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Connections in High School Writers: Affective Connections as a

Writing Self-Efficacy Dimension

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Connections in High School Writers: Affective Connections as a
Writing Self-Efficacy Dimension

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While scholars of writing self-efficacy (WSE) have long explored self-efficacy as multidimensional, not every crucial dimension of self-efficacy has been explored (Walker; Zumbrunn et al.; Bruning and Kauffman). Recently, scholars have called for new WSE dimensions so that scholars can better examine the contextual and relational factors of self-efficacy (Usher and Pajares 786). My thesis is one answer to this call. Using ideas from contemporary affect theory and data from an IRB-approved study on thirteen high school seniors in a language arts class, I theorize and explore a new dimension of WSE that I call *affective connections*. Affective connections are connections both intentional and unintentional between bodies/objects that to varying degrees stick to and influence other bodies/objects. By analyzing the study's ethnographic data, I found that affective connections are a helpful dimension for exploring how relationships and contexts influence self-efficacy. In two particular types of affective connections—student connections to assignments and student connections to teachers—intense connections often, but not always, indicated high self-efficacy to complete tasks and skills successfully, present and generate ideas, and self-regulate. More intense connections also usually indicated less student apathy about self-efficacy tasks or skills. Yet affective connections also complicate self-efficacy. Strong connections are not inherently positive, and affective connections ultimately reveal the ever-shifting and sometimes contradictory nature of WSE. My study indicates that affective connections are an exciting, likely widely applicable dimension of self-efficacy that may bolster scholars' understanding of self-efficacy as a highly relational and contextual concept.

Keywords: self-efficacy, writing self-efficacy, connection, relationship, affect, ideation, self-regulation, teachers, assignments, multidimensionality, language arts, high school, composition, writing studies

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Dimension

Scholars of writing self-efficacy (WSE)—the judgment of one's capability to perform a

certain writing task or skill at a certain level of performance—have long recognized and explored

self-efficacy as a multidimensional concept (Walker; Zumbrunn et al.; Bruning and Kauffman;

Usher and Pajares, Spicer; Jalaluddin et al.; Zimmerman and Bandura; Bruning and Dempsey).

These researched dimensions of WSE include, among others, writers' past experiences with

writing, the types of skills and tasks writers are asked to perform, and various results or

outcomes of self-efficacy. These diverse dimensions of WSE help scholars better understand

how WSE occurs, what it looks like for writers, how it increases and decreases, and how it

influences writers (Zumbrunn et al.; Bruning and Kauffman; Jalaluddin et al.)

Recently, scholars have noted that few WSE dimensions explore how relationships and

contexts influence self-efficacy (Bruning and Kauffman; Usher and Pajares). Instead, scholarship

tends to examine the "cognitive, procedural, and strategic" factors of student WSE (Zumbrunn et

al. 3). Furthermore, scholars may isolate WSE dimensions from relational and contextual factors,

perhaps in order to more easily categorize and define the dimensions (Usher and Pajares 786).

Noting that this isolation limits how holistically scholars are able to understand WSE, Usher and

Pajares call for a more "ecological" and "integrative approach" to WSE dimensions and argue

that there are "other" dimensions yet to be explored that can give us a more contexal, relational,

and holistic understanding of WSE (786). Following Usher and Pajares's call, my thesis

contributes a new dimension to WSE which more fully explores the relational and contextual

factors of WSE and how those factors might inform writers' beliefs.

Using ideas from contemporary affect theory and my own research findings, I theorize a

dimension of self-efficacy that I call *affective connections*. Specifically, I argue that affective

connections function as a self-efficacy source dimension, the type of self-efficacy dimension that

indicates, influences, supports, or helps increase or decrease self-efficacy. I define *affective*

connections as connections both intentional and unintentional between affective bodies, which

are people, objects, places, ideas, or any combination. These connections become affective by

virtue of their intensity: the strength and way bodies are pulled toward or pushed away from

other bodies and the stickiness of that pull or push, meaning the extent to which it alters the

bodies involved or the relationship between them (Ahmed). By exploring how students connect

with various bodies both human and nonhuman—teachers, curriculum, assignments, ideas,

locations, friends, family, etc.—I propose that we can more fully understand what influences

student self-efficacy, how that influence occurs, and how important and valuable specific self-

efficacy beliefs are to these students. In short, affective connections allow us to more fully

explore the relational and contextual factors surrounding students' self-efficacy judgments.

   To investigate affective connection as a WSE source, I use data from a school-year–long,

IRB-approved study of thirteen high school seniors in a regular language arts class.[1] I employ

ethnographic data from classroom observations, students' written texts, and interviews both to

study self-efficacy and affective connections in conjunction and to provide evidence that

affective connection is an important source of self-efficacy. To analyze this data, I conducted

qualitative coding of interview transcripts and a student writing assignment. I coded the

transcripts and assignment for both self-efficacy and affective connections, and almost all of the

data that I use in this thesis comes from examining both quantitatively and qualitatively these

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[1] As a graduate research assistant, I was a member of the three-person research team that gathered this data. All publications from this thesis will be co-authored by me; the lead researcher, Amy Williams; and the other research assistant, Anika Argyle.

coded segments.

In this thesis I will first provide a review of self-efficacy and its dimensions that are relevant for my findings and discussion. I will then review literature on contemporary affect theory to demonstrate how affect scholars use the idea of connection and intensity in their scholarship. In this review section, I more fully define affective connections based on the existing affect research. After the literature review, I provide my research designs and methods for collecting and analyzing data, as well as descriptions of participants and the context of the study. I then present my findings. I examine the most common types of writing tasks and skills in which students reported developing WSE. I also examine quantitatively the overlaps between data segments coded for affective connection and segments coded for self-efficacy. I conclude my thesis with a section on the theoretical and pedagogical implications of my research. Overall, my research indicates that affective connection is a helpful source dimension in exploring self-efficacy, especially for seeing how relationships and contexts influence self-efficacy, seeing differences in quality of self-efficacy, and examining the complex and ever-shifting nature of self-efficacy.

Review of Writing Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is almost universally defined as "a judgment of one's capability to accomplish a certain level of performance," (Bulut 282; Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* 391; see also Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy"; Bayraktar; Linnenbrink and Pintrich). First theorized by psychologist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy theory posits that self-beliefs about capabilities greatly influence individuals' behaviors, including what they do or do not do and what they avoid or embrace (Usher and Pajares 751; see also Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory"; Bulut). Usher and Pajares succinctly state the range of influence that self-efficacy beliefs have on human behaviors: "self-efficacy beliefs help determine the choices

people make, the effort they put forth, the persistence and perseverance they display in the face of difficulties, and the degree of anxiety or serenity they experience as they engage in the myriad tasks that comprise their life" (751).

As a subset of self-efficacy, writing self-efficacy is self-efficacy as it applies to all aspects of writing. Borrowing language from both Bandura's widely used definition of general self-efficacy and composition scholars Mehmet Demirel and İbrahim Aydin's description of writing self-efficacy, writing self-efficacy can be defined as the belief in or judgment of one's capability to perform a certain writing task or skill at a certain level of performance (Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* 391; Demirel and Aydin 107). Writing self-efficacy is not actual writing ability or general confidence in our ability to write well. Rather, writing self-efficacy examines how confident we are that we might accomplish a specific writing skill or task in the present or future[2] (Bong and Skaalvik 24; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 791). The higher the self-efficacy, the higher our confidence or expectations that we will accomplish a task at a certain level (Bong and Skaalvik 5; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory").

Though self-efficacy theories were first used in psychological research, compositionists have long-employed self-efficacy to study writers and their behaviors (see Jalaluddin et al.; Singh and Rajalingam; Bulut; Mitchell et al.; Daniels et al.; Hier and Mahony; Bruning and Kauffman; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory"; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy"; Kim and Lorsbach). Studies in educational self-efficacy and writing self-efficacy generally indicate that people with high self-efficacy are engaged in tasks and work hard (Bandura; Pajares; Walker), persevere despite difficulty (Bandura; Bottomley et al.; Liew et al.; Walker), seek help from others when completing challenging tasks (McTigue et al.; Walker), and set goals

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[2] Our evaluations of the past, however, can influence how well we think we can perform now and in the future.

(Bandura). Because high self-efficacy has so many benefits for writers, compositionists want to know how WSE influences certain behaviors and what can influence WSE.

<u>Multidimensionality in WSE</u>

Most WSE scholars agree that writing self-efficacy is multidimensional (Zumbrunn et al. 3; Bruning et al., 2013; MacArthur et al. 2015). While scholarship usually does not explicitly categorize these dimensions, WSE research indicates three main types of dimensions associated with WSE, which I call *sources*, based on the term theorized by Bandura; *targets*; and *outcomes*, based on terms used by Zumbrunn et al. and Bandura.

Sources

Sources are what indicates, influences, supports, or helps build self-efficacy (Pajares). For example, past experiences of success or failure can influence how well students think they can complete a similar task (Usher and Pajares 752; see also Mascle; Khost; Bulut). If students previously succeeded in writing a paragraph that incorporated secondary research, then the next time they are asked to write a paragraph that incorporates research, they may feel more confident in their ability to do so. The success of the past experience thus can influence students' self-efficacy. In the 1970s, Bandura theorized four main "sources of self-efficacy": *mastery experiences*, *vicarious experiences*, *social persuasion*, and *emotional and physiological states*. These four sources are by far the most commonly explored dimensions in WSE research and are generally considered the most important sources of self-efficacy for WSE (Bandura; Shell et al.; Usher and Pajares; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy"; Bruning and Kauffman).

Mastery experience is the "interpreted result of [our] own previous attainments," the idea that previous experiences of perceived successes or failures can affect self-efficacy beliefs of similar tasks in the present or future (Usher and Pajares 752; see Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy"; Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*; Bandura, "Self-

Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory"). Writers also form WSE beliefs through vicarious experience, which is observing others perform tasks and assessing one's capabilities in relation to the performer (Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy" 106; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 792; Bruning and Kauffman 161). By comparing "themselves to particular individuals such as classmates and adults," writers can judge their own capabilities for certain skills or tasks (Usher and Pajares 752). The third source of self-efficacy refers to the verbal or written judgments others provide an individual about that individual's capabilities, whether intentional or unintentional (Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy" 106; Bruning and Kauffman 162; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 792). Social persuasion may come in the form of praise, encouragement, written or verbal feedback, suggestions, exhortations, interpretations of performance, or, on the negative side, discouragement and derision (Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 792; Bruning and Kauffman 162; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy" 107; Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory" 143). Finally, *emotional or physiological states* refer to the feelings, arousals, emotions, and moods that an individual perceives consciously or unconsciously when faced with a writing task or skill (Bong and Skaalvik 6; Corkett et al. 69; Bruning and Kauffman 162; Mascle 223; Khost 275; Usher and Pajares 754; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 792; Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory" 146; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy" 107). As our emotional states change, so too can our perceptions of our capabilities.

Although these four sources are by far the most commonly accepted and researched sources, a few other sources have been explored. Psychologist James Maddux explores "imaginal experiences" as a source, where people visualize and imagine effective or successful behaviors in a given situation. WSE scholars Spicer and, later, Jalaluddin et al. have proposed *task difficulty* as a source of self-efficacy, arguing that "the magnitude of one's self-efficacy beliefs will differ

upon how difficult he/she perceives a task to be" (Spicer 1; see Jalaluddin et al. 546). Spicer has

also proposed another source, *generality*, how applicable the self-efficacy belief is to certain

tasks and skills (Spicer; see Jalaluddin et al. 546).

While all of these sources are incredibly useful, they often do not take into account how

relationships and contexts inform self-efficacy. For example, we might assume that studies on

vicarious experiences and social persuasion closely examine the relationships writers have with

others. After all, vicarious experiences and social persuasion demand relationships between at

least a writer and one other person. But actually, scholarship rarely examines these relationships

closely. Scholars do note that there are complex and significant relationships involved in

vicarious experiences and social persuasions, but the main area of interest and study is in the

content of the vicarious experience or social persuasion—what was said or modeled and how

those words and modeling influenced self-efficacy (Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-

Efficacy"; Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*; Polychroni et al.). In other words,

the focus is on how writers cognitively interpret vicarious experiences and social persuasions and

how they then apply those interpretations to their WSE beliefs, rather than on how the

relationships themselves influence those interpretations.

Likewise, studies on emotional or physiological states often note what the emotional state

of a writer is, but few of them focus on exactly why the writer feels that way (Bulut; Usher and

Pajares; Wachholz and Etheridge). Again, these scholars acknowledge that there are complex

contextual, social, cultural, and relational elements that influence these states, but the studies'

main focus is how writers interpret their emotional states and how those interpretations influence

self-efficacy, not how the context influences the emotional states (Linnenbrink and Pintrich.;

Singh et al.; Mitchell et al; see Martinez et al. and Yap and Baharudin for studies that do focus

on context). Though the content and writer interpretation of the sources should certainly be *a*

focus, I claim that another focus must be the relational and contextual elements involved in self-efficacy beliefs. We cannot separate how writers interpret self-efficacy sources from the relationships and contexts that surround the writers. I claim that affective connections focus on and give us valuable insight into how relationships and contexts inform and influence self-efficacy.

Targets

The second dimension of WSE are *targets*, writing tasks and skills one can develop self-efficacy in. While any number of targets exist for WSE, examples of targets include grammar skills, spelling skills, organizational skills, generating and presenting ideas, regulating emotions while writing, and understanding assignment requirements (Pajares et al., "Gender Differences"; Pajares, "Empirical Properties"; Bruning and Kauffman; Shell et al.; Zumbrunn et al.). Thus, when a student has high self-efficacy in regulating emotions while writing, the regulation of emotions is the target. Shell et al. split WSE targets into two elements—writing tasks and writing skills. Writing task self-efficacy examines student judgments about how likely they are to succeed in selected whole writing activities such as writing a letter or writing a one-page summary of a book (Shell et al. 388; see Bruning and Kauffman 162). Writing skill efficacy measures or examines student judgments about how likely they are to successfully perform a skill set such as correctly punctuating a sentence or "get your point across in your writing" (Shell et al., 388; see Bruning and Kauffman 162). My thesis uses the terms *task* and *skill* frequently to distinguish between types of targets.

Scholars tend to focus on certain targets more than others. For example, Pajares's widely used Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (WSES), used to quantitatively measure self-efficacy, usually measures two types of targets: writing conventions (spelling, grammar, and usage skills) and organizational skills (Pajares, "Gender Differences" 244 and Pajares et al., "Empirical

Properties" 61). Less commonly explored targets include motivation (Bruning and Kauffman; Pajares, "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs"); engagement (Linnenbrink and Pintrich; Bruning and Kauffman); ideation, or generating and presenting ideas, (Bruning et al.; Bruning and Kauffman; Limpo and Alves); and self-regulation, or writers' beliefs about their capacity to "direct themselves successfully through [writing]" and manage "emotions, challenges, and frustrations that writers often encounter" (Bruning et al. 28–29; Zumbrunn et al. 3; Bruning and Kauffman; see, for more explorations of self-regulation as a target, Bruning and Kauffman; Pajares, "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs"). While students may hold self-efficacy beliefs about many targets, students in my study seemed to be especially concerned with ideation and self-regulation.

Outcomes

The third dimension of self-efficacy are *outcomes*. Outcomes are what self-efficacy can influence or what self-efficacy may cause (Zumbrunn et al. 2; Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*).[3] For example, high or low WSE can influence or cause engagement with assignments, determination, and achievement, among many other possible outcomes (Zumbrunn et al.; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs"; Shell et al.). While researchers often study how self-efficacy beliefs might be utilized to achieve certain outcomes, I do not focus on any specific outcomes, because the students were not required to do enough writing to make enough text for me to meaningfully analyze writing outcomes.

Review of Affective Connections

In this section of my literature review, I theorize and define a new source dimension of self-efficacy, *affective connection,* through the lens of contemporary affect studies (CAS). I use

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[3] Bandura calls these "outcome expectancies," or what one hopes will occur because of one's self-efficacy.

CAS and affect in theorizing a new source dimension for two main reasons. First, the study itself was designed to put affect and self-efficacy in conversation together. Amy Williams, the lead researcher, has focused in previous publications on the under-theorized connections between affect and self-efficacy, and this study continued that work (see her publication, "I Can't Do Cartwheels"). Furthermore, as the other researchers and I studied the data, we found that the lens of CAS allowed us to better see how relationships and contexts informed student beliefs about their writing. In CAS, affect focuses on the complex myriad relationships between bodies (meaning people, texts, processes, objects, places, ideas, or any other actant) and other bodies. Thus, affect is an ideal lens for studying the relational and contextual aspects of self-efficacy. As a reminder, I define *affective connections* as intentional or unintentional interactions—pulls toward and pushes against—between bodies. While the term *affective connections* is not a common term in writing studies or even in affect studies, Williams employs the term to describe various writing relationships "between a writer and reader, a writer and a text, and a writer and writing itself" (70). My use of the term *affective connections* builds on this idea of writing relationships and expands it to include many different interactions, even unintentional interactions. To better understand what affective connections are, I break the concept down into its two parts: *affect* and *connections*. CAS helps us explore both of these parts to give us a fuller understanding of affective connections.

<u>Affect in Affective Connections</u>

To understand what makes connections affective, we must first generally understand how scholars define affect. When composition scholars use the term *affect* in their research, most define *affect* as emotions, feelings, or moods (McLeod; Addison and McGee; Khost; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy"; Lawson; Johnson and Krase; Davidson et al.). While emotions are certainly a dimension of affect, since the 1980s, contemporary affect studies (CAS)

has sought to broaden and expand *affect* as a term and concept. For CAS, affect is a concept through which we can consider all that which we cannot ultimately fully define or grasp, cognitively or otherwise. Though CAS does not have an overarching definition or description for affect—it tends to define affect contextually, study by study—there are a few starting points that theorists all seem to follow that help us understand what affective connections are, even if we do not have a complete definition for affect itself (Gregg and Seigworth).

The first starting point comes from Deleuze's 1988 reading of Spinoza, who published his *Ethics* over 300 years earlier. This reading gives us the vaguest, yet most generally accepted starting definition of affect: Affect is a body's "capacity to affect and be affected," where a body can be anything at all, "things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects" (Anderson 6, 9; see Sedgwick 19). Put another way, affect is "how we are touched by what we are near" (Ahmed 30). Many scholars reference this idea of bodies touching other bodies, and most CAS affect theories stem from and expand on this central principle as they theorize affect (Anderson; Massumi; Ahmed; Gregg and Seigworth; Stewart; Nelson; Williams). What is *affective* then in affective connections is a focus on the forces that influence bodies and how those forces influence bodies, even if these forces are not fully definable or understandable. Affective connections are not just parts of human-to-human relationships that we can fully and cognitively understand—though affective connections are involved in those types of relationships—rather, they comprise all sorts of bodies who touch and influence other bodies.

Connection in Affective Connection

Connection is another underlying principle of contemporary affect theory. If bodies affect other bodies and vice versa, then, logically, these bodies must interact, touch, and form a relationship with each other in some way. Anderson notes that the broad definition of bodies

affecting and being affected allows us to see affect as always connective, always enacting "specific relations within some form of relational configuration" (10). Several scholars note the broad nature of these connections—affects "may be connected to anything" (Anderson 78). Stewart likewise calls affects "a tangle of potential connections" (4).

CAS shifts the concept of *connection* from how we would normally conceive of it. In affect theory, "potential connections" are not *just* bodies pulling toward each other physically, emotionally, conceptually, or subconsciously, like how we might say someone "connects" with another on a date. Affective connections do include connections that have that type of pull, but other types of affective connections exist. Ahmed explains that these connections are "relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to . . . [bodies]" (8; see Rice 206). Affective connections then comprise a slew of interactions that involve not only pulls toward but also pushes away from and various forms of in-betweenness and intensities in those pushes and pulls. For example, if someone "hates" another body, that hatred is still representative of an affective connection; the person is still linked to the body by the fact that he or she is pushing away from it.

Likewise disrupting how we might normally think of connections, affect theory emphasizes both change, stickiness, and intensity in the connections between bodies. In CAS, the relationships between bodies are never fixed or static. Instead, connections are always in flux; connections "change, always from one state, gathering, or body into another" (Nelson 4). Deleluze and Guattari call this constant flux "becomings." Affect is also "sticky" in that it helps maintain relationships between bodies. Ahmed says that "affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between [bodies]" (29). Another unique element to the concept of connection in CAS is the intensity of connections. Intensity indicates how strongly a body is pulled toward or away from another body, how strong the connection is and how that strength

may create alterations to the bodies. Sedgwick noted that intensity as a dimension "alters the meaning of . . . almost anything" (62) and Stewart argues that affects' significance lies "in the intensities they build" (3). To Sedgwick and Stewart, the raw strength of the pushes and pulls alter the bodies being pushed and pulled. Affective connections ultimately focus on the forces between bodies, including the pulls, the pushes, the intensities of those pulls and pushes, and the constant changes between these forces. "Affective" connections help us see how connections change, are preserved or maintained, and how intense the connections are.

Research Design and Methods

Having laid the theoretical groundwork for my thesis, I now offer a summary of the research study. This thesis pulls from an IRB-approved, school-year–long research study, I helped conduct as research assistant with a faculty lead researcher and one other research assistant. The study focused on three twelfth-grade classroom sections of the same basic-level language arts class at a public high school in a mid-sized US city. The class was taught by Ms. Butler, a veteran teacher and former head of the school's language arts department. The class was a regular Language Arts 12 class not designated as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), College Prep, or Honors. Some, but not all, students in this class plan on attending college, and Ms. Butler believes that "ninety percent of the kids in this class are only here because it is a requirement for graduation. Period."

<u>Context of the Study</u>

Here I provide brief descriptions of the school, participants, teacher, her curriculum, and the researchers in this study.

School

The school is located near a large public research university in one of the city's more affluent and predominately white neighborhoods. Yet the school's large geographic boundaries

and the district's open enrollment policy create a more diverse student population: 40% of

students are people of color and 38% are economically disadvantaged. Three percent of the

school's nearly 1,700 students are homeless.[4]

Student Participants

The thirteen participants in our study—six male and seven female—reflect that diversity.

Seven (54%) were students of color, identifying as Hispanic (2), Polynesian (2), part-Native

American (1), and Black (2). Six had no immediate family members who had graduated from

college. Eight participants intended to attend a four-year college within three years of graduating

high school, and six would be first-generation college graduates. All participants were most

fluent in English from kindergarten onward, but eight students also identified either themselves

or their guardians as multilingual.

Teacher and Curriculum

Ms. Butler was a white, early middle-aged woman, who enjoyed interacting and bonding

with her students. Ms. Butler was confident, charismatic, informal but still strict in her teaching

style. She met student retorts with her own, and would swear frequently in the class: "Holy hell,

what are you doing? Put your damn phone away." "Sit your ass up!" She would also mock-

threaten her students—"If I see you touch that backpack, that phone will be mine. Forever!"

During one class period, students were going over an assignment sheet with Ms. Butler. A

student asked Ms. Butler about an error on the assignment sheet: "Is it supposed to say *your*

instead of *you*?" Ms. Butler stamped her foot and, with mock-anger, said, "Of course it is

supposed to say *your*; *you* doesn't make any sense. Pisses me off." Everyone laughed at this

retort and someone said, "She is so cute." This experience highlights that students were aware

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[4] I have not cited this source in order to protect the identity and location of the participants in this study.

that Ms. Butler's retorts, swears, and threats were playful rather than mean-spirited. She also kept a balance between mock-threats and caring language. She would call her students "my ducklings" and say things like "If you have finished, then just chill. Just be."

Ms. Butler's course had a year-long critical/cultural studies curriculum. Students read and discussed recently published books and articles that tackled social issues like race, technology, and bias—for example, *The Hate U Give*. The culminating project for the year was a collaborative group project called the Social Action Project. Working in groups, the students chose a social problem (e.g. police brutality or white privilege), interviewed people about the issue, and created a multimedia presentation on their findings with the school as their audience. They also wrote a short reflective essay on the social action project.

Researchers

The research team consisted of one faculty member and two graduate-student research assistants at a research-intensive institution. I was one of the two research assistants. The other research assistant and I were brought onto the project halfway into the data-collecting process, after the second quarter of the high schools' academic year. Thus, the lead researcher gained IRB approval for this research and collected half of the data without my assistance. After being hired, both research assistants participated in designing interview protocols, interviewing students, and observing class instruction along with the lead researcher.

Because this study was ethnographic and involved our interacting with students, my identity and my fellow researchers' embodied identities undoubtedly and irrevocably influenced this study's data. While it is impossible to know all the ways that our identities impacted students and the data, I outline three major aspects that likely influenced the data: our association with a university, our religion, and power dynamics. All three of the researchers are affiliated with Brigham Young University (BYU), a private research university owned by The Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). Our association with BYU as both a university and as a religious entity may have influenced how students interacted with us. For example, students might have assumed that because we were from a university, we would judge them for not wanting to go to college. They may have been reluctant to tell us their goals and plans for after high school if they had no intention of attending university. Others may have conveyed more interest in writing than they actually felt in order to try to please us. For example, one student repeatedly told us how much he "love[d] writing" but in interviews he usually spoke about his struggles with writings and how much he felt he had left to learn. It is hard to distinguish whether this student is being genuine in his love of writing or just wanting to please the researchers. On the opposite side, students might have indicated that they had less interest in writing than they actually had in order to flout our study.

Our association with BYU as a religious entity also seemed to have an impact. Though we never explicitly revealed our religious affiliations to the students, students assumed that we were LDS. Trying to connect with us, some students would indicate that they too were LDS, though we never asked them questions about their religion. They would refer to LDS terms like "missions" and "seminary" with the assumption that we knew those terms and the implications of those terms. Students may have spoken more about their religion because of our university affiliation than they otherwise would have.

Finally, the researchers shared an unequal power dynamic with the students. Because of our association with the university and because we were not their peers, students saw us in authoritative roles. Some would call the lead researcher "the professor," indicating that they were very aware of her status. While I, as a younger research assistant, was perhaps less intimidating, I also was an authority figure because I interviewed them, observed them, and asked them to fill out surveys and other documents. I also did not share an equal power dynamic with the students

because I had a higher education level. As white and middle-class, I also carried with me socio-economic and cultural privilege that some participants did not also have. Like all ethnographic research, the other researchers' and my identities impacted and shaped the data we collected. Our study cannot be wholly separated from our embodied identities.

Methods

The study employed qualitative ethnographic methods, which were specifically interviews, collecting writing from students, and fieldnotes. The data collection process was recursive—as we gathered the data, we analyzed interview transcripts and fieldnotes to plan for future rounds of data collection, especially in creating interview protocols.

During this study, the research team collected the six major writing assignments, collectively spent 35 hours observing the class and taking fieldnotes, and conducted interviews. I pull mostly from interviews and students' social action project reflection papers in my direct analysis of the study, but the fieldnotes and observations help me understand the classroom dynamics. For this thesis, the most valuable data of this research was the four interviews we conducted with each participant, one at the end of every quarter. These 15-20–minute interviews were semi-structured in nature, and the research team developed new interview protocols for each quarterly interview. The interview questions focused on students' identities as writers; their writing processes; what they were learning in Ms. Butler's class; their self-efficacy (phrased as "confidence"); their affective states (often phrased as "feelings"); and how their learning, self-efficacy, and affective states were changing over the course of the school year. Students were also asked questions related to specific assignments, past writing experiences, and future goals. See Appendix A: Interview Protocols for questions from each interview.

Analysis of Data

After we collected all data and transcribed the interviews, we open coded the interviews and fieldnotes using MAXQDA, a qualitative and mixed methods coding and analysis software. Open coding is used regularly in educational self-efficacy studies to analyze data sets like transcribed interviews, though this method of analysis is not as frequently employed in writing self-efficacy studies (see Creswell; Bryant; Lane et al.) After collaboratively conducting a first-round of coding for self-efficacy and general connection with the other researchers, I conducted second and third rounds of coding, and I ultimately coded the data segments for "self-efficacy" and "affective connections."

Self-Efficacy Code Description

I coded segments of text for "self-efficacy" if the student gave a statement about or related a narrative describing specific beliefs, confidences, skills, abilities, and capacities regarding a certain writing target (see Bryant for a similar coding description).[5] For example, I coded "I can organize it [my writing]" as self-efficacy because the student describes what she can do for a specific writing target. Any statement about self-efficacy, whether positive or not, was coded for self-efficacy; I coded segments under self-efficacy that discussed both increases or decreases in confidence or belief and low or high confidence or belief. For example I would code both "[Ms. Butler] shares lots of personal experiences, and I feel like she can be relatable in that way, and I feel like her example kind of made me more open" and "I think my least strong aspect of my writing is kind of getting the main point across" as self-efficacy, even though the first one indicates an increase in WSE and the second one indicates a low level of WSE. However, not every mention of confidence or ability was coded for self-efficacy. Because self-efficacy deals with only specific tasks and skills, I did not use general statements of confidence about general

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[5] Note that while everyone has subconscious judgments of many self-efficacy targets, this study could only explore and code judgments that students reported or described.

writing ability. For instance, I did not code: "I think I've just gained more confidence in . . . my writing" as a self-efficacy segment (Bong and Skaalvik would categorize that statement as a statement of self-concept, not self-efficacy). See Table 1 below for a fuller description of my self-efficacy code.

Table 1

Description of Self-Efficacy Code

Self-Efficacy Indicator*	Description	Example(s)
Increase	Students say or otherwise indicate that they have grown in confidence, ability, or capacity in some writing task or skill.	"I think the growth I'm most proud of. I've definitely expanded my vocabulary, for sure, which is something I really enjoy. I used to use a lot of just short words."
Decrease	Students say or otherwise indicate that they have lost confidence, ability, or capacity for whatever reason in some writing task or skill.	"I feel like [my confidence in completing an assignment successfully] may have dropped after the summer because I'm not taking concurrent classes as I was last year."
High	Students say or otherwise indicate that they have confidence or belief in a specific ability or capacity for some writing task or skill.	"I can make everything look slash sound proper." I felt confident in knowing what to say, how to say it, or figuring out how to say it." "I think I'm most proud of actually being like being able to do it when I need to do it."
Low	Students say or otherwise indicate that they do not believe they can complete a writing task or skill well. Students may believe that they cannot complete a task or skill at all. They may also believe that they have some ability to complete a task or skill, but they indicate that they cannot do it well or successfully.	"I still can't spell. I can't do grammar properly. I can't do punctuation and everything. I just can't do anything right."

Self-Efficacy Indicator*	Description	Example(s)
General Statement	Students indicate some measure of confidence or ability in a specific writing target, but they do not indicate that the level of self-efficacy is low or high.	"I feel like I can do it. I don't know if it's great, but I can get it done. It's fine."
Narratives	Students tell a story or relate an experience that shows their self-efficacy or indicates how that self-efficacy has changed. Sometimes, these stories do not directly or explicitly talk about ability or confidence, but it is clear that the experience has informed their self-efficacy.	"One of my English teachers, she presented my paper in front of the whole class and just as an example because it was really good. And I think it just boosted my confidence, and I was like, maybe I'm um pretty good, and so I feel like I can be very good at, I have potential to be a good writer and I bring up a lot of good points in a lot of my writing."
Common Words or Phrases Indicating Self-Efficacy	*I can*, *I can't*, *confident*, *proud*, *I've learned how*, *I know how*, *good at*, *bad at*, *I don't know how*, *easy*, *easier*, *hard*, *difficult*, and *grow*	
What Was *Not* Coded For Self-Efficacy	Bong and Skaalvik distinguish between self-efficacy and self-concept. They argue that general feelings of self-confidence that are not attached to specific targets or outcomes are self-concept, not self-efficacy. Thus, I did not code for self-efficacy if the statement or experience did not convey some sort of self-efficacy target or outcome. The statement needed to have something that the student was self-efficacious in or some indication that the confidence had some specific result.	"I probably would be just as confident as I was when I was still in school."

a. *Note: I did not have individual codes for these self-efficacy indicators. These indicators simply suggest what may be coded as self-efficacy or whether or not to code a segment under self-efficacy.

Affective Connection Codes Descriptions

For affective connection codes, I read through all of the texts several times to notice broad trends in affective connections that related to writing. I coded and twice recoded for sixteen affective connections following broad trends that related to participants, writing, and writing in

the classroom. These sixteen codes were things, places, people, or concepts (or some combination of these) that I observed students explicitly or implicitly drawing near to and pushing away from. The codes are as follows: objects, grades, school, assignments, ideas, curriculum, location, time, emotions, audience, self, teachers, peers, friends, family, and human other. I provide a brief description and example of each code in Appendix B: Description of Affective Connection Codes.

I chose affective connections only if they involved the participant and some other body, although there were certainly affective connections that did not involve the participant, such as connections between the teacher and the curriculum. While I did not use any strict metrics for picking these sixteen codes, I based my code selection on frequency of the connection in the data and how likely the affective connection was to influence the writer or their writing in some way. This influence did not need to be on the students' self-efficacy; in fact, I actively avoided comparing the affective connections to student self-efficacy as I generated these codes. While it is impossible to escape all bias and preference, self-efficacy did not play a conscious factor in what I decided were the most common affective connections that related to writing. Because many segments involved several affective connections at once, segments could be coded for as many affective connections as were relevant.

While all affective connection segments overlapped substantially with self-efficacy codes, I focus on two connection codes in my discussion section that had both high percentages of overlap and that added the most new insight into self-efficacy scholarship. These codes were *Assignments* and *Teachers*. Table 2 below provides a description and example of *Assignments* and *Teachers*, pulled from Appendix B.

Table 2

Description of Affective Connection Codes

Code	Description—Connection to:	Example
Assignments	Writing assignments or projects set by a teacher in a school setting and the subparts of those assignments including topics, subject, type or genre of assignment, the importance of the assignment, and other teacher expectations.	"It takes me a really long time to write because I have a hard time focusing on the assignment."
Teachers	Any specific teacher, though usually Ms. Butler. *Teachers* as a general concept would be coded under school.	"She's [Ms. Butler's] very serious, and . . . . it keeps me determined."

To analyze the self-efficacy and affective connection codes, I performed coding queries in MAXQDA in order to find the number and percentages of overlaps between self-efficacy and affective connection segments. MAXQDA's analysis function can indicate all the times that a segment with an affective connection code also was coded for self-efficacy. Thus, the self-efficacy code and the affective connection code overlap on the same data segment. See Figure 1 on the following page for an example of what the overlap looks like on MAXQDA. Notice that two affective connections are present on the data segment with the self-efficacy code. I then qualitatively analyzed the overlapping codes and their intensities through textual analysis.

Fig. 1 Example of Overlapping Self-Efficacy and Affective Connection Codes on a Data Segment*
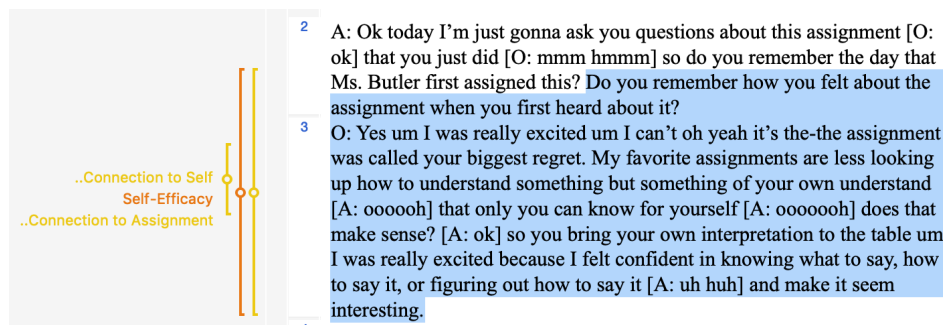
*Note that Ms. Butler is not the teacher's real name, and I have changed the interview text to protect her identity. "A" represents the researcher giving the interview. "O" indicates the student being interviewed.

Findings

I have broken my findings into two sections. The first describes the types of self-efficacy judgments or experiences that students reported in interviews or in their reflection essay. I also describe the most common types of affective connections students reported or experienced. These descriptions help orient the later discussion section, especially as the most-reported targets in this study are not the targets that researchers usually measure in their writing self-efficacy studies (i.e. conventions and organizational skills found on Pajares's WSE survey). By knowing the general targets of self-efficacy beliefs and affective connections students experienced, we can better understand how affective connections influence and inform the self-efficacy narratives or judgments of these particular students. In short, we gain a context with which to more fully understand how these participants' particular self-efficacy judgments were informed by and influenced by various types of affective connections. In Finding One, I found that students' self-efficacy could be divided into three broad targets—ideation (generating and presenting ideas), self-regulation (avoiding procrastination, setting goals, engaging with material, managing frustration), and most commonly, meeting perceived expectations (meeting what students think are the expectations for an assignment).

My second finding explores the quantitative overlap between segments I coded for self-efficacy and segments coded for affective connections. I find an extremely strong overlap between self-efficacy and affective connections. I explicate the significance of these findings in my discussion section following the findings sections.

Finding One: The Types of Self-Efficacy Targets These Students Reported

To explore affective connections as a dimension of WSE that influences and informs self-efficacy, I first describe the types of self-efficacy judgments these students reported.

Descriptions of Reported Self-Efficacy Skills and Tasks

The participants' most reported writing targets can be divided into three main categories (65.5% of segments coded for self-efficacy): ideation (10.2%), self-regulation (16.6%), and, most commonly, meeting perceived expectations (38.8%). The rest of the segments coded for self-efficacy (34.4%) are not easily categorized but consisted of scattered mentions of certain writing conventions, grades, and personal writing. Students often reported to the researchers times when an affective connection helped them feel more confident in more than one of these three types of WSE targets. For example, one student discussed a time that he had a conference with his teacher (connection to teacher), where she helped him feel like he could persevere and work hard (self-regulation) and helped him talk through ideas for his next assignment (ideation).

Ideation: Students frequently mentioned skills and tasks relating to ideation. Ideation involves two self-efficacy skills: generating ideas and presenting ideas. Generating ideas is equivalent to the rhetorical term *invention*, while presenting ideas involves how capable students think they are at including their ideas in their writing. While students mentioned confidence in *presenting* ideas only twelve times, in total they spoke 20 more times about their self-efficacy for *generating* ideas for their writing, 32 times total, so ideation makes up 10.2 percent of all segments coded for self-efficacy. In generating ideas, students described feeling confident that they could "come up with a lot of ideas in [their heads]," "get more ideas and more thing [come] to [their heads]," and "think with like layers." For presenting ideas, students talked often about "getting [their] point across," or "put[ting] everything [they] know" about a topic into their writing. Ideation is vital to student writing success. Writing cannot occur without generating and presenting ideas.

Self-Regulation: There are 52 mentions of self-regulation self-efficacy in student interviews and reflection papers, making up 16.6 percent of self-efficacy segments. Students expressed both low and high self-efficacy regarding their ability to avoid procrastination and

regulate their behaviors, like time management, to produce success in writing. While some students mentioned starting assignments early to finish them on time, "I start [a writing assignment] the night of [receiving it] or the day after," others have more difficulty regulating their writing behaviors. One said in an interview, "Usually I don't really think about [a writing assignment] until the night before it's due, and then I write it all in like an hour." Another explained, "I wait until like the last two days until it's due and then I do it." Others used words and phrases like "slack," "procrastination," "boredom," and "not getting all my stuff done" to talk about how they had difficulty avoiding procrastination and regulating their writing experience to produce success. Students who felt confident in their self-regulation tasks and skills reported being able to persevere in writing assignments despite difficulties, felt motivated to work hard, regulated their emotions properly, and engaged with the writing and the assignments.

One oft-repeated writing task (mentioned 24 times) I found in the segments coded for self-regulation is completing an assignment, meaning turning it in at all. Eleven out of the thirteen students spoke in some way (and several many times) about their confidence in completing assignments at all. Most participants talked about how they *did* have confidence that they could complete a certain assignment or certain task. However, the students' mentioning this task at all as something they were fairly confident in doing suggests that they did not see completing assignments as a given. While most were fairly confident about completing assignments at all, some participants reported low self-efficacy in turning in assignments. One student noted that in his eleventh-grade class, he failed to complete multiple assignments, resulting in "a couple of Fs" and he claimed that he did not "write a lot." He "hope[d]" that he would not get F grades in this twelfth-grade class, but he was not necessarily confident that he would pass all of Ms. Butler's assignments. Three out of the thirteen participants (23%), not

including the student above, said that the thing they were *most* "proud" of in their writing in their

twelfth grade year was the fact that they had completed the assignments, "that I've gotten it done

and turned it in," one student said in an interview.

Meeting Perceived Expectations: By far the largest percentage of self-efficacy

segments (38.8% of total segments) falls into this third category, meeting perceived expectations.

Very little research explores meeting teacher's expectations as a target for self-efficacy, so I

form my own definitions based on my qualitative analysis of my data. Meeting perceived

expectations means how confident students are that they will meet what they think are the

expectations for the assignment. Students hold ideas about what the teacher expects or does not

expect from student writing, and these perceived expectations may or may not align with actual

expectations that teachers hold. From our classroom observations, we repeatedly saw that Ms.

Butler expected students to be able to avoid personal bias in their writing and explore social

issues through various perspectives and lenses. So when students reported to us in interviews that

they were able to avoid bias and think of different perspectives in their writing, they were trying

to meet Ms. Butler's actual expectations. However, students also discussed how they felt that

good writing involved generating ideas and then writing those ideas as quickly as possible.

While some students reported that Ms. Butler's class was fast paced, there was no evidence that

Ms. Butler expected students to write as quickly as possible. In fact, she often gave students

extra time past the due date to finish assignments and extra time in class. Thus, meeting

perceived expectations involves expectations that Ms. Butler did have or likely had *and*

expectations that Ms. Butler might not have had but that the students still felt were her

expectations.

Of this third category of meeting perceived expectations, 48.7 percent—and 18.9 percent

of total segments coded for self-efficacy—concerned the WSE task of completing a *successful*

assignment. Completing a successful assignment involves turning in what the student expects will meet teacher criteria and result in a satisfactory (to the student) grade. Unlike turning in an assignment at all, completing a successful assignment relies on students' beliefs in their ability to carry out a writing task that fulfills criteria, not just carrying out a writing task to any degree. Students were a mixed bag on whether they had high or low self-efficacy in completing an assignment successfully. Often it depended on type of assignment, topic, genre, and past assignments. I will discuss segments that involved meeting perceived expectations in more depth in my discussion section. Other segments from the "meeting perceived expectations" category involved understanding the subject matter (13 segments), the instructions for the assignment (13), and the expectations for the genre (10).

Finding Two: Affective Connections Overlap with Segments Coded for Self-Efficacy

In this section I provide quantitative evidence that affective connections can act as a source of self-efficacy, helping us more fully see the relational and contextual nature of self-efficacy. This quantitative evidence demonstrates how often affective connections overlap with self-efficacy beliefs or experiences. Overall, 92.6 percent of all the number of segments coded for self-efficacy overlapped with at least one affective connection code. Only 23 self-efficacy segments (7.4%) did not overlap with an affective connection code.[6] In fact, any single segment coded for self-efficacy often overlapped with two or three affective connection codes; there were 221 more overlaps than there were segments coded for self-efficacy (534 total overlaps). This double-overlap feature means also that there are 170.5 percent more overlaps than total segments of self-efficacy. This overwhelming number of overlaps indicates that it is likely that affective connections, as things that "stick with" and "affect" bodies, influence students' WSE beliefs.

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[6] Of course, these 23 self-efficacy segments still are linked to other bodies, as all bodies are linked to other bodies. However, none of the sixteen affective connections codes in this study matched these 23 self-efficacy segments.

Note that 54.2 percent of all segments coded for affective connection overlapped with self-efficacy compared to 92.6 percent vice versa. However, since affective connections exist almost everywhere, this less extreme overlap on the affective connections side is not surprising. While not all affective connections are associated with self-efficacy, most (if not all) self-efficacy is associated with affective connections. See Table 3 below to see the percentages of segments coded for self-efficacy that also overlapped with a specific affective connection code. The table is organized by percentage of overlap (e.g. emotion is at the top because it was the affective connection code that had the highest percentage of overlap).

Table 3

Percentage of Segments Coded for Self-Efficacy That Overlapped with Affective Connection Codes

Affective Connection Code	Number of Segments Coded for Affective Connections	Number of Overlaps with Self-Efficacy Segments	Percentage Overlap with Self-Efficacy Segments (i.e. "Emotions" segments overlapped with 42 percent of all the segments coded for self-efficacy)
Emotions	241	131	42.0%
Teachers	86	77	24.7%
Peers	107	57	18.3%
Assignments	75	48	15.4%
Ideas	85	48	15.4%
Curriculum	43	30	9.6%
Self	59	23	7.4%
Time	56	21	6.7%
Humans Other	43	20	6.4%
Friends	25	18	5.8%
Grades	19	13	4.2%
Audience	26	13	4.2%
Objects	52	11	3.5%
Family	31	9	2.9%
School	16	8	2.6%
Location	19	5	1.6%
Total	983	**532**	**170.5%**

*Note: Percentages over 100 occur because there can be more than one affective connection overlap per self-efficacy source. Thus, one self-efficacy source might create two or three overlaps.

Table 3 above indicates a huge overlap between affective connections and self-efficacy. The emotion code alone overlapped on 42 percent of all self-efficacy segments. The two affective connection codes I explore in the discussion sections—*assignments* and *teachers*—occupy two of the top four spots percentagewise, although they do not have the most total occurrences. While it is abundantly clear that this overlap is substantial, by itself the overlap tells us almost nothing about the nature of the relationship between affective connections and self-efficacy. Having established, quantitatively, the abundance of connections, it is now necessary to qualitatively see how these affective connections interact with self-efficacy. In the section below, I offer a description of the quality of these links between self-efficacy and affective connections in order to provide evidence that affective connections operate as a self-efficacy dimension that can reveal important information about and even influence self-efficacy.

Discussion of Findings: Understanding Self-Efficacy Through Affective Connection Intensity

While the amount and percentage of overlap between affective connection and self-efficacy indicates the potential for affective connections to be a source of WSE, the overlaps themselves do not tell us much about how the intensities of the connections—the strength of push toward and pull away from bodies—inform self-efficacy. In this discussion section, I qualitatively examine the ways that the affective connections stick to or push away from students and their self-efficacy beliefs. I argue that the intensities of the connections reveal how and to what extent affective connections influence students' judgments of their self-efficacy beliefs.

Because of the sheer number of overlapping cases, I cannot examine in one document all the ways that affective connections intersected with and influenced self-efficacy. Thus in this section, I narrow my investigation of these intensities in three ways. First, I explore only the most commonly reported self-efficacy targets—ideation, self-regulation, and meeting perceived

expectations. Second, I examine students' affective connections to two kinds of affective bodies: *assignments* and *teachers*, because these connections gave the most valuable new information to writing scholars. Other bodies, such as *emotions* and *peers* overlapped more and at a higher percent, but the way they overlapped generally concurred with previous research on self-efficacy judgments and beliefs without adding much new insight. The overlaps between assignments and teachers, affective connections, and self-efficacy suggest that these relationships are complex and fluid. Finally, I focus on just a few of the many cases that indicate how affective connections influenced and altered student self-efficacy. For my section on *assignments* I discuss the experiences of five students. For my section on *teachers*, I discuss the experiences of four students. While most of these nine cases are quite characteristic of how affective connections influenced self-efficacy for the other students in this study, I also examine more unique and complex cases in both my *assignments* and *teachers* sections. These cases are complicated by multiple pushes and pulls and unexpected outcomes of connections. These more complex experiences highlight both how affective connections can complicate self-efficacy for students and how studying self-efficacy through the lens of affective connections can better nuance and make sense of self-efficacy's complex and ever-shifting nature.

I found overall that when students felt intense affective connection pulls (vs. weak or casual connections) to assignments and teachers, they were more likely to indicate high self-efficacy for ideation, self-regulation, and meeting teachers' perceived expectations. Students with intense affective connections especially noted high self-efficacy in their ability to engage with tasks, persevere, and be motivated to complete tasks successfully. Furthermore, intense connections often influenced the quality of the self-efficacy belief, meaning that students with intense connections found importance in their self-efficacy beliefs and were more likely to be motivated by their self-efficacy beliefs to work hard and persevere. For the more complex cases,

intense connections could both increase self-efficacy in certain self-regulation targets and decrease self-efficacy in other self-regulation targets.

<u>Assignments</u>

In this section, I examine five students' reported experiences with connection to assignments and how those connections influenced their self-efficacy. I have put them into three groups by similarity of experience: (1) Nate, (2) Hannah and Rachel, and (3) Vince and Gina. Nate's story about his "best" writing experience indicates how interest in and knowledge about an assignment topic can increase self-efficacy in turning in assignments, completing assignments successfully, and ideation. Nate's story indicates that knowledge about and engagement with an assignment topic are key connections that help students have higher self-efficacy, especially students that do not typically have much confidence in any aspect of writing. Hannah's and Rachel's experiences are typical to most of the participants. However, I highlight Hannah and Rachel because their connection to assignments increased from a very weak connection and thus we can examine how change in connection influenced self-efficacy over time. I found that while both Hannah and Rachel always felt confident that they could turn in assignments, this confidence occurred because they simply did not care much about their success in the assignment. However, as they connected to assignments at a higher intensity, Hannah and Rachel began to care about succeeding, became less apathetic about their self-efficacy beliefs, and began to place value in their self-efficacy beliefs. I claim that Hannah's and Rachel's "self-efficacy quality," or how valuable and important the self-efficacy beliefs were, improved as their connection to assignments increased. Vince and Gina were two complex cases. Both had very intense connections with assignments. Their experiences demonstrate how affective connections can complicate self-efficacy beliefs. Their experiences show that intense connection does not always yield completely positive changes in self-efficacy but also that even seemingly negative

connections—feeling pushed away from an assignment—may be highly beneficial to self-efficacy.

Nate: Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Nate's case illustrates a pattern that occurred throughout other students' narratives of highly intense connections with assignments—if the students were passionate about a topic, they felt like they could write really well and meet their teacher's expectations. Six students told us that passion about and strong interest in topics were essential to believing that they could meet teachers' expectations in an assignment, suggesting that high connection to assignments affects students' confidence in their ability to achieve success. Including Nate, eleven of the students told us that a perfect writing assignment would consist of writing about a topic they had a personal, passionate connection with. The ability to better engage in an assignment when they could connect to it echoes students in Eodice et al.'s "Meaningful Writing Project" study. Eodice et al. found that students' interest and "personal connection" to an assignment subject or topic could make an assignment "meaningful" or "significant" to the writer (332).

Specifically, Nate's experiences highlight that connection to assignments typically influenced self-efficacy beliefs in ideation, self-regulation, and meeting expectations, at least in this study. Nate was a student who did not typically perform well or feel confident in his writing self-regulation, especially because he had failed many assignments during his eleventh-grade year. Yet he found great confidence in writing when the topic was something he was passionate about. When asked, "how do you feel about yourself as a writer?" he replied, "I feel really good. 'Cause . . . the thing is, it's got to be something that I'm really interested in." He noted that he could write "really well" when "it's something [he's] really passionate about." Nate gave an example of how a passionate connection to a writing topic helped his confidence in his writing ability. In eleventh grade, the same year he failed several assignments, he was given the option to

choose his topic for a writing assignment. He "was able to write like a four-page paper in . . . like about 45 minutes" about his engineering projects, including a water purification device he's been developing for "a few years" and other side projects, projects that he was clearly proud of and excited to tell the interviewer about. Nate's passion and interest paid off: his teacher "loved it," and he achieved success in this writing assignment. Nate later told us that this essay on his engineering projects was the "only time" writing was good for him. He needed that connection to a topic to feel like he could succeed *at all* with writing. His self-efficacy for the self-regulation task of turning in an assignment dramatically increased with intense interest in the topic.

     In fact, intense connection to the topic seemed to be the key to Nate's success not only in turning in assignments but also in meeting teacher expectations. Nate's belief that he could write "really well" during this assignment persisted even though other factors could have easily lowered his self-efficacy. He noted that, while his eleventh-grade teacher never told him this directly, he felt that she did not think he was a good writer. He said, "She's like, I didn't think you could write," and later corrects himself, "Well, . . . she didn't, like, say that, but I'm just saying . . ., 'cause, . . . like I said, I'm not really [a] good writer." Nate did not usually picture himself as a good writer, and he did not feel like his teacher believed he could write well. Nevertheless, he was confident he could not only finish an assignment but also write really well when he had a topic that he loved. The passionate connection to the assignment trumped even his sense of his teacher's doubt that he could succeed. He ended up succeeding; the teacher loved his paper. However, more importantly, he believed he could be successful even when other factors told him he could not be.

     Intense connection with an assignment also seemed to boost ideation self-efficacy. Six students told us they could better present ideas—an ideation skill—when they were passionate about and were knowledgeable of the assignment topic. One possible reason that high intensity

connection to the topic of an assignment indicates a higher confidence in successful presentation of ideas could be that students are typically very knowledgeable about the topics they love or have a vested interest in. Therefore, it was easier for the participants to both generate ideas for and present their ideas in their writing because they could pull from their knowledge base. For example, Nate worked an after-school job in mechanical engineering and had many personal projects related to engineering. He had a vast knowledge base from which to pull from when generating and presenting ideas, allowing him to write the paper quickly and easily. His knowledge and passion for an assignment topic intersected to create Nate's only reported experience where writing was "good" for him.

Students may feel more confident in their ideation and meeting perceived expectations self-efficacy if they can feel connected to the topic enough to gain knowledge of it or if they already possess knowledge of it. This idea is not surprising; most of us would feel uncomfortable writing about something we do not know much about. However, the interplay between high intensity connection to a topic and knowledge of the topic indicates that students might be more willing to gain knowledge about a topic and then feel more confident presenting that knowledge in writing if they feel engaged with that topic. It is not knowledge alone that helps these students' self-efficacy; it is knowledge combined with strong connection to the topic of the assignment. For Nate and the ten other students like him, the more intense this passion and knowledge, the more likely they were to feel confident about completing the assignment, generating ideas, and presenting ideas.

Hannah and Rachel: Self-Efficacy Quality

Hannah's and Rachel's experiences indicate that not only does connection to assignments seem to increase self-efficacy for the three most common targets, but that connection might influence the quality of the self-efficacy beliefs themselves, meaning how valuable and

important the self-efficacy beliefs are to the students. Previous research in educational self-efficacy implies that self-efficacy can differ in, what I term, "self-efficacy quality." Self-efficacy, at its best, can encourage motivation and student achievement because students find their beliefs to be important and valuable (Bottomley et al.; Liew et al.; Walker). However, I noticed in this study that students could hold self-efficacy beliefs that they did not find important or valuable. When someone is generally confident that they can do something just because they do not care much about the result, the self-efficacy level can still be high, but the quality of self-efficacy is much lower. While students may have high confidence in their ability to complete a task or skill, a low-quality self-efficacy belief indicates apathy toward the task or skill. In short, students do not care that they are confident because the task or skill is not important. Low quality self-efficacy does not indicate all the positive outcomes that self-efficacy can offer (Bayraktar).

Hannah's and Rachel's self-efficacy quality was typically low because their self-efficacy to complete a task was not based in personal motivation to complete an assignment, any self-regulatory engagement with the assignment, or any need for achievement beyond minimum passing. Instead, Hannah and Rachel were always confident they could turn in assignments only because they did not care about the quality of their writing and they knew they would complete the assignment because of external pressure to complete the assignments. While they *did* have confidence in their abilities, this confidence was based in apathy rather than determination and striving for success. When applying affective connection as a dimension to self-efficacy, Hannah's and Rachel's weak connections did not produce the quality of self-efficacy that would lead to positive outcomes. However, when their connections became more intense, the quality of their self-efficacy improved.

Hannah and Rachel reported throughout the school year that they did not typically connect strongly to any writing assignments Ms. Butler and other teachers asked them to do.

Although Hannah believed she could always turn in an assignment, she admitted that she was unmotivated to complete them to the teacher's expectations. She said that with most writing assignments, "I don't really think about it until the night before it's due, and then I write it all in like an hour." By saying that she did not "really think about" the assignment, she did not feel a strong connection to it nor an urgency to complete it satisfactorily. Rachel also was typically apathetic about her writing assignments. She described most of her writing assignments as boring, indicating a low-intensity connection to assignments that negatively affects Rachel's self-regulation. She said that her writing process was as follows: "I write out the first paragraph. I get bored. I stop. I finish it at home. Well, keep doing it at home. I get bored. I stop. And I do it in class again. And then I get bored. And then I wait until like the last two days until it's due and then I do it." Here Rachel could not self-regulate her negative emotions well, and writing became an arduous task of start and stop. Yet this boredom indicates that while writing was difficult for Rachel, she also did not care very much about it. She stopped because she was bored, not because she was anxious that she could not figure out what to write or do. While she did turn in her assignments, she felt a weak push away from assignments. Boredom is not hatred of her assignments, but it certainly is not enjoyment or desire.

Because Hannah and Rachel felt little connection to the assignment and find little importance in their beliefs about being successful, deadlines and passing the class were the main factors that motivate Hannah and Rachel to complete an assignment. Hannah said that she could only focus on the writing task at all when there was a very close deadline motivating her: "I don't like focusing on my homework until it's like, to the deadline. . . I can just focus better when I have to do it, as when I don't have to do it." Because Hannah said she could only focus on—a type of pull toward—an assignment when it was near its deadline, Hannah's connection to an assignment was not dependent on Hannah's own wants and desires to write but rather a weak

pull toward something she felts externally compelled to do. She told the lead researcher, "I just kind of do [writing assignments] because school tells me to." She expounded on this statement; the only reason she had turned in all of Ms. Butler's assignments was so that she could pass the class and graduate. Rachel felt similarly: "I have to do [writing assignments] so I'll do it" but she usually did not write "for fun." Their low-quality self-efficacy appears to be a response to a weak or casual connection to the assignment. They both held some self-efficacy beliefs that they can turn in assignments, but they held these beliefs not because of some internal desire to turn in the assignments. Rather, they held these beliefs because they felt outside pressure to turn in the assignments despite an intrinsic lack of care for the assignments.

However, when the connection to the assignment was more intense, Hannah's and Rachel's self-efficacy quality improved and their self-efficacy seemed to increase in the targets of completing certain tasks and skills. For example, while Hannah was usually unmotivated and apathetic, she noted that stronger connection to the assignment produces her "best" writing because the connection helped her become more motivated to try to succeed. When asked what the perfect writing assignment would consist of, Hannah replied, "It would just be about a topic that I actually care about." Only with the right topic would a writing assignment be "more than just getting it done." Hannah even told the lead researcher that the perfect writing assignment could be any length and any genre; the only requirement was the topic of the assignment. She agreed when the researcher asked her if "for you the key to writing" is assignments that are "connected to something you are interested in and passionate about." When the topic was something Hannah cared about, she claimed that she would "pay more attention to actually doing it and not stop in the middle." Rather than half-heartedly completing an assignment so that she could pass the class, with the right topic, Hannah believed that she would feel more motivated, would not stop writing, and would be more mindful about her writing while she writes. When

Hannah connected to an assignment, even in her imagination, her self-efficacy for getting an assignment done took on a different quality. With a topic she cared about, she could "enjoy" the writing and be "excited" about it. What is interesting about the cases of Hannah and Rachel is not that they generally felt apathetic, but rather that intense connection to assignments helped dissipate some of that apathy. Their self-efficacy quality changed as their connections to assignments changed.

This connection to the assignment seems to make the difference between apathy and excitement, external motivation and at least some internal motivation in passing the assignment and trying to succeed. Furthering Eodice et al.'s findings that personal connection is important for engaging with assignments, I argue that, for Hannah and Rachel, the assignment is not the only thing that becomes more meaningful when the connection is strong; their beliefs in both getting the assignment done and being successful in those assignments also becomes more meaningful—more important and valuable to them. In short, the quality of their self-efficacy changed, not just how well they engaged with the assignments.

Hannah's and Rachel's self-efficacy beliefs and self-efficacy quality constantly shifted and changed with the push and pull of their connections to assignments. Thus, while some students may find it easier than Hannah and Rachel to connect with their assignments, Hannah's and Rachel's experiences show that apathy about assignments and about self-efficacy beliefs may not be intrinsic and unchanging; rather apathy may be contingent on a host of factors. Rachel's and Hannah's self-efficacy quality and self-efficacy beliefs seem to depend on a slew of pulls toward and pushes away from assignments and all the other connections they subconsciously or consciously experience during a writing assignment. These two students' experiences indicate that apathy both toward assignments and toward their own confidence in their potential success might change with something as simple as giving students a topic they

enjoy.

Vince and Gina: Complex and Contradictory Connections

For Hannah, Rachel, Nate, and others, more intense connection to assignments indicated higher self-efficacy and higher self-efficacy quality. However, affective connections are not necessarily a simple correlation, where the more intense the connection, the more positive the result for self-efficacy. Affective connections are not always positive, and they can intersect and influence self-efficacy in surprising and complex ways. Vince's and Gina's experiences with specific assignments indicate these complex intersections. For example, Vince had an intense connection to his group assignment, but it was a strong push away from the assignment, not a strong pull toward it. He disliked the topic of police brutality that his group explored, and he attempted to "rebel" and do the project by himself, which Ms. Butler did not let him do. When hearing about the assignment, he said, "I was not very stoked. I didn't like the idea of having to like wander out and go interview people on the subject, which my group chose that I didn't like or see any relevance to. And it sort of just set me out not wanting to do the assignment at all." According to Vince's reflective essay, this push against the assignment ultimately led to his low effort throughout the group. He did not get the project finished in time, indicating low time-management self-regulation. By the time he wrote the reflective essay, which was assigned after the posters were due, his group was still "finishing up" the posters. Vince wrote in the reflection essay, "The whole project was meaningless to me, simply because the topic wasn't anything I cared about." Like students with high connection to assignments, Vince was very strongly connected to the assignment, but because the assignment topic was not meaningful to him, his connection pushed strongly away from the assignment. Ultimately his self-regulation seemed to suffer because of his intense connection.

Like the students who imagined a perfect writing assignment, Vince claimed that he

could imagine higher self-efficacy to self-regulate in this assignment were he allowed to write about a topic he cared for: redheads (he was one). He felt that as a white man, he could not relate to or present information that anyone would actually care about on the topic of police brutality. He told us multiple times throughout the year that he wanted his writing to be unique, to say something new, to effect change. He did not feel like he could effect change with an assignment on police brutality. He wrote in his reflection, "it's a topic that [I] don't have anything new to say or make any change." He also wrote, frustratedly, "what really am I supposed to do here?" The intense push away from the assignment led him to be very connected and very engaged with the assignment, but not engaged in the way the assignment was meant to engage the student. Connection with an assignment, then, is not a sure sign that the student values the assignment or will feel capable in other self-efficacy skills, like time management or completing the assignment successfully. While, in most cases, intense "pull-toward" connections indicated higher self-efficacy, Vince's case indicates how intense "push-away-from" connections may decrease self-efficacy. Intensity of connection then does not inherently indicate positive self-efficacy changes. Rather, Vince indicated that because he was not "very stoked" to complete the assignment and because he rebelled against it, he was actually less able to complete the assignment on time and less involved in the assignment. A weaker connection to the assignment—whether that connection was a push or pull—might have actually increased Vince's performance and his beliefs about his performance abilities.

However, Vince's cases is not indicative of all intense pushes away from assignments. Indeed, pushes away from assignments did not always indicate low self-efficacy and could even indicate increased self-efficacy. In Gina's case, she experienced both a strong push away from and a strong pull toward an assignment, but the intense push away from the assignment ultimately helped her gain self-efficacy. In eleventh grade, Gina wrote a personal paper

describing an emotionally challenging experience that she went through: she had to put in her paper "all her emotions that I went through [during the difficult] experience." She noted that it was her most challenging paper to write because it was so challenging to deal with the emotions the paper elicited in her. She told the lead researcher that it was challenging emotionally to "mentally [relive]" that experience and that writing the experience "took a lot of energy and effort out of me." This mental reliving of the experience was nearly too challenging for her, and she almost did not complete the paper. Gina told the lead researcher, "It . . . was . . . a really hard paper for me to write. . . . I think it was like two days before I had to turn it in and I had to edit it and finish up . . . my conclusion. And I was like 'K I can't do this. I need a new story.' This is too hard 'cause it was just getting too frustrating for me to write and I wasn't getting what I wanted to say out." She felt that she might give up on her paper because the emotions surrounding her trying experience were draining her *and* she felt the frustration typical when writing and meaning are not aligning. Nevertheless, she did complete the paper without changing the story. She persevered.

Even though the experience was frustrating and emotionally challenging, she was continually pulled toward that assignment. At the same time, the assignment provoked frustration and emotion that simultaneously pushed her away and incited her to stay involved—to persist. The connection complicated her self-efficacy beliefs, both challenging her beliefs that she could regulate her emotions and allowing her to persist despite the challenges. Gina told the lead researcher, "it was . . . my greatest [paper] because . . . . [it] was probably one of the hardest papers I had to write." Because she finished the paper, she felt "proud," not necessarily because of the content of her paper—though she did like "how it turned out"—but because she kept writing when she wanted to stop and when she was emotionally drained. Her strong connection to the assignment (the push away) initially emotionally overwhelmed Gina, but the connection

also kept her committed to finishing the assignment despite its difficulty. Since many scholars study determination and perseverance in WSE, Gina's experience of persistence indicates how one might be able to develop this important self-efficacy target of perseverance through connection to (both pushes away and pulls toward) an assignment. Yet her experience also highlights the complex nature of self-efficacy. Her self-efficacy for self-regulation both increased and was challenged during this assignment.

For Gina, self-efficacy was not fixed but was dependent on an affective web of pushes and pulls related to the assignment. Gina's experience indicates the possible complexity of affective connections: she experienced synchronously both pushes and pulls and negative and positive responses to her connection with that assignment. Affective connections then do not need to be a steady, generally positive pull toward some other affective body/object. Instead they can be seemingly contradictory—both a pull and a push, both positive and negative, intense and weak. These paradoxical connections can potentially complicate self-efficacy beliefs and demonstrate that many affects may influence self-efficacy at one time.

Teachers

While connection to assignments typically focused on interest in and passion for assignment topics, connection to teachers focused mainly on feedback and motivation from the teachers. In this section, I examine four students' reported experiences with connection to teachers and how those connections influenced their self-efficacy. I have put these students into three subsections: (1) Patricia and Kaleb, (2) Annie, and (3) Vince. Patricia's and Kaleb's experiences demonstrate how connection to a teacher generally influences self-efficacy for the students in the study. They felt intense connection to their teachers and that connection helped them feel more confident in their ability to self-regulate and generate and present ideas. Their experiences highlight how teachers may influence self-efficacy through "pushes." Annie's and

Vince's experiences are more complex. Annie had two intense connections with teachers but had very different results in recognizing feedback and having that feedback alter her self-efficacy. Vince's connection to teachers is also multifaceted; he experienced both intense and weak connections to Ms. Butler, and this variation in intensity both increased and decreased his self-efficacy depending on the situation. His experience highlights the ever-shifting nature of self-efficacy.

Patricia and Kaleb: Self-Regulation and Ideation

Generally, students with strong connections to their teacher indicated that their teachers positively influenced their self-efficacy. Several students indicated that they felt an intense pull toward Ms. Butler. To these students, the connection with Ms. Butler acted as a motivator, altering their confidence in self-regulation, ideation, and meeting her expectations. Three students told us that Ms. Butler motivated the class to "go deeper" into understanding the text. She motivated them to work harder than they would by themselves, and a couple of students told us that they are able to bring that deepness into their writing. Another student said that he anticipated bringing Ms. Butler with him in his mind even after the school year ended. He told us that he would keep the thoughts, "What would Ms. Butler do? What would she say about this?" when he goes to college. Even as an imaginary figure, Ms. Butler molds the ideas the student generates while learning. One student explained to the researchers that he feels more confident in using different genres because Ms. Butler "force[d] us to write different essays" and corrected them when they write outside of the genre they are supposed to be writing in. Her teaching helped his self-efficacy. Yet another student told us seven times over two interviews that Ms. Butler "pushes us," meaning that she motivated them. This phrase is reflective of what affective intensities and affects do—push and pull us toward and away from things. Ms. Butler is a force in these students' lives, molding and shaping them, but only if the students also feel that

connection to her. She did not always succeed in molding and shaping her students, at least in some of her students' minds. At least five students indicated times where they felt that Ms. Butler had little influence on their writing. They said that she rarely gave them help and that they could write well without her influence. They rarely remember her giving feedback.

While Ms. Butler attempted to connect with and subsequently influence the self-efficacy of at least the majority of her students, if not all of them, she did not fully succeed. Affective connections might provide some theoretical explanation as to why. Two students, Patricia and Kaleb, spoke of experiences when they were younger where they connected to a teacher, which influenced their self-efficacy. Patricia explained that when she entered high school she thought she was "really bad at . . . writing. Period." However, when one of her English teachers presented her paper in front of the "whole class" as an example of good writing, she felt that she had potential in writing and that she was good at it. Patricia explained that her teacher said that "[my paper] was really good and I think it just boosted my confidence, and I was like, 'maybe I'm . . . pretty good,' and so I feel like . . . I have potential to be a good writer and . . . I bring up a lot of good points in a lot of my writing." Here she mentions a specific ideation skill—bring up good points (presenting ideas)—in which her self-efficacy increased because of this experience. More generally, Patricia felt that she could write well not just then but in the future: she had "potential" for "good" writing. Kaleb had a similar experience. In sixth grade, he tried to write well for "the first time"—to him this meant using capital letters and not starting sentences with *that*. When the teacher conferenced with him at the end of the school year, she told him that his writing was "good" and provided encouragement and motivation—"she was like pushing me" to write better. During the interview with the researchers, Kaeleb was smiling while telling this story, and the researcher noted that this was "clearly a happy memory" for him. Patricia's and Kaleb's experiences highlight how affective connections to teachers may influence self-efficacy.

While these two teachers provided encouragement and care to Patricia and Kaleb, the students'
self-efficacy increased because the students assigned weight and importance to their teachers'
words and beliefs. While they did not explicitly talk about the relationships they had with their
teacher, they were pulled toward the teacher's encouragement and thus also pulled toward the
teacher.

Teachers may try to motivate and encourage all their students but only some students
actually feel this motivation. Students need to feel connected to their teacher in order to benefit
from the teacher's encouragement. Students may not be entirely aware that they are connected to
the teacher or that they care what the teacher thinks, but without that at least subconscious
connection, it is unlikely that teachers could motivate or encourage student successfully. These
experiences correlate with Bandura who argues that self-efficacy will only change if someone
consciously or subconsciously "perceives" or recognizes the forces that act on his or her self-
efficacy. Taking Bandura's argument a step further, I suggest that it is equally important to
connect to the forces that may act upon our self-efficacy. The connection to, not just the
perception of, the altering forces allows those forces to influence and change us in some way.

Annie: Feedback

Annie presented an interesting case of how connection allows for teachers to influence
and alter students' self-efficacy through feedback. In self-efficacy research, feedback is part of
social persuasion, a major source of self-efficacy. Scholars note that feedback gives students
information about their performance and their potential performances in the future, allowing
students to take more accurate measure of their self-efficacy and increase their self-efficacy if the
feedback is generally positive (Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* 106; Bruning and
Kauffman 162). However, if a student does not recognize feedback or find feedback valuable,
feedback cannot increase or decrease self-efficacy.

Annie felt two intense connections to her teachers—an intense connection to her dance teacher, Julie, (who teaches at the neighboring high school for the arts) and an intense connection to Ms. Butler. With Ms. Butler, Annie felt an intense push away from her; with Julie, an intense pull. In the connection with Julie, Annie remembered and appreciated Julie's feedback to her, whereas Annie did not remember Ms. Butler ever giving her feedback (even though it is very likely that Ms. Butler did). While other students noted times that Ms. Butler gave them at least some feedback on writing assignments—mostly grades and endnotes on a final draft—Annie initially reported that she never received any feedback: "I don't write to others. . . . Ms. Butler hasn't really given any response on my writing, and other teachers haven't either." However, when the researcher pressed Annie to think about any sort of feedback from teachers, Annie said that she got grades on her papers and that her dance teacher, Julie, made "comments on the dance papers, like this part is great; you should have done this instead; this was good; that was good; this was a fun paper to read." This quotation indicates Annie recognized teacher feedback from Julie, but she never recognized written teacher feedback from Ms. Butler.

While Annie did not think that Ms. Butler gave "any response on [her] writing," she remembered her dance teacher's feedback because she felt that Julie was more caring and helpful. In short, Annie felt a strong pull toward Julie. To Annie, "the dance [class] is my favorite place to write" because of Julie's "influence" and her "encouragement": Julie "gives you a bit of encouragement on where she wants you to improve, and what you could have done better or . . . she'll point out like 'you forgot to describe their dance moves and how you would describe it to someone.'" To Annie, the feedback that Julie gives was not critique but rather encouragement, a push in the right direction. Annie clearly enjoyed her dance class, and she had a friendly relationship with her dance teacher, calling her teacher Julie instead of by her last name. Annie also praised Julie and told us that Julie gave Annie "complete freedom" in writing.

Annie's strong connection with Julie is best exemplified through a writing assignment Julie had Annie complete. Annie excitedly described a writing assignment where she had to write a timeline about the history of Jazz dancing. Annie wrote a series of letters to herself as if she was a time traveler through various parts of the Jazz era. Annie told us that her Julie loved her project, that her dance teacher said "this is the most creative thing I've had so far." The positive feedback about Annie's creativity gave Annie a lot of confidence in her ability to complete assignments successfully in the dance lass. She said this assignment was the "thing I am most proud of that I wrote" because it was so "creative." Echoing Julie's praise of Annie's writing, Annie said that she found her own writing "creative," "amazing," and "brilliant" because of her creative approach to the assignment. Through Julie's positive feedback and Annie's connection to Julie as a caring teacher, Annie gained self-efficacy that she could generate creative ideas and present her ideas in creative ways.

While Annie was confident in Julie's class that she could complete assignments successfully, she felt the complete opposite in Ms. Butler's class. She said that "at first, I was terrified of Butler. I still a bit am . . . . I always have a tough time talking to teacher[s]." While Annie felt a connection to Ms. Butler, it was not a pull toward Ms. Butler but an intense push away from her. While Annie enjoyed getting feedback from Julie, it was "tough" to talk to Ms. Butler. Annie told researchers several times that she felt "rushed" in Ms. Butler's class and sometimes did not understand what Ms. Butler is teaching. She did not seek out help from Ms. Butler and thought that assignments in Ms. Butler's class were "do it your own."

The push away from Ms. Butler and from Ms. Butler's potential feedback also seemed to influence Annie's self-efficacy. She says that she was "not confident" in the writing she was asked to do for Ms. Butler. She said, "I feel like my writing [is] way behind. I still can't spell. I can't do grammar properly. I can't do punctuation and everything. I just can't do anything right."

While she did not tie this lack of self-efficacy in these skills to her connection to Ms. Butler, she did not have these same concerns in Julie's class, where she feels her writing is "creative" and "brilliant." While Julie, as a dance teacher, might not require the same writing level, it is clear that Annie felt like her writing was fostered and appreciated in Julie's class whereas she could not do "anything right" in Ms. Butler's class. Annie's intense push away from Ms. Butler might also be reciprocated by Ms. Butler. During our observations, the researchers noticed that Ms. Butler developed a pattern over the semester of "coolness" toward Annie. During class, she would often ignore Annie and her comments. Ms. Butler told the lead researcher that Annie was "one of the worst writers in the class." Though we did not formally interview Ms. Butler, it seems that her own push away from Annie influenced how well Annie was able to recognize and appreciate feedback from Ms. Butler.

We might assume that Annie would be fearful of Ms. Butler's feedback and feel discouraged by it if does not feel like she is a good writer in Ms. Butler's class. After all, self-efficacy studies often note that negative feedback from instructors can greatly decrease self-efficacy because students will doubt their writing abilities and feel shame from the critiques (Bruning and Kauffman; Pajares, "Self-Efficacy Theory" 140; Pajares et al., "Sources of Writing Self-Efficacy" 117). However, rather than feeling shame or doubt because of the feedback, Annie did not remember Ms. Butler *ever* giving her feedback. Admittedly Ms. Butler did not frequently give written or verbal feedback to her students. However, most students noted that Ms. Butler did give them helpful feedback at least occasionally. Thus, it is likely that Annie received feedback from Ms. Butler, but she either did not remember or did not recognize the feedback. The intense nature of her connection to Ms. Butler may explain why. Annie's connection to Ms. Butler was primarily a push away. Annie did not ask for help on assignments, and she did not seek out what Ms. Butler had to say about her. Annie's strong connection both

linked her to Ms. Butler and kept her distant—pushing her away. Ultimately, she can both feel an intense negative connection and not recognize how Ms. Butler interacts with her. Annie's case illustrates that affective connections are not simple pulls toward or pushes away from bodies/objects. Rather they encompass a range of intensities and distances, all with varying outcomes and influences on self-efficacy.

Overall, Annie's experience indicates that teachers can strongly influence self-efficacy but not just through social persuasion and feedback. Feedback alone is not enough to increase or decrease self-efficacy. Rather, feedback influences self-efficacy only as much as students are able to recognize it. Though Annie certainly does not represent every student, for Annie, a strong pull toward the dance teacher helped her recognize and use teacher feedback to strengthen self-efficacy. Yet, she did not recognize feedback when she experienced a strong push away from her language arts teacher. Her experience reveals a potential link between affective connection as a source of self-efficacy and other sources of self-efficacy. Perhaps for the source of social persuasion, its effectiveness and results are dependent on the affective connection between the giver of feedback and the receiver. If we can understand the intensity and push or pull of a connection, we may more easily be able to understand how social persuasion can influence self-efficacy. Furthermore, Annie's experiences highlight that teacher feedback is not the only way that teachers influence self-efficacy. Teachers' general disposition might be just as important as feedback. While Annie does not recognize Ms. Butler's feedback, she also indicates that she does not feel as safe and encouraged by Ms. Butler as she does by Julie, and her self-efficacy clearly suffers in Ms. Butler's class.

Vince: Complex Connection and Ever-Shifting Self-Efficacy

Similar to Annie, Vince's response to Ms. Butler highlights a complicated affective connection to a teacher. Vince felt both positive pulls toward Ms. Butler and pushes away from

her; he both acknowledges and appreciates her role in his writing and resists her role. Vince's ever-shifting connection to Ms. Butler also shifted Vince's self-efficacy, as exemplified through Vince's experience with Ms. Butler during his social action group project.

Vince generally liked Ms. Butler, because he found her to be surprisingly motivating. Vince credited Ms. Butler for increasing his "work ethic," by not giving him "room for error" or "slack." While Vince was usually low-achieving and always wants to "rebel," he recognized that Ms. Butler's intolerance for "slack" was ultimately helpful for him and his ability to complete hard projects. He told us, "I've always loved just . . . having easy classes and . . . I've always kept like a 3-3.2 [GPA] but that's because I've chosen easy classes, and this is like the first class . . . that wasn't as easy as I was hoping." Yet rather than balk at the difficulty of Ms. Butler's class, Vince was surprised to find that he enjoyed the challenge of Ms. Butler's class and her intolerance of lazy work. He said that he found surprising "determination" and "motivation" that he did not have in other, easier classes. Researchers observed in fieldnotes that Ms. Butler was strict in class but generally had an open nature and friendliness. This strict but open nature might be a reason he connected with her enough to be motivated to work hard.

Even though he did not want to do the group project and ultimately did not do the project in a timely manner, Ms. Butler still motivated him to do it more than he would have. Vince said, "if it weren't for Butler tryna change my mind throughout the whole thing, I probably wouldn't have done most of it. . . . she persuaded me into being into the project that I didn't want to be in at all." Vince eventually did complete the entire assignment, but without Ms. Butler's persuasive assistance, he would not have felt sure that he would have finished the project. His self-efficacy for self-regulation would have been lower without his connection to her. It's true that his detestation of the assignment ultimately led him to not try as much as he could have, but Ms. Butler's persuasiveness countered the detestation (the push away) to some degree. In this case,

connection to teacher was high but so also was the negative connection to the assignment; both of these connections modified Vince's behavior and beliefs, leading to weaker but still existing motivation to complete the assignment. Ultimately, her persuasion helped him engage with the project—"she opened my mind to. . . wanting to further my knowledge on [police brutality]"— and helped him realize the assignment could be useful to his knowledge, even if the push away from the assignment was still strong. In short, Vince's connection to Ms. Butler helped him self-regulate and feel more confident and convinced that he could and should self-regulate.

However, I noted that Vince did not always recognize Ms. Butler's help and did not always agree with her points of view. This sometimes led to either a lowered intensity of connection or a strong push away from Ms. Butler rather than a pull toward. He told us that Ms. Butler gave only occasional and never "constructive" feedback unless he was "asking her for help." While Vince felt connected to Ms. Butler's motivational aspects, he seemed less connected to her feedback methods on the writing itself. Likewise, although he credited Ms. Butler with helping him feel that he could complete the assignment at all, he still wrote in his reflection essay "I know you [Ms. Butler] want to fail me because I wasn't all over the topic and wanting to really make a difference." Here Vince noted that he did not agree with Ms. Butler's expectations for a successful group project—find meaning in the topic and desire to use the project to make a difference in one's community. Because Vince did not agree with Ms. Butler's expectations for a successful group project, Vince's self-efficacy was an odd mixture of high and low. He did not have confidence that he successfully completed the assignment according to Ms. Butler's requirements, but he also believed that he was successful by his own standards. Vince's connection to Ms. Butler complicated how he viewed success in assignments and how confident he was that he could be successful. When he does not agree with Ms. Butler, Vince pushed away from Ms. Butler, even though in other aspects of his and Ms. Butler's relationship, he felt pulls

toward her and appreciation for her. Just as intensity of connection to assignments might shift and change, Vince's connection to Ms. Butler shifted and changed depending on what the assignment was, what Ms. Butler did, how she reacted, what Ms. Butler's expectations were and whether Vince agreed with those expectations, and what Vince recognized as helpful.

The mixture of intensities Vince felt toward Ms. Butler indicates the ever-shifting, mutating, multiple nature of affective connections and how those connections alter and transform self-efficacy. Affective connections and their intensities depend not only on the body meeting another body, but on the ever-changing variables of that meeting. Vince's experiences with Ms. Butler highlight the true nature of affective connections—messy and tangled.

Most of the time, intense connection to teachers increased self-efficacy beliefs as students felt encouraged and cared for by the teacher and received helpful feedback that informed their self-efficacy beliefs. Typically, the more they pulled toward their teacher the higher the self-efficacy in ideation, self-regulation, and meeting expectations. However, students also had complex connections with their teachers. They pulled toward them and pushed away from them, sometimes at the same time. And these fluctuating pulls and pushes influenced their self-efficacy beliefs. Students might feel higher self-efficacy with one teacher than another even relative to the same task or skill. The result of a strong connection might be surprising. Students might disagree with the importance of the task or skill but still felt that they are successful in other ways beyond teacher expectations. Yet regardless of the nature of the connections to the teacher, the connections themselves always invited change. Simply having an affective connection with a teacher in some way altered the students. Hopefully the alteration results in strong self-efficacy, motivation, engagement, and encouragement.

Drawing Conclusions

Overall, affective connections are an informative source of self-efficacy, because they

examine the relational and contextual factors of self-efficacy in a holistic, easily applied way. Affective connections overlap with sources of self-efficacy and they influence the study participants' self-efficacy targets. Typically intense "pulls toward" connections tended to yield higher self-regulation, especially more perseverance, motivation, and engagement; feelings of confidence in completing writing tasks to the teacher's satisfaction; and feelings of confidence generating and presenting ideas. Affective connections can also alter self-efficacy quality. We better understand students' self-efficacy beliefs when we know whether or not students value a self-efficacy task or skill. Yet affective connections also highlight the messy and complicated nature of students' self-efficacy. It can shift and change as connections to bodies/objects shift and change.

While my specific findings about connection to assignments and teachers are too narrow to be generalizable to other groups of students or writers, I argue that my research clearly points to affective connections as a self-efficacy source dimension. Affective connection can be considered a new source dimension for self-efficacy, but it is also a source that seems to be involved in every previously researched self-efficacy predictor, every self-efficacy belief, and every self-efficacy narrative. We better understand how self-efficacy occurs and how it changes when we understand the push and pull between writers and other body/objects and the way those pushes and pulls change the writer. Using affective connections also allows us to complicate how we normally think of connection in the classroom. While we typically think of connection as positive and, once established, as relatively stable, affective connections are more complex. They can be positive, negative, pushes, pulls, intersecting, and ever-shifting. Ultimately, using affective connections as a WSE dimension greatly increased my ability to understand my study's participants as writers.

Implications

My research has several important implications for composition research and composition teaching. Most of the time, intense connection to an assignment increased self-efficacy beliefs and improved self-efficacy quality. With intense connection to assignments, students cared more about the assignments as they used their knowledge and passion in their writing. While this finding is not totally surprising, affective connections do help us uncover new aspects about self-efficacy. For one, not every self-efficacy belief will be high quality. Affective connections can potentially ascertain the quality of self-efficacy beliefs and can be a possible remedy for low quality self-efficacy because connection may yield more care and less apathy. Furthermore, affective connections reveal the complexity of engaging with assignments. Just because students are actively engaged in an assignment does not mean that students will necessarily experience high self-efficacy. They may need to know the topic well and have interest in it. Some students might feel very connected to the assignment but hate the assignment. Furthermore, even connections to assignments where students push away might be ultimately beneficial for self-efficacy. After all, Gina's self-efficacy for persevering despite hardships increased because she felt such a strong push away from her assignment and persevered anyway. Affective connections then are not a one-size-fits-all model for how self-efficacy works. There is not necessarily an easy correlation with affective connections and self-efficacy. Yet affective connections still seem to greatly influence self-efficacy in both degree and quality and tell us valuable information about the complexity of self-efficacy.

Another theoretical implication from my research is that affective connection might be a lens through which we may examine more dimensions of self-efficacy at the same. While many WSE scholars recognize the multidimensionality of WSE, it is nearly impossible to holistically and contextually explore or combine many WSE dimensions together (Zumbrunn et al.; Usher

and Parajes; Bruning and Kauffman). It is quite difficult to meaningfully categorize yet sufficiently explore the interactions and overlaps of many dimensions at once. Yet as scholars like Usher and Pajares call for a more "ecological approach" to examining dimensions of self-efficacy, we need a way to examine those dimensions together. Affective connections may be a perfect overarching lens for examining many dimensions at the same time. Because affective connections are omnipresent yet studiable and categorizable, one might be able to examine what kinds of affective connections form between various self-efficacy dimensions in a specific context and analyze those connections to understand the intersections of various dimensions. In this study, I examined briefly several self-efficacy targets through the unifying lens of affective connections, even though that was not my express purpose.

Pedagogically, this research might point to how teachers may influence their students' self-efficacy or at least understand it. In this study, more intense pulls toward students almost always increased participants' self-efficacy. This finding indicates that teachers should focus on student-to-teacher connections through caring for students, being vulnerable with them, and encouraging and motivating them to work hard. One might present work from a low-achieving student in front of the class as a sign of good writing skills to bolster their self-efficacy. However, one should also note that connection is on an individual basis—just because one student feels connected to you does not mean they all do or that they all recognize how you try to connect with them. Just because you feel connected to them does not mean that they feel the same about you. There might need to be various connection strategies to create connections between the student and the teacher. Because connection so informs self-efficacy, teachers should not only develop proficiency in content knowledge and pedagogy but also proficiency in forging connections through care, motivation, and expressions of confidence. While all teachers want to connect with and care about their students, connection does more than simply create a

positive learning environment. It shapes and molds students and their beliefs about their abilities. Furthermore, creating connections that strengthen self-efficacy may be more important than creating connections that simply foster positive feelings between teacher and student.

Along with connecting with students to encourage self-efficacy, teachers should consider how assignment feedback may or may not help WSE. Teachers should recognize that simply providing assignment feedback does not necessarily mean that students will recognize the feedback, much less apply it. Instead, teachers need to build connections with students so that written, oral, and grade feedback becomes meaningful and helpful to students. Students need to not only receive feedback, but process it and learn from it in order for feedback to accurately regulate self-efficacy (Bruning and Kauffman). Encouraging connections between teacher and student can help feedback become meaningful and help student self-efficacy become accurate.

Teachers should also consider designing assignments that have student-chosen elements. My findings indicate that allowing students to pick their own topics or allowing students to write about themselves often led to higher quality self-efficacy and higher self-efficacy for turning in assignments and completing them successfully. Not every assignment need have a student-chosen topic. After all, it can be difficult to design writing assignments that work well over a range of topics. Not all students will take topic-choosing seriously, and teachers run the risk of not broadening student knowledge base if students tend to choose the same topics. However, teachers might recognize which types of assignments their students are most likely to have low self-efficacy in, such as long writing assignments or new genres. They could then modify those more difficult assignments to include student-chosen topics or elements, such as choosing the genre or choosing from a variety of prompts. If students have a strong connection to the assignment, they seem to care more about succeeding in that assignment, even if they initially do

not have much confidence in that assignment. That personal investment may give them the self-efficacy boost they need to try hard and ultimately feel more capable.

Finally, teachers must be aware of the affective conditions that work around them. Micciche rightly notes that "compositionists tend to over-invest in signifying practices while largely neglecting the affective dimensions of writing" (264; see Edbauer). Edbauer notes that "whether we recognize it or not, affect is always part of the conversations we have about how to teach writing" (136; see Micciche 265). Let us then recognize affective connections' power in our classrooms and mold these affective connections and intensities to help our students succeed in writing.

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Over the course of the school year, the students participated in four semi-structured interviews. I present the interview protocols below for these four interviews. While we did ask every question in the interview protocols during the interviews, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed us to ask follow-up or related questions as appropriate and change the order in which we asked these questions (see Merriam and Tisdell).

Interview One Protocol

Questions were adapted from Kathleen Blake Yancey's *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* (61).

1. Describe yourself as a writer.

2. If I looked at one of your assignments for this class, what would it tell me about you as a writer?

3. What would you want me to know about your writing that I might not see in the assignment?

4. What are your goals as a writer?

5. What are your goals after high school?

6. What are you learning in this class?

7. How does what you are learning in this class connect with what you already knew/know?

8. Is this what you expected to learn? Why or why not?

9. What else do you need to learn to accomplish your goals as a writer?

10. What else do you need to learn to accomplish your goals for after high school?

11. What kind of writing do you do outside of school?

Interview Two Protocol

Questions were adapted from Linda Miller Cleary's "Affect and Cognition in the Writing

Processes of Eleventh Graders."

1. Tell me about a time when writing was really good for you.

2. Tell me about a time when writing was really bad for you.

3. What is writing like for you right now?

4. Describe a typical day and how writing fits into the day?

5. How do you go about school writing from the time you receive an assignment until

   you hand in the finished product?

       a. When is it easy, satisfying, exciting, hard, worrisome, or distressing?

6. What other people are part of your writing? What objects are part of your writing?

7. If I had a picture of you writing at home/at school, what would it look like?

8. How have you changed as a writer this year?

9. How would you describe what you are learning in this class?

10. What language(s) do you speak in your home?

11. What language were you most fluent in when you entered school?

12. What language are your parents most fluent in?

13. Who in your family has attended college? Did they graduate from college?

Interview Three Protocol

Questions centered around the students' experiences during the social action group

project.

1. What did you feel when you first heard about this assignment? Did your feelings change?

   How?

2. Can you tell me about your experience with working in a group?

    a. What was hard about it?

    b. How did you feel about that?

    c. What was easy about it?

3. Can you tell me about your process writing this paper?

    a. Where did you work on it?

    b. What help did you get from your teacher?

    c. What additional help did you need?

    d. Did anyone help you?

4. Can you tell me about your paper about your social action project?

    a. What did you write about?

    b. What is the strongest part of your essay? The part you felt most capable as a writer?

    c. What is the weakest part of your essay? What is the part you felt least capable as a writer?

Interview Four Protocol

Questions centered around getting a cumulative view of the students' writing across the entire school year. We also tailored 2-3 questions specific for each participant based on earlier interviews. I have not included these specific questions to preserve student identities.

1. How does writing make you feel? How does that compare to where you started the year?

2. What are you most proud of about your writing this year?

3. What do you think you have achieved?

4. What have others said about your writing this year?

5. What have you seen your peers do with writing this year?

6. Is there someone you know who you think of as a good writer?

    a. How are they the same as you?

    b. How are they different from you?

7. How confident do you feel about your ability to do the writing you do now?

    a. What do you feel most confident about?

    b. What do you feel least confident about?

8. How has your English language arts class prepared you to do the kind of writing you think you'll do next (in college, work, etc.)?

9. If you could describe your perfect writing experience, what would it be?

    a. What would you write about?

    b. Where would you be?

    c. How long would you spend?

    d. What would you hope to accomplish?

Appendix B: Description of Affective Connection Codes

Here I provide Table 4, a description of the affective connection codes I used for my

analysis.

Table 4

Description of Affective Connection Codes

Code	Description—Connection to:	Example
Objects	Things that were non-human and non-ideas, though they might not be tangible (e.g. the internet). Objects might include pencils, the internet, a bed, and a physical book (though not the ideas contained in the book).	*Journal/Planner:* "A typical day for me is to wake up and kind of look at my journal/planner, see what I'm doing for that day, and then it gives you writing prompts every morning."
Grades	Grades both in the literal sense (what percentage of full credit a student received on an assignment) and the general idea of being judged on one's work by a teacher.	"We have to do this project to get a grade."
School	The concept of school, the physical school (e.g. classrooms, cafeteria), activities associated with school (e.g. classes, student government, school sports), and ideas associated with the culture of school (e.g. place of learning, school spirit, loyalty to school)	"I just kind of do it because school tells me to. I don't really have an opinion."
Assignments	Writing assignments or projects set by a teacher in a school setting and the subparts of those assignments including topics, subject, type or genre of assignment, the importance of the assignment, and other teacher expectations.	"It takes me a really long time to write because I have a hard time focusing on the assignment."
Ideas	Student's concepts, thinking patterns, knowledge or impressions about a certain subject or topic, and interests. Though related to *assignment*, ideas do not have to be related to a specific assignment but can be much more general. This code also includes ideas from sources other than the student (i.e. ideas from the teacher, ideas in a book). There was overlap between assignment and ideas when students discussed topics.	*Perspectives:* "I like to think about things from different perspectives and try and understand the full story instead of one person's side of the story."

Code	Description—Connection to:	Example
Curriculum	The main foci of a classroom course, usually Ms. Butler's course, or the general expectations for learning, performance, and writing in a course.	*Frustration with curriculum:* "I understand reading a lot . . . [it] just feels kind of overboard. We're just kind of continuously reading"
Location	A physical location that was not the school (e.g. a bedroom, one's house) or a location on the internet (e.g. Wattpad, Google Docs).	*Bedroom:* "my bed . . . [is] very much my safe space. It'd probably be me with my reading prompt, glasses, my blanket thrown over my shoulders, and kind of like hunched down, either like typing away on my keyboard or in my journal um and usually there's like a cup of tea or coffee around somewhere."
Time	Time, usually time needed to complete an assignment or time given to complete an assignment.	Researcher: "How did having that time, what difference did that make in your writing experience?" Participant: "I felt my writing was better. It was more calmed. It wasn't rushed."
Emotions	Feelings, emotions, moods, and emotional states. By far the broadest category, it involves references to how students were feeling or how their feeling affected something.	"When I first get the assignment, I get really excited."
Audience	People who will read or could read the students' writing, excluding teachers. Often this was an imagined audience that the students would like to reach.	"Whoever's reading the paper, if you feel like they know what you're trying to say, I feel like that's a happy feeling."
Self	Oneself, including better understanding one's needs, hopes, and expectations.	"I feel like I like to express myself and get my own thoughts on different things we are writing about."
Teacher	Any specific teacher, though usually Ms. Butler. *Teachers* as a general concept would be coded under school.	"She's [Ms. Butler's] very serious, and . . . . it keeps me determined."

Code	Description—Connection to:	Example
Peers	Real people in the same class as a student either currently or in the past. While peers did not have to refer to a specific person that was a peer, it had to refer to real peers that the student has or had. The general concept of *peers* would be coded under school. The terms "group members," "classmates," "schoolmates," and other similar terms would be coded as peers. "Friends" or other close relationships like "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" would be coded under the friends category, not the peers category.	"I mean, it's good bounding [*sic*] ideas off each other and getting feedback from each other. And so, I guess I find it beneficial for not just the individual but for as whole group."
Friends	People who the student specifically identified as friends. When a student referred to another student in Ms. Butler's class as a friend, and not as a classmate or peer, I coded that connection as *friends* and *peers*.	"My best friend. . . . just helps edit when she can have, when she has the free time."
Family	People in a students' family whether immediate or extended, including parents, guardians, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.	"My grandmother who is an English teacher, I send her my rough draft and she kinda helps revise it."
Human Other	Other real people who do not meet any of the above descriptions (e.g. librarian, author) or references to unspecified people.	"I have like a . . . life guidance [counselor] . . . and he was the one that got me to start writing in a composition notebook."

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