insofar as 1) personal learning objectives, multi-causal language, and self-efficacy appear within students’ written reflections generally and 2) whether and how those co-occurrence patterns appear to contribute to an increase in instances of students’ use of personal learning objectives, multi-causal language, and self-efficacy language. Based on the results of this study, it appears that multi-causal descriptions of students’ goals plays a role in students’ writing as it relates to their perceived development over a semester. Most importantly, though, it appears that multi-causal descriptions are a means by which to identify and count students’ task-based efficacy beliefs.

Throughout this section, I will show that attempting to measure self-efficacy in students’ reflective writing is a worthy endeavor as it allows for researchers to see students’ task-based perspectives on a course and their learning. Most importantly, when students are asked to write about learning objectives (their own or perhaps course objectives more generally) and to monitor them throughout the course of a semester, the opportunity for students to assess task-based efficacy in their writing increases. For example, a student who writes multiple reflections in which they are asked to reflect on the same goal(s) might recognize over time that there are different components of that goal, thus providing more opportunities to see progression and achievement while becoming self-aware about their writing practices. This activity across the semester is in stark opposition to approaches [to measuring student self-efficacy] wherein a student might only be asked one or two times during a semester to answer explicit questions
about his or her efficacy beliefs. This role of self-efficacy in a writing classroom – most specifically this definition of self-efficacy as a task-based belief – plays a role in student development more so than providing students with the language of a survey instrument and asking them to contextually determine their efficacy beliefs about writing.

As evidenced in the results detailed above, in this study, students’ use of their personal learning objective (PLO) appears to be a factor (although not the sole factor) in their use of multi-causal language as this style of descriptive language appears frequently when students write reflectively about whether and how they’ve achieved their goals. The PLO is derived from the literature on self-directed learning, which not only asks that the student be the driving factor behind the kinds of learning and types of activities that occur in the classroom, but self-direction within the classroom also means that the students’ learning is driven by their own goals just as they articulate them. When asked to view the process of completing writing assignments in a course through the lens of their own objectives and desires for pursuing higher education (broadly or specific to the writing classroom, depending on the students’ goals), this can lead to students’ investments in their learning whereas in prior learning experiences they may have felt like an outsider in an environment that was merely a requirement (e.g. highly structured high school writing classrooms and genres).

Ultimately, the results of this study may lead us to better-understanding of not only the ways in which self-efficacy can be measured in student writing overall, but the study also shows that potential impact for the basic writing classroom more specifically. As I’ve detailed in previous chapters, the population of basic writers (specifically at-risk students when those students are enrolled in basic writing classes) often struggle to feel comfortable in a writing classroom (Rose; Rodriguez). If we as teachers can implement a pedagogy that seeks to address
student self-efficacy in a way that not only yields the opportunity to measure that efficacy but also (and most importantly) provides multiple opportunities for students to build and articulate those efficacy beliefs about writing tasks, the use of the PLO and other elements of self-directed learning are a relatively easy addition to any basic writing classroom.

*Multi-causality, Self-Efficacy, and the PLO: Further Implications*

The incorporation of the personal learning objective into a basic writing pedagogy could help instructors effectively promote self-efficacy in students simply because students would then have the ability to do so through the connection to and carrying out of their objective(s). Even if teacher-researchers are not interested in identifying the language of self-efficacy in their own students’ writing, the results of this data suggests that students’ efficacy can be affected and potentially increased through this pedagogy (notably the PLO). Furthermore, this method of promoting and identifying self-efficacy in students’ writing can lead to, at minimum, another reason for purposeful, scaffolded reflection assignments that cater to students’ particular needs (in this case, a basic writers’ need to have more opportunities to discover his or her abilities through task-based reflective writing).

Independent of the PLO, this study also demonstrates a potentially meaningful correlation between students who use multi-causal descriptions of their writing and who also show an increase in self-efficacious language. The aforementioned correlation is indicative based on the fact that the number of students who *increased* their use of their PLOs and the number of times they demonstrated self-efficacy in their written reflections is very low (only 10%). While it might be the case that a student does not need to increase their PLO (only to articulate it consistently), it is worth noting that PLO and SE increases did not happen as much as MC and SE increases did. As I will describe later, there may be a number of other factors that could
promote even more opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning achievement in their reflective writing (other than the PLO), therefore potentially leading to an increase in self-efficacy language.

In other words, not only the PLO’s connection to multi-causality – but the multi-causality itself – may be the key to identifying more instances of self-efficacy in students’ written reflections. It may be that its precisely the PLOs prompting of multi-causal descriptions that makes it so effective in promoting student self-efficacy. The PLO in this study specifically seems useful for basic writers in implicitly prompting them to break down their goals into smaller, multi-causal parts of a whole objective, thus yielding more opportunities to demonstrate growth and build efficacy beliefs as they relate to writing tasks specifically. Ultimately, the personal learning objective seems to have the potential to support the development of self-efficacy but not as a thing in and of itself. The PLOs potential could be precisely that, in this study, it served as the means to facilitate the students’ use of multi-causal language which then lead to higher instances of self-efficacy. It may be then that the PLO’s usefulness is only so if required along with other pedagogical approaches that prompt students to develop and use multi-causal descriptors of learning objectives more directly.

That said, the PLOs usefulness might not be the case for all students. As referenced in the results section above, Daniel’s case is one in which we can see how a student might not be impacted the personal learning objective due to a pre-disposition toward efficacious beliefs about his writing ability. Because Daniel had such a dramatic increase in PLO use in his final assignment, it may be an example of a student who 1) is already efficacious about his writing ability and 2) who identified the explicit purpose of the course (as evidenced by Daniel’s explicit
reference to the section description of the course syllabus in one of his reflective assignments which demonstrates his awareness of the self-directed purpose of the course).

It might be that Daniel’s attention to that detail caused him to drive home his achievement of his PLO in his final reflective assignment, especially because the assignment is designed to be an argument for one’s learning achievement over the course of the semester. It is also important to note that the final assignment is intended to be the most lengthy of the reflective assignments in the course, allowing for more use of the PLO language (or any discussions of learning) in general. For Daniel, the PLO was simply a requirement of the course rather than a means by which to develop the multi-causal language which could lead him to more instances of efficacious language. Therefore, Daniel’s case is important as an example of how an already-efficacious student might utilize a PLO but could easily have utilized a course objective just as effectively and frequently.

As could have been the case with Daniel, the PLOs potential could be hampered by the possibility that students would use multi-causal language not to discuss a PLO, but to discuss any learning objective that is not their own (i.e. one of the classroom/institutional objectives determined for their classroom). It remains though, regardless of what means by which students arrive at multi-causal language that looking for multi-causal descriptions of objective achievement or work-in-progress toward objectives might be the key for future researchers to identify and measure instances of self-efficacy in student reflective writing where in the past we have struggled to define and identify student self-efficacy in their writing. Ultimately, it appears based on the results of this study that multi-causality can lead to identifying student self-efficacy and that multi-causality and self-efficacy when occurring together also demonstrate students’ increase in their use of it. While the PLO can prompt multi-causality, students also utilized
multi-causal language independent of their specific PLO which might mean that the PLO is only one way to elicit multi-causal language.

Making a case for the PLO: further implications

As seen from the data, the great majority of students in the study showed an increase in both their self-efficacy and their use of multi-causal language throughout the course of the semester. Based on the fact that the PLO had a total of 17 co-occurrences with multi-causal language (MC) across the semester, it may be that the PLO can play a role in facilitating that multi-causal language. Even though there were no increases in self-efficacy and the use of PLO alone (independent of multi-causal language) and that there may be various means by which students can arrive at multi-causal language within their reflective writing, the fluid and dynamic nature of the PLO as a pedagogical tool is still an effective means for teachers and researchers to investigate a more diverse language of self-efficacy which may appear more often as a result of the PLO’s facilitation of multi-causal language.

As mentioned earlier in this section, it is likely then that the ability to measure this multicausality in students’ reflective writing comes from the design of the course itself. Specifically, that the core of self-directed classrooms is the Personal Learning Objective (PLO), and this objective is scaffolded throughout the course’s written reflection assignments so that students are given the opportunity to revisit the objective multiple times throughout the duration of the course.

Because the personal learning objective is part of a self-directed theory of pedagogy, it gives students the agency in determining what is most important to their work in the writing classroom. The personal learning objective does not privilege any specific type of knowledge or learning. Instead, it only asks that the student decide what they want to gain from a particular
course. This control over one’s own learning experience (in determining what is most important to them) can potentially be the reason why a student would begin to see their goals as something that contains multiple parts (multi-causality). As we see in examples above, students in this study often use this agency as a means to discuss their PLOs through what we might see as a more traditional discussion of a writing process. In other words, multi-causality often takes the shape of common parts of a writing process (e.g. peer feedback, drafting, editing).

These results appear to indicate that the PLO might yet be an important means of promoting students’ use of multi-causal language. The connection between all three – PLO, multi-causality, and self-efficacy language – may be crucial to measuring student self-efficacy in writing because it provides students with a measurable outcome. In other words, students who identify and break down their own learning goals might be better able to monitor, gauge, and authentically report on their progress throughout the semester (as opposed to a student who is only waiting until the end of an assignment to see the effectiveness of their broader goal or to answer a survey about their generalized ability to write well). For example, here in Summer’s first reflective assignment (SA1) after her summary essay, she discusses some multi-causal break-downs of her personal learning objective of being what she calls a “functional and detailed writer.” Summer writes:

I feel I have had some assignments that have helped me towards my learning objective; one of the assignments is my summary, which was about an article of my choice. Writing that summary, I had to break down the author own words into some of my own, a bit challenging because I had to be careful not to plagiarize the text, but to break the words down so it’s completely my own words but still means the same as the authors. I think that doing that assignment really tested my writing skills because I had to challenge myself to think of other words that can substitute for the authors’ words, which were pretty basic, and doing so it challenged me to switch up on my writing preference, and that help me to understand a part about being a functional writer. Summarizing is a major part of being able to be a detailed writer this is going back to the principal of writing. Learning how to write a summary helped me understand to be more descriptive in my writing, and to explain what I’ve read in the text. Do I think I mastered my
objective? I don’t think I fully mastered my learning objective, but I feel that I’m starting to get a better understanding of the functionalism of writing (Summer SA1, emphasis mine).

In this excerpt from Summer’s reflection, we see her reference to her personal learning objective as framing her entire discussion of what she felt she needed to do with the summary genre and how that genre helped her work toward her goal of being what she refers to as a “functional writer.” We then see that Summer uses specific skills she focused on in the summary assignment to break down her larger goal of “functional writing.” Key to identifying the multicausal language in Summer and in other students’ reflection is the phase “helped me to realized/achieve/understand…” when referring to the different parts of an assignment or class activity that contributed to their overall goal achievement or progression toward that achievement. Noteworthy in this reflection is how Summer assesses her achievement at this stage of the semester (the first major assignment) – she indicates that she has not yet mastered her own objective, but she demonstrates self-efficacy when she states that she “feels she is starting to get a better understanding” of her objective.

In another student example, we are able to see again how students break down their personal learning objectives into different areas of improvement. Here, Paige discusses her PLO as it relates to different realizations she had while working on her Response assignment:

My experience with this project relates to my learning objectives because I want to become a better thinker when it comes to this type of stuff. Although the project was challenge for me, it kind of helped me with my learning objects. This project helped me prove to myself that I can write off of topics that I am not interested in and don’t quite understand. It helped me become a deeper thinker in a way, but not completely. This project also helped me become a more focused reader. There was times when I would read the Zimmerman and McCarty texts and not remember a thing that I read. I had to reread it a number of times before I could actually understand what the authors were talking about. That helped me because I use to usually just read a text one time and just write about what I thought was stated from my own mindset based on that one time, and not from what was actually being presented in the text. This project did help me with my
learning objectives in a way. I see myself becoming a better writer project by project (Paige, SA2, emphasis mine).

Here we can see that Paige indicates her PLO as wanting to become what she calls a “better thinker.” As is with many students in their reflective writing assignments, she indicates that despite the challenges of the assignment, she still sees improvement – the improvement is then broken down into different parts of the whole PLO: In Paige’s case, those parts are becoming a better reader and the ability to write about something she is not interested in. As mentioned in Chapter 3, when coding student reflections for PLOs, the multi-causal descriptions of those goals then became clear in their writing.

Our identification of these multi-causal descriptions of personal learning objectives can help us to see the “untapped” moments in students’ reflective writing wherein they intuitively understand how highly-contextualized – or as Bandura would say “task-specific” – those moments of efficacy beliefs about writing truly are. In another circumstance where students might only be explicitly asked to discuss how efficacious they feel about their writing knowledge and skills at the beginning and end of a semester, students themselves may not have the appropriate context in which to think back to the specific elements of the course and how those worked to develop their writing – they may rely on only the broad generalizations that dispositions researchers have come to understand as problematic for measuring self-efficacy insofar as they are not nuanced enough (Zimmerman). In the case of a writing classroom, it is possible that any significant amount of time between the students’ immediate writing context(s) and his/her evaluation of performance/ability could leave many untapped moments of efficacy like the one we see in Summer.

All in all, whether or not the PLO is the only way for students to articulate learning goals, the multi-causality that can come from it appears to be a good way to interrogate what self-
efficacy language looks like in students’ written reflections. Future researchers might consider identifying the difference between the use of the PLO and only the set objectives for the course in order to determine if the PLO actually does make a difference in the development of multi-causal language or if students who are asked to develop PLOs have more instances of multi-causal language. Further, researchers can also determine from there whether and how the PLO (as opposed to students who are only reflecting on the objectives of the course) and multi-causal language leads to more evidence of task-specific self-efficacy in students’ reflections.

VI. Conclusion and Limitations

The results of this study were most insightful about the ways in which the definition of self-efficacy may need to evolve – or in other words, how it may need to become broader – insofar as we look for the language students use to express their self-efficacy in order to identify it in their written reflections.

Based on qualitative content analysis of students’ written reflections throughout an entire semester, the construct of self-efficacy evolved to include more varied language used by students who self-reported their feelings of efficacy in their writing and writing processes. Results of this study indicate that there is a correlation between students who demonstrate and increase their efficacy and students who also use multi-causal descriptions of learning objectives (sometimes as reference through personal learning objectives and sometimes not). In the future, it would be important to consider how this approach to defining self-efficacy can be measured quantitatively. This project does provide a framework with which to identify and count instances of self-efficacy language which can be helpful in developing statistical data of students’ efficacy beliefs.

The study is not without its limitations. The most significant limitation is the lack of survey data. A future study investigating similar elements of self-efficacy in student writing
would benefit from a survey at the beginning and end of the semester which asks students to rate their own efficacy in specific writing tasks (task-specific) as well as general self-efficacy in the writing classroom (domain-specific). The data from these surveys could then be measured against the instances of self-efficacy coded in students’ writing throughout the semester and the results of whether students increased those elements of efficacy beliefs in their reflective writing. Methodologically, any correlation between the survey data and the qualitative data (e.g. a student shows an increase in her efficacy beliefs in survey questions as well as demonstrated an increase in the instances of efficacy expressed in her writing throughout the semester) can further enhance the triangulation of the data and thus increase its validity. Additionally, future work might also utilize students’ final grades to determine whether there is a correlation between students who demonstrate/increase self-efficacy and their success in the course overall.\footnote{This project did not have IRB permission to use students’ grades.}

Another limitation to the study is the small number of students’ studied and the fact that the study only examined one particular context (my own classrooms). Future studies would benefit from examining how other instructors implement self-directed learning pedagogy into their own basic writing classrooms as well as in other institutions with different student demographics. As we know, basic writing classrooms (as all classrooms) contain different demographics depending on the institution and its location. Implementing this study in a different institution (e.g. a basic writing classroom in the southwestern United States where ESL is sometimes also part of the BW program) could be important for understanding whether and how self-directed pedagogy is well-suited for different demographics of basic writers.

The results of this study might also benefit from an in-depth coding of the field notes taken for the project. During the study, field notes were taken after each class session across the duration of the semester for both sections. The original intention of taking field notes was to see...
if students demonstrated any behaviors during class sessions that might have indicated particular dispositions as they related to the course and our daily activities. Considering the classrooms were taught with a self-directed pedagogy, students would often collaborate in creating various parts of our course design including rubrics as well as the structure of peer review. However, during the analysis of the data, it became clear to me that the most significant implication of this study would be its contribution to the complexities and difficulties of defining and identifying self-efficacy in student writing of which is evidenced only in reflective writing specifically.

The use of the field note data of this project might have also yielded answers to one of the original research questions of the project: whether and how the self-directed learning classroom and the use of the personal learning objective lead students to identify their use of writing skills in simultaneous contexts (e.g. other class assignments). The question of knowledge transfer is still, I believe, an important implication for this project’s design – most specifically the self-directed design of the classroom. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any evidence of knowledge transfer in students’ written reflections. It might be the case that because I did not specifically prompt students to write about other contexts (transfer) that this is why students did not identify their use of writing skills. However, one of the key elements of identifying self-efficacy in student writing for this study was not to prompt students to write about their efficacy beliefs specifically but only to write about the achievement (or lack thereof) of their personal learning objectives.

In this chapter, I presented findings and analysis which I hope represent a positive contribution to the field of Writing Studies, most notably approaches to defining, identifying, and measuring dispositions (in this case self-efficacy in students’ reflective writing). Moving toward a better understanding of how to define a disposition like self-efficacy – and further to find a way
to measure this both qualitatively and quantitatively can prove beneficial for a number of reasons which I will elaborate on in the final chapter of this project. Furthermore, by discovering the multi-causal construct within reflective writing, researchers may now code for multi-causality in students’ reflections perhaps for other dispositions in addition to self-efficacy. Finally, the results and analysis of this chapter demonstrate the potential for using the personal learning objective (PLO) as one way to foster students’ use of multi-causality in their reflections, thus providing them the opportunity to convey task-based self-efficacy – a type of self-efficacy measurement that has been supported by researchers in cognitive psychology for many years (Zimmerman; Bandura).
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Introduction

This chapter will show how the methods, theory, and results of this dissertation study may be useful for thinking about several aspects of the field of writing studies. Most specifically, I will describe in this chapter the ways in which this study may be useful to consider as we continue to investigate whether and how our students (particularly at-risk students) are affected by our pedagogy. In order to frame this, I will draw a connection between the “translingualism” theory in literacy studies and how it can be used to think about what we have long-believed to be a self-evident aspect of student success in writing classrooms.

I will elaborate on the contributions of this research to the field as it relates to the teaching of basic writing, writing research, assessment of student writing, and writing programs more broadly. Overall, the results and implications of this research demonstrate the value in continuing to interrogate the methods and methodology used to investigate student dispositions in the writing classroom. In recent years, scholars in writing studies have shown commitment to debunking old arguments that inspired the “cognitive turn” and it is my hope that this project contributes to that effort – continuing to show that dispositions are inextricably linked to student learning, and while they might be difficult to define and identify, they are no less worthy of studying as the results of that work may mean an increased number of best practices with which to share with current and future teachers and scholars of Writing Studies.

Basic Writing Pedagogy: Self-Efficacy, Self-Direction, and Academic genres

Self-Efficacy and Success

Because the history of basic writing is inextricably interwoven in literacy studies, I felt it important in the final chapter of this dissertation to address the elephant in the room: that is, where do the basic writers in the self-directed classroom end up on the other end of this
pedagogy in terms of what their writing “looks like” – especially given that the first chapter of this study argues that an issue with earlier studies of self-efficacy in student writing is that they focused too heavily (perhaps primarily) on the correlation between self-efficacy and “success” in the kind of writing students produce. But, this project challenges what it means to measure success in terms of students’ efficacy beliefs. More pointedly – this project offers a perspective on self-efficacy – both in evaluation and assessment – that looks beyond the criteria of what constitutes “good writing.”  

Putting the emphasis on students’ agency – that is, their choices about what to value (or what is to be gained) in the class (and even how certain class activities are designed and approached) – is the way to keep students’ experiences and perspectives at the heart of a classroom that might need to achieve a particular set of goals in order to prepare students for the writing sequence they will face at their University. In other words, not only did this project’s inquiry into self-efficacy not focus specifically on the course’s evaluation of their success (it focused on their perception of success), but success was measured through narrative-based reflection assignments (referred to as self-assessments). This element of the course design is important as it positions this study in relation to a long-held tension in writing studies: the debate between those who believe that full, narrative-based assignments are the key to tapping in to students’ values and efficacy and those who believe expository writing assignments are the key to success for basic writers. In the case of Urban University specifically, my students needed to practice what I refer to as foundational academic genres in order to be prepared for our first-year

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29 This is highlighted by the common measures of success in basic writing classrooms – either that students adopt SWE and are then able to “perform” academic writing (Bartholomae; Rose), or that students are successfully able to “code-switch” (Bizzell; Pennycook) or that students learn the value of their “home discourse” (Perryman-Clark) and to use it in academic settings which is also a common measure of success in some writing classrooms.
writing curriculum. And yet, the pedagogy of this study is not positioned in either of the aforementioned “camps” within the field.

**Narrative vs. Expository**

In Norbert Elliot’s 1995 essay “Narrative Discourse and the Basic Writer,” he provides a detailed review of major players in the field at the time he was writing (most notably Mike Rose and Min-Zhan Lu) who take what he interprets as two opposing positions on the use of narrative writing assignments in the classroom. Elliot claims that Rose is an example of a scholar who advocates for expository writing assignments. Elliot then provides a short lit review of what he sees as a minority in the field who advocate for the use of narrative in basic writing classrooms. Elliot then continues to critique the expository writing assignments that he claims instructors like to use in order to prepare students for what “they feel” is the kind of writing that students will face in the University. While Elliot rejects the stance that basic writing classrooms serve to further marginalize students, he claims that this perception exists because students are not performing academic genres in the ways they are expected to; but according to Elliot, the problem is that students should not be asked to perform these genres at all. Elliot argues that students are not assigned the type of writing that will make them successful and, according to him, that type of writing is personal narrative. To explain further how he regards narrative writing, Elliot evokes Wendy Hesford when he asserts that

More open-ended and provisional than the traditional academic model of argumentative exposition, personal writing and its use of narrative is part of the framework advocated by composition instructors such as Wendy Hesford to help bridge "the chasms which alienate students from one another, from teachers, and from the learning process" (Hesford in Elliot 14).

While I agree that when students are asked to do “personal writing,” it can lead to bridging what Hesford calls the “chasms” that alienate students from all the aforementioned parts of their
college writing lives, this dissertation project (albeit likely not the first to do it) offers an important nuance not present in Elliot’s argument.

Elliot’s oversight, and the missing nuance in this argument, is the fact that there exists a middle ground. It does not have to be that basic writers are either writing narrative-based essays or they are practicing academic genres. Instead, it is possible to use narrative writing (in this case, reflection-as-narrative) in a classroom in which students are also practicing expository academic genres. As Kathleen Yancey reminds us, the process of reflection allows students to be “agents of their own learning” (Yancey 5). One can argue that the kinds of reflection Yancey defines in her book are not the same as the kinds of narrative writing that are being advocated for by Elliot. However, while personal narrative may not always be considered reflection, it is difficult to deny that reflection is narrative-based – students are asked to consider themselves as writers in regards to the writing they produce, and in those moments they tell the stories of their identities as writers. This is most closely related to what Yancey refers to as “constructive reflection” where she specifically positions this kind of reflection as different insofar as it is a cumulative reflection that has a “shaping effect” which contributes to a “writer’s identity” through multiple texts and contexts of writing (Yancey 15).

**Academic genres**

At the time that Elliot wrote his critique of exposition in basic writing, it might have been appropriate to refer to common writing assignments as an “egocentric drive to prove a point.” However, it remains (and Elliot himself acknowledges) that those instructors were making an effort to prepare students for what they felt students would face in the future. While I do not believe my own assignments to be part of an “egocentric drive,” I do have a clear sense of where my own basic writing students at Urban University are headed especially as it relates to the
curriculum they will face within the English department (of which they are required to take intro and intermediate writing in order to obtain any degree). Because of this, I designed the basic writing curriculum at Wayne State in order to prepare students for the genres they would practice in subsequent writing courses assuming they take them at Urban University.

This aspect of the basic writing classrooms of this study is important here because it is the manifestation of the nuance described earlier in this chapter. The way that academic genres were incorporated into my classrooms also upheld what Elliot refers to as incorporating the “world of academy into their own lives” (Elliot 19). While Elliot seems to believe that narrative alone can accomplish this, this project asserts that reflection as part of self-directed pedagogy, carefully scaffolded between academic genre assignments, can still very much achieve the important goal of helping basic writers to see how the academy fits into their own lives.

Ultimately, Elliot claims that narrative “helps students discover and create the metaphors for their lives.” While this is a noble endeavor and certainly can help students to reflect on their discourse(s) much in the way Richard Rodriguez did in Hunger of Memory, many teachers of basic writing have less time and more to contend with when asking students to tap into such complex notions of their literate lives.

This is not to suggest that there is no value in using a semester’s time to begin basic writers on the journey of discovering their own literacies through several personal narrative assignments, however, I am suggesting that there is a middle ground – a nuance – that honors the traditional narrative legacies of basic writing instruction while also regarding literacies as multiple, fluid, and – oddly enough – the sturdiest bridge a basic writer might have for the rest of their education.

**Discourse, Agency, and Basic Writing**
As I explored in the previous section, writing studies has a rich history of teachers and scholars who have debated the value of narrative writing as a core component in basic writing classrooms. Some believe that narrative is the key to bridging basic writer’s lives with their new role in the academy while others have contended that narrative writing does not support what basic writers need to know in order to write for the university. In the case of the basic writing students at Urban University, as their instructor I felt it important to teach the foundational genres (e.g. summary, response, analysis) that I knew would serve to prepare them for their first-year writing class.

And while the classroom design of this study did not move to impact or measure students’ literate practices, the theory behind it (self-directed learning) is one that focuses on students’ agency in the classroom insofar as the classroom design focuses on students’ direction of their learning within the classroom in various ways (e.g. what is most important for them to learn for their own growth, how best to conduct peer review, choosing classroom activities to practice course concepts). This concept of agency is important when we think about Yancey’s definition of reflection as students being agents of their own learning. In the previous section, I referenced the reflections/self-assessments that students wrote in my classroom as narratives that were focused on exploring success/achievement in relation to learning objectives (specifically the personal learning objective). This element of the self-directed classroom is important because it demonstrates the connection between agency, reflection, literacy, and academic genres for basic writers. Most important in this section of the chapter, though, is the theory of literacy that supports the pedagogy of self-direction for basic writers. This theory of literacy is defined by Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner in their article “Translingual Literacy and Matters of Agency.”
What Lu and Horner call for in terms of students’ language and language practices is a move away from “understanding context simply in terms of self-evident places – for example, the supposedly unchanging context of home or school – by foregrounding the specificity of a temporal context of individual instances of language practice from moment to moment” (Lu and Horner 5-6). What their perspective on language does here is reinforce the call to look beyond the “self-evident” when it comes to how students should practice writing and – for the purposes of this study – what we might look for when wanting to determine whether our classrooms are promoting student dispositions. Lu and Horner continue, stating

In defining agency this way, a translingual approach marks reading and writing and the teaching of writing as what Pennycook terms “meso-political” action: action that mediates the “micro” and the “macro.” Individual users of language exert agency in responding to the intersection and differences between the macro and the micro, and in light of the specificity of relations, concerns, motives, and purposes demanding meaningful response in individual writers’ past, present, and future lives. (Lu and Horner, 5-6, emphasis mine).

It is clear that Lu and Horner are calling for a way to view students’ language that allows for us to see language as fluid – as something that moves beyond the common view of “code-switching,” “standard written English,” and “home discourse” – to understand language as something more than honoring places, spaces, and origins. In fact Lu and Horner are clear in their call for teachers of writing to encourage students to recognize their agency in choosing what kind of discourse they write whether it be dominant discourse or a home discourse or both. In this way, the “translingual” approach to literacy is not about where language comes from, but a student’s ability to articulate how and why they “do” language.

In the self-directed classroom, basic writers are “translingual” insofar as the personal learning objectives they develop and monitor over the course of the semester are tapping in to their agency (sometimes in terms of their discourse, sometimes in terms of other choices they
make). Students in the self-directed classroom are not monitored in terms of their discourse – they *monitor themselves* in terms of how they engage with what Lu and Horner call the “macro” and the “micro” – in other words, how they feel their goals are being met (in that moment [micro] and/or in the larger context of their writing lives [macro]). We see this in the results of the study when students break down their goals into multi-causal descriptors and as they engage with their present, the past, and the future writing work and achievement. For example, in Melina’s first self-assessment, she uses multi-causal language to do what Lu and Horner call exerting “agency in responding to the intersection and differences between the macro and the micro:”

We have had some reading assignments so I’ve been reading more often. Sometimes I don’t understand the reading that’s why I don’t read that often. But I see with just taking my time or reading it over it will help me comprehend the concepts of the readings. The summarizing sources reading helped me with summarizing the article a bit. By combining ideas in sentences and paragraphs, and by highlighting the main point of the article. The article presentation gave me a chance to express what I felted about college costs. By having to write a summary I wrote what I felt was right about college so that was expressing how I felt in writing (Milena, SA1 emphasis mine).

As we can see in Milena’s self-assessment, she chooses to focus on her reading habits not only as what they are now but how they carry over from broader experiences she has as a reader (macro). Milena then moves to the “micro” context of a classroom assignment (the article presentation) as she seems to draw on the intersection of these moments all leading up to her ability to express herself in relation to a text.

What Milena’s self-assessment says about the self-directed classroom is that it promotes students to explore their own purposes for learning. This self-direction promotes Milena to have agency in her learning as she determines what it most meaningful to her. This approach to goal-setting and monitoring might also prompt the teacher/researcher to abandon preconceived
notions of any “self-evident” contexts of student success. The latter serves to widen the lens through which we might understand how efficacy “plays out” in students’ writing. Specifically, as students use multi-causal descriptions of their personal goals, the students appear to begin to gain an understanding of what success means and those specifics do change depending on the assignment they are reflecting on, the context, and their purpose – as Lu and Horner call it, the macro and the micro. These “sub-goals” are often fluid (drawing on experiences both inside and outside of what they learn and do in the writing classroom exclusively) and illustrative of what students care about because they are task-specific as well as context specific. Students’ own language for those task-specific sub-goals emphasizes the importance of agency and the ways in which that agency can be privileged in a classroom that also asks students to practice expository, academic writing.

The way reflection is taught and utilized in the self-directed classroom serves as an alternative to a common approach to basic writing classrooms in which narrative writing is frequently turned to in order to build students’ connections to their writerly identities. Of course narrative practices are valuable for students who are practicing writing with the intention to move into subsequent writing courses. However, it might also be the case that students who will be taking subsequent writing classes might also benefit from practicing those genres which they will confront in those future courses (e.g. basic writers who then will enroll in first-year writing). Using reflection with attention to goal-development can provide the same benefit of larger narrative writing assignments while also affording for an instructor to focus on the practice of multiple genres which may help students to become more flexible writers as they progress in

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30 Earlier in this chapter and in chapter two, I referred to the difference between identifying and defining self-efficacy as it relates to the success of students written work in the course (e.g. their grades/evaluation) and understanding students’ own discussion of what self-efficacy and success are and how they are defined.
their writing lives. Attention to the transition that basic writers will make to their subsequent writing contexts is also an important implication for writing research more broadly.

**Implications for Writing Research**

In the summer of 2012, I developed this project out of an inspiration by the basic writers of Urban University whom I felt deserved a better classroom – one in which they could achieve their maximum potential. As I began to research best practices for teaching, every compelling argument and practical advice came from the field of Educational Psychology. As I continued to read, I wondered why it was that the concepts I found in those texts were largely absent from my own field – one in which pedagogy is considered to be a primary area of theory and research. It was at this moment that I knew I wanted to pursue a project that would apply principles of teaching that (as far as I had seen) had not been studied in my own field of Writing Studies. It was my hope that perhaps, based on the findings of this study, I might then contribute a best practice for the teaching of basic writing.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the results from this study have the potential to be useful to any researcher looking to investigate student dispositions more broadly, and also any teacher who is looking for a method with which to identify and measure the disposition of self-efficacy in their students’ writing. But where does this leave basic writers? What does this project mean for the basic writing students in my own classroom and what they were or were not able to accomplish?

I believe the answer to this is two-fold. Foremost, studying basic writing classrooms (in addition to first-year writing classrooms) makes visible the work of basic writing students. Without rigorous studies of basic writers, we might be left to use FYC data to “reverse engineer” basic writing pedagogy and assessment without attending to the context of their learning. Early
on in this project as I researched existing scholarship on knowledge transfer and dispositions in writing studies, I found that almost all classroom studies focused on the population of first-year writers. This was curious to me not only as I thought about how many basic writing programs exist across the country, but also for the fact that basic writing classrooms serve such a large population of students at Urban University and those students go on to be those first-year writers who the field is interested in knowing so much about.

Because of this, I began to ask myself whether and how those students (the basic writers who then become first-year writers) had something unique to say about their dispositions about writing and (as part of the original research questions of this study) whether and how they saw their writing knowledge transferring to different contexts. This study contributes to these conversations in our field because its results show that students’ reflective writing offers insights into how basic writers define and develop self-efficacy and success. Because basic writers were the population of this study, we can hopefully continue to pursue these questions regarding them specifically and that any data may prove useful for the preservation of basic writing courses when their very existence and effectiveness is often challenged.

The second implication of this study for basic writing has to do with best practices in the classroom. Writing Studies has and continues to be interested in students’ prior knowledge and how it informs their uptake and practice of composition skills (Robertson; Taczak; Rounsaville). What this study does is provide current and future basic writing teachers and researchers a(nother) lens through which to design their classrooms. As I addressed in chapter 2, this project provides one clear classroom design that can allow for instructors to clearly implement the

31 While some might argue that Herrington & Curtis’ Persons in Process and Marilyn Sternglass’ Time to Know Them are studies with basic writers that relate to dispositions and transfer, I would argue that these studies were long-enough ago to be considered as “pre-dating” the more recent conversations about knowledge transfer and dispositions in the field that provide more substantive theories regarding whether and how students are developing dispositions/making the moves to transfer knowledge.
“student-centered” teaching and learning that our field has long advocated. The practice of self-directed learning in basic writing classrooms (specifically as it relates to students’ development and monitoring of a personal learning objective) aligns with conversations in the field regarding basic writers’ agency in their written work (Gray-Rosendale; Elliot; Rose; Bizzell).

As detailed previously in this chapter, prominent discussions of basic writers’ success largely revolve around whether students are able to perform academic discourse in standard written English (e.g. the well-known debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae in which they discussed personal writing and academic writing). While much debate about basic writers’ abilities is focused on whether they can or should be successful in adopting academic discourse, success is understood differently through the implications of this study. In this study, students’ reflections were not read with the goal of identifying a particular discourse, lexicon, code-switching or code-meshing of their writing. Instead, in this study, success is understood by the agency the student demonstrates in his or her articulation and development of their learning objectives.

This study was not one that sought to investigate students’ literacy or literate practices nor did the prompts for their reflections ask them to write in any particular way (e.g. the prompts did not asks students to write in SWE or encourage them not to if that was so their desire). Instead, the prompts merely asked students to discuss whether and how they felt they had achieved goals for the course (and one might assume that students in the basic writing classroom were doing their best to conform to the practices of SWE as students generally attempt to do throughout their educational lives). Through the pedagogy of this study, teachers of basic writing might feel more comfortable with “meshing” narrative and expository writing in their assignments and/or pursue research with this tension in mind.
Implications for Dispositions Research

In addition to writing research more broadly, there are implications regarding future research into student dispositions and how they might affect learning. At the Conference on College Composition and Communication a few years ago, I attended a Special Interest Group for scholars who were interested in or actively engaging in researching cognition and writing. During this SIG meeting, I realized then (more than I had before) that despite what I had read in various anthologies depicting the history of writing studies, people were still interested in and still researching various ways in which cognition affected students’ writing. In particular, researchers are still curious about what more we can learn about the impact of dispositions on our students writing, whether dispositions affect their ability to learn to write, and whether those dispositions affect their ability to transfer that knowledge beyond our classrooms. In addition and in relation to this meeting, the SIG organizers and a keynote speaker (who is a noted scholar in writing studies) circulated a CFP for chapters focusing on writing and cognition for a planned edited collection.

Because of this and because of the recent work being done to determine if we are able to measure the impact of pedagogy on students’ dispositions, I am confident that this project contributes to writing research more broadly in the field of writing studies. Specifically, this project contributes to those looking for methods and methodologies to define self-efficacy in students’ writing. As explain in chapter 3 of this project, in my original attempt in this project to apply existing definitions of self-efficacy to my students’ written reflections, I learned rather quickly that my students did not use the same language to discuss their learning and efficacy
beliefs (this made sense given that the original researcher’s terms were used to gauge efficacy beliefs in studies outside of the field of writing studies).  

This experience – which led to subsequent passes at the data and the identification of new patterns – afforded for a new way to identify students’ articulation of efficacy beliefs. I believe this demonstrated two things: 1) that self-efficacy is a more complicated construct than we may have understood it to be and that the ability to measure self-efficacy via methods like a survey instrument does not necessarily mean that we can use the same terms and constructs to identify and measure self-efficacy qualitatively in students’ writing, and 2) that regardless of the complexity of self-efficacy as it plays out in students’ written reflections, we may still be able to measure the existence and development of that self-efficacy in students’ writing through identifying the multi-causal descriptions that students use to describe their progress in a classroom via their goal setting and goal achievement (or lack thereof).

The development of qualitative coding for aspects of self-efficacy can inform the ways in which researchers consider student self-efficacy as measureable in student writing. The ability to measure student self-efficacy – especially the identification of multi-causal descriptions of goal achievement – can then lead to specific assessment practices that may be helpful for writing programs and writing teachers alike.

**Implications for Writing Programs**

As we know, the history of basic writing in U.S. higher education is one that is fraught with controversy, much of which is focused on whether basic writing should exist in post-secondary education and, if so, in what capacity should it operate within a writing program? These are legitimate questions most especially when we think about the difference between two-

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32 Here I am referring to Albert Bandura’s definitions of self-efficacy as used in survey instruments to gauge quantitative measures of self-efficacy for students in educational contexts (e.g. intro and exit surveys that asked students to identify how they feel about their abilities in a particular domain – writing, math, etc).
year and four-year institutions as well as the challenges of new stipulations for the funding public higher education. In its history, basic writing has been seen as an obstacle, a space for marginalization and the preservation of difference, as well as a course that is confused about how (and does little if nothing) to prepare students for the context of academic writing. I think it is easy to see how the aforementioned perspectives are/have been born by concerns that are related to the goal of developing a strong writing program that serves a student body. That said, I believe that while these perspectives are based in valid concerns, they are not accurate.

The strongest implication of this study for writing programs throughout the country is the increased visibility that research into basic writing can achieve. The act of pursuing answers that are unique to a population of basic writers makes a strong case for the importance of studying every group of students within a writing sequence/writing program. Take into consideration that recent results of a national survey of 493 4-year institutions, 43% indicated that they have a basic writing program at their institution. At the time of this study, basic writers comprised just under half of the total population of students who entered writing classrooms in their freshman year at Urban University. Given this information, we can imagine that if one were to study students within first-year writing at Urban University, there is the potential that different outcomes could be indicative of the diverse background of the students within those groups of first-year writers. These facts lead me as a researcher to ask questions regarding the ways in which students in Urban University’s basic writing classrooms were learning and how they saw that learning as applicable to current and future situations in which they would be asked to perform writing tasks.

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33 Some 4-year public institutions have faced budget cuts if so-called “remedial” courses remained part of the curriculum. The idea here is that secondary schools should sufficiently prepare students for writing at the college level and therefore a state should not spend money “twice” in order to prepare students to write for the university.

34 http://writingcensus.swarthmore.edu/survey/4?question_name=s4q193&op=Submit#results
It is then what we do with the results of this research that works even more to benefit a writing program. Specifically, if a writing program experiences pressure to deliver clear, measurable progress from their population of basic writers, having as many ways to measure that success can only increase the program’s potential of answering those requests from administration. For example, the in the fourth chapter of this project, I indicated that the method of identifying the multi-causal description of goal achievement in students’ reflective writing could lead to an understanding of the specific sub-component skills students need to write effectively. In addition to this, identifying multi-causal descriptors could lead to the ability to quantitatively measure statements of self-efficacy beliefs. The potential connection between personal goal setting, the use of multi-causal descriptions of those goals, and its connection to the presence of self-efficacy language, could in fact provide a set of data with which to present program administrators to argue the value of basic writing courses that ask students to develop and monitor their own learning objectives.

The aforementioned data could also lead to further studies to determine whether and how the pedagogy that affords for this kind of reflective writing is effective in transferring writing knowledge and skills to future or concurrent writing contexts. For example, a teacher of basic writing at Urban University might conduct a longitudinal study which seeks to determine whether a self-directed pedagogy focusing on personal learning objectives has a greater likelihood of students’ transferring knowledge and skills to their first-year writing course. A study of this kind could then lead to productive, collaborative curricular revision amongst basic writing and first-year writing faculty within a writing program. This collaboration might come as a result of identifying what students valued and retain from their basic writing course (as they would identify in reflective writing in their first-year writing course). Instructors of both courses
could then consider any necessary/useful revisions to the curriculum so that bridge between the
courses remains strong.

Regardless of the degree of success in any hypothetical scenario, the endeavor to
research basic writers and basic writing pedagogy can only serve to increase the conversation
and collaboration between writing program faculty, thus increasing the potential for students to
feel a stronger connection between their basic writing and first-year writing classrooms.

Implications for Writing Assessment

As Brian Huot, Peggy O’Neil, and Cindy Moore remind us in *A Guide to College Writing
Assessment*, “if we believe that literacy activities or events occur within – and reflect – a social
context… then assessment (itself a literacy activity or event) must account for context in order to
yield meaningful results” (Huot et al 60). In an effort to be concise, in this section I will focus
on one element of context that I believe to be the most impactful for assessing basic writers and
basic writing classrooms within a writing program – that element is knowing who the students
are within these basic writing classrooms. Not only is this context integral for assessing basic
writers in general, but it is the most impactful context of writing assessment as it relates to the
theory, methods, and results of this study.

The theoretical framework and research methods of this study demonstrate a commitment
to investigating the disposition of students in a task-specific way – a way that asks students to
report on their progress in a course as close as possible to the context in which the student is
writing. Generally, when attempting to assess basic writing students, we must “argue for multiple
indicators of student performance and should carefully weigh the data generated by standardized
testing with the knowledge of the individual particularities, or differences, that are harder to
measure but which have a significant impact on classroom learning and achievement” (Huot et al
What this project does is contribute a potential approach to considering those “particularities and differences” which we acknowledge are indeed difficult to measure. As we get closer to determining the best methods through which to measure difficult things like dispositions (which have that impact on classroom learning and achievement), we can honor the context of our students in much stronger and significant ways in future assessments.

It is the case that the methods and results of this project show promise for future assessment of basic writers (especially here at Urban University) by offering ways in which to measure a particular disposition in students’ written reflections. In addition to the ability to look closely at the disposition of self-efficacy in student writing, this study identifies the construct of multi-causality in students’ written reflections that might prove to be useful in determining how students operationalize learning objectives. An understanding of how students view their learning objectives in the course and monitor them throughout the semester can be a way to address the difficulty of attending to the “particularities and differences” of students’ own unique contexts which affect whether and how we are able to assess them effectively.

However, when it comes to other methods of programmatic assessment – most notably interviews and focus groups which are largely based on students’ volunteered participation – implications of this study might problematize these common assessment methods where we may not have considered a problem before. Entering into this project, I realized that it might be the case that students entered my classrooms with pre-determined dispositions toward writing of which I might not be able to change in just one semester (or more in any case). I also considered that it might be the case that there exists a pedagogy that could, in fact, have some impact on that

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35 It might be the case also that the Personal Learning Objective (PLO) is the a key factor in facilitating multi-causal descriptions in students’ reflections in which teachers and researchers would need to implement a specific pedagogy including this element in order to yield a result within which they can identify/measure multi-causality.
self-efficacy (as, in part, a social construct) that could impact that self-belief for the better (or for the worse) based on a student’s experience in my classroom.

What I found was that self-efficacy beliefs are much more complicated than that and what I thought about self-efficacy and students’ expressions of it was entirely unable to be applied to my students’ writing. What was realized through this, in part, was something I addressed in the limitations of my project – that my study might have benefited from a survey instrument implemented in the beginning and at the end of the semester in order to measure those expressions of self-efficacy against the task-based self-efficacy that was ultimately identified in the students’ written reflections. As it relates to the common assessment methods of focus groups and interviews, I believe it is possible that the implementation of a pedagogy which specifically seeks to foster and develop student dispositions could have the potential to increase the participation of basic writing students in these voluntary assessment methods.

In my own classroom, I had difficulty gaining participation from students for my own focus groups – from my own students. This lead me to believe as I continued thinking about this in subsequent semesters, that perhaps students who lack self-efficacy might not wish to respond to a call for participation in focus groups because they might believe they do not have much or anything to add. So, despite the fact that scholars have called for methods like focus groups and formal interviews (Harrington; Adler-Kassner) as the “best means of gathering information about student experiences, attitudes, and beliefs,” (Huot) this may not be the case for a context-specific population of students (e.g. the basic writing students at Urban University). A pedagogy that seeks to address and develop self-efficacy could lead to an increase in participatory justice as it relates to programmatic assessment.

Conclusion
Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated the connection between self-directed pedagogy, student agency, literacy, and the teaching of academic genres in basic writing. I also emphasized the importance of students’ use of multi-causal descriptions of their goals as it relates to their perceptions of success. Based on the results of the study, I recommend that we consider two lessons from turning to cognitive psychology to understand student self-efficacy in basic writing: 1) that we should consider pursuing self-efficacy – in the least, perhaps even other dispositions more broadly – as a task-specific construct and 2) With Bandura’s call for considering that efficacy beliefs often have a multi-causal construct, we find that students do, in fact, appear to use multi-causal descriptors to discuss their achievements (or lack thereof).

It is the students’ reflective writing that yields the multi-causal writing as students use these reflections to determine what they believe to be (in their words) the keys/measures of success in the writing classroom. What we find from this type of reflection from students is that looking at these constructs might show us that students’ own language for those task-specific subcomponents are crucial for our ability to understand self-efficacy but also for our ability to see how students comprehend what they are being asked to do. The multi-causal construct (both its use and our attention to it) emphasizes students’ agency as it relates to their own understanding of success.

As we begin to gain more of an understanding of what success looks like to the basic writer, we are then able to think about what that means when we think about the literacies that students are practicing in the basic writing classroom. As I detailed in chapter 2, the classrooms of this project emphasized students’ ability to create and work to meet their own goals. The goal achievement was more so a focal point than asking students to consider what kind of writing they produce (whether it is true to a home discourse, whether it’s “code switching,” or whether it is
strict in its execution of Standard Written English). This project shows how the self-directed classroom (specifically the personal learning objective and multi-causal descriptions) provided a venue for students to practice what Lu and Horner refer to as a “translingual” approach to literacy. Ultimately, in considering basic writers’ agency, we might shift our focus from which literacies they are using to how effectively they can create and pursue their own goals.
APPENDIX A

Reflection prompts (questions to consider for your self-assessment):

- “What wasn’t so great?”
  - What were your biggest areas for growth as a writer at the beginning of the semester? Have they changed? How?
  - What kinds of problems/challenges did you encounter this semester, and during revisions, and how did you solve them?
  - What did you learn/notice/pay attention to with regard to comments given to you (or done on your own) about your writing?
  - Surface conventions and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence structure, etc.)?
  - What pushed you forward in your writing this semester?
  - What changes have been made in HOW you go about writing? How and why?

- “What was great?”
  - What was your biggest victory in your own writing this semester?
  - What, specifically, helped you to most to make your pieces as strong as they could be?
  - What parts of your project essays were done especially well? What qualities or characteristics, specifically, make them effective?
  - What have you learned to do, as a writer, that you didn’t know about or practice before this semester?

- “What about Goals and Objectives?”
  - Where in your project essays did you meet course goals and objectives? (point to specific examples!)
  - Where in your project essays did you meet your own personal learning objectives? (point to specific examples!)

- “Where can you use this?”
  - How will you recognize future writing situations where you can use skills and strategies learned in this course?
  - What might you do with your writing in the future? (in academia, in life…)
  - What specific strategies, processes or concepts that you learned in this course would be helpful to you in the future?
APPENDIX B

Who am I? Where am I coming from? Why am I here?

Reflection is a key part of our classroom this semester. In our initial essay, the goal will be to reflect on what brought us to college, to ENG 1010, and what we hope to gain from our time here. This essay will also serve as an excellent “getting-to-know-you” tool – this is important because much of our work this semester will be in groups.

To do this, you will first answer these three questions: Who am I? Where am I coming from? Why am I here?

In addition, choose a text (a poem, song, film, book, etc.) that you think represents you and your responses to these “who am I” questions. Explain why it does so, pointing to specific moments in the text in your explanation.

Your written response to these questions should be 750-1000 words long, typed, in MLA format.

We will do some initial writing in class.

Your “final” version is due Thursday, September 6th, by class time.

Please upload the assignment to Blackboard.

Evaluation:

1. The text explains the student’s responses to the questions in sufficient detail. 25
2. The text is organized in purposeful, coherent paragraphs. 10
3. Sentences are clear and coherent; word choice is appropriate for the purpose and audience; there is minimal error. 10
4. The essay meets the requirements of the assignment, including length and formatting (MLA). 5
APPENDIX C

Foundational genre: Summary

Overview:

One of the goals of the basic writing classroom is to understand the multiple genres of writing expected of college students. While we will discuss and practice multiple genres throughout the semester, the genre of summary is a foundational genre incorporated into most college writing – in other words, summaries are found almost everywhere.

Task:

For this assignment, we will identify and analyze summaries as well as use in-class exercises to practice the conventions of summary writing. Activities include: choosing an article to summarize, presenting the rationale behind the choice of article, annotating articles and editing for main points, and writing summaries of different lengths. Along with the summary, students will compose a 500-1,000 word reflection on the process of selecting an article and completing the summary assignments.

Project points (150 points possible):

(1) article presentation (20 points)
(1) article annotation (30 points)
(1) peer group session (20 points)
(1) 250-300 word summary (30 points)
(1) self-assessment/reflect on the process of selecting an article and completing the summary assignments.

Self-Assessment / Reflection Rubric

At various moments throughout the semester, students will be asked (either formally or informally) to reflect on aspects of the writing process – these may include but are not limited to: drafting, revising, brainstorming, planning, and final drafts. For this project, your reflection should take the form of an essay addressing the question: how did this project help me to achieve the learning objectives for the course? Feel free to consider any activity we have done in class, any readings, as well as formal assignments submitted to this point. Be sure to include the learning objectives listed in our course syllabus.

You will be evaluated based on the overall thoroughness of your reflection: how well you evaluate your own writing practice(s), and how you use the learning objectives of the course to answer the main essay question.
Rubric (50 points total)

Content: Project identifies and describes learning objective(s) as well as includes citations of specific moments/readings/etc; project reads clearly as a reflection. 20

Thesis: Project includes a strong thesis statement making a claim about the project and its connection to the learning objective(s) for the course. 5

Mechanics: Project contains few grammar and spelling errors 5

Organization: Project is coherent and organized; project transitions well between sentences and paragraphs 10

Formatting: the project meets the requirements of the assignment, including length and formatting (MLA). 10
APPENDIX D

Project 3: Responding to sources
Metcalf – ENG 1010 – Fall 12

Overview: This goal of this assignment is to learn and utilize key strategies/concepts that “expert” writers use to enter into a greater “conversation.” Writers (like all of us) respond to what has already been said – writers do not create out of nothing. Similar to any oral conversation or thoughts/reactions contained within our own mind, writers listen to what others are saying (or writing), think about it and then respond to it with their own ideas.

This assignment is asking you to take on that role. You will be reading two texts, listening to what these authors are saying, and then developing your own view on the issues being discussed. Your papers will not only need to be original, contributing something that has not already been said, but they will also need to speak to the authors who have already joined the conversation. In other words, you will need to connect your unique ideas to what others have said, showing how you are adding to the conversation and not merely speaking into the air.

This is the conversation cycle: listen to what others are saying about an issue (read), develop your own position on the issues (annotate, elaborate, synthesize), directly connect your position to the conversation taking place (talk about the ideas that the authors put forth), and use parts of what others have said to support your unique contribution (integrate quotes into your own original ideas). This is a very complex intellectual task – but this is also an exciting opportunity to create your own ideas and write meaningful papers on real issues. Joining real conversations on important issues is the core of your university education.

Task: We have read 2 different authors’ views on self-confidence and self-directed learning. It appears that it is possible to learn in a certain way that will not only help you retain knowledge, but to continue to pursue knowledge on your own terms. I want you to engage with these ideas in whatever way most meets your needs right now as a writer. That said, you should absolutely do three things:

1) You should generate your own “take” on the idea you are discussing – your essay should not merely repeat the same ideas from the texts – this is *NOT* a summary! You *should* add to the authors’ ideas by including your own thoughts, prior knowledge, experiences, analysis, etc.

2) You need to reference both authors/articles.

3) Try to present your idea in such a way that your reader is invited to think about this issue. In other words, offer insights that might lead someone to ask questions or consider their own situation.
**Format:** 1,000-1,500 words / MLA format

**Pre-writing packet for Project 3:**

2 article annotations (10 points each)
2 quote responses (10 points each)
1 rough draft “game plan” (10 points)
1 rough draft (30 points)
Peer review activity (10 points)
1 reflection/self-assessment (10 points)

**Total pre-writing points:** 100 + **Total final paper points:** 100 = **Total project** 200 points
APPENDIX E

Project 4: Visual and Textual analysis
Metcalf – ENG 1010 – Fall 12

**Overview**: This goal of this assignment is to learn and utilize the skills of analysis. Analytical thinking and writing are at the core of higher education and this assignment (pre-writing assignments as well as the final paper) will approach analysis in different forms in order to provide a broad understanding of the various functions of analysis. In the final paper assignment, you will be asked to use the analytical skills you’ve developed to analyze either the Zimmerman or the McCarthy essay.

**How does analysis differ from response?** As you recall from our previous assignment, responding to a text requires that you introduce your own opinion/perspective to an existing idea/set of ideas. In other words, for a response you were asked to “integrate ideas and information from sources with your own ideas” (Course syllabus).

In an analysis, however, you will be asked to provide an **objective** assessment of the text. Where response includes personal opinion and background knowledge, analysis involves a close reading/viewing of a text to determine two things: **what** function the text serves and **how** it performs this function. Personal opinions, agreements, and/or disagreements are NOT part of an analysis.

**Pre-writing goals and tasks**: Throughout the coming weeks, we will familiarize ourselves with the function of analysis and how it is done. We will view different examples of visual and textual analysis as well as practice analysis in various forms. We will consider several questions including but not limited to:

1) What is the difference between *subjective* and *objective* and why does it matter?
2) What is rhetoric? What are rhetorical techniques?
3) How do we determine an author’s rhetorical purpose?

**We will practice analysis in the following ways:**

1) Practicing analysis by observation/data-collection.
2) Practicing visual analysis
3) Applying what we’ve learned to textual analysis.

**Pre-writing packet for Project 4:**

1 observation assignment/mini-essay (30 points)
1 visual analysis (20 points)
I rough draft “game plan” (10 points)
I rough draft (20 points)
Peer review activity (10 points)
I reflection/self-assessment (10 points)

Final paper assignment:

For the final paper, you will be asked to perform a textual analysis of ONE of two texts: Zimmerman or McCarthy. You project will include a thesis that details your objective analysis, informing the reader of the author’s rhetorical purpose (what) and the techniques the author uses to achieve his/her purpose (how).

Format: 1,500 - 2,000 words / MLA format

Rubric:

Intro/Thesis (Writer explains the “what” and the “how” of the author’s text): 25
Content/Organization (Writer follows a well-organized description/discussion of each portion of the thesis; content is appropriate and on topic): 25
Grammar/spelling (Paper contains few grammar/sentence-level issues; proper formatting is used): 15
Appropriate use of sources (Writer utilizes specific moments in the text to support the thesis; sources are used at appropriate moments throughout the paper): 15
Strength/clarity (Ideas are expressed clearly; writer’s tone and voice are strong and objective; the paper reads clearly as an analysis and not a response): 20

Total pre-writing points: 100 + Total final paper points: 100 = Total project 200 points
APPENDIX F

Project #5: Reflection
ENG 1010 Fall 2012
Metcalf

Objective:

In this project your goal will be to reflect on the work you have completed throughout the course of the semester. In other words, you are being asked to write about your writing and your writing practices. A good way to begin framing your reflection essay is to think through the following questions:

1) What did I know about writing prior to this class?
2) What did I want to learn about writing?
3) How has my writing practice changed?

Writing practices include any part of the writing process: brainstorming, freewriting, outlining, drafting, revising, etc. Feel free to discuss any of these in your reflection essay. In addition to discussing your writing practices, consider the course learning objectives that you’ve reflected on throughout the semester. Recall your own personal learning objective(s) as well as those listed in the syllabus.

Directions:

Compose a 4-5 page reflection essay. Final essays will be in MLA format: double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font with 1” margins. You may choose to reflect however you wish, but the following guidelines must be met:

1) Make direct reference to at least two of the four papers you wrote this semester.

2) Have a clear goal for the reflection. In other words, be clear about whether you’re discussing your achievement of the learning objectives, whether you’re giving a detailed account of your writing processes and how they have changed, or whether you’re discussing how the writing you’ve done in ENG 1010 has impacted your writing outside of the classroom. These are just examples but be sure no matter what approach you take, that the thesis/purpose is clear from beginning to end.

3) Submit a paper that is free of surface errors (grammar errors, spelling errors, MLA formatting errors).

The reflection assignment is due uploaded to Blackboard no later than 11:59pm on Thursday December 13th!
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Print.


ABSTRACT

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-EFFICACY IN BASIC WRITING

by

AMY ANN LATAWIEC

May 2016

Advisor: Dr. Gwendolyn Gorzelsky

Major: English (Rhetoric and Composition)

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation examines and analyzes the work of two sections of basic writing over the course of one semester. I explore relevant research in Writing Studies, Cognitive Psychology, and Educational Psychology to build a framework within which to discuss pedagogical strategies implemented to support student’s self-directed learning behaviors and to positively affect their efficacy beliefs. Through an analysis of students’ written work, I determined whether and how this pedagogy facilitated students’ articulation of efficacy beliefs as evidence through the language of their reflective writing assignments. Analysis of the data suggests three major arguments: first, that while self-efficacy is a complex construct to identify and analyze qualitatively, the multi-causal construct of goal articulation serves as a helpful tool with which to measure it; second, that students’ development and discussion of personal learning objectives – in which students break down those objectives into component parts making the monitoring of their learning accessible and task-based – appears to facilitate students’ use of multi- causality in their writing; third, that identifying task-based learning throughout the course of a semester can lead teachers and researchers to see students’ own language as it relates to their perceptions of success in a writing classroom.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Amy is a Lecturer in the English department at Wayne State University where she teaches Basic Writing (ENG 1010), Introduction to College Writing (ENG 1020), and Technical Writing (ENG 3050). Amy earned her B.A. and M.A. both in English from Wayne State. Amy’s research areas include dispositions and cognition, knowledge transfer (specifically in at-risk populations), Basic Writing theory and pedagogy, and writing program assessment. Amy has presented her research at CCCC, NCTE, CWPA, MLA, and various regional conferences. Amy also co-developed and coordinates the first Composition Learning Community at Wayne State. In addition to her commitment to researching and teaching writing, she also teaches group fitness at her campus gym, enjoys reading indie comics, and loves watching pro wrestling.