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ENGAGING AND ENACTING WRITING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: RE-IMAGINING STUDENT SELF-EFFICACY IN WRITING

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

According to educational theory, learning to write necessitates self-belief that one is capable of performing required tasks. This belief is called self-efficacy, a component of human agency. 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.

This dissertation challenges the current view of self-efficacy as it is described in the educational literature as well as the ways in which self-efficacy in writing is measured, suggesting instead that self-efficacy beliefs and learning to write are deeply contextualized. In this dissertation, I examine student self-efficacy in writing using the lens of activity theory, not only as a set of stated individual beliefs but also as belief-in-action measured as images on writing maps, subtle shifts in language and talk about writing, as well as changes in writing practices. More importantly, I examine the agency that is constructed in the social system of FYC classrooms which may only later become internalized individual beliefs about abilities to write. My study suggests that self-efficacy beliefs are not bound by inside the head as belief about performing certain rules for writing, but instead self-efficacy beliefs about writing are emergent and enacted and bound to particular writing systems. Lingering feelings of agency for
working in particular systems can move with students to similar systems; however, strong beliefs about writing as fixed and rule-bound can actually hinder how much students learn in FYC. The evidence suggests that self-efficacy in writing may be better theorized as *writing efficacy*, emergent agency for writing that strengthens as participants become engaged in working toward the motives of a writing system.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was not the production of one scholar working in isolation. Like many of the students in my study, I came to recognize that any project is the result of many hands and many minds. I wish to acknowledge the various systems of support and individuals who helped in the completion of this project. First, I wish to acknowledge my family, who saw me less and less as this project continued, who encouraged me to continue when I was too overwhelmed, who cooked dinner, did laundry, managed money, ran errands, and generally took over the running of a household for years as this project was underway. To my husband, Michael, who believed in me more than I believed in myself, and to my daughters, Laura, Alicia, and Sarah, who encouraged me, made me laugh, and took on a lot of responsibility, I cannot thank you enough.

I am also grateful to my chair, Elizabeth Wardle, who pushed me to create something better than I thought possible. Elizabeth saw important ideas in my work, offered valuable insights and suggestions, and commiserated and supported me with grace through my tantrums and tears. I also wish to thank my committee members, Blake Scott, David Slomp, and Stacey Pigg, as well as David Wallace, who all generously offered thoughtful, detailed, and encouraging feedback on my writing and who were always available to answer last minute questions.

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participants. Teachers and graduate students in my department all helped me think through complex ideas, listened to my frustrations, and offered encouragement. These included teachers Adele Richardson, Matt Bryan, and Deborah Weaver, who let me bounce ideas and helped make sense of my conclusions. Tara Tripathi and Shabori Sen brought me into their lives, gave me a sense of perspective, helped me clarify theoretical conundrums, and fed me the most delicious Indian meals I’ve ever tasted; Laura Martinez helped administer surveys and generally aided my mental sanity; and Chelle Becker-Bernstein ate bagels with me every Saturday morning while I worked out theoretical and practical concerns. In the midst of a massive staffing change, Amber Mullens took time to schedule rooms for my interviews. At the Dartmouth Summer Seminar, many excellent writing scholars took an interest in my work, most especially, Barbara Bird, who helped me think through the intricacies of coding text.

Without the seven students, two teachers, and two administrators who lay bare their writing, thoughts, and feelings any time I asked, this project would have never happened. From the beginning, they generously shared their writing and their teaching materials. Students drew pictures about their writing processes, which was sometimes frustrating and sometimes funny. I enjoyed every minute talking to each student and teacher. Through this project, I learned more about teaching and writing than I experienced in my years as a classroom teacher, and most importantly, I learned that the best work is accomplished by many rather than one.
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INTRODUCTION

The six chapters in this dissertation explore the concept of self-efficacy in writing and explore alternate ways of understanding self-efficacy in writing, especially its role in learning about writing, as contextually-bound to particular writing systems such as FYC. In Chapter 1: Self-Efficacy, Agency and Learning to Write in Activity Systems is a review of the literature, I first explore self-efficacy as described in the education literature, which theorizes and measures the phenomenon as an individual cognitive belief about how well writing rules are performed. In that chapter, I next lay out three problems with self-efficacy and writing as they are presented in the literature and indicate a need to re-examine self-efficacy in writing as intimately bound to context and systems of action. I suggest that posthuman, socio-cultural, and activity theories offer fuller explanations of self-efficacy as a factor in learning how to write. In Chapter 2, Methods for Studying Self-Efficacy in Writing, I explain the contextual methods I developed for my study of self-efficacy in writing in FYC. My study contrasts current accepted survey measures used by self-efficacy theorists with contextual methods that I developed to explore the phenomenon more thoroughly. In Chapter 3, FYC Classrooms at UCF, I explore the activity systems of the two FYC classrooms in this study, including larger program motives and examine the ways in which the two teachers in my study enact the learning outcomes and program motives of FYC in their classrooms. The results of this chapter suggest that both official and unofficial motives are shared between teachers and administrators in these particular activity systems, and that enacting shared motives creates agency for all participants in the system as they contribute to the work of the system. In Chapter 4, Results of Student Study, I first lay out the results of current self-efficacy surveys that I administered all students
in the two classrooms in this study. I also explain the results of the seven student cases who participated in these classroom activity systems. I then compare the results of the survey with the cases and explore what one measure can tell us about the other. The data shows that high self-efficacy as measured by survey, does not necessarily indicate strong beliefs about learning to write, only strong beliefs about “doing school,” and that this kind of high self-efficacy, in some cases, hindered students from engaging new concepts, enacting new writing practices, and sharing the motives of FYC. In Chapter 5, Emergent and Enacted Agency in Two FYC Writers, I discuss two representative cases that indicate two ends of a continuum from which students engage and enact the motives of FYC and negotiate contradictions between their individual histories and motives and those of the FYC system. Marie, a student with high self-efficacy survey scores was less able to negotiate contradictions and left FYC feeling less able to write, while Danielle, a student with low self-efficacy survey scores was better able to negotiate contradictions and left FYC feeling more empowered as a writer. In Chapter 6, Toward an Emergent and Enacted Model of Self-Efficacy in Writing, I explore how the data from this study suggest a broader and more contextualized model of self-efficacy in writing for FYC. In this model, students must first recognize a need to engage with the writing system in ways that help them resolve contradictions with their own histories. Then, by enacting new writing practices with the help of resources within the system, they build agency for doing the work of the FYC system. This collective action can create a lingering sense of agency about abilities to write in systems and moves with them to new writing situations. This “lingering sense,” I argue, is self-efficacy, but it is not the “brain-built” self-efficacy as described in the self-efficacy literature and measured in the surveys. Instead, it is self-efficacy for doing the work of a system.
in which writing is both a motive and a way to enact that motive. These results also suggest implications for teaching writing in FYC. At the end of the last chapter, I describe *writing efficacy* as emergent and enacted agency for writing in FYC classrooms.
According to educational theory, learning to read and write for the university necessitates self-belief that one is capable of performing required tasks. This belief is called self-efficacy, defined as one’s belief in the ability to perform specific tasks. Educational theorists carefully isolate self-efficacy as one aspect of human agency, studying this single belief separately from other related beliefs that form human agency. Although not universally accepted in educational circles, Bandura and fellow self-efficacy researchers over the last thirty years have posited this single belief as the most important factor in school learning and performance success, including learning writing (Bandura, Pajares, Schunk, Zimmerman). Still, implications and ramifications for this research are vast. Self-efficacy is one of the most-studied aspects of belief systems, with over 570 published studies as of early 2004 (Jones 210). A more recent Web of Science citation search shows nearly 1000 citations of Bandura’s work in the last five years, and there are hundreds of doctoral dissertations that use some form of Bandura’s self-efficacy theory as a basis for studying human performance outcomes in many domains. The influence of self-efficacy research in educational studies also has implications for teachers of writing at the university, where these studies have directly or indirectly influenced the way curriculum decisions and teaching strategies are developed and implemented in first-year composition (FYC) classrooms. For example, teaching practices such as scaffolding writing assignments, peer tutoring, and using written models to teach new forms of writing are directly
descended from Bandura’s self-efficacy research which suggests that scaffolding, tutoring, and modeling are important ways to improve self-efficacy (Bandura “Self-Efficacy” 395).

To date, methods of understanding self-efficacy, based in socio-cognitive theory, have focused on an individual’s cognitive experience in which the social context influences on cognitive beliefs. However, research in writing studies as well as post-modern theories of agency point to a less cognitively situated “self” centered view of self-efficacy and toward a broader, more contextualized, socially constructed understanding of human agency. These areas of inquiry offer avenues for extending and distributing notions of self-efficacy in ways not discussed to date.

This dissertation explores how socio-cultural theories in writing studies and posthuman views of agency challenge the notion that self-efficacy beliefs work as a single set of de-contextualized cognitive beliefs apart from disciplinary knowledge, texts, and the broader social system. The extended, distributed, and enacted view of self-efficacy in writing proposed in this dissertation removes the focus on individual beliefs and shifts the focus to agency as located in systems. This literature review explores how self-efficacy theories can be extended by considering socio-cultural lines of writing studies research and posthuman views of agency that taken together, develop deeply contextualized theories of writing and agency that lead to learning.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief historical overview of self-efficacy theories as they move from cognitive to social cognitive, which will help frame the discussion. Next, I will discuss some problems with the underlying assumptions in these theories. As I lay out each underlying assumption, I will also discuss how applying socio-cultural theories expand existing
notions of self-efficacy. At the end of this chapter, I will introduce my study which uses more contextual methods to examine self-efficacy in FYC.

History of Self-Efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura is acknowledged as the first researcher to systematically study self-efficacy beliefs starting in the 1970’s, and much of the work in self-efficacy studies follow his pioneering work (McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Johnson and Pajares; Jones; Kizilgues, Tekkaya and Sungur; Pajares; Pintrich and DeGroot; Rhoads, Duerden, and Garland; Schunk; Shell, Murphy and Bruning; Zimmerman and Bandura; Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons). In the literature, self-efficacy is defined as “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura “Self” 122). In this section, I will briefly review self-efficacy theories as they have moved from cognitive to socio-cognitive since the 1970’s when Bandura first began work on these theories.

Cognitive Approaches to Self-Efficacy

Historically, Bandura’s cognitive approach to self-efficacy offered a radical challenge to predominant educational ideas, particularly operant behavioral models of B.F. Skinner. Bandura’s theories of self-efficacy and his work on the larger issue of human agency were developed as a response to the predominant behaviorist views at the time: “In this view, human behavior was shaped and controlled automatically and mechanically by environmental stimuli” (Bandura “Social” 2). Bandura’s response to behavioral research, which at first led to the development of a cognitive view of human behavior, attempted to correct the prevalent belief that humans were merely pawns of their environmental stimuli operating on a stimulus-reward
system. According to Pajares, in “rejecting the behaviorists’ indifference to self-processes, Bandura (1986) later proposed a view of human functioning that emphasized the role of self-referent beliefs” (“Self-Efficacy” 139). Bandura’s work did not remain completely cognitive for long, however, and his theories evolved over a thirty-year period, changing with educational paradigms that suggested the importance of social as well as cognitive influences on agency.

_Social Cognitive Views of Self-Efficacy and Agency_  
To expand his theories in the 1980’s and 1990’s, Bandura and other educational psychologists moved toward a social cognitive view of agency. According to Pajares, Bandura “situated the construct [of self-efficacy] within a social cognitive theory of human behavior that diverged from the prevalent cognitivism of the day and embedded cognitive development within a sociostructural network of influences” (Pajares “Current” 1). It is important to note that Pajares emphasizes the role of cognitive beliefs that develop within a social network of _influences_, locating the belief firmly in the cognitive domain of functioning. In his social cognitive model of agency, interactivity influences both behaviors and beliefs. Bandura explains: “Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency (“Social” 4). But underlying this discussion of “emergent interactivity” is a strong foundation in the cognitive processing model. For Bandura, social cognitive theory means that thoughts are influenced by social events, and cognitive processes are at the center of any interactions. Bandura explains that “thoughts are not disembodied, immaterial entities that exist apart from neural events. Cognitive processes are emergent brain activities that exert determinative influence” (“Social” 4). For cognitivists, the brain is the central focus of study where social
influences can affect cognitive functioning, but cognitive functioning does not extend outside the body.

Self-efficacy, according to Bandura, serves not only a pivotal role in social cognitive theory but it is also the central mechanism in human agency. According to Bandura, “Perceived self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants” (“Social” 10). Exploring the social cognitive perspective more fully, Bandura’s later theories of agency are rich and contextual but always situated inside the brain. He states: “human functioning is analyzed as socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally orchestrated within the dynamics of various societal subsystems and their complex interplay” (“Social” 5).

After his social cognitive turn, Bandura acknowledges that self-efficacy is influenced by diverse cultures and social structures: “cultural embeddedness shapes the ways in which efficacy beliefs are developed, the purposes to which they are put, and the sociostructural arrangements through which they are best exercised” (“Social” 16). In all his work, however, Bandura retains his stance against behaviorism and against a reductive view of human agency as reactionary while also acknowledging individual will as central to human functioning; “by choosing and shaping their environments, people can have a hand in what they become” (“Social” 11). Bandura’s cognitively focused stance influenced not only the development of his theories of human functioning but also the ways he and his followers measure individual beliefs.
Bandura’s work and the work of his followers greatly influenced educational studies in agency, motivation, learning, and educational psychology. As a “grand theory” of human agency, one which spans disciplinary context, Bandura aimed to create a “comprehensive theory . . . to provide a unifying conceptual framework that can encompass diverse modes of influence” (“Self-Efficacy Mechanism” 127). While these contributions move theories of learning toward several productive areas of research, Bandura’s theories are always constrained by a cognitively situated view of human agency. Bandura’s contributions to social understandings of human agency are historically important and far-ranging; however, they do not tell the whole story of human belief systems.

Contextually and epistemologically bound within his field of psychology, Bandura naturally speaks in ways that tie his theories to that field. Psychologists and educational psychologists who follow Bandura’s work in learning, rarely question their position on agency as an internal construct. According to James Wertsch, Peeter Tulviste, and Fran Hagstrom: “The most basic, underlying assumption made in theories about agency is that agency is a property of the individual” (336). Bandura, like his colleagues in the field are not ignorant of different viewpoints about agency, are unconcerned with this particular debate. Wertsch and his collaborators explain that prevalent theories of agency as culturally emergent discussed in philosophy and other fields are not unimportant to psychologists, but are not currently fashionable as topics of discussion in the world of psychology (336). Whatever the reason, psychology has been less willing to adopt culturally-bound models of human functioning and have been more concerned with individual cognitive processes. Educational psychologists are also bound by their disciplinary understandings of human learning. Because of their focus on
mechanisms of learning, which they view as biologically bound, educational psychologists focus on those biological and cognitive mechanisms, acknowledging social *influences* but not a social *existence* of those mechanisms.

Bandura’s work on the mechanism of self-efficacy as the most important aspect of human agency is some of the most detailed on the topic of self-efficacy. In these detailed descriptions, Bandura carefully isolates the mechanism of self-efficacy for study in ways that do not conform to the contextual theoretical models he articulates in his theories of agency. Bandura and others that follow his work have studied agency very carefully and theorized its function in ways that were groundbreaking and not previously discussed in educational literature; therefore, it is important not to dismiss the historical value of his research in helping understand how beliefs affect learning in ways that behavioral theories cannot explain.

*Defining Self-Efficacy*

Relationships between the concepts used in educational studies such as student attitude, self-efficacy, student apprehension, performance, and self-concept are multi-faceted and heavily interrelated but also carefully delineated in educational studies in order to isolate and measure individual beliefs with statistical accuracy (Bandura, Pajares, Zimmerman). According to Barry Zimmerman, “As a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy differs conceptually and psychometrically from related motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept, or locus of control” (“Self-Efficacy” 82). *Self-efficacy* in this body of literature refers to perceived capability to perform given tasks, and self-efficacy in writing is the student’s perceived ability to perform writing tasks (Zimmerman and Bandura). For example, self-efficacy in writing does not refer to a student’s attitude toward writing but attitude about
ability to perform the task (Bandura, Pajares, Zimmerman). Bandura explains: “Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people’s beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments” (309). For Bandura and his followers, it is possible to isolate beliefs about ability to perform a task from the attitude about the topic, to measure these beliefs and quantify them.

Self-efficacy as a judgment of capability is distinguished from other constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, locus of control, and outcome expectancies which, for Bandura, are entirely different phenomena (309). For example, Zimmerman and Bandura explain the importance of singular cognitive features on motivation: “The capacity to exercise self-influence by cognized aspirational goals provides a major cognitive mechanism of motivation” (847). Because self-efficacy researchers have carefully separated students’ beliefs in self-efficacy from general concepts of student attitude, self-concept, agency, and other self-beliefs using statistical factor analysis, many of these researchers claim that self-efficacy emerges as the most influential factor in any type of student performance from math to writing (Bandura; Pajares; McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Zimmerman and Bandura; Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons). While these claims are not universally accepted by educational theorists, the influence of Bandura’s research on general conceptions of human agency as socially constructed is undeniable.

*Self-Efficacy for Learning*

Self-efficacy researchers, especially Bandura, have made broad claims about the central role of self-efficacy in learning: “Perceived self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants” (Bandura *Self-Efficacy*)
Like other social cognitive models in educational psychology, self-efficacy theory offers models for better learning in any domain through teaching strategies that increase self-efficacy beliefs. Vlad-Petre Glaveanu explains that social cognitive models are designed to “produce and test hypotheses . . . . and from them to conceive more productive group interactions” (479). This scientific approach to learning leads to more experimental and quantitative measures of learning outcomes.

Self-efficacy theory is used to explore ways in which students learn to write as well as to develop ways teachers can help students learn to write (Charney, Newman, and Palmquist; Johnson and Pajares; McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Schunk; Schunk and Swartz; Shell, Murphy, and Bruning; Zimmerman and Bandura). Based on much replicated research, Bandura posits four durable strategies for teaching students in any discipline, including writing. These strategies include using: (1) verbal persuasion by a mentor, (2) peer modeling, (3) scaffolding of assignments for providing mastery experiences, and (4) the management of writing anxiety (Zimmerman 88). Teaching strategies such as these, based on self-efficacy research, are often used by writing instructors to help students meet writing challenges. For teachers who read self-efficacy research, these teaching strategies are validated by the findings of these studies. The underlying assumption in this research, however, is that a classroom houses a set of individuals who participate in dialectical moves between the teacher and the learner where the teacher sets up classroom activities that encourage self-efficacy for learning particular content and performing particular tasks.

Bandura’s theories have something to contribute to understanding how students learn in specific domains and for considering how student beliefs affect learning to write, and his
theories certainly move educational psychology toward a fully contextualized view of human functioning in ways that behavioral and cognitive processing theories do not explain. Self-efficacy theories have influenced current teaching practices and have broad implications for teaching any content, but in this study, I focus on how these theories affect the teaching and learning of writing.

*Self-Efficacy and Writing*

While the broad claims of self-efficacy theorists have not always gained firm traction in fields related to teaching writing, a number of individual and meta-analysis studies by these self-efficacy theorists claim that self-efficacy is a major factor contributing to writing performance for adolescent and early college students (Bandura; McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Pajares; Schunk; Shell, Murphy, and Bruning). Zimmerman and Bandura clearly state this claim: “Perceived self-efficacy is one of the influential determinants in the proposed causal structure governing writing course attainment” (847). One of the premises about writing that often appears in the literature on writing self-efficacy is that writing is performed in isolation as a mental activity. Zimmerman and Bandura articulate this stance: “writing activities are usually self-scheduled, performed alone, require creative effort sustained over long periods with all too frequent stretches of barren results, and what is eventually produced must be repeatedly revised to fulfill personal standards of quality” (846). The bulk of research on self-efficacy and writing remains located in education fields and remains steeped in theoretical and methodological traditions of that field which post that learning to write is a cognitive task performed in isolation (Bandura and Zimmerman, Pajares, Schunk).
Not all self-efficacy research offers conclusive findings to support the broader claims about learning to write. While the research indicates links between student self-efficacy beliefs and student performance on specific writing tasks, several areas of research that measure general student attitudes toward writing and various instructional interventions have proved inconclusive in improving student performance, especially when measured by student grades. Part of this discrepancy may be linked to the heavily intertwined nature of student attitudes toward writing, self-efficacy, beliefs about enjoyment in writing, beliefs about the learnability of writing, self-concept, and writing apprehension (Bandura; Pintrich, Marx and Boyle). Mike Palmquist and Robert Young, for example who are specialists in writing, assert that a belief in writing learnability should be considered an important factor in student apprehension about writing, which ultimately leads to lower performance (140). Ann Penrose and Barbara Sitko also offer a collection of practices that encourage a view of writing as learnable in their study of student attitudes. Additionally, Davida Charney, John Newman, and Mike Palmquist conducted a study, in which the results “indicate that students who had low belief in the learnability of writing had lower opinions of their own writing ability” (313); however, other researchers found no significant correlation among grades, enjoyment of writing, belief in the learnability of writing, and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons 672). These findings can be attributed to other factors than student performance, though, because grades in writing courses are not always or solely linked superior performance on writing tasks. Duane Shell, Carolyn Murphy, and Roger Bruning, however, do find strong evidence to support the notion that self-efficacy is correlated with writing performance. While studies of self-efficacy in writing conducted by researchers with a background in psychology offer more conclusive
results about the central role of self-efficacy in learning to write (Bandura, Pajares, Schunk, Zimmerman), studies by researchers with a background in writing are less conclusive (Charney, Newman, and Palmquist, Palmquist and Young, Penrose and Sitko). Taken together, studies by scholars who are situated in writing theories than in psychological theories, suggest that that self-efficacy is too narrowly described as a cognitive process and that helping students build self-efficacy in writing is not as simple as adjusting a few teaching practices.

Complicating Self-Efficacy

Given Bandura’s description of self-efficacy beliefs as influential to many subsequent views of human agency for learning (Bandura, Pajares, Schunk, Zimmerman), it is important to examine the underlying assumptions about human beliefs and human agency as they are applied to teaching and learning writing. Taken together, studies conducted by researchers with strong foundations in early writing study research (Charney, Newman, and Palmquist; Palmquist and Young; Penrose and Sitko) offer some inroads to understanding self-efficacy not as a central mechanism for writing performance, but as part of a larger, more complex system of socially constructed beliefs about writing. While the models proposed by self-efficacy researchers who follow Bandura offer many contributions to writing instruction, the underlying assumptions about agency and writing that undergird these studies call into question their conclusions about learning to write. This dissertation calls into question two underlying assumptions in the research on self-efficacy in writing: (1) the notion that human agency as cognitively bound but socially influenced, and (2) the notion that writing performed as a set of discrete tasks performed according to universal writing rules that can be measured separately. As a result of these two theoretical assumptions, measures of self-efficacy in writing are often flawed, and this
dissertation also calls into question a third point: (3) the methods of measuring self-efficacy as only individually reported beliefs about abilities to complete discrete, universal writing tasks. I suggest that socio-cultural theories offer a response to these three claims which complicates these underlying assumptions in self-efficacy and offers a way to measure self-efficacy more fully.

A Socio-Cultural Response to Self-Efficacy Theories

In this dissertation, I argue that social-cultural theories present a way to complicate underlying assumptions about the nature of writing and the nature of agency, and offer more robust ways to measure self-efficacy in writing. Social cognitive theories and socio-cultural theories often seem similar, and in some ways, the differences may be in somewhat different aims for each paradigm. Vlad-Petre Glaveanu suggests that “while sociocognitivists generally investigate episodic instances of collaboration and the value of their end-product, socio-culturalists are primarily interested in long term collaborations and their broader link to developmental and social processes” (488). Socio-cultural theories are drawn from the field of sociology. Writing studies theorists, for example, often cite sociologists Clifford Geertz and Anthony Giddens as the foundation for the view that agency as socially constructed (Bawarshi, Berkenkotter and Huckin, Devitt). In “Genre Function,” Anis Bawarshi explains Giddens’ argument: “Human activity—motive, intention, and agency—is constituted by and enacted within social system, which it in turn reproduces” (352). Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin cite Geertz in the introduction to their article, “Rethinking Genre From a Sociocognitive Perspective”: “The shapes of knowledge are ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements” (475).
While some lines of socio-cultural research focus on the role of texts, culture and community, or power relationships. In all of these socio-cultural approaches, the individual exists as an integral part of the system, and more radical socio-cultural theories do tend to dissolve the agency of the human subject into the system altogether (Miller, Deleuze and Guattari, Herndl and Licona). Critiques of these more radical socio-cultural views bring up the point that humans, while not living in isolation, do have some influence on the social system and some control of their own behaviors. Charles Bazerman, for example, acknowledges that much writing does happen in isolation and inside the head (“Writing” 86). Even with these critiques in mind, I argue that less radical forms of socio-cultural theory (Bawarshi, Bazerman, Cooper, Devitt, Russell) offer ways to think about self-efficacy as less brain-centered and more culturally emergent in the action of particular social systems.

*Complicating Self-Efficacy and Agency as Cognitively Bound*

Self-efficacy currently remains theorized and measured as a cognitive belief influenced by particular social interventions. Current theories of self-efficacy suggest a container model for social context, where beliefs are held inside a “container” (usually described as the brain) which is acted upon by social contexts. These social contexts are only imagined as location and social surroundings. Cultural and more broadly socially constructed influences are not taken into account. However, socio-cultural theories in writing as well as posthuman views of agency suggest that individual cognitive beliefs are bound to context and cannot be studied outside the social system. Based on these theories, I suggest that agency begins first in the social system and is then internalized as individual self-efficacy belief. I also suggest that studying only individual beliefs about learning is problematic for creating a robust understanding of self-
efficacy. Because self-efficacy is theorized as a component of human agency, it is important to explore theories of agency as well as theories of self-efficacy. In this section, I will explore underlying assumptions about agency in the self-efficacy literature that may benefit from re-examination through lenses of socio-cultural and posthuman theories of agency. Then, I will discuss how applying socio-cultural theories and posthuman theories of agency reframe the underlying theoretical stance in a way that extends and distributes self-efficacy.

*Underlying Assumptions about Agency in Social Cognitive Theories*

Bandura’s view of agency as individually constructed and bodily-bound, results from locating agency squarely inside the head of the writer. For Bandura, “agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place (“Social Cognitive” 2). Although at first this reads as a discussion of agency as distributed, Bandura essentially describes personal influence acting upon embedded distributed structures. Notably, the word influence in this sentence and throughout much of Bandura’s work reveals this underlying assumption. Bandura’s thinking on the topic of agency is not static over the thirty years he worked with this phenomenon. Bandura’s views on agency evolved from cognitive to social cognitive theory to more physically embodied theories. In Bandura’s more recent work, agency is emergent, but it is also bound by the physical body. Bandura explains this physically determined model of social cognition in his more recent work from 2001, “Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective”: “Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency (Bandura, 1986, 1999a). Thoughts are not disembodied, immaterial entities that exist apart from neural events. Cognitive processes are emergent brain
activities that exert determinative influence” (4). Notice in this passage Bandura suggests that cognitive processes (including beliefs) emerge from the brain first, not from the social system.

Researchers view self-efficacy as necessarily individual and situated solely inside the mind, with social influences shaping the mind. Jonathan Tudge and Paul Winterhoff explain: “Bandura and his followers have argued that social influences can only operate within the constraints imposed by the ‘hard wiring’ of the psychological system” (70). For self-efficacy theorists the result of this emphasis on the individual and physically-bound nature of knowledge construction is exhibited in performance outcomes. Zimmerman explains: “With regard to their content, self-efficacy measures focus on performance capabilities rather than on personal qualities, such as one’s physical or psychological characteristics” (“Self-Efficacy” 82). Some self-efficacy researchers are careful, however, to distinguish between self-efficacy for learning and self-efficacy for performance (Jones 210). Ed Jones explains: “Embedded in this distinction are the regulatory strategies that affect the way in which new tasks/skills are approached, as opposed to the confidence in specific tasks and skills that affect writing performance” (210). Whether they discuss performance outcomes or self-regulatory beliefs, however, the underlying assumption that individual beliefs are the major influence on learning is problematic for fully understanding the phenomenon.

While performance outcomes, such as a grade on a writing assignment, allow for measuring the result of an individual’s beliefs, a focus on outcomes does not explain the contextually-bound process of attaining those performance outcomes. And, just as self-efficacy research has focused on narrower and more delineated individual belief mechanisms such as self-regulatory beliefs, the problem of context still exists. Jones explains the kind of empirical
evidence self-efficacy researchers typically cite: “Analysis of the findings from nineteen articles focusing specifically on writing reveals that the proportion of variance in writing skill accounted for by self-efficacy ranges from .10 (McCarthy et al., 1985; Shell et al., 1989) to an astounding .69 in an experimental design (Schunk & Swartz, 1993)” (210). For example, if a student reports that she can do well on a task and then she earns a high grade, and a researcher can correlate the outcome with self-reported outcome beliefs with a high statistical significance. When agency and beliefs are examined in this way, the findings are suspect because they are particularized, delineated, and measured to such an extent that they cannot take into account the social, cultural, or historical system that may account for the ways these beliefs are constructed.

Many self-efficacy studies do explain beliefs as contextualized, but they use the word context as a container that surrounds the individual, a cognitive processing unit. In his review of self-efficacy literature, Barry Zimmerman uses the word context but only as a social and physical phenomenon, not as a fully integrated cognitive, social, and cultural and historical experience. Zimmerman states: “Self-efficacy measures are also designed to be sensitive to variations in performance context, such as learning in a noisy lounge compared to the quietude of the library” (83-83). While Zimmerman is careful to explain that his view of self-efficacy as happening in context, his understanding of context is limited to location and social surroundings. This limited understanding of context curtails a complete understanding of self-efficacy.

Posthuman Views of Agency

Posthuman views of agency, which echo the socio-cultural views of agency, as emergent, extended, and distributed, offer some insight into how agency can be considered as
action within the context of a social system, rather than as a set of cognitive beliefs. Posthuman theorists posit that agency exists first in a system of action and is enacted by all participants in that system. N. Katherine Hayles, for example, argues for a conception of the posthuman that is characterized by distributed cognition. Distributed cognition places humans in a matrix involving technology, society, and text. Humans distribute their cognitive processes and influence through technology and into society. For Hayles, distributed cognition complicates notions of individual, biologically-bound agency. Hayles states that in a posthuman world, we are necessarily unfree (in the sense of a sole, unfettered agent in the world) because "there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (4). For Hayles, there is no fundamental separation between the agency of an individual and the agency in a system. Sherry Turkle similarly sees agency as developed in social interaction and with technology. Turkle suggests that the “self” is not a stable identity separate from the system in which it participates. Interactions on the internet, according to Turkle, cause participants to "become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction" (12). In a posthuman view of agency, then, there is no differentiation between objects such as technology or texts and the human participant. Agency instead is constructed in a system that is not necessarily bi-directional or even multi-directional, but rather bound and blurred into a single system of action.

This radical shift in defining agency as residing in a system rather than in the body can also be explained as a blurring of the boundaries between subject/object relations (Haraway). In Donna Haraway's conception of agency, physical boundaries are transcended: “Machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-
developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert” (Simians 163). These blurred boundaries lead logically toward a shared explanation of agency in which humans have no more control over the action of the system or any more agency than machines or texts or other physical or cultural artifacts.

Blurring subject/object (or internal/external) boundaries is also central to the work on extended mind by Andy Clark and David Chalmers. This idea of the extended mind, that the mind is not bound by the skull or even biological processes but that the mind extends into the world, also has something to contribute to theories of self-efficacy. In particular, Clark and Chalmers “argue that beliefs can be constituted partly by features of the environment, when those features play the right sort of role in driving cognitive processes. If so, the mind extends into the world” (12). Chalmers, in his introduction to Clark’s book on extended mind, explains a definition of belief as “the space between perception and action” (xiv). In this definition, beliefs are formed in the “space between” or interaction. Beliefs such as self-efficacy, then, are not bound inside the head, but in the “space between.”

This “space between” can be viewed as the place where the action of a system works. Various versions of systems theories place agency in the work of a social, historical, cultural, ecological, and/or organic system, and where agency is shared within the entire system. Marilyn Cooper, for example, claims that: “Complex systems (an organism, a matter of concern) are self-organizing: order (and change) results from an ongoing process in which a multitude of agents interact frequently and in which the results of interactions feed back into the process. Emergent properties (such as agency) are not epiphenomena, nor ‘possessions’ in any
sense, but function as part of the systems in which they originate” (“Rhetorical” 421).

While binding a human subject to a system may appear at first to prohibit transferability between contexts, Clark and Chalmers explain how portability, coupling, and affordances explain the possibility for transfer across various systems with their view that “the brain (or brain and body) comprises a package of basic, portable, cognitive resources that is of interest in its own right” and that this portable package seeks coupling with environment to extend resources for further functioning (10-11). While posthuman discussions of agency discuss broader notions of where, when, and how agency exists and moves, it is important to remember that agency is the ability to act, and agency only exists as action toward some kind of object. In the case of this dissertation, that object is writing. Writing, like agency, is not a universal construct, but rather it is tied to particular systems.

*Complicating Universal Writing Rules*

Given ways in which posthuman theories complicate the nature of agency laid out in the previous section, it follows that the nature of writing as enacted in a system is also more complicated than the self-efficacy literature suggests. Socio-cultural theories in writing studies suggest that the writer is not always at the center of the writing process, but instead, the writer is engaged in the action of a social system in which texts are constructed and constrained by histories, cultures, genres, technologies, and artifacts, as well as other members of the community. Writing, and academic writing in particular, like self-efficacy is constructed socially and within the conventions, genres, and practices of particular communities. Writing researchers Berkenkotter and Huckin explain that “knowledge of academic discourse in its various permutations grows out of enculturation to the oral and written ‘forms of talk’ of the
academy . . . [and] genre knowledge is a form of situated cognition” (485). Yet, when self-efficacy researchers examine writing, they often view writing as substantially the same as every other domain of knowledge, applying the same universal theories and methods without sufficient attention to the disciplinary differences of knowledge construction tied to each field.

**Underlying Assumptions about the Nature of Writing in Self-Efficacy Theories**

In self-efficacy theory, writing is often described as a set of universally applied writing tasks that add up to form “good writing.” Although many of these non-specialist researchers define writing tasks narrowly, they believe that these writing tasks, such as writing a good introduction or a good first sentence, are universal to every writing situation (McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Pajares, Hartley, and Valiente; Schunk; Shell, Murphy, and Bruning; Zimmerman and Bandura). Later, Zimmerman and Bandura explain the reasons that underlie this belief: “This is because writing activities are usually self-scheduled, performed alone, require creative effort sustained over long periods with all too frequent stretches of barren results, and what is eventually produced must be repeatedly revised to fulfill personal standards of quality” (846).

Patricia McCarthy, Scott Meier, and Regina Rinderer explain the types of questions they used to determine “good writing” for the basic students in their study: “criteria were devised to measure the most mechanical and perhaps most easily measurable of writing skills. Examples of skills include: ‘Can you write an essay without major spelling errors?’ ‘Can you write an essay without run-on sentences?’ ‘Can you write an essay free of comma faults?’ ‘Can you write an essay in which the ideas are clearly expressed?’” (468). Duane Shell, Carolyn Murphy, and Roger Bruning also find strong evidence to support the notion that being able to complete specific writing tasks, such as writing a good introduction or knowing how to revise, are
universal indicators good writing performance (99). This and other research into writing self-
efficacy define writing as a series of tasks that apply to all academic situations (Pajares, Schunk, 
Zimmerman and Bandura). Self-efficacy researchers, then, see writing as a skill that, once 
possessed, will apply equally to all academic writing situations.

Socio-Cultural Views of Writing

Socio-cultural views of writing, however, point to the socially constructed nature of 
writing within particular communities. Paul Prior articulates this socio-cultural view:

“Sociocultural theory argues for viewing writing as a mode of social action, not simply a means 
of communication. Writing participates in making particular kinds of people, institutions, and 
cultures, as well as indexing them” (“Sociocultural” 58). Researchers in self-efficacy studies 
have applied the same understanding of “good writing” to many different disciplines (Pajares 
“Current” 1). Socio-cultural theories of writing, on the other hand, have explored many aspects 
of a single phenomenon—writing—deeply exploring aspects of writing from many different 
angles. Genre theory, in particular, explains this form of textual social action.

Socio-cultural theories of writing are formed in various ways in writing studies theories, 
including notions of discourse communities, communities of practices, genre theories, and 
et ecological models of composition. While genre theory uses genres as its main focus, it also 
provides a lens through which we can understand human agency and with it, a deeply contextual 
view of self-efficacy in writing. Genre theorists also illustrate agency as not just responsive to 
external stimuli, but acting in systems. Other theorists such as James Paul Gee, explain writing 
as emergent from discourse communities, in which writing and individual agents are embedded 
members of a speech/writing communities, and where writing in that community also represents
the identity of a community as well as the individual, an index to the cultural patterns of that community: "As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality. Genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers; for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community" (Gee 165).

Newcomers to discourse communities bring histories of cultural patterns and tools for understanding writing in general, but at times histories can hinder learning. Institutionalized genres, such as the five paragraph essay can become so reified in the mind of a student that learning new forms of writing becomes difficult. For example, students who experience school writing as a way to demonstrate in a timed exam session a set of universally determined writing skills, such as the perfect five paragraph essay written in 25 minutes, will necessarily work within this institutionally determined understanding of writing. When, however, these same students move to the University and are now asked to view writing forms, or writing as a way to learn, they may be resistant to accepting new models based on their shared school writing histories. Therefore, agency in learning to write is often more than just the immediate dialectical interaction of student and social system in a classroom. Agency for learning new forms of writing is also about engaging with the cultural system in a way that the student adapts to the language and usage of that particular system.

The socio-cultural and posthuman theories used in this dissertation describe agency in writing as constructed in a social system, but with an understanding of the role of the individual writer. According to Prior, authorship is situated “in the socially distributed activities of collaborative invention and authorship attribution” (180). Instead of the lone author, struggling
nobly toward a work of individual genius, Prior takes up a “fuller account of mediated authorship . . . describing ways that sociohistoric tools-in-use actively participate in authorship, [in] ways that they operate to enable, channel, and constrain both the substance and participation frameworks of literate invention” (180). Agency is then mediated by histories, cultures, genres, and other human actors, and all these mediated activities are situated in some form of language, physical objects, bodies of knowledge, institutions, or situated practices (Prior 183). If viewed in this way, notions of agency in writing offer fuller descriptions for research on the phenomenon of self-efficacy in writing than consciously reported internally-situated beliefs.

*Complicating Self-Efficacy Methods*

Given the ways in which socio-cultural and posthuman theories complicate self-efficacy theories, it is also important to re-examine the methods used to measure the phenomenon. Self-efficacy studies following Bandura never question his self-reported survey methods (Eastman and Marzillier). Instead, self-efficacy researchers advance research on self-efficacy by constructing similar self-reported surveys in different domains of functioning. In particular, self-efficacy in writing is more complex than the literature suggests. Although Bandura at times theorizes a robust interaction between the individual and the social environment, his methods which measure only individually stated beliefs never reflect that complexity. This complexity, coupled with models of teaching for self-efficacy, suggested by Bandura and other self-efficacy researchers suggests a limited view of the phenomenon as happening only in the mind of the individual, risking methodological reductionism “to the exclusion of other levels of the phenomenon . . . something that socio-cultural views struggle to overcome” (Glaveanu 480).
More importantly, beliefs are not only present or influential when we are conscious of them, but beliefs remain with us regardless or despite of our conscious attention to them (Clark and Chalmers 14). If this is the case, then traditional measures of self-reporting beliefs about self-efficacy may also be called into question. In this section, I will review problems with the methods used to measure self-efficacy to date and suggest richer, more descriptive methods for examining the phenomenon as an activity system.

Bandura’s theories acknowledge social context and the dialectical relationship between society and the individual; however, Bandura uses methodology that measures cognitive beliefs as conceptually separate from the social influences. Jonathan Tudge and Paul Winterhoff explain:

> Although Bandura [1986] discusses the ‘two way influence process’ involved in observational learning, experimenters have limited themselves to analyzing results based on the individual as the unit of analysis, rather than focusing on the mutual interplay of interacting partners, an approach that might lend itself more effectively to the study of bidirectionality of effects (75).

Bandura’s theories espouse a dialectical understanding of social and cognitive influences, one in which the agent influences and is influenced by social inputs, but he never measures self-efficacy in writing in the social context. His measures of writing are self-reported surveys of belief. The distinction is important here: while Bandura theorizes much that is close to socio-cultural views, his methods never reflect that assertion. At other times, Bandura emphasizes that self-efficacy is a cognitively held belief that should be measured through individually-reported survey questions. Even when discussing collective agency, Bandura
asserts that: “The locus of perceived collective efficacy resides in the minds of the group members” (“Exercise” 76). This location of self-efficacy in the mind leads Bandura to methods which measure only cognitive beliefs in isolation. And, while Bandura claims that “there is no all-purpose measure of perceived self-efficacy” (Self-Efficacy 307), the only tailoring of measurement in self-efficacy studies is adjusting one all-purpose self-efficacy survey to fit various domains of functioning (Bandura Self-Efficacy Chapter 4 “Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales”). Self-efficacy measures, as developed in practice, have focused on the individual cognitive experience and have relegated the social context to mere influences on cognitive beliefs. However, theoretical changes in other fields suggest that this underlying social cognitive model needs to be re-examined.

Attitude surveys are the central and unquestioned method of measuring self-efficacy, which are then correlated with other data such as course grades, scores on writing samples, standardized test scores, or in very few studies, case studies and self-reflections. Self-efficacy researchers rely on survey methods which do not accurately describe the phenomenon when studying writing, or in fact when studying any situation because the survey methods cannot take into account the deeply contextualized nature of learning. The survey methods developed by Bandura and described in a book chapter titled, “Guide to Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales,” offers advice to self-efficacy researchers on ways to rework existing survey scales for application to all learning situations (and all disciplines) in the same way (Bandura). Not one researcher that follows Bandura’s self-efficacy research questions the use of self-efficacy survey scales in their study of self-efficacy in writing (Johnson and Pajares; Jones; McCarthy Meier, and Rinderer; Pajares, Hartley and Valiante; Schunk and Swartz, Shell, Murphy, and Bruning;
Usher and Pajares; Zimmerman and Bandura). The problem here is not in the way the scales are reworked, but instead in the unquestioning way these scales are used at all, with no substantive attention to context.

Notably, some scholars do tend to consider implications of various methodological approaches (Charney, Palmquist and Young, Zimmerman and Bandura), but even with these acknowledgments, they do not alter their quantitative methods. It seems that by simply acknowledging the social circumstances surrounding their study, but not measuring them in any meaningful way, the researchers believe they have fulfilled the necessary prerequisite for methodological critique. Only one of the studies I examined makes a meaningful effort to examine methodological assumptions, using a pluralistic, feminist methodological approach in order to gain a thicker description of student attitudes toward writing (Wallace). Research studies, such as those more often conducted by writing researchers, incorporate pluralistic methodological approaches advocated by bring a critical awareness and explain the epistemological issues implied by their research practices (Kirsch 248).

Methods in the fields of self-efficacy and writing studies also point to different disciplinary understandings of writing research. Bandura’s methods, in particular, emphasize rigorous empirical research program which has “limited the scope of such research, relative to the bidirectional and contextualizing nature of the theory” (Tudge and Winterhoff 74). In order to discover more about self-efficacy, researchers must are forced to isolate aspects of human agency and narrowly define writing tasks, making measurable and calculable connections between self-efficacy and writing. Bandura and Walters explain their positions on experimental research, which should try to reproduce social stimuli and responses, but which “does not imply
that laboratory experiments should be designed to reproduce real life in toto; if there were, the experimenter would necessarily relinquish the crucial scientific strategy of manipulating one variable while holding others constant and thereby forfeiting the possibility of establishing precise cause-effect relationships” (46). This trend toward measuring rigidly embodied beliefs and narrowly defined writing tasks compromises the values of the findings about writing and agency in self-efficacy research.

To date, all surveys that measure self-efficacy misrepresent the role of writing as a set of universal tasks to be applied in any situation (except perhaps Jones, a writing researcher who comes closest to characterizing the contextual nature of writing in his unpublished survey). For example, Pajares explains the guidelines for self-efficacy surveys as following three main threads, none of which represent writing as contextual: surveys assessing students’ confidence that they possess a particular writing skill such as grammar or usage; surveys assessing students’ confidence that they can complete a particular task such as writing a research paper or a short story; or assessing the grade students believe they can earn in a class (142-144). Usually, these assessments are correlated with particular performance measures such as grades in the course or on a particular written assignment (Pajares 142).

Educational attitude surveys all seem to follow this trend. Several student attitude surveys have been developed from John Daly and Michael Miller’s original writing apprehension survey. For example, Charney, Palmquist and Young made changes to a previously validated instrument used by Palmquist and Young in 1992. This earlier instrument was based on a well-established test by Daly and Miller from 1975. In order to validate the changes they made to their instrument, Charney, Palmquist, and Young ran a statistical test to
see how closely their instrument matched the validity of previous instruments (MacNealy 54). David Wallace also uses Daly and Miller’s apprehension survey as a basis for his early work on writing apprehension. And, Bandura wrote an entire book on designing general self-efficacy surveys, many of which have been validated and used several times (Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Ponz, Schunk). These attitude surveys are mostly anonymous, and students are generally solicited to participate in the surveys by their instructor or by their writing program (Charney et al.; Johnson and Pajares; McCarthy, Meier, and Rinderer; Palmquist and Young; Pintrich, Marx, and Boyle; Rhoads, Duerdend, and Garland; Schmeck, Ribich, and Ramanaiiah; Schunk and Hanson; Wallace; and Zimmerman and Bandura). While these surveys cite statistical data to affirm their validity and reliability for measuring student attitudes about performing specific writing tasks, the underlying assumptions about writing lead to incomplete descriptions of the phenomenon when applied to genuine, contextualized classroom writing situations.

_Socio-Cultural Models for Studying Self-Efficacy_

Given the contextually-bound model of beliefs about writing developed in socio-cultural theories, it becomes important to re-examine the methods used to measure writing in these socio-cultural models. Methods which examine writing and agency in context are more appropriate than the cognitive-based methods currently being used by self-efficacy theorists. Several options exist for the researcher interested in this type of project. Ecological models offer rich contextual descriptions of entire situations. Ecological models, such as the Social-Ecological put forth by Bronfenbrenner, place the phenomena under study in the center of an ecological-social system. While models such as these do take context into account, they retain
the human subject at the center, reinforcing the cognitively-bound nature of beliefs as well as the internal/external dichotomy so prevalent in the educational literature.

In advocating an extended view of the mind as participating in a system on a continuum from internal to external, Clark and Chalmers see the need for methodology that matches this revised view of the mind and beliefs. According to Clark and Chalmers, “in seeing cognition as extended one is not merely making a terminological decision; in these cases, it makes a significant difference to the methodology of scientific investigation. In effect, explanatory methods that might once have been thought appropriate only for the analysis of "inner" processes are now being adapted for the study of the outer” (10). While Clark and Chalmers don’t recommend a specific methodology for measuring these cognitive processes, they do explain the need for revised methodology to match these revised views of the mind.

Even some of the philosophical discussions, such as that from Clark and Chalmers on extended cognition subtly retains this internal/external dichotomy. While working toward dialectical and reciprocal notions of agency, posthumanists such as Hayles try to get at the dangerous nature of measuring complexity: “The problem comes when the move circles around to constitute the abstraction as the originary form from which the world's multiplicity derives. Then complexity appears as a 'fuzzing up' of an essential reality rather than as a manifestation of the world's holistic nature” (12-13). Clark and Chalmers continue to use language that places cognition at the center of a cognitively bound mind as “extended” beyond the body. While this dialectical and reciprocal notion of cognition is revolutionary, especially for philosophers whose main goal is to explain human thinking and knowing, the language and descriptions of cognition and agency remain encircled by the environment rather than an actor in the environment. The
model described here places cognition and agency as more bound with histories (expressed as both personal history and genres), cultures, environments, and other human actors in concert. Beliefs are first constructed in the system rather than in the head.

Socio-Cultural Theory: The Work of Activity Systems

Given the posthuman notion that individual agency is not bodily bound, but bound within systems of action and the socio-cultural notion of writing as socially constructed in particular discourse communities, it becomes important to understand how systems work. Activity theory offers a way to understand the interactivity produced when writing is used as a tool by agents in a community, working in concert to develop self-efficacy. The way meaning is constructed in context is so important in activity theory that any part of the system or any individual action in the system cannot be examined outside the social context of that particular system. Charles Bazerman and David Russell, in Writing Selves/Writing Society define activity theory as it is used in writing studies:

Activity Theory is a set of related approaches that view human phenomena as dynamic, in action. Human-produced artifacts, such as utterances or texts, or shovels or symphonies, are not to be understood as objects in themselves, but within the activities that give rise and use to them. Their meanings are found in these dynamics of human interaction (Introduction 1).

Activity theory suggests that phenomena are located “in the space ‘in between’ self and others. This standpoint doesn’t deny the role of individual mind . . . [but] envisions the human mind as more social than we would normally realize” (Glaveanu 480). Berkenkotter and Huckin cite Brown’s explanation of activity theory, in which “understanding, both of the world and of the
tool, continually changes as a result of their interaction . . . The culture and the use of a tool act together to determine the way that practitioners see the world; and the way the world appears to them determines the culture’s understanding of the world and of the tools” (486-7). Most importantly, activity systems offer a way to examine how agency works in a deeply contextual system, which offers another way to examine agency and the component of self-efficacy in writing situations.

Activity theory locates learning in the interactive process described by Lev Vygotsky as “socially distributed cognition” (Berkenkotter and Huckin 487). Learning to write, as viewed through this lens, is developed within and between social interactions. Activity theory stems from Vygotsky’s work on the mind in society, which posits that the mind is socially constructed in social action. Tudge and Winterhoff explain: “the influence of interacting partners cannot, either in principle or in reality, be separated” (76). This distinction, that the mind and all the accompanying beliefs that influence action are socially constructed, is important for understanding how self-efficacy must be examined as part of the social context, not as individually reported beliefs. More importantly, the highly contextual model of human agency in contemporary activity theory (Cole and Engeström) expresses the “co-genesis or co-evolution of mind, brain, and society . . . presenting an image of densely interlaced trajectories to represent ‘the interweaving of modular and contextual constraints which denies temporal priority to either and which provides for “leakage” between modules in microgenetic time’” (Cole 216 in Prior and Shipka 207). In activity theory, mind, brain, and society are not analyzed apart from each other in time or space, but instead in co-evolution as they shift and change.
Vygotskian theories, especially as they are taken up by writing studies, connect historical developments to activity systems through the use of mediating tools. For Vygotsky, tools are the carriers of social history. Prior explains: “Vygotsky’s (1978) fundamental question was how we become human through day-to-day engagements in the cultural practices of our communities and institution. He argued that in such engagements we encounter, selectively appropriate, use, and refashion for others’ use, material and semiotic resources that have been developed historically” (57). This addition of history is especially important when examining writing in learning environments because students bring with them expectations for how to use writing as a tool that are often challenged in courses such as FYC.

Context is so important in activity theory that any part of the system cannot be examined outside the interaction of that particular system. Paul Prior explains this tightly bound model in which activity is “a holistic unit, fusing the often separated categories of culture, biology, and the physical world; of thinking, communication, individual development (learning), and social reproduction; of production, consumption, and exchange (31). David Russell offers a discussion of activity systems which avoids metaphors of context and content and instead embraces words such as interlocking, dynamic, and network (par. 14). Russell offers a framework for analyzing systems in a way that is more complex than dialogic models which emphasize utterances and oral language in common space and time. Russell explains: “the unit of analysis in activity theory is not the workings of an individual mind but the relations among the participants and their shared cultural tools” (“Activity” 56). Therefore, according to Russell, activity systems can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, multiple views, and various levels, allowing for
triangulation of views in order to develop a contextualized analysis of social action (“Activity” 56).

Activity systems include meanings, tools, and goals that relate the individual to the social world in context, and tools are jointly constructed by the learner and by the culture with the assistance of competent mentors (Tudge and Winterhoff 67). Contrary to Bandura, who believes the primary mechanism for learning is imitation of models in the social environment, and who examines this mechanism from individual viewpoints, Vygotsky views learning as interactive, especially interactive in classroom settings.

Classroom Activity Systems

Learning requires action, not just on the part of the learner, but from all participants in the system. Agency for learning exists first as action in the system (which in many cases is a classroom system) and is then, after engaging with the system, internalized as individual beliefs by participants. These individual beliefs about learning may come with a student from a previous classroom experience as a lingering sense of ability to do the work of the system, but self-efficacy for learning in the new activity system must be built anew through participation in the new activity system. Self-efficacy for learning in particular classrooms does not exist a priori of participation in that particular classroom system.

Activity theory has been used to analyze classroom learning by a number of writing studies researchers, including Charles Bazerman, Paul Prior, David Russell, and Elizabeth Wardle. Following like Russell, I argue that the FYC classrooms are activity systems and that activity in these classrooms is not isolated inside walls but also deeply bound to the contexts and rules of the institution, community, and divisions of labor that interact and energize those
classroom activity systems. Bazerman explains how learning to write is a complex, historically developed practice: “The social, organizational, and practical interventions are intertwined with the more overt textual inventions, which are selectively deployed by individuals within historically emerged social and institutional arrangements that have come to rely on literate action” (299). Charles Bazerman and David Russell, in Writing Selves/Writing Societies, include a number of studies of classroom activity systems by authors Goltrow, Prior and Shipka, Evans, Bazerman, Lundell and Beach, and Powell. Following research by Newkirk and Herrington and Curtis, Powell uses activity theory to explore agency in writing by offering “a way to examine participant identity, through self-representation, that might reveal what motivations are at play when writers participate in activities within discourses” (in Bazerman and Russell 281). Researchers who use activity theory to study classroom activity systems acknowledge the individual student as an agent interacting in various activity systems—from home, to various classrooms, to work, to friends (see Bazerman and Russell).

Classrooms are places of learning, and what motivates action in a classroom is learning. Learning requires the possibility of action: “Agency is the conjunction of a set of social and subjective relations that constitute the possibility of action” (Herndl and Licona 3). If learning requires the possibility of taking action, then agency emerges as foundationally important for learning. Cooper, in her model of agency, sees learning as one part of a continuing loop of conscious and non-conscious activity, an intentional arc, where human agents are embedded in intention, action, and meaning making. For Cooper, learning happens “as an action is being concluded and the consequences are being organized and integrated into meaning” (“Rhetorical 436). Even when agency is possible, learning does not happen just inside the head of the
individual student. Learning is socially constructed. For Vygotsky, learning happens “first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (Vygotsky *Mind* 57). Therefore, learning, especially school learning, is first constructed in the social system and then internalized and carried forth to the next learning situation. The connections between learning and agency are often very clear to teachers in the classroom, but they are often only measured as motivation to do specific, individual tasks. If learning is social, agency for learning must be more than an individual student believing s/he can act on a particular task, agency for learning requires engaging with the action that exists in a particular social or classroom system.

*Describing Agency using Activity Theory*

The problem that motivates this discussion is a problem of agency, and posthuman notions of agency as extended, distributed, and emergent become difficult to fully describe using survey or other self-reported measures. Agency in a system offers participants the ability to take action toward solving a problem, of *becoming* through interaction. To be an agent is to act (Cooper “Rhetorical”). To believe one can act, one must have a sense of agency. Agency does not come only from believing, though. Agency develops in action toward a goal, over time, in response to problems, and through participation in systems. Therefore, activity theory is a logical choice for thinking about the kind, quality, and forms of action which take place individually and in collectively inside particular systems. Sasha Barab et al., explain: “The ‘minimal meaningful context’ for understanding human actions is the activity system, which includes the actor (participant) or actors (subgroups) whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis and the acted on (object) as well as the dynamic relations among both”
Actors and action are at the heart of activity theory as the way to understand how humans work toward change.

Many teachers, myself included, know of students who are disengaged from learning altogether or who seem to be only engaged because their motives are to earn a good grade in the course. Levels of engagement depend on many factors that rest inside and outside particular activity systems. Enacted agency of students (and teachers) differ from each other; even the same people on different days may seem fully engaged or only partially engaged with the learning activity of the class. Agency is enacted and emergent, however, and tied to activity systems rather than carried in the body of individual members. Cooper explains human agency as action that necessarily brings about changes, and often these are troublesome changes caused by the actor that reveal agency (“Rhetorical” 424). I follow Cooper’s notion of agency as action that brings about change (and in the case of classrooms, this change is directed at learning) in this discussion.

Agency is also not dissolved into the system, as more radical posthuman approaches suggest (Cooper “Rhetorical” 424). Cooper explains:

The process of assimilation defines an agent as an individual with his or her own intentions and goals; individual agents are determinate, but not determined, in an ongoing 

*becoming* driven by the interactions among the components of their nervous system and by their interaction with the surround (*emphasis mine* “Rhetorical” 428).

Students are not, therefore just “victims” of the agency built inside classroom. Instead, they are 

*becoming*. If, as many teachers experience in the classroom, students need to feel a sense of
agency (ability to act) upon the work required for learning to write, then understanding more about how agency becomes in classrooms is an important step in helping students learn.

The interaction between all the elements of the activity system, including the human subject, work together to form a complex and organic understanding of the role of the individual in the work of the system. According to Stetsenko and Arievitch, who explore how children form ‘the self as a leading activity’ in relation to social activity:

The patterns of endeavors and activities that the child engages in, although initially influenced by the presence of a certain inborn feature and by diverse social forces and affordances, gradually evolve into a complex ongoing reality sui generis with its own logic and internal dynamics that ultimately gives rise to and shapes the child’s emerging self (486).

Given the complicated nature of self-efficacy beliefs and the ways in which self-efficacy is so intertwined with agency, it becomes important to clarify how I will use the terms agency and self-efficacy. In this and following chapters, the terms self-efficacy and agency are not used interchangeably. Following Bandura and for the sake of clarity, I use self-efficacy in a stricter sense, when describing individual beliefs about accomplishing writing tasks, and following Cooper and Stetsenko and Arievitch, I use the term agency in a broader sense, as emergent individual and collective action. Agency is also used to describe the action of the system that facilitates shared motives; whereas, the term self-efficacy is used when considering individual and more specific beliefs, usually shaped by individual histories, but also expressed by students as individual beliefs. It is theorized in this dissertation that self-efficacy is a lingering sense of agency that results from participating in the collective action of an activity system. The notion
of agency is slippery, and it is often defined differently by different theorists. In this
dissertation, I attempt to use the terms as described above, but words sometimes fail to
accurately describe exactly a moment in which agency as engagement and emergent action
become internalized. And, more importantly, the blurred boundaries between internal beliefs
and external action, between emergent action and individual engagement are not at once
changed from internal to external. Any attempt to make these distinctions between agency as
action and self-efficacy as individual belief are rife with slippage that I have attempted to clarify
when possible.

*Engeström, Activity Systems, Agency, and Learning*

In this study, I use Yrjo Engeström’s model of activity theory as a lens to examine
agency for learning in classrooms. Activity theory emphasizes the *action* of the system which is
never stable and which, when newcomers enter, often produces *contradictions* sometimes
leading to psychological *double binds* for the newcomer (Cole and Engeström 8). For
Engeström, these contradictions are the source of change and development which leads to
learning (Engeström “Expansive” 137). In his study of a Helsinki Children’s Hospital,
Engeström found that “learning needs to occur in a changing mosaic of *interconnected activity
systems* which are energized by their own inner contradictions” (140). Examining these
contradictions can clarify how learning happens and how newcomers negotiate this learning as
individuals working in a new system of activity (Engeström “Expansive” 378). The activity
system diagram below (based on Engeström “Expansive” 135) illustrates the relationships in an
activity system. I have bolded the central activity triangle to indicate the space in which, I
theorize, agency exists (Fig. 1):
FIGURE 1 ENGESTROM’S ACTIVITY SYSTEM MODEL

This model of activity systems is useful for analyzing writing classrooms. A writing classroom has subjects who, for example, may be students whose beliefs about abilities to write are examined (Engeström “Communication” 174). Members of activity systems act in order to solve problems (Cooper “Rhetorical”). They generally come to a classroom system with a problem related to learning (this may be the problem of not wanting to learn), either articulated or not, and are motivated to work toward solving that problem by using the rules, tools, and collective action of the system to work toward a solution. The problem that classrooms address is learning. The outcome is the long term goal that is the result of collective activity, usually an outcome answers a problem that the system works to address¹ (Wardle “Can Cross” par 3).

¹ Wardle points out in her article that the term “outcomes” as well as the terms “objectives” and “goals” can be problematic when analyzing student learning, as these terms are also used in education literature to describe programmatic goals for learning, particular objectives for classroom activities, and broader outcomes for teaching units. In activity theory, these terms are used differently, where “outcomes” indicates “the actual result of the activity whether it is intended or not”; “object” is the problem space, or place where students work out the motives
Contradictions arise when students have difficulty constructing a connection “between the goals of their individual actions and the object and motive of the collective activity . . . often gives rise to alienation and various tensions” in the system (Engeström “Communication” 173).

The object is the immediate object of attention, or the problem space, upon which the subject is acting in order to achieve the outcome (Wardle “Can Cross” par 3). The motive is the goal of the activity, but also the guiding purpose for the action (object + outcome). In a writing classroom, the motive is generally to help students learn about writing, and the object is the curriculum, which when acted upon by the subject and other members of the system, helps them achieve the motive. Contradictions between motives of the system and the individual member may act as constraints on participant action within the system (Engeström “Expansive”). When constraints interfere severely with achieving the motive, a psychological double bind exists for the subject. Engeström explains how double binds can lead to learning by conflicts between expectations of the learner to expectations of the system when different types of learning take place:

Sometimes the context bombards participants with contradictory demands . . . [which] creates a double bind. Such pressures can lead to Learning III where a person or a group begins to radically question the sense and meaning of the context and to construct a wider alternative context (“Expansive” 138).

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of the course; and “goals” are part of the overall “motive” for the system (Wardle footnote 2). In some cases, these terms may overlap, as in the case of this study, where “officially stated motives” for FYC are also the goals of the program.
Engeström then goes on to re-invent this concept of Learning III as “expansive learning activity” which produces new patterns of activity (“Expansive” 139). For Engeström, double binds in the classroom can lead students to radical new ways of learning. While only a few students experience this kind of radical learning, most students simply work toward negotiating the contradictions they feel as they work in an activity system. In order to negotiate contradictions students often turn outside their own experience to available resources in the system. In any activity system, tools are physical objects (sometimes called artifacts) that the subject uses to accomplish the motive (object + outcome) (Wardle “Cross-Disciplinary”). Tools could be things like computers or pencils; or they could be people like writing center tutors or the teacher; or tools could be digital objects such as software.

In many activity systems, “teaching [of writing] is often indirect, tacit, embedded in the everyday actions of the participants” (Russell “Activity” 66). In many writing classrooms, however, teaching is explicit and learning may not apply for any other purpose than passing the course. This poses some problems for an analysis that examines outcomes of the course because often teachers and students are at odds over the intended outcomes (teachers often want students to learn “good writing” and students want to pass the course). Prior cautions the researcher to recognize “that teachers in schools are always coauthors (often dominant ones) in students’ writing as teachers take up many roles in the authorship function (deciding to write, setting deadlines, specifying style and topic, structuring the writing process, offering specific words and phrases). The fact that students are typically held fully accountable as authors is thus an interesting cultural practice” (“Theories” 58). Stetsenko and Arievitch, however, have developed an activity theory model that is especially designed to examine agency in activity
systems, validating the usefulness of this method for examining writing and agency in the FYC classroom.

The contextual nature of classroom learning specifies that learning is anything BUT individual: “the nature and processes of interaction between an adult and a child in a school setting cannot be fully understood without reference to the meaning imparted by that historically and culturally organized context (school), to the tools of learning, and to the meaning that the interaction itself has for the participants” (Tudge and Winterhoff 66). Therefore, activity theory offers a useful lens for examining the mind in social action.

This dissertation challenges the view developed in education studies that self-efficacy is the most important aspect of agency in writing, instead examining writing in classrooms as a situated, contextualized process involving social action between the content of the course, the social system, and individual identity. In order to develop a fuller description of this re-imagined notion of self-efficacy, I conducted a study in which I examine self-efficacy using methods developed with socio-cultural theories of writing and posthuman theories of agency in mind. The next chapter, Methods for Studying Self-Efficacy in Writing,” describes those methods and how I applied those methods to my study of self-efficacy in writing.
CHAPTER 2: METHODS FOR STUDYING SELF-EFFICACY IN WRITING

Given the nature of agency, self-efficacy, and writing as theorized in Chapter 1, current accepted survey methods of measuring self-efficacy are inadequate to fully describe the phenomenon. In this chapter, I describe the methodology I developed for studying self-efficacy beliefs as they are enacted in writing practices, and I compare these new methods to individually reported surveys used by self-efficacy researchers. This methodology doesn’t reject self-reported surveys out of hand, but it does provide a more robust way to examine self-efficacy and the writing habits that signify those internalized beliefs. Measurement of self-efficacy in educational psychology is generally done through self-reported surveys, providing large patterns of information about self-efficacy beliefs of individuals and acknowledging change over time. Fundamentally, this type of measurement provides only a broad sweep of individual responses. A more effective way to measure self-efficacy includes individual student narratives that help illuminate the embedded nature of social writing practices that signify the development of self-efficacy. In this study, I use individual case studies that explore student narratives about writing activities, examination of student academic texts in FYC, and student drawn “maps” of the social interactions that happen when students write. I place these interactions in the context of particular activity systems by examining teacher portfolios, program materials, textbooks, and by interviewing teachers and administrators in these particular activity systems.
Problems with Current Methods of Describing Self-Efficacy

As I discussed in Chapter 1, there are a number of problems with the definitions of writing and agency as they are measured in self-efficacy research. Because these definitions are problematic, the ways in which self-efficacy is currently measured is also problematic. If, as I put forth in Chapter 1, self-efficacy is the lingering effect of engaging with the motives of a particular activity system, and if agency is emergent in the action of an activity system, and if writing is constructed socially in particular communities, then self-efficacy in writing cannot be measured as a set of beliefs about discrete writing tasks. These flaws, especially the flaws with the way writing is defined in the self-efficacy literature, lead researchers to measure writing as a set of discrete and individually performed tasks. In order to describe and measure writing beliefs, these researchers create tightly constructed operationalized definitions of writing beliefs that can be measured and analyzed using statistical methods.

In their attempts to operationalize measurements about self-efficacy in writing, researchers are often faced with problems about how to observe and quantify concepts, such as agency or self-efficacy or writing, which may be theorized in different ways. Allen Rubin and Earl Babbie cite three different classes that can be distinguished for measurement: direct observables, things we can observe directly; indirect observables, things that are reported, but not directly observed; and constructs, things that cannot be directly or indirectly observed (158). Self-efficacy and agency are constructs, and thus cannot be directly or indirectly observed. Yet, self-efficacy theorists use indirect observables, such as self-reported surveys and sometimes direct observables, such as grades, to “accurately” measure the construct of self-efficacy. Earl
and Babbie go on to suggest that it is possible to operationalize measurements of constructs by creating clear, ordered, and operationalized definitions:

In rigorously structured research designs such as surveys and experiments, operationally defining variable is vital at the beginning of the study design. In a survey, for example, it results in a commitment to a specific set of questionnaire items that will represent the concepts under study. Without that commitment, the study could not proceed (159). So, as in the case with self-efficacy researchers, the desire to create “conceptual order” and “rigorously structured research designs” outweighs the need for a robust description of the phenomenon.

Surveys are often viewed as the only accepted way to create this kind of rigorously structured research design. According to Mary Sue MacNealy, surveys “are the only research tool available to obtain certain kinds of information, namely opinions, preferences, beliefs, feeling, and other personal information. Surveys provide a way to describe a population in quantitative terms” (148). While I agree that beliefs and personal information can be measured by surveys, I do not agree that surveys are the only research tool available to obtain that kind of information. The use of existing scales, according to Rubin and Babbie, is a popular way to operationally define variables which can save time and money (165). Just because it is popular and efficient to use existing self-report scales, however, does not mean it is always the best way to design a study (Rubin and Babbie 167). Yet, self-efficacy researchers continue to prefer self-reported survey scales to more robust qualitative methods to analyze self-efficacy.
Research projects should advance knowledge in the field, not only by confirming previous research, but also by looking for new ways to examine a phenomenon. According to MacNealy, "good research project often arise from some kind of dissonance, such as a clash in beliefs, a lack of important information in some area, or expectations that are violated in some way" (128). Wallace, for example, who experimented for years with correlations, t-tests, ANOVAs and multiple regression analyses, experienced this dissonance when he became dissatisfied with the large trends described by these statistical results (116). As a result of his dissatisfaction, Wallace provides a more descriptive model for incorporating psychometric measurement and individual reactions to rhetorical situations into a fuller description of a particular phenomenon, writing anxiety. This multimodal methodological approach does not suggest that either statistically measured data or rich, detailed descriptions of individual case studies are flawed approaches (Charney), but rather that these approaches can complement each other to provide a fuller picture of a phenomenon. Following MacNealy’s notion of exploring dissonance in research projects, the case study methods I use in this study follow a mixed methods approach in which I compare the results of the case studies to the results of self-reported surveys.

Research Question

To explore self-efficacy beliefs contextually, I conducted a study that compares self-efficacy survey methods with case studies of self-efficacy in writing using activity theory and individual case studies. To begin my study, I developed a central research question for this project: Does contextual analysis of self-efficacy in writing offer different explanations of the role of self-efficacy on student learning and writing practices than current survey measures?
This central research question is broad. So, in order to conduct a research study, I needed to examine self-efficacy from several perspectives:

(1) Given the contextual nature of agency, self-efficacy, and writing, I wished to explore how a particular classroom activity system works. Using activity theory, I examined activity in two particular FYC classrooms in this study. The first part of this research is designed to answer the question: How does the FYC classroom work as an activity system, and how do students gain a sense of agency to work in that system?

(2) Given the established quantitative measures of self-efficacy as limited to self-beliefs, I administered a currently used self-efficacy survey to compare these established measures with the new contextual method proposed in this study. The second part of this research is designed to answer the research question: What are student beliefs about self-efficacy in writing as measured by accepted survey methods used in self-efficacy research?

(3) Given the importance of contextualizing self-efficacy, especially considering individual histories and writing practices in the formation of student beliefs about writing, I developed the third part of this study to answer the question: What writing habits, experiences, social relationships, and attitudes about writing do students bring with them and develop during FYC?

(4) Given the important role of self-efficacy in learning as established in the education literature, I also asked students about their learning, as demonstrated in writing practices and writing knowledge as it developed over the course of the
semester. The fourth part of this study explores the research question: Is there a change in student beliefs, practices, and knowledge about writing over the course of the semester?

Study Procedures

I conducted my study during the Fall 2010 semester, and the results are described in the next three chapters of this dissertation: first, a summary results of self-efficacy surveys and case studies are described in Chapter 3; second, an analysis of the FYC classrooms in this study, including the FYC program learning outcomes, as well as administrator and teacher interviews and teacher portfolios, and totals from traditional self-efficacy surveys distributed to all classes in this study (discussed in Chapter 4); and third, two individual student case studies that included pre-and post- self-efficacy surveys, a series of four interviews at one month intervals, student writing portfolios, and mapping of the writing processes (discussed in Chapter 5). Students were interviewed about writing beliefs, knowledge of writing concepts, writing practices, and use of social and technological resources for writing.

Site for this Study

The site for this study is the University of Central Florida (UCF), a large southeastern public university with over 58,000 students, 4000 of whom are taught in about 140 sections of FYC each semester (“UCF Facts at a Glance”). According to the UCF website, UCF offers 92 Bachelor Degree programs and over 100 graduate degree programs, 30 of those are Doctoral degrees. The top five majors for undergraduate students are psychology, elementary education, finance, nursing, and marketing. The University employs nearly 2000 faculty and adjuncts, and
73% of those hold doctoral degrees. Sixty percent of faculty are tenured or tenure-earning, and 40% are non-tenure earning. First-year students who attend this university are, on average, 18 or 19 years old, as represented in this study. The three largest ethnic groups are Caucasian, Hispanic, and African-American, all of which are represented in this study (“UCF Facts at a Glance”).

At the UCF, the particular site is the Department of Writing and Rhetoric (DWR), the department that houses the FYC program. The DWR recently (2010) implemented a new writing pedagogy for first-year writing students. Along with this new writing pedagogy, more professional development for FYC teachers was implemented. Given the recently re-organized and articulated programmatic goals, the FYC program at UCF provides a coherently organized site for studying self-efficacy in FYC students. The FYC writing program at UCF is under the direction Elizabeth Wardle and coordinated by Deborah Weaver. This study will focus on students who enter this program during their first semester at the university, exploring their attitudes and beliefs about writing as well as the activity system they encounter in their FYC classrooms.

Analysis of FYC Classrooms

To answer the first research question listed above (How does the FYC classroom work, and how do students gain agency to work in this system?), I collected data in the form of teacher and administrator interviews, teaching portfolios, textbooks, and official FYC documents. I then wrote an analysis of the FYC classrooms in this study using activity theory as the framework for the analysis. As I laid out in Chapter 1, activity theory offers a useful lens for examining the agency that is emergent through the actions of an activity system. I collected
data in the form of interviews and teaching portfolios from the administrators and instructors of FYC. When I interviewed administrators and teachers in the FYC program, I asked questions about the motives, curriculum, labor practices, community attitudes, and perspectives that shape activity in the FYC classrooms. For a complete list of interview questions, see Appendix B. To triangulate the information gathered about the program in these interviews, I also consulted published information (mission statements, program goals, historical accounts) on the university website and FYC textbook as well as reports from the university news service and other online discussions of this FYC program. Any activity analysis is written for a particular system, and as such, the site for the study becomes an important factor in the development of beliefs and habits of students as they experience agency by “plugging in” to the system for support (Clark and Chalmers).

I used Engeström’s activity model (discussed in Chapter 1) as a framework to describe department and program official and unofficial motives as they interact to form the FYC classroom activity systems in this study. Some participants’ motives, while never identical to the official motives of the system, may still work toward similar objects and outcomes, while other participants may choose not to engage or even purposefully contradict the broader motives of the system. As a researcher, FYC instructor, and active member of this system, I necessarily had a particular perspective from which to view this system. While I can never completely lose my own perspective, I made efforts to obtain feedback from others on my analysis, and I used public documents whenever possible to frame the perspective of those I interviewed.
Texts Collected for this Study

For the classroom analyses, I obtained relevant public texts written by or about the FYC program. In addition to interviewing FYC program administrators, I also reviewed official statements on UCF’s Department of Writing and Rhetoric website, FYC textbooks used by teachers in this study, and reports in the university newspaper about the development of the FYC program and new Department of Writing and Rhetoric. Additionally, I looked for other non-UCF sponsored sources of information about the FYC program at UCF which might offer other insights into the official public messages about the program. I also referenced articles, conference presentations, or other non-published or pre-published sources of information about this particular FYC program. When analyzing the FYC classrooms, I solicited teaching assignments, syllabi, and lesson plans as written documentation of teacher motives and practices in the classroom. Together, these texts helped me develop a description of official and unofficial program goals, outcomes, and general atmosphere of the FYC program at UCF as well as the motives of teachers in the classroom activity systems in this study. I analyzed these texts for direct statements or references to official motives, labor practices, community attitudes in this Department and the FYC program.

Administrators Interviewed for this Study

To collect data about official motives, professional development, and curriculum choices, I interviewed administrators Elizabeth Wardle, the Director of Writing Programs at UCF, and Deborah Weaver, the Composition Coordinator for FYC. Both these FYC administrators were involved in the development of the FYC curriculum. Elizabeth Wardle is an Associate Professor with a PhD in Rhetoric and Professional Communication, who was hired to
direct the composition program at UCF in 2008. With Doug Downs, Wardle co-authored a FYC textbook in 2011, titled *Writing About Writing: A College Reader*, which is used by the teachers in this study and piloted by them prior to its publication. Wardle has also written a number of articles and book chapters published in *College Composition and Communication*, *WPA Journal*, and *Undergraduate Research in English Studies* on topics in FYC pedagogy and FYC program administration. I interviewed Wardle about the goals of the FYC pedagogy, labor practices that influence FYC instruction, and the general culture and reaction to the implementation of the new FYC curriculum. A complete list of the interview questions is in Appendix B.

Deborah Weaver is the Coordinator of FYC and Instructor of writing courses in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric. Weaver has an MA in English, and she has taught writing courses at UCF for over ten years. As Coordinator, Weaver has trained GTA’s in the FYC curriculum, and at the rank of Instructor, she has also worked in non-administrative roles with many of the FYC faculty who are also instructors. Weaver assists instructors with course development and classroom management issues. I interviewed Weaver about professional development, curriculum issues, and general attitude of participants in the FYC program. A list of interview questions is available in Appendix B. I transcribed and analyzed these administrator interviews for statements of FYC program official and unofficial motives and for statements about curriculum development and culture, attitudes, and philosophies of FYC instruction at UCF.
Teachers Interviewed for this Study

Two FYC teachers, Professor Byrd and Professor Perry, agreed to participate in this study. These instructors worked closely with FYC administrators Wardle and Weaver during the development of the FYC curriculum and were instrumental in developing lesson plans for the new curriculum and had also agreed to mentor other teachers new to the curriculum. These teachers, among a few others, were recommended by Deborah Weaver as two of the best FYC teachers in the program. I chose among the best teachers for this study on the recommendation that any study conducted in a classroom should be conducted under the best conditions (Wallace Personal Communication). By choosing teachers that came with high recommendations from the administrative staff, I was able to conduct a study under optimal conditions and one in which other factors such as poor communication, lack of responsiveness, or ineffective teaching were less likely to affect student feelings of self-efficacy. When I asked teachers to participate in this study, I chose Byrd and Perry because of their willingness to openly discuss their teaching practices with me, share all their teaching materials, and because of their interest in participating in FYC research.

The two teachers in this study are experienced with teaching first-year composition. Professor Byrd had a long career in the publishing industry, writing school library books, before she started teaching writing courses. She has over 100 publications, and her experience writing school books has helped her develop skill at scaffolding difficult material. Byrd is local to the community and she completed her MA in Literature at UCF. Byrd has taught FYC since 2007. In teaching, Byrd articulates homework, classwork, writing assignments, and grading rubrics in
detail. Byrd pays special attention to scaffolding assignments, as she believes this allows students to develop a stronger sense of authority as writers.

Professor Perry, who was hired with Byrd in 2009, also teaches a full composition course load at UCF. Perry earned an MFA from UCF. With his background in creative writing, Perry is skilled at running writing workshops, and he is especially available to students for writing conferences and email consultations. Perry is also deeply interested in the concepts about writing (such as the constructedness of texts) that are presented in this FYC program. Perry’s writing assignment sheets are very detailed, often running several pages long, but his classes are also involved in creating their own grading rubrics. Perry believes that his students can succeed by thinking reflectively about their own writing and using social resources to help themselves write better.

I interviewed both teachers before the beginning of the semester. Questions centered on classroom pedagogy (for a list of questions, see Appendix B), assignments, and general approach to FYC. During the interviews, I also asked teachers about their teaching philosophies, their goals and motives for this FYC course, and their approaches to the new curriculum. I transcribed these interviews and examined them specifically for phrases that described official and unofficial motives as well as directly stated teaching philosophies and practices. I also looked for references to labor practices and the culture of the FYC community. Additionally, I asked Byrd and Perry to submit a teaching portfolio with syllabus, teaching schedule, and assignments, which I reviewed and used to triangulate student experiences when I analyzed student interviews. The teaching schedules helped me consider when to schedule student interviews, so that particular assignments could be discussed in each student interview.
Teacher interviews and examination of teaching portfolios took place before the semester began, but I often went back to teachers during and after the study semester to verify my understanding of assignments and classroom practices. During this analysis, I kept in mind the descriptions written in previous activity theory analyses of FYC programs (Bazerman, Russell, Wardle); however, as my focus in this study is student agency in writing, this analysis is also written with particular student experiences in mind.

Self-Efficacy Surveys

In the literature on self-efficacy in writing, self-efficacy instruments usually consist of survey questions in which students rate their belief about specific writing tasks on a 5 or 7 point Likert scale or by filling in a number on a continuum from 0 to 100. Pajares suggests that the 0 to 100 continuum offers the psychometrically stronger format (144). Pintrch and DeGroot use a 7-point Likert scale adapted from various instruments to assess student motivation, cognitive strategy use, and metacognition (34). Sampling procedures are not generally specified in these self-efficacy studies, perhaps because many of the studies involve instructional interventions, which are not intended as generalizable research.

While self-efficacy studies engage a range of statistical methods, depending upon the study design and specific criteria tested, the self-efficacy study designs that were most similar to mine analyzed data using a t-test to determine difference between control and experimental groups and to determine any change in perceptions of self-efficacy over the course of the semester (Meier, McCarthy, and Rinderer; Schmeck, Ribich, and Ramanaiah; and Rhoads et al.). T-tests analyze the differences between groups when the variables are interval or ratio variables (MacNealy 106). Terry Rhoads et al. ran a set of paired t-tests to compare beginning
and end of the semester surveys in two types of courses (975). Patricia Meier, Scott McCarthy, and Rinderer used a t-test to determine how accurate subjects were in predicting writing performance by comparing a total number of writing tasks subjects expected to perform with the total number of tasks completed (115). My study is a pre-post survey, so I use a t-test to determine change in survey results. I chose to use a t-test based on my study design and in consultation with David Wallace, an experienced researcher.

Survey Procedures

Given the established quantitative measures of self-efficacy as limited to self-beliefs, I administered a currently used self-efficacy survey to compare these established measures with the new contextual method proposed in this study. The second part of this research is designed to answer the research question: What are student beliefs about self-efficacy in writing as measured by accepted survey methods used in self-efficacy research? To answer this question, I administered a writing self-efficacy survey to 168 students enrolled in ENC 1101 during Fall 2010 at the beginning and end of the semester during weeks two and fifteen. I administered surveys to all students in the eight classes taught by Professors Byrd and Perry. These surveys allowed me to compare self-efficacy scores of student case study participants to a larger population of FYC students in these particular classrooms.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, I asked students to create a code to write at the top of the survey. The code was two numbers and two letters: the first number of birth day, the second number of birth month, the first letter of first name, the first letter of city of birth. When I handed out the surveys in class, I instructed them how to write the code and demonstrated my code on each classroom whiteboard. After students wrote the code on their
paper surveys, I gave them fifteen minutes to complete the survey in class. After the surveys at the beginning of the semester, I also solicited participants for case studies. I will explain more about recruitment in the section on Case Studies.

Survey Instrument

In choosing a self-efficacy measure, I consulted reviews of self-efficacy in writing literature, particularly those by Frank Pajares and Rob Klassen. Klassen explains that of the self-efficacy in writing studies that he reviewed, 94% assessed self-efficacy through self-reported survey scales (183). Klassen and Pajares both claim that self-reported survey measures are most commonly used measures of self-efficacy, but these survey scales are domain-specific and differ with the writing task (or, as Bandura puts it, the domain of writing) under study. For example, survey questions that measure self-efficacy for grammar differs significantly from survey questions that measure a broader domain such as success in “English class.” Margaret Johnson and Frank Pajares, in their self-efficacy study of writing for example, ask students if they can “correctly punctuate a one-page passage” (166); whereas Paul Pintrich and Elisabeth DeGroot asked questions such as “I think I can earn a good grade in this class” (35). Despite differences in the kinds of questions on self-efficacy in writing surveys such as those above, most self-efficacy researchers follow Bandura’s Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales. The survey instrument I used was Zimmerman and Bandura’s Scale Measuring Perceived Self-Regulatory Efficacy for Writing (see Appendix C), which has been tested for validity and reliability according to accepted practices in education studies (Pajares; Zimmerman and Bandura). However, I deleted four questions from the original survey that addressed writing tasks not relevant to academic writing, and I added four questions to test extended self-efficacy
using technology (Bandura “Guide”). These questions were added to explore how self-efficacy might be extended in a manner expressed by Hayles as well as Clark and Chalmers.

Also, I adjusted the original instrument measure slightly, using a 0 – 100 answer scale which, according to evolving survey research in the field of education, is psychometrically stronger than the seven-point Likert scale in the original survey (Bandura; Pajares, Hartley, and Valiente; Pajares). According to Pajares, “since neither a Likert-type scale nor a 0-100 scale is more difficult or longer than the other, using a format that adds predictive utility is especially warranted” (144). Additionally, standard practice in self-efficacy surveys since Pajares’ review indicates that the 0-100 scale is the preferred measurement (Bandura; Pajares, Hartley, and Valiente; Schunk). While Zimmerman and Bandura’s survey title (“Scale Measuring Perceived Self-Regulatory Efficacy for Writing”) suggests that it measures self-regulatory efficacy, a special concern of Zimmerman, the questions are more relevant to the research question for this study than surveys developed by Dale Schunk or Daly and Miller’s Writing Anxiety Inventory, which have also been used as a measure of student beliefs in composition studies (Charney et al., Palmquist and Young, Wallace).

The survey instrument is believed by education researchers to measure the criteria listed on Table 1 below. For a complete list of my survey questions, see Appendix C.

**TABLE 1 SURVEY QUESTION CRITERIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question Number</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,7,12,15,18,22,23</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>to execute strategic aspects of the writing process such as planning, organizing, and revising compositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,5,11,13,17,25</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>to realize the creative aspects of writing such as generating good topics, writing interesting introductions and overviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analyzing the Surveys

Statistical methods are specific to the particular research question and data collected. In some self-efficacy research, for example, path analysis, multivariate test, and chi-square tests were calculated to determine if the self-efficacy model fit desired factors (Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons 670). Other studies analyzed data using a t-test to determine difference between control and experimental groups and to determine any change in perceptions of self-efficacy over the course of the semester (Meier, McCarthy, and Rinderer; Schmeck, Ribich, and Ramanaiah; and Rhoads et al.).

Before I could run statistical analyses of my data, I needed to establish total pre- and post- self-efficacy in writing scores for each student. In order to determine a self-efficacy score, I added the numbers (0-100) for all responses to the 25 questions on the survey. The highest self-efficacy score possible is 2500 out of 2500. Students at the higher end of the self-efficacy range scored over 2000/2500 on the survey scale. Students at the lower end of the self-efficacy range scored around 1000/2500 on the survey. I calculated total scores for each student at the beginning and end of the semester. Of the 168 students I surveyed, I collected 113 pre-post pairs. The difference was due to absences at either the first or second administration of the survey. Also, because I did not ask for names on the surveys, but student supplied codes, it’s possible that student reported codes changed from beginning to end, and those surveys could not be paired. After I paired the surveys, I subtracted pre-survey scores from post-survey scores
to see if students increase or decrease their self-efficacy survey scores after participating in ENC 1101. In order to determine whether the change in scores was significant, I calculated a one-tailed T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means. This test was chosen because it is the standard statistical test to determine significance in the difference between means from pre- and post- and paired surveys, especially in educational settings as in this study (Bandura and Zimmerman, Pajares, Schunk).

Student Case Studies

In this section, I will first describe case study methods as they are generally used, and then I will describe the specific methods I used in my study. Case studies have often been used in writing studies research, especially in writing pedagogy research and writing process studies by researchers such as Emig, Berkenkotter, and Flower and Hayes. According to MacNealy, a case study usually investigates only one event or only a very small number of people or objects (usually fewer than 12), and is usually conducted over a short period of time (a semester or less) (MacNealy 198). The advantages of case study research are that it offers a holistic view of an event or situation; it offers rich detail that can lead to a better understanding of the event or situation; it offers information that cannot be collected through other methods; and it helps define and refine research questions (MacNealy 199). The disadvantages of case study research are that it is not generalizable; the methodology is often misused or misunderstood; and they are often expensive and time consuming to conduct (MacNealy 199).

While qualitative research includes a number of methods, intensive and repeated interviews are often characteristic of qualitative research. Case studies are used in qualitative research to study “subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviors and for examining social processes
over time. As such, the chief strength of this method lies in the depth of understanding it permits” (Rubin and Babbie 428). Rubin and Babbie explain the differences between survey questions and interview questions when conducting qualitative research: “In surveys, questionnaires are always structured and commonly use many closed-ended questions, but in qualitative research interviews will almost entirely open-ended and likely to be unstructured” (441). In my case study interviews, I follow practices detailed by Rubin and Babbie, using open-ended and semi-structured guided interview questions in which I had a set of questions that I asked each participant, but with a “natural, conversational nature” and the “flexibility to follow upon important unanticipated circumstances or responses” (Rubin and Babbie 444). Following the advice of Rubin and Babbie, I used great care in the “wording of the questions and their sequencing,” yet I retained the flexibility to probe further when necessary (446).

There are limitations to the participatory research that is used in this study, where the subjects help the researcher understand meaning in the writing maps, and where subjects are asked to confirm interpretation, both researchers and subjects should benefit from the outcomes and findings (Kirsch 263); however, this type of collaborative research does pose questions about the role of authority of different participants in the research (Kirsch 264). "Rewriting the role of research subjects does not alter the status of the research report; it remains a fiction. But it does change how that fiction gets played out. As Donna Haraway insists, researchers must respect the agency of their subjects, and not cast them as purely 'resources' from which to appropriate knowledge for reproduction in the sterile field of scholarly text" (Mortensen 123-4). In this study, I have taken great care to view the subjects as participants in the research rather than as resources under investigation.
Students self-selected into this study, and this self-selection presents another set of limitations to the range of possible FYC students represented here. In choosing cases, I recruited volunteers from the general population. Because I was only able to recruit a small number of students volunteers, I used all students who responded to my inquiries. There was no need to use a snowball or other specific sampling guidelines as suggested by Rubin and Babbie. This study was undertaken with the understanding that interviews about writing necessarily affect student attitudes about writing (Lunsford, MacNealy, Sommer and Saltz). This effect requires the researcher to understand the ways in which the interview process has become part of that student understanding of writing, and indeed becomes part of that student’s particular activity system in FYC. It should be noted that the researcher is also an instructor in the FYC program under study, and while good conscience attempts were made to refrain from overdue influence on the subjects during interviews, the goals and values of the researcher are certainly part of the activity system in this study.

Case Study Procedures

Given the importance of contextualizing self-efficacy, especially considering individual histories and writing practices in the formation of student beliefs about writing, I used student case studies to answer the question: What writing habits, experiences, social relationships, and attitudes about writing do students bring with them and develop during FYC? During these case studies, I also asked students about their learning, as demonstrated in writing practices and writing knowledge to answer the research question: Is there a change in student beliefs, practices, and knowledge about writing over the course of the semester? I collected data from seven FYC students enrolled in Composition I (ENC 1101) during the Fall 2010 semester.
These two research questions explore individual student beliefs about their self-efficacy and agency in writing. I collected several kinds of data from these students, including a series of interviews, during which students answered questions about their beliefs, attitudes, histories, practices, and knowledge about writing. I also asked students to draw writing process maps during these interviews. Students allowed me to copy the writing portfolios they completed for ENC 1101.

In this section, I will first discuss recruitment and data collection including interviews, student drawn writing maps, and writing portfolios. Next, I will describe the students who volunteered to participate in this study, and my reasons for selecting representative cases described in this dissertation. Next, I will discuss the frameworks I used to analyze the data (interviews, maps, and portfolios) I collected for these cases. Finally, I will discuss several limitations of my study.

Recruitment for Case Studies

Because of the time commitment for participants, I recruited students on a volunteer basis for this study. Although this sampling method is not ideal, the students who participated in this study represent a typical range of students who take FYC at UCF. For example, the students who self-selected into this study closely match the demographics (ethnicity, age range, high school rank, and test scores as available from student interviews and student records) of the general population at UCF (UCF Library Website).

To recruit students, I made paper copies of my two page self-efficacy survey and the one page consent form (see Appendix C) and distributed the 15 minute survey in each of Byrd and Perry’s ENC 1101 classes (four classes each) with the permission of the instructor. Student
participation in the survey was voluntary. I administered paper self-efficacy surveys in person during the second and fifteenth week of the Fall 2010 semester. After students completed the in-class self-efficacy surveys at the beginning of the semester, I also solicited students for participation in individual interviews. At the time of the survey, students interested in participating were asked to share contact information with the researcher in order to discuss potential for case study participation (Appendix D).

Once I had a list of students, I contacted each by email and informed them about compensation, interview times and locations, criteria for participating in the study, as well as confidentiality as stated on the informed consent form (See Appendix A for IRB Approval Letter). Although sixteen students initially signed up to participate in the individual interviews, only seven responded to my email inquiries and agreed to meet with me for interviews during the entire semester. Students agreed to participate in four one hour interviews (one each month) during the Fall 2010 semester and were compensated with a $5 Starbucks gift card and refreshments at each interview.

**Interview Procedures**

At the beginning of the term, I asked students about their writing histories and established writing practices, so that I could get a preliminary sense of the type of writing instruction the student experienced before entering FYC. Interview questions were tested on two subjects before being used in this study. A copy of the interview questions for this first (and subsequent interviews) are in Appendix E. The second and third meetings occurred at one month intervals during the semester, and a final interview was conducted during the last week of classes. At these meetings, I discussed any change in beliefs about writing abilities and
writing habits for the most recent writing assignment. A final interview at the end of the semester explored overall changes in writing habits and beliefs about ability to write for FYC over the course of the semester. After conducting these case studies, I also collected student portfolios, which contained all writing assignments and instructor assignment sheets. These writing portfolios are a regular requirement of students enrolled in these FYC courses at UCF and thus posed no additional burden for students. These portfolios provided textual evidence to triangulate conclusions I developed by analyzing the case study interview transcripts.

**Analyzing Interview Transcripts and Portfolios**

An inductive or “bootstrapping” approach was used to develop a coding scheme that described categories that demonstrated student beliefs in the texts. Thomas Huckin describes this as a “more exploratory [approach], using qualitative analysis in an inductive, flexible manner” (Geisler16). Categories were developed in concert with two other coders (Barbara Bird and Kristin Sendur) during the summer of 2011 at the Dartmouth Summer Seminar for Methodology in Composition Studies, and then I refined these categories further during data analysis in Fall 2011. According to David Altheide, a sociologist who developed methods for ethnographic content analysis, this method “consists of a reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation” (68). Likewise, Cheryl Geisler’s coding system, which I followed when refining my category descriptions, uses a bootstrapping technique to reflexively read and code data while developing categories. The categories that emerged from this process were used to develop a frame for analyzing both transcripts and portfolio reflection letters.
While developing these categories, I noted not only explicitly stated student beliefs, but also implicit beliefs as indicated by behaviors and language markers that reveal underlying beliefs and attitudes (Bazerman “Middle”; Donahue; Lillis; Russell and Bazerman Writing Selves). I noted that these beliefs and attitudes had much to do with students’ sense of self-efficacy in writing. While student claims of self-efficacy can be explicit—“I can do this” “I’m proud of the work I did” or a lack of self-efficacy such as “I don’t write well” or “I can’t do this,” those explicit statements don’t tell the whole story. In the transcripts, I noticed that students may say they can write the paper and even be proud of having written a paper, but coding for hedging often reveals contradictory evidence about beliefs in abilities to write.

Nuances of beliefs, which are sometimes not explicitly stated are evident in the way a student talks and writes about learning to write, writing tasks, writing concepts, or writing processes—happiness, fluency, frustration, hedging, resistance. The design of this coding scheme also explored social writing practices as evidence of student beliefs by naming the ways students use or don’t use resources such as the teacher, the writing center, peers, parents, mentors. Research (usually labeled psycholinguistic discourse analysis) does not yet exist that discusses fluency and hedging when speaking about writing processes as indicative agency or self-efficacy in writing. Therefore, the method of psycholinguistic discourse analysis used here is developed based on research by Geisler and Gee, and theories by Bazerman and in conjunction and direct consultation with Geisler and Bazerman at the Summer Seminar for Methodology in Composition Research held during July 2011 at Dartmouth College.

In all, I developed five categories (described in two dimensions on the coding sheet in Appendix F) that included (1) Academic Concept Knowledge - the use of the vocabulary of
writing studies (such as rhetorical situation, discourse community, writing process), (2) Social Resources - references to using social resources for writing (such as teacher conferences, the writing center, or consulting friends), (3) Internal Self-Reflection - self-reflective statements about writing process, and explicit and implicit statements of self-efficacy as demonstrated through (4) Confidence - explicit statements of beliefs about writing abilities, and (5) Hedging - linguistic indicators of decreased self-efficacy as indicated by hedging, broken language or lack of fluency in discussions of writing assignments. After describing these five categories in detail on the coding sheet, I coded the transcripts according to these categories, marking places where any of these five categories appeared in direct statements or in implicit linguistic markers. I analyzed student portfolios using the same coding scheme and framework as interviews, however, the implicit linguistic markers were not as evident in students’ written work for the portfolios, so the Hedging category was often not marked in student portfolios. The coding scheme for this study was developed over a period of a year during which several coding and analytical frameworks were attempted and then discarded. This scheme provided the most productive of those I developed for analyzing the case studies for the phenomenon of self-efficacy.

The speed of speaking can (but does not always) indicate the level of anxiety that a person is experiencing when discussing a particular topic. Hedging is a physical and often non-conscious way to express anxiety when students talk about their writing. Likewise, fluent speech is also a non-conscious way to express comfort with the topic under discussion. When I analyzed the transcripts, I noted fluency when students expressed a feeling self-efficacy. I noted hedging (hesitation, pausing, dropped thoughts, interrupted language) as students expressed a
feeling a lack of self-efficacy or less confidence. For example, in this study students will often hedge more (up to 10 or 15 times per 100 words) when discussing bad grades or difficult writing assignments and speak more fluently (fewer than 5 hedges per 100 words) when discussing writing assignments that were particularly successful or topics they really enjoy. This type of hedging is apparent in the transcripts of almost all the students who participated in this study, especially when new disciplinary vocabulary, rigorous reading, and time consuming writing assignments pose a strain on their confidence. Hedging could also be attributed to nervousness about the interview process; however, if this is the case, the hedged words should become less apparent as the semester progresses, and it should appear throughout the transcripts consistently rather than during discussions of certain topics.

Analyzing Writing Maps

The relationships between language and action about writing are evident not only in language that I coded in transcripts and portfolios, but also in the maps students drew (Prior and Shipka), evidenced by arrows between elements, relative sizes of elements, or quantity of elements (Wysocki). Writing maps as well as direct questions were used in this study to get at these kinds of implicit beliefs. At each interview, I asked students to draw maps of their experiences with writing (Prior and Shipka). Researcher mapping has also been conducted by Edward Soja as well as Patricia Sullivan and James Porter, but because my interest is in student beliefs, I chose to follow the research of Prior and Shipka. For Prior and Shipka, the drawings provide “a thick description of literate activity. The combination of texts, talk, and drawings, of participants’ accounts and our [researcher] perceptions, supports a triangulated analysis of these writing processes” (185). The students in this study were asked to draw “pictures” of the
process they went through to compose their assignments in FYC. I decided to use different mapping prompts in each interview in order to access different aspects of the writing process. In the first map, students drew the internal and external influences that helped them write a paper. In another map students were asked to draw the step-by-step process for writing a college paper. Another time, students were asked to view their process as a “function.” Students were asked to draw the influences that helped the paper develop and to draw the outcomes (or things they learned and things they can transfer) from having written the paper. Students were also asked to draw relational maps which depicted the various influences on writing with the final product at the center of the map and the social, personal, historical, and technological influences that went into the process of producing that writing product. These maps illuminated the entire situation surrounding the writing in an attempt to describe the ecological system (Cooper) that helps the writing come into being as well as the effects of writing on the next writing event.

Using participatory research methods in which the subject participates with the researcher in explaining the data, I discussed with each student possible interpretations of each map, and these comments are recorded in the interview transcripts (Kirsch, Prior and Shipka). I analyzed maps for the relationships between features, placement of images, size of images, and overall organization. I follow practices developed by Anne Frances Wysocki and articulated in her article, “The Multiple Media of Texts: How Onscreen and Paper Texts Incorporate Words, Images, and Other Media.” Specifically, I used Wysocki’s “Questions for Looking at a Screen or Page Itself” (138) in order to write a descriptive interpretation of each map. I adapted Wysocki’s questions to fit the hand-drawn student maps, using reflexive techniques in which I moved between the transcripts, the maps, and the categories developed for the interview
transcripts. I then wrote narrative descriptions of each map. Finally, I matched these map-narratives with categories in the interview transcripts. The questions that I followed for analyzing the maps are:

- **Naming the elements**: What are the individual elements depicted? How many of each are in the map? What colors are used? What is depicted in words and what is in images? What does this tell me about how the student views these elements? What information from the interview transcripts will help me understand this image? How might I categorize the images based on the coding frame I developed?

- **Naming relationships among elements**: Do the visual elements on the page look small and centered and swallowed up the page, or do they take over the whole page? Does the shape of words on the page fit and echo the shape of the page, or suggest geometric order, or is there incongruence? Is the page designed so that you are not supposed to notice certain elements? What are the relationships between the student and the words and images on the text?

- **Contextualizing the elements**: How is the page put together as a whole? Does the student use all the available space? What does this mean? What images are prominent? Which images are repeated? Which images change over the course of the semester? How would my experience of this page be different if it were a different size or shape or color?

**Students in this Study**

The seven students who participated in interviews were mostly 18 year old first-year college students (with the exception of one 47-year old retired military veteran.) While there
was ethnic diversity in students who participated in the study, socio-economically most were middle class, had solid family support, and came to the university prepared to meet the challenges of college from their high schools. These students had a variety of attitudes toward writing, ranging from a desire to pursue a writing career, to writing as a rather irritating necessity to outright aversion. A variety of majors are also represented, from theater to engineering to anthropology to business. Students who participated in this study were generally outgoing and willing to discuss their experiences in FYC openly during interviews.

Marie

Marie is an 18 year old engineering major and photography minor, Caucasian and female, who is living away from home for the first time. Marie is highly intelligent, motivated and articulate. She plans to go on to medical school after graduation. Her interests outside the classroom include an active participation in the local music scene as well as an avid interest in photography. Marie came to the university with a large number of AP exam credits, placing her as a sophomore in her first semester. Marie sees writing as something Marie sees writing as a tool to help her achieve her career goals, and she appreciates Professor Byrd’s detail-oriented teaching style.

Danielle

Danielle is an 18 year old Caucasian female journalism major who is away from home for the first time. Danielle attended classes at her local community college, likely as a dual enrollment student. Danielle is generally reserved and often relied on advice of others, such as her boyfriend and her instructor, to validate her writing moves. Although on the surface,
Danielle was generally compliant to those in authority, she did express confidence through a subtle resistance to suggestions by peers and even her instructor. Danielle’s interests outside school mostly revolved around her long-distance relationship with her boyfriend and her family. Danielle sees writing as something she needs to learn, and she’s careful to make sure she understands everything she is asked to do, often emailing her instructor, Professor Perry, several times a week for clarification about assignments.

Marcus

Marcus is an 18 year old, African-American, male theater major who is a few hours away from his home in this state. Marcus came to the university with twelve hours of transfer credit from his local community college, likely as a dual enrollment student. Marcus is articulate, funny, and loves to entertain, having attended a performing arts high school in his hometown. Marcus enjoys writing, but struggles with reading, and his low reading scores kept him from entering his “dream” performing arts college, so this university was a second choice. Marcus enjoys learning, and he actively engages with the challenges he faces, only expressing real discouragement about his reading test scores. Marcus’ emotions and attitudes toward writing range from high to low depending on the feedback he receives from peers and his instructor. Marcus really enjoys and responds to the carefully scaffolded approach that Professor Byrd uses to help him understand the difficult reading in FYC.

Tyler

Tyler is an 18 year old, Caucasian, male hospitality major. He grew up in the area around the university and attended a small, local private religious high school. Tyler lives at
home and describes himself as a spoiled rich kid who had everything handed to him on a silver plate. Tyler is an athlete and especially busy with the rowing team at the university. Despite his hectic schedule, Tyler was dedicated learning more about his writing by participating in this study. Tyler came to the university confident in his writing skills, having won the English award at his high school. Reliant on social approval, Tyler’s confidence plummeted after his first low grade, and he remained discouraged and uncertain about writing until the discourse community assignment at the end of the semester, which helped him see the role of social action in identity. Tyler appreciated Professor Byrd’s encouragement to make it through a tough semester.

Aurora

Aurora is an 18 year old Caucasian female hospitality major, also away from home for the first time. Although Aurora’s family is split between Alaska and the southeastern US, she is in close contact with them on nearly a daily basis. Aurora came to this university because of its location near Disney World, and often expressed a love bordering on obsession with the theme park (note that she chose as her pseudonym one of the Disney princesses). Her career, she hopes, will be at the theme park. Aurora is passionate and vocal about her hatred of writing, but she did like her writing teacher, Professor Perry very much. Aurora sees writing courses as an obstacle to her ultimate career goal of working for Disney, which incidentally began during the semester of this study when she landed a job as a part-time attractions operator.

Kent

Kent is a 47 year old Caucasian male and returning student seeking a college degree after his retirement from the military. Kent had worked in military intelligence during conflicts
in various parts of the world. Confident that he knows how to adapt to any situation, Kent dives into FYC as he does any military exercise—find out the target and do everything possible to obliterate any obstacles. Older and without the drive toward a career that almost all his FYC peers experience, Kent is engaged in learning from an entirely different perspective. He’s in college because of a great desire to learn more about the world. Kent thinks almost constantly about his writing assignments, often having revelations about approaches and topics while driving his son to rehearsal or during discussions at his Bible study. Older than his teacher, Professor Byrd, by a few years, Kent had a hard time adjusting to the college experience. Kent was so worried about forgetting to write down these revelations that he bought a voice recorder so he could save any productive ideas from oblivion. While Kent is majoring in anthropology, he also has a keen interest in non-fiction writing, hoping to write a sequel to Bill Bryson’s *Walk in the Woods* during his retirement.

**Camille**

Camille is a Hispanic female, younger than the rest of the students in my study, and living away from home with her aunt while attending university. She calls herself a “political junkie” and is majoring in political science. She’s bilingual, having learned Spanish and English at home as a child. Camille is family-oriented, and speaks frequently about her young cousin who shares her room with Camille in her aunt’s house so that she can attend University. Camille is also passionate about learning to cook from her aunt. As a member of the Student Government Association, Camille is also very active socially and politically in the university community, and she is passionate about learning to write from Professor Byrd. She also has a
deep interest in writing and publishing, blogging about her experiences as a bi-cultural female at a large university.

Choice of Representative Cases

In addition to describing all the student cases in this dissertation, I chose to describe two representative cases at each end of student self-efficacy spectrum as measured by the self-efficacy survey. Following strategies suggested by Rubin and Babbie, I chose these two students based on positive and negative case outcomes because they best represented the object under study (448). In my cases, Marie represents a student who enters FYC with very high self-efficacy and Danielle enters with very low self-efficacy. I follow these two students in particular because they not only represent the high and low end of the self-efficacy spectrum, but also because they represent different outcomes which are also representative of the outcomes I found in students cases I examined with similar self-efficacy scores. While Marie and Danielle are the most dramatic examples of the phenomenon of self-efficacy development in these FYC courses, they also represent experiences across the cases I examined for this study. All students, at some point in this study, exhibited traits demonstrated by both Marie and Danielle. While other student outcomes were not as dramatic as Marie and Danielle, these cases best characterize the experiences of all students in this study.

Limitations of this Study

In the first chapter, I articulated problems with survey methods used to measure beliefs such as self-efficacy. In that chapter, I suggested a more contextualized approach to understanding the phenomenon of self-efficacy, and the methods used here attempt to
accomplish just such a contextualized approach to examining self-efficacy in writing. And while the methods I have chosen offer more fully contextual views of the social phenomenon of self-efficacy, they is not without limitations.

Thick descriptions of individual cases are limited in the ways they can be applied to other situations. According to MacNealy, a case study usually investigates only one event or only a very small number of people or objects (usually fewer than 12), and is usually conducted over a short period of time (a semester or less) (MacNealy 198). The advantages of case study research are that it offers a holistic view of an event or situation; it offers rich detail that can lead to a better understanding of the event or situation; and it offers information that cannot be collected through other methods (MacNealy 199). The disadvantages of case study research are that it is not generalizable; the methodology is often misused or misunderstood; and they are often expensive and time consuming to conduct (MacNealy 199). The methods I propose here do offer a fuller description of self-beliefs and the context in which they exist, but they are not complete or generalizable.

While I argue that quantitative methods, such as surveys, are limited, they do have the advantage of limiting the role of the individual researcher in interpretation, avoiding one of the main criticisms of qualitative methods. This problem with qualitative research, that interpretation is necessarily bound with the researcher and the interactions of participants in the research, is bound to the method. Kirsch, for example, has articulated this problem: "Qualitative research methods have also have the advantage of situating themselves as methods that need interpretation and thereby problematize the interpretive stance of the researcher" (257). Also, students who participated in this study did so for a small compensation which may have
affected their responses and willingness to continue with the study. Researcher bias may also be present in a study of this type, in which the researcher develops categories for analysis based on several readings of the transcripts. While care was taken to verify categories with two other researchers, it is possible another researcher would have developed different categories for analysis which may have produced different results. The activity analysis of the FYC program offers only a partial description, as only administrators and teachers who participated in the study were interviewed. More teacher interviews may have provided different perspectives on different classroom experiences in this particular program, and students in those classes may have had different experiences than the ones I interviewed in this study. Although this study explores several students in detail, it does not provide a completely accurate picture of the phenomenon of self-efficacy in writing for FYC.

Another limitation, researcher influence, became evident to me as I read student final portfolio reflection letters. Many of the ideas we discussed in our interviews appeared in some form in most of those reflection letters, although not necessarily in the same way I understood the idea. These instances of cross-pollination speak even more clearly to the deeply contextualized nature of learning to write. One student that I interviewed for this study, Aurora, even mentioned me by name in her portfolio reflection letter. Her letter exclaims, “I hate writing” a number of times in the first paragraph, but she also mentions how the interviews with me influenced other papers for the class, such as the Autoethnography paper. In this paper, Aurora described an interaction in almost the opposite way that I would have described it. The excerpt below is from Aurora’s revised Autoethnography paper in her final portfolio:
I began to notice something peculiar about my writing process. I discovered this, not by my transcripts, but by Mary Tripp, another English professor. She was doing a study about what freshman college students do when they write and how they feel about writing. I participated and had a one hour interview with her. While there, she noticed something about me. I procrastinate till [sic] the very last minute, again not surprising to anyone, but when it comes down to that ‘crunch time’, I write better.

From this excerpt, I now understand that Aurora saw me as a professor as well as a researcher, and that she credited me for her own explanation of herself as a better writer during crunch time. I note in the transcript that I did make a summative response to a long section of Aurora’s explanation of her writing process, but my comments appear as a non sequitur in the middle of Aurora’s own ideas. Below is the transcript excerpt:

Aurora: . . . . unfortunately, I’m a procrastinator and I wait until the night before. But what I do, I usually write better. I don’t write as grammatically correct, but my ideas, I just put them out on paper. That’s what happened with this last assignment. It was just like [writing noises].

Tripp: Okay so really good ideas because of that last minute adrenaline rush.

Aurora: It was because I’m like, “Oh my gosh, it’s due. I’ve got to get a good grade on it, and even though I didn’t get a grade on it until—because it wasn’t due until Monday, so I had that weekend to edit it. But I was just like I need to finish it. I need to make it sound good. . .

While it is possible my summative comment was seen as validation of Aurora’s point about writing, this incident speaks not only to the effect of research on subjects in this study, but
also the kind of authority represented by a researcher conducting interviews with FYC students. It is possible that because of the intervention, students in this study did not have the same experience as other FYC students at this UCF. Any methodology is limited, and a well-designed study “does not demand that researchers withhold their judgment but, instead, that they articulate the criteria used to arrive at judgments” (Kirsch 258). The activity analysis of the FYC classrooms was especially tricky for me as a researcher because I am a FYC instructor in the program and because Elizabeth Wardle, the director of the FYC program, is also my advisor on this dissertation study. My first few attempts at writing that activity analysis needed outside readers, so I enlisted fellow graduate students, Jane Moody and Chelle Becker-Bernstein, to check my interpretations and fairness.

The importance of choosing the correct methods for research is based on each situation. In this study, I pursue qualitative research methods for studying self-efficacy which is descriptive and subject to researcher bias, but with careful consideration, qualitative research can be trustworthy and rigorous. Rubin and Babbie explain six strategies for evaluating the rigor of a qualitative study: (1) prolonged engagement, (2) triangulation, (3) peer debriefing and support, (4) negative case analysis, (5) member checking, (6) and auditing (434). The case study procedures that I have designed do incorporate these criteria. Specifically, (1) I followed students over a period of five months (one semester plus a follow-up interview); (2) I triangulated my research by collecting portfolios, teacher assignment sheets, interviews, and maps; (3) I checked my results with other researchers at the Dartmouth Summer Seminar and with my dissertation advisor; (4) I analyzed all the cases and noted in particular two cases (Marie and Kent) with more negative outcomes; (5) I checked my outcomes with students in the
follow-up interview after the study semester ended; (6) I have over 1000 pages of data that is available for review by other researchers.

With these limitations in mind, and with my attempts to establish trustworthy and rigorous qualitative research, I composed the following analysis of the FYC classroom activity systems in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I present the complete results of my study, and in Chapter 5, I illustrate these results through an analyses of two representative student experiences in FYC. Taken together, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 develop answers to the research questions presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER 3:
FYC CLASSROOMS AT UCF

Given the contextual methods proposed in Chapter 2, the next three chapters present results of my study and address all three of the critiques of self-efficacy theory presented in Chapter 1, where I explained that in order to fully understand how beliefs such as self-efficacy in writing are formed by newcomers over time in an activity system such as the FYC classroom, it is necessary to examine the constituents of the system in concert. Specifically, this chapter addresses my first research question: How does the FYC classroom work as an activity system, and how do students gain a sense of agency to work in that system? The purpose of this activity theory analysis is to help understand the nature of agency in two particular FYC classrooms.

In this chapter, I examine the two FYC classrooms in this study, those of Professor Byrd and Professor Perry, and how agency is built in those classroom systems. Following Bazerman and Russell, I argue that FYC classrooms are indeed activity systems, ones which are generally organized to address the problem of learning particular content or skills. In this chapter, I examine the activities that build agency for the work of these classroom systems, as indicated by data from teacher and administrator interviews, official program documents, teaching portfolios, writing assignments, and classroom activities. Using this data, I describe official program motives and learning outcomes, and I explore how those motives and outcomes shape the ways in which these teachers’ classrooms operate and the ways in which teachers act upon program motives in their classrooms. I also discuss unofficial motives of FYC in these
classrooms and end this chapter with a discussion of how agency may be created through collective action toward engaging with official and unofficial motives of the FYC system.

Motives for Learning about Writing in FYC

In this section, I introduce the concept of motives as they are inscribed in the learning outcomes of this particular program. I also introduce the concept of contradictions, which can be frustrating for participants, but which can also motivate action toward the goals of the system. Next I discuss the official and unofficial motives and the curriculum as motives enacted by these teachers in their classrooms. In the last section, I will discuss how agency is constructed in these particular classroom systems.

The action of an activity system is generally directed at a goal. Often activity systems are organized in response to a problem, and the collective action of an activity system works toward its goal of resolving the problem. These goals are called motives. In a FYC program, for example, the problem is usually described as helping students learn about writing and the goal of the classroom system is organized to solve that problem. In other words, the motive that directs classroom action in a FYC system is to help students learn about writing. In many cases, the motive of a FYC program or curriculum is officially inscribed as a set of learning outcomes; however, there may be unofficial motives that are not particularly described in the curriculum or particular teaching materials. In this dissertation, I follow Wardle’s convention in describing the official motive as the stated motive of the activity system, and unofficial motive as unstated (or un-inscribed) motives of other members in the system (“Can-Cross”). In FYC, the motive is acted upon by collective action in the system. Individuals may engage and participate in systems without sharing the motives of the system because those motives are only indirectly
connected to the motives of the system. For example, the FYC system may have a motive of helping students learn about writing by asking them to write particular genres or practice particular writing strategies or learn particular concepts. However, the motives of individual students may extend beyond the action of particular classrooms in this study (Russell “Rethinking” 506) toward things like getting a good job or going to medical school. These motives, while not perfectly aligned, they are not in direct conflict with each other.

Contradictions, however, may arise if the student does not believe that the work of the FYC system is valuable for meeting his individual motives. Many times, activity systems have motives that are enacted, but not directly stated in official documents. In a FYC classroom system, for example, the teacher may teach the official learning outcomes explicitly, but unofficial motives, such as empowering student writers, or how to be a good student, or how to format “school papers” may also be suggested by the teacher’s action in the classroom or in grading practices.

When people participate in classroom activity, they generally agree that the motive is supposed to be learning. They may disagree on why they should learn (to write better, to get a good job, to get an A, to please parents). They may disagree on how that learning should take place (by group projects, multiple choice tests, lecture, class discussion, writing papers). They may disagree on what learning should take place (learn concepts about writing, learn how to write correctly, learn how to be a better student). These, and other types of disagreements may become contradictions, which cause tension and frustration for members. For Engeström, these contradictions are the source of change and development which leads to learning (Engeström “Expansive” 137). As Engeström suggests, contradictions may energize participants to move
toward the goals of the system in a form of expansive learning, or they may cause frustration which leads to disengagement from the work of the system. Or, members may disagree on why, how, and what they should learn, but they may generally work toward achieving the motives of the system. In this dissertation, I theorize that agency is built through energizing action of overcoming contradictions, but agency is not given or even felt by members until they work in concert toward similar or complementary motives.

FYC at UCF

Unlike many activity systems, the official motive of the FYC program has been articulated in a number of places, such as the department website, the FYC textbook, and through university announcements as a way to “create curricular consistency and rigor in Composition I and II courses (ENC 1101 and 1102) that provide a strong foundation for writing throughout the university” (UCF Today “New” par 7). According to the department website, FYC courses are viewed as “the entry point to a vertical, comprehensive writing education that extends across students’ time in the university” (“First” par 4), while the broader mission of the department is “fostering transferrable disciplinary and professional writing expertise [where] students will build on the rhetorical dexterity developed in the First-Year Writing program through sustained writing and research in their discipline-specific courses” (“About ” par 2).

Writing about Writing Curriculum

The FYC curriculum that inscribes the official motives is called writing-about-writing (WAW). This curriculum was piloted by Weaver with a handful of teachers, including Byrd and Perry, in 2009. In 2007, Downs and Wardle argued for a curriculum “teaching about writing—
from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced” (553). Following the work of Anne Beaufort, Wendy Bishop, Debra Dew, Kathleen Yancey, and others who see writing as contextualized practice, a discipline worth serious research, and also as something that can be learned, researched, and practiced in the classroom, UCF’s new FYC curriculum was developed with Downs and Wardle’s WAW approach in mind. Byrd explains how this curriculum has energized her own teaching in FYC: “You really can’t go into this curriculum half-hearted” (Byrd Interview). Perry explains his view of this new curriculum and its effect on his teaching: “As a teacher, when you walk into the classroom, and you have all this scholarship behind you, I think it’s easier to feel more confident” (Perry Interview). At least from our interviews, Byrd and Perry made it clear that they valued the learning outcomes as they were articulated in this new curriculum, and they tried to enact those outcomes by rethinking the entire goal and sequence of the FYC courses they taught, and in the process developing new classroom activities and writing assignments for a course they had taught before using a different curriculum (Perry and Byrd Teaching Portfolios). This time and energy required for this kind of holistic re-thinking of how they taught the curriculum demonstrated to me a strong sense that

2 Similar Writing about Writing pedagogies have been implemented at universities across the US and Canada (Dort College, Florida State University, Montana State University, Taylor University, Texas A&M University, University of Alberta, Canada; University of Ottawa, Canada; University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, University of North Florida, University of Dayton, and Western Washington University). The pedagogy is also being used and studied at some high schools in Canada (Slomp).
the re-developed official motives of this system were valued by these teachers, and that they could meaningfully as teachers share the motives of this system.

The officially stated learning outcomes of the FYC program emphasize “instruction in both procedural and declarative knowledge about writing that is intended to be transferable to later writing situations,” (UCF “First” par 4). The writing handbook used by all students in the program articulates the official motives of the program for newcomers. In Wardle’s introduction to the writing handbook that every FYC student uses, the page titled “Principles of the ENC 1101 and 1102 Curricula” explains that students who possess these types of knowledge “know how to use language effectively and how to adjust their writing processes to be most effective given the rhetorical situation in which they are writing” (Lunsford Everyday UCF-5). A “deep understanding of writing-related concepts such as rhetorical situation, genre, plagiarism, error, incubation, discourse community” are also emphasized in the curriculum (Lunsford Everyday UCF-5). Concepts for ENC 1101 include: how writers and readers construct texts; effective writing processes and practices; how discourse communities shape writing; and understanding how writing works at the university (Lunsford Everyday UCF-7).

The official statement that FYC become an entry point to “vertical, comprehensive writing education” placed a heavy burden in FYC teachers to teach foundational concepts about writing as well as “transferrable” writing expertise and rhetorical dexterity. These foundational concepts and transferrable writing expertise were inscribed in the curriculum that Perry and Byrd teach. Both teachers spent time engaging in professional development to learn the concepts and rationale for teaching this curriculum. Additionally, Byrd and Perry recognized that the particular curriculum they teach was required although they have different explanations
of where these requirements originated. When I asked Perry why he chose this particular curriculum, he said: “It was inherent with the job. It was contracted,” but he also said he was “convinced pretty early of its usefulness [for] transfer” (Perry Interview). Likewise, Byrd explained to me that “outcomes are set by the university. However, I can pick chapters that are most useful to students. The ideas of transfer and of constructing texts all lead to rhetorical reading and rhetorical writing” (Byrd Interview). From my interviews with these teachers, I understood that they were both clear that they needed to teach a particular curriculum that would foster transfer, but they both also agreed with the curriculum and its motives to teach concept knowledge and transferrable writing skills as beneficial for learning to write. Although Perry and Byrd were required to teach a particular curriculum and understood the motives as “contracted” or “set by the university,” they also seem to have developed a sense of sharing the motives and even ownership over the curriculum as they worked to implement it in their classrooms (Perry and Byrd Interviews). That sense of sharing the motives and taking ownership seems to help Byrd and Perry develop agency for working in the FYC system.

Both Perry and Byrd engage with the official motives in their teaching practices, assignments, and daily classroom activities in their teaching portfolios by emphasizing knowledge of rhetorical situation, discourse community, and writing processes as articulated directly in interviews and demonstrated through their respective writing assignments for FYC (Byrd Interview and Portfolio, Perry Interview and Portfolio). For example, both teachers scheduled peer review sessions, multiple drafts, and self-reflection assignments for each major unit in FYC. Outcomes of the new curriculum include “consideration, active thought about how texts work and how writers and readers construct meaning” (Wardle Interview). As in many
FYC curricula, “good writing” practices, based on writing studies research, such as incubation time, multiple revisions, peer review, and self-reflection are valued by the teachers I interviewed, and these values are also evident in the assignments and daily activities these teachers develop for their classes (Byrd, Perry Teaching Portfolios). However, these teachers also had unofficial motives (centering around the terms empowerment for Byrd and authority for Perry) that were delivered to students in daily classroom activities and also generally aligned with unofficial motives (empowerment) of FYC expressed by program administrators (Wardle and Weaver Interviews). These official and unofficial motives are discussed in the next two sections.

Official Motives: Declaring and Practicing Concept Knowledge in Writing

The results of my analysis suggest that both Perry and Byrd enacted the official motives of the FYC program and that through this interaction, they developed a sense of ownership in how these motives were enacted in their classrooms. Official motives for this curriculum are centered around concept knowledge in writing, such as how texts are constructed, how writing processes works, how communities shape, and how to gain authority in writing. These motives are articulated in the course textbook in FYC, and also by the director and both teachers in this study. One specific outcome articulated by Wardle, Weaver, Byrd and Perry in interviews is that students understand how “texts are socially constructed” (Wardle Interview). The knowledge that texts are socially constructed allows students to “take some control of what happens to them when they go into a new community where they don’t know how to write the texts” (Wardle Interview). Professor Perry also emphasizes the construction of texts in his classroom. Perry’s goal is for students to “understand the constructedness of the idea of the
writing process, the constructedness of identity and community or identity as a writer, the writing process. . . and understanding that there’s a bunch of conversations going on and writing is at the center of different conversations” (Perry Interview). Likewise, Byrd emphasizes understanding the concept of social construction by asking students to write about the rhetorical situation that surrounds the construction of particular texts. For example, in her assignment titled Navigating Sources That Disagree, Byrd asks students to analyze three sources that express differing opinions on the same topic and writing this analysis during the first month of classes (Byrd Teaching Portfolio). In this assignment, Byrd explains, students learn that “everything is not black and white. In fact, very little is” (Byrd Interview). While assignments may differ, both teachers in this study articulate learning outcomes that generally align with official program motives.

Understanding writing processes as rhetorical is also an important outcome for this FYC activity system, but “outcomes should change or be a little different depending on who the student population is” (Wardle Interview). Both Perry and Byrd have developed units on writing processes, auto-ethnography assignments, asking students to conduct a study of their writing processes during the second month of classes. Perry’s first month of classes focuses on this concept. A unit on writing process is broken into two assignments, which include a Writing Self-Portrait and an autoethnography titled Major Project 1: Autoethnography (Perry Syllabus). Perry hopes that students can “articulate that kind of growth and development [as a writer] . . . in a really explicit way” (Perry Interview). Byrd’s writing process assignment, titled Auto-Ethnography of Your Academic Writing Processes, is similar, but with a focus on academic writing. She states, “I have them look at their own writing process, one of the things we always
look at is this idea of revision” (Byrd Interview). Although these learning outcomes are enacted differently in each class, self-reflection and analysis of writing processes are present as learning outcomes in both teachers’ classrooms.

The concept of discourse communities, how “a community values and helps them with writing . . . . so they can take some control of what happens to them when they go into a new community where they don’t know how to write the texts,” is another learning outcome for FYC (Wardle Interview). For Byrd, this translates into classroom activities that “have them look at this idea of discourse community from three different points of view” (Byrd Interview). For Byrd, this translates into writing analyses of several different discussions of discourse community: “it’s kind of a throwback to the Navigating Sources that Disagree [assignment from the beginning of the semester], so it kind of brings the whole course full circle” (Byrd Interview). Perry explains that his course moves outward from individual as writer with a particular writing process to the construction of texts to asking them to “think about how that works in a specific community” (Perry Interview). For Perry, the last unit culminates in an analysis of a particular discourse community and the texts it produces. This unit gives students an understanding of how all those things they’ve learned about writing work in a community, and more specifically how they can apply that knowledge when they need to learn about writing in a new community (Perry Interview). Discourse communities, then, also appear as learning outcomes in Perry and Byrd’s courses.

While each teacher enacts the learning outcomes differently, both share learning outcomes with the official FYC motives. Byrd, however, emphasized during her interview that rhetorical situation was the most important thing she wanted her students to learn. Perry, on the
other hand, believed students should really understand the constructedness of writing, and this term “constructedness” appeared a number of times in his interview transcripts as the thing students should take away from his course. And, while both teachers enacted the official outcomes in ways that are complementary, they also engaged in ownership over the ways these outcomes were enacted in their classrooms. While these official motives of learning concept knowledge are aimed at students, these teachers also seemed energized in talking to me and other teachers about these concepts, working out understanding and ways of teaching these concepts for themselves and for how they will present these concepts to their students. And, while these teachers were “required” by contract to lead small group discussions for professional development of other teachers, they do seem to have genuinely learned how to implement the knowledge they gained in their classroom activities.

Unofficial Motives: Empowerment, Ownership, Authority

The results of this analysis also suggest that both Byrd and Perry shared similar unofficial motives with the program administrators, and that these teachers enacted these unofficial motives in their classrooms in different ways. While official motives are inscribed and reinforced through professional development, unofficial motives are often enacted but not explicitly stated. One kind of unofficial motive for the administrators (program director, coordinator) and teachers in this study became apparent to me as I analyzed the administrator and teacher interviews and teaching portfolios. That kind of unofficial motive centers on the notion of student empowerment in writing, where students to actively engage with the concepts, content and process of writing, thus developing agency for learning about writing. In this dissertation, I argue that actively engaging with the concepts of FYC are at the core of what
teachers want for students, and this active engagement as represented by these unofficial motives is more important than individual feelings of self-efficacy.

All the teachers and administrators in this study understand that this kind of active engagement is important for learning. Wardle explains how she understands this unofficial motive: “I think that there’s a theoretical and research-based need for students to learn about writing in a way that empowers them to take some active role in their writing lives and education” (Wardle Interview). Perry doesn’t use the word empowerment in this passage, but he does use empowerment and ownership throughout our interview, and here he emphasizes how learning to enter academic conversations helps students learn how to use writing as a mode of participation:

Understanding that there’s a bunch of conversations going on and writing is at the center of different conversations—from the work you’re doing in your classes to the work you might do in your job, or the conversation that’s going on in this message board. And writing is at the center of a bunch of these different activities. To understand how writing works in these different activities, you can start to take control of those yourself, and you can join those conversations more readily (Perry Interview).

Byrd uses the term authority as a kind of empowerment when she describes how her last assignment, “a step-by-step plan to incoming freshmen on how to revise” helps students “feel like they have more authority over this whole thing, too. So it’s ‘You know what, I’ve been through this. Let me give you some advice on how to do it’” (Byrd Interview). Weaver simply says that students she sees “are more confident [writers]” (Weaver Interview). And, although student empowerment is not an explicitly stated outcome in this FYC program, it was
articulated by those that I interviewed for this study, indicating similar unofficial motives in these classrooms. While the teachers in my study did not do exactly the same thing in their classrooms—they didn’t teach exactly the same assignments or use the same classroom activities—they did claim that they felt empowered to create their own assignments and activities to meet the official learning outcomes of FYC.

Contradictions, Collective Action, Shared Motives, and Agency in FYC

The purpose of this activity theory analysis is to help understand the nature of agency in two particular FYC classrooms. As I have argued above, agency emerges through engagement with the motives of a particular activity system. Agency is not a given, nor does it exist a priori of the work of a particular activity system. The use of Engeström’s model helps explain how agency is emergent when “learners are engaged in diligent problem solving and structuring in order to cope with changes that have shaken their lives” (Engeström par. 9 Learning).

According Engeström, the tensions that are constantly at work in an activity system can act as a way to instigate a change, an expansive learning cycle, which happens when the collective action of the system engages in learning activities (Learning). Activity systems, then, are in a constant state of attempting to resolve tensions, of attempting to instigate change, of attempting to produce learning activities that will reduce or resolve tensions.

Figure 3 below (in an illustration that does not depict the dynamism of the system) illustrates the features of a particular FYC classroom system at UCF, where the bold line indicates a space where agency means collective action toward engaging some way with official and unofficial motives of the system (see Fig. 2 below):
For the teachers in this study, the motives of FYC are focused on student learning. For Byrd, problems in FYC are centered around students’ motivation, which is why she is motivated to so carefully scaffold assignments. According to Byrd, “If students have success early on, it builds their intrinsic motivation. That’s why I do the scaffolding because it builds their motivation and confidence as a writer, and they become more willing to consider complex ideas” (Byrd Interview). For Perry, the problems are more about understanding complex ideas such as the constructedness of writing. These teachers also agree that building concept knowledge about writing, actively developing writing practices, and empowering students to feel confident as writers are important learning outcomes of the FYC system.

The results I present in Chapters 4 and 5 of my study illustrate the kind of agency that I describe in this chapter. In the next chapter, I summarize the results of my last three research questions, including results of my self-efficacy survey and case studies of seven FYC students. These results suggest that agency for doing the work of particular systems is not carried only inside the head of individual students as self-belief, but also as emergent collective action.
toward the motives of those classrooms. The results also suggest that students bring to these classrooms unique histories which may contradict the motives of the new FYC system and lead to learning, to expansive learning, or away from the motives of the system altogether. The results also suggest that the lingering sense of agency that students bring from similar classroom activity systems can easily disappear as agency emerges over time through the collective action of the new activity system. The experiences of each student are unique and not easily categorized, but all students did experience some change in agency and self-efficacy for writing over the course of my study. As I compare self-efficacy survey results to the results of the case studies, the connections between high self-efficacy beliefs and agency for learning about writing are less important than the self-efficacy literature suggests.

After I explore the two classroom systems in this chapter, I move on to other results of this study. In Chapter 4, I will summarize the results of my survey and case study research. Next, in Chapter 5, I explore particular examples of two student experiences, Marie and Danielle, as they participate and build agency in these classroom systems. Taken together, the evidence in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 suggest revisions to the current model of self-efficacy in writing are necessary. If the goal of self-efficacy research is to improve learning by improving self-efficacy, then it becomes vitally important not to conflate higher self-efficacy with more learning. I suggest in these next chapters that self-efficacy does help individuals spend time completing the tasks of the system, and that newcomers who have high self-efficacy can do the work of the system, but I also suggest that it is more important to examine how agency for learning about writing emerges as participants enact the official and unofficial motives of the activity system.
CHAPTER 4:
RESULTS OF STUDENT STUDY

This chapter summarizes the results of my self-efficacy study on students in FYC, specifically addressing how agency for learning about writing is developed by seven FYC students. The activity analysis in Chapter 3 set up the ways in which FYC program motives are enacted in the classroom activity systems that these students experience. In the last chapter, both Byrd and Perry acknowledged the value of the FYC curriculum. Agency, as we saw in the last chapter, is emergent in activity systems, and stronger agency can be created by resolving contradictions that move members toward engaging the motives of the system, even if those motives are not completely shared or enacted. For Byrd and Perry, taking ownership of curriculum choices and feeling knowledgeable and empowered by the research and concepts that undergird the new FYC curriculum helped them, in different ways, share the motives of the FYC system.

In this chapter, I explore my last three research questions. The first section of the chapter deals specifically with three of my research questions: (1) What are student beliefs about self-efficacy in writing as measured by accepted survey methods used in self-efficacy research? (2) What writing habits, experiences, social relationships, and attitudes about writing do students bring with them and develop during FYC? And (3) Is there a change in student beliefs, practices, and knowledge about writing over the course of the semester? I present these results in three parts: Survey Results and Analysis, Comparison: Case Study and Survey Results, and Complicating Self-Efficacy for Writing in FYC. In the first section, I lay out the results my self-efficacy survey. I explain the results using statistical analysis to test for significance in mean
scores from the beginning to the end of the semester. In the second section, I summarize the case study results, briefly explaining each student’s experience engaging with the motives of FYC and comparing those experiences to their individual survey results. In the last section, I use these findings to explore how these case studies complicate current understandings of the ways in which self-efficacy and agency function in engaging with writing systems and learning how to write.

The results of my study suggest that self-efficacy survey methods, while they may predict a drive to earn good grades or to “do the work of school,” do not say much about how much students learn in systems where learning about writing is the primary motive. Despite the finding of many self-efficacy researchers that suggest high self-efficacy aids learning, in this study, some students with the lowest self-efficacy survey scores engaged more with the official and unofficial motives of the system, as evidenced by more frequently explaining the concepts they learn in connection with their own experiences, drawing maps in which writing is depicted as more socially constructed, and making attempts to change or improve their writing practices in response to feedback.

Survey Results

My first research question asks how student feelings of self-efficacy are represented using current methods used in self-efficacy research. In choosing a self-efficacy measure, I consulted a number of articles and dissertations, including reviews of self-efficacy in writing literature by Pajares and Klassen. Rather than creating my own survey, which would need to be validated for reliability, I chose to follow Bandura’s Guide for Constructing Self-Efficacy Scales and adapted a previously validated survey designed by Bandura and Zimmerman because
it most closely reflects the kinds of writing done by students in FYC. I administered paper
surveys to all students in Byrd’s and Perry’s FYC classes at the beginning and the end, weeks
two and fifteen, of the Fall 2010 semester. Surveys were anonymous, and 113 pre- and post-
pairs were analyzed for this part of the study.

Following Rhoads, Duerden and Garland, I analyzed the paired surveys in my study for
changes in self-efficacy from beginning to the end of the semester using a one-tailed, paired t-
Test for means. A one-tailed t-test was chosen for this study in consultation with writing
researcher David Wallace and after reviewing several books that explain how to use statistics in
the social sciences. Jack Levin and James Fox, for example, recommend this particular
treatment in pre/post test comparisons with students in educational settings (221-222). First, I
calculated an average of all student survey scores at the beginning of the semester and I
calculated another average for all student survey scores at the end of the semester. The average
increase in self-efficacy from beginning to end of the semester was 320 points. Using the Data
Analysis feature in Excel, I was able to calculate a one-tail t at 5.92, where the critical threshold
for significance is 1.65 (see Table 2 below). And, although not all students Byrd’s and Perry’s
classes increased self-efficacy scores, on average, they increased at statistically significant rates.

**TABLE 2 T-TEST FOR MEANS ON ALL STUDENT SURVEYS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means on all student surveys</th>
<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1569.327434</td>
<td>1888.929204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>110667.0972</td>
<td>86108.33423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.629336122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
<td>320</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>-25.00976313</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>5.9203E-48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.658572629</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to these calculations, the results of my self-efficacy survey reproduce the findings of previous self-efficacy researchers who use similar methods (Pajares; Rhoads, Duerden, and Garland; Zimmerman and Bandura). It should be noted that I was not looking for factors other than an increase in self-efficacy over the course of the semester. While other statistical tests run on this same data may explore additional factors, I was only interested in whether student self-efficacy beliefs about ability to write increased a statistically significant amount over the semester for most students in Byrd’s and Perry’s classes.

Because this dissertation challenges the effectiveness of self-efficacy measures as represented in the results of this survey, I also felt it necessary to appropriately represent and reproduce survey methods used by self-efficacy researchers so that I could develop a fair comparison between survey and case study methods in this chapter. And, while I have not been able to confirm every finding claimed by self-efficacy researchers by administering this survey, I do use this survey as representative of the way in which self-efficacy researchers represent self-efficacy and its effect on learning writing. Given that my survey results do indicate similar findings to those of previous self-efficacy researchers, I am comfortable making a comparison of these findings with the results of the seven student case studies I present in the next section.

Case Study Results

My last two research questions explore individual student histories and writing practices as well as how students learn writing concepts, develop writing practices, and express confidence for writing specific assignments over the course of one semester in FYC. Given that learning is more than just feeling capable of completing individual tasks, but it is also about feeling capable of doing the work of a social system, I argue that self-efficacy survey methods
are inadequate for describing the kind of genuine learning that is both socially and individually enacted. Through analyzing case study data, which included a series of four interviews, student-drawn maps of their writing process, and portfolio analysis, I found that engaging with both official (conceptual and procedural knowledge) and unofficial motives (empowerment as writers) is the driving force for learning depends less on high self-efficacy scores and more on enacting agency for writing in a system.

The patterns of change that I noted in my case studies rest on a continuum moving toward and away from engaging and sharing motives with the FYC system. Although any categorization system or descriptive framework limits the ways in which data is interpreted, this framework describing students as moving along a path over the course of the semester, highlights the slow and not necessarily linear nature of learning about writing. By imagining students moving on a continuum toward overcoming contradictions and engaging motives more fully or disengaging and moving away from the motives of the system, it becomes easier to see that student learning never moves forward in lock-step toward pre-determined outcomes, even well-articulated outcomes set in writing, in books, or on websites by teachers or programs.

The continuum that I describe in this section is not stable, and students at different times during the semester move along the continuum toward or away from engaging the motives of the system depending on many factors, such as grades on recent writing assignments or success with writing practices developed in previous writing courses. Also, it is important to note that in this study, I only follow students over one semester. Effects of learning about writing in a FYC course may be felt months or years down the road, and my study does not follow these students for more than a few months.
Because individual self-efficacy beliefs and general feelings of agency are fluid and tied to particular systems, the results of this study in no way suggest that students will continue to move in the direction I indicate here. For example, I spoke with Kent a full year after this study. When I had analyzed Kent’s case, I noted that, based on interview transcripts and portfolio review, he engaged only superficially with the motives of FYC, in a formulaic, almost sarcastic retelling of things he was supposed to learn but didn’t really apply in his writing practices. At this chance meeting over a year later, Kent told me he was thinking of changing his major from anthropology to writing. When I mentioned my surprise at his apparent change in attitude, Kent explained that he had a difficult semester during the time of our study (he and his wife both had some medical issues). Kent’s eventual move toward accepting the motives of FYC indicates both the fluid nature of self-efficacy beliefs and agency which are shaped in context as well as the possibility that the FYC experience has longer-term effects than those analyzed in this study.

**Individual Student Cases**

In these cases, many students moved generally toward more engagement with the motives of the FYC system—that is, at least toward the end of the semester many students did feel the things they were learning in FYC (concept knowledge, writing practices) would help them learn transferrable concepts about writing. Moves toward agency in writing are indicated in the case studies by increasing smooth integration of writing concepts into general conversation about writing, increasingly self-reflective talk about writing practices, increasing use of outside resources to help writing, and changes in writing practices, such as more revision, that foster good writing. In these cases, I also noted that student writing histories play a role in
the willingness to learn new concepts and practices. When writing histories and beliefs contradicted the concepts and practices learned in FYC, students tended to resist new ideas, at least at the beginning of the semester; however, as they moved through the course, many students began to see the value of learning new concepts and writing practices. In general, less agency in writing at the end of the semester was demonstrated by students with higher beginning self-efficacy scores, solid histories of success in writing, and more reified writing practices that more often resisted applying new ideas about writing, resulting in only minimal engagement with the system motives beyond just memorizing terms and following instructions to please the teacher. Conversely, students with lower beginning self-efficacy scores generally demonstrated greater amounts of agency for writing by the end of the semester, by engaging more fully with the motives of the system, applying these motives to their own lives and seeing the concepts and practices they learned in FYC as fixing problems in their own writing and applicable beyond this particular FYC course.

As a point of comparison, I begin this section with a summary of the self-efficacy survey scores for these students, grades, and case study results in rank order at the end of the semester (see Table 3 below). I will refer to the survey scores and the rank order of results as I discuss both the individual cases and the discussion of agency and self-efficacy in the last section. The rank order column on the far right is based on results from my case studies. Although the rank order is not entirely descriptive of the case study results, it does usefully summarize an overall impression of those results. When I discuss the individual student cases in the next section, the students are presented in rank order based on their case study results from highest self-efficacy to lowest self-efficacy at the end of the semester.
As seen in Table 3, I have arranged the individual cases in rank order by post-survey results from stronger self-efficacy scores to weaker self-efficacy scores. The rank order is noted in the column to the right of the scores. In the far right column are the rank order results of my case studies with “1” representing the strongest sense of self-efficacy in writing and “7” representing the weakest sense of self-efficacy in writing based on the case study results. In the following sections, I will draw comparisons between the self-efficacy survey scores and the self-efficacy patterns that these students exhibit in their case studies through interviews, writing maps, and writing portfolios.

**Danielle**

Danielle is an 18 year old Caucasian female journalism major. Although Danielle did not fully engage with the motives of her FYC classroom, she did rank the highest (1) in writing
self-efficacy at the end of the semester, based on my case study results. At the beginning of the semester, Danielle saw writing as something she needed to learn, and she was careful to make sure she understood everything she was asked to do, often emailing her instructor, Professor Perry, several times a week for clarification about assignments. One her first self-efficacy survey, Danielle scored 1030 out of a possible 2500, at the bottom of all students who took the self-efficacy survey that semester (Fig. 5). In our interviews at the beginning of the semester, Danielle talked about earning A’s in her high school writing courses and the rules she needed to follow (five paragraph essay form, never use “and” to start a sentence, use big vocabulary words) in order to write well: “When I sit down, I try to think of like bigger words to use or like devices I could use, like metaphors and stuff like that” (Interview 1). While Danielle did recognize that she needed to learn about writing, she was also often frustrated and disappointed when she did not earn high grades on her writing assignments. Danielle experienced a number of contradictions between her individual motives and her understanding of good writing that she needed to address before she could build agency as a writer in this system. After her first failing grade, 6 out of 10 points on a short reading reflection assignment, Danielle’s motivation waned; her answers were curt and slow, and she often looked down when we spoke about her writing (Interview 2).

Toward the middle the semester, when Danielle completed a rather long study of her own writing process (titled Autoethnography), she became more reflective of her own writing: “It kind of made me think, like how do I write and kind of made me question a little bit” (Interview 3). Danielle’s writing maps showed writing as a social activity, and she engaged her teacher and others in the class more often in order to help her build a sense of how to write.
better. While Danielle was able to reflect carefully on her writing, she failed to make many of
the revisions her professor suggested for revisions in her final portfolio, claiming that she
should have done more, but lacked the time (Interview 4). Danielle did express rather strong
sense of self-efficacy in writing, as I could see from her portfolio reflection letter. Danielle said
that she made revisions she knew would make her papers better—a rather confident statement
about her writing (Portfolio Reflection Letter). On her pre- and post- surveys, Danielle had
some of the lowest self-efficacy survey scores of all students in this study, but her self-efficacy
for writing as demonstrated in her case study had increased rather dramatically. Danielle’s
results suggest that although she had not fully adopted the official and unofficial motives of
FYC, she did express an understanding of the concepts she learned and an acceptance that
changing her writing practices would make her a better writer.

Tyler

Tyler is an 18 year old Caucasian male hospitality major. Tyler ranked a close second
(2) in writing self-efficacy to Danielle, based on my case study results. Tyler came to the
university confident in his writing skills, having won the English award at his high school. In
our first interview, Tyler explained: “I got, like, the highest English grade in the class, like, I
never did a bad paper.” Yet, Tyler’s low scores (1050/2500) on the self-efficacy survey at the
beginning of the semester seem to directly contradict the kind of self-efficacy he demonstrated
in our interviews about at the beginning of the semester. Tyler was very confident in his
efficient writing process at the beginning of the semester, smiling as he tells me: “I just start
writing. Whatever direction it goes, it goes. I don’t have set blocks, like this paragraph will be
on this topic. . . . After I’ve gone through and deleted and add stuff [maybe two or three
sentences], I pretty much print it out, ready to turn in. . . . I never read through the entire paper. I never have anyone look over my stuff” (Interview 1). Tyler’s easy, almost thought-less writing process changed rather dramatically after he experienced a dramatic realization that he had more problems in writing that he realized.

After his first low grade, a “D,” on a rhetorical analysis assignment in FYC, Tyler’s easy, smiling demeanor changed dramatically in our interviews: “Yeah, I was in a good mood and, like, the entire class. Like, she gave them back at the end of class. So, I was in a good mood and then I got it back and I was, like, oh that’s it” (Interview 2). Tyler remained discouraged and uncertain about writing, and he even considered dropping the class, but he knew he needed to learn more about writing, and he recognized that this class would help him improve, so he continued to engage with the curriculum. It wasn’t until near the end of the semester when he completed a discourse community assignment about Gee’s conception of Discourse when Tyler’s enthusiasm returned to our interviews (Gee “Discourse”). This assignment energized Tyler, who saw himself as a “mushfaker” in many discourse communities and, although he doesn’t explain it this way, the assignment helped him understand how his identity is constructed by the different roles he plays (Interview 4). It’s interesting to note that Tyler never mentioned his grade when discussing this paper, only that he was excited to learn about Gee’s concept of discourse communities. Tyler explains: “I think the mushfaker one I thought was really cool because like it showed how I don’t fit into that community, even though I’m part of it” (Interview 4). By this last interview, Tyler learned not to look for grades as approval for good writing, but rather to look at what he learned to build his confidence in writing.
Tyler’s last self-efficacy survey improved only 30 points, the lowest of all the cases I studied, and his ending scores were also near the very bottom of the larger group surveys, falling far behind the average increase of 320 points for other students. However, in interviews at the end of the semester, Tyler felt like his worldview was changed by taking this course: “I had never heard about discourse, or ethnographies before, and they have changed the way that I look at other people’s writings forever. I learned that there was much more thought and meaning put into simple newspaper articles or reviews of items, that it blew my mind [sic]” (Portfolio Reflection). Tyler’s writing process had gone from one draft with quick edits to multiple drafts using feedback from outside readers. Tyler’s case study results suggest that by the end of the semester, he had developed a strong sense of self-efficacy in writing and that he had engaged rather fully with the official and unofficial motives of the course.

Marcus

Marcus is an 18 year old African-American male theater major. Marcus ranked third (3) in writing self-efficacy based on my case study results. From the beginning of our time together, Marcus enjoyed learning, and he actively engaged with his coursework in FYC, only expressing real discouragement about his reading test scores (Interview 1). Still, Marcus was reluctant to make changes in his writing process, at least in our first interview: “It’s really late in the game for me to start changing my writing process from the last 12 years.” While Marcus’ first self-efficacy survey placed him toward the middle range of students (1630/2500), he experienced the most increase in self-efficacy of all students in this study—increasing his survey score by a whopping 540 points, far above the average increase of 320 points. Although Marcus’s self-efficacy scores indicate a strong belief in his ability to write, his actions during the semester
demonstrated a real need for outside approval and almost desperate attempts to get feedback from others on his writing. I can speculate this has something to do with his big personality and love of theater, but I also know that Marcus exhibited a strong sense of self-efficacy for writing throughout our interviews, speaking reflectively, fluently about his writing process, and articulating genuine interest in the concepts he was learning.

Overall, Marcus was self-reflective about his writing and genuinely critical of his work, and his writing maps reflected a highly social writing process. Marcus explained how he relied on the writing center for help when he wasn’t sure how to improve his writing: “I went to the writing center twice. Like, I did that last time, too. I got into the habit. I think when you go the first time, they give you good stuff, but I think you need follow up, so I make that a habit now” (Interview 3). In our third interview, Marcus described his reliance on classroom peer review when writing:

Yeah, the first draft was awful. I--when we did our peer review. I handed it to my partner and I said, don’t read this. I was like this is just crap. Don’t even pay attention to it. It’s not right at all. And then we had our peer reviews and after the talk, I was taking notes out of what she was talking about so I could understand where I was going and like reading other people’s papers kind of was like, oh, I see how they’re taking this. So I could see how they were doing it to see how I needed to be. And then I was like, so now I get it.

Even though Marcus spent much of the semester reaching out for help on his writing, by the end, he did have a sense that his writing was getting better. In our last interview, Marcus explains that he will be able to improve his writing after FYC ends:
I can continue to do it. I’m, after I do a lot of analysis. So, I have to write. It’s like a given and then if I eventually turn that into playwriting, who knows, I might start writing plays and understanding the different things the directing involves (Interview 4).

By the end of the semester, Marcus had drastically changed his writing process, discussed and applied concepts about writing, used social resources, and began to understand how to make his writing better, indicators of agency in writing. In our last interview, Marcus had “really mastered my writing process; I wasn’t really good at English and writing in high school. And so now I feel like I’ve overcome that” (Interview 4). The case study results for Marcus indicate strong engagement with the official and unofficial motives of the course. Marcus built self-efficacy by using the tools of the system to change his writing process in a way that reflected the motives of FYC.

Camille

Camille is a Hispanic female political studies major. Camille ranked fourth (4) in writing self-efficacy in my case study results. She’s bilingual, having learned Spanish and English at home as a child. Camille calls herself a “political junkie” and is majoring in political science. As a member of the Student Government Association, Camille is also very active socially and politically in the university community and has a deep interest in writing and publishing, blogging about her experiences as a bi-cultural female at a large university. When Camille entered FYC, she was engaged with writing and interested in learning more. In our interviews, Camille was almost always enthusiastic, engaged, and positive about her writing. She knew she was an effective writer, and she spoke enthusiastically about writing projects that could really change readers’ ideas.
On the self-efficacy scale, Camille rated herself toward the middle of the students I interviewed at the beginning (1970/2500) and near the top of students at the end of the semester (2260/2500). Camille was very reflective about her writing process throughout the semester, discussing how she wrote multiple drafts and had them reviewed by multiple readers. For example, because Camille needed scholarships, she wrote many versions of her college admissions essay and asked several of her high school teachers to give her feedback (Interview 1). Her interest in writing for FYC seemed, from our interviews, less engaged with learning about writing, and more related to Camille’s interest in the kind of civic action that could result from her ability to write well. It worked, too, because Camille did apply for and receive a number of college scholarships.

Camille never experienced much in the way of contradictions. She worked hard to understand concepts, but she never really struggled with her writing. Her goal for the course was not exactly the motive of FYC, but it was close enough that she felt comfortable sharing the motives of the system. By the middle of the semester, Camille believed she had learned to write more fluently and was able to discuss new concepts about writing. In our third interview, she says: “We had conferences with [the] Professor. . . . So that was really helpful. . . . Make sure that when you make move one, for example, to create a niche, like made sure you focus on what, like for example, people like Perl and Berkenkotter, what not their methods, but focus on what they found, like their discoveries” (Interview 3). But, in our interviews, Camille spent a good deal of time recounting what she learned.

Although her self-efficacy survey scores were very high at the end of the semester (2260/2500), indicating that she felt capable of doing the work of FYC, Camille doesn’t do
much more than repeat concepts and follow directions. While Camille engages with learning concepts about writing, Camille moves back and forth between engaging with the unofficial motives of the course. For Camille, high self-efficacy survey scores do correlate with high grades in FYC, but they don’t necessarily correlate with applying writing concepts outside this particular course. In her portfolio reflection letter, Camille explains the actions she took in the course, but she says little about learning and applying knowledge:

   It was my goal to ace this course and so I gave it my all. I earned full credit on almost all my reading responses, and perfected my formatting and citing. I aced all 3 of my major papers, even thought [sic] my first paper had the original grade of a B, I revised and obtained the final grade of A. In almost every homework assignment for each unit I got full credit or close by providing insightful ideas and following directions and following the professor's directions. In addition, I attended a Showcase in order to gain extra credit

In brief, after much work I believe I earned an A for this course (Portfolio Reflection). Camille’s results suggest that she did engage with the official motives of the course, she did everything she was supposed to do, and she worked hard. Yet, Camille’s engagement with the unofficial motives is rather uneven. She continued to see the concepts she was learning about writing as not relevant to the other types of writing she clearly enjoys.

Aurora

   Aurora is an 18 year old Caucasian female hospitality major. Based on my case study results, Aurora ranked sixth (6) in writing self-efficacy. Aurora came to this university because of its location near Disney World, and she often expressed a love bordering on obsession with the theme park (note that she chose as her pseudonym one of the Disney princesses). Her career,
she hopes, will be at the theme park. Aurora was passionate and vocal about her hatred of writing, and she saw writing courses as an obstacle to her ultimate career goal of working for Disney World.

Aurora expressed a strong hatred of writing and a rather dismissive attitude toward the usefulness of FYC, and she scored in the lower range on the self-efficacy survey (1470/2500). Aurora retained a last-minute, “writing-under-pressure” strategy that earned her average writing grades in high school and FYC. In our first interview, Aurora explained how she thinks when she writes: “What was going on in my head—like I had to have a good intro, and then of course writing rules. I need rules. They’re always in your head” (Interview 1). Aurora was very proud of her first paper, a literacy narrative, which came to her in a moment of epiphany. According to Aurora, “the night before [my first paper was due], and I just came up with this epiphany, and in like two hours I had five-page essay. So I don’t even know why. I was really proud of it” (Interview 1). So, for Aurora, it’s not hard work or even any kind of knowledge that makes a good writer, it’s about having epiphanies, at least at the beginning of the semester.

Contradictions were strong when Aurora received a “D” grade on that first paper. She became frustrated and was ready to give up on writing. She exclaimed: “What’s wrong? I should be able to do this! I was a straight A student in school” (Interview 2). Aurora stuck with the course, but often expressed a sense of futility about her lower grades, consoling herself by saying that the teacher was just a hard grader and that she hated writing anyway (Interview 2). But, by the end of the semester, Aurora did seem to resolve some of her contradictions, and in our interviews, she enjoyed talking about how much she hated writing. She also felt a small sense of empowerment about some of the new kinds of writing she was asked to perform: “Back
in grade school, I always felt that writing your opinions was a big no-no. But in your class [Professor Perry,] you asked us to write what we thought about. This was new to me” (Portfolio Reflection). And, although Aurora hated writing and believed she was terrible at writing, she did notice that she learned something by the end of the course. In our last interview, Aurora explains what she has learned:

> When I was reading my roommate’s paper last night, she, hers was very choppy. . . . It didn’t flow, and I was just like, you’re not connecting your ideas. I was like, oh my god! This is the person [me] that hates English, and I’m telling her--your ideas aren’t flowing. You need to come up with a concrete argument. This is not me (Interview 4).

Yet even after she told me this, Aurora continued to claim that she hated writing. In her portfolio reflection, Aurora says, “This class was one of the toughest things I have ever had to finish. I hate writing. I don’t know if you could have been able to tell, but I hate it. I compare writing to an old angry man lives [sic] next to you that seems to never die but you must have to live with” (Portfolio Reflection). By the end of the semester, Aurora had theorized that the best writing is fast writing that gets the bad experience over quickly. Aurora’s “epiphany” writing strategy has been reified into a consistent writing practice, almost in opposition to the concepts and strategies she learned in FYC. Aurora’s results suggest that she engaged with the official and unofficial motives of FYC in some ways, and she did see herself as a more capable writer by the end of the course, but she did little to change her attitude toward writing or her writing practices.
Kent

Kent is a 47 year old returning student seeking a college degree after his retirement from the military. Based on my case study results, Kent ranked seventh (7) in writing self-efficacy. Kent is extremely confident that his military experience has helped him adapt to any situation. In our first interview, Kent explains:

I have not been formally in college. I have spent all my time at 18 years of age I went to high school and into United States Marine Corps infantry. After four years of the infantry, I decided I’d rather be on the front lines, and became a Russian linguist for the Army. I had top-secret special background investigation; I had clearance; I worked all over the world and various things like that. And in so doing I had extensive Russian training at the Defense Language Institute.

In our interviews, Kent told me that he thinks almost constantly about his writing assignments, often having revelations about approaches and topics while driving his son to rehearsal or during discussions at his Bible study (Interview 3). While Kent’s major is anthropology, he also expressed a keen interest in non-fiction writing, hoping to write a sequel to Bill Bryson’s *Walk in the Woods* during his retirement.

On his self-efficacy scale, Kent scored near the top of self-efficacy scores both at the beginning (2060/2500) and end (2220/2500) of the semester. Kent seemed to work the hardest and think the most about writing of all the students I interviewed. Like Marcus, Kent often expressed great self-efficacy in writing, and like Marcus, Kent did often seek help with his writing, but he always attributed his success to his thoughtfulness about his own writing not to those around him who helped him with his writing. At times, he even contradicted himself,
describing his efficient and inspired writing process, but later in the same interview explaining how he printed off six or eight drafts to be “proofread” and “critiqued” by his wife (Interview 3). In other interview discussions of his writing, Kent explained deep consideration of feedback from his peers at Bible study and respect for the feedback his wife (whom Kent says has published several books) provides on his drafts (Interviews 3 and 4).

This mismatch between what Kent thinks he’s doing and what he’s actually doing as a writer is also evident in his lack of genuine self-reflection in his portfolio reflection letter. Kent’s portfolio reflection letter reads as formulaic and expresses an almost sarcastic explanation of his learning in FYC. In the first line of his reflection letter, Kent states: “I learned that I am wordy, I overcomplicate things, and I wander off topic. I hate to add to the previous line, but to support the requirements for this reflection I feel I must. Maybe if I repeat it enough I will remember” (Portfolio Reflection). And, parts of his reflection letter rather overtly attempt to cater to the teacher by repeating specific criticisms the teacher had written on his papers over the semester.

Kent seemed almost unaware of the contradictions he was expressing, and his superficial engagement with the motives of the course, his belief that he was really an excellent writer whose problems could not be addressed by what he learned in FYC, his declarations that in FYC, students don’t engage in any kind of real research, indicated to me a kind of individual self-efficacy not at all tied to the FYC system:

Frankly, I consider the research in all of them [at KnightsWrite Showcase] to be, let’s say, marginal at best. And if any of them had been paying attention in their other classes, in statistics, they would know that they couldn’t use that in a research paper. But this
wasn’t a real research paper, this was a mock research paper for Composition I (Interview 4).

At the end of the semester, because Kent doesn’t value the learning outcomes of FYC and he fails to see problems in his own writing, Kent disengages from the system, offering critiques to me in our interviews, but engaging with the motives for his teacher as a kind of performance, retelling of things he was supposed to learn and repeat back to the teacher. Kent often seems unable to engage in any meaningful way with the official motives of the course. Kent’s case study results suggest a kind of self-efficacy, but not self-efficacy for learning about writing.

**Marie**

Marie is an 18 year old engineering major and photography minor, Caucasian and female. Based on my case study results, Marie ranked last (7) in writing self-efficacy. Marie is intelligent, motivated and articulate. She plans to go on to medical school after graduation. Although Marie rates herself as a highly confident writer on the self-efficacy scale at the beginning (2080/2500) and end (2340/2500) of the semester, she continually deferred judgment about writing to her cousin, an English major at the same university. For Marie, writing is a tool to help her achieve her career goals, and learning to write better is not possible. Marie sees herself as a “math” person who is fundamentally incapable of understanding the mysteries of writing. Perhaps her high self-efficacy scores are related to a belief in her excellent work habits and use of resources to help her write effectively, but they do not appear to reflect a belief in an ability to write well.

In our first interview, Marie does express a strong motive to earn an “A” in this FYC course. For Marie, an A in the course means that she writes well. Marie is confident that she can
write for the course, but she sees little value in what she’s learning outside FYC. Marie does see problems with her writing, but she doesn’t believe FYC can help her learn about writing. Marie goes through the steps of writing as directed by her teacher, Professor Byrd, but she takes little away from the course other than her highly-prized A. Although Marie can explain the concepts that she is learning, she doesn’t seem to notice how they apply in her writing for the class. Even at the end of the semester, Marie continues to equate achieving her motive by earning high grades with hard work and efficient, established writing processes. In her portfolio reflection, Marie says, “Reflecting back on how hard I worked for this course I believe I earned an A. My final written products showed that I could read and write well because I earned two As and one B [sic].” Marie doesn’t seem to notice that she isn’t applying the concepts she is learning and can so easily recount to me in our interviews.

At the end of the semester, Marie sees herself as an unskilled writer, even though she gave herself the highest self-efficacy scores (2340/2500) of all the students in my study and nearly the highest of all the students I surveyed. In her portfolio reflection letter, Marie states: “I was confident about writing, but I knew it wasn’t natural for me. I’ve never been a natural writer.” Marie’s results suggest that she has very eagerly engaged with the official motives by following directions to the letter; however, Marie does not seem also to have become alienated to the point of disengagement with the unofficial motive that any student could be empowered as a writer.

Comparison: Agency and Self-Efficacy in Writing

When compared, the survey and case study results show that while self-efficacy surveys explain motivation to work hard, to be a “good student,” and/or to earn good grades, they
predict very little about how students engage meaningfully with the motives systems where learning is the primary outcome. In the summary of students and their final grades and self-efficacy survey scores (Fig. 5 above), I have ranked student survey scores from highest to lowest at the end of the semester. These scores can be grouped into two categories: higher and lower self-efficacy, where higher ends the semester with a score over 2000 out of a possible 2500, and lower ends the semester under 2000 out of 2500. Of course, any grouping is problematic, and may result in different interpretation of the data, but given the possibilities for grouping these students for the purposes of this discussion, this method offered a useful framework for the following analysis.

When comparing self-efficacy survey scores to case study results, I noted a pattern of high self-efficacy and disengagement with unofficial motives and another pattern of low self-efficacy scores and fuller engagement with the unofficial motives of the course. While all students engaged with the official motives of procedural and declarative knowledge about writing to different degrees, lower self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester, tended to indicate a sense that the student’s writing is in need of improvement and a willingness to see FYC as a possible way to improve writing. Higher self-efficacy scores at the beginning of the semester often indicated strong histories of success in writing or high levels of confidence at “doing school.” These students generally didn’t see much wrong with their writing throughout the semester, they sometimes saw FYC as an obstacle to doing what they really valued, and in some ways, they failed to accept or apply the conceptual and procedural knowledge in that was being taught in any meaningful way. If, as I argue in this dissertation, learning requires action, particularly the action of engaging with a social system, toward solving a problem or changing
the status quo, then these “high self-efficacy survey score” students did not learn much about writing.

It is important to note that the pattern I describe here is not a one-to-one match with learning. So, higher self-efficacy scores do not necessarily lead to less learning, and lower self-efficacy scores do not necessarily lead to more learning. I did notice, however, that the sense of self-efficacy I describe using case study methods does seem to correlate with learning more about writing, which I saw as applying concept knowledge to personal experiences and/or changing or developing writing practices and/or engaging with the motives of the system in a way that made the student express a kind of empowerment, ownership, or authority in writing.

Marie, Camille, Kent, and Marcus, all students in the higher range of self-efficacy scores, worked hard to meet their expected outcomes of earning an A in the course. They all did. Marie and Camille expected and earned an A, knowing from their previous experiences in writing courses and from the goals they set for themselves that an A was the goal. Not all students in this group, however, expected A’s at the end of the semester. Kent, for example, scored almost as high as Marie on the self-efficacy survey (2060/2500), but his expectations of high grades changed as he continued to resist engaging with the concepts being taught in the course. By the end of the semester in his reflection letter, Kent explained that he probably could have earned an A in the course, but he says, “I earned a B” (Portfolio Reflection). While a B is not a “low” grade, Kent did recognize that his grades may not necessarily reflect “A” work as expected by his teacher. Marcus worked almost frantically to earn an A, but he also worked frantically to improve his writing. So, while high self-efficacy scores suggest that students will
earn good grades (Fig. 5 above), and all these students entered the course with the motive to earn an A, that “student” motive did not remain constant for all through the semester.

Marcus, Marie, and Camille were all able to engage quite fully with the officially stated motives of the course (declarative and procedural knowledge about writing). They fluently discuss the new terminology and concepts (such as rhetorical situation, discourse communities, and concepts about writing and revision), the fluency in language shows that they have mastered these concepts. In different ways, these students engaged quite fully with the official motives of the system by doing exactly what was stated on assignment sheets and course syllabi. However, these students are not in lock-step based on their self-efficacy results. Students enact motives differently. For Marcus and Kent, writing practices do change over the semester, and Marcus is aware of how he can improve his writing by applying new concepts and adjusting his writing processes. Kent is less aware of his own writing practices, often contradicting what he says he does with what he actually does as a writer. For Marie and somewhat for Camille, learning in FYC seems to be more about memorizing concepts and writing about those ideas, not about using that declarative knowledge to change their already well-established writing practices.

Two students with the highest self-efficacy scores at the beginning of the semester were also the most disengaged from the unofficial motive. Although enacted differently, both Marie and Kent express this kind of disengagement from the motive of being empowered to write. Kent, for example, sees the work of his FYC colleagues as “fake research” for the class. Marie believes by the end of the semester that writing is for “gifted” people, but not for “math” people like herself. Taken together, the evidence suggests that higher scores on self-efficacy surveys do
predict higher grades in writing courses as demonstrated in the self-efficacy literature (Pajares, Klassen) and the results of these seven cases (Fig. 5), but they do not predict learning as indicated by engagement with both official and unofficial motives of the writing system.

Students with lower self-efficacy scores sometimes felt like giving up, and they generally earned slightly lower final grades (B’s) than those with higher self-efficacy scores (Pajares, Klassen, Fig. 5). While a B isn’t exactly a low grade, it’s possible that lower than expected grades at the beginning of the course (many of these students earned C’s and D’s on their first assignments) signaled a need to change writing beliefs and practices because, at least for Tyler and Marie, these early low grades made them realize they needed to make some changes to their writing processes over the course of the semester. Tyler, however, struggled more than Danielle. Because he earned so many low grades, Tyler considered dropping the course, and he told me this in his fourth interview:

I got the terrible grade back, and I was like, okay I was actually thinking about withdrawing and taking it again with a different person even though I liked her as a teacher. Maybe, I don’t know. And then the autoethnography started to make sense, so it was like, I’ll stick with it and I’ll do this paper and see how it works out. And then it got, and that wasn’t bad and this was even better. So it came off to, like, now I feel like I’ve gotten something out of this class.

What seems to keep Tyler going is the idea that he was learning something important and that he could write better as a result. Low grades at the beginning of the term, for Tyler and Aurora at least, seemed to encourage or even motivate learning, but at the cost of frequent frustration and emotional drain that these students expressed in our interviews.
Tyler, Danielle, and Aurora came in to FYC with a variety of attitudes toward writing, ranging from love to hate, and they enacted the motives of the system in very different ways. Tyler, for example, was rather confident and had won the “English award” at his high school. Danielle wasn’t very confident, but she wanted to learn about writing. Aurora started FYC hating writing and ended FYC hating writing. In our first interview, I asked Aurora about how she liked writing. She said: “I’ll do it because I need the grade or, but it’s not like, ‘Oh my gosh! It’s my favorite thing to do.’ I’d rather do math and science before I write” (Interview 1). Unlike the high self-efficacy students, who seemed to really value hard work as the way to write better, Aurora saw good writing as a form of inspiration, a sort of magic that flows through her at the last minute and while she’s under pressure. And like Marie, who had the highest self-efficacy score, Aurora believed that certain people are more gifted in writing while others are more gifted at math. Marie and Aurora (at opposite ends of self-efficacy survey scores) placed themselves in a “non-writer/math person” category, feeling less empowered than they started to the point of disengaging from the work of the system.

Of all the students in my study, Danielle (1030/2500) and Tyler (1050/2500) scored the lowest on the first self-efficacy survey. Yet, Tyler, much like Danielle, finished FYC with a real sense that he knew how to write better. In his portfolio reflection letter, Tyler (who had won his high school English award) says that when he entered FYC, “I was told I was the best and that was definitely not the case when I got to college comp. I was lacking in major areas of writing a paper. It made me feel stupid, yet also made me determined to work on my areas that need improvement so that way I can become a better writer” (Portfolio Reflection). Both Tyler and Danielle struggled with meeting the motives of FYC, but they were both able to articulate the
concepts about revision and to apply those concepts to their writing practices in ways that were meaningful; these students seem to have more fully engaged the unofficial motives of empowerment, ownership, and engagement than the high self-efficacy group.

In the next chapter, I explore two of these student experiences in detail. Marie, a student with very high self-efficacy scores, performed well and earned an A in the course, yet by the end of the semester she felt alienated from the work of the system, she didn’t feel empowered as a writer, and she failed to see any value in what she learned about writing. Danielle, however, is a student with very low self-efficacy scores who demonstrated a move toward engaging with the motives of the course, using social resources to relate to new concepts about writing and create new writing practices. While these students are a study in contrasts, together they represent many of the characteristics I noted in all the students I studied. For example, Danielle, like Marcus, seeks help almost frantically to help herself write better, and like Tyler, she is often discouraged by low grades. And Marie, like Aurora, believes she is not gifted at writing, and like Kent and Camille, she enters school with a history that gives her confidence that she can succeed in FYC. Both Marie and Danielle pass FYC and learn the concepts. The both meet the official motives of FYC (conceptual and procedural knowledge about writing); however, while Danielle makes moves toward the unofficial motives like empowerment, Marie moves away from feeling empowered as a writer. As discussed in Chapter 3, both students have teachers who feel engaged and empowered as teachers of the FYC curriculum, and they both work hard to implement official and unofficial motives of the FYC program in their classes. Both students have excellent teachers and are afforded the best possible opportunity to succeed in FYC. Both do succeed, if grades are the measure of learning. However, the results of my study suggest that
neither grades nor self-efficacy survey scores best explore how much students learn about writing in FYC.
CHAPTER 5:
EMERGENT AND ENACTED AGENCY IN TWO FYC WRITERS

Given the model of FYC developed in Chapter 3 as a system of FYC in which the teachers and administrators have similar and complementary official and unofficial motives, it seems likely that students who enter this system will make attempts at engaging with the motives of the system. In this chapter, I highlight two particular students and they ways they enact the motives of the FYC system. The results of the seven cases explored in Chapter 4 show a continuum from high to low self-efficacy survey scores and a different continuum of engaging with the official and unofficial motives of the system from fuller engagement to disengagement an activity theory lens. The results of the case studies suggest that students who more fully engaged both official and unofficial motives demonstrated more self-efficacy in writing at the end of the semester. A comparison of survey and case study results also suggest that students with the highest self-efficacy survey scores were less likely to see the need to learn anything about writing and less likely to engage with the unofficial motives of empowerment, ownership, and engagement, and students with the lowest survey scores were more open to learning how to write better and more often enacted the motives of the system as personally important and useful in other contexts. The two students highlighted in this chapter represent the two ends of a continuum I described in the last chapter as moving toward and away from engaging and sharing motives with the FYC system, and at the same time, also representing the two ends of the high and low self-efficacy survey score continuum.

The evidence in this chapter addresses the three critiques of current models of self-efficacy theory proposed in Chapter 1 by exploring (1) the nature of writing as conceived by
students at the beginning of the semester and how those conceptions changed over the course of
the semester for one student but not for another; (2) by how self-efficacy in writing changes as
students engage with the motives of the system. The results of this analysis indicate that agency
in writing is formed through fuller engagement with official and unofficial motives of the
system and that self-efficacy beliefs are formed as students struggle to resolve contradictions by
seeing affordances and using tools to enact the motives of the system.

When strong histories of success in writing prevent students from using affordances in
the system, students fail to engage in any meaningful way and they may leave FYC feeling
disengaged as writers and without having learned much about writing. When student histories
allow them to see the need for learning about writing, students look to the system for
affordances that can help them achieve their goals of wanting to write better. These personal
goals closely match the goals of the FYC system, which is motivated to help students learn
about writing. When these motives are shared, agency is built for doing the work of the system,
and strong self-efficacy beliefs are formed. Student histories shape the ways they engage and
enact the motives of a new system. Self-efficacy beliefs, which are carried in student histories,
help students “plug-in” to a system, but they are also re-formed as students work together to
develop agency for doing the work of the new system. When students feel they can use the tools
to contribute meaningfully to the work of the new system, agency is developed. When these
beliefs are internalized, through repeated action in the system, a sense of self-efficacy can be
carried with the student into systems that they recognize as similar.

As I articulated in Chapters 1 and 3, self-efficacy and agency are highly intertwined
concepts, so I will clarify my use of these terms in this chapter. I use the term self-efficacy
when referring to individual beliefs about accomplishing writing tasks, and the term agency when I discuss the broader sense of enacting the work of the system. More often in this chapter, I use the term *agency* because this chapter is more about how those feelings of self-efficacy are developed through plugging in and enacting the motives of a larger system. I also use *agency* to describe the action of the system that facilitates shared motives; whereas, I use the term *self-efficacy* when considering individual and more specific beliefs, usually shaped by individual histories, but also expressed by students as individual beliefs. It is theorized in this dissertation that self-efficacy for writing is built by participating in a context-specific system as an active agent.

Marie and Danielle are two first-year students who engage the system of FYC at UCF. Marie demonstrates a strong sense of self-efficacy, as measured on a self-efficacy survey, and yet her story also undermines many of the assumptions about learning to write in theories of self-efficacy. Danielle demonstrates a weak sense of self-efficacy, as measured on a self-efficacy survey, yet her story illustrates enacting self-efficacy and stronger beliefs about her ability to learn writing than Marie. For both, contradictions develop when their historically-formed expectations of “good writing” contradict the motives of the FYC system. For both Marie and Danielle, these contradictions cause a psychological double bind which must be negotiated over the course of the semester. This double bind is resolved in different ways by these two students—Marie resolves it by increasing alienation from the work of the system, and Danielle resolves it by increasing participation and agency within the system.
Marie’s Semester

Marie enters FYC confident in her ability to earn an A in the course. Her motive for FYC is to finish the course as quickly and painlessly as possible and still earn an A so she can get on to the important work of getting into medical school. At the beginning of the semester, Marie is engaged and interested in learning new concepts about writing, but she is often frustrated by the amount of time it takes to write her papers and the number of drafts she is expected to write. By the end of the semester, Marie is confident that she can write for the course as demonstrated in her very high self-efficacy survey scores (2340/2500) but she doesn’t see any value in what she’s learning outside FYC. The results of her case study suggest that while she felt a strong sense of self-efficacy for meeting the official motives, but she failed to “plug in” to the system in a way that helped her engage with the unofficial motives of empowerment for learning how to write.

Marie is a tight bundle of energy who bounded into our interviews each month nearly out of breath from her busy schedule. She is a highly motivated engineering major whose ambitions are to go to medical school. Outside school, Marie keeps a journal. She loves music and photography. Marie engages the social networks with gusto. She follows several bands on Twitter. Last summer, she tracked down her favorite band at Subway before the concert because she discovered on Twitter that they were eating there before the show. Marie also claims that Facebook is as vital as her circulatory system, but writing wasn’t part of that system, according to Marie. Marie avoids any extra or advanced English courses. In our first interview, Marie proudly states: “I never took an AP English course.” According to Bandura and Daly and Miller, this type of avoidance behavior is likely due to high writing apprehension which also
often indicates low writing self-efficacy. However, that low self-efficacy for writing is not reflected in her survey scores at the beginning of the semester (2080 out of 2500), which places her near the top of her peers in self-efficacy for writing.

Marie represents a type of writer who often enters FYC—one who has the motivation and skills to complete the required writing tasks, but also one who does not see value in the skills and concepts she will learn in FYC. FYC is just another writing course to be “aced” with strategies that have worked well in the past—hard work and meticulous attention to the instructions. Marie resists changing her beliefs about writing as a “natural ability” and one she does not possess: “I’m a math major, so English is not my thing” (Interview 1). Hard work and extra time and effort earn her good grades: “I put, like a lot of time and, like, analysis in them. Like, we only had to choose one of the four, um, like, parts of the rhetorical situation and, like, I analyzed all four parts and then I, like, went in depth on the one I found the most” (Interview 1). The distinction between spending time accomplishing particular the goal of earning an A and valuing knowledge about writing becomes very important when considering how Marie interacts in the FYC system.

In the following discussion of Marie’s experience in FYC, I will discuss the various contradictions between her own history, beliefs, and motives about writing and those of the FYC classroom she enters. In negotiating these contradictions, Marie chooses to retain her well-established writing practices, writing beliefs, and writing history. Rather than engaging with the motives of the system, Marie’s strong personal motives and belief that FYC won’t really teach her anything new, keeps her writing in the same way all semester without really learning anything new about writing. Marie’s case suggests that the kind of self-efficacy that earned her
such high scores on the survey does not predict that she will learn anything about writing. Analyzing her case using activity theory shows that this kind of self-efficacy actually hinders her ability to learn about writing by preventing her from seeing any problems with her writing and thus preventing her from seeing affordances in the FYC system that could help her learn about writing.

**Contradictions: History in Writing**

Given her strong sense of self-efficacy as shown in her survey results, Marie should feel capable of writing; however this strong belief does not match the data from her case study when I analyzed her transcripts from the first interview. Marie does say that she keeps a journal and has kept one since middle school. Marie writes in her journal about once a week and says writing is a “stress reliever.” Marie also rereads her old journals. She explains: “I was looking at some of my old journals from when I was like in middle school. I was like, God, there was one, like my personality was so much different . . . . I’m like the crap I went through. Why didn’t I just skip middle school altogether [laughing]. It was a horrible time” (Interview 1). Although Marie sees value in this type of personal writing and in “just anything that I can relate to, like even in English class,” she also declares that she despises English as a major [when discussing her cousin’s major] and that she is not a natural writer. Marie also indicates that she does not have the gift for writing like her “English major” cousin (Interview 1). This contradiction may have something to do with her history as someone who had a hard time in school, as Marie alludes to in her journals from middle school. Perhaps this history moved her to identify with math people in school or to avoid subjects like writing. Or, perhaps school writing is pseudo- or non-transactional for Marie, isolated from any “real” writing that she will ever perform.
Although she did not elaborate on this history in our interviews, the strong aversion to writing courses must have some historical significance for her. Because of this strong history that contradicted some of the new concepts she was learning in FYC, Marie experienced a number of contradictions as she moved through the semester.

**Contractions: Expectations of Good Writing**

Given Marie’s strong history of aversion to “school writing” (identity as a “math” person, enjoyment of personal writing, hatred of “school writing”), Marie should not be motivated in FYC; however, in our first interview, Marie does express a strong motive to earn an “A” in this FYC course. For Marie, an A in the course means that she writes well. Marie explains that “grades mean so much” (Interview 1). This motive is shared by most students in my study at the beginning of the semester. Marie’s motive for FYC (to earn an “A”) does not necessarily help her share the motives of FYC administrators or even her teachers because while good grades do indicate an ability to perform the tasks required, they do not always indicate learning. And, while most students (in this study) start the semester wanting to earn an A in the course, many other students I interviewed (Tyler, Marcus, Aurora) do move away from their desired outcome and more toward sharing the system motives of learning about writing by the end of the semester. Marie, on the other hand, continues to discuss grades on her assignments as part of recounting her writing process at each interview and in her final portfolio reflection letter.

Marie’s teacher, Professor Byrd, however, never mentions grades as an outcome for her course. Instead, she wants her students to learn that “writing is not just something you do in college” (Byrd Interview). While research in self-efficacy does sometimes use final course
grades to triangulate the self-reported survey data with achievement in writing (Pajares; Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons), researchers in writing studies do not support using course grades as a measure of learning how to write (Slomp, Yancey). For example, final course grades often encompass more than just assessment of writing, but often include grades for good work habits such as participating in class, completing homework or reading notes, and therefore, they do not always fully reflect a student’s ability to write well. While Marie expects an “A” as an outcome, the motives of her teacher are for Marie to become a better writer through declarative and procedural knowledge about writing.

Contradictions: Writing is Fast and Easy

Given Marie’s constant drive for good grades, her actions are often directed at ways she can earn those good grades. However, her writing history also includes the need for efficiency in completing writing assignments, a history shared by many of the students I interviewed. In our interviews, Marie often expressed anxiety and frustration over writing assignments taking too much time. Except for Kent, the older student returning to school after 20 years in the military, and Camille, a budding journalist and blogger, the students I interviewed all viewed efficient writing as “good writing.” However, this definition contradicts the definition of “good writing” in the FYC program and by teachers in my study, which encourage incubation, multiple revisions, and peer input as a part of the writing process. Some of the self-efficacy survey questions, however, suggest that efficient writing is good writing, for example: “When given a specific writing assignment, I can come up with a suitable topic in a short time”; “I can start writing with no difficulty” (Bandura and Zimmerman). As those survey questions suggest, Marie and many other students in my study came to FYC with the belief that writing quickly is
a sign of good writing. This contradiction in definitions for good writing causes frustration for many students in my study.

With the exception of Camille and Kent, who rather enjoyed the time required to do each assignment, the five other students I interviewed expressed frustration with the time required for each writing assignment in FYC. Likewise, Marie’s descriptions of writing difficulty stem most often from assignments that take a lot of time. In our third interview, Marie explains: “I wasn’t really frustrated with my paper. It just took a lot of time. That bugged me the most. It was so time consuming. It was horrible” (Interview 3). Perhaps her frustration stemmed from spending a lot of time on a task that she didn’t see as valuable. In her portfolio reflection letter, written at the end of the semester, Marie explains her first short assignment on a reading from class, an article titled “Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively” by Margaret Kantz. Her response to this article, which Marie described as a “dull” article about “creative research,” frustrated her a great deal: “I probably spent two hours on the 150-word assignment and wanted to cry as I was completing it” (Portfolio Reflection). Efficient writing is not one of the official (declarative and procedural knowledge about writing) or unofficial motives (empowerment) of FYC, and it is not stated in any of the official outcomes or inscribed motives for FYC courses. Program administrators and Marie’s teacher also never mention efficient writing as an unofficial motive for the course. And, while some of the literature in expertise (Bazerman “Writing,” Carter, Sommers and Saltz) suggests that expert writers do write efficiently in a “flow” type state for a number of reasons, it is not generally expected that FYC students, as newcomers to academic writing, will reach this level of expert proficiency in less than one semester.
Even with a contradiction between her motives (of high grades and efficient writing) and the official motives of the system (learning concepts about writing, practicing those concepts, and producing better writers), Marie does not perceive the contradiction as the source of her frustration. At times, Marie contradicts herself, sometimes claiming that writing is easy and other times claiming that it almost makes her cry in frustration. In her portfolio reflection, Marie explains that writing is not stressful for her: “I don’t view writing as an extremely demanding process, so I don’t treat it as one. I work hard when I write but I don’t freak out if something isn’t working for me, I’ll take a break and come back to.” [sic] [end of paragraph] (Portfolio Reflection). It’s almost as if Marie doesn’t recognize that her writing is not as carefully constructed or efficient as she asserts.

Socio-cultural theories of writing agency explored in Chapter 1 suggest that writing is formed by engaging with the work of a system and adopting the writing practice of that system. In order to meet the motives and learn how to write better, Marie may need to give up some of her strong beliefs about herself as a writer and practice what she is learning in FYC. However, Marie’s strong beliefs about writing as efficient gives her the confidence to reject at least in practice many of the values of good writing (such as incubation, revision, peer review) presented in FYC, at least in practice. Instead of learning new ideas about writing, Marie relies on the validation of good grades to confirm her efficient writing process.

*Negotiating Official Motives: Concepts about Writing*

Given that Marie’s understanding of good writing is based on writing efficiently and getting good grades, and given that she follows the teacher’s instructions well and earns good grades, it’s not surprising that Marie accomplishes the officially stated motives of FYC without
much trouble. As explained in Chapter 3, the official motives of FYC are that students
demonstrate declarative and procedural knowledge about writing. Marie negotiates initial
contradictions and resulting frustrations by relying on what she does well—school learning.
Marie follows school rules. Marie studies hard, pays attention to the teacher, follows directions,
and takes advantage of the tools available to help her achieve her objectives. For Marie, the
rules mean learning the vocabulary of the new community and being able to explain that
vocabulary to others verbally and in writing. Marie is able to memorize new terms and use the
language of the new system with a great deal of fluency. Marie is also able to explain new
terminology she learns—rhetorical situation, audience, constraints, author, encoder/decoder,
topic—all appear in one answer about what she learned during the first month of FYC
(Interview 1). This fluency with new language seems to indicate a willingness to learn new
concepts. And, in many ways, Marie does see herself as working toward with the motives of the
system by adopting its language. When I first began analyzing Marie’s transcripts, her use of
language and discussion of new strategies indicated a strong sense of participation with the
motives of the FYC system—more strongly than other students who did not adopt the language
as quickly. However, when I looked closely at what Marie was saying about writing concepts
coupled with a close examination of her writing practices, I noticed contradictions between her
statements about good writing and her writing practices.

Contradictions: Stated Rules; Staid Writing

Marie’s success in previous writing courses has taught her that “school writing” requires
the correct application of writing rules and efficient strategies in order to write quickly and
correctly, and for Marie, successful application of these rules and strategies has helped her
achieve her goals of good grades, in some ways, fostering resistance to the new ideas about writing by her teacher. After all, Marie was successful in earning her A’s, so she didn’t see the need to change her writing practices. Still, Marie is able to articulate what she is supposed to do. In our first interview, Marie explains: “I always thought, like, my first draft was supposed to be good and then, like, I tweaked it a little and got my paper. And then I’ve learned that revising, like, you completely tear apart your paper and then you get, like, your final draft. Sometimes you have to revise two or three times to get your final draft.” Yet, even though she can articulate correctly that revision is “tearing apart your paper,” on her first assignment, Marie did not change her writing process to reflect this new knowledge. Her portfolio contains two drafts of her first assignment, a Diagnostic Essay in which she was to read a student essay titled “Seven Ways High School Prepares You for Failure” by Kelsey Daiz. The two drafts in her portfolio contain only minor, local changes. No “tearing apart” is evident in her work.

In practice, Marie focused on learning the rules of writing rather than on sharing the motives of learning about writing. Marie is able to recount the steps of her writing process, but she doesn’t change any of her writing practices over the course of the semester. From our discussions of her writing process on each assignment during the semester, I noticed that the writing process she brought with her to FYC (as she explained in our first interview) remained rigidly stable the entire semester, despite the concept knowledge about writing she says she has learned. For Marie, learning the writing process wasn’t about becoming a better writer, but about learning the rules of the writing process so that she could earn an “A” in the course. For example, on her first paper, Marie spent time pre-planning and waiting for inspiration, then she takes her paper to her cousin for “editing” before she turns it in. Although Marie can explain the
concepts that she is learning, she doesn’t seem to notice how they apply in her writing for the class. Marie’s use of language and knowledge of writing rules suggests that her writing behaviors might change, but her motive to earn an “A,” by following the writing process steps she learned in high school (brainstorm/draft/edit), rarely varied except when additional drafts were required by her teacher:

[I] had to write my expectations on, and, like, it was only like a 2 or 3 page paper, but I took it really seriously. Like, I brainstormed and then I wrote down a draft, or like, I wrote down a web of ideas, and then I wrote down, like a draft, and then, like, I wrote my paper, and then I had, like, my friend who’s an English major—she’s an upper classman. I had her proofread, and then I redid it. Like, I went through a lot of steps and like included internal citation (Interview 1).

Marie’s teacher explains that she wants her students to learn that “writing is a process, and it’s been shaped over the years, and it’s not just about grammar. It’s about looking at a situation and adjusting the writing for that situation” (Byrd Interview). For Byrd, writing processes are rhetorical; for Marie, however, the writing process as a set of universal, linear, discrete steps. Like Bandura and Zimmerman’s model of writing as a set of discrete tasks that can be applied to any writing situation, Marie’s describes her writing process as stable and divided into discrete steps (see Fig. 3 below).
FIGURE 3 MARIE’S WRITING PROCESS MAP

This rigid writing process is evident in her second writing map, where Marie lists her writing process in steps:

(1) Marie in bed thinking about her project and listening to music.

(2) At her desk writing her first draft.

(3) In her class doing a peer review. Marie drew herself at the front of the room.

(4) Walks to the residence hall to ask her cousin (an English major) to review her paper.

(5) Back to her house and writes her final draft.

(6) Turns in her paper.

As an afterthought, Marie adds a pre-planning step—(0) Writes detailed words to describe the tasks she needs to complete. For Marie, the writing process consists of a long pre-planning period, usually starting when a writing task is assigned, and she thought about her assignments in her resting hours before writing. As with all her maps, Marie prefers a strict order and lots of
words to explain her points. She wants to be very sure that I understand exactly what she means by her drawing, choosing to label each image. This labeling may also indicate a sense of insecurity about her ability to communicate ideas in this unfamiliar mapping mode of communication, or perhaps her “good girl, rule following, please-the-teacher” attitude. If Marie labels her drawings, she’s sure there’s no ambiguity about following the instructions.

Being able to recount and articulate writing processes doesn’t mean that learning has been enacted in any significant way. In practice, what Marie calls revision is really editing. Marie focuses on the rules of writing and a historical writing process that came with her to the university rather than applying the new concepts she learns in FYC. For example, the paper she illustrates in Fig. 6 is a rhetorical analysis paper titled Navigating Sources That Disagree, where her teacher, Professor Byrd asks students to examine three articles on the same topic, written from different rhetorical perspectives. The point, for her teacher, is that students deeply understand rhetorical situation, something she emphasizes a number of times in my interview about her goals for FYC: “They understand the rhetorical situation so much. I start with them and it’s just constant, constant, constant through the whole paper” (Byrd Interview). Yet, when I asked Marie about this paper in our interview, Marie simply recounted her process step-by-step (Interview 2). Rather than applying rhetorical situation to her own writing process, Marie looks for ways to explain the steps of the process, as if it’s another thing to memorize for school. When she does “revise,” Marie looks for areas where she can make small, editing-type adjustments to improve her grades. She is content with her first graded paper, at a B+, convinced that she could make an A on subsequent papers because now she understands that the teacher wants a good title: “I realized then in class when we were turning it in, she was, like,
someone said something about a title, and I was, like, crap, I didn’t make a good title! So I knew that wouldn’t help me, but other than that I felt pretty confident” (Interview 2).

Marie’s focus is on the surface level of writing—getting the details right for the teacher, but not on the deep level of understanding writing process as rhetorical that her teacher so wishes her students would learn. For example, Byrd’s assignment on writing process says, “Answer the questions ‘What are my writing processes for college-level academic writing tasks? What are the strengths and weaknesses, in light of the readings for this Unit? What needs to be done differently? What is working well?’” Marie listens carefully does try to apply that information; however, her writing practices indicate that she hasn’t really learned the concepts she has memorized.

Marie only changes her writing practices when those practices are made into a rule (such as when the teacher requires extra drafts or peer review). Marie’s writing process remains relatively stable over the semester, adding revision steps when requested by the teacher. After completing her third writing assignment, a self-study of her writing process which her teacher has titled: Auto-Ethnography of Your Academic Writing Processes, Marie concludes that she spends little time revising—something she already knew and indicated to me from the start of the semester. In her third assignment, however, Marie incorporates four drafts and uses peer review and a teacher conference to help her write. Yet, Marie is unhappy with the inefficient process of writing this paper and becomes disengaged with the purpose of the assignment (to learn about her own writing process and apply that knowledge to other writing situations): “Like I knew I had to use IMRD and CARS, and I know I need to cite my sources. Just actually doing it. It was just like, I could be doing something better right now.” So, while Marie does talk
about revising, it is a time-consuming process that she doesn’t like. Marie does not demonstrate an understanding of her teacher’s motives or purpose in requiring this time-consuming process. Efficiency and rule-following seem to go hand-in-hand for Maries as strategies to accomplish her motive of earning an “A” in her FYC course. When the rules interfere with her definition of good writing as efficient (by causing her to waste time), she becomes irritated with the writing process. Given the description of self-efficacy in Bandura’s theories, it’s almost as if Marie possesses a kind of self-efficacy for “school work” rather than for learning about writing. Marie’s self-efficacy for writing does not help her share the official motives of FYC, nor does it help her to share the unofficial motives of FYC.

**Negotiating Unofficial Motives of Empowerment**

As discussed in Chapter 3, unofficial motives of FYC expressed by administrators and teachers I interviewed, center around the words: empowerment, ownership, confidence, and authority in writing. For Marie, however, these notions of empowerment center around “doing school,” not learning about writing. And, as Marie continues to experience contradictions with these motives of her FYC classroom activity system, she eventually loses any sense of empowerment as a writer. By not participating in the motives of the system, Marie becomes disenfranchised from the system. And, while the terms empowerment, ownership, confidence, and authority mean do often mean different things, the notions of building confidence and authority, taking ownership, and empowerment for learning about writing, all contribute to building agency as a participant in an activity system. Because Marie doesn’t participate in these motives, she does not build a sense of self-efficacy for working toward those motives. Unofficial motives, by their nature, are not inscribed or specified or even systematically applied.
Because unofficial motives are not inscribed, these motives are often implied in classroom practices and in ways teachers talk about writing. Unofficial motives are not taught as learning outcomes, and they are loosely communicated to students in classroom talk and practice, perhaps leading to differing understanding of the motive on the part of teacher and student.

In some ways, it appears that Marie understands her teacher’s unofficial motive of building authority in writing; however, authority and empowerment seem to be applied differently than her teacher expects. For her teacher, authority means “they start taking ownership of the process and begin to forget being taught FCAT. They begin taking authority and more responsibility in their writing” (Byrd Interview). While her teacher expects more ownership and authority over the course of the semester, it’s almost as if Marie loses ownership and authority for writing as the semester progresses. For Marie, authority means showing confidence by clearly articulating the concept knowledge presented in the course, following the rules of writing presented by her teacher precisely, and doing it all efficiently. While ownership and authority are not the same as self-efficacy or building agency in a system, ownership and authority do contribute to agency for work in a system.

Relying on Gifted Writers

When she speaks about writing, Marie seems to represent authority in writing. She is able to recount ideas from articles she has been assigned to read; she knows exactly what steps to take to complete each writing task; she has earned good grades in the course; and she has done this without help from her peers in class, except when she views someone as “gifted” in writing. In our last interview, Marie explains her peer review process in writing her last paper, a
discourse community paper in which she was asked to argue a position on Gee’s claim about discourses in his introduction to *Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics*:

So I did the peer review, which is always like worthless, and then I just think my peer review was good this time because it was a different girl reviewing. If she, like, she told me, like, this paragraph doesn’t fit here, it doesn’t flow here, like, move it. Put it somewhere else. I actually, like, changed. Like, I moved around three or four paragraphs. So my peer review was good this time. And then I went home and edited, like, probably half an hour or an hour and that was my final one (Interview 4).

Marie uses “gifted” writers as resources, but in that process she loses her own authority as a writer. In this case, and in all her other experiences writing for this class, Marie relies on those she feels has a talent for writing. In Marie’s case, she takes all her drafts to her “English major” cousin for editing before turning them in to the teacher. In the example above, Marie has substituted her gifted cousin for a gifted classmate. It’s almost as if when Marie relies on others more gifted in writing, she loses her own authority as a writer—an outcome her teacher did not expect. In an interview with Marie’s teacher, I asked about the overall message she wanted her students to learn about writing. Professor Byrd states that writing is “not this idea that’s locked up in a vault and only some people can crack the code. . . . It’s not a secret message that only some people can figure out.” Yet, Marie continues throughout the semester to tie her success to other good writers and to her writing teacher rather than to herself as a writer. Marie explains that she can only meet demanding writing tasks if she has a detailed rubric, “Like for [Professor Byrd], we’re given a rubric so I know what to look for, like specifically. But if not, I mean I’m just going to have to go with my gut and hope that if I just work hard at it” (Interview 4).
In our last interview at end of her FYC semester, Marie discusses this idea: “I do not know how to improve myself in my writing. That’s definitely why I’m taking English. Like I could never do this on my own. Absolutely. That’s not my thing.” Even when she is able to write successfully according to her motives of earning a good grade, Marie fails to see her success as an ability to act as a genuine participant in the system. For example, although she earned an A on her last assignment in FYC without the benefit of “edits” from her English major cousin, Marie seemed to view her success as a sort of fluke. On this last paper, Marie says: “I was like I didn’t try very hard. Like, I was definitely really lazy on this paper. It’s only three or four pages. . . . so I was like, I kind of thought I did a crappy job” (Interview 4).

Marie’s conception of writing as an individual effort, isolated from the system, is not one that works in concert with foundational theories and motives of the FYC system she enters. Marie fails to practice the concept knowledge about writing as socially constructed and continues to hold on to her belief that writing is the result of individual effort. Contradictions between her self-beliefs about agency in writing and the kind of shared agency that is encouraged in the FYC system causes a psychological double bind for Marie, a stressful situation because in order to learn new writing strategies and apply the new writing concepts she learns, she must first give up her strong sense of herself as a capable writer and give up the efficient writing process that has worked so well for her in the past. She believes very strongly that she is capable of writing, yet the concepts she learns concepts about writing as socially constructed and rhetorically situated contradict those beliefs. To relieve this tension, Marie must either give up some of her strongly held beliefs and adopt the motives of the system for herself or she must stop identifying with the system altogether and just “get by” until the semester is
over. In order to negotiate this double bind, Marie moves away from the motives of the FYC system and toward activity systems such as chemistry and calculus, that for Marie, match more closely with her firmly held self-beliefs.

*Attempts at Sharing Unofficial Motives*

At times, Marie asserts herself as a kind of authority who can “teach the teachers” about how to teach better. Perhaps this unusual way of manifesting authority are Marie’s attempt to enact the unofficial motives (empowerment) of the system, or perhaps it is a way to resist those motives, or given her history, these unusual manifestations of authority could be continued attempts to rigidly follow rules in order to please the teacher. In the case of unofficial motives (empowerment), however, because the “rules” are not stated explicitly, Marie is left unaware of how to follow the unstated rules and still accomplish her motive of earning an “A” in the course. For Marie, the desire to be a good student drives her to do everything the teacher wants, including perhaps engaging with the unofficial motives of building authority and ownership in writing, but the teacher has not given the class a detailed rubric or scaffolded lessons to teacher her how to build authority in writing. It appears that Marie makes attempts at following unstated rules for unstated motives. But, as Marie struggles to follow unstated rules and to meet unofficial motives, her inability to negotiate those contradictions leaves her frustrated and alienated from the system. Marie’s inability to read the unofficial motives of the teacher because they are not explicitly stated causes another kind of psychological double bind for Marie.

Marie tries to negotiate this double bind by asserting influence over others in a way that is unusual for students in FYC. Her last sentence in the completed autoethnography paper says that her writing will “also be useful to my professor [Byrd] because she will now be able to see
what I need help with and can assist me with improving my writing process” (Portfolio Autoethnography). Marie also believes that perhaps her teacher has been changed by reading Marie’s completed paper. This belief the she and her work can add to the knowledge of others, even figures of authority such as her teacher, develops a way to negotiate her own double bind in a way that wasn’t apparent in any of my other student interviews. For other students, the teacher was the authority, whether they agreed with the ideas or not. In the last sentence of her portfolio reflection letter, Marie states: “But taking English with you was a pleasure and I hope I made an impression on you too [sic]” (Portfolio Reflection). This statement in her final portfolio may be an unusual way to express authority in writing, but perhaps it is an awkward attempt to meet the unofficial motives of her FYC teacher. Although I didn’t find any direct statement in Professor Byrd’s reflection letter assignment, and I did not directly observe any classroom discussion that may have prompted this type of response, it’s possible she saw this statement as a way to “check off” a rule that her teacher mentioned as part of a class discussion.

Unresolved Contradictions: Disengagement

By our third interview, Marie’s maps became more and more centered around words and around her individual experiences with writing. For other students in this study, like Danielle, Marcus, and Aurora, the maps tend to incorporate more social resources used as tools in creating writing; whereas Marie’s maps (and Kent’s as well) move more toward her individual experience and the world that influences her experience.
FIGURE 4 MARIE’S WRITING FUNCTION MACHINE MAP

In Fig. 4 above, Marie makes a list of her writing process and makes a point to follow my instructions for drawing the map explicitly, even to the point of drawing a “function machine” for writing, as I had prompted to help her think about her writing in a different way. Marie’s function machine has inputs, which show everything that went in to writing her third major assignment, and outputs, which shows everything that she took away from the assignment. This assignment was a long study of her writing process—an Autoethnography paper. Students in Professor Byrd’s class were asked to record themselves writing two short Reading Responses (RR on the map) and then transcribe and analyze their writing processes. This project was time consuming, and required a number of steps to accomplish correctly. Notice that Marie lists everything she was asked to do for this assignment—teacher conference, peer review, read certain articles. Marie does note “4 drafts” of this paper, but again those were required by her teacher. Marie is still using her “English major cousin” to help her write well, and she also believes that her cousin and her teacher have become better for reading her work.
Marie does take away a sense of pride from this paper, and this map was drawn before she received her grade, so she is proud of her writing and her hard work at this point in the semester.

Despite the belief of her teacher that by the end of the semester, students understand they can learn important and transferrable concepts about writing, Marie solidifies her belief that she is not a natural writer. Byrd says that she teaches writing as a learned ability, and that by the end of the semester they understand that “it’s not whether you’re born with it or not. And they also have more trust in their own abilities, their own abilities not only to write, but to figure out a problem.” (Byrd Interview). Yet, at the end of a semester in Byrd’s class, Marie insists that “professional writers create amazing first drafts, even if they deny it. I think they’re trying to make unskilled writers feel better about themselves” (Portfolio Reflection). Marie rejects the concept knowledge taught in the course and thus cannot adopt its motives.

Contradictions, when unresolved as in Marie’s case, lead to alienation. Even at the end of the semester, Marie sees herself as an unskilled writer, even though she rates high scores on the self-efficacy survey: “I was confident about writing, but I knew it wasn’t natural for me. I’ve never been a natural writer.” Marie separates herself from the “writing” world by relying on others to edit her work. When speaking about her cousin’s editing on her first paper, Marie says: “And then I meet with my cousin, and she messes up my paper and tells me what to do. . . . I go back and I print it, and I type it up, and I turned it in.” This sequence doesn’t change over the semester, except for the very last paper on discourse communities, which Marie found very easy to write: “I’m like, whoa a 96! And my cousin didn’t even proofread this one. I was like holy crap--I did it on my own!” Marie doesn’t credit her own writing for her good grade, and
she doesn’t credit her hard work. It’s almost as though Marie’s self-confidence in writing diminishes over the semester as she fails to fully engage the unofficial motives of the FYC community.

While Marie explained at the beginning of the semester that she wrote frequently in her journal for personal satisfaction, by the end of the semester, these activities are no longer discussed in our interviews. At the end of the semester, Marie has further isolated her identity from writing by repeating her comments about being an “unnatural” writer frequently in our last interview. Marie’s extremely high self-efficacy scores at the end of the semester (2340 out of 2500) seem to directly contradict her behaviors about writing and her aversion to writing courses. Marie explicitly states her aversion to other writing courses: “For the rest of my college career, I only plan on writing what I am assigned in Composition II. I am an engineer major so I don’t have time to take additional English courses that do not pertain to my major. I am certain that this class will help me in Comp II” (Interview 4). Marie does see that Comp I will help her meet the challenges of Comp II if she takes the same teacher, but she has no plans to take any additional writing courses. In our last interview, Marie explains that she is not smart at writing: “It’s always helpful if you have someone else, preferably someone smarter than you, or like you know, who knows the topic better, better at writing.” Although Marie sees the need to use social resources, relying on the social system is a viewed as a loss of self-efficacy rather than increasing self-efficacy as indicated by her survey scores.

In our last interview, Marie’s comments turn more and more to her engineering classes, especially chemistry, and she struggles to imagine how the writing will help her in any meaningful way outside school. Marie goes through the steps of writing as directed by her
teacher, but she takes away nothing that she sees as transferrable other than her highly-prized A. Although Marie is highly confident in her ability to write, as measured by her self-efficacy surveys, she seems even more disengaged from the motives of the FYC system by the end of the semester.

Marie’s narrative suggests that her excellent work ethic, teacher-pleasing behavior, detailed and analytical writing process, and use of social resources assure the quality of her writing and meeting her goals as a student, but not meeting goals of the FYC system. It seems like a lack of confidence or a refusal to adopt the major concepts of writing taught in her FYC course lead to alienation for Marie. Instead, Marie is acting effectively for her motives to earn a high grade as an individual agent in a system she never really intends to join.

Danielle’s Semester

As newcomers to the FYC system, Danielle and Marie do initially share the same motive of earning high grades, but this is not the motive of the FYC system. Both students enter FYC with the motive of earning an “A” in the class. However, by the end of the semester, Danielle does begin to share the motive of the FYC system by using the social system to make herself a better writer and taking ownership of her writing choices. And while she doesn’t leave her first semester completely sharing the motives of the FYC system, Danielle is moving toward seeing herself as part of the system rather than alienated from the system. This move helps her create agency which, although not complete by the end of the semester, slowly brings Danielle toward a sense of self-efficacy for working toward the motives of the system. If agency only existed in a system, then every newcomer would eventually learn to share the work of the system. Individual histories can allow students to resist the work of the system or to alienate
themselves from the motives of the system, or even to change the system altogether. Or, histories can help students negotiate contractions. And, while histories can hinder or help students in participating with the motives of the system, other factors in the system, such as social interaction, also work to develop shared motives and create agency for the work of the system. Marie and Danielle both share motives of earning an “A” in the course at the beginning of the semester, but they end the semester with different outcomes.

If self-efficacy beliefs (as described by Bandura) was a strong determining factor in learning, then Marie would have ended the semester doing the work of the system and feeling capable of writing. Instead, although Marie’s self-efficacy scores went even higher at the end of the semester, she left FYC feeling less able to write. Danielle, on the other hand, scored lower than Marie and many of the other students on her self-efficacy in writing survey (1030 out of 2500). Yet, by the end of the semester, she exhibits a stronger ability to work with the motives of the system and demonstrates in her writing practices more learning about writing than Marie. Danielle also earned a lower final grade in the course than Marie, but this case indicates that she actually learned and applied more of the writing concepts (official motives) when she writes, even though at times she chooses not to apply those concepts because she lacks time or energy to do so. According to self-efficacy theory, Danielle’s score indicates a serious lack of self-efficacy in writing. Yet throughout our interviews, Danielle exhibited signs of building confidence and knowledge as a writer as a result of her participation with the motives of the FYC system over the course of the semester.

While Danielle’s survey answers placed her at the low end of the self-efficacy spectrum (scoring 1030 out of 2500), she explained in her first interview that she enjoyed writing and was
pretty comfortable with her abilities as a writer. Like Marie who kept a personal diary as a “stress reliever,” Danielle also has a positive attitude about writing at the beginning of the semester. In our first interview, Danielle says: “I think I actually do enjoy writing.” Danielle’s language at the beginning of the semester expressed confidence in writing: “I think I did really well. I had to write about . . . past experiences that really . . . contributed to the writer that I am today—that I think are significant” (Interview 1). Danielle’s language and expressions of confidence seem to directly contradict the results of her self-efficacy survey. In our first interview, Danielle fluidly explains her drafting process: “I don’t really write drafts. I write on everything that I think of and then I go from there and just eliminate what’s not needed, add more stuff when I reread it” (Interview 1). Later, Danielle explains her revision process: “I’ll stop after a paragraph, read it, and then if it doesn’t sound right, then I’ll fix it” (Interview 1). The confidence in her writing process is exhibited throughout this first interview. Danielle seems critically aware of her own process even though her self-efficacy scores would indicate lack of awareness. While self-efficacy research suggests that higher self-efficacy is beneficial to both motivation and performance, studies such as the one by Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz suggest that lower confidence at the beginning of a task may actually facilitate the process of learning about writing: “Freshmen who see themselves as novices are most capable of learning new skills” (127). In many ways, Danielle’s story undermines the claims of self-efficacy researchers. Danielle’s low self-efficacy scores may leave her more open to learning new concepts about writing.
Contradictions: History in Writing

Based on her writing map and our discussion about writing in her first interview, it becomes clear that Danielle enters FYC with expectations of earning high grades from the teacher by relying on rules about writing that she has learned in high school. However, new concepts about writing presented in FYC center around the social construction of writing (Perry Interview), not the universal rules about good writing that she learned previously. Danielle’s history is punctuated by rigid writing rules. Danielle also, however, has a history of negotiating contradictions when her rigid writing rules fail to help her meet objectives. In her first paper, Danielle explains how confident she was in her fourth grade writing, but also how her confidence was shattered by her high school AP teacher who “was constantly flinging new terms at me such as ethos, onomatopoeia, paradox, and asking to use them in my writing” (Self-Portrait). Danielle had negotiated contradictions before, finding a way out of the double bind by adjusting her actions to adopt the rules of the new system. For example, in our first interview, Danielle explains the points she made in a Writing Self-Portrait, a paper she wrote for FYC about her history as a writer:

I talked about my AP Lang class, and then I, like, combined how in fourth grade I learned about like five paragraph essay and three points, because like FCAT Writes, so that’s like when I first got introduced to the essay, and then I transitioned to AP English when basically, like the whole thing changed in how there was like new rules to everything, and so I just talked about how I incorporate those now (Interview 1).

In this self-portrait paper, Danielle also seems fixated by rules and by breaking rules, such as learning that an essay can have two points and not three (as in the traditional five-
paragraph essay taught to fourth-graders for the state writing exam). Danielle’s revelation in this high school AP course was that she was allowed to write three paragraphs and make only two points, as long as she used better vocabulary (Self-Portrait). At the beginning of the semester, Danielle, like Marie, sees learning the rules of the new system as the way to meet her objective. Early in the semester, when she describes her college writing experience, the new rules are about how she can arrange papers differently or how she can be free to let her ideas flow. In her first paper for FYC, Danielle explains that she’s a better writer today, but that she’s “still developing and learning how to shape my words to make them worth reading, and worth getting that A+” (Self-Portrait). While Danielle wants to learn how to craft words better, she also sees getting an A+ as the tangible evidence of her accomplishment in writing. At the beginning of the semester, her motive for FYC, like Marie, is good grades.

Contradictions: Expectations about Writing in FYC

At first Danielle views grades as indicators of good writing. While Marie’s grades in FYC remain high throughout the semester, Danielle’s grades plummet right at the start of the term. It is then that Danielle becomes aware that her motives do not match Professor Perry’s motives, and her confidence begins to wane. Danielle is not sure why her rules and strategies are not working to achieve her objective of “A” papers, and she attempts a number of explanations to negotiate the contradiction she feels. During our second interview, I noticed a change in Danielle’s demeanor. She was more subdued and less confident about her work. Danielle tried to ameliorate the sting of her first low grade, a C-, by emphasizing that the teacher was a tough grader: “Yeah, he grades kind of hard, so I don’t feel too bad” (Interview 2). To cope with the contradiction she senses, Danielle blames the teacher rather than herself.
As in her first interview, Danielle is reflective about her writing and honest about her abilities to write in a new environment. As a newcomer, Danielle realizes that the skills, knowledge, and resources she had drawn upon in the past were insufficient to the new expectations: “I write really broad instead of specific, and that’s what he’s looking for. I guess I just have a problem narrowing it down and analyzing it, which is kind of what the class is about” (Interview 2 emphasis mine). At this point in the semester, Danielle attempts to resolve the contradiction she feels by figuring out how to please a new teacher. Although Danielle does see herself as a newcomer, it is to this particular FYC class. Danielle sees herself as a novice at “reading” this teacher rather than a novice at learning the work of this FYC system. In negotiating contradictions, Danielle’s words become more halting and disjointed. There are more incomplete sentences, more mumbled words, and a number of “I don’t know” answers. In the example below, I asked Danielle to explain the feedback on her first paper, and she uses “like” and other hedges 10 times in an 86 word answer:

“Because I know that I am, like, really broad, and like, we had to, like really analyze, like, the things that we did find out. And for me, I guess, it’s just really hard to elaborate because what he’s looking for is, like really in depth and I feel, like half the time when I do try to get, like, really deep with it, like, I just kind of—there’s just like a block, and I can’t go any deeper when he wants me to. So . . .” (Interview 2).

Danielle’s difficulty in expressing ideas is in sharp contrast to the fluid language she exhibited in her first interview. Through the rest of this interview, trailing sentences, “like” and “I don’t know” are more prevalent and more intrusive in her spoken language.
By the second month of classes, Danielle struggled with an assignment called *Constructs*, which requires that students think and write about the ways in which we socially construct knowledge. The assignment required that students understand new terms, *rhetorical situation*, *genre*, and *construct*, as well as apply those terms in order to write the paper. While Marie seemed to almost revel in learning new vocabulary and using those words in her assignment on rhetorical situations, Danielle struggled with how to apply the concepts in her written work. Professor Perry clarified “the two goals that are the most important. The part I would point to is constructedness of writing process and being able to join in an ongoing conversation where writing is at the center of some activity” (Perry Interview). The knowledge constructs that most students analyzed in this paper were “plagiarism,” “fact,” or “error.”

Students were asked to research a construct using scholarly sources and personal experience. They were then asked to write a persuasive essay that would convince an outsider that their long held beliefs about that construct may not be universal. For example, grammatical errors in writing may not always be considered grammatical errors by everyone.

Danielle’s frustration understanding this assignment is evident when she discusses it in our second interview: “That’s why I’ve been struggling with it a lot more, and it’s just because I didn’t even know what it was, and then we had to write a paper on it” (Interview 2). Danielle understood the need to reach beyond her required sources to really understand this assignment, and that need is evident in her second map (Fig. 8). Resources and people are depicted, but images of papers and text dominate this map. Danielle avoids some of the resources she knows she needs: “I need to go talk to him [Professor Perry],” but she gives several excuses for not making it to office hours. When asked about using the writing center, she says: “I haven’t really
thought about going to the writing center until, like, my portfolio just because, I mean, based on content, it’s, like, what my professor wants, because he’s the one grading it, and stuff like that. But, like, with grammar and stuff like that, I always need help. So, I’ll probably go to the writing center then” (Interview 2). Danielle sees the writing center as a place to go for last minute edits, not for help formulating ideas or clarifying concepts.

**Contradiction: Role of the Writing Teacher**

Danielle entered the university with a respect for all-knowing teacher authority who know and teach the clear-cut writing rules which will help her achieve her motive of earning an “A+” in FYC. The model of writing which Danielle carries with her to FYC emphasizes the universal nature of writing as following a set of specific rules, and she sees the teacher as her main source for understanding these rules: “His [the professor’s] comments are the ones I appreciate the most because his feedback is important” (Interview 1). Teacher-mandated rules figure prominently in Danielle’s first writing map as well. Danielle’s high school AP teacher emphasized the importance of crafting language when writing. Danielle’s map from this interview depicts a teacher “yelling” in all caps “BIG WORDS/BETTER DEVICES!” (Fig. 7). Like Marie at the beginning of the semester, Danielle focuses her efforts on surface level writing rules. Danielle believed that the rule for better wording was an important part of the drafting process, not part of the revision process. When discussing her Writing Self-Portrait draft, she states: “When I sit down, I try to think of like bigger words to use or like devices I could use, like metaphors and stuff like that” (Interview 1). Professor Perry, however, states that students should understand that when they learn in FYC is “not just—well this is what we do in
composition class, but this is how all these other people have been talking about writing, and these are ideas that maybe I can apply some other time” (Perry Interview).

Rules and authority of the teacher prominently in Danielle’s first writing process map (Fig. 5 below). In the center of her first map, a big circle represents her head, but not much is represented inside except memories of high school – FCAT, AP Lang, rules for big words and better devices being told to her by her teacher. This indicates that she’s bringing these high school rules with her to the university experience. Past writing experiences, mostly shaped by rules about using figurative language (as Danielle described “devices” in her interview) and timed writings from FCAT and AP exams are how she viewed writing. Marie’s writing process at the beginning of the semester seems based in rules already learned in high school, where peers give feedback about the rules and changes are made based on how well the suggestions fit those rules. While Danielle’s process is defined by universal writing rules, these are not the socially constructed rules negotiated in an activity system. Instead, the rules seem to come from the authority of the teacher (signified by the “yelling teacher” on her map).
Danielle’s second writing map (Fig. 6 below) also depicts the teacher as authority and giver of grades:
At the middle right of Map 2, a student receiving a paper from the teacher and another in a conference, the student is about half the size of the teacher. Also, because size is often significant in a visual analysis, it is interesting to note that student papers are bigger than the people, which represent the struggles with understanding her writing assignment that Danielle explains during her second interview. As she struggles, however, writing becomes more social for Danielle, a sign that she is using the resources of the system to meet her goals. Note the many more people that appear in this map than in her first map.

* Negotiating Official Motives: Using Tools to Become a Better Writer *

Even when feeling less confident in their abilities to write, students like Danielle find tools to help themselves build writing skills and adjust writing to match the motives of the system. Marie finds tools to help her waning confidence by looking for gifted friends. Danielle turns to the social system and to the teacher for help. At times, Danielle had difficulty accepting the new concepts, but knowing the professor was available for individual conferences boosted Danielle’s confidence: “I just think that one-on-one would be, like, better for me to, like, understand it exactly, like, accept it more if we, like, talked about it” (Interview 2). For Danielle, even email communication with the teacher gave her the confidence to make it through the rough times: “I e-mail him probably every other day about the assignments and stuff, and he’s, like, he’s really helpful” (interview 2). While Marie also saw the teacher as the seat of authority, Danielle’s interaction with her teacher was more social and conversational than Marie’s interactions with her teacher.

Danielle exhibits developing confidence which appears to exist first in the social system rather than in her head, as evidence in her writing maps which depict more social activity during
the middle of the semester. Unlike Marie, who believed her peer review sessions were generally “worthless,” Danielle quickly learned to value the social action of classroom peer review sessions: “I had two guys in my group and they were brutally honest. . . . Then it helped me more when I went back to finish it” (Interview 2). In her second writing map (Fig. 6), Danielle spends time depicting details about peers who helped her write a difficult paper, indicating that she believes these resources were an important part of her process. Danielle exhibits some confidence in her ability to make good revision decisions when she does receive input from peers: “I probably would have eventually come to them [the revision suggestions from the peer group] . . . I think it could have been better and they told me” (Interview 1). Unlike Marie, who only relies on her “gifted” writers for help all semester, Danielle becomes open to suggestions from anyone who reader her writing. In our interviews, Danielle’s discussions of writing and revision processes are spoken confidently and fluently with few hesitations in language during this first interview, indicating confidence in the interview process and, perhaps, confidence in her abilities to learn better writing.

By the third month of FYC, Danielle is becoming much more social in her writing, and her attitude toward writing is becoming more positive, as evident in her third writing map (Fig. 7 below) where Danielle’s face is depicted as more confident than the previous month’s image, and more resources seem to help her write her assignments. Images of people, resources, and textual sources all combine to help her write a challenging paper on the construct of plagiarism. Danielle’s third writing map (Fig. 7 below) illustrates several faces of Danielle smiling as she’s thinking of ideas and she draws only one confused face during a drafting phase. A number of images of papers, emails, revisions, and thinking depict the creation of this paper. A light bulb
going off represents her finally understanding a difficult concept. This light bulb might also illuminate Danielle’s move toward understanding concepts rather than understanding writing rules. The central motive for Danielle is still writing an assignment, but Danielle seems more fully aware than Marie of the social resources needed to make writing happen. Danielle is more dominant in this map, but papers and text still dominate the graphics. This emphasis on texts reveals how much Danielle is really thinking and struggling with writing and ideas and using resources in the world to help herself understand these ideas. Danielle’s goals are shifting, but she still sees the social world (including her teacher and peers) as tools to help her understand, not just the assignment, but also new concepts.

FIGURE 7 DANIELLE’S WRITING FUNCTION MACHINE MAP 3

* Negotiating Unofficial Motives: Ownership

Although Marie really struggles with the unofficial motives in her FYC class, Danielle seems to struggle less with the unofficial motives of her teacher. Perhaps because by the middle of the semester, Danielle is more open to accepting new ideas about writing or perhaps because
Danielle’s motive has changed from a desperate need to earn an A+ in the course and Marie’s did not change. For Perry, unofficial motives for FYC include taking ownership for research, creating knowledge, gaining control, and “something like empowerment, but that’s not it exactly” (Perry Interview). Although Danielle is reaching out to others in the middle of the semester, she still wants to hold on to her writing history, which was often successful. Her carefully constructed beliefs about writing did sometimes work, and giving up everything she knows about good writing is almost paralyzing. When discussing the low grade on her autoethnography paper, Danielle understands the need to revise: “I’d have to re-analyze the videos and stuff like that to make it better for the final portfolio” (Interview 3).

Still, the effort of revising is often overwhelming for Danielle, possibly because she understands just how much needs to be revised: “I just felt like maybe me my argument wasn't strong enough, but I mean I could make it stronger, but with this paper I just feel like it will be too hard” (Interview 3). This lack of follow-through is evident in her final portfolio, which shows only minor revisions to her final papers. Often adding only a sentence or two to each paper, Danielle acknowledges in her portfolio reflection letter that she did not make many of her professor’s recommended revisions, even though her instructor had marked them in previous drafts. In her portfolio reflection letter, she states: “I didn’t dedicate enough time to revise everything you commented on” (Portfolio Reflection). And in her last interview, she says: “I’ve thought of different ideas to like how to fix it. I haven’t actually put it into the essay” (Portfolio Reflection). While Danielle knows how to write better, she doesn’t always put it into practice. In contrast, Marie never resists the authority of her teacher. When she’s frustrated, it’s a frustration with the assignment or a mystery altogether. Gaining authority allows Danielle to see
her teacher more as a writing partner than a writing authority—a step toward the unofficial motives of the system. Teacher conferences seem to solidify this move.

Danielle’s final writing map is more balanced than any of the others (Fig. 8 below). Danielle is in the center of the map as a major figure and smiling. An important change has happened in her relationship with her teacher as well. In an image of her teacher conference, both are sitting in chairs and of equal size. In all earlier maps, the teacher is about double the size of the students. Only students are depicted as equal in size. In an earlier image of a teacher conference in her second writing map (Fig. 6 above), Danielle and Professor Perry are not equals. The shift from teacher as writing authority to teacher as equal is an important part of Professor Perry’s goals for the course. In our interview, Professor Perry spoke of students gaining authority and gaining a voice as an important outcome (Perry Interview). At this stage, Danielle seems to share Professor Perry’s goals, at least in some areas. This final representation of Danielle’s writing represents a significant shift in her thinking about writing. This shift, however, is not as apparent in her post self-efficacy survey scores which moved only slightly upward from the beginning of the semester. The value of these maps lies in the ways in which students can non-verbally represent their understanding of writing, and from the images in this last map, that Danielle has moved from a rule-bound writer to one that uses resources in the social system to help her negotiate contradictions she faces as a newcomer.
By the end of the semester, Danielle makes authoritative decisions about what teacher suggestions she will include in her revisions. In her reflection letter, Danielle explains why she deserves a B or C in the course by saying: “I read and took your comments into consideration” (Portfolio Reflection). As a less confident writer, according to the self-efficacy survey, Danielle should have shrunk away from challenges. Sommers and Saltz note in their study of first-year writers, that “the comments of the weaker and stronger writers are indistinguishable, except that the weaker writers often speak with even greater passion about the role of writing in helping them make the transition to college, in giving them the confidence ‘to speak back to the world’” (129). At the end of the semester, Danielle does speak back, seeing her teacher as someone who helps her write better, but also as someone who doesn’t hold all the authority about writing. Her last interview demonstrated decreasing frequency of hedging, such as hesitating or stuttering when answering questions about writing (like, um), use the phrase “I don’t know” in the context of ability to write. By the end of the semester, Danielle was willingly using and accepting the
help of resources (teacher and peers) in a way that while somewhat frenzied, also demonstrated a willingness to participate in the social system.

_Resolving Contradictions: Unfinished_

Even at the end of the semester, there are times that Danielle holds on to her beliefs and old writing practices, believing that she can save time by writing drafts and revising them as she writes. Clearly this habit to write/revise/write/revise at the paragraph level impeded her ability to structure her papers coherently, and yet Danielle claimed that she was going to stick with this writing process, claiming in her Portfolio Reflection Letter that the efficient one-draft process works well for her:

I do not make drafts. I’ve always been taught to have multiple drafts, but I picked up on the habit of not having any [drafts] on my own. Drafts don’t progress my writing, but rather waste time that I could be using making sure the paper I turn in is at its best. I know some people use it to just pour ideas out, but I write ideas out before I even start writing the paper. I’m not sure if revising as I work is out of laziness or just because I like perfection right away. It may also be because sometimes I run out of time due to distractions. I saw that after each paragraph, or even after every two sentences, I would go back and read it to see if I could change anything or elaborate. This was significant to me because, once again, it shows that I do not write drafts (Portfolio Reflection).

However, the evidence in her portfolio shows that Danielle does write drafts and she does make changes to those drafts by engaging with peer editing and teacher conferences (Portfolio and Interviews). Danielle’s writing practices do not reflect her claims in this last reflection letter. By the end of the semester, she has adopted many (but not all) of the concepts
about good writing that she has learned in FYC. At the end of the semester, Danielle’s self-efficacy scores remain very low (1170 out of 2500). Yet, a kind of ownership in writing shows through in her language. At the end of her portfolio reflection letter, she states: “I did revise the things I knew would make my essays better than they were the first time” (Portfolio Reflection). Note here that Danielle contradicts her own statement that she doesn’t make drafts. While contradictions about notions of good writing with the FYC system are beginning to resolve, Danielle’s notions of her own ability to write do not yet match her writing practices. Danielle’s explicit claims about her writing practices and her explicit reports about her confidence (as reported on her self-efficacy survey) do not always match her actual practices. A revised view of self-efficacy, based on Danielle’s experience suggests that agency emerges through participating socially with the system, but it does not immediately become conscious to the writer. Agency in writing appears to reside in the system, and it may only become internalized after multiple experiences of writing that matches the motives of the new system.

While Danielle does not completely leave behind all the writing practices, rules, and beliefs she brought from high school, she does begin to see writing as a more social endeavor, but this doesn’t alienate her from the system as it does with Marie. Danielle accepts the motives of the new system, that learning these concepts will help her become a better writer. She just doesn’t always put that knowledge into practice. While Danielle has tools for success in writing for a new community, she has not effectively or consistently implemented those tools in writing for her FYC course. In her last interview, only one week before the end of the semester, Danielle still struggled with how to revise papers for her final portfolio. Her language is still broken, and she expresses concern about how to revise the papers. Danielle seems to know what
to do, what actions to take, what resources to use, but she’s still hesitant about the final product: “I do take into account what he says, but I feel like even then, I don’t really know if I do it completely to the extent. But, I like talked to him yesterday . . . . And I’ve gone in and saw him last week. But I really haven’t, I mean I’ve written down notes of what he said, but I haven’t like put it into, like, into play yet” (Interview 4). Danielle visited her professor frequently during the final weeks of classes, and found those meetings helpful for writing the final revisions: “I feel I have a better understanding of what to do” (Interview 4).

Unlike Marie, by the end of the semester, Danielle does not expect an “A” in the course any more. In her portfolio reflection, for example, Danielle states: “I think I deserve either a B or C in this class. From the grades on my reading responses, I was able to understand them, which was what set the basis for each essay. I read and took your comments into consideration. I don’t think I deserve an A because I know my work isn’t the best it could be” (Portfolio Reflection). Instead, her outcomes are more about writing better than about earning good grades. Danielle recognizes that her essays are not perfect or even finished, and she takes only the revision suggestions that she knew would make her essays better.

Often, students like Danielle feel unprepared to meet the writing challenges they face in their writing courses. Bandura has identified self-efficacy, a component of the human agency, as a driving force in overcoming challenges. According to Bandura, if students’ self-efficacy beliefs are strong, they will be able to overcome challenges. I noted in this case study, however, that Danielle’s self-efficacy was not strong, yet she did not alienate herself from the system as Marie did. Danielle kept trying to understand difficult concepts and persisted in using the tools of the social system when she didn’t understand. Activity analysis shows that narrowly defined
versions of self-efficacy, in which students articulate their beliefs about writing without considering motivation, history, or the agency-building action of the system, does not work in Danielle’s case. The evidence, especially noticeable in her hand drawn maps, shows that Danielle does in fact exhibit a kind of self-efficacy and growing authority in writing. For example, images of the teacher-student relationship move from the teacher as authority to teacher, student, and peers negotiating writing together. And this analysis suggests that the social system had much to do with Danielle’s growing confidence as a writer.

Danielle’s narrative suggests that low self-efficacy scores do not inhibit learning to write. It also suggests that self-efficacy may have little to do with the ways in which students act as participants in building agency within a particular system. In order to come participate in this agency, Danielle needed to negotiate contradictions by leaving behind some of her writing history and rely on others around her for help. Wardle explains that newcomers engage in new writing practices that “may ask them to give up some measure of authority to which they believe they are entitled” (“Identity” par. 10). Marie, on the other hand resists giving up this authority. Sommers and Saltz confirm this need to reform ideas about writing in a large study of first-year writers. After a rigorous first year of writing, Sommers and Saltz were surprised to see “the buoyancy of students after a year in which they are asked to refashion themselves as writers” (128). Danielle’s case suggests that students gain confidence in learning about writing by using the social system to participate in the work and goals of a new community, but that process is slow, uneven, and often unfinished at the end of one semester. Marie, on the other hand, uses the social system only as a means to overcome her inadequacies as a writer, by consulting “gifted, English major” friends, and while Marie’s self-efficacy survey scores
indicate high self-efficacy in her ability to write, this confidence is in her work ethic and ability to “do school,” not self-efficacy for her abilities to write.
CHAPTER 6: TOWARD AN EMERGENT AND ENACTED MODEL OF SELF-EFFICACY IN WRITING

As I claimed in Chapter 1, current theories and methods in self-efficacy research limited by a view of writing as a set of discrete and universal tasks and a view of agency as limited by the physical body. The data in this study suggest that self-efficacy, as it is generally measured and theorized, is too narrowly measured. The data also suggest that self-efficacy survey measures do predict whether a student will work hard and make a good grade. However, working hard and earning good grades do not necessarily indicate that a student has learned much about writing. More importantly, the findings in this study suggest that learning about writing can happen with high or low self-efficacy, as measured by self-reported surveys. In this dissertation, I have argued that theorizing self-efficacy through the lens of posthuman descriptions of agency and measuring self-efficacy through the lens of activity theory offers a broader view of self-efficacy for learning about writing as emergent and enacted engagement with the motives of particular activity systems.

This chapter is presented in four sections (1) What the Data Shows, where I summarize the research findings presented in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 as they relate to learning about writing in FYC; (2) Answering the Critiques of Self-Efficacy Theory, where I address each critique of self-efficacy laid out in Chapter 1 and how the results answer those critiques; (3) Implications for Teaching FYC, where I offer some implications for this research; and (4) Re-Imagining Self-Efficacy in Writing as Writing Efficacy, where I propose a re-imagined view of self-efficacy in writing, not as an individually constructed belief, held inside the head, but as enacting the agency
emergent in writing systems. I conclude with areas in which further research could be developed based on the findings in this dissertation.

What the Data Shows

The results of my analysis of the two FYC classrooms in Chapter 3 suggest that there are official and unofficial motives that are being engaged and sometimes shared, but enacted in different ways by the two teachers and students in this study. The ways these motives are enacted rests on individual teacher histories and are bound to a system which has been energized by recent changes in official motive and curriculum. Officially stated motives for FYC are that students learn procedural and declarative knowledge about writing through the explicit teaching of concepts such as discourse communities, rhetorical situations, the constructedness of writing, and writing processes. Unofficial motives such as empowerment, ownership, authority, and active engagement were also mentioned by teachers and administrators in this study. In their classrooms, Byrd and Perry attempted to engage all students with these motives, a practice which, according to Engeström, can lead to expansive learning: “The object of expansive learning activity is the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged” (“Expansive” 139).

While these teachers experienced a sense of engagement with the motives of the FYC system and demonstrated in their teaching portfolios a strong ability to enact those motives, not all their students were equally engaged. Like teachers, students bring histories. For example, Marie and Tyler ended the semester on opposite ends of the self-efficacy continuum I described in Chapter 4. Both had vastly different self-efficacy scores at the end of the semester (the highest and lowest of those I studied) and entirely different outcomes in the case studies. Marie moved
away from the unofficial motives of empowerment and ownership, and Tyler moved toward the
official and unofficial motives of the system, yet they both had the same teacher, Professor Byrd.
Likewise, Aurora and Danielle took FYC with Professor Perry, yet they also had different self-
efficacy scores, Aurora in the middle and Danielle near the bottom of students in my study, and
likewise different outcomes in their case studies. These students had the best chance possible for
engaging with the system, yet not all responded in the same way. These results suggest that
students do not move in lock-step as the teacher directs, but engage with each new system and
enact the motives of that system in different ways depending on their histories and the
contradictions they experience during the semester.

In my study, the data from Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that when students enact the motives
of the system, learning happens. Students like Marie can still be successful, earning high grades,
but they may not share the motives of the system, or may only partially share those motives. In
these cases, students don’t experience agency for working in the system and they don’t build
self-efficacy for writing. This study, then, suggests that learning can happen with high or low
self-efficacy and that self-efficacy alone is not a predictor of learning. This study also suggests
that high grades are not necessarily indicators of self-efficacy in writing, especially when writing
is considered as happening within the action of a system, rather than individually performed. In
this study, students like Danielle who began to participate in working toward the motives of the
FYC system did believe they could learn transferrable concepts about writing; while those like
Marie, who did not share the motives of the FYC system, left FYC believing that writing well
was only for other people who are gifted in English, not for them.
The survey data on student cases discussed in Chapter 4 shows that all those students improved their self-efficacy survey scores by the end of the semester (Fig. 5), and while all the students engaged in some way with the motives of the system, the case study results show that not all enacted these motives enough to improve their self-efficacy. Two students improved only slightly on their pre- and post- self-efficacy scores, Aurora at 70 points higher and Tyler at 30 points higher, yet these two also had different outcomes based on the case study results. Tyler seemed to learn a great deal about writing and came to more fully engage and enact the motives of the system. Aurora left FYC hating writing, and while she could recognize writing errors in other student papers, she had trouble acknowledging that she might apply her learning in FYC to future writing. Even though their self-efficacy survey scores are very different, Aurora’s pattern of beliefs about writing over the semester in FYC are similar to Marie’s alienation from writing. Tyler’s experience is close to Danielle’s, but Tyler left FYC even more excited and engaged with the new concepts and ideas he has learned.

Students such as Danielle and Marie enact the motives of an activity system in different ways, and this means self-reported surveys do not always show how students enact their beliefs about writing. High self-efficacy on these surveys did not always translate to better learning. As the case with Marie demonstrates, students who measured the highest on standard self-efficacy surveys often demonstrated the most resistance to writing in the new ways required by FYC. As the case with Danielle demonstrates, students who scored the lowest on these surveys sometimes improved writing practices and expressed the most new knowledge about writing. While all the case study participants felt increased self-efficacy over the course of one semester according to self-efficacy survey data, these surveys do not represent the sometimes shared and sometimes
competing student and teacher histories, cultures, genres and motivation as well as the
affordances and constraints of people, tools, cultures and histories interacting in a complex
activity system such as FYC.

Answering the Critiques of Self-Efficacy Theory

This study addresses three critiques of self-efficacy theory and methods discussed in
Chapter 1. In particular, this study reveals that (1) agency (and the construct of self-efficacy) is
not always individually constructed inside the mind of the learner, nor is it only influenced by
outside factors; (2) writing is not a set of discrete measurable tasks but is instead socially
constructed in the action of activity systems, and (3) methods of measuring self-efficacy for
learning about writing should not be limited to self-reported surveys but should be measured
contextually. I have addressed these critiques by conducting a study of self-efficacy in writing
that suggests that agency for learning new concepts and practices, where students participate and
change their practices to adopt motives of the community, is constructed by engaging, enacting,
and sharing the motives of a particular activity system. I argue, however, that agency for
learning about writing is important in FYC, and that self-efficacy is more broadly constructed
than the literature and current measurements suggest. The data in this dissertation also suggest
that when students see writing as an isolated effort or an effort that requires following discrete
rules, they fail to adjust their writing practices, they miss important social clues about how to
write better, and they fail to see how the writing knowledge they gain in FYC will transfer to
other writing situations. Taken together, posthuman conceptions of agency and socio-cultural
models of classroom learning offer more robust ways to think about self-efficacy for learning
about writing.
This section is set up to address each critique individually. In the first section, I explain how the data answers the question of agency and self-efficacy in writing. In the second section, I address the notions of writing that students and teachers explain in their interviews and how that relates to their feelings of self-efficacy. And, in the third section, I explore the ways in which this more contextual method of examining self-efficacy in writing helps to resolve those problems.

*Agency and Shared Motives in Writing*

In chapter 1, I offered the critique that, in the self-efficacy literature and indeed in many formations of socio-cognitive theory, agency for learning is essentially a cognitive process that is *influenced* by social forces. In this dissertation, I propose that a better way to think about agency for learning is to consider socio-cultural theories and posthuman notions of agency where the learner becomes deeply embedded in an activity system, and where real learning happens when the learner comes to participate with the motives of an activity system. The data also suggest that agency and self-efficacy are not bound inside the head of the learner, but are emergent in the action of activity systems. In some cases, strong histories and individual determination and motivation influence the way a student approaches learning, as is the case with Marie, who worked diligently to meet her individual goals, but did not fully engage or enact the motives of the system. This happens when students do not see a problem in their own writing that can be resolved by working in the system. When students see value in the system for helping them write better, as in the cases of Danielle, Tyler, and Augustus, they more willingly participate in the work of the system and they build agency for learning that they can see as transferrable to other writing systems. The process of engaging and enacting motives is long, complicated, and often unfinished by the end of FYC, as can be seen in the cases of Scott and Danielle. In this section, I
will summarize notions of agency used in this dissertation, and then I will describe how those
notions of agency are enacted by individual students in my study.

In this dissertation, I argue that agency for learning exists first in the system by engaging
the motives of the system. Over time, this learning is internalized into a set of specific beliefs
which can be applied in new learning situations. At times, these beliefs can become reified to the
point of petrification in which case, learning new or contradictory ideas about a topic becomes
difficult or even impossible. According to Bazerman, “In this view we form ourselves within
social interaction, moving from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal, but we also reform the
social milieu by our actions and inventions in response to situations. This account allows for
cultural invention and transformation of human consciousness through history as individuals
develop new tools and interactions and actions within larger social systems” ("Writing" 101).

A number of theorists cited in this study suggest posthuman views of agency enrich our
understanding of literate activity (Bazerman, Clark and Chalmers, Hayles, Turkle). According to
Bazerman, “Literate activity is not a matter of free-floating subjectivity; it is carried out in the
material world and engages socially oriented bodies, living in geographies and histories, who
circulate signs among themselves, activating brains and neurochemical states through the
interpretive activities of social and individual minds” (“The Disciplined” 8). Likewise, Cooper
and Herndl explore the notion of rhetorical agency as emerging and enacted in social systems.
While the notion of embedded and distributed in social systems theorized across multiple
contexts, from screen literacies (Turkle) to cyborgs (Haraway) to technological extensions
(Hayles) to everyday mediated activity (Clark and Chalmers), the theories and evidence,
particularly in the cases of Marcus and Danielle, suggest that agency and self-efficacy are not
bound inside the head of the learner, but need to be constructed in, with, and through social
systems.

Activity theory, as Engeström suggests, offers a way to consider the role of agency in
learning. Engeström’s activity theory, further, emphasizes learning and development as essential,
historical considerations in the examination of agency where “contradictions play a central role
as sources of change and development” (“Knotworking” 322). When viewed as a factor in
learning about writing, agency becomes an important consideration for classroom teachers. More
importantly, the way agency (and the central role of self-efficacy) is currently theorized as the
most important factor in learning to write are called into question by posthuman theories of
agency. Likewise, the evidence in this study suggests that while agency is often distributed when
learning to write, it never completely disappears into the activity system. Students like Danielle
and Tyler do reach out for help when they need to learn about writing and improving their
writing practices, but they also make individual determinations of what is good in their own
writing. The distributed view of agency as theorized and examined using activity theory in this
dissertation offers teachers a fuller and more comprehensive way to consider the student’s role in
learning to write.

Agency for learning does not mean that students lose their histories or give up personal
goals. Instead, I suggest that agency for learning is about negotiating a middle ground between
dissolution of the human subject, as some postmodern theorists suggest (Deleuze and Guttari;
Dennett; Foucault) and the bodily bound agency suggested by Bandura. Activity theory, among
other theories (Latour’s Actor Network Theory, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, Cooper’s
Rhetorical Agency, Iser’s Reader Response Theory) also offer ways to consider this kind of
middle ground. Among other applications, activity theory has been used to describe FYC genres (Russell “Re-Thinking”), FYC curricula (Russell “Activity Theory”), FYC programs (Wardle “Can Cross-Disciplinary”), general education courses (Russell and Yañez), business management interactions (Geisler), professional writers (Prior and Shipka), and assessment (Bazerman). All these approaches use activity theory to understand systems and human interaction. Engeström suggests that activity analysis gives the researcher a middle ground between individual discourse and ambiguous social systems: “Thus, between the artificially-isolated fragment of discourse and the ambiguously-global argumentative social fabric, there is the middle ground of the situated activity system” (Engeström “Communication” 173). The system does not, however, completely absorb the individual agent, and sharing the motives of a particular system does not mean giving up individual agency.

Students enact agency differently as they join particular activity systems. Just as Danielle doesn’t apply every suggestion in her revisions, the action of the system doesn’t “force” the students in my study into any kind of submission to the motives of the system. Rather, student newcomers bring histories of learning to write and identities about themselves as writers that are often so influential that they work at some points to alienate students from the work of the system. If, like Marie, students choose not to engage or enact all the motives of the system, they alienate themselves from the work of the system. In Marie’s case, as well as Aurora’s case, the action of the system was so strong, and their identities and histories were also so strong, that contradictions lead to an alienation from the work of the system. On the other hand, some students responded very positively to the work of the system, developing a strong sense of self-efficacy as writers. If enacting and engaging the motives of particular systems is required for
learning, then agency must be distributed in the system, where the individual participated in the goals and the values of the system as a whole. In the cases of Danielle, Tyler, and Marcus, all had histories in similar writing systems that taught them to adapt when necessary and to react rhetorically to the system and its motives when contradictions arose.

When students are focused on the future-oriented motive of learning transferrable concepts about writing, one that is compatible with the motives of the system, they are more likely to fully use the tools of the system and use them to engage with the motives, and when these motives work together, genuine learning happens. Engeström suggests that “Human agency gains unusual powers when the two future-oriented activity level envisioning and consequential action-level decision making, come together in close interplay” (“Knotworking” 313). For example, a student such as Marie focused only the immediate consequential action of earning an A in her FYC course without engaging broader, future-oriented motives of learning about writing, and as a result, she did not experience a sense of self-efficacy for writing (see Fig. 12 below). Bazerman also explains this phenomenon: “When writing is embedded in significant social activities, people care about it and work on it. When writing is for a grade, students are more likely to feel work has ended when they have achieved an acceptable grade” (“Writing” 94). While Marie met her individual motive of earning an A on each paper she wrote, she did not experience agency within the system and did not build a sense of self-efficacy for writing.

Figures 9 and 10 below illustrate, using modified versions of Engestrom’s activity model, the difference between Marie’s and Danielle’s experiences of agency in FYC. The bold line in Fig. 9 below suggests Marie’s action in the system, moving almost straight through the system, only engaging when affordances are seen in the system (such as assignment sheets or doing
homework for a grade) to meet her more immediate consequential motive of earning an A in the course. Marie sees the “bottom layer” of this system as “mandates” or rules that she must meet in order to achieve her motive. And, while Marie did successfully pass the course, she did not engage with the system in any meaningful way, and because of this, she did not build a sense of self-efficacy in writing. Marie did score high on the self-efficacy survey, and this image does more closely depict the way self-efficacy is currently theorized in the education literature, as individually motivated and performed.

FIGURE 9 SELF-EFFICACY FOR SCHOOL WRITING
FIGURE 10  SELF-EFFICACY AS EMERGENT AND ENACTED

Figure 10 above, instead depicts Danielle’s experience of self-efficacy, which as I have theorized in this dissertation, built as collective agency, emergent, and enacted by individual participants as they do the work of the system. In this model, students begin to feel agency by resolving contradictions and more closely sharing the work of the system. As students engage with the system, they build agency that is represented by the bold line in Fig. 10 above. For Danielle, “plugging in” to the collective action of the system (as demonstrated dramatically in her writing maps) allowed her to build a sense of self-efficacy in writing that went with her as she left this particular system. When students see that engaging with the system produces results toward those larger system motives, they have a lingering sense of agency which can move with them to similar new systems.

Writing as Socially Constructed

This study also addresses the critique of writing as it is imagined in self-efficacy theory; namely, addressing the notion that writing is a set of universal and individually performed tasks.
In this dissertation, I argue that writing is socially constructed inside particular activity systems, and any measure of self-efficacy must take that view of writing into account (Bazerman, Bawarshi, Devitt, Flower and Hayes, Gee, Swales). Any researcher who studies how students write must also consider the social practices that attend the creation of that text. According to Tiane Donahue, “literacy is social practice and discourse is social transaction” (327). And, as the motives of FYC demonstrate, learning to write, especially writing that transfers to other contexts, requires not only self-reflective awareness, but engagement with the content. According to Joachim Lompscher:

Learning actions are prerequisites for acquisition of certain material, but they cannot be formed (acquired, learned) without being engaged in the corresponding material. It is impossible to learn the appropriate learning actions first and then to learn the material itself. The actions’ content, structure and course are determined by the object, there is no contentless or objectless formal action to be transferred to different materials (267-268).

The FYC teachers in this study, Byrd and Perry, stated specifically that they agree with the motives of FYC and the ways in which the curriculum teaches transferrable writing knowledge and the constructedness of writing and teach this as a specific outcome of their courses.

Because many students who enter FYC do not have a conception of writing as tied to content and context, the task of teaching these new concepts becomes a challenge. Some students, like Danielle and Marcus engage with the concepts more fully than others, like Marie and Kent. This kind of engagement with the concepts being taught became more apparent to me when I compared the case studies, especially those of Marie and Danielle. The difference is students’ understanding of the concept that writing as socially constructed is strikingly evident in
the different depictions of the writing process that Marie and Danielle drew in their third writing maps, Fig. 11 below:

FIGURE 11 COMPARISON MARIE’S AND DANIELLE’S WRITING PROCESS MAPS

A side-by-side comparison of Marie’s (left) and Danielle’s (right) third writing maps reveals some striking differences in the way each viewed the writing process at the middle of the semester. I asked each to consider their previous writing assignment as an input/output machine. Marie’s map is full of words rather than images. Danielle’s map recognizes the affective inputs (two happy faces, one neutral face) as well as resources to help her write (writing center, Skype session with boyfriend, teacher conference). Marie’s map also reflects affective inputs (annoyance, discipline) and affective outputs (good feeling, pride) and resources to help her write (teacher, peer, English-major cousin). The difference here is not so much in content, because much of what appears on the maps was prompted by me during our interviews with questions such as: What resources did you use? How did you feel about this paper when you started? When you finished? The difference is more about how this information is represented. Marie sees her writing process as a series of bullet points—steps to complete. Danielle sees her
writing process as a world of social action in which she participates. While Danielle draws herself into the system, Marie stays outside, listing the steps she must take to meet her objective. These writing maps, offer an interesting confirmation of the activity system triangles in Figures 9 and 10 above, where Marie situates herself outside the action of the system and Danielle is more fully engaged with the work of the system. These images of writing process demonstrate the ways in which students enact the motives of learning transferrable concepts about writing. When students see writing as social, they are more able to see affordances in the system to help them. When students see FYC as a hurdle to complete, they perform writing only as an individual task to be completed rather than as a way to engage with the work of a system.

Based on the data from this study, it becomes more important for student learning that students genuinely understand the socially constructed nature of writing. It also becomes important to understand that grades don’t measure this kind of learning. If students like Marie just list the steps in the writing process without genuinely applying that knowledge to their writing practices, then they aren’t sharing the motives of the FYC system, and they aren’t really learning how to write better. I suggest here that even “school” writing such as the kind performed in FYC does not have to be an individual task, but rather, students can learn to write as engaged members of a system producing the work of learning.

Methods of Measuring Self-Efficacy for Writing in this Study

In Chapter One, I articulated a specific critique of the survey methods used by Bandura and other self-efficacy theorists as inadequate for measuring self-efficacy and for the implications that self-efficacy predicts learning. Given the findings about the nature of agency and about the nature of writing in this study, I also argue that the contextual method developed in
this study offers a more robust way to theorize and measure self-efficacy for learning to write. I suggest a fuller picture of the self-efficacy necessary for understanding how students learn to write, and that self-efficacy for learning is better (but not ever fully) described using activity theory analysis, which examines not only individual beliefs but also the entire system that the student experiences when learning to write. While there are limitations to the terminology of activity theory, which limit the ways in which interactions are described in the system, activity theory is a more robust lens from which to view self-efficacy.

The data in Chapter 4, which shows that survey results differ from case study results when measuring self-efficacy. While the data in chapter 4 does indicate that self-efficacy surveys do predict final grades and motivation to work hard, they do little to explain how much students beliefs have actually changed over the semester. For example, Tyler experienced drastic changes in his self-efficacy for writing as indicated by how much he engaged and enacted the motives of the FYC system, according to the case study results, but he reported almost no difference in self-efficacy (only a 30 point increase) according to the survey results. Marcus reported a large increase in self-efficacy (a 540 point increase) according to the survey results, but only a moderate increase in self-efficacy if measured by the case study methods.

When examined as action within a system, the definition of self-efficacy becomes broader and more diffused as action toward motives of the system. Using the activity theory as a lens, I was able to see how students use affordances to engage more fully with the motives of the system. Danielle recognized that she needed to learn writing concepts so she could learn to write better and that her teacher was willing to help her, so she emailed him frequently and visited his office to go over her writing. She did not, however, view the writing center as an affordance to
help her write better, but only as a place where she could get her grammar corrected at the end of her writing process; therefore, she did not visit the writing center during her semester in FYC. While the writing center was available for exactly the kind of help Danielle needed, she did not “plug-in” to the writing center as an extension of her own agency or as a tool for writing better. Like Clark and Chalmers, who view agency as extended into the world, Bazerman also explains that:

rather than considering writing as an isolated modularized function, we might look at it as a complex accomplishment, enlisting varying assemblies of human psychological and material capacities that we have learned how to redirect and coordinate for these special purposes, and that over time might create more enduring or automatized assemblies that take shape in individuals, perhaps influenced by available social practices and organized instruction (“Writing” 98).

As Bazerman suggests, students who see “psychological and material capacities” in the system are able to “redirect and coordinate” the tools available to them and shape their actions over time.

Activity theory, however, is only one lens from which to examine the phenomenon of self-efficacy in writing, and it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this theory. First, activity theory is used to examine actions and interactions between multiple actors in a system. At times, human and non-human actors are seen as “tools” or “resources” for use with the “subject.” These labels limit the ways in which non-human actors are viewed. Posthuman theories of agency suggest instead that all actors, human and non-human, engage in the process of building agency. The label “tool” or “resource” as I’ve used here limits the description of
agency that I’ve developed in this dissertation. As with any lens, focus is sharpened on some aspects and blurred on others. In the case of this dissertation, the action of non-human actors in these systems has been blurred, and perhaps further research into the work of non-human, technological actors may sharpen the view of agency developed here.

Methodological implications from this study are important to consider. The results of this study suggest that self-efficacy surveys do little to explain how students learn about writing, important information for teachers and program administrators. The results of this study also suggest that grades do not always indicate self-efficacy for learning about writing. The new methods proposed here, including detailed case studies and activity analyses are time-consuming and expensive to conduct by classroom teachers or on a programmatic level. I do not suggest that these particular methods can be implemented on a very large scale, but the methods proposed here point to ways in which broader examinations of self-efficacy for learning about writing can be implemented. For example, a teacher could work to make sure that students understand and see a need to engage with the motives of the course. This could be accomplished through writing assignments or classroom activities that explore the official motives of the course. It may also be helpful for teachers to examine their own unofficial motives and how those are enacted in the classroom. On a programmatic level, administrators could ensure that official motives are clearly stated and that unofficial motives of individual teachers are examined in workshops or through observation or examination of graded student papers. Although self-reported surveys are critiqued in this dissertation, perhaps anonymous surveys which explore how students, teachers, and program administrators value the official motives could provide some insight into areas where certain groups do not share similar or complementary motives. Although I have not
theorized how these methods can be applied to larger scale populations, I do believe there are several ways these findings can be put use in practical classroom and program problems.

Implications for Teaching FYC

The problem of agency in writing may be particularly relevant in FYC courses for two reasons: (1) all students are typically required to take these courses, and (2) students have years of experience in writing for school, so they enter FYC believing the course is just a review of things they already know. When students enter a course already believing they know how to do the work, teachers have a more difficult time convincing them that they can learn something new and convincing them that the writing practices they have already established may need to be adjusted. This double challenge creates a kind of on-going crisis in helping students understand that they can learn concepts that will help them write better.

Student histories are important, and teachers might help students learn better if they know something about students’ writing histories. Engeström suggests activity theory as a “somewhat more differentiated framework for analyzing agency” which does “not assume that the foundational agent is the individual” but rather emphasizes “the principle of mutual constitution of actions and activity, the principle of contradictions as a source of change, and the principle of historicity” in a way that calls for “a serious examination of the social constitution and institutional embeddedness of agency” (Engeström “Knotworking” 332-333). This integration of agency with the social system is important for the development of self-efficacy and for understanding more clearly how students learn to write. Genuine learning, the kind both teachers in this study and the larger program values, necessitates a building of agency in the system. This cannot be accomplished until the newcomers see themselves as part of that system and identify
with the goals and values of that system. Self-efficacy beliefs are good for describing a single-minded goal-oriented agent who is capable of producing desired outcomes of the individual agent.

Histories move with the students, and students look for places to plug-in to a new system. Teachers should offer students those places to plug-in and offer students ways to see the affordances that tools offer to help them write better. If student histories are marked by previous experiences of challenge, contradiction, and change, when needing to adapt to a new system, they more easily negotiate contradictions. If student histories are marked by previous experiences of success and quick adoption of the teacher’s goals, then those students have more difficulty engaging with challenging or contradictory motives that may be present in a new system. It’s almost as if histories of overcoming failure (in experiences that may or may not have to do with writing, but that are seen as applicable to writing systems in some way) help students prepare and adapt to challenging circumstances. But, histories are not “the thing” either.

Teachers cannot just substitute “history” for “self-efficacy” and be finished. Agency does not happen in isolation from the motives of a particular system. When histories and motives move together, students see multiple affordances for plugging into the system and engaging with the agency that exists in the system. For example, if a FYC teacher can relate a new writing assignment (a literature review, let’s say) to something in the student’s history (the five paragraph essay) in a way that the student can draw upon the previous experience as a tool for learning, and the teacher can point to similarities and differences between the previous concept and the new concept, then students can more easily negotiate the motives of the new system. Simply negotiating the motives of the system does not necessarily mean that students share the
motives of the system. Sharing motives also requires that the teacher articulate and understand the motives of the system and can help students see value in participating in the system. And, when student resist or fail to see value in the work of the system, teachers must recognize that some students may never adapt their histories or adopt the motives of the new system.

Given the evidence presented in these case studies and the deeply contextualized nature of self-efficacy developed in this dissertation, it becomes difficult to deny that larger systems have some role in the determination of agency, especially agency in writing. For Prior and Shipka, “literate activity is about nothing less than ways of being in the world, forms of life. It is about histories (multiple, complexly interanimating trajectories and domains of activity), about the (re)formation of persons and social worlds, about affect and emotion, will and attention” (181). When viewed as the social construction of beliefs and attitudes about writing that happen within and through interacting activity systems, a broader, more contextualized view of learning to write emerges. Beliefs about writing, especially those about writing in FYC, aren’t always formed first in the mind of the writer, but instead, they are formed from interactions with social systems, historically and both inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps instead of measuring the written product, a measure of student motives in FYC will give teachers a better indicator of how well students will learn. The cases of FYC students presented in this study demonstrate a re-imagined role for self-efficacy as a contextualized, socially constructed form of agency that develops with and through the acquisition of concept knowledge of the discourse community, social interaction with peers and trusted mentors, as well as individual histories, motivation and self-reflection about writing.
What does this mean for writing teachers, especially those who work so hard to structure courses for student learning and self-efficacy? Simply put, teachers can’t control the motivations and beliefs of students beyond the classroom experience, but they can help students see the value of adopting the motives of the system. Students arrive with a set of expectations that govern many of their choices in the classroom. Teachers can help students recognize their own histories and help them see where their histories may contradict what they’re learning. Perhaps this could be enacted in the classroom as a literacy narrative or an affective writing history assignment. It may be accomplished through open acknowledgement and discussion of the contradictions among “school” writing practices as they are enacted in different classrooms. Teachers and students should acknowledge that contradictions will happen, and teachers should help students see that engaging with the work of FYC will help them resolve those contradictions, even if it is frustrating at first.

The results of this study illustrate the difficult position of classroom teachers who must orchestrate and manage a number tensions, balancing a hundred or so students’ affective, social, and intellectual engagement with available tools for enacting the motives of learning to write while also managing their own frustrations with larger issues of labor practices and teacher empowerment. Sommers and Saltz offer consolation for the beleaguered teacher and administrator: “Writing development isn't always happening on the page during freshman year, an important fact to consider for those who require concrete evidence--a one-time measure at the end of a first-year writing course--as a way to assess student learning” (144). My encounter with Kent drives this point home. Regardless of how effectively the course is structured, scaffolded, and designed, teachers do not control individual beliefs or individual practices. As teachers, we
can help them see the value of the motives we enact in the classroom and help them find available tools and help them build bridges to ease their way toward future experiences with writing, but in the end, students must enact self-efficacy to recognize these affordances on their own.

Re-Imagining Self-Efficacy as Writing Efficacy

Given the findings in this dissertation, which suggest that self-efficacy as it is currently theorized and measured is inadequate for understanding how students learn about writing, and given the motives of student learning in FYC courses, it becomes important to re-imagine self-efficacy as socially situated and socially enacted in writing classrooms. I propose a broader and more accurate description of the phenomenon, not as self-efficacy in writing, but as writing efficacy. Self-efficacy may be an individual feeling or even a lingering sense of being able to accomplish the work of a system, but writing efficacy more effectively describes the action of an individual in a classroom activity system. Writing efficacy, then, can be defined as the social construction of agency for writing that is emergent through engagement in particular activity systems. Using this definition, writing efficacy helps students learn about writing better than self-efficacy. In this study, Danielle did not report high self-efficacy for writing, but through her sustained engagement with the motives of the classroom writing system, she demonstrated writing efficacy. Alternately, Marie did report high self-efficacy for writing, but because she failed to engage with the motives of the system, she did not identify herself as a participant in the writing efficacy that was built in the system. And because she did not identify with this writing efficacy, she failed to change her writing practices and failed to learn new concepts about writing in this FYC course.
This re-imagined view of writing efficacy offers a broader, more contextualized view of the process of learning about writing. In this view, beliefs about writing, especially those about writing in FYC, aren’t formed first in the mind of the writer, but instead, they are formed from interactions between individual histories and social systems both inside and outside the classroom. This new understanding of writing efficacy resolves the two major problems underlying self-efficacy theory as it stands; namely, (1) flawed views of writing as universal, rule-dependent, and (2) a-contextual views of writing as constructed cognitively by a single writer, independent of the social action of text, tools, and other participants in the action. Socio-cultural theories of writing and posthuman theories of agency help reframe writing efficacy, not as constructed individually by the self, but as socially constructed through participation and engagement with the agency that is emergent in particular activity systems. Therefore, it is more appropriate to explain the phenomenon of self-efficacy, especially for learning about writing, as writing efficacy rather than self-efficacy in writing.

Implications for a theory of writing efficacy are broad, and provide areas for further research. For example, based on this research, classroom teachers may wish to think carefully about how they enact both official and unofficial motives in their classrooms and how they can foster a sense of value and need for working toward those motives together. Teachers might also consider how students participate in the motives of the system and how individual student and teacher histories can cause tensions that may affect the agency constructed in the system. Perhaps a written assignment that explores how well students identify with the motives of FYC could help teachers identify students who will encounter tensions for accomplishing the work of learning about writing. While these tensions can lead to expansive learning, there is also a
chance that tensions could lead students away from the work of the system, as in Marie’s case.

Teachers who are sensitive to these tensions may be able to help students identify more closely with the goals and motives of FYC. Teachers might also consider how tools within the activity system can be engaged or even changed to better accomplish agency for learning about writing. For example, teachers should encourage students to work with other FYC students inside and outside the classroom, and the teacher should also encourage the use of university resources, such as a writing center, when available. If writing efficacy is emergent in activity systems that focus on learning about writing, then all participants should be encouraged to engage more fully with the work of the system.

Implications for writing program administrators are also broad, and a consideration of writing efficacy could help more students learn concepts about writing that are transferrable to other writing situations. Because grades don’t always reflect the kind of engagement necessary for learning, new assessment practices may need to be developed. Writing program administrators should consider how assessment practices reflect engagement with learning outcomes developed for the program. This could be in the form of surveys, but instead of asking about particular writing skills, the survey could ask about motives for learning about writing. For example, the survey might ask if the student believes she can learn to write better by taking FYC or knowing about discourse communities will help him understand writing in his future career. Surveys still pose problems, however. Students may state that they “believe” and “value” the learning outcomes stated by a writing program, but those students may never enact those motives in their writing practices. Perhaps teachers could look for enacted motives by tracking changes in understanding of concepts or writing practices in a writing portfolio where students reflect on
their writing practices or their understanding of writing concepts several times over the course of a semester. These types of assessments are certainly not as quick or convenient as Bandura’s twenty-five question self-efficacy survey, but they may provide administrators with a better way to assess learning in their programs. Although transfer is not a focus of this dissertation, the results of this study suggest that students who actively engage with motives that are directed at learning about writing may be more likely to build writing efficacy that is transferrable to new writing situations. Taken together, the evidence about writing efficacy in this dissertation points to important ways in which teachers and administrators may wish to re-imagine how students engage with first-year composition classes. Continued research on writing efficacy could offer productive avenues for assessing student learning, transfer, and helping students learn about writing.
APPENDIX A: IRB EXEMPT LETTER
Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Mary L. Tripp

Date: August 05, 2010

Dear Researcher,

On 8/5/2010, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Initial Review
Project Title: Portrait of a Writer: Distributed and Embodied Self-Efficacy Practices of Students in WaW FYC Courses
Investigator: Mary L. Tripp
IRB Number: SBE-10-07024
Funding Agency: None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in IRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 08/05/2010 12:11:30 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator
APPENDIX B:
ADMINISTRATOR AND INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Administrator Interview Questions:

1. How would you define Writing about Writing?
2. Why did you see the need for this pedagogy at UCF?
3. How suitable is this pedagogy for other student populations? (say at a community college, or rural or urban institution) Why?
4. What concepts or ideas do you hope students take away from WaW courses?
5. What type of assignments have you seen teachers develop for this pedagogy?
6. How are these assignments different from the previous curriculum at UCF?
7. What type of classroom activities have you seen teachers develop for WaW courses?
8. How are these classroom activities different from the previous curriculum?
9. How are “big” assignments interrelated in WaW courses?
10. What has been the teacher feedback about student reactions to WaW courses so far?
11. What’s your sense of how teachers feel after teaching these courses?
12. Do you notice a different sense of “teacher self-efficacy” with this WaW approach over the previous curriculum?
13. How might a teachers’ confidence influence students in the class?
14. In a general sense, have you noticed a difference in student feedback (either from students approaching you to resolve problems or from student evaluations) between WaW courses and courses using the previous curriculum?

Teacher Interview Questions:

How would you define Writing about Writing?

Why did you choose to teach using a WaW design over the previous curriculum?
Tell me about the main objectives for your overall course design.

What concepts or ideas do you hope students take away from your course?

Let’s consider the main concepts you teach. Explain how students demonstrate their knowledge of this concept.

What types of “big” assignments do you give?

Let’s discuss one of these assignments: What is the main purpose of this assignment? What is the main concept you hope students will learn with this assignment? What classroom activities lead up to this assignment? What do you look for when you grade this assignment? What help do you offer students who are struggling with this assignment?

How are “big” assignments interrelated?

What does your daily classroom activity look like?

Do these daily activities differ from activities you developed for other curricula?

What is the overall message about writing that you hope students will learn by the end of the course?

What’s your sense of how students feel about writing at the beginning of this course? At the end of the course?

What changes are you thinking about for this semester over the previous time you taught the course?

How well you think students get the Writing about Writing concept? What helps them understand the most?

What is the most important thing you think students should know when they leave ENC 1101?
APPENDIX C:
SELF-EFFICACY SURVEY
Mary Tripp, a researcher at the University of Central Florida, would like to know more about your writing habits and your feelings about yourself as a writer. This inventory will be administered at the beginning and end of ENC 1101. The researcher is looking for general sense of how writers’ habits and feelings change over the semester. This survey does not evaluate you individually in any way.

Informed Consent: I voluntarily agree to take this survey and understand that the results will be used to understand the general feelings about ability to complete writing tasks in ENC 1101 at the University of Central Florida and may be used for published research stemming from the data collected here. I understand that I will not be compensated for taking this survey. This survey is not anonymous; however, my name will be kept separate from my survey and only identifiable by the researcher. Your answers on this survey will be combined with the answers of approximately 375 other students who will take this survey. The collective answers from this survey will not be identifiable in any scholarly publications or presentations stemming from this research. All identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office until the end of the study. At the end of the study, all names will be destroyed, so there is only minimal risk to me in providing answers to the questions posed here.

___ I agree
___ I do not agree  *** If this box is selected, then please do not continue with the survey.

Are you 18 years of age or older?

__Yes
__No  *** If this box is selected, then please do not continue with the survey.

Please sign here to acknowledge your willingness to complete this survey. This form will be kept in a locked cabinet separate from your survey answers.

Signature __________________________________________________________

Please print your name here________________________________________________

Survey # _______
Survey # ________

Directions: Below there are statements about writing. For each statement, select the number that best describes your degree of confidence by choosing a number from 0 to 100 using the scale -- 0 (cannot do at all), 50 (moderately can do), 100 (highly certain can do). Please skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

1. When given a specific writing assignment, I can come up with a suitable topic in a short time.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

2. I can start writing with no difficulty.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

3. When I am stuck with a topic, I can find people or places to get help with my paper.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

4. I can find people and places that will help me learn to write better.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

5. I can write a brief but informative overview that will prepare readers well for the main thesis of my paper.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

6. I can use different types of technology to help me write.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

7. I can adjust my style of writing to suit the needs of any audience.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

8. I can find a way to concentrate on my writing even when there are many distractions around me.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

9. When I have a pressing deadline on a paper, I can manage my time efficiently.
   
   0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

10. I can meet the writing standards of an evaluator who is very demanding.
    
    0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

11. I can come up with memorable examples quickly to illustrate an important point.
    
    0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100
12. I can rewrite my wordy or confusing sentences clearly.

13. When I need to make a subtle or an abstract idea more imaginable, I can use words to create a vivid picture.

14. I can locate and use appropriate reference sources when I need to document an important point.

15. I can write very effective transitional sentences from one idea to another.

16. I can refocus my concentration on writing when I find myself thinking about other things.

17. When I write on a lengthy topic, I can create a variety of good outlines for the main sections of my paper.

18. When I want to persuade a skeptical reader about a point, I can come up with a convincing quote from an authority.

19. When I get stuck writing a paper, I can find ways to overcome the problem.

20. I can find ways to motivate myself to write a paper even when the topic holds little interest for me.

21. I can find resources on campus to help me write papers for school.

22. I can revise a first draft of any paper so that it is shorter and better organized.

23. When I edit a complex paper, I can find and correct all my grammatical errors.
24. I can find other people who will give critical feedback on early drafts of my paper.

0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100

25. When my paper is written on a complicated topic, I can come up with a short informative title.

0------10------20------30------40------50------60------70------80------90------100
APPENDIX D:
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

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Email to case study volunteers invited to participate in study:

Dear _______________,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the study of writers in UCF’s first year composition program. I would like to invite you to participate in four one hour interviews this semester so that I can learn more about your writing experiences at UCF. As a token of my appreciation for your participation, I can offer you a $5 Starbucks or UCF Bookstore gift card and lots of yummy refreshments at each interview. You may also find that by talking about your writing experiences with a writing researcher, you’ll gain insight into your writing, gain some confidence in your abilities, and learn ways to develop your skills. Of course, this series of interviews will require an hour of your time each month and sharing of your writing with the researcher. Your information will be kept confidential by the researcher and your instructor will not be told anything you say at the interviews and will not even know that you are participating in this study unless you wish to tell them.

Please email me at mtripp@mail.ucf.edu in the next few days to let me know if you wish to participate in this study. At our first meeting, I’ll be happy to answer any questions you have about this process.

Sincerely,

Mary Tripp
Email to schedule students for interviews:

Dear _______________,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study of students in first-year composition at UCF.

I’d like to schedule our next interview for the (first, second) week of (September, October, November, December). Please email me at mtripp@mail.ucf.edu in the next few days to let me know what day and time will be best for you. I will be available any time on M/W/F or T/R mornings before 10:30.

I look forward to hearing from you in the next few days.

Mary Tripp

Email for interview schedule:

Dear _______________,

It was nice to hear back from you so quickly. Our next interview is scheduled for ____________ (date) at ___________ (time). We can meet in Colbourn Hall, room ________.

Please remember to bring a paper you have written for class so that we can talk about your writing process and the experiences you had writing that paper. At our interview, you will receive a $5 Starbucks giftcard and lots of yummy refreshments. I look forward to speaking with you on ___________ (day).

Mary Tripp
APPENDIX E:
STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview 1 (to take place during the first week of September):

Explain informed consent and have student sign form before beginning.

Materials: Blank paper, lined note paper, pens, markers, recording device

Background on writing practices:

1. How many pages do you think you write in one day? For example, you might IM, email, text message, write notes for class, write papers for school, write song lyrics, Facebook updates)? (P)(R)

2. What kinds of writing do you do? (P)

3. What’s the most frequent kind of writing? (IM, email, text).

4. What kind of writing is most enjoyable? (E)(R)(M)

5. What kind of writing are you the best at?

6. How do you judge how good you are at writing (what standards do you use to judge your writing)? (other people, vocabulary, flow, how much you struggle to write it)

Mapping:

Tell me about the paper you brought with you. (If student doesn’t bring a paper, have them think of one particular assignment to answer the next several questions.)

1. Tell me about the assignment for this paper? (M)(R)

2. I’m interested in finding out the steps you took to write the paper.

3. Specifically, what steps did you take to write this paper (research, thought process, brainstorming, prewriting, number of drafts, peer review, revision)? (P)(M).

4. Did you have anyone else read your paper?
5. I’d like you to draw a picture of your writing process. For example, think about ways you can use maps, webs, or other pictures to identify the steps you went through to compose this paper (Draw a sample if necessary.) Try to draw a picture of the things that went on inside your head and things outside your body that you used to write the paper (this could be technology ranging from a pen or pencil to computers, things or people who helped with research, or people who helped you edit your paper).

6. What places did you go when writing this paper? (M)(P)(T)

7. Or, think of your writing as a metaphor such as a container (filing cabinet or other container), an epic (a battle or love story), transportation (train or bus), a window or mirror, a web or network. (M)(T)

8. From beginning to end, how long did it take you to write this paper? Where did you write (home, class, library, Starbucks, friend’s house)? (P)

9. Now, give a title to your picture. (M)(R)

10. Let’s look at the map together. Please explain what you mean when you draw (X,Y,Z)? (M)

11. Do you feel you were successful on this assignment? (R)

12. How did you know you were successful? (R)

Background on prior classroom experiences with writing:

1. Think about your past experiences with writing. Where they generally good or generally bad? (M)

2. Would you say that you’re good/bad at writing? What made you believe you are good/bad at writing? (B)
3. When you get a new assignment in school, do you generally feel like you can do the assignment? (B)

4. What instances do you feel you can’t do? When are those times? (B) Why do you think you can’t do those assignments? (B)

Beliefs and experiences with college writing:

1. Did you ever write “college-level” papers before (high school AP course, a particularly rigorous high school teacher, previous college course)? (R)(M)

2. How confident do you feel about doing well on your first “big” assignment for college? (B) Why?

3. Do you think you can learn how to write college papers? How might you learn to write better?

4. What is the most important thing you need to really pay attention to when writing for college (focus, grammar, organization, vocabulary, topic, research, adding detail)? (M)(B)

5. Do you think you will need to write differently for your English teacher than for, say, your biology (or other course student is taking) teacher? (R) What do biology (or other course student is taking) teachers expect that’s different from English teachers? (R)

6. Are you confident that you can adapt your writing to the different kinds of writing you are required to do? (R)

7. How confident do you feel about being successful in your English class at UCF? (B)

Interview 2 (to take place during the first week in October):
In this interview, students will be asked to bring their first “real” ENC 1101 paper. This interview will explore concepts learned in class as well as writing practices and beliefs.

Materials: Blank paper, lined note paper, pens, markers, recording device

Content knowledge:

1. What did you learn about this month in Comp I? (Prompt for a narrative about challenges and new information that might have been introduced in class.) (M)(R)

2. I see you discussed ________ in class. Can you explain what that is? (The researcher will reference instructor’s syllabus for particular readings or concepts and try to determine student’s understanding of those concepts.) (M)(R)

Mapping:

Tell me about the paper you brought with you. (If student doesn’t bring a paper, have them think of one particular assignment to answer the next several questions.)

1. Tell me about the assignment for this paper? (M)(R)

2. I’m interested in finding out the steps you took to write the paper.

3. Specifically, what steps did you take to write this paper (research, thought process, brainstorming, prewriting, number of drafts, peer review, revision)? (P)(M).

4. Did you have anyone else read your paper?

5. I’d like you to draw a picture of your writing process. For example, think about ways you can use maps, webs, or other pictures to identify the steps you went through to compose this paper (Draw a sample if necessary.) Try to draw a picture of the things that went on inside your head and things outside your body that you used to write the paper (this could
be technology ranging from a pen or pencil to computers, things or people who helped
with research, or people who helped you edit your paper).

6. What places did you go when writing this paper? (M)(P)(T)

7. Or, think of your writing as a metaphor such as a container (filing cabinet or other
   container), an epic (a battle or love story), transportation (train or bus), a window or
   mirror, a web or network. (M)(T)

8. From beginning to end, how long did it take you to write this paper? Where did you write
   (home, class, library, Starbucks, friend’s house)? (P)

9. Now, give a title to your picture. (M)(R)

10. Let’s look at the map together. Please explain what you mean when you draw (X,Y,Z)?
    (M)

11. Do you feel you were successful on this assignment? (R)

12. How did you know you were successful? (R)

Beliefs about ability to write:

1. How well did you do on this paper? Depending on answer, follow up questions may be:
   o What helped you prepare for this paper? Why did you feel so confident about
     your work in this class? (P)(M)(B)
   o What part of the writing task was the easiest to perform (writing the introduction,
     writing the citations, getting started, writing enough detail)? (P)(B)
   o Did you feel more confident in your knowledge of the topic or in your ability to
     write the paper? (B)

OR
Why do you think you didn’t do well on this paper? Is this a common feeling for you?

What writing tasks specifically seemed to frustrate you about this paper (writing the introduction, writing the citations, getting started, writing enough detail)?

Did you feel less confident in your knowledge of the topic or in your ability to write about the topic?

Have you written any papers for other classes yet? How did you perform on those papers?

Were there differences in expectations between your English teacher and your other teachers?

Interview 3 (to take place during the first week in November):

In this interview, students will be asked to bring their second ENC 1101 paper. This interview will explore concepts learned in class as well as writing practices and beliefs.

Materials: Blank paper, lined note paper, pens, markers, recording device

Content knowledge:

1. What did you learn about this month in Comp I? (Prompt for a narrative about challenges and new information that might have been introduced in class.)

2. I see you discussed ________ in class. Can you explain what that is? (The researcher will reference instructor’s syllabus for particular readings or concepts and try to determine student’s understanding of those concepts.)

Mapping:
Tell me about the paper you brought with you. (If student doesn’t bring a paper, have them think of one particular assignment to answer the next several questions.)

1. Tell me about the assignment for this paper? (M)(R)
2. I’m interested in finding out the steps you took to write the paper.
3. Specifically, what steps did you take to write this paper (research, thought process, brainstorming, prewriting, number of drafts, peer review, revision)? (P)(M).
4. Did you have anyone else read your paper?
5. I’d like you to draw a picture of your writing process. For example, think about ways you can use maps, webs, or other pictures to identify the steps you went through to compose this paper (Draw a sample if necessary.) Try to draw a picture of the things that went on inside your head and things outside your body that you used to write the paper (this could be technology ranging from a pen or pencil to computers, things or people who helped with research, or people who helped you edit your paper).
6. What places did you go when writing this paper? (M)(P)(T)
7. Or, think of your writing as a metaphor such as a container (filing cabinet or other container), an epic (a battle or love story), transportation (train or bus), a window or mirror, a web or network. (M)(T)
8. From beginning to end, how long did it take you to write this paper? Where did you write (home, class, library, Starbucks, friend’s house)? (P)
9. Now, give a title to your picture. (M)(R)
10. Let’s look at the map together. Please explain what you mean when you draw (X,Y,Z)? (M)
11. Do you feel you were successful on this assignment? (R)

12. How did you know you were successful? (R)

Beliefs about ability to write:

1. How well did you do on this paper? Depending on answer, follow up questions may be:
   - What helped you prepare for this paper? Why did you feel so confident about your work in this class? (P)(M)(B)
   - What part of the writing task was the easiest to perform (writing the introduction, writing the citations, getting started, writing enough detail)? (B)
   - Did you feel confident in your knowledge of the topic? (R)(B)
   - Do you think you spent enough time researching the topic? (M)

   OR

   - Why do you think you didn’t do well on this paper? Is this a common feeling for you?
   - What writing tasks specifically seemed to frustrate you about this paper (writing the introduction, writing the citations, getting started, writing enough detail)? (B)
   - How much time did you spend researching the paper? (M)
   - How much time did you spend drafting and revising the paper? (M)

2. Have you written any papers for other classes yet? How did you perform on those papers? (M)(B)

Were there differences in expectations between your English teacher and your other teachers? (B)(M)(R)

Interview 4 (to take place during the first week of December):
Materials: Blank paper, lined note paper, pens, markers, recording device

Background on writing practices:

1. How many pages do you think you write in one day? (For example, you might IM, email, text message, write notes for class, write papers for school, write song lyrics, Facebook updates)? (P)(R)
2. What kinds of writing do you do? (P)
3. What’s the most frequent kind of writing? (IM, email, text).
4. What kind of writing is most enjoyable? (E)(R)(M)
5. What kind of writing are you the best at?
6. How do you judge how good you are at writing (what standards do you use to judge your writing)? (other people, vocabulary, flow, how much you struggle to write it)

Mapping:

Tell me about the paper you brought with you. (If student doesn’t bring a paper, have them think of one particular assignment to answer the next several questions.)

1. Tell me about the assignment for this paper? (M)(R)
2. I’m interested in finding out the steps you took to write the paper.
3. Specifically, what steps did you take to write this paper (research, thought process, brainstorming, prewriting, number of drafts, peer review, revision)? (P)(M).
4. Did you have anyone else read your paper?
5. I’d like you to draw a picture of your writing process. For example, think about ways you can use maps, webs, or other pictures to identify the steps you went through to compose this paper (Draw a sample if necessary.) Try to draw a picture of the things that went on
inside your head and things outside your body that you used to write the paper (this could be technology ranging from a pen or pencil to computers, things or people who helped with research, or people who helped you edit your paper).

6. What places did you go when writing this paper? (M)(P)(T)

7. Or, think of your writing as a metaphor such as a container (filing cabinet or other container), an epic (a battle or love story), transportation (train or bus), a window or mirror, a web or network. (M)(T)

8. From beginning to end, how long did it take you to write this paper? Where did you write (home, class, library, Starbucks, friend’s house)? (P)

9. Now, give a title to your picture. (M)(R)

10. Let’s look at the map together. Please explain what you mean when you draw (X,Y,Z)? (M)

11. Do you feel you were successful on this assignment? (R)

12. How did you know you were successful? (R)

Background on classroom experiences with writing:

1. Think about your experiences with writing. Where they generally good or generally bad? (M)

2. Would you say that you’re good/bad at writing? What made you believe you are good/bad at writing? (B)

3. When you get a new assignment in school, do you generally feel like you can do the assignment? (B)
4. What instances do you feel you can’t do? When are those times? (B) Why do you think you can’t do those assignments? (B)

Beliefs and experiences with college writing:

1. Think of the most memorable experience you had writing for college this semester. Describe that particular assignment. What made it particularly successful? (M)

2. Do you feel more capable of writing “college-level” papers now that you have almost completed ENC 1101? (R)(M)

3. What concepts that you learned in ENC 1101 were particularly helpful in learning to write (discourse community, rhetorical awareness, metacognition, writing process)? (R)

4. Do you believe your writing has improved this semester? (B)(L)

5. Do you believe you can continue to improve your writing after you finish taking English courses? (B)(L)

6. What resources might you use to help yourself become a better writer (writing center, composition teacher, internet resources such as OWL, writing blogs)? (L)(T)

7. How did you perform on other college writing this term (humanities, history, biology)?(M)

8. What do you think you need to really pay attention to when writing for college (grammar, organization, vocabulary, topic, research, adding detail)? (M)(B)

9. What do you think makes a good college paper? (M)(B)
APPENDIX F: CODING SCHEME
Coding for Self-Efficacy in Writing

Dimension 1

The purpose of this dimension is to determine where the speaker places authority for decisions or action in writing. Don’t be afraid to use the other category if the category is not apparent in the

Code as Social Resource any clause that mentions an aid for writing that’s outside the self. These clauses place writing authority in the social realm such as things learned in the classroom or from others.

- Any pronouns or nouns that reference people, places, or things that help with writing, such as peer groups, teacher conferences, writing center, roommate, family member or friend, such as “I asked her about”

Code as Academic Concept Knowledge any clause that reference concepts or texts from class, regardless of the effect. Whenever a concept or idea or even learning this semester is referenced, use this category.

- Any words that name concepts such as discourse community, rhetorical situation, writing process, constructs, plagiarism, exigence, musfhaker, recursive, constructs, enculturation, revision, incubation, conversation, CARS, literacy, identity, authority. If an academic concept appears, default to the academic category.
- Names of authors of reading from class, such as Lamott, Perl, Grant-Davie, Penrose & Geisler, Rose, Sontag, King, Swales, Greene, Berkenkotter, Murray, Williams, Kantz, Porter, Johns, Mirabelli, Wardle, McCarthy (Lucille)
- Specific titles or parts of titles from readings in class, such as “Skilled and Unskilled Writers” or “the thing we read about rigid rules” “Shitty First Drafts” “What Writing Is” “Argument as Conversation” “Discourse Communities” “Lab Rat” “Phenomenology of Error” “Textual Sources” “Intertextuality” “Learning to Serve” “Stranger in a Strange Land”

Code as Internal Self-Reflection any clause that expresses any reflection about the writing process, either for class assignments, class reading, or previous writing experience.

- Expresses confidence in ability or ease of completing the writing task, such as “I was actually right” or “I thought it made sense to me” or “I could see what to do”
- Explains any aspect of the writing process with student as subject such as “I went home and edited” “I moved around three or four paragraphs” “I did it all in one day”
- General thinking, emotion, or response about writing, “I think” or “I guess” or “I didn’t like it” “I was happy”
- Past experiences that influence writing, such as memories things high school teachers said, or experiences that shape the way they write today. “It’s not what I’m used to.”

Code as Other any phrase that is off the topic of writing, doesn’t seem to reference a particular writing task, or otherwise doesn’t fit a category above.

- Statements about things other than writing (rowing team, student council)
- Statements about hunger or feelings not related to a particular writing task, such as “I’m tired today”
Coding for the Quality of Confidence in Accomplishing a Task

Dimension 2

The purpose of this dimension is to look for the quality of confidence (or lack of confidence) in accomplishing a writing task.

Code as Confidence any clause that expresses facility, a sense of pride, emotional or time invested in the writing task. Statements that appear neutral but are stated as active voice should be coded as confidence.

- Expression of confidence in ability or ease of completing the writing task, such as “I was actually right” or “I thought it made sense to me” or “I could see what to do”
- Explains writing process in active voice with an active verb, with student as subject such as “I went home and edited” “I moved around three or four paragraphs” “I did it all in one day” or even “I got a 55” which is a simple statement in active voice.
- Expressions where the student has committed time or energy to the writing or revision task such as “I spent a lot time” “I learned how” or “I really learned a lot this semester”
- Expressions of emotional response such as “I was happy”
- A sense of pride, even if it explains a deficiency, or speaks of something that has improved over this semester or double negatives such as “There’s only one thing I didn’t know” or “I kind of just actually flowed” or “It was better than I thought” or “I did more than I normally do” or “there weren’t really negative things”
- A sense of accomplishment about what is learned in class or for previous writing tasks such as “I never wrote a bad paper in high school”
- A sense of confidence in using outside people to help, such as “The writing center was great” or I have her revise it

Code as Hedging any clause that references concepts, writing, or other assignments from class, but also expresses doubt or questions the social authority. Only code hedging when doubt or frustration seems apparent.

- Any uses of weak evidential words such as “perhaps” “I think,” “maybe,” “I guess,” “I just think” or “that’s not what I’m used to” that indicate excuses or uncertainty about writing, concepts, or trust in others about writing.
- Extra wordiness or trailing sentences that indicates uncertainty, dashes, or stopped thoughts that seem to dance around the point “um, that seems---” I think, maybe, that’s what I did”
- Any statement that reports confusion or doubt or negative emotion. “I didn’t understand what they meant” or “my peer review didn’t give me” “I was frustrated”
- Any statement that reports confusion or error about a concept from class. “I didn’t understand rhetorical situation”
  - Statements that give reasons for the quality of a paper “I was lazy on this paper” or “I didn’t try very hard” or “I had no idea about this”

Code as Other any clause that does not appear either neutral (but with active voice), confident, or hedging in reference to writing tasks.

- Statements about places or events that aren’t related to writing such as, “I went to work” or “I had to go to the library” when they don’t reference a writing task or don’t seem to influence the writing or feelings about writing.
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