Exploring the Impact of Social Emotional Learning to Support Motivation and Self-Efficacy in Text-Dependent Analysis Writing

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO SUPPORT
MOTIVATION AND SELF-EFFICACY IN TEXT-DEPENDENT ANALYSIS WRITING

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DEDICATION

This labor of love is dedicated to my family. To Mom and Dad, your unwavering belief in me and concern for excellence and hard work throughout your lives set a tone I will strive to honor always. You live on in my soul. To my husband Gene, your support made this possible, as it has all the most important things in life. Thank you for being my constant strength. To Meredith and Allen, John and Alex, Clara and Charles, you are my heart. Thank you for bringing such joy to my world. I hope I have made you proud. Finally, to my students and school family, thank you for always helping me to remember why.
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ABSTRACT

Social emotional learning has been the subject of much attention in K–12 education in recent years. In addition to self-regulation strategies such as concept mapping, using graphic organizers, and goal setting, social emotional learning includes mindfulness practices such as visualization and mindful breathing. This action research dissertation in practice explored the experiences of three academically gifted seventh-grade students in a multiple case study design to better understand how using social emotional learning strategies affected their motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analysis writing.

Keywords: social emotional learning, writing instruction, gradual release instructional design, self-regulation, goal setting, visualization, mindfulness, motivation, self-efficacy for writing, text-dependent analysis, self-determination
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CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As someone who loves reading and writing, I have aspired to create a community of readers and writers in my classroom. As a language arts teacher of middle school students enrolled in a gifted magnet program, I hoped each of us would engage by reading independently for pleasure and then writing about what we have read. This type of writing is *text-dependent analysis*, and it is the dominant form of academic writing through which writers apply critical thinking to texts. I looked forward to this time for modeling the reading and writing process as I shared my own work with students, and I especially enjoyed talking with my students about their reading and writing.

Although my students usually engage eagerly in reading and most of them immerse themselves readily in writing, there are several in each class who engage reluctantly, if at all, with writing tasks. Specifically, I determined my students disliked the type of analytical writing about text that is expected as they transition from elementary to middle school. Even a few years before the COVID-19 global pandemic forced significant changes to their school experience, my students’ interest in writing seemed to be waning from the levels I had observed over more than two decades of teaching. Firmly convinced that if I studied my students carefully enough, they would teach me what was missing in their writing experience, I began to observe. I noticed the difference between what I saw and what I wanted for my students.

Understanding the needs and motivation of my students is a complex but essential part of guiding them to become stronger readers and writers. Generally, the adolescents I
teach are strong readers; because I teach in an academically gifted program magnet with placement based on standardized test scores, almost all read at or above grade level. Yet, being identified as gifted is associated not only with cognitive factors, such as advanced reading levels, but also with social and emotional factors. Like all adolescents navigating the changes to their bodies and brains, not to mention adjusting to the new demands of middle school, my students need time each day to become centered, calm, and reconnect with themselves in the busyness of schooling. Reading and writing are perfect for those pursuits. I subscribe to the belief that writing helps me to understand my own thoughts and feelings, and I want that for my students. Psychologist and flow theorist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) seemed to concur, stating, “First of all, writing gives the mind a disciplined means of expression. . . . It is a way to analyze and understand experiences, a self-communication that brings order to them” (p. 131). I have found enacting this simple truth, along with steadily supplying fresh, diverse books designed for young adolescents, to be my strongest strategies in my quest to build a community of readers and writers in my classroom.

Problem of Practice

Beginning in 2018, I began attempting to fan the flames of students’ love for reading and writing by making more time for self-selected reading and text-dependent writing every day in my language arts classes. I tried to craft a classroom environment and procedures to be supportive of their social and emotional needs. While I took attendance, I reminded students to find their books and choose their spots to read. Cushions were available to scatter around the room, or students could remain at their desks if they chose. I played instrumental music to signal silent reading time was
beginning. Whenever possible, I read while the students were reading and set the timer to signal the transition from reading to writing after 10 minutes. After offering a few moments to get to a good stopping point in their reading, I invited students to talk briefly with a partner about what they had read. Then, I asked students to choose a prompt from a list of questions intended to develop their analysis skills. The prompts also steered students away from writing plot summaries, which seemed to be the default way to write about their reading; this redirection was the critical change needed to meet the academic demands for writing text-dependent analysis. Although prompts were available for both literary and informational texts, most students chose some type of fiction for their reading. For example, students could write about how the author used contrasting points of view, or how a particular chapter contributed to the overall development of the theme, setting, or plot.

Once we had chosen our individual prompts, we engaged in a quick write and wrote for no more than 5 minutes. Each student kept a thinking log, which was a Google document designed to record responses to self-selected reading (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). I modeled this process by writing in my own thinking log about what I had just read, always using a prompt from the chart. I used a chime to signal when it was time to wrap up, and we shared what we had written after everyone’s keyboard was silent. I monitored the conversation level in the room and strolled around the classroom, eavesdropping. When I noticed off-topic conversation or gradual silence, I asked students to wrap up their conversations.

I invited students to share what they had written or to encourage a classmate to share if they found the classmate’s words interesting. If no one volunteered, I could
choose names from a “pick me” jar, but this was seldom necessary; frequently, the same students volunteered to share their writing. I invited feedback based on these questions learned from educational consultant L. Newman (personal communication, September 6, 2018): What do you notice? Why does that matter? How could you use the structure in your own writing? Students were usually quick to provide feedback, most often sharing about what they had noticed; I added my comments as needed to model how I processed and analyzed writing. Offering feedback became a way to engage students with the craft of writing even when they did not wish to share their own written responses. Finally, I shared what I had written and invited feedback. I described my writing process using a think-aloud strategy, meaning I made my internal dialogue of decision-making and mental processes audible for the students to hear. If I had changed words or edited my work, I was careful to point it out because I wanted students to view writing as a process, even when it was just a quick write. Altogether, these activities took between 20 and 25 minutes of class time.

I noticed the students who seemed to most enjoy time for quietude and calm (Lind, 2011) by reading were often the ones who had the most difficulty engaging and focusing attention when it was time to write. Despite months of repetition and familiarity with the routine, some students still struggled to get started when we transitioned from reading to writing. I observed them playing with the lead in their pencils, digging through their bookbags, checking their shoes, staring into space, looking to see what other students were doing, looking to see what I was doing, leaving the room to use the restroom or get water, or putting their heads down to rest. In other words, they were avoiding the writing task. A few students had additional exceptionalities beyond
giftedness, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, making them twice exceptional. Usually, these students’ difficulties with writing were not linked to any diagnosed disabling condition; instead, it seemed they needed strategies to promote achievement in writing that would more closely approximate their achievement in reading and better reflect their overall intellectual ability.

I believed I was doing what I could to promote a supportive environment (National Institute for Literacy, 2007); however, a handful of students were still not producing much writing. My instructional decisions and teacher actions were intended to promote students’ social and emotional development toward becoming self-directed and goal-oriented writers who could employ self-regulation strategies that allowed them to use the writing process effectively. I promoted a supportive instructional environment by integrating writing across all content areas routinely so students could understand why writing was relevant academically, using probing questions to spark thinking, modeling the writing process, and making connections about the usefulness of writing outside of school (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). For most students, this process seemed to be working. Some students almost attacked their writing tasks; they wrote vigorously and with passion, wanted to share their written words with classmates, and were eager to receive and give feedback. Most students wrote a paragraph of three to five sentences during a 5-minute quick write before sharing their work or offering feedback to others, but my reluctant writers would often produce less than a sentence and have little or nothing written to share. Overall, my impression was the students who wrote minimally and perfunctorily, by contrast, did not seem to view the writing as relevant or purposeful,
and certainly not as enjoyable. I wondered how to increase their motivation for and engagement with writing.

In other words, I needed to find ways to kindle their interest in writing. I recalled Judy Sorum Brown’s (2012) poem *Fire*, introduced to me by Ms. Newman, a language arts consultant hired by the school, who became a treasured friend and colleague. It reads:

*Fire*

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.
We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way. (pp. 147–148)

As I was beginning to piece together new thoughts about how to build the fire for
writing among students into my instructional practice and support their social and
emotional needs, our school closed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020.
During the closure, teachers provided asynchronous distance learning, but there was little
accountability for students to complete their assignments. When the school buildings
reopened, I found the landscape of my classroom was vastly different. It was no longer
possible to sit shoulder to shoulder or have close conversations face to face. Students who
were physically in the classroom sat 6 feet apart and behind clear partitions, and many
students remained virtual or returned to school on a hybrid schedule of classroom-based
and distance learning. By the end of the 2020–2021 school year, most students were
returning to school 5 days per week, but we were advised to maintain social distancing whenever possible.

**Problem of Practice Statement**

By the 2021–2022 school year, when this study was conducted, we were asking ourselves what the new normal would be following the COVID-19 global pandemic. During this time, I noticed my students’ motivations for writing had suffered due to the loss of regular social interaction about their work. Some students, who may have already had trouble sustaining engagement in challenging school work like writing tasks, were further challenged by having to use writing muscles they had not recently used. Knowing my students had advanced reading levels and could communicate their thinking well in conversation, the difficulty seemed to be located in their motivation to engage in the writing process rather than reading comprehension or critical thinking. The problem of practice I identified was: Some students view text-dependent analysis as an unappealing academic exercise rather than a useful tool for comprehending and communicating about texts, and I need to find new ways to support their motivation and engagement with these writing tasks.

**Overview of Research**

A brief research review revealed writing instruction has previously been investigated as a cause for concern. Dean (2010) explained concerns about the academic writing abilities of students have persisted for decades, and current research efforts continue to highlight these previous concerns with renewed urgency. The National Institute for Literacy (2007) reported, “Skilled writers learn to be self-directed and goal-oriented” (para. 3). These are clearly social emotional traits; Zimmerman (2002)
explained that “self-regulation...is the self-directed process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills” (p. 65). To achieve this result, the National Institute for Literacy advocated for “using direct, explicit, and systematic instruction; teaching students the importance of prewriting; providing a supportive instructional environment; using rubrics to assess writing; and addressing the diverse needs of individual students” (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, para. 5). Because building competency has been shown to promote self-efficacy and motivation to write (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2017), it seems reasonable to infer these strategies may help equip students with both the skills and dispositions of effective writers.

Although text-dependent analysis has clear academic relevance (e.g., it is required on end-of-year state tests and on end-of-course examinations and college entrance testing), I do not wish to convince my students about the value of writing purely for academic reasons. I want them to be motivated to write because it helps them understand themselves and each other, which I consider the essence of social emotional learning. The topic of motivation surfaces frequently in research literature and in collegial conversations about writing. Kruch (2012) called for consideration of “physical, intellectual, social, and emotional needs—and plans for students’ active involvement and future success—all of which are keys to motivating writing” (p. 20). Gallagher and Kittle (2018)—whose work inspired me to significantly change my instructional practices to allow more time for self-selected reading and conversations about writing—explained, “We begin anew every year with too many students who do not know the power of reading and writing. We continue to see how the pedagogy in most English classes consistently fails to create passionate readers and writers” (p. 24). Creating passionate
writers who lose themselves in the joy of writing and find flow in the experience for the sake of writing, is the goal of my instruction. The ability to find flow in their writing requires students achieve mastery, motivation, and self-regulation for learning in their writing practice (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Students’ attitudes about reading must also be considered. Applegate and Applegate (2010) found no significant differences in motivation among students in Grades 2–6 when the students had the ability to comprehend texts at high levels. They reported, “Children with high inclination to respond thoughtfully to text were significantly more motivated to read” (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, p. 229). Addressing the common belief that female students are more likely to be motivated readers than male students, they also found that “among children skilled at responding thoughtfully to text, there were no significant differences between males and females in any dimension of reading motivation” (Applegate & Applegate, 2010, p. 229). Based on this research, it seems students’ motivations will follow efficacy with high-level, deep thinking about texts; in other words, motivation follows mastery. Oppong et al. (2019) linked self-efficacy and motivation with self-regulation, stating self-regulation is “linked to motivation, specifically self-efficacy, a belief about one’s ability to succeed on a task or in a situation” (p. 103).

Further, the concept of social emotional learning, which includes self-regulation and self-regulatory learning, has become increasingly prevalent in efforts to understand the needs of gifted students (Oppong et al., 2019). Zimmerman et al. (1996) defined self-regulation in an academic context as “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions intended to attain specific academic goals” (p. 2). Oppong et al. (2019) explained the
theory of social emotional learning includes elements of students’ emotions and motivations to existing understanding of metacognition and intellectual development, which is an important addition because “metacognitive skills can be regarded as relatively domain-general, whereas self-regulatory learning skills are domain-specific or, at the least, identified with regard to the subject matter” (p. 107). Therefore, addressing self-regulation strategies as part of writing instruction can be beneficial, not only for academically gifted students, but for all students. Through this action research study, I explored how students experienced the inclusion of social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing strategies (e.g., concept mapping, using graphic organizers, goal-setting) and mindfulness strategies (e.g., visualization and mindful breathing), in analytical writing instruction. I sought to understand how including these social emotional components affected student motivation and self-efficacy as they developed skills for critical analysis of text in their writing. I hoped these strategies would help to close the gap I noticed between students’ critical analysis in conversations about text and their written analysis.

Ultimately, as Gee (2001) argued, “Reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening, and interacting, on the one hand, or using language to think about and act on the world, on the other” (p. 714). According to Gee (1989), how ideas are exchanged and expressed is broadly defined as discourse, which is the result of both acquiring information from the environment and learning about language and identity in that environment. Gee posited that discourse is socially constructed, meaning it prioritizes the forms of discourse of the dominant culture while marginalizing others according to dominant culture norms. Gee (2001) explained, “Discourses (with a capital
D) and their connections to socially situated identities and cultural models” (p. 714) reveal language is used “to scaffold human affiliation in cultures and social groups and institutions through creating and enticing others to take certain perspectives on experience” (p. 715). Among my student population, experiences with text-dependent analytical writing—commonplace in schools and based in dominant cultural norms—has varied widely. The discourse of school is often foreign to many of my students because they are asked to write in an academic manner that is rarely part of their primary discourse. For example, one participant came from a home where English was not the primary language, nor was it his first language, which means he may have to filter the discourse of school through his primary discourse lens. Thus, Gee’s theory of discourse speaks directly to the problem of practice statement and my desire to promote the students’ competence for text-dependent analysis writing while engaging with their thoughts about reading to better understand themselves, others, and the world from a variety of perspectives. Thus, assuming there is a clear connection between the instructional choices teachers make and students’ motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2017), teachers can adjust instruction to promote more engagement on the premise that improved motivation and engagement in response to effective instructional practices will result in improved writing. In the language of Brown’s (2012) poem, *Fire*, I sought to find the optimal balance of logs and space to build their fire as writers.

**Research Question**

Given this instructional context, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of applying social emotional skills to produce text-dependent analytical writing as a tool for communicating students’ thinking about texts and themselves. The emerging
line of inquiry involved transferring the teacher’s knowledge of students, including their social emotional development, and the language arts into the context of writing instruction. The overarching research question was: How may social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to support motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing among academically gifted middle-level writers? This question was worthy of consideration because it wove together three critical threads in the tapestry of the whole child: the social emotional, the cognitive, and the academic. These threads reflect the categories Dean (2010) addressed as essential components of effective writing instruction, about which students need strategies for developing behavior practices that promote success, including thinking or cognition in general and writing in particular.

To improve internal validity, process validity, and clarity for data analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015), it was helpful to explore the overarching question through subordinate questions aligned with the key constructs of the theoretical framework, which included Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory and Ryan and Deci’s (2017) self-determination theory on the production of analytical writing. The subordinate questions were: (a) How did learning and using self-regulation strategies affect the students’ motivation to produce analytical writing? (b) How did developing students’ self-regulation skills affect their sense of agency for producing analytical writing? And (c) What was the relationship between the students’ sense of self-efficacy as writers and production of analytical writing about texts? Investigating these questions generated the data I analyzed separately and interpreted collectively to produce more trustworthy findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Purpose Statement

Given this foundation, the purpose of this study was to explore the effects of integrating self-regulation and mindfulness strategies with the writing process to understand how students’ experiences with these strategies affected their motivation and self-efficacy for analytical writing. The research questions guided my investigation as I transferred what I knew about my students, including their social emotional development, and the language arts into the context of writing instruction. Essentially, there were two core constructs in the conceptual framework of this research: (a) motivation and (b) self-efficacy. Both constructs have direct bearing on student engagement in writing (Bandura, 1997; Hodges, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

The first construct, motivation, may be viewed from both sociocognitive (Bandura, 1997) and psychological (Ryan & Deci, 2017) theories. For Bandura (1997), “the capacity for self-motivation and purposive action is rooted in cognitive activity” (p. 122). Bandura argued motivation is the result of forethought and beliefs about one’s efficacy, meaning motivation follows self-efficacy. However, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued motivation results from the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Their self-determination theory proposes intrinsic motivation, or self-motivation, is by its very nature autonomous. Both theories maintain that social experiences serve as influences for intrinsic motivation.

The second construct, self-efficacy, relates to an individual’s sense of agency, or acts done intentionally (Bandura, 1997). In other words, self-efficacy is an individual’s belief about their ability to produce desired results in a given context. Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) explained. “Those with high self-efficacy for acquiring a skill or
performing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at higher levels” (p. 9). Bandura (1997) theorized that mastery experiences are the primary influence on self-efficacy. However, Bandura also viewed vicarious experience, social influences, and physiological and affective states as sources of self-efficacy.

These two concepts offer insight into different aspects of students’ writing engagement. Self-determination theory does not include self-efficacy as a motivational force, arguing the “self-efficacy approach does not account for issues of alienation, undermining, or reflective commitment, nor does it contrast authentic living with empty, inauthentic success” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 71). Thus, self-efficacy is not the concern of self-determination theory; rather, self-determination theory concerns “the social conditions that facilitate or hinder human flourishing” (p. 3). However, it is clear the two theories share a common ground—both posit a social influence on the developing self, whether cognitive or psychological.

Writing is a cognitive task, and the writer’s classroom environment and experiences create synergy with motivation and self-efficacy as the learner develops their identity as a writer. Ryan and Deci (2017) support this synergy, stating, “Social–contextual factors support or thwart people’s thriving through the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy” (p. 3). In fact, these researchers’ desire to understand this process of thriving is at the heart of their self-determination theory. The importance for self-regulation demonstrated by Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory and Ryan and Deci’s (2017) self-determination theory may also be seen in Vygotsky’s (1999) social constructivism theory.
Theoretical Framework

To create a systematic approach to investigate how self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies may relate to motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing, this action research was grounded in a theoretical framework visualized as a series of three overlapping circles with social constructivism as a central circle. Vygotsky (2004) extended the idea of social construction of knowledge to include imagination and creativity, stating, “The implication of [the importance of experience] for education is that, if we want to build a relatively strong foundation for a child’s creativity, what we must do is broaden the experiences we provide him with” (p. 15). Experience, in Vygotsky’s view, was not only personal and individual, but also social and vicarious. Vygotsky viewed imagination as containing both intellectual and emotional elements. According to Juvova et al. (2015), constructivist pedagogy is student centered and emphasizes the active interplay among the individual learner, the environment, and social interactions. Thus, Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory is broad, wide ranging, and readily connects to other theories, such as social cognitive theory, which are considered types of social learning theories (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Conceptually, Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy may be visualized as an inner circle situated inside social constructivism, predicated on Vygotsky’s assertion that cognition occurs in a zone of proximal development and that “full cognitive development requires social interaction” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 43). Bandura’s social cognitive theory emphasizes three-part “reciprocal interactions” (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020, p. 2) among the personal, behavioral, and environmental processes at work on humans. Bandura’s social cognitive perspective is appropriate for
this study because it supports specific applications for writing instruction that resonate with my experiences as a teacher, practitioner, and researcher. For example, I view students’ success as writers as related to their ability to understand the writing process and make choices about how to improve their writing; establishing a classroom environment of trust, collaboration, and inquiry is vital to their success (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). According to Hodges (2017), Bandura’s social cognitive theory has specific relevance for writing instruction because writing “requires meaning making as well as self-understanding” (p. 142). In Bandura’s social cognitive theory, both self-regulation and self-efficacy result as “people seek to exert control over important aspects of their lives” (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 9). This concept is important because the same constructs of self-regulation and self-efficacy are relevant to other motivational theory, such as the psychological theory of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Although people can observe an individual’s behaviors, actions, and competencies, it is impossible to observe the internalized process of developing intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Thus, Ryan and Deci’s (2017) self-determination theory provides an empirical lens for understanding how environmental influences support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thus fostering motivation. Deci and Flaste (1995) viewed the teacher, in fact, as a “socializing agent” (p. 8) who is responsible for “facilitating motivation” (p. 8) and serving as a conduit to transmit societal values. They noted across their lifetime of research that “self-motivation, rather than external motivation, is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behavior, and lasting change” (Deci & Flaste, 1995, p. 9). Accordingly, teachers should consider what conditions they might create in the classroom to encourage students to become self-
motivated; using self-determination theory as a lens may offer some answers. For example, Guay (2022) reported one condition is creating appropriately challenging tasks, so students have the experience of viewing themselves as competent; however, Guay also cautioned the three needs on which motivation rests (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) act interdependently. Due to the interdependent factors affecting motivation and their grounding in social experience, the theories of social constructivism, self-efficacy theory rooted in social cognition, and self-determination theory are present in the theoretical framework; each supports that learning and developing beliefs about oneself as a learner is the result of social processes.

**Overview of Methodology**

This action research used a qualitative approach through a purposeful sample of multiple case studies. This method supported the goal of understanding the experiences of students when interventions to promote social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, were integrated with writing instruction. The multiple case study design allowed me to investigate the students’ motivation and perceived self-efficacy for text-dependent writing using interviews, observations, and student artifacts as data collection tools. Participants were seventh-grade students who identified as academically gifted and were enrolled in one of the teacher–researcher’s language arts classes. I used a semistructured survey (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) at the beginning and end of the active research cycle to have the students assess their use of self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies and their self-efficacy as writers. The survey included open-ended response items to provide qualitative “thick description” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 120) about
how these strategies were or were not helpful, and how confident the students felt about themselves as text-dependent analytical writers (Klassen, 2002). Much as Haberlin and O’Grady (2018) used “quantitative percentages of qualitative findings” (p. 173) in their data analysis, this study used the survey, writing conference interviews, and observation field notes for indicators of motivation and self-efficacy.

During the implementation phase of the action research (i.e., the intervention), qualitative data were collected through participant observation groups, which functioned as small group writing conferences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Based on the premise of social cognitive theory, using this small-group approach facilitated a more open exchange of ideas among students and allowed the teacher–researcher to function as a cocollaborator and a facilitator of the group. The interventions began with direct instruction and were embedded throughout the process; they included (a) self-regulation for writing exercises using concept-mapping, a graphic organizer, and goal setting; and (b) mindfulness strategies of visualizing success and breathing exercises.

Along with data collected from the writing conferences, students submitted writing samples for analysis using a rubric cocreated by the student and teacher for self-assessment (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017; Ghaffar et al., 2020). These writing samples served as a portfolio to collect and reflect on student writing, and this approach supported the students’ social emotional well-being by emphasizing progress over perfection, an important facet of gifted education (Pyryt, 2004). Ultimately, my use of writing samples, observation notes, and coded responses from surveys and interviews supported both outcome and process validity through triangulation (Herr & Anderson, 2015).
Positionality

Positionality refers to the researcher’s role in relation to the research and its participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As the adult member of the community of readers and writers in my classroom, and my role as a professional educator, I had some outsider status because I held a position of authority in the classroom at the time of the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My position of power was an important consideration, especially because one characteristic of gifted students, the focus of this study, is a reluctance to ask for help and a strong desire not to “disappoint adults who are highly invested in their success” (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009, para. 8). Thus, my efforts to foster a safe, autonomy-supportive classroom atmosphere as a community of readers, writers, and thinkers was intentional. It was essential my students felt secure in my regard for them—which is the essence of Ryan and Deci’s (2017) relatedness construct—and were willing to be their authentic selves. As an educator, I am experienced in assessing my students’ behaviors, thought processes, and work products. Over time, I began to wonder if my reluctant writers were struggling with self-regulation, which was further evidence of my outsider status because it was not a struggle familiar to me in the context of writing.

As reflected in the study’s theoretical framework, I considered my students to be collaborators in this study because they were the most authentic assessors of their own beliefs and feelings, including their feelings about writing. I have found students to be wise assessors of their writing, and I am convinced of the power of peer collaboration to engage students, offer helpful feedback, and improve writing quality. Thus, I thought of myself as an insider in the group because I am also reading, writing, and thinking along
with the students. At the same time, as Efron and Ravid (2013) pointed out, my personal values influence how I perceived and interpreted both my students’ behaviors and the results of action research. I recognize the bias in my own enthusiasm for reading and writing, and I am aware that my own inclination toward reflection and introspection enables me as a reader, writer, and thinker. I wondered how my transparency in the classroom separated me from some of my students and united me with others. As a result of my reflection on this question, I sought more pathways to support my students in developing their own identities as writers. To find those pathways, I looked to social emotional learning strategies.

**Significance**

Because of the opportunity to create vicarious experience, action research has more potential to inspire change for participants and others exposed to the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2015), which expands the significance of this action research study and my role as a teacher–researcher in my professional community. At the time of this action research, the school administration had identified social emotional learning and small-group, collaborative instruction as top priorities for its faculty. Because both priorities were directly related to the problem and purpose of this study, we established a collaboration between the English language arts department and the school’s behavior interventionist, with the hope of expanding the significance of the study to other teachers and students in my school.

This study was significant for my students and other academically gifted middle school students in the magnet academically gifted program of the study. The knowledge gained from this study might also benefit academically gifted students who are served in
other grades and programs, both in the school and outside. Herr and Anderson (2015) stated action research “produces local knowledge . . . [and] it also clearly has the potential to inform the knowledge bases in our fields of study” (p. 162). Because communicating through text-dependent analytical writing is a common academic goal for secondary students, and because the concerns surrounding writing have been persistent (Dean, 2010), it is likely a better understanding of the role of self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies in the context of the writing process could benefit adolescent writers in general and my students in particular.

Writing can be more than just an academic pursuit to be perfected; its recursive process provides an opportunity to reframe perfectionism, a common trait among my students, with the concept of progress toward a goal. Indeed, communicating critical thinking about texts through text-dependent analytical writing can empower adolescents to process and communicate complex ideas, both ideas they find in texts and their own ideas, whether they are communicating with peers or adults. The National Council of Teachers of English, in its Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing, asserted, “Literate practices are embedded in complicated social relationships” (Fink, 2015, para. 2). I recognized my adolescent students navigated the challenges of these relationships while forming their identity as writers and as human beings, and I wanted to support their success. I saw support as my role as their teacher and the aim of this action research.

This study focused on the child’s experience and built upon existing knowledge for how gifted students might benefit in their motivation to write and in their sense of self-efficacy. Thus, this study focused on supporting students as they developed a writing identity. A growing awareness of the cultural bias inherent in the academic expectations
for writing (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Gee, 1989, 2001) caused me to consider the presence of linguicism in academic standards, assessment practices, and scoring guidelines. Delpit (1995) emphasized the institution of school is part of “a network of institutional structures, policies, and practices [that] creates advantages and benefits for people who speak the language of power—standard English” (as cited in Boutte & Johnson, 2013, p. 303). Developing classroom practices to reduce coercive extrinsic factors (Deci & Flaste, 1995), create equitable opportunities for academic success, and integrate issues of equity related to the needs and experiences of gifted students, is the goal. The National Association for Gifted Children (2009) reported, “Egalitarian societal attitudes and education mandates have not encouraged attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted students” (p. 2). In its report to the Board of Directors of the National Association for Gifted Children, the Whole Child Gifted Task Force (2018) called for advocacy in meeting gifted students’ social and emotional needs. In a perfect world, students could use whatever kind of writing they prefer to express their thoughts and feelings; however, in academia, text-dependent analysis writing will probably always be a staple of their writing lives. Therefore, I proposed this study to make mastering this skill a more productive, relevant, and satisfying experience for students. Better understanding the diverse needs of gifted students will enable more effective advocacy for them in schools, including more effective instructional practices to maximize their academic achievement, which meets “the emancipatory challenge” (Kinsler, 2010, p. 172) that is the true test of action research.
Definitions of Terms

_Academically gifted_ means the student has met specific academic criteria for inclusion in academically gifted classes. According to the website for the district in which the study took place, students are identified on a combination of aptitude and achievement measures. Aptitude scores must be at or above the 93rd percentile, and achievement scores must be at or above the 94th percentile. If students meet the placement criteria on one dimension but not the other, placement can be made based on grade point average of 4.0 or a minimum score on a set of performance tasks developed by the state. If the student qualifies on aptitude alone, the score must be at or above the 96th percentile, according to state guidelines.

_Agency_ relates to control over the writing process, including content, cognitive, and affective skills related to text-dependent analysis. Agency is a component of Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory.

_Autonomy_ is “the need of individuals to experience self-endorsement and ownership of their actions—to be self-regulating in the technical sense of that term” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 86). Autonomy is closely aligned to agency and self-regulation through the exercise of choice.

Much like mastery, the need for _competence_ is defined in self-determination theory as “feeling effective in one’s interactions with the social environment—that is, experiencing opportunities and supports for the exercise, expansion, and expression of one’s capacities and talents” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 86). It is contextualized to indicate the development of critical analysis in text-dependent writing in this action research.
Csikszentmihalyi (1990) originated flow theory in an attempt to understand the “optimal experience . . . when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (p. 3). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) recognized flow as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p. 4). For the purposes of this action research, flow may be thought of as the students’ immersive engagement in the pursuit of their writing goals. In the language of self-determination theory, flow states are similar to the joy of experiencing deep, intrinsic motivation.

As part of a district- and state-wide response to the social emotional toll of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the teacher–researcher’s district and state identified specific practices to support social emotional well-being, including mindfulness activities (South Carolina Department of Education, n.d.-a). Therefore, for the purposes of this action research, mindfulness is defined as the use of visualization and breathing practices to promote self-awareness and focus.

Another construct of self-determination theory, relatedness is the reciprocal experience of caring relationships with others. In other words, it implies an individual feels cared for and has opportunities to show care for others. This connectedness creates a sense of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This study operationalizes self-efficacy according to Bandura’s (1997) definition, which is someone’s belief in their ability to perform a given task.

For the purposes of this action research, self-regulation is “the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills”
(Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65). This definition reflects the theoretical grounding in Zimmerman’s self-regulated learning theory, which developed from social cognition theory. Further, self-regulation is integral to the experience of autonomy according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

According to the South Carolina Department of Education (n.d.-a), “Social and emotional learning refers to a wide range of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can affect a student’s success in school and life” (para. 3). Operationally, social emotional learning is an overarching term that relates to a student’s overall well-being, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy, encompassing self-regulation and mindfulness skills.

In the state where this study took place, text-dependent analysis is defined as responding to a writing task that pertains to a reading passage. According to the state’s test information website, “This type of item requires that students read a piece of text or passage and draw upon that text for their written responses—e.g., support their responses with evidence from the text” (South Carolina Department of Education, n.d.-b, para. 22) Additionally, based on the holistic rubric by which student writing is evaluated on the state achievement test, the writing must thoroughly explain how the evidence supports the analysis in response to the writing task.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In the chapters that follow, I discuss in greater detail the action research into the problem of practice provided in this chapter. Chapter 2 includes an expansion upon the theoretical framework and a literature review of concepts related to the study. Chapter 3 covers the study design and methodology, including additional information about the sampling, instrumentation, and data analysis. In Chapter 4, I describe and analyze the
findings of this action research. Finally, Chapter 5 covers the implications of the findings for both the researcher and for future practitioners and researchers.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.

—Judy Sorum Brown, Fire (2012), pp. 147–148

Text-dependent analysis writing is one of the most challenging tasks for the gifted students in my seventh-grade language arts classroom. For some students, the fire for writing has gone out. They seem to view this writing as meaningless beyond earning a grade or meeting a testing expectation, and my instructional approach has done little to change this persistent problem of practice. As a result, their writing does not seem to reflect their understanding and interpretation of texts, which I observed through dialogic exchange in class discussions, because it is often brief, repetitive, and mechanical in style. Based on the behaviors I observed in the classroom and the quality of writing produced, I wondered what more I could do to engage their creative and critical thinking so it reflected their insightful discussions of text. This study addressed how social
emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, can be integrated with writing instruction to support motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing skills for middle-level writers who are identified as academically gifted. In pursuit of the answer to this overarching question, three subquestions focused the study:

- How did learning and using self-regulation strategies affect the students’ motivation to produce analytical writing?
- How did developing students’ self-regulation skills affect their sense of agency for producing analytical writing?
- What was the relationship between the students’ sense of self-efficacy as writers and production of analytical writing about texts?

These questions supported my investigation of the reasons students perceived writing as a tedious academic task. In response, the underlying purpose for this action research was to create conditions that enabled students to experience a supportive environment as writers to promote academic writing as a meaningful, enjoyable act of self-discovery and self-expression.

Arguably, it was easier to eliminate causes for the problem than to positively identify them. For example, I knew neither reading levels nor general academic ability were the problem. Most of my students read at least 1 year above grade level, based on the Lexile levels that measure text complexity. All students had been identified as academically gifted; according to the official figures from my district website, this classification means they had earned aptitude scores at or above the 93rd percentile, achievement test scores at or above the 94th percentile, or—in absence of one of these
options—they may have met the performance standard on a state performance tasks assessment or have grades reflecting a 3.75 grade point average. Further, the students seemed to enjoy reading for the most part; they were quick to begin reading independently at the beginning of class and they had lively conversations with their peers and with me about their reading.

By process of elimination, I inferred the problem was motivation to engage in the process of academic writing. This chapter probes the problem through the lens of a theoretical framework grounded in Vygotsky’s (1999) social constructionism, Ryan and Deci’s (2017) self-determination theory, and Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory. Related theories of self-regulation for learning (Zimmerman, 2013), flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), and gradual release theory (Fisher & Frey, 2013) are also discussed. Next, historical perspectives on the social emotional needs of gifted learners, including overexcitabilities and perfectionism, and mindfulness in education are examined before turning to social emotional learning and writing instruction, including goal setting, feedback, and metacognitive processes. In the section on concerns for equity in gifted education, particularly for diverse gifted learners, I examine critical literacy considerations and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Finally, related research on modeling, peer-assisted writing, coconstructed rubrics, and metacognitive questioning are discussed through existing research studies.

**Literature Review Methodology**

Machi and McEvoy (2016) described the literature review as an argument to support someone’s research; thus, as with any argument, claims must be supported by credible evidence and sound reasoning. Therefore, using databases accessed primarily
through The University of South Carolina library, this literature review employed EBSCOhost, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis, Taylor and Francis + NEJM, ERIC, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, and GALE. Additionally, I included peer-reviewed journal articles from courses, textbook resources from the curriculum studies program, and publications from government agencies and professional organizations (e.g., the National Association for Gifted Children, the International Literacy Association, the National Council of Teachers of English). Finally, I employed professional titles (e.g., Visible Learning for Literary: Implementing Practices that Work Best to Accelerate Student Learning [Fisher et al., 2016], 180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents [Gallagher & Kittle, 2018]) encountered through district-based professional development.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section provides an overview of the theoretical foundations for this study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Each of the theorists contributing to this foundation have approached learning as a social process, even though they represent different disciplines and backgrounds. Vygotsky’s (1999) social constructivist theory serves as a broad basis for understanding learning as a social process. Social constructivism served as a foundational theory for this study, and shares the concept of learning as a social experience with self-determination theory, which grew out of psychological theory and research by other theorists (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Guay, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory emerged from his social cognitive theory, again with the common constructivist premise that learning is both social and contextual (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Zimmerman, an educational psychologist,
became interested in the application of Bandura’s theory to education and collaborated with him extensively (Zimmerman, 2013). Zimmerman built upon social cognition theory to develop self-regulated learning theory. In a related line of theory, self-regulation is a primary component of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) flow theory, a psychological perspective that relates to the universal experience of finding pleasure in meaningful, challenging work. These theories, with their shared understanding of learning as a social process despite differing roots and perspectives, served as the theoretical bases for this study.

**Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism is the worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that considers learning as a social activity grounded in the interactions of the learner with the environment. As such, learning is highly contextual (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, is considered the primary social constructivist theorist, but others, including Kuhn (Liu & Matthews, 2005), Berger and Luckmann, Lincoln and Guba, and Merten and Crotty (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), have also contributed to social constructivism. Sometimes referred to as realist constructivism (Liu & Matthews, 2005) or interpretive constructivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the premise of social constructivism is threefold. First, it posits that “people around the learner have a central role in learning” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 35). In other words, learning is, by definition, a social process that occurs as the individual interacts with the environment. Next, because learning is social, the “people around the learner influence, sometimes deeply, how the learner sees the world” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 35). This influence, in the context of school, means learning is the result of active engagement
among the teacher, the students, and the environment of the school itself (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Finally, the “tools” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 35) of culture, language, and people influence the progression of intellectual development. Of these tools, Vygotsky considered language to be the most influential factor for all development (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010).

According to Liu and Matthews (2005), Vygotsky’s social constructivism grew out of his conviction that behavioralist and information processing theories were too limiting and did not consider the social influences on the learner or the learner’s active participation in learning. Therefore, Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory is “commonly regarded as a shift in paradigm in educational psychology” (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 387) because it placed the social environment of the learner at the center of learning theory. Because social learning is collective in nature, Vygotsky viewed individual learning as following collective learning, and collective learning eventually exceeds the cumulative individual learning. Social constructivist theory views school learning as a social enculturation process whereby cultural practices and values become internalized by the learner. According to Liu and Matthews (2005), in the social constructivist view, “Individual mastery and development must be based on history and culture; moreover, the individual should be enabled to stand above the social collective because of the ability of the mind to generate personal understandings” (p. 392).

The capacity of the mind to create its own subjective views and experiences grounded in history and culture is precisely what makes social constructivism appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative design, the researcher strives to understand the participants’ unique and individual understandings, with a goal
to better understand the participants’ experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, social constructivism offers powerful implications for pedagogy because the teacher’s role is defined as a facilitator whose central task is to craft appropriately challenging lessons in the learner’s zone of proximal development (i.e., a developmental range of readiness; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). Equally important is the ability of the teacher to provide a “meaningful context” (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 37) for learning that is relevant to both the school and its community.

**Self-Determination Theory**

Like social constructivism, self-determination theory is a psychology theory that views learning as a social process. Ryan and Deci (2017) contend all humans have an intrinsic need for three essentials: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met optimally, the individual thrives optimally. To the extent the environment supports the individual’s needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the environment supports the learner’s growth. In the self-determination view, all motivation is the result of the individual striving to meet these three needs. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), *autonomy* is “the need to self-regulate one’s experiences and actions” (p. 10). Deci and Flaste (1995) explained:

To be autonomous means to act in accord with one’s self—it means feeling free and volitional in one’s actions. When autonomous, people are fully willing to do what they are doing, and they embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment. (p. 2)

Autonomy, because it is followed by motivation and task commitment, can lead to the development of competence.
Competence, the result of applied self-regulation, is defined as “the need to feel effectance and mastery” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11). According to Guay (2022), the mastery of skills alone does not satisfy the need for competence; rather, the perception that one can develop skills is, in itself, a “phenomenological experience” (p. 79). This experience motivates students to take on challenging and difficult tasks, which further develops their sense of competence over time. The influence of parents and teachers who support students as they engage in challenging tasks is paramount because learners require “both the strategies and the capacities for attaining desired outcomes” (Deci & Flaste, 1995, p. 64). Additionally, the feedback received as someone is developing competence can be motivating or demotivating; thus, it is important the feedback is reflective rather than evaluative (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Instead of focusing on evaluative feedback and extrinsic motivation, self-determination theory emphasizes the learner’s capacity for self-monitoring and setting personal goals and standards to build intrinsic motivation. It positions motivation on a continuum of self-determination with amotivation on one end and intrinsic motivation on the other. In between, there are various forms of extrinsic motivation with increasingly greater autonomous self-regulation and motivation as one moves toward intrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Specifically, these forms of extrinsic motivation include external regulation, which is based on consequence for compliance versus noncompliance, and introjected regulation, which refers to an individual’s sense of “self-worth contingent on performance” (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 336). As someone becomes more autonomous, identified regulation emerges, a condition marked by goals and valuing of external regulations. Hopefully, this condition evolves into integrated
regulation as someone internalizes the extrinsic regulations imposed. Ultimately, *intrinsic motivation* results, driven by an individual’s delight in the task (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Finally, the most affective of self-determination theory’s needs is the need for relatedness. *Relatedness* is defined as the need to feel social connectedness and belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Satisfying this need involves autonomous interdependence, or choosing to contribute to and be supported by social relationships (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Typically, the first social group is the family unit, but as a family unit grows, their social community grows. In a classroom community, Ryan and Deci (2017) stated, “Even a small dose of adult autonomy support and relatedness can significantly influence the school experience” (p. 357). Teacher behaviors can be highly influential in creating social relatedness and autonomy support in the classroom. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), such behaviors include:

- Listening to students, making time for students’ independent work, giving students an opportunity to talk, acknowledging signs of improvement and mastery, encouraging students’ efforts, offering progress-enabling hints when students seem stuck, being responsive to students’ comments and questions, and acknowledging students’ experiences and perspectives. (p. 367)

In relation to the problem of practice for this action research study, self-determination theory offers a lens for developing autonomous motivation, which can lead to intrinsic motivation, by supporting the participants’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom.
**Self-Efficacy Theory**

Bandura (1997) theorized that humans seek agency, or control, over their lives in general and over three specific processes: (a) behavioral, (b) personal, and (c) environmental. In Bandura’s social cognitive framework, the ability to act in ways to address the problem of practice concerning motivation and engagement in text-dependent analysis writing requires agency. *Agency* is deliberate, purposeful action of the individual; however, in social cognitive theory, agency extends beyond the individual to the social context, opening the definition to include collective agency of the social group as an environmental factor (Bandura, 1997). Importantly, an individual cannot act without the prerequisite behavioral and personal factors needed; however, an individual is more likely to exercise agency if they believe the task is both worthwhile and achievable. In Bandura’s view, both self-efficacy and self-regulation result in response to the human desire for control (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Bandura (1997) believed humans strive for this control because of the perceived benefits it brings. Agency, in the context of this action research, is the ability to exert control over the writing process, including content, cognitive, and affective skills related to analytical writing about texts.

*Self-efficacy*, or an individual’s belief in their ability to perform a given task, is the critical condition for developing agency. This belief is especially important because it is necessary to sustain effort over time (Bandura, 1997). Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) explained that “those with high self-efficacy for acquiring a skill or performing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and achieve at higher levels” (p. 9), making self-efficacy a factor in motivation, engagement,
persistence, and achievement. Thus, Bandura (1997) related motivation directly to self-efficacy because an individual’s belief in the ability to successfully complete a task directly impacts their willingness to engage in that task. Schunk and Swartz (1993) noted students may be motivated by task and ego needs, which reflects Bandura’s (1991) conviction that motivation may be influenced by multiple factors, including intrinsic and extrinsic forces. For example, task orientation reflects the internal process of skill mastery, whereas ego orientation reflects the desire to compare well with others and be viewed as competent by them (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). Both the perceived benefits and outcome expectations associated with achieving the task, and the inherent value of the task itself, can affect motivation (Bandura, 1991). This fact is useful for addressing the problem of practice for this action research because students’ experiences with writing, both as individuals and as members of the social community of the classroom, affect their motivation to produce it.

Bandura (1997) proposed four sources of self-efficacy: (a) social competence, (b) mastery experiences, (c) types of communication received, and (d) physical and psychological experiences. The first source of self-efficacy, social competence, relates to an ego orientation because it derives positive self-efficacy from comparisons with others and the experiences of others. This source of efficacy means social experiences in which an individual sees the achievement of others can also advance their belief in personal efficacy. Mastery experiences, in which the individual successfully completes the task, are another source of efficacy. In fact, Bandura believed mastery experiences to be the most influential factor because they strengthen individuals’ belief in the likelihood of success in future tasks. Thus, an individual’s sense of competence and task orientation is
supported. Another source of efficacy is the type of communication an individual receives in the social environment. Both messages and experiences provide feedback that influences an individual’s personal efficacy. Finally, self-efficacy is influenced by both physical and psychological experiences, which can also affect the reasons to which an individual attributes success or failure. If someone attributes success or failure to external forces beyond their control, self-efficacy is diminished; alternatively, if someone attributes effort as a cause for success, self-efficacy is enhanced. As applied to this action research, student self-efficacy for writing is influenced by how students perceive their writing skills in relation to the skills of others, the mastery experiences the students gain as they progress in their writing skills, and by their interactions with the teacher and fellow students during the writing process. Finally, the emotional and sensory experiences (e.g., psychological experiences) of writing in the classroom impact student self-efficacy. Therefore, it was important the classroom offered a safe space, both psychologically and physically, for engaging comfortably in the challenging task of academic writing.

Self-regulation further supports self-efficacy, and vice versa, because both impact academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) noted, “A fundamental goal of education is to equip students with self-regulatory capabilities that enable them to educate themselves” (p. 174). In the social cognitive view, self-regulation is broadly defined as resulting from a combination of personal and social influences; it includes self-monitoring of performance, self-assessing based on individual standards and judging competence in relation to others, and reacting to an individual’s own behaviors and experiences. The process of self-regulation is adaptive, involving matching someone’s
perceived skill with a desired skill, requiring repeated refinements and self-monitoring to perform at the desired level (Bandura, 1991). Although actions are individual, they are influenced by personal and social factors. Ultimately, using self-regulation is an act of agency. Someone must not only know how to do something, but also believe it is desirable to do it, and to persist in engaging both cognitive and affective skills in the face of difficulties. For students in this action research, self-regulation required an underlying belief that analytical writing about text was a pursuit worthy of their focused, sustained effort, relating self-regulation directly to the problem of practice.

**Self-Regulated Learning Theory**

Zimmerman (2002) expanded the inclusion of the affective processes of self-regulation, describing a cyclical three-phase model of self-regulated learning: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. Each phase informs and reinforces the next, and each phase involves specific processes. In the initial phase, forethought, the individual analyzes the task, determines goals, and develops a plan for meeting those goals. The individual’s beliefs about their ability to be successful and the desired outcomes of task completion are critical in this phase. Additionally, the value the individual ascribes to the task, and whether the individual’s goals are intrinsic or extrinsic in their orientation, are also critical. In the performance phase, the individual exercises agency, or self-control, by applying strategies needed to perform the task, and to remain focused and engaged in its completion. Self-observation, which involves monitoring an individual’s own use of strategies and experimentation with skills, is regularly employed. In the self-reflection phase, the individual makes judgements about the quality of the work produced and the factors that contributed to the outcome. Additionally, the
individual reacts affectively to their performance, either taking satisfaction, adapting processes for future performance, or becoming defensive.

Importantly, Zimmerman (2002) distinguished self-regulation from cognition, separating the self-directed processes for learning from the disciplinary concepts learned. Zimmerman (2002) emphasized, “Self-regulation is not a mental ability or an academic performance skill; rather it is the self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills” (p. 65). This concept has direct implications for this study as the rationale for including self-regulation processes as an intervention. Further supporting the inclusion of self-regulation strategies, Kaplan (2017) recognized self-direction as a feature of gifted education, framing it as a type of advocacy for the gifted learner by teaching students how to learn.

**Flow Theory**

At the heart of this action research was my desire for students to embrace and enjoy the creative act of discovery possible through academic writing. Similarly, Romano (2009) advanced a goal that students should “expand their notions of fun in learning” (p. 30) and specifically emphasized the possibilities for reclaiming the joy of writing. Romano (2009) stated:

When given latitude in topic choice, when convinced to be bold on the page, when engaged respectfully about their writing, when nudged to be specific, inventive, simpler, and clearer, students write remarkably well. There’s no deeper fun in language arts. (p. 34)

Because I wanted to enable students’ engagement with academic writing as a purposeful and pleasurable process, Romano’s (2009) argument—calling for both
“defining fun and seeking flow” (p. 30)—was hopeful, suggesting the concept of flow had application to this study. Flow is a construct of flow theory, developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as a way to understand how artists and others become thoroughly immersed in their work, lose track of time, and find intense enjoyment in their pursuits (Beard, 2015). Flow is associated with intensity of experience and giftedness in the performing arts and athletics (Thomson & Jacque, 2016), but also has implications for the art of writing. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) opined, “The optimal state of inner experience is one in which there is order in consciousness” (p. 6) and argued that only by having self-control and the ability to regulate inner experiences (i.e., self-regulation) can someone develop the intrinsic motivation necessary for self-fulfillment. Flow theory provides an integrated context for the constructs of social cognition theory and self-regulated learning theory in pursuit of the affective goal of someone finding pleasure in their work. In an interview with Csikszentmihalyi, Beard (2015) probed the applications of flow theory to pedagogy. Csikszentmihalyi stated that, among all the components of flow, the most critical is concentration; a person must devote their full attention to a pursuit to experience flow. Beard (2015) concluded the elements of flow theory have implications for classrooms because “teachers pursue optimal teaching and learning conditions where deep concentration is essential” (p. 363). In the context of this action research, the ability to concentrate is essential to the challenging work of academic writing about texts. Further, experiencing flow requires creating a classroom environment that promotes self-regulation and self-efficacy for writing. Additionally, experiencing flow can result in improved writing performance and a greater sense of purpose and pleasure in writing.
Gradual Release of Responsibility

The gradual release of responsibility instructional framework offers a recursive process for developing skills and dispositions (Fisher & Frey, 2013). It emerged as a synthesis of efforts to increase autonomy support and provide for social interaction in the pursuit of finding flow in writing. According to Fisher and Frey (2013), new information and skills are introduced by teacher modeling through direct, explicit instruction, providing demonstrations of the skill in context. Next, the teacher supports the learner in the process of performing the skill, with the degree of support determined by the learner’s need. Known as guided practice, this phase of the framework is marked by metacognitive questioning and feedback from the teacher to facilitate learning. As the learner’s skill develops, social learning through collaboration provides skill support with fellow learners. Through peer interaction, the learner engages in problem solving and feedback to refine their skills. Finally, the learner is fully autonomous in the performance of the skill and independent learning is possible. As the learner moves through the process toward independence, the teacher releases responsibility for learning gradually to promote student success. Importantly, this process is not always linear, meaning learners may need additional teacher modeling, direct instruction, guided practice, or collaborative learning at any point where support for skill development is needed (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Alignment of the Theoretical Framework and the Problem of Practice

Collectively, the ideas of social constructivism, self-determination theory, and self-efficacy theory provided a structure for investigating the problem of practice and the guiding research questions of this action research. Self-determination theory (Ryan &
Deci, 2017) provided a pathway to understanding and fostering motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, which proposes reciprocal interactions of the behavioral, personal, and environmental factors affecting agency, self-efficacy, and self-regulation, supported focusing the research questions on an exploration of the role of self-efficacy in developing analytical writing skills. The processes to support self-regulation for writing (i.e., the interventions to support forethought, performance, and self-reflection) were informed by Zimmerman’s (2002) self-regulated learning theory and Fisher and Frey’s (2013) work on the gradual release of instruction. Finally, flow theory affirmed the purpose of this action research by highlighting the connections between autonomous motivation and self-efficacy in the pursuit of experiencing academic writing as a meaningful act of self-discovery.

Inasmuch as the similarities among the constructs of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) intersect, it is important to remember that Bandura (1997) also noted, “There is a marked difference between being driven by an intrinsic effectance motive and being motivated by anticipated outcomes” (p. 13). Someone can infer autonomy and self-regulation are similar—if not identical—constructs, and competence bears similarities to agency, effectance, and mastery. The affective needs for relatedness in self-determination theory have commonality with Bandura’s (1997) emphasis on the interdependence of the individual and the social environment. In self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), the result of satisfying needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is motivation, whereas in Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy, the result of complex interactions between the individual’s
personal characteristics, behaviors, and the social environment result in agency, and the exercise of agency fosters self-efficacy.

**Historical Perspectives**

Encouraging both motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analysis writing has deep roots in the history of both gifted education and writing instruction. Gifted education has been viewed as an elitist attempt to reserve the best instructional methods for students whose test scores have identified them as potential high achievers (Lo & Porath, 2017). This mindset reflects a perception that gifted students do not have educational needs that require special services (Moon, 2009) and implies underachieving students may not be truly gifted. Reis and Renzulli (2009) refuted this perception, asserting underachievement can result from “decreased motivation, social and emotional affect, interest, and absence of challenge, engagement, and support” (p. 234). Similarly, Dean (2010) explained concerns about students’ writing abilities have been expressed “for over a hundred years” (p. ix); thus, more current research has represented a continuation of these concerns with renewed urgency thanks in part to an emphasis on accountability and testing. To address these combined concerns presented in the literature, this action research acknowledged and explored the social emotional needs of gifted learners as they developed their skills to meet the challenging task of academic writing. This issue is more than an academic problem; it is a matter of equity in viewing the needs of the whole child, including cognitive, social, and emotional needs, and ensuring institutional and perceptual biases do not disrupt the meeting of those needs (Levy, 2017; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009; Oppong et al., 2019; Payne, 2011). This section examines historical perspectives on social and emotional needs of
gifted learners, mindfulness in education, and the connections among social emotional learning and writing instruction.

**Social Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners**

Because the participants in this study were students identified as academically gifted, it was critical to understand the needs they had as learners and how those needs may have impacted their self-efficacy, self-regulation, and writing skills. According to Wiley (2020), “Being identified as gifted adds a layer of complexity to the social and emotional experiences of some students” (p. 1530), in addition to the cognitive traits that are often the focus of gifted education. Specifically, the intensity of experiences and perfectionism may influence how gifted students perceive their abilities and how they believe others perceive them, which can affect their self-efficacy and motivation for self-regulation. Although not unique to gifted populations, heightened sensitivities—historically referred to as overexcitabilities—are commonly recognized among gifted students and contribute to the intensity of their experiences (Bailey, 2011; Gross et al., 2007; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Piechowski et al., 1985). Similarly, perfectionism is associated with, but not limited to, gifted populations (Anderson & Martin, 2018; Cross & Cross, 2015; Fong & Yuen, 2014; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015, 2018; Olton-Weber et al., 2020). In the frameworks of Vygotsky’s social constructivism (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Vygotsky, 1999), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), these traits are among the personal factors that act reciprocally with behaviors and the environment to affect motivation and learning. Understanding the needs of gifted learners in this context is both a practical matter for
fostering their achievement in the classroom and a matter of equity for gifted learners (Moon, 2009; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009).

**Intensity of Experience**

One of the most recognized social emotional traits of gifted learners is the presence of heightened sensitivity or intensity of experience (Bailey, 2011; Gross et al., 2007; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Piechowski et al., 1985). Historically, this trait has been described as overexcitability (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019; Vuyk et al., 2016), a designation based on Dabrowski’s (1964) positive disintegration theory of personality development. Although the theory is descriptive of the manifestations of giftedness, stating they may appear in psychomotor, intellectual, emotional, imaginational, and sensory experiences recognizable to parents and teachers of gifted learners (Gross et al., 2007; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Piechowski et al., 1985; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019), Dabrowski’s personality theory is often problematic because it is oversimplified and misinterpreted (Vuyk et al., 2016). The theory links personality development with psychopathology and describes the “processes, from emotional disharmony to the complete fragmentation of the personality structure” (Dabrowski, 1964, p. 5), which Dabrowski viewed as the positive and sometimes dissonant process experienced by an individual reaching their full potential. Unfortunately, because of its psychopathological perspective, the label may have a negative influence on the perception of the gifted learner, both from others and from the gifted learners themselves.

Instead, the tendencies of gifted learners to experience their senses, imagination, thoughts, and feelings more intensely than others may be viewed as “openness to experience” (Vuyk et al., 2016, p. 192), which is a perspective rooted in the more current
five factor model of personality development. The framing of sensitivity to experiences, whether sensory, cognitive, emotional, or creative, of gifted learners was an important consideration for this study because it impacted the level of acceptance and affirmation gifted learners experienced in the classroom, which influenced their self-efficacy and sense of agency (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, students’ different overexcitabilities impacted the necessity of appropriately differentiated and challenging experiences facilitated by the teacher (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Indeed, overexcitabilities or intensities may be traits present in Csikszentmihalyi’s flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Thomson & Jacque, 2016). In other words, overexcitabilities and intensity may lead gifted learners to become thoroughly engrossed in their own experience, including the intellectual work of writing. In the context of this action research, these traits may both distract from and promote engagement in the task of academic writing, depending upon learner’s sense of autonomy, self-regulation, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As a matter of equity in meeting the social emotional needs of gifted learners, recognizing these traits is important for creating classroom environments that allow students to engage in appropriately challenging work with their intellectual peers and minimize the risk of isolation and lower self-efficacy some gifted learners experience (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009; Oppong et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019).

**Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is a trait that could have both a positive and negative influence on gifted learners’ experiences in the classroom. This trait can have both healthy and unhealthy (i.e., adaptive or maladaptive) ramifications depending on how perfectionism
is experienced by the learner (Flett & Hewitt, 2020; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015, 2018; Olton-Weber et al., 2020). For example, a student who has high personal standards for their work or is exceptionally organized may positively influence their academic success, and these expressions of perfectionism are positively correlated with the presence of emotional overexcitabilities or intensities (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015). Such perfectionism can increase the learner’s willingness to engage in challenging work and set high personal goals (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018). According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), exercising the autonomy or self-regulation to engage in challenging activities builds competence with those activities.

On the other hand, perfectionism can be experienced and expressed as a preoccupation with avoiding mistakes, failing to meet extrinsic expectations, and with criticism. Gifted learners with these perfectionist tendencies may be particularly sensitive to teacher and parental expectations (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009). Importantly, maladaptive expressions of perfectionism may reduce creativity and imagination and have a negative effect on self-efficacy because students fear failure or negative comparisons to peers, which can reduce their motivation and engagement (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Reis & Renzulli, 2009). Therefore, understanding how perfectionism may interact with student self-regulation and self-efficacy was critical to understanding the problem of practice. Students who fear failure or are hypersensitive to negative perceptions, whether their own perceptions or those of others, may be reluctant to commit imperfect words to the page as part of engaging in the writing process. Considered through the lens of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), preoccupations with producing perfection
may interfere with the learner’s need for competence and relatedness, limiting the application of their creative potential and resulting in reduced writing outcomes.

**Mindfulness in Education**

The inclusion of mindfulness instruction is gaining traction in the literature (Doss & Bloom, 2018; Olton-Weber et al., 2020). Szymanski and Wrenn’s (2019) findings suggest developing mindfulness as a tool for self-regulation may lead to self-acceptance and self-efficacy because participants in their study all found mindfulness and meditation useful for mitigating “the stress of trying to fit in when they know they are different” (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019, p. 253). Likewise, Olton-Weber et al. (2020) found mindfulness practices helped reduce perfectionism in gifted middle school students. On the other hand, Doss and Bloom (2018) did not find significant changes in perfectionism or anxiety among their population of gifted middle school students. However, their mixed-methods study found evidence of growth in the participants’ perceptions of the benefits of meditation, which was the focus of their mindfulness intervention.

Among the concerns surrounding mindfulness in education are questions relating to origin, operational definitions, and measurement (Haberlin & O’Grady, 2018; McCaw, 2020). Haberlin and O’Grady’s (2018) study on mindfulness education for gifted students is of interest for both its subject and its design. Using a qualitative, biographic, narrative inquiry design, they collected interview and observation data to investigate the effects of a 10-week intervention that taught several mindfulness techniques to their population of 23 gifted students in Grades 2–5 in a magnet school in suburban, southeast Florida. They wanted to know how the students described their experiences, to understand how they responded to specific mindfulness methods, to identify any patterns that emerged from
the student responses, and to determine what the implications might be for gifted education. Using an intervention program adapted from one developed to reduce child stress, they found five major themes emerged from the data: “enjoyment, calmness, heightened awareness, creativity, and discomfort” (Haberlin & O’Grady, 2018, p. 176). In other words, although students enjoyed the practices and reported feeling more calm, aware, and creative, they also expressed that practicing the techniques sometimes caused them physical discomfort and embarrassment. The authors recommended further studies focus on specific practices with other gifted populations, including some simple problem solving to ensure comfort and ease. This action research study aligned with this body of research because it employed breathing practices and visualization, as did the Haberlin and O’Grady (2018) study.

Haberlin and O’Grady (2018) noted the Buddhist origins of mindfulness but used a secularized model of the mindfulness practices. Using critical discourse analysis, McCaw (2020) identified mindfulness concerns with implications for educators and researchers. McCaw (2020) posited that secularized mindfulness, or “thin mindfulness” (p. 263) derived from the more religious, ethically rooted “thick mindfulness” (p. 265) traditions and distilled specific aspects of the practice for applications with a narrower focus. McCaw (2020) noted, “Discursive positioning serves to build the legitimacy and acceptability of mindfulness in policy debates” (p. 270), which helps educators by making mindfulness more marketable for schools. Potentially, mindfulness practices could change the standard practices and normed ways of being in schools (McCaw, 2020). Because my students reflect diverse religious cultures, including Buddhist, Hindu,
and Christian religions, sensitivity to different cultural norms for mindfulness practices is an essential expression of equity and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

The implications from the Haberlin and O’Grady (2018) and McCaw (2020) studies are significant for this action research because they involve both research ethics and school policy. Care must be taken to ensure the physical and psychological safety of study participants; similarly, the potential power dynamics of the teacher–student relationship to affect students’ decisions to engage must be acknowledged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), especially because gifted students may be overly concerned with teacher expectations (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009). These concerns, in combination with the desire to sustain diverse cultures in the classroom and community and adhere to district policies, indicate a need for caution and forethought in using mindfulness interventions in this action research.

**Social Emotional Learning and Writing Instruction**

Unsurprisingly, the impact of attending to the social emotional needs of students on their writing outcomes has been of interest in writing instruction research since the 1990s (Graham & Perin, 2007; Klassen, 2002; Pajares, 2003; Perry et al., 2002; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1996; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). The ability to write well affects an individual’s opportunities for education and employment (Graham & Perin, 2007), and developing student agency for writing remains a high priority for educators (Barnes, 2020). Both self-regulation and self-efficacy are strong motivators for engaging in academic reading and writing tasks, which are the focus of this action research. Importantly, researchers have suggested the integration of self-regulation skills with
writing instruction can and should be taught explicitly in the context of instruction on writing strategies (Fisher et al., 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). This section explores how goal setting, feedback, and metacognitive processes can be instrumental in promoting self-regulation and self-efficacy for writing.

**Goal Setting**

According to self-regulated learning theory, the initializing phase of any self-regulated process is forethought, which involves setting a goal (Zimmerman, 2002). In the context of this research, writing outcomes are enhanced when students have clear goals that relate the purpose of the writing task to the qualities desired in the writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). In other words, students need to know what criteria must be met for their writing to be considered masterful, so they can set goals that clarify their intentions for writing (Fisher et al., 2016). Similarly, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) suggests autonomous motivation and competence result from strategic support for necessary skills and capacities. Consequently, combining goal setting with specific strategies for writing improves student writing (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). Further, because writing is a recursive process, students need goals and strategies for all aspects of the process, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Importantly, the goal orientation of learners, including gifted learners, varies in the degree of intrinsic or extrinsic orientation, which affects their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). Setting goals that are both challenging and clearly related to performance improves motivation and writing outcomes, which then reinforces self-efficacy and persistent engagement (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). As an intervention for
this action research, goal setting throughout the writing process seemed most likely to be effective for students, particularly goals related to meeting criteria for success with a writing or self-regulation strategy.

**Feedback**

Both during and after the performance phase of a task, such as writing, feedback on progress toward goals affects students’ self-efficacy and performance outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Zimmerman, 2002, 2013; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). Therefore, writing improves when students receive feedback, from the teacher or peers, that is clearly connected to the desired characteristics for a writing task (Graham & Perin, 2007) and is tailored to the implementation of a writing strategy or process (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). A benefit of peer feedback is twofold: (a) students can leverage the strength of their oral communication skills to foster written communication and (b) students recognize all writers have relative strengths and weaknesses (Barnes, 2020). Peer interaction can encourage adaptive perfectionism (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018) because it highlights ways writing products can be improved with effort, which reduces apprehension about writing and fosters agency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014). Appropriate peer feedback also meets the learner’s need for relatedness, according to self-determination theory (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Teacher and peer feedback was relevant to this action research because it supported the interventions (e.g., writing conferences, peer-assisted learning strategies) to support self-regulation and self-efficacy for gifted learners and strengthened students’ academic writing skills.
Metacognitive Processes

The abilities of self-monitoring and self-reflection are implicit in the self-regulated learning process for writing (Hacker, 2018; Zimmerman, 2002). According to self-determination theory, the capacity for self-monitoring is critical to developing autonomy and competence with skills, which supports autonomous motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017). From a social cognitive perspective, self-monitoring involves both behavioral interactions (e.g., effort), personal interactions (e.g., self-efficacy and outcome expectations), and social interactions (e.g., instruction and feedback) that reinforce the benefits of goal setting. Cultivating self-awareness of thought processes and learning to plan, self-monitor, self-assess, and adjust goals and strategies can be especially beneficial for gifted learners because their heightened cognitive abilities may predispose them to metacognitive processes (Oppong et al., 2019).

From a self-regulated learning perspective, the scope of metacognitive processes is integrated with motivation through the three phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Oppong et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This perspective recognizes the cyclical process of initiating planning and task analysis, performing the task, and practicing the self-control in using writing strategies necessary for the purpose and audience. In the performance phase of metacognitive processes, self-recording, or keeping a record of an individual’s efforts and use of strategies, leads to the self-reflection phase and the practices of self-judgment and self-reactions (Zimmerman, 2013). In the context of writing instruction, the implications for gifted learners support modeling metacognitive strategies with think-aloud demonstrations (Fisher et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2008) to allow students the vicarious experience of metacognitive
processes. Further, grouping students for differentiated practice with metacognitive processes related to writing content is supported (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Additionally, the use of small groups engaging together in the writing process presents the opportunity for satisfying the need for relatedness, which is necessary for autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The clear implications for the interventions of this action research suggest that using small groups of gifted students to practice metacognitive processes while engaging in the analytical writing process should promote self-efficacy, self-regulation, and improved writing outcomes (Graham & Perin, 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

**Equity Concerns for Diverse Gifted Students**

Although concerns about equity for gifted students due to their giftedness have been discussed in the context of historical perspectives and this problem of practice, there are additional concerns affecting gifted students with diverse racial and ethnic identities. Marginalized students may be viewed as underachieving or less capable rather than having different discourses (Gee, 1989; Perry et al., 2002), forms of expression, and ways of knowing (Boutte & Johnson, 2013). Ensuring an equitable classroom experience for these students was a consideration for this action research because the goal was to ensure access to experiences of excellence (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and support collective self-efficacy from a social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Thus, critical literacy considerations and culturally sustaining pedagogy merit special mention and are reviewed in this section.
Critical Literacy Considerations

English language arts present an inherent risk for linguicism, or discrimination based on an individual’s language. Gee (1989) posited individuals have multiple sociolinguistic discourses, including the primary discourse from their home and family, and secondary discourses acquired later, often in school. For students who hold the dominant cultural identity, the discourse of home and the discourse of school may be quite similar; however, for culturally diverse students, this similarity is not the case. Gee (2001) argued language always embeds social and cultural perspectives, and this perspective taking is part of its function. Thus, Gee advocated for instruction that involves perspective taking from multiple cultures. In the context of this action research, academic writing favors students from the dominant discourse, suggesting the awareness and valuing of multiple discourses present in the classroom will more successfully provide equitable access to writing outcomes and self-efficacy.

Luke (2012) seemed to concur with Gee’s argument, and asserted critical literacy is an “overtly political orientation to teaching and learning and to the cultural, ideological, and sociolinguistic content of the curriculum” (p. 5). Luke believed literacy in schools should be constructed from the learner, not just received by the learner, and the implicit assumptions of both texts and the institution of school should be regularly questioned and critiqued. Thus, classrooms should be democratic places where the free exchange of ideas can occur. In this context, Luke (2012) said, “Literature becomes a means for the moral and intellectual construction of the self” (p. 7). This statement was precisely the goal of this action research study—to create conditions whereby students write analytically about text to better understand themselves and their world.
Systemic functional linguistics are a critical literacy pedagogy tool. Teachers can employ systemic functional linguistics to equip students with semistructured responses, such as sentence starters, for engaging in dialogue and posing questions (Luke, 2012; Thwaite et al., 2020). These simple adjustments can help students participate more actively in collective exchanges, reciprocal exchanges with their teacher and peers, and supportive exchanges with classmates to foster self-expression (Perry et al., 2002; Thwaite et al., 2020). These exchanges can result in a more inclusive environment that invites and empowers all students to participate, which promotes agency. For this problem of practice, modeling and providing instruction about systemic functional linguistics tools promoted student engagement and feedback. Therefore, models that included sentence frames and questioning were important for gifted learners from marginalized backgrounds in peer collaboration and writing tasks, and the intervention strategies and research goals for this study were supported further by creating an inclusive classroom environment.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Inclusive environments recognize the strengths of speakers of African American Language (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and speakers of other languages (Woodard et al., 2017). Because linguicism can be individual or institutional and intentional or unintentional, diverse students can experience oppression because the dominant language—in this case, standard English—is deemed superior to the native languages of culturally diverse speakers (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Calling for pedagogy that respects the strengths of students’ diverse cultures and
languages, Ladson-Billings (2009) described culturally relevant teaching practices that view knowledge as dynamic and coconstructed by teachers and students.

Other scholars have questioned whether Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant practices are equitable enough and proposed a change in stance is needed to overcome the hegemonic influences in the institution of school (Paris, 2012; Woodard et al., 2017). Paris (2012) argued the goal should not be to make the culture of school accessible to all, but rather to promote and maintain students’ diverse cultures. Paris (2012) offered “culturally sustaining pedagogy” (p. 95) as an alternative to culturally relevant teaching practices. Woodard et al. (2017) concurred, finding teachers who employ culturally sustaining practices (a) provide students with opportunities to switch between languages and dialects for purposes of comparison and critique; (b) encourage the use of voice and choice in linguistic expression; (c) recognize standard English is a political and cultural construct rather than a superior language; and (d) place less importance on conventions of standard English grammar in assessing writing, emphasizing the communication of ideas instead. Thus, culturally sustaining practices have implications for this research because they offer instructional choices that remove institutional barriers to success and empower participants from nondominant groups whose primary discourse is not standard English to use their multiple discourses as strengths for learning.

**Related Research**

Among the related research on self-regulated learning strategies in this action research are modeling (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman, 2013; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999) and peer-assisted writing (Fisher et al., 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007). As students identify and set goals for emulating models of mastery (Zimmerman &
Kitsantas, 1999), they participate in constructing knowledge and writing skills by coconstructing rubrics that promote agency and motivation for academic writing (Ghaffar et al., 2020). Further, metacognitive questioning can promote agency and self-regulated learning as students monitor and reflect on how they engage with academic writing (Barnes, 2020; Oppong et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 2013). This section investigates existing research on these interventions.

**Modeling**

Fidalgo et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study of 62 sixth-grade students using a cross-panel design to measure the effect on writing outcomes of (a) observing and reflecting on a mastery model in a whole class group, (b) direct instruction on writing strategies, (c) peer feedback in writer–observer pairs, and (d) solo practice. Their purpose was to determine the benefits to students if they were provided models for writing and self-regulation, primarily through self-talk and self-monitoring, but not direct instruction on writing strategies. In other words, they investigated if the whole class observing teacher models of writing and self-regulation and then reflecting as a class about what they noticed would make a difference in their writing outcomes, even if no writing strategies were mentioned explicitly by the teacher. Fidalgo et al. found students had gains in writing products from the modeling and reflection intervention alone. Although their population, a mixed-ability sample of native Spanish speakers, was not gifted students, Fidalgo et al.’s findings support the intervention of teacher modeling and shared reflection in writing conference groups. Modeling the use of writing and self-regulation strategies should improve writing outcomes for students in this action research.
**Peer Feedback**

Participant groups for this action research included peer-assisted writing interventions, such as peer feedback. De Smedt et al. (2020) clarified the relevance of this intervention through a quantitative study with a randomized control design. Using a population of 431 fifth- and sixth-grade students from 10 Flemish schools, they used a social cognition theoretical framework to investigate the relationships among explicit or direct instruction on writing strategies, peer-assisted learning, writing outcomes, writing self-efficacy, and motivation to write (i.e., a measure of self-regulation). They found using explicit instruction and peer-assisted learning in combination resulted in better outcomes for writing performance if the writing genre corresponded to the explicit instruction. These interventions also resulted in increased self-efficacy for generating writing ideas and increased motivation to write. Their findings supported using the intervention of teacher modeling as part of direct instruction for writing, and for collaboration with peers to self-assess and self-monitor the writing process. Thus, their findings reinforced the relevance of the interventions for this action research to strengthen student self-regulation and self-efficacy while improving their writing outcomes through collaboration with both the teacher and peers in direct instruction and writing conferences.

**Coconstructed Rubrics**

Another feature of the participant group intervention for this action research was coconstructed rubrics to improve student motivation, self-monitoring, self-efficacy, and writing outcomes. Using rubrics in this manner was supported by Ghaffar et al.’s (2020) study, which used a mixed-methods design to determine the effect of using a
coconstructed rubric on the middle-grade learners on writing outcomes, attitudes about writing, perceptions about assessment with coconstructed rubrics, and classroom collaboration. They used a sample of 28 students who ranged in age from 12 to 14 years old. All students had the same teacher and were bilingual students in a Lebanese school where they studied English. The findings were drawn from interviews with the teacher and students, a prequestionnaire and postquestionnaire, classroom observations, the coconstructed rubric artifact, and prewriting and postwriting tests. Ghaffar et al. (2020) found using the coconstructed rubric had a positive impact on progress in writing quality from preassessment to postassessment. There was also a clear, positive effect on the students’ attitudes about writing. Students found the writing task more relevant and expressed a better understanding of assessment criteria, which they could apply to the self-assessment of their writing. Observation data also showed greater engagement in writing tasks. Finally, students who used the cocreated rubric also increased in their perceived ability for writing. This finding supported my plan for using coconstructed rubrics as an intervention for my middle-grade students and contributed to the growing body of research about the impact of this type of assessment with a middle school population from another cultural context. Additionally, the methods used for data collection by Ghaffar et al. were the same as those used in the present study, although the instruments and data analysis varied.

**Metacognitive Questioning**

Finding strategies to support my gifted students in demonstrating their advanced reading skills, evident in their critical thinking, through their writing is vital; part of the problem of practice is their reading levels and writing outcomes are often significantly
different. Colognesi et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study with a population of 43 students, ages 11 and 12, in a French-speaking school in Belgium. They wanted to determine how using the strategy of metacognitive questioning to learn affected student writing skills and how students responded to metacognitive questions. Using a pretest and posttest measure of student writing, audio recordings of student discussions, and responses to metacognitive questions posed by the teacher over a 4-week period, they found both the control and intervention groups made progress in writing from prewriting to postwriting samples. However, the intervention group made progress more quickly and showed growth in all four elements for which the writing was assessed. The control group, on the other hand, required more time to progress and showed gains in only two elements of their writing. The student responses to metacognitive questions showed they were engaging in goal setting and continued to self-monitor their writing throughout the writing process. Students offered explicit strategies for their future writing and referenced peer advice for improving their writing. These findings have important implications for this action research because students engaged in peer collaboration and metacognitive conversations about their understanding of text and their analytical writing. Although Colognesi et al.’s (2020) population was different (i.e., not identified as gifted and there were language and culture differences), the participants’ ages were similar to the students involved in this action research, and the findings support the effectiveness of using metacognitive questioning in participant groups for this action research study.

**Summary**

The complexity of learning to communicate ideas through writing is a challenge for all students, even students identified as academically gifted. Academic writing
presents a particular challenge because it places additional metacognitive demands on students (Oppong et al., 2019). By examining writing instruction for gifted learners through the lens of social cognition theory, self-regulated learning theory, and flow theory, this chapter has provided historical perspectives for the behavioral, personal, and environmental factors that influence self-efficacy and self-regulation for academic writing. The literature has also provided support for the research questions and intervention strategies used in this action research. Finally, concerns for equity as an ever-present issue in gifted education, which frames the environmental factors that influence access, perceptions of giftedness, and gifted education, were highlighted in this chapter. Equitable practices provide models for growth and feedback so diverse gifted learners can flourish in a supportive learning environment as they construct knowledge and develop writing skills. Since the 1980s, the social emotional needs of gifted learners and the intersectionality of social emotional learning and writing instruction have been investigated, and this work continued through the present action research study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.


This study was a social constructivist inquiry, grounded in theories of self-determination and self-efficacy, to determine the participants’ experiences with the purposeful integration of social emotional learning strategies to increase motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analysis writing. In other words, metaphorically, I wanted to explore what combination of logs (i.e., tools) and space (i.e., an autonomy supportive environment) might result in sparking their motivation for writing. This problem of practice resulted from recognizing my writing instruction was not adequately
engaging some of my students. They possessed above-grade-level reading skills and advanced cognitive abilities, so the disparity between their writing skills and other forms of communication and self-expression was noticeable. I determined some students viewed text-dependent analysis as an unappealing academic exercise rather than a useful tool for comprehending and communicating about texts, and I needed to find new ways to support their motivation and engagement.

Because writing was viewed as unappealing, some students expended energy avoiding the task of writing rather than producing written work; accordingly, the quality of their written work did not keep pace with the quality of their thinking or their ability to analyze the texts they read. The purpose of this study was to engage my students in applying social emotional learning skills, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, to produce analytical writing that communicated their thinking about texts and themselves. This research was significant due to the impact of analytical writing skills on overall academic achievement for my students and the potential to share my research findings with other language arts teachers or teachers of academically gifted students who may have similar concerns.

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this study was: How may social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to support motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing among middle-level writers identified as academically gifted? This question addresses the problem of practice by exploring methods for improving (a) motivation for writing and (b) the cognitive and social emotional skills necessary for
producing effective analytical writing (i.e., writing that helps the writer process the meaning of texts). The study determined what tools were useful for probing the meaning of texts and how students related to those meanings through connections to self, others, and the world. For the sake of internal validity, process validity, and clarity for data analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015), three subordinate questions aligned with the theoretical framework were also considered:

- How did learning and using self-regulation strategies affect the students’ motivation to produce analytical writing?
- How did developing students’ self-regulation skills affect their sense of agency for producing analytical writing?
- What was the relationship between the students’ sense of self-efficacy as writers and production of analytical writing about texts?

**Research Design**

This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate the integration of social emotional learning, including self-regulation and mindfulness skills, with strategies for analytical writing to enhance motivation and self-efficacy for analytical writing skills. As a rationale for this design, the goal was to synthesize subjective assessments of self-regulation, mindfulness, self-efficacy, and analytical writing with observations of and artifacts from the writing process, and to assess changes in agency and self-efficacy based on students’ self-assessment. Thus, although improved analytical writing was one desirable outcome, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) helped to understanding the participants’ experiences with writing motivation and
self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) helped to understand their experiences with developing confidence for analytical writing, which framed the interventions.

**Rationale**

Through a qualitative design, this action research addressed the problem of practice that originated from my classroom experience. The qualitative multiple case study approach allowed me to engage in the “plan-act-observe-reflect cycle” (Lewin, 1948, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 105) through narrative inquiry in the context of ongoing classroom instruction. Thus, as students provided accounts of their experiences as writers, their individual narratives were synthesized into my collective narrative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In keeping with the psychological approach to narrative inquiry, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this study focused on “the personal, including thoughts and motivations” (p. 35) as they related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness, on the premise that strengthening these factors would result in increased motivation and self-efficacy.

** Constructs**

The main constructs for this action research were motivation and self-efficacy. These related constructs have a synergistic effect on mastery of skill and motivation to engage in the task of analytical writing (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, they are grounded in Bandura’s self-efficacy theory, which was appropriate due to its relevance for developing writing skills (Hodges, 2017; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). As an expression of Vygotsky’s social constructivism, inclusive of the concerns for skill attainment in the zone of proximal development and the contextual nature of the social construction of knowledge (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010), these constructs (i.e.,
motivation and self-efficacy) and their theoretical bases were defined in Chapter 1 and discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

**Active Research Cycles**

This study consisted of three phases of an active research cycle, and I present the phases of the active research cycle for each case study participant in Chapter 4. This approach provided an opportunity to examine findings and any growth from the first phase through the third phase on a case-by-case basis. Each phase integrated the social emotional tools for writing throughout instruction using a gradual release framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013) with the intention of developing the students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which I hoped would promote their motivation, agency, and self-efficacy for writing (Bandura, 1997).

During the first phase, students learned the self-regulation and mindfulness strategies for preparing to write (i.e., the tools of visualization and mindful breathing). Importantly, mindfulness skills were the subject of schoolwide counseling lessons throughout the year, and the direct instruction for the instructional context of this action research was provided by the school’s behavior interventionist, who came into the classroom and modeled a guided mindfulness activity to teach the processes. I provided direct instruction on concept mapping and using a graphic organizer (see Appendices A and B), modeled each process, and followed the gradual release of responsibility framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013). All these processes were explained to the students as tools for planning their writing. Because having autonomy is important for developing agency (Bandura, 1997), competence and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and engagement (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018), students could choose the
prompt they wished to use from a list of standards-based prompts I provided. I reminded students of the mindfulness strategies they learned from the behavior interventionist, and I modeled those strategies as I engaged in my own writing process, encouraging them to do the same but allowing them to exercise autonomy and modify or omit strategies (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Students also completed a survey instrument to pre-assess their use of the tools and their perceived self-efficacy for writing. Following these preparatory strategies, students composed text-dependent analytical paragraphs in their Google Doc writing portfolios. They discussed their paragraphs in writing conference groups and self-assessed their work with a teacher-prepared rubric, which provided a model for the process of self-assessment. During each writing conference, I modeled the use of strategies in the writing process (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Fisher et al., 2016; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007) and interviewed participants about their responses on the preliminary survey.

During the second phase of the research cycle, I modeled developing a rubric to self-assess progress toward the writing goal (see Appendix C), which involved articulating a goal and determining criteria for success. Thus, the second writing conference was devoted to sharing writing and practicing self-assessment using the coconstructed rubrics (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017; Ghaffar et al., 2020). I modeled this process using my own writing and rubric, using a think-aloud process as I described my experiences using visualization, mindful breathing, concept mapping, and the graphic organizer to plan my writing, and then self-assessed my written work. During this phase of the research cycle, students worked in literature circle groups to choose their text-
dependent prompt collectively, and they worked collaboratively to complete a concept map of the key word(s) in their prompt.

In the final phase of the active research cycle, students were encouraged to practice their visualization and breathing strategies before working individually to choose a prompt, create a concept map and graphic organizer, and write an analytical paragraph about their literature circle text. The decision to have them complete their planning behaviors (e.g., mindfulness strategies) and processes individually in this cycle reflected my desire for them to become more self-directed by developing agency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) while experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Before the writing conferences, students also completed a postsurvey to self-assess their use of self-regulation strategies and self-efficacy for text-dependent analysis writing. During this final conference, I asked follow-up questions based on the survey responses, and the students shared their self-assessment of their writing on the rubrics we had constructed together.

**Interventions**

As described, this study synthesized elements of several high-yield instructional strategies rather than using a scripted, specific curriculum resource. Direct instruction in self-regulation for writing strategies and mindfulness strategies preceded writing practice, which kept with the gradual release of instruction model provided by Fisher and Frey (2013) and Parent et al. (2014). Concept mapping, the use of graphic organizers, and goal setting were introduced to students by the teacher–researcher, and the mindfulness practices of visualization and breathing were introduced to students by the school’s behavior interventionist and modeled by the teacher. Although originally developed for
gifted students specifically, Harris et al. (2013) advocated for generalizability of self-regulation strategies to all student populations, and Oppong et al. (2019) suggested self-regulation strategies are particularly appropriate for students identified as academically gifted. Specifically, students were taught how to plan writing through concept mapping and graphic organizing. Hughes et al. (2019) found computer-based graphic organizers, which involve converting writing from table to text, are effective for students with learning disabilities. Zimmerman (2008) described task analysis practices for goal setting and strategic planning as part of a “forethought phase” (p. 178) of writing, noting “growing empirical support for this model” (p. 179). Similarly, Lee and Tan (2010) determined using graphic organizers promoted self-monitoring of progress toward writing goals. Finally, students learned specific mindfulness practices, including visualization and awareness of breathing, to use when they feel agitated, distracted, or need to restore focus (Haberlin & O’Grady, 2018). The need to restore focus is especially relevant for gifted students, who often experience overexcitability (Gross et al., 2007; Lind, 2011; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Pyryt, 2004). Students completed self-assessment surveys, and the teacher–researcher recorded observations as field notes.

During the composition phase of writing, students practiced self-assessment and reflection strategies for their writing in participant groups, which functioned as writing conferences. In this intervention, students used a coconstructed rubric to assess writing and practiced discussing their writing in small groups with peers and the teacher. DeMent (2008) asserted the characteristics of gifted learners “strongly support the need to incorporate the use of self-evaluation into a writing curriculum for gifted students because self-evaluation requires them to study and immerse themselves into their own
work” (pp. 21–22). This study emphasized using think alouds to describe thought processes and retroactive metacognition to assess the production and process of writing during writing conferences with peers. The teacher modeled all strategies and participated as a fellow writer by assessing and reflecting on her own written work. Three basic questions guided these discussions: (a) What do you notice about the writing? (b) Why is this important? and (c) How can this be used to help you improve your writing? (adapted from L. Newman, personal communication, September 6, 2018). The questioning approach was supported by Colognesi et al. (2020), who asserted that “to activate metacognition, students can be asked questions” (p. 460), and noted metacognitive questioning may be integrated before, during, and after a process. Further, Fisher and Frey (2013) included noticing as part of their instructional framework for the gradual release of responsibility for learning. Writing conferences also served as follow-up interviews to the semistructured surveys.

Throughout the active research cycle, students assessed their change in quality of analytical writing. The underlying assumption guiding the self-assessment intervention was that successful experience with writing and monitoring progress would increase the students’ mastery experiences and beliefs in their competence for analytical writing skills and themselves as writers. For example, Sanders-Reio et al. (2014) found “beliefs about writing explained the most variance in writing performance” (p. 8). Golombek et al. (2019) also found strong correlation between beliefs about self-efficacy, forethought, and performance in their study of college students engaged in academic writing. For this investigation, a primary focus was analyzing how students with differing motivations and self-efficacy for analytical writing experienced the interventions; interventions were
applied to all participants to support outcome validity and democratic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Using the overarching instructional framework of the gradual release of responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2013), three types of social emotional intervention tools were employed in this study. The first tools, concept mapping (see Appendix A) and graphic organizers (see Appendix B), were self-regulatory tools for writing; these tools were supported by self-regulation for learning theory as part of the forethought phase of writing. Concept mapping and graphic organizing (Opaleski-DiMeo, 2014) were tools used during the phase of planning to write. Knowing these evidence-based tools should be familiar and beneficial to the students (Fisher et al., 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Harris et al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1996), this study aimed to combine “thin mindfulness” (McCaw, 2020, p. 263), or secular mindfulness, tools with more traditional prewriting strategies. The mindfulness tools included visualizing success (Ericsson & Pool, 2016) and focusing oneself with mindful, calming breaths (Haberlin & O’Grady, 2018; McCaw, 2020; Olton-Weber et al., 2020). In keeping with the gradual release of responsibility framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013), these interventions were introduced through focused, direct instruction, which included my own teacher modeling. I also facilitated whole-class guided practice, followed by peer collaboration through small group writing activities, before encouraging students to use the tools independently.

The second type of intervention tool involved small groups of four students discussing their independent reading of a shared text—23 Minutes (Velde, 2016)—using a literature circle approach (Daniels, 2006). Using literature circles, which we called
book clubs, allowed for the collaborative conversations advocated by Fisher and Frey (2013) and Gallagher and Kittle (2018) as vital for developing readers and writers. Further, these conversations provided students with the opportunity for social interaction necessary for learning (Bandura, 1991, 1997) as they shared their understandings of the text in purposeful exchanges about shared reading. These small groups of students also wrote in their electronic writing portfolios about the texts they were reading and participated in a series of three participant group writing conferences I facilitated as the teacher–researcher. Although not all students in the literature circle groups were study participants, all students participated in literature circles and all writing conferences were conducted in small groups. Small group writing conferences were a strategic choice to provide students with opportunities for social engagement as they engaged in the desired behaviors (Bandura, 1991, 1997) of modeling, thinking aloud, and noticing, which were key elements of the gradual release of responsibility’s instructional framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Further, writing conferences provided students with opportunities for peer feedback and goal setting, both evidence-based strategies for improved writing (De Smedt et al., 2020; Lee & Tan, 2010; Schunk & Swartz, 1993) supported by self-regulation for writing theory (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

The third type of intervention tool was the practice of self-assessment. As the students set writing goals and developed a coconstructed rubric (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017) to assist them in measuring progress, they self-assessed their writing and monitored their progress (see Appendix C). This rubric allowed the students to describe the perceived areas of strength and areas needing attention in their writing, reflecting
their perceived self-efficacy for analytical writing (Bandura, 1997; Barnes, 2020; DeMent, 2008; Fisher et al., 2016; Ghaffar et al., 2020; Oppong et al., 2019; Pajares, 2003; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 1996). Students participated in teacher-constructed pre- and post-surveys by responding to questions about their perceptions of self-regulation strategies and self-efficacy for analytical writing. Based on their responses, I followed up with semistructured interviews during our small group writing conferences.

**Research Setting and Sample**

This study occurred in a public middle school in the southern part of the United States. The school was situated in one of the state’s most affluent suburban districts and benefitted from business tax revenue in the district’s boundaries. At the macro level, this setting provided a broad context because all public middle school students in the state used the same academic standards and took the same end-of-year tests for federal accountability in English language arts. However, the involved middle school was in a district that embraced public school choice through a variety of magnet programs. The middle school in this study was an international academic magnet program, which had a more diverse student population and wider geographical reach, meaning some student participants did not reside in the school’s attendance zone.

Further, the class involved in this study was part of a gifted magnet program, meaning the students met specific academic criteria for inclusion in the classes. According to the criteria posted on the district’s website, if the student qualified on a combination of aptitude and achievement, their aptitude scores must be at or above the 93rd percentile, and achievement scores must be at or above the 94th percentile. If
students met the placement criteria on one dimension but not the other, placement could be made based on grade point average of 4.0 or a minimum score on a set of performance tasks developed by the state. If the student qualified on aptitude alone, the score must be at or above the 96th percentile. As a result, at the micro level, participants were from one teacher’s student population in the gifted magnet class; more specifically, specific students were selected purposefully from one of the teacher’s classes.

**Sampling Method and Justification**

The sample for this study was a purposeful sample drawn from the student population of one class of the teacher–researcher’s academically gifted seventh-grade language arts classes. Six students were originally selected for participation with parent consent; their selection ensured equity by reflecting the diversity of ethnicities and writing skills representative of the class. Inclusion was based on parent permission secured by the researcher and the choice of texts for independent reading in literature circle groups. Ultimately, three unique case studies emerged from this group. This type of convenience sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was appropriate for this action research study because the students were “the people who affect or are affected by the issue under investigation . . . [and] among the nearest and most accessible individuals” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, pp. 61–62). More importantly, having students from the teacher’s classes participate ensured the teacher–student relationship remained supportive and allowed the teacher to serve as an instructor and a coparticipant in reading, writing, and discussing texts while modeling self-regulation and mindfulness strategies. This relationship was critical to building both relatedness and self-efficacy because it supported a safe environment for honest dialogue and self-assessment. This sample also provided the
greatest benefits to participants because the researcher was also their teacher and would already be interacting with them and making instructional decisions about their writing. There was very minimal risk of harm because the instructional interventions were typical classroom practices, and the overall purpose was to create a supportive and effective instructional environment that empowered students with motivation and confidence for their writing practice.

**Sample Characteristics**

Despite their high ability and above-grade-level reading, participants’ writing skills showed varying levels of competence in terms of fluency, content, organization, voice, and conventions in their written responses. Any difficulties with academic writing could have severely limited their progression in school because analytical writing was an expected part of advanced placement classes, college courses, entrance exams, and scholarship applications.

Even when the gap between potential and performance is small, gifted students may experience writing challenges due to experience that cause them to have difficulty with sustaining focus and organizing ideas. When gifted students face a difficult or unsatisfying task, they may feel a more intense sense of frustration or failure. Oppong et al. (2019) described this feeling as “the social emotional and motivational gap” (p. 105) and stressed that academic instruction must address the needs of the “whole child” (p. 105). Pyryt (2004) cautioned perfectionism may cause gifted students to abandon a task rather than risk a perceived failure or risk the inability to achieve at the highest level. Therefore, students with high cognitive ability may require additional supports to develop their potential as writers and view their writing as a work in progress.
**Role of the Researcher**

I was the teacher–researcher for this study and I had dual roles that created simultaneous insider and outsider positionalities (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As the teacher, I was an integral member of the learning community who had detailed knowledge of the students. In this role, I routinely read, wrote, and discussed texts and writing about texts with students while modeling strategies and providing feedback. At the same time, I was evaluating students and making judgments about student work related to the action research study purposes. Throughout the course of this study, I also served as a participant group facilitator in addition to serving as observer, interviewer, data collector, and data analyst.

**Data Collection**

Trustworthy results depend on appropriate data collection measures. This section details the instruments used to collect data, the tools used as interventions, and the procedures for implementing the study.

**Semistructured Student Survey**

At the beginning and end of the research cycle, participants were asked to complete a semistructured student survey instrument (see Appendix D) via a Google Form that included (a) a self-assessment of their use of self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies and (b) their assessment of their confidence as an analytical writer, which assessed their perceived self-efficacy for analytical writing. This practice aligned with the qualitative approach for this study because it allowed for data triangulation (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
This survey was developed by the teacher–researcher, reviewed by members of the language arts department, and piloted with a similar student sample from another middle-level language arts class. It included a student self-assessment of their use of the specific interventions. For example, in the section assessing self-regulation, students were asked to assess their use of concept mapping, graphic organizers, visualization of successful outcomes, and awareness of breathing practices. In the self-efficacy section of the survey, students assessed their confidence for analytical writing tasks. They were also invited to make additional comments about their experiences as writers.

**Interviews With Participant Observation Groups**

Students participated in three writing conferences, which served as participant observation groups for the study. This process aligned with the social constructivist conceptualization of the study because “the participant observer sees things firsthand and uses [their] own knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed rather than relying on once-removed accounts from interviews” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). Essentially, I interviewed students in a small group setting in the classroom, which allowed me to facilitate, participate, and observe the student participants. I followed up on my observations with open-ended questions and transcribed the student responses. Students shared their writing assignments in this setting, which created the opportunity for students to ask questions and make comments about the work to the teacher and to peers. The interview notes included participants’ words along with observation and field notes so I could record what was taking place in the group along with thoughts and questions that emerged during the experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Students prepared for the writing conference groups by writing a constructed response about the text they had chosen for their literature circle group. During the conference, students engaged in peer conferencing to give and receive feedback, assess their writing, and set writing goals. As the students discussed their writing goals and their thoughts about the writing process by using a think-aloud strategy, they told the story of themselves as emerging writers. This discussion created space for narrative inquiry in the study and allowed me to model, explore, and observe the integration of self-regulation and mindfulness strategies. Therefore, it addressed the research subquestions on how the students experienced the social emotional learning strategies in their production of analytical texts. According to Clandinin et al. (2007), narrative inquiry must include process, social, and place considerations. This study explored the students’ experiences in the process of becoming writers through socially constructed learning situated in the classroom community of writers.

**Student Writing Portfolio Assessment**

Students wrote writing samples to serve as a portfolio, providing “a systematic collection of samples of student work” (Popham, 2013, as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2013, pp. 157–159). The instrument for writing portfolios was a Google Document, which was submitted through Google Classroom for ease of collection. Using a portfolio also supported the students’ social emotional well-being by emphasizing progress over perfection, which is an important facet of gifted education (Pyryt, 2004). Students composed the writing samples after the research had begun, making researcher-generated documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Portfolio samples were collected at the beginning,
middle, and end of the implementation phase of the research cycle to provide evidence of progress in analytical writing skill.

Additionally, for each of the three writing portfolio samples collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation phase, participants self-assessed their writing using a rubric they discussed in their writing conference group. The initial teacher-created rubric assessed writing for content, organization, and voice with an emphasis on identifying strengths and areas needing attention, rather than editing for conventions. Thus, the instrument for the writing portfolio self-assessment addressed student competence for analytical writing and included open-ended response items to identify progress toward goals and next steps. Subsequent rubrics for writing portfolio self-assessments were coconstructed by the teacher and students, further supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the participant group.

The purpose of self-assessment was self-monitoring writing quality and enhancing students’ writing identity. Harris et al. (2010) stated:

Activities including self-planning, self-monitoring, self-regulation, which are included in the metacognitive strategy, may contribute to secondary education pupils’ creating a quality text . . . because these activities may help learners develop and regulate awareness of linguistic and cognitive levels for writing. (as cited in Cer, 2019, p. 1)

One important aspect of the self-assessment included setting writing goals, which was discussed in the participant group. As students assessed their writing using the rubric and their assessment of progress toward writing goals, they generated qualitative data that were interpreted using descriptive statistics to better understand their experiences with
the interventions and the relationship of the interventions to their analytical writing, as
the research questions directed.

**Teacher Assessment**

After the students self-assessed their writing, I assessed the writing samples using
descriptive coding at the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation phase of the
action research. I copied the student writing into a spreadsheet so I could analyze and
compare samples in the order they were written for each participant. Specifically,
descriptive codes for content, organization, and voice were generated so patterns of
change in the overall effectiveness of the writing samples could emerge. The data
collected from this method directly addressed the overarching research question by
analyzing the impact of the social emotional learning strategies on analytical writing,
which was the outcome of interest for this study.

**Data Organization Procedures**

I collected the semistructured student survey data in a Google Form and organized
it into two Excel spreadsheet (i.e., presurvey and postsurvey) so they could be accessed
and organized easily by intervention type (i.e., self-regulation strategies, mindfulness
strategies, open-ended responses). Initially, I added data from participant group
observations to the first Excel spreadsheet during the first writing conference; however, I
found this practice cumbersome, and decided to switch methods. For the second and third
rounds of conferences and interviews, I instead used a Google Doc to collect notes and
transcriptions. This method allowed for consistent formatting of qualitative data,
including narrative data from the participant group and illustrative student work samples.
Student writing portfolio entries and self-assessments were completed in Google Docs
and submitted through Google Classroom, which delivered them directly to my Google Drive, where the relevant data could be copied into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet format facilitated comparison of writing samples to identify patterns and collect data that were then copied into a password-protected Quirkos program for coding. This process further facilitated triangulation with the qualitative data, which was central to the rationale for the qualitative design and further supported rigor and validity in the data analysis process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Justification**

The tools, strategies, and instruments used for data collection were commonly used and accepted in action research and in the instructional practice in my classroom. Therefore, they created minimal disruption to normal classroom routines and procedures, and to the students’ customary instructional sequences. As such, these methods represented the “plethora of small changes made by critical teacher researchers” (Kincheloe, 1991, as cited in Dana, 2015, p. 162). Dana (2015) rejected the “assumed dichotomy between research and practice” (p. 168), which appealed to the purpose of action research to transform teaching practice.

In this study, the chosen methods allowed me to make ongoing adjustments to instructional practice through simultaneous data collection and analysis. This process resulted in more effective feedback to students, which promoted better student outcomes and outcome validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Additionally, because the sample came from a district with a one-to-one technology initiative, all participants had equitable access to the instruments, tools, and strategies. Finally, the use of these methods
promoted process validity by allowing for data triangulation and democratic validity by providing data that reflected multiple voices.

**Permission, Privacy, and Confidentiality**

In addition to school and district permission, parent permission was required for student participation. I thoroughly explained the purpose and procedures of this research to participants and their parents; thus, consent was well-informed. Importantly, I solicited participation with the clear and explicit disclaimer that participation was entirely voluntary, and that nonparticipation would not affect the nature of instruction, required workload, or grade for the course. This clarification was intended to address the justice concern described by Pritchard (2002). To reduce the effects of coercion due to the role as teacher in requesting consent, I assured parents and students the role and responsibilities of the teacher would supersede any conflicting expectations with the role as an action researcher. All participants and their parents were advised of the limited confidentiality and privacy typical of participant groups. I emphasized confidentiality and privacy with participants and ensured these ethical considerations in my own conduct and reporting. For example, pseudonyms were used in stored data and participants’ identifying characteristics were removed and protected as much as possible in the school setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the action research so it could inform instructional decisions and provide a basis for research findings and implications. Following Teuton’s (2018) example, some data were collected using Google Forms so the data could be transferred to password-protected Excel spreadsheets for analysis.
Qualitative data were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. Taken together, conclusions from these data were triangulated to limit bias and answer the action research questions (Herr & Anderson, 2015) because they included information from the students and the teacher–researcher. Finally, all three sets of data (i.e., student surveys and interview notes, writing samples and self-assessments, and observation and field notes) supported catalytic validity because students engaged with these experiences as they made substantive changes to their writing practice. Importantly, the data collection procedures supported democratic validity because participants were involved in data collection and analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

**Interviews With Participant Observation Groups Data**

The notes and documents from participant observation groups and student writing excerpts informed the interview questions for participant observation groups. As the participants spoke, the teacher–researcher took notes and immediately reviewed these notes through member checking with student participants to ensure transcriptions and inferences accurately reflected their intent (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and ensure internal validity for emic data. Because the metacognition strategy used think alouds as story narration of how the writing developed, the data were best aligned with narrative inquiry analysis tools. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted, “Learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2). As students constructed their stories through their interactions and experiences in the social setting of the focus group, they were influenced by the stories of their peers and the modeling of their teacher. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained, “Narrative inquiry is, however, a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and
restorying as the research proceeds” (p. 4). Heikkinen et al. (2007) also emphasized the importance of reflexivity and dialectic exchange as indicators of quality action research. In this study, as data were coded and recoded into emerging themes and patterns, I was influenced by stories of the participants’ experiences, especially through selecting individual stories representative of the collective story. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained, “By listening to participant stories of their experiences of teaching and learning, we hope to write narratives of what it means to educate and be educated” (p. 12). Using this data analysis process allowed me, as the teacher–researcher, to better understand how each participant experienced writing, and how their experiences were related to their developing writing identities.

**Semistructured Student Survey Data**

The student surveys also generated qualitative data for analysis. First, I analyzed the qualitative responses using descriptive statistics to determine students’ experiences with using self-regulation and mindfulness strategies and students’ perceptions of their self-efficacy as writers. Next, I combined descriptive and in vivo coding to analyze open-ended student responses (Best & Kahn, 1986; Saldaña, 2021). Finally, categorical thematic analysis identified patterns and categories among coded data (Saldaña, 2021).

**Student Writing Portfolio Assessment Data**

I collected writing samples in a Google Doc and copied them into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Following the inductive process described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I used descriptive and in vivo coding to analyze responses from the open-ended response questions about progress toward goals. As patterns emerged, I applied categorical thematic analysis to the coded data to (a) identify and describe patterns in the
categories and (b) align with the research questions and the constructs of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and self-efficacy (Saldaña, 2021). This application supported “conceptual congruence” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 214) to align labels with the study’s research questions and theoretical framework. At this point, I employed a deductive process and reviewed the data for more evidence supporting my final set of categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Although the student self-assessment aligned with the autonomy construct of the theoretical framework, it also generated data that could be triangulated with other collected data. Triangulation of data is important, especially with self-assessment, because of limitations inherent in the process. For example, Taylor (2016) argued students’ writing skill self-assessments may reflect their perception of the teacher’s expectations and may be somewhat “artificial and distorted” (5:49). Taylor (2016) questioned “the assumptions that underlie the supposed authority of the individual voice” (1:52). Instead, Taylor (2016) suggested “the medium and situation of the communication shapes the message” (11:53). This statement aligns with the narrative structure of inquiry by contextualizing the setting for the study and the characteristics of its participants. The National Association for Gifted Children (2009) explained, “In regard to social and emotional concerns, several studies have found that gifted students are not likely to ask for help, protecting an image of competence and not wanting to disappoint adults who are highly invested in their success” (para. 8). Thus, another purpose of self-assessment was to provide teacher modeling of metacognitive practice and to serve as a source for giving and receiving feedback to foster competence, relatedness, and autonomy.
Limitations

This action research study had some limitations despite my best efforts to ensure rigor and validity. One of these limitations was the potential mismatch between the students’ perceptions of their skills and their actual use of strategies. As Efron and Ravid (2013) cautioned, “Most surveys measure respondents’ perceptions or attitudes, not what they actually do or how they behave” (p. 109). I hoped to mitigate this issue by requiring students to use specific self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies throughout instruction, embedding those practices in the writing process, and using the teacher feedback provided in participant group writing conferences. Self-efficacy is largely dependent on students’ impressions; however, assessing self-efficacy is inherently subjective. Because the goal was to determine the relationship between self-efficacy and analytical writing, the more objective assessment of change over time should have ameliorated this limitation. Another limitation was generalizability. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), action research is criticized because it lacks the statistical generalizability of traditional quantitative research. However, they argued a personalized, narrative approach provided vicarious experiences and fostered what Stake (1986) called “naturalistic generalization” (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 74). Finally, the study took place mostly during the last quarter of the school year, which meant its timeline was interrupted by standardized testing—during which time no data could be collected per district requirements—and by end-of-year festivities.

Summary

This action research study used a qualitative multiple case study design to address the problem of practice. The problem was some students viewed text-dependent analysis
as an unappealing academic exercise rather than a useful tool for comprehending and communicating about texts, and I needed to find new ways to support their motivation and engagement. The overarching research question was: How may social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to support motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing among middle-level writers who are identified as academically gifted?

Using a participant sample of three students observed over 8 weeks, the action research examined student experiences with social emotional learning strategies on their motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing. The interventions included participant group writing conferences for direct instruction on self-regulation for writing strategies (i.e., concept mapping, using graphic organizers, and goal setting), mindfulness strategies (i.e., visualization and breathing exercises), modeling, think alouds, and feedback among participants including myself as the teacher–researcher, and assessment of student generated writing and the use of self-regulation and mindfulness strategies by both the student and teacher–researcher participants.

The context for the study was a public middle school in an urban district. Participants were students in my seventh-grade language arts class for students identified as academically gifted. Data were collected from participants and the teacher–researcher. Data collection methods included semistructured student surveys addressing the interventions and self-efficacy for analytical writing, writing portfolio artifacts and self-assessment—including both student and teacher assessment of student-produced analytical writing—and participant group records, which included interviews and field
notes. Data analysis methods included descriptive and in vivo coding and categorical thematic analysis.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

We only need to lay a log lightly from time to time.

A fire grows simply because the space is there, with openings in which the flame that knows just how it wants to burn can find its way.

—Judy Sorum Brown, Fire (2012), pp. 147–148

As a purposeful sample, participants reflected varying interest in analytical writing and were representative of the cultural diversity of the class. Each participant was chosen for specific reasons related to social emotional learning. They were all male because my experiences have suggested male students are more likely to have less interest in writing (Al-Saadi, 2020), and there were 3 times more male students than female students in this class. As a reminder, pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality and student privacy.

Donovan had exceptionally high intelligence on verbal measures, but he despised writing in response logs or completing constructed responses, stating he had “a traumatic experience with a reading log in fourth grade.” Upon exploring what this experience was,
I learned his teacher made him complete the logs, and he considered it traumatic. Ethan was a high-ability student in both reading and mathematics. He found making high grades with minimal effort to be achievable in most assignments, but his writing did not always yield the high results he expected. Karim was highly gifted, based on verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal measures. English was his second language, and although he was highly proficient in English, it was not the primary language spoken in his home. He seemed to enjoy reading and writing, loved to engage in discussion, and was happy to challenge ideas and assumptions. All three participants were classified as gifted, although they identified by different paths. Two participants qualified as gifted based on aptitude scores and one participant qualified with achievement test scores and grades. Thus, each participant presented specific opportunities relevant to the problem of practice for this action research, and each participant experienced different challenges with writing.

For example, Donovan’s feelings about writing interfered with his production; he often produced only a sentence or two, if that, during writing time. Ethan was concerned about his grades but resisted using the writing process, believing his work was adequate as long as he received the good grades he wanted. Karim articulated the writer’s craft well, but although his writing often showed exceptionally strong voice, his efforts were inconsistent, and sometimes his writing did not showcase his exceptional thinking very well. During the 4th quarter of the school year, the class completed a book pass with eight titles, all from South Carolina Junior Book Award lists, and all students were asked to select their top three choices. These three participants included Velde’s (2016) 23 Minutes in their top choices, so they and one other student were placed in a literature circle to discuss this book together and write text-dependent analysis paragraphs in their
electronic writing portfolio. This selection process was important because it afforded the students autonomy in selecting a title (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which self-determination theory points to as a defining aspect of motivation. Further, using a literature circle approach for reading and small group writing conferences allowed for social interaction to meet relatedness needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and promoted the social construction of knowledge according to social constructivist theory (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Vygotsky, 1999). All these factors, including the convenience and opportunities presented by having them discuss their reading and writing together, made these students ideal participants for this action research.

**Intervention Strategies**

As described in Chapter 3, interventions used in this study were all presented in the instructional context of Fisher and Frey’s (2013) gradual release of responsibility. Following direct instruction and modeling by the behavior interventionist on visualizing and mindful breathing, I presented explicit lessons on concept mapping and using the graphic organizer, which students called ICED, to plan writing (see Appendix B). The students engaged in guided practice as a whole class with each of these strategies; then, they were encouraged to use them in the context of their four-member small group writing conferences. After the initial direct instruction for visualizing and mindful breathing, I continued to encourage these practices and to model them in each of the three writing conferences. Specifically, I described visualizing calm surroundings and a successful, finished paragraph, as well as the practice of taking three slow, deep breaths to focus my attention. Although I modeled all of the interventions, students had autonomy in choosing their level of participation in the intervention strategies.
The students’ first writing samples showed their initial efforts with concept mapping were poor, demonstrating difficulty with both generating multiple ideas and using concept mapping to organize ideas, and I chose to double back and provide additional direct instruction, guided practice, and peer collaboration to create a group map for the second writing sample. Similarly, when the students’ indicators of success for their writing goals were vague, I provided additional guided practice and resources to use as springboards for determining their success indicators. In both instances, the recursive nature of the gradual release instructional framework (Fisher and Frey, 2013) were evident.

**General Findings**

The discussion of each case study focuses on the research question for this study: How may social emotional learning, including self-regulation and mindfulness strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to affect motivation, support agency and self-efficacy, and increase text-dependent analysis skills for middle-level writers who are identified as academically gifted? To answer this question, the continuum of motivation provided by self-determination theory (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017), discussed in Chapter 2, provided a framework for understanding the inner, subjective experiences of the participants. As autonomy increases, identified regulation develops, which is considered moderately autonomous motivation. Here, the individual identifies the significance of standards. As the most self-determined extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation is autonomous extrinsic motivation wherein the individual has internalized the externally imposed standards and aligns those standards with their own individual standards and goals. Participants developed competence with the social
emotional intervention tools, initially through teacher-led direct instruction and modeling, and then through the experiences of autonomy and relatedness they experienced in their small group collaborations. The shift from identified regulation to integrated regulation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017) was a pattern common to all three participants.

With this pattern in mind, the participants’ experiences are described in the sections that follow. Changes in the participants’ text-dependent analysis writing, as evidenced in the first, second, and third writing samples for each participant, are further discussed in Chapter 5.

Case Study 1: Donovan

Among adults and peers, Donovan was a likeable student. His personality might be described as quirky, in the sense that he was quick to change subjects or make unexpected remarks. He was also extremely sensitive and empathetic, the type of student who desired to please his peers, teachers, and parents. For example, he invited a classmate to join him in a group project when he discovered the student had done nothing to complete the major assessment for the class. He did not want his classmate to fail, so he asked if the student could become part of his group. In other words, Donovan exhibited many of the personality traits often associated with giftedness (Gross et al., 2007; Lind, 2011; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Vuyk et al., 2016). Donovan was chatty, quick to respond, and often the first to volunteer. He enjoyed reading, and could become lost in a book and ignore everything around him. He read his book club selection within 2 days of receiving his copy of 23 Minutes (Velde, 2016) because he did not want to stop reading until he knew how the story ended. However, when it was time to write,
Donovan’s interest was in preparing his environment. He found a snack in his bookbag and placed it on his desk, checked his water bottle, arranged the various papers, books, and fidgets across his desk, crossed one leg underneath himself, listened to music through earbuds, and squirmed a bit in his seat to get comfortable. Eventually, he began to write, but setting up his space seemed to be a large part of his process.

**Perceived Competence With Social Emotional Intervention Tools**

According to Donovan’s initial survey responses, he found concept mapping somewhat helpful. He noted, “I made a main idea had other smaller ideas and connected them to the main idea.” He recognized the relevance of the concept mapping process, explaining that “it can be used with almost everything.” Similarly, he found the ICED graphic organizer “somewhat helpful” and explained, “I made some points in the graphic organizer and defended them.” He added, “It was good fun.” Initially, he found visualizing “not very helpful.” He commented, “I pictured me being happy and me feeling good about myself,” but added, “It was tough to visualize some parts.” He felt similarly about mindful breathing, explaining, “I felt like it was good to get in some strong breaths, but it did not really help much.” It seemed Donovan found the social emotional tools pleasant, but they did not make writing more accessible or enjoyable for him. However, he reported feeling very confident about concept mapping and mindful breathing, somewhat confident about using a graphic organizer, and not confident at all when visualizing. Based on his comments, his confidence seemed to correspond to the level of difficulty he found with using the tools. Interestingly, because he is open about his dislike for writing, especially writing in a response log, he reported feeling very confident overall for writing text-dependent analysis. His response to my inquiry about
whether there might be anything else he wanted me to know revealed his people-pleasing personality: “No, but thank you for asking.” Like many of Donovan’s remarks, this comment led me to infer he was motivated by a desire to please others (Bandura, 1997; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009).

**Relatedness and Support for Competence**

Donovan shared his first writing conference sample with his book group using a think-aloud strategy (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Fisher et al., 2016). He paused to elaborate on each idea he shared from his written response. The errors in writing conventions in this response were typical of Donovan’s writing. He wrote:

I believe that the setting for the whole book will be this bank. and that we will rarely if ever leave this bank and that the whole book will be centered around stoping a bank robbery. While we may not leave the building i am sure that we will go to different parts of the bank.

Notably, Donovan read ahead of the pages assigned for the literature circle, so he was not making a prediction but rather commenting on the importance of the bank to the setting. He started his group’s conversation by asking what pages everyone had read, then mentioned he read ahead. This comment seemed to indicate the social aspect of learning was especially important to Donovan because he was usually the one to initiate this type of conversation in the group. I asked Donovan about how he created his concept map (see Figure 4.1), which described how the setting of the novel affected the characters and events of the story. Donovan’s circles for bank, desks, and computer show elements of place whereas the people, or characters, are acted upon by the setting. He replied, “I really just pick one [concept map design], and I don’t really think about it, and if it’s too
hard, I go back.” I followed up, asking, “How often do you go back?” He replied, “Like maybe once in fourth grade.” When asked about the graphic organizer and how it was helpful, Donovan responded, “I would suspect just doing it for each part. I don’t remember what the letters stand for, but like identify, cite, and so on.”

Figure 4.1 Donovan’s Initial Concept Map Figure

**Identified Regulation**

Donovan self-assessed his writing on the teacher-constructed rubric by noting areas needing attention and areas showing writing strengths for content, organization, and voice. He recognized opportunities to improve, stating, “I feel like I could give more and work harder on getting more into one entry,” and, “I could put stuff that is related together and make each topic have other mini topics.” His remarks about voice showed self-regulatory awareness, as he commented, “I feel like I can spend more time on working two find what the deeper meaning of what the writer is saying.” At the same
time, he found his content and organization to be strengths, noting, “I feel like with what I wrote was deep and that I have good in sight,” and commenting, “I feel like I had stuff that was kind of connected.”

However, in terms of voice, he stated, “I feel like I can find what the writer is talking about but I can’t put it to paper.” This statement suggests Donovan was aware his understanding surpassed his ability to express himself in writing. However, when it came to choosing a goal, Donovan seemed to relate writing skill with using tools and conventions, even though conventions were not included on the rubric. His goal statement read, “I will like two get better at ICED and other writing methods like that maybe I can get better at using proper punctuation.” I talked with Donovan about viewing the tools as supports for expressing his ideas thoroughly and in depth; however, I wondered if he understood the tools to be a means to an end or an end in themselves.

**Relatedness and Support for Increasing Competence**

Relatedness was a clear priority for Donovan. Just before the second writing conference, Donovan encouraged Ethan, a fellow group member, by telling him he could catch up on his reading with the following section, keeping the peace in the group by adding, “It’s fine.” He suggested, “There’s four of us, so each of us could share one part” of the reading. He did not share his writing first, but he was quick to offer feedback to Ethan when he shared, stating, “I agree with that; I was expecting more of an adventure.” When it was his turn, Donovan stated, “I didn’t have enough time to write it, so I will be telling you while I write.” A fellow group member mentioned the concept map the group had worked on collaboratively, making sure it had been shared with a group member who had been absent.
The book group had worked together to do their concept mapping for this entry (see Figure 4.2), and they had chosen a common prompt to facilitate collaboration. The figure shows the students’ increased fluency of ideas and responses because it contains both theme statements and statements that hint at how themes were developed in the novel. They decided to create their map electronically and all worked simultaneously on it. The results were revealing, demonstrating the benefit of relatedness through peer interaction to the social construction of knowledge (Bandura, 1997; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Donovan explained, “If you state your ideas out loud, it can give you more confidence, like when you talk to a friend.” The increase in fluency of ideas, and the more precise articulation of those ideas, was evident as compared to Donovan’s initial concept map. At one point, Donovan appeared to be digressing to the idea of genre instead of theme, but referencing the concept map seemed to get him back on track.
Integrated Regulation

I met with the group to model my own writing process, which included visualizing my paragraph and focusing my attention with mindful breathing. I also shared my concept map and ICED graphic organizer so the group could see how these tools helped me to organize my paragraph. Then, I self-assessed my own paragraph, modeling the process and inviting feedback from the group. When it was time to self-assess his writing, which he completed as the group talked, Donovan began by saying, “Murple. It’s a thing I say. I don’t know what it means.” My field notes for the day included this
statement showing my concern for harnessing Donovan’s imagination as he flittered from one topic to another: “How can I get Donovan to stay on topic? He is so creative and fun, but he bird walks like the best bird walker that ever bird walked.” We began discussing Donovan’s experience with the coconstructed rubric, and he commented, “I felt like doing the coconstructed rubric was easier than giving yourself a grade. With this, you actually had things you should focus on to get your grades.”

This emphasis on grades was interesting to me, so I asked how the process worked. Other group members chimed in as Donovan listened, and then he offered, “That’s kind of what I do. I may go back and check it. But if I don’t have time, I might just write it and go back and see if it’s good enough.” His indicators of success for his goal were interesting, too. He moved away from specific mention of the tools and convention and wrote more general indicators on his rubric, including, “I will see my writhing [sic] go more in depth the farther I go,” and “I will see my writing become easier to write.” Donovan clearly wanted to make his ideas appear on his paper with greater detail and ease, and he recognized his “creative thinking” and the opportunity to “build on my prevesus writings” as strengths. He shared the following writing sample:

I believe that this is the most event ful part of the story. Because usually, she would end up with the same thing over and over the bank robber winning. With this I also believe that this will be the last playback or their will be one more playback to advance the plot. Lastly, I believe that the last thing that can move the plot forwards is for her to not be scared and face the robber.

Noticeably, Donovan had again departed from the prompt, to analyze the themes of the novel and how the author developed those themes, and the concept map the group had
preparation together. He conceded he needed to continue to work on developing his ideas in “more depth” but did state he found it easier to write, noting this indicator as a strength on his rubric.

**Changes in Autonomy, Competence, and Self-Efficacy**

Donovan’s preoccupation with the tools returned during the third writing conference. Again, I modeled the writing process with my own writing, including visualizing and mindful breathing, concept mapping, and the ICED graphic organizer. As before, I modeled self-assessing my writing and invited feedback. Donovan had completed the concept map electronically, but he worked extensively on his graphic organizer. For ideas, he wrote, “I believe the end of the book was really important, not just because it was the end of the book but because it goes back to one of the major problems of the first few trials and errors.” As evidence, he noted, “The last few pages have Zoe and Daniel walking two his car and him telling her I bought you a phone so you can call people if this every happens again.” He explained:

This makes me believe that the author always planed to end the book with going back to the main problem that she had before telling Daniel about her power. In summary the book had a nice wrap up that I always enjoy when the story goes back and solve a major issue.

Donovan’s postsurvey indicated he used Google Drawings and found the concept map “somewhat helpful,” but he found the graphic organizer, which he spent more time on, as “not very helpful.” He added, “It was not really helpful; it was fine.” However, the paragraph Donovan finalized as his third sample lacked much of the detail he included in
his graphic organizer. He thought having written it in his graphic organizer, he could be brief in his actual paragraph. He wrote:

I believe the suspeness of the sentences ending when zoe thinks she died but it turns out that daniel jumped at him. I feel like the way that they ended the book where she got a phone reflects the beginning of the story where she had to ask the mom to borrow her phone. I always like it when the story wraps up like that.

In contrast to the initial survey experience, Donovan found visualizing “very helpful,” adding, “It helped me have an idea while i wrote.” He did not feel the same about mindful breathing. He rated it “not helpful at all,” and then he repeated, “It did not help. it did not help at all.” He assessed his confidence for the social emotional tools as “very confident” with the exception of mindful breathing, which he assessed as “somewhat confident.” Despite his rubric self-assessment showing he was finding writing easier by the last writing conference, his overall confidence for writing text-dependent analysis decreased to “somewhat confident” by the postsurvey.

Case Study 2: Ethan

Ethan was a quiet, often somber student whose face rarely showed emotion. He was measured and methodical, thinking carefully before responding. He often wore a hooded sweatshirt with the hood pulled up loosely around his head and face. He was an outdoorsy type, who enjoyed activities with adults and peers. Thus, he seemed comfortable with people of all ages and spoke confidently when interacting with adults. He expected to do well in school with little effort, and most of the time, he succeeded. Writing, however, was hit or miss for Ethan, reflecting the uneven development of competencies found in gifted students (Moon, 2009; Reis & Renzulli, 2009). Depending
on his motivation, specifically whether the work would be graded, his writing was highly analytical or rather formulaic. In other words, Ethan exemplified the importance of autonomy for motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When a task was related to a goal that was important to him, primarily earning high grades, Ethan was motivated to perform at a higher level than if it was not. Further, Ethan’s emphasis on grades established much of his motivation was extrinsic (Bandura, 1997). During times he could choose a learning activity in class, Ethan enjoyed playing Wordle and games involving strategy, and he moved away from classmates to sit on the floor by himself when he chose to read silently, so as not to be distracted. When he forgot to move on his own, I suggested he “grab a cushion and find a spot,” which he did without any hesitation.

**Perceived Competence With Social Emotional Intervention Tools**

On his initial survey, Ethan reported concept mapping was “not very helpful,” although he described doing it on Google Drawings, a choice that demonstrated autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017) because this was not a suggested or modeled method. He found the ICED graphic organizer “somewhat helpful,” adding that he “followed the steps listed” and thought “the ICED method could be helpful to writing.” His response caused me to question his sense of competence with the graphic organizer because he seemed to recognize its potential value despite only finding it “somewhat helpful.” He found visualizing and mindful breathing “not very helpful,” although he commented about visualizing, sharing, “I didn’t really get this part. I kind of just visualized myself writing and then did it.” He responded similarly to mindful breathing, noting, “I didn’t really need to calm down in any way.” He expressed feeling “somewhat confident” about
all interventions except mindful breathing, for which he felt “not very confident.”

Overall, he rated his confidence for text-dependent writing as “somewhat confident.”

**Relatedness and Support for Competence**

Prior to the first writing conference, I observed Ethan was slow to get started with his writing, so I moved closer to him in the classroom. My proximity seemed to help, as did the reminder of time remaining to write. Often, Ethan appeared to be thinking before he began writing because he gazed at his screen intently. I observed this gaze during his self-selected activities and designated writing time. I made notes in my field journal about him gazing at his screen with one hand on the keyboard while he was chewing the fingernails from the other hand before beginning to write his analytical paragraph. He kept his hood pulled up over his head throughout the writing time. Ultimately, he finished his entry, and during the first writing conference, Ethan shared:

> The first chapter of 23 minutes sets the road for all of the other chapters. Without the first one, we wouldn’t know the origin of the time-reversal ability, the main plot, and the character’s attitude as quickly. The first chapter plays a primary role in the story, as it shows the origin of the power, why she was in the bank, and a few other backstory elements to the book. Without the details said in the first chapter, the book wouldn’t be as well written.

> After modeling my own writing process, beginning with visualizing and mindful breathing, I shared my process for concept mapping and using the graphic organizer to prepare for writing. I asked Ethan to describe how he prepared to write, and specifically how he experienced the concept map. He responded, “There isn’t really that much thinking involved. I just browse the [concept map designs] a little bit and find the
simplest one that would be the easiest to work with.” When I asked him to tell me more about why simple was desirable in the mind map, he added:

> Just starting out simple, so it’s easier to work with. Plus, your thinking connects, so it’s a mind map—it’s supposed to connect and so you wouldn’t want that to be more complicated. You want to organize; that’s what a mind map is supposed to be.

When describing the graphic organizer, Ethan’s thinking seemed to have evolved a bit from the initial survey. He commented, “I thought it could be useful. I didn’t necessarily see anything wrong with it. I just gives you sort of a form to follow, not necessarily steps.” I affirmed the components of the ICED graphic organizer could be adapted, especially where evidence and explanation are concerned, according to his purpose in writing and how much he had to say. Judging from these responses, I inferred Ethan valued clear and concise tools for forethought (Zimmerman, 2002), so he responded to these aspects more positively than the more imprecise social emotional tools of visualizing and mindful breathing.

**Identified Regulation**

During our first writing conference, Ethan commented that using a think-aloud process was helpful because “you could express your thoughts to people. People understand you better.” In other words, using a think-aloud approach helped him elaborate on his ideas, which he might then transfer to his writing (Fisher & Frey, 2013). He self-assessed his writing by identifying areas needing attention in content and organization, saying, “I think in this paragraph I circled back a lot and didn’t create that many new ideas. If I expressed more information, which I probably should’ve, maybe it
could be easier to get lost in it.” I interpreted this comment to mean Ethan recognized that if he worked on generating and developing his ideas, his writing might flow more easily and he could, perhaps, become absorbed in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Thus, Ethan wrote his goal, sharing, “I would choose to expand off of ideas, because in this writing excerpt I mainly kept circling around the one idea I had.” When I asked him what he meant by “expand off of,” he elaborated, saying, “I just didn’t really use much in the writing. Focused topics are fine if you use lots of details and analysis.” At the same time, he identified strengths upon which he could build, noting, “I think the information I did include was fine. I think how I organized the information was completely fine.” This comment shows a sense of competence with ideation and organization (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which should result in increased self-efficacy as he strengthened his sense of mastery with expanding these aspects of his writing (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002).

**Relatedness and Support for Increasing Competence**

Our second writing conference revealed Ethan’s strong feelings about the text. He departed from the prompt the group had chosen and mapped together; instead, he wrote on what the section the group had read contributed to the text. He was the first to share his writing with the group, and shared the following entry:

This chapter gave some details, but I don’t understand why these would help Zoe. The Jacket guy’s name is Daniel, and she convinces him she’s a time traveler in one timeline, but Daniel will just forget in the next and it would have never happened. But they created a safe word. It doesn’t contribute that much because even if she did explain to him in a separate timeline and use the safeword, Daniel would just think she’s insane. “But the truth is, I have a very limited ability to
travel back in time. And it’s precisely because that sounds so crazy that you gave me some key things to mention to you—to prove I have met you. Several times already.” It might have even worked if Zoe wasn’t poorly explaining it to him and didn’t show that she was nervous, but this evidence shows exactly that. Overall, this chapter is a bit different and more important than the rest, which is a rare delicacy in this book. But, she didn’t even have that many time travels left, so telling Daniel would be close to useless since the plan might fail a couple of times. This book is trying to have the quality of being unique without putting in any actual work.

I practiced intentional pausing to see if he would say more, and Ethan elaborated without prompting, adding, “The whole concept of this book is lazy—just doing the same thing over and over. So, she picked this random number to make it original.” Karim challenged this thinking, stating, “I don’t think 23 is random. It’s the midpoint between 15 and 30.” I realized the participants were truly engaging in reading like a writer and vice versa. Ethan had written about what was really troubling him with the text, showing his autonomy in the way he addressed his concern rather than the prompt and his need as a reader to discuss his feelings about the book with his peers (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Their conversation showed an effort to put themselves in the writer’s head as they debated possible implications of the author’s choices. Importantly, Bandura (1997) and Fisher and Frey (2013) emphasized the importance of collaboration and social engagement with peers, and the effect of the decision I made to require the group to work collaboratively on the concept map and graphic organizer for this entry shows the result (i.e., increased critical thinking and meaningful conversation about text). Ethan’s comments reflected the
importance of social engagement and collaboration. He explained, “I’m in a different mindset when I’m reading, and I sort of reread, and maybe my thinking changes after we talk about it and there’s things I don’t want to say anymore.”

**Integrated Regulation**

After I modeled the interventions in sharing my own writing process, we began to discuss the coconstructed rubric and the performance indicators for Ethan’s chosen goal, I noticed he struggled a bit to explain how he would measure success toward his goal. I asked him to be as specific as possible in describing how he would “expand off of ideas,” and he identified the following criteria: “lots of detail and analysis, clear and organized, flows well.” Ethan’s holistic criteria were evidence of his writing process, and on his self-assessment, he recognized each of his indicators as strengths he could build upon as he continued to work toward his goal (see Figure 4.3). He described using the rubric by saying, “I write whatever I’m writing first, and then I go back to revise it. Sometimes I do revise it, and it really does help to be mindful of what I need to change.”

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<th><strong>Areas needing attention:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Success Indicators</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strengths I can build on:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>I will see these traits in my writing when I have reached my goal:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lots of ideas and analysis</td>
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Figure 4.3 Ethan’s Self-Assessment
Changes in Autonomy, Competence, and Self-Efficacy

For the third writing conference, Ethan continued to describe how he used the rubric. He explained:

Well, when I go back to look at things, basically what I do first is look to see if there’s anything basic like grammatical and punctuation. Then, I go back and revise, see if it’s too wordy or something like that. Basically, I write what comes to mind, and I look back to see if it’s the best it could possibly be. It’s revision. If I see something I’ve said too much, if I could shorten the sentence to make it more concise and clear, like grammatical errors, and I see if it’s like those goals I have, if it’s clear and organized, if it flows well.

His response seemed to support what Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) and Ghaffar et al. (2020) emphasized: the importance of setting process goals and the use of coconstructed rubrics to promote agency for writing, respectively. Ethan sensed his agency (Bandura, 1997) and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as he used his goal and coconstructed rubric to guide his revision process. As before, I shared my writing first, modeling the interventions and the process of self-assessment. Ethan then shared the following entry during our third writing conference:

The setting of this book is a town with a bank in it, and the entire story surrounds that bank. This story covers the bank so much, that it gets more and more uninteresting the further you read, with the occasional difference in the plot that at least gives the story something to work off of. This clearly affects both the plot and the characters, even if it’s indirect. The plot surrounding the bank in the entire story does not only make itself not at interesting as it could be, but also indirectly
makes the characters the same way. Most time travel books can go to different periods, and that is what makes them a great genre. But in this book Zoe can only travel in the same period, making it repetitive. Daniel says, “You mentioned twenty-three minutes.” “That’s as far back as I can go,” Zoe says, “And only up to ten times. This is number nine.” This piece of evidence is important because it confirms that Zoe can travel back in time a total of ten times, showing how repetitive this book can become after a while. Overall, as I have stated in a previous entry, this book tries to have the luxury of a unique storyline but ultimately doesn’t try and it doesn’t come out well. This book could be much, much better but it is just a middle ground.

Ethan’s paragraph shows not only his desire to continue to critique the author’s craft, but this entry also shows his effort to support his critique with evidence from the text. He continued to identify his fluency of ideas and analysis, his clarity and organization, and the flow of his writing overall as strengths.

In the postsurvey, Ethan indicated he found concept mapping “somewhat helpful” but found the ICED graphic organizer “not very helpful.” Because this response had changed from the initial survey, I followed up by asking Ethan how he decided what he should include in his graphic organizer. He asked me to repeat the question, so I rephrased, asking, “How did you decide what to type in?” He thought for a moment and then replied, “I thought about the subject of the paragraph, and then I guess from there, I guess I visualized [laugh] what I would write.” Returning to his postsurvey response, I noted he had reported finding visualizing as “somewhat helpful” and added, “Visualizing could be somewhat helpful. What I did personally was I wrote a little bit, visualized what
else I could write, and wrote more.” I inquired about how the rubric may have affected that process, and he replied, “With the rubric it’s nice to know what the requirements are and knowing that in advance helps you decide.” His success indicators seemed to relate to the components of the graphic organizer. Thus, Ethan appeared to find relatedness in the tools, except for mindful breathing, which he reported finding “not helpful at all.” He added, “I don’t think about breathing when I write.” It is not surprising his confidence rating for using the tools was reported as “somewhat confident” for everything except mindful breathing, which he rated as “not very confident.” Without understanding the relatedness of mindful breathing to the task of analytical writing, his perceived by self-efficacy for using this tool remained lower by comparison (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Case Study 3: Karim

Karim seemed to enjoy expressing his ideas in writing even though he did so in a second language, which may have been due to his very high level of English proficiency (Al-Saadi, 2020). He was often quiet around adults but responded well to direct questions and invitations to explain or expand his thinking. He was polite, loved to play games on his Chromebook, and would often complete an assignment quickly to return to game playing. He displayed intense focus on what he was doing, and he seemed to experience flow in both writing and gaming (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). School achievement was very important to Karim’s family; however, although he seemed to be aware of his family’s expectations, he was most interested in the intellectual challenge of completing his work (Bandura, 1997; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018).
Perceived Competence With Social Emotional Intervention Tools

On his initial survey, Karim indicated he found concept mapping “somewhat helpful” and explained how he used it, stating, “I started by listing all of the settings [in 23 Minutes], which there was only really one, and listing what mood they gave off. Then, I put reasons why I felt that way so i could write them down.” He was less responsive to using a graphic organizer, rating it as “not very helpful” and adding, “It didn’t really help because I didn’t see a way most of the thing would fit in my sentence. I didn’t put any notes because it didn’t help me much.” In other words, after an initial attempt to use it, Karim decided it was not working for him and moved on to drafting, demonstrating his autonomy and rejecting the relatedness of the organizer to his purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2017). He said visualizing was “not helpful at all” and followed up with, “I never really [find visualization helpful], though I made a high school/college essay or even paragraph [using visualization].” This response seemed to suggest Karim understood the relevance of text-dependent writing to the type of academic work he would be expected to do as he continued his education. He rated mindful breathing as “very helpful,” explaining, “Whenever I had to think about what I had to do next, this made my mind not strain so I never felt like I couldn’t do it. I didn’t really breathe. I just stopped what I was doing and then relaxed.” This comment demonstrated Karim experienced the relevance of mindfulness to his needs as a writer (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017). His confidence for mindful breathing was, not surprisingly, “very confident” as compared to “not very confident” for using the graphic organizer and visualizing, and “somewhat confident” for concept mapping. Overall, Karim described his confidence for writing text-dependent analysis as “somewhat confident.”
Relatedness and Support for Competence

Karim’s first writing conference revealed his strong writer’s voice. He shared the following entry:

I think that the storm and rain sets a really good mood at the beginning of the story and is why Zoe goes to the bank in the first place, to get out of the rain. And the fact that a robbery is happening during the storm where all you can hear is the rain on the roof really make it feel dangerous and like a real showdown. Imagine your just at the bank attending to some business like putting your paycheck in the bank, and then, all sudden a man pulled out a gun and starts pointing it at everyone, including you. If that doesn’t give off danger vibes, then I don’t know what will.

After I had modeled the interventions in sharing my writing, I asked Karim to describe his experience with concept mapping for mood. Karim said, “I usually use one of the spiderweb maps because it’s simple and flexible. If you can find one that can suit multiple areas, it will be easier to work with.” I inquired what he meant by “multiple areas,” and his response again showed an awareness of the relevance of the skills for general academic use. He replied, “I mean, like, it can be used for [English language arts], for science, and for social studies.” Karim added that talking about the ideas in a concept map was also helpful because “it helps people understand why you think something.”

When it came to using the graphic organizer, Karim explained his frustration with the ICED tool, saying:
I mean personally, when I tried to use it, I didn’t find it helpful. I found that it held me back because my mind kept conflicting. My mind was trying to write an essay, but when I used the ICED, I ended up making an argument.

This response shows Karim had a clear and focused purpose for his writing, and he exhibited agency in choosing the tool(s) he found helpful for his purpose. Although he was not describing the practice of mindful breathing specifically, the awareness that breathing practice is intended to promote was evident in his self-monitoring remarks. His choices about the social emotional intervention tools are indicative of his growing sense of control, autonomy, and ownership of his writing (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

**Identified Regulation**

Karim self-assessed his writing sample with the teacher-constructed rubric by acknowledging, “It’s hard to put what i understand on paper so it always comes out how i don’t want it.” Yet, he recognized his comprehension and critical thinking skills as a strength, stating, “I can understand articles and essays well.” Although he identified “organizing [his] writing well” as a strength to build on, he noted, “I can’t use transition words very well.” He returned to the difficulty with expressing himself when it came to assessing voice in his own writing, recognizing, “I know how to find theme and tone,” in other writers’ work, but then acknowledged, “It’s hard to describe what i’m thinking.”

His writing goal aligned well with his self-assessment: “Be able to transition well because then it makes people understand my thought process more.” To measure his success, Karim wrote, “I will use more transition phrases and bridge sentences.”
Relatedness and Support for Increasing Competence

However, in pursuit of his goal, absences caused Karim to miss much of the collaborative work his book group completed. For example, he was not present to assist in choosing a prompt or for creating the group concept map. Our second writing conference began, as usual, with teacher modeling as I described how I had used the interventions and shared my work. Karim submitted the following entry for the second writing conference:

I think that Daniel is the character that starts the whole point of the story, the only reason that Zoe uses the playback is to save Daniel but every time she fails to save him and even lets regular people die so she tries again and again to see if she can save him with little to no casualties.

When he assessed this writing sample later, Karim added a success indicator about grammar in recognition of his run-on sentence, inserting he would recognize success when he doesn’t “see lots of small grammar errors.”

Integrated Regulation

Karim seemed to like the accountability of the coconstructed rubric in general.

When I asked how he experienced its use, he replied:

I think it’s much easier to see what you need to work at. It’s easier to be mindful of when you’re using your rubric. If I know my strength, I can be mindful of that. However, if I am mindful of the things I need to work on, it can help me.

I responded with interest in his use of the word “mindful,” and he explained:

I often write in intervals, so I’ll write a few words, a few sentences, a few paragraphs, and then, I’ll go and look at the rubric. If it’s going well, I’ll just keep
writing, or if it’s not, I might stop and change some things. If it’s really bad, I might start over.

Again, Karim’s awareness of his writing process and the agency he exercised in making choices indicated his ownership of a writing identity, and his self-efficacy and self-determination (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

**Changes in Autonomy, Competence, and Self-Efficacy**

By the third writing conference, Karim was still finding the use of concept mapping “somewhat helpful,” explaining, “I started with the topic of my prompt and then, I branched off from there.” Despite my modeling and that of his peers, he continued to reject the graphic organizer, saying, “I don’t feel like graphic organizers help me much so I didn’t use it.” However, he did find visualizing “very helpful,” explaining, “by picturing what I wanted to write I could write with much more detail.” His assessment of mindful breathing had changed dramatically to “not very helpful.” He added, “I don’t find it very helpful because I don’t feel very nervous while writing.” The tool was no longer helpful because his experience with writing in this instance was not something from which he needed a break, as he had needed previously. His perceived self-efficacy, described as confidence, indicated great unevenness. He reported feeling “very confident” about concept mapping, “not very confident” about using the graphic organizer, “somewhat confident” about visualizing, and “not confident at all” about mindful breathing. I did not follow up with him to inquire if this simply meant he did not feel confident about it because he did not use it, or if he did not use it because he did not feel confident in using it. However, based on his earlier responses, I inferred the former
over the latter. Karim’s overall confidence for writing text-dependent analysis remained “somewhat confident.”

Karim’s final writing sample and self-assessment detailed his experience as a reader. Although his sample lacked specific examples of words showing connotation, he successfully communicated the urgency felt by the character and the suspense this created for the reader. He wrote:

The author’s use of connotation makes the story feel much more grim and bleak, because of that you feel that you are losing more and more hope as Zoe runs through her playbacks and still seems to get no progress. She has run through about 6–7 playbacks and she only has 10 playback in total until she has to leave that part of time alone. Zoe at first only lost Daniel with could have been fine, but she decided to use playback, and everytime there were more casualties than when she first went through the robbery, so instead, she tries stopping Daniel before he goes in but the bank still gets shot up. She then tries to work with Daniel to help stop the bank robbery; however, with so few chances left we can’t help but feel nervous and desperation.

Karim reflected on his writing, saying:

When I looked over it, I saw that there were lots of minor grammatical errors, like sometimes I used the wrong word or added too many words. It kind of messed up my writing. I was writing the paragraph but I felt like I was just writing – like I normally write what comes into my mind. I don’t really plan. I type whatever comes to mind and if it works, it works, and I keep it.
During our writing conference, I inquired how Karim decided what worked, to which he replied, “I mostly read and go back two or three sentences that I wrote and see if there are transitions, and I see if it makes sense in general.” When I asked how he decided where he wanted to end up, he added:

Once I feel like I’ve written down all that I want people to know, then that’s how I know. That if, like, there’s nothing more I need to say. If I say anything more, I would just start to repeat myself.

Because of his strong sense of agency for writing, I asked Karim about autonomy in the choice of a prompt. He replied:

I can write if I have a prompt from someone else. I can write, but I feel like I write best when I choose my own. Mostly because if I choose my own prompt, I know what I’m looking to write, so I don’t feel as restricted.

As for visualizing and breathing, Karim noted, “If I am writing everything I felt, then I don’t really need it. I just write it down, a few words at a time. When I write what comes to mind, I don’t feel as burnt out.” This comment made me think Karim was using analytical writing to process texts and explore complex ideas, which was one of my hopes for my young writers.

**Analysis of Data Based on Research Questions**

Returning to the problem of practice and research question, the case studies presented suggest each learner brings unique social emotional context to the writing process, and this context shapes their motivation to use tools for planning, drafting, and revising their written work. The problem of practice was some students viewed analytical writing as an academic exercise rather than a useful tool for making meaning and
communicating about texts, and I believe this view of text-dependent analytical writing remained somewhat true despite implementing interventions. The task was, after all, an academic skill mandated by the institution of school. However, it seemed when students were given the opportunity to plan and share their writing together, along with opportunities to give and receive feedback, they experienced greater motivation and mastery (Hodges, 2017; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Further, each learner’s context reflected Vygotsky’s social constructivist skill attainment in the zone of proximal development and the contextual nature of the social construction of knowledge (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010). In other words, the learners benefitted from the tools to the degree they aligned with the zone of proximal development for that student, and the student’s mindset about trying to use them.

The overarching question for this study was: How can social emotional learning, including self-regulation strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to affect motivation, support agency and self-efficacy, and increase analytical writing skills for middle-level writers who are identified as academically gifted? The data discussed in each of the case studies suggest that, to the degree the student writers were able to see the value of the tools and use them, they resulted in stronger writing. For example, the second writing samples for Donovan and Ethan showed more development of ideas supported by text evidence, and supported by their own reasoning, than their first samples. However, there was unevenness in each writer’s journey, which could be described as a trek through hills and valleys rather than climbing a smooth, gradual incline to a mountaintop experience. For instance, Karim’s second entry was minimally developed compared to his first and third entries, perhaps because he was not present for
the collaborative concept mapping the group used to prepare for writing. Further, Ethan’s third writing sample showed more text evidence and interpretation to support his topic sentence, although his second entry reads more like a critique of the author’s craft. Donovan’s second entry did not reflect the detailed forethought of his graphic organizer, which resulted in few gains in his writing fluency. Still, he did write his ideas in the graphic organizer.

The subquestions for the study helped to illustrate the interpretation of the data further. The first subquestion was: How did learning and using self-regulation strategies affect the students’ motivation to produce analytical writing? Based on the quality and fluency of the student’s writing samples, the findings suggest the social emotional learning interventions had a limited effect on motivation, although two of the three participants ascribed value to visualization. For example, Donovan reported on both the pre- and post-surveys that he found concept mapping “somewhat helpful.” His assessment of the usefulness of the ICED graphic organizer declined from “somewhat helpful” to “not very helpful.” However, my assessment as a teacher was that including the development of ideas from his graphic organizer in his final paragraph would have resulted in stronger writing. By the end of the cycle, Ethan’s pre- and post-survey ratings of concept mapping and using a graphic organizer seemed to have reversed. By the end of the cycle, he preferred the concept mapping to using the graphic organizer. Karim’s pre- and post-surveys reflected no change in his perceived usefulness of concept mapping or using the graphic organizer, but during our writing conferences, he described what he considered comparable tasks in his head rather than on paper.
Goal setting did seem to have a focusing effect on writing quality, especially in the writing conference immediately following the goal setting. The longer the interval of time between the goal setting and the writing, the less effect it seemed to have on writing quality based on my assessment as the teacher. I say this statement because the time lapse between the first and second writing conferences was approximately 5 weeks due to standardized testing and spring break schedules. When I asked the students to locate their writing goals, they required reminders about where they could find them and did not seem immediately familiar with them. As a result, I inferred they had not been referencing the goals during their writing process. However, the interval between the second and third writing entries was less than 3 weeks, and the students were able to recall their goals with greater ease. Thus, their discussion about the usefulness of the rubric based on their goals showed they were more relevant to their writing task. Ethan’s comment is illustrative, and he shared: “With the rubric, it’s nice to know what the requirements are and knowing that in advance helps you decide.”

The second subquestion was: How did developing students’ self-regulation skills affect their sense of agency for producing analytical writing? The students seemed to develop agency more as the result of social interaction rather than using the tools. This development was particularly evident in the writing samples submitted following group concept mapping. The fluency of ideas and the discussion their shared ideas sparked were evident in the second writing sample as compared to the first. For example, Donovan’s first response contained one key idea referenced in three sentences. By the second response, he had added a fourth sentence and an insightful remark about how the plot might develop further. Karim, on the other hand, who was not present for the group
collaboration, wrote one long run-on sentence for his second response and did not
develop the voice so evident in his first response. Further, when the tools were employed
in collaborative group work, the students seemed to enjoy their writing more in addition
to producing better quality work, as evidenced by both the progression in their writing
samples and the authentic conversation they had in discussing the author’s craft and their
strong feelings about the text. My field notes for the second writing conference
exclaimed, “They’re reading like writers!” I recognized the students were developing
their writers’ identities as they critiqued the author’s use of the genre.

The last subquestion was: What was the relationship between the students’ sense
of self-efficacy as writers and production of analytical writing about texts? This question
raised concerns about the gap between perceived self-efficacy and actual efficacy for
analytical writing. For an adolescent student identified as gifted, many factors influence
their interactions with peers, their developing identities as people and writers, and their
perceptions of themselves; additionally, their skills fluctuate over time, as illustrated in
the case studies (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018; Moon, 2009; National Association for
Gifted Children, 2009; Oppong et al., 2019; Pyryt, 2004; Reis & Renzulli, 2009).
Constructing indicators of success was a very challenging process for my students, which
made me wonder how they determined their level of mastery and agency without specific
criteria in previous writing experiences. The word “feel” was used by all participants to
describe their writing experiences, which caused me to consider if the ease of writing was
a factor in their perceived self-efficacy. For example, as an indicator of success on his
coconstructed rubric, Donovan included, “I will see my writing become easier to write.”
Initially, Ethan seemed to find visualizing difficult, stating, “I didn’t really get this part.”
However, with additional modeling and practice, he noted, “Visualizing could be somewhat helpful. What I did personally was I wrote a little bit, visualized what else I could write, and wrote more.” Perhaps the autonomy-supportive environment created ease. Surely, this ease is related to agency and competence (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2017). As Donovan seemed to suggest, ease also results from recognizing progress in one’s work. Perhaps ease is simply enjoying the flow of pouring out what is on their mind, as Karim indicated. Perhaps ease in writing is all these things in varying combinations at varying times.

Supplemental Data Analysis

In addition to the data triangulated from student artifacts, interviews, and field journal notes, I used Quirkos as a tool for descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) to identify three recurring themes: social engagement, the exercise of autonomy, and the experience of competence. First, social engagement is part of the communication process that is writing, so the participants found it helpful to interact with their peers and even family members as they developed their ideas. This idea is indicative of Ryan and Deci’s (2017) concept of relatedness. As evidence, all participants expressed a desire to be understood by others. For example, Donovan noted, “If you state your ideas out loud, it can give you more confidence, like when you talk to a friend.” He also commented that when he was deciding on his revisions, he asked his parents to help him. This comment suggests he found input from a trusted friend or adult helpful to his writing process. Similarly, Ethan described the benefit of using a think aloud, stating, “So, you could express your thoughts to people. People understand you better.” Karim seemed to agree, commenting, “It helps
people understand why you think something.” These comments reflected the social constructivism of Vygotsky (1999) and social cognition theory (Bandura, 1997).

Next, in addition to reflecting Ryan and Deci’s (2017) theory of self-determination with a theme of relatedness, the exercise of autonomy (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2017) emerged as a frequent theme. For example, participants experienced the exercise of autonomy in choosing what tools related to their purpose and goals as writers. Autonomy was evidenced by their candid responses about the helpfulness of the intervention strategies, or lack thereof, on the post-survey, recalling that none of the interventions, apart from visualizing, were rated as “very helpful” by participants. In fact, participants described generating and organizing ideas in their minds’ eye rather than on paper. For instance, Karim described his writing process by saying, “I normally write what comes into my mind. I don’t really plan. I type whatever comes to mind and if it works, it works, and I keep it.” He went on to describe the benefit of being able to choose his own prompt, explaining, “I can write if I have a prompt from someone else, I can write, but I feel like I write best when I choose my own, . . . mostly because if I choose my own prompt I know what I’m looking to write, so I don’t feel as restricted.” Likewise, Ethan stated, “Basically, I write what comes to mind, and I look back to see if it’s the best it could possibly be.” Donovan took time to use the ICED graphic organizer, but when it was time to compose his response, the ideas and evidence he planned did not appear in his paragraph. Autonomy was, in fact, the strongest theme to emerge in the descriptive process in Quirkos, lending further evidence to its importance to participants.
Lastly, participants’ experiences with competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) were a major part of their overall writing experience. Like relatedness and autonomy, mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997) or experiences with competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) were a strong, recurrent theme. Competence was particularly evident in their self-assessments of writing on the coconstructed rubrics. Each participant identified both areas needing attention and areas of strength to build upon. Ethan was especially reflective in this regard. For example, he noted an area needing attention, sharing, “I think in this paragraph I circled back a lot and didn't create that many new ideas.” However, as an area showing strengths, he stated, “I think the information that I did include was fine.” By the last writing conference, he marked all of his indicators of success as strengths in his writing. Donovan described his exercise of agency as part of developing competence by stating:

So, for me, I believe in myself to do it like I do stop motion videos. Where basically, I have an idea in my head, I start writing, and at the midpoint, I stop and check for any errors, and then I keep writing, and then I polish it up.

For Donovan, exercising agency to build competence connected to his sense of autonomy and relatedness, because he stated he might decide to delete everything and start over, or perhaps to ask his parents for suggestions. Karim was particularly aware of his need for competence with the conventions of English, a second language for him. For example, he explained his revision process, sharing: “When I looked over it, I saw that there were lots of minor grammatical errors, like sometimes I used the wrong word or added too many words. It kind of messed up my writing.” However, he recognized his “ideas” and a
“good framework” as strengths in his writing, indicating his sense of competence in these areas.

These recurring themes from the findings in the discussion of each case study suggest social emotional tools had different effects for each participant. Participants did not seem to experience greater self-efficacy from presurvey to postsurvey; however, two of the participants, Donovan and Karim, shared they found the writing process less frustrating than their initial assessments indicated. Further, the limitations of self-assessment affect the findings. Participants seemed to vary widely on what they used to determine mastery and identity as a writer. Donovan and Ethan mentioned meeting the requirements and earning a grade. For Karim, mastery was more intrinsic and related to how effectively he communicated what was on his mind. These variations give rise of several questions. These questions, and the implications for these findings, are the topic of Chapter 5.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to engage my students in applying social emotional learning skills, including self-regulation and mindfulness, to produce analytical writing as a tool for communicating their thinking about texts and themselves. Intervention strategies were introduced and integrated with instruction using the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Over the course of three phases, students participated in small group writing conferences with other students who were reading the same text and prepared text-dependent analysis writing. Students practiced self-assessment of their writing samples using a think-aloud approach modeled by their teacher. Data analysis was ongoing and data from each phase informed the next.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

The problem of practice for this research was affective because it concerned the feeling among students that text-dependent analysis was an unappealing academic exercise rather than a useful tool for comprehending and communicating about texts. As part of this action research, I sought new ways to support students’ motivation and engagement by creating space for the “openings in which the flame that knows just how it wants to burn/can find its way” (Brown, 2012, pp. 147–148). In response to the overarching question (i.e., How may social emotional learning, including self-regulation for writing and mindfulness strategies, be integrated with writing instruction to support motivation and self-efficacy for text-dependent analytical writing among middle-level writers who are identified as academically gifted?), I considered how both cognitive, affective, and social interventions could be added to the writing instruction in my classroom. The findings suggest at least some of the interventions, particularly the practices of goal setting and visualization, were used as fuel for writing text-dependent analysis, to borrow language from Brown’s (2012) poem Fire. Although the participants’ perceived self-efficacy did not change over the course of the 8-week research cycle, the findings suggest an environment that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness can promote more autonomous motivation.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the relationship among the study results, the extant literature, and the guiding theories. The next section examines what the findings suggest for classroom practice, provides recommendations for supporting
motivation and self-efficacy in the classroom, and offers possibilities for future research. Following those sections, an actionable implementation plan for using and sharing the findings is articulated. This section is followed by my reflections as a teacher–researcher on the action research and this study’s methodology. As part of this reflection, I include commentary about the limitations of this study’s design, how the results might be improved in future research, and how this action research study might be extended. Finally, I discuss how this study’s overall conclusions might increase understanding of the problem of practice.

**Results in Relationship to Literature**

For each student, direct instruction with social emotional intervention tools and the use of a gradual release instructional framework were critical in developing their sense of competence with the tools. The centrality of the gradual release instructional framework was consistent with both Ryan and Deci’s (2017) emphasis on effectance support in building competence and with mastery experiences as a primary source for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, both Bandura (1997) and Ryan and Deci (2017) emphasized how each participant’s personal factors presented a unique context for the development of skills and understandings. For example, Donovan’s dislike for assigned writing tasks may have originated from his need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and his heightened imaginative sensitivities (Gross et al., 2007; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2015; Piechowski et al., 1985; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). On the other hand, Ethan’s desire for good grades represented an extrinsic though autonomous motivation (Bandura, 1997; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and a heightened sensitivity to the expectations of parents and teachers. Ethan’s perfectionism may have caused him
to become frustrated with tools that he did not fully understand, like visualizing (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009; Pyryt, 2004). Karim, with his primary discourse from a different language and culture (Gee, 1989, 2001), and his intrinsic motivation for intellectual challenge, seemed to enjoy setting high personal goals for himself (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018). This intrinsic motivation was evidenced by his desire to express himself clearly while avoiding grammatical errors, even though conventions were not addressed by the teacher or in the teacher-constructed rubric. The participants’ different religious cultures may have impacted their openness to mindfulness practices (McCaw, 2020). I was intentional about modeling simple, secular practices of visualizing success and awareness of breathing rather than discussing or modeling meditation in any form. Making this decision was my attempt to respect the different religious cultures in my classroom, and to stay in the boundaries of experience promoted by my district.

However, each participant’s personal context, religious and otherwise, influenced their motivation, implying that understanding a student’s social identities is critical to planning equitable and appropriately differentiated instruction. Gee (1989) and Boutte and Johnson (2013) stated there is an inherent risk for linguicism in English language arts instruction. Understanding social identities suggests students have much to teach their teachers, and fostering their autonomy can be one way to learn from them. The autonomy supports for choice in reading selections, writing prompts, and the use of social emotional intervention tools were necessary for fostering the democratic environment and means for the “intellectual construction of the self” (Luke, 2012, p. 7). The sentence stems provided in the ICED graphic organizer and the discussion questions for noticing were a means of
providing support for collaborative dialogue and self-expression (Fisher & Frey, 2013, Perry et al., 2002, Thwaite et al., 2020). Further, Ryan & Deci (2017) shared, “Children (like adults) are not just in institutions [schools] to accomplish adult-established cognitive goals, but also to live and to be” (p. 361). As educators, to borrow imagery from Brown (2012), our task is not just to lay logs of skills and strategies, but also to create space for being, for imagination, for catching hold of an idea or experience, and following it where it leads.

The complexity of the writing process was evident in these data through the unevenness of work product and changes in perceived competence and self-efficacy. The cyclical nature of forethought, performance, and self-reflection in self-regulated learning theory (Oppong et al., 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Zimmerman, 2002, 2008) supports the idea that mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997) and fostering competence for motivation take time and are nonlinear processes. In this study, I supported the recursive process of writing with direct instruction, modeling using think-aloud demonstrations (De Smedt et al., 2020; Fidalgo et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2008), grouping students for discussing their reading and writing, and allowing opportunities for peer feedback and self-assessment (Graham & Perin, 2007; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007), to promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Each of these needs and experiences supported increasingly more autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and increased self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991, 1997; De Smedt et al., 2020). Though the results of this action research found little change in self-efficacy over the 8-week period,
it is possible a longer intervention duration and changing the timing to avoid end-of-year testing could yield different, and likely more positive, findings.

Working in a small group was an instructional choice based on my desire to increase social collaboration for learning (Bandura, 1997; Fisher & Frey, 2013) and building competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the first phase of the study, students completed their concept maps individually, and demonstrated minimal fluency of ideas. After completing their graphic organizer collaboratively in the second phase, they were encouraged to discuss their graphic organizers in their literature circle group (Lee & Tan, 2010; Zimmerman, 2002) before composing individual paragraphs about their literature circle text. This instructional design supported students in the writing process because the results of the first conference suggested students were not as familiar with the process of planning their writing as I had expected. The difference between the individual concept map and the group-generated concept map (see Figure 4.2) revealed the increased fluency of ideas resulting from collaboration.

Another facet of autonomy, supported by the literature and related directly to competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and the experience of mastery (Bandura, 1997), was the use of coconstructed rubrics (Ghaffar et al., 2020). All three participants expressed satisfaction with the process of autonomous goal setting for their writing process, which further supports research by Zimmerman (2002) and Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999). However, Bandura (1997), Deci and Flaste (1995), Ryan and Deci (2017), Zimmerman and Bandura (1994), and Zimmerman and Kitsantas (1999) noted individuals vary greatly in their goal orientation; in other words, learners vary in their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and these variances also impact self-efficacy. Further, Fisher et al. (2016) and
Ryan and Deci (2017) emphasized learners must understand the criteria that constitute competence and progress toward a goal.

In this action research, the participants’ difficulty with deciding which criteria for success to include on their coconstructed rubrics revealed a need for more explicit instruction on the traits of effective text-dependent analysis. I felt fortunate my action research design allowed me to modify my instructional plans. This process of goal setting and determining indicators of success was revealing because students found it difficult to identify specific indicators to show progress toward their self-determined writing goal. In other words, they were able to set goals, but they needed assistance with knowing what realizing part of the goal would look like. Scaffolding was a necessary component of being able to monitor their own progress; thus, following the “plan-act-observe-reflect cycle” (Lewin, 1948, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 105) of action research was critical to their success. Instructional plans were adjusted to include a brief lesson on the six traits of effective writing (Bolkema, 2018) and sample rubric goals (Jones, 2014) related to those traits, which provided models for students (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Upon reflecting on the challenges the students experienced with developing their rubrics, I adjusted the pace of the study to align with the readiness of the participants. Once my students were able to compose goals related to their desired performance, they responded positively to the clarity of expectations, and they also recognized progress in their writing. This ability to self-monitor and self-assess their progress toward their writing goals could lead to greater self-efficacy and persistence with writing over time (Ghaffar et al., 2020; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Zimmerman et al., 1996; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). As Ryan & Deci (2017) pointed out,
competence is the result of applied autonomy and is, by definition, self-regulated. Both literature and findings of this action research suggest self-regulation strategies for writing, the practice of goal setting, the use of coconstructed rubrics, self-monitoring, and self-assessment are mutually reinforcing. Further, the setting of challenging personal goals and self-assessing personal progress toward the goal in a group setting allowed participants to be more authentic in their assessments because their needs for relatedness were met (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Lastly, literature has suggested mindfulness practices can support social emotional well-being and academic achievement in schools (Doss & Bloom, 2018; Haberlin & O’Grady, 2018; McCaw, 2020; Olton-Weber et al., 2020; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019), and the findings of this study support this connection as well. The practice of visualizing was particularly interesting because my students engaged in this practice in different ways. For example, Donovan pictured himself “being happy,” whereas Ethan seemed to use visualization as a tool for forethought (Zimmerman, 2002) as he planned his writing. However, Karim seemed initially more interested in mindful breathing than in visualizing, which seems to support the idea that students’ personal contexts affect their use of mindfulness strategies just as they affect other aspects of self-regulation.

**Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

The findings of this action research, though not generalizable to other populations or contexts, have convinced me that voice and choice are essential to motivation, which means I must consistently seek ways to create a classroom environment that supports my students’ needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. My role as a teacher requires me to control what types of writing are assigned based on academic standards and high-
stakes tests, and I cannot simply allow my students to write only their favorite types of writing. However, by finding opportunities to offer choices whenever possible, to engage students in conversing about texts, to share their writing with each other, and to self-assess their work authentically, I can support them in moving to increasingly more autonomous motivation, even if it remains extrinsic. I find both the cognitive and psychological emphases of Bandura (1997) and Ryan and Deci (2017), respectively, compelling; after all, my students are whole human beings (Whole Child Gifted Task Force, 2018). Further research in social emotional aspects of contextualized instruction seems wise, particularly regarding mindfulness strategies for gifted students, who may present more complex and intense socioemotional characteristics.

The focus lesson (Fisher & Frey, 2013) on concept mapping was particularly illuminating because students did not have the prior knowledge I expected them to have with this technique. Those who were familiar with concept mapping, in a general sense, were not able to describe its usefulness to writing other than generating ideas. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the reason for their lack of familiarity with a prewriting tool as common as concept mapping, I inferred the COVID-19 global pandemic and frequent interruptions to their schooling and writing practice might be a factor. Upon observing their confusion with the relevance of this technique for showing the relationships among ideas in composition, I provided additional direct instruction in the form of an online lesson through BrainPop, including electronic templates with a variety of concept mapping options.

Using coconstructed rubrics as a tool for authentic self-assessment is another practice recommendation, because this rubric served as an exceptional tool to help me
assist my students in recognizing the strengths in their own writing and what constitutes exemplary text-dependent analysis. Therefore, it could be a worthwhile topic for future research. Additional research on this topic could be how to shift the focus of writing instruction away from extrinsic motivators, such as comparisons to others based on grades and standardized test scores, to making space for more autonomous, intrinsic motivation (Guay, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Using coconstructed rubrics seems highly complementary to Fisher and Frey’s (2013) gradual release framework for instruction. Explicit, direct instruction; modeling; guided practice; time for independent work; and opportunities for collaboration and peer feedback are all parts of a process to promote both competence and relatedness. Another natural complement would be portfolio assessment for writing. The emphasis on grades and standardized testing has become so powerful that its harmful effects of motivation are hard to overcome by middle school (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This difficulty is true for all students, but when accompanied by heightened sensitivities and intensity of experience common among gifted students, the impact of focusing on extrinsic motivators such as grades and tests becomes even more concerning (Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018; National Association for Gifted Children, 2009; Vygotsky, 2009).

Lastly, I plan to continue promoting the use of mindfulness in the context of writing instruction, but I will offer and model mindfulness practices as tools, inviting others to choose their level of participation in using them. Too often, I fear educators extinguish the flame of motivation for writing with long lists of requirements and things to do. Educators must make space for students to simply be so they can develop self-
awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Ryan and Deci (2017) framed mindfulness as a tool for problem-solving, stating:

> Mindfulness allows people to contact information from both internal (needs, feelings, and values) and external (social environmental) sources and to use the information in a reflective way to come to a clear focus and gain a sense of what, all things considered, they would find most helpful to do. (p. 451)

As I reflect on my teaching practice with middle schoolers, this thoughtful process of becoming self-aware and situationally aware before deciding on actions or attitudes seems central to the developmental tasks of adolescence. Supporting middle school students in this process across a variety of domains is part of a teacher’s professional responsibility.

Moving forward, my implementation plan is simple. I plan to tell the stories of my students and myself as a practitioner. I look forward to doing this through professional writing and seeking opportunities for coaching teachers, both preservice and those already in classrooms. I feel confident in modeling instructional strategies, but I am most interested in modeling supporting strategies for practitioners’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Through my experiences with many mentors over the course of my career, those who gave me space and reflective feedback to discover and reflect on my teaching practice have had the most influence on my pedagogy and the person I want to be in the classroom. Thus, I hope to pay it forward.

**Reflection on Action Research and Methodology, Limitations, and Suggestions**

The beauty of action research is its flexibility to meet the real needs of teachers and students. Twice in this study, I needed to provide more explicit instruction on topics
related to the research than I had anticipated. It quickly became apparent students were not as familiar with concept mapping or mind mapping as I expected, nor did they understand its relevance. Similarly, students had difficulty suggesting criteria for success on their coconstructed rubrics, so their goals were difficult to monitor for progress. In these instances, action research methodology, with its cycles of “plan–act–observe–reflect” (Lewin, 1948, as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 105), afforded me the flexibility to tailor my instructional plans and timing to provide more direct instruction and guided practice before expecting students to engage independently. Using a multiple case study approach in the action research design allowed me to conduct the study without disrupting normal classroom routines, which provided a more natural setting and generating authentic local knowledge.

One limitation of this study was the difficulty associated with self-reporting; I noticed students’ growth in writing ability even when they reported no change. Bandura (1997) emphasized perceived self-efficacy and actual self-efficacy are not the same phenomena. Bandura offered several reasons why self-assessed efficacy could differ from actual performance, including overestimating one’s ability, which is common among children, or underestimating the difficulty of the work. In some instances, both errors in thinking occur simultaneously. Even on validated scales of self-efficacy, there is the problem of self-reporting. For my purposes in this action research, I was most interested in how participants experienced the tools used as interventions and noticing how their experiences might be reflected in their perceived self-efficacy and their text-dependent writing. Thus, I wonder how the variables Bandura (1997) discussed may have
contributed to the participants reporting no increases in their self-efficacy for text-dependent analysis.

Another relevant limitation for these participants is the timing of the study, which took place at the end of the school year. The active research cycle was interrupted by state testing, final exams, and end-of-year activities. If it had been possible to conduct it earlier in the year and for a longer duration, I wonder how the results may have differed. Especially because writing instruction is so very time consuming, a longer active research cycle may have been beneficial.

If I were to extend this action research, I would provide more support for peer questioning rather than relying on teacher questioning. Although participants had opportunities for questioning each other in their literature circle meetings and writing conferences, they seldom did so. I expected additional direct instruction, guided practice, and extended time for independent practice with questioning would have encouraged them to engage in questioning more often. I would also include an artifact for more frequent self-monitoring efforts and use of strategies (Zimmerman, 2013), such as a writer’s reflection notebook. Not only would this be likely to assist in more thoughtful self-assessment on the part of the student, but it would also serve as a record of change over time and another source of dialogue for writing conferences.

Summary

This action research study used a multiple case study design to explore a problem of practice. Some of my students viewed text-dependent analysis as an unappealing academic exercise rather than a useful tool for comprehending and communicating about texts, and I needed to find new ways to support their motivation and engagement.
Therefore, this study aspired to integrate self-regulation and mindfulness strategies with the writing process and to understand how the students’ experiences with these strategies affected their motivation and self-efficacy for analytical writing. I found recurring themes of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the participants experienced the interventions of concept mapping, using a graphic organizer, visualizing, and practicing mindful breathing. Although their perceived self-efficacy did not change over the 8-week study, the evidence showed their motivation changed from identified regulation toward integrated regulation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2017), which was evidence of more autonomous motivation. The significance of the gradual release framework for instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2013) and an autonomy-supportive classroom environment (Guay, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017) were also factors in analyzing the students’ experiences.
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APPENDIX A: CONCEPT MAP TEMPLATE (IRA/NCTE, 2013)

Name: ___________________________________ Date: ________________

Concept Map

The concept map below is a way for you to show relationships between words and concepts. An arrow connecting two words shows that those words are related in some way. When you’re done, you can group words that go together with a circle or box.
**Appendix B: ICED Graphic Organizer (Opalesski-Dimeo, 2014)**

I’ve ICED this paragraph!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does ICED mean?</th>
<th>Sentence Frames</th>
<th>My Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong>=introduce your topic</td>
<td>Example task: How does this section contribute to the development of ideas in the text? Topic Sentence: This section contributes to the development of ideas in (title of the text) by...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is where you write a topic sentence to introduce your answer to the question in the task.</td>
<td>For instance, in the text it states, “<em><strong><strong>” (Author’s Last Name, Page or Paragraph #). For example _____ says “</strong></strong></em>” (Author’s Last Name, Page or Paragraph #).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong>=Cite evidence</td>
<td>This makes me think _____ This is important because _____ The author uses _____ to _____</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your evidence may be a combination of facts, examples, details, and direct quotations from the passage. Remember that each piece of evidence must relate directly to your topic sentence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong>=Explain the evidence</td>
<td>Overall, this clearly suggests... In summary... As one can see...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is where you make your thinking visible by expanding on what each piece of evidence means. You are making the connection between your topic sentence and all the evidence clear to your audience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong>=Defend your paragraph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By defend, we mean pull it all together and show how the point you introduce in your topic sentence is supported by your evidence and explanation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Read, Write, Think. [https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/iced-elaboration#strategy](https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/iced-elaboration#strategy)
**APPENDIX C: SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC MODEL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Mrs. Crocker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date: 4/25/22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My writing goal:** Use transition words to make the single idea of each sentence clear and focus the sentence on just that one idea. Consider using paraphrasing frames to do this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas needing attention: Sentences are too wordy and confusing.</th>
<th>Success Indicators I will see these traits in my writing when I have reached my goal:</th>
<th>Strengths I can build on: Use of transition words and paraphrasing frames.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Each sentence in my paragraph:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Is clear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Has an obvious purpose in the paragraph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Relates a key idea or message concisely.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Develops the central idea in my topic sentence.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX D: SEMISTRUCTURED STUDENT SURVEY

Name:

Section 1: Self-Regulation Strategies

1. Before you began writing, you created a concept map of your paragraph’s main topic using the key word in the prompt you chose. How helpful was making the concept map?
   A. Very helpful
   B. Somewhat helpful
   C. Not very helpful
   D. Not helpful at all

2. Please describe your experience of creating the concept map. What did you do to make the concept map?

3. What else would you like me to know about your concept map?

4. As part of your prewriting process, you were provided a graphic organizer for your paragraph. How helpful was completing the graphic organizer?
   A. Very helpful
   B. Somewhat helpful
   C. Not very helpful
   D. Not helpful at all

5. Please describe your experience with using the graphic organizer. What did you do to fill in your graphic organizer?

6. What else would you like me to know about your graphic organizer?

7. Before you began writing, you were encouraged to visualize yourself writing an effective paragraph. How helpful was visualizing your success for the writing task?
   A. Very helpful
   B. Somewhat helpful
   C. Not very helpful
   D. Not helpful at all

8. Please describe your experience of visualizing your success for the writing task. What did you picture in your mind’s eye?
9. What else would you like me to know about your experience of visualizing your success for the writing task?

10. During the writing process, you were encouraged to practice breathing to create awareness. How helpful was the breathing practice?
   A. Very helpful
   B. Somewhat helpful
   C. Not very helpful
   D. Not helpful at all

11. Please describe your experience of the breathing practice. How did you feel about your activity?

12. What else would you like me to know about your experience of using the breathing practice?

Section 2: Confidence

13. How confident do you feel about your ability to use concept mapping?
   A. Very confident
   B. Somewhat confident
   C. Not very confident
   D. Not confident at all

14. How confident do you feel about your ability to use a graphic organizer?
   A. Very confident
   B. Somewhat confident
   C. Not very confident
   D. Not confident at all

15. How confident do you feel about your ability to visualize your success for the writing task?
   A. Very confident
   B. Somewhat confident
   C. Not very confident
   D. Not confident at all

16. How confident do you feel about your ability to practice breathing to create awareness?
   A. Very confident
   B. Somewhat confident
   C. Not very confident
   D. Not confident at all

17. Overall, how confident do you feel about your ability to write a paragraph to show your analysis of what you have read?
   A. Very confident
B. Somewhat confident  
C. Not very confident  
D. Not confident at all  

18. Is there anything else you would like me to know about how you feel about your confidence for writing a paragraph to show your analysis of what you have read?