



# Understanding Composing- Related Writing Opportunities in Early Childhood Classrooms

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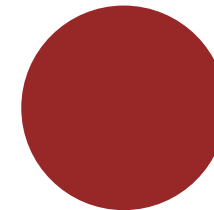
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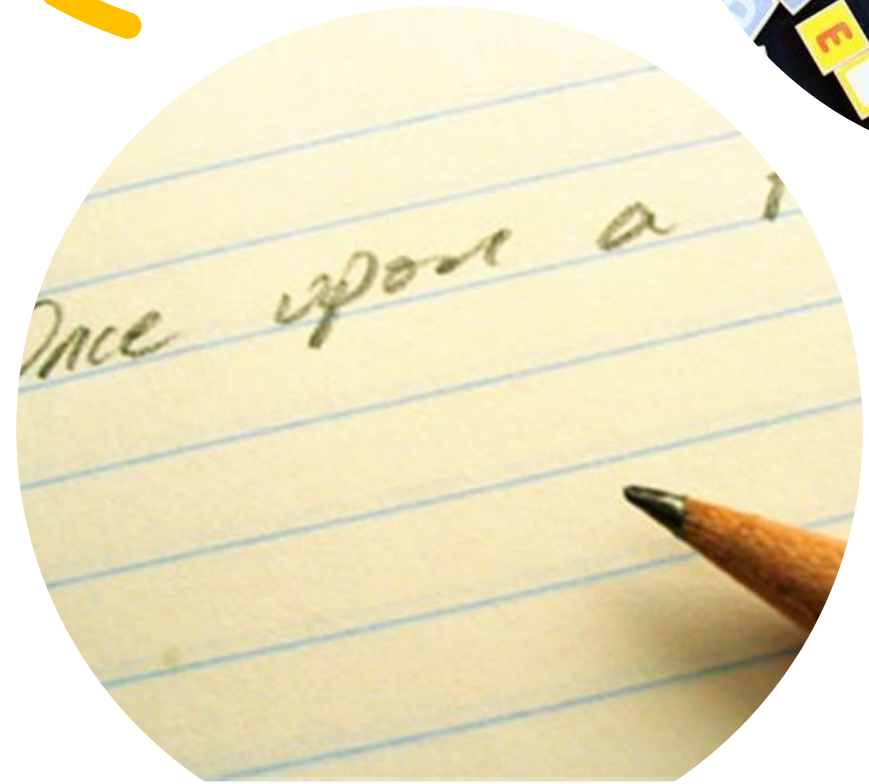
- Dr. Shayne Piasta
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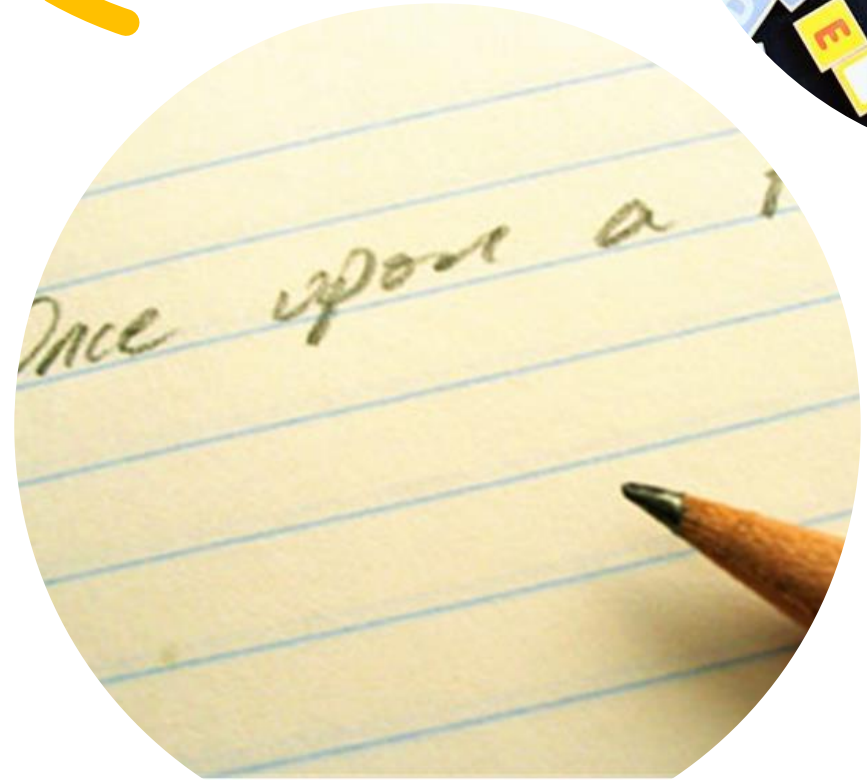
**Early writing** refers to the writing behaviors that preschool-age children demonstrate that precede and develop into conventional writing.



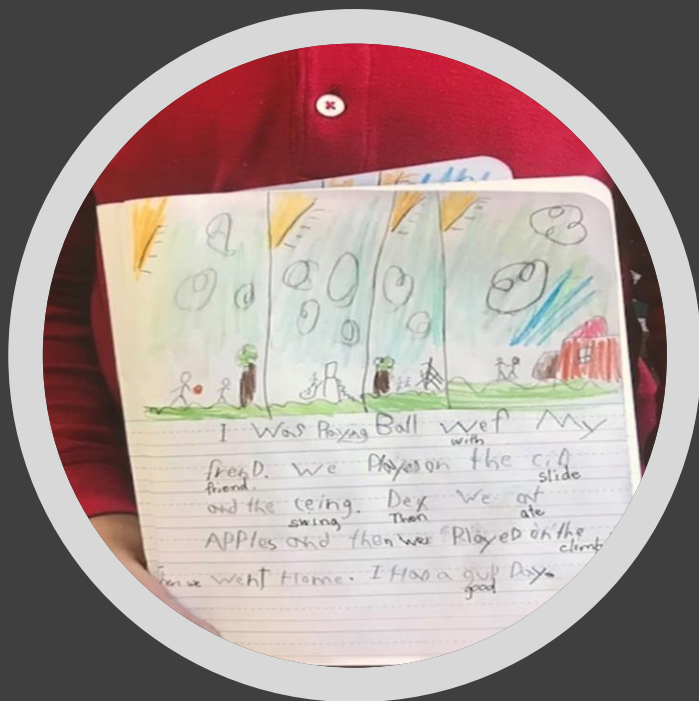
(Cabell et al., 2013; Casbergue & Strickland, 2016; Clay, 1975; Tolchinsky, 2006)



- Fostering early writing **supports** reading development.
- Children have **limited opportunities** to practice or engage in writing.
- Teachers tend to place greater emphasis on **handwriting** compared to composing.



(Bingham et al., 2017; Gerde et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2015; NELP, 2008; Zhang et al., 2015)



Meaningful and language-rich opportunities for writing is essential for children's writing development.

(Gerde et al., 2012; Hooper et al. 2010; Kim & Schatschneider, 2017; Puranik & Lonigan, 2012; Rowe, 2018)

# Alternative Approach

- Modeled from the "beating the odds" and "effective teachers" literatures to sample classrooms with higher language gains.
- Used deductive and inductive approaches to gain a more nuanced understanding of children's opportunities to write for meaning.

(e.g., Langer, 2001; Pressley et al., 1996, 1997; Taylor et al., 1999, 2000, 2002; Wharton McDonald et al., 1998)

# Research Questions



1. Across two observations (i.e., fall and spring) how many opportunities did children have to participate in composing-related writing events?



2. What were the **group configurations** when these composing-related writing events occurred (e.g., large group, small group, one-on-one)?



3. In which **activity contexts** did these composing-related writing events happen (e.g., circle time, activity time, etc.)?



4. What kinds of **compositions** were produced during these composing-related writing events?





# Methods





We used purposive sampling, modeling strategies from the “beating the odds” and “effective teachers” literatures.

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Data was from a larger project ( $n = 489$  classrooms)



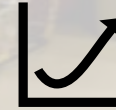
Up to 5 children were randomly selected to complete pre- and post-tests, including the CELF-P2



A latent language change score was calculated from 3 subtests of the CELF-P2



Identified 30 classrooms with the highest language gains





# Data Sources

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- Video-recorded classroom observations that were collected in the **fall and spring** of one academic year.
- The observations represented a **full instructional day** and featured teachers and children engaging in a variety of classroom activities.





# Classrooms

( $n = 30$ )

- Location: 30% rural, 27% suburban, 37% urban
- Funding: 30% Head Start, 30% other state programs
- Curriculum: 70% global curriculum
- Average class size: 19 children



# Teacher Demographics

- **97%** female
- Mean age: **41.2 years** ( $SD = 10.3$ ; range 24-67)
- Avg. years of experience in early childhood: **12.9 years** ( $SD = 7.7$ ; 0-30)

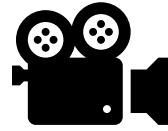
	Frequency ( $n = 30$ )	%
<b>Race</b>		
Black/African American	7	23
White/Caucasian	23	77
<b>Education Level</b>		
Less than an Associate's degree	4	13
Associate's degree (A.A.)	7	23
Bachelor's degree (B.A.)	6	20
Higher than a Bachelor's degree	12	40
Not reported	1	3
<b>Degree Type</b>		
Early childhood education	17	57

# Child Demographics

- Mean age: **5.0 years** ( $SD = 5.3$  months; range 45-82)
- **98%** of children's home language was English.

	Frequency ( $n = 131$ )	%
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	25	19
White/Caucasian	87	66
Multiracial	8	6
Other race	7	5
Hispanic/Latinx	4	3

# Analytic Approach



- Viewed the fall and spring observations of each classroom and identified writing events.

## Writing Event

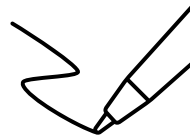
A unique occurrence which involves the construction of a graphic text (including scribbling or using letter-like forms) that is defined by the either the teacher or child as writing. Writing event may also include any occurrence involving the discussion of writing materials, tools, content, or writing processes (Gerde et al., 2019; Rowe, 2008)



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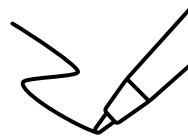


- Conducted deductive coding:
  - Group configuration
  - Activity contexts
  - Domains of writing addressed within each writing event
- Identified a subsample of the writing events that addressed composing.

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## Group Configuration

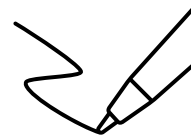
- Large group (i.e., teacher with 6+ children)
- Small group (i.e., teacher with 2-5 children)
- Teacher-child one-on-one
- Child independent (i.e., no teacher present)

(Turnball et al., 2009)

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## Activity Context

- Circle/meeting/group time
- Individual work
- Shared book reading extension activity
- Activity time formal
- Activity time informal

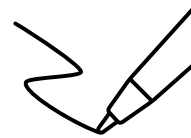
(Turnball et al., 2009)



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## Composing-Related Writing Events

Writing events in which teachers and/or children were generating words, phrases, or sentences to express ideas, convey meaning, or share information.

(Bingham et al., 2017; Gerde et al., 2019)

# Analytic Approach Inductive Coding

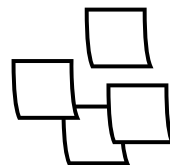
(Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018)



- Viewed the fall and spring observations of each classroom and identified writing events.



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- Conducted inductive coding to examine the compositions that were produced during these composing-related writing events.

# Trustworthiness

- Double-coded the data.
- Met regularly to discuss our observations.
- Remained open and flexible to the concepts and themes emerging from the data.
- Produced memos and an audit trail.
- Discussed findings with a third investigator to test and validate our interpretations.



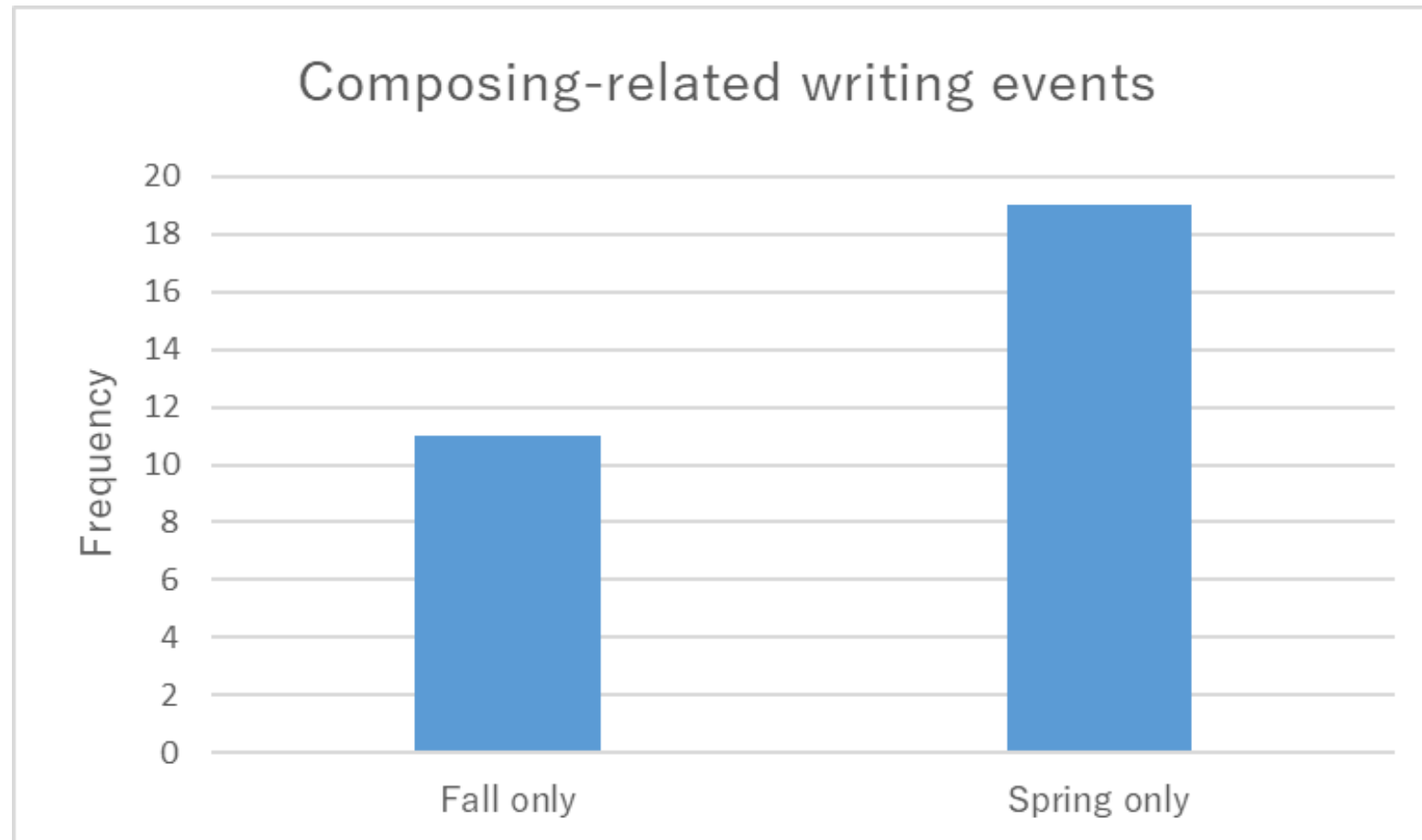




Results

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# RQ1. How many opportunities did children have to participate in composing-related writing events?

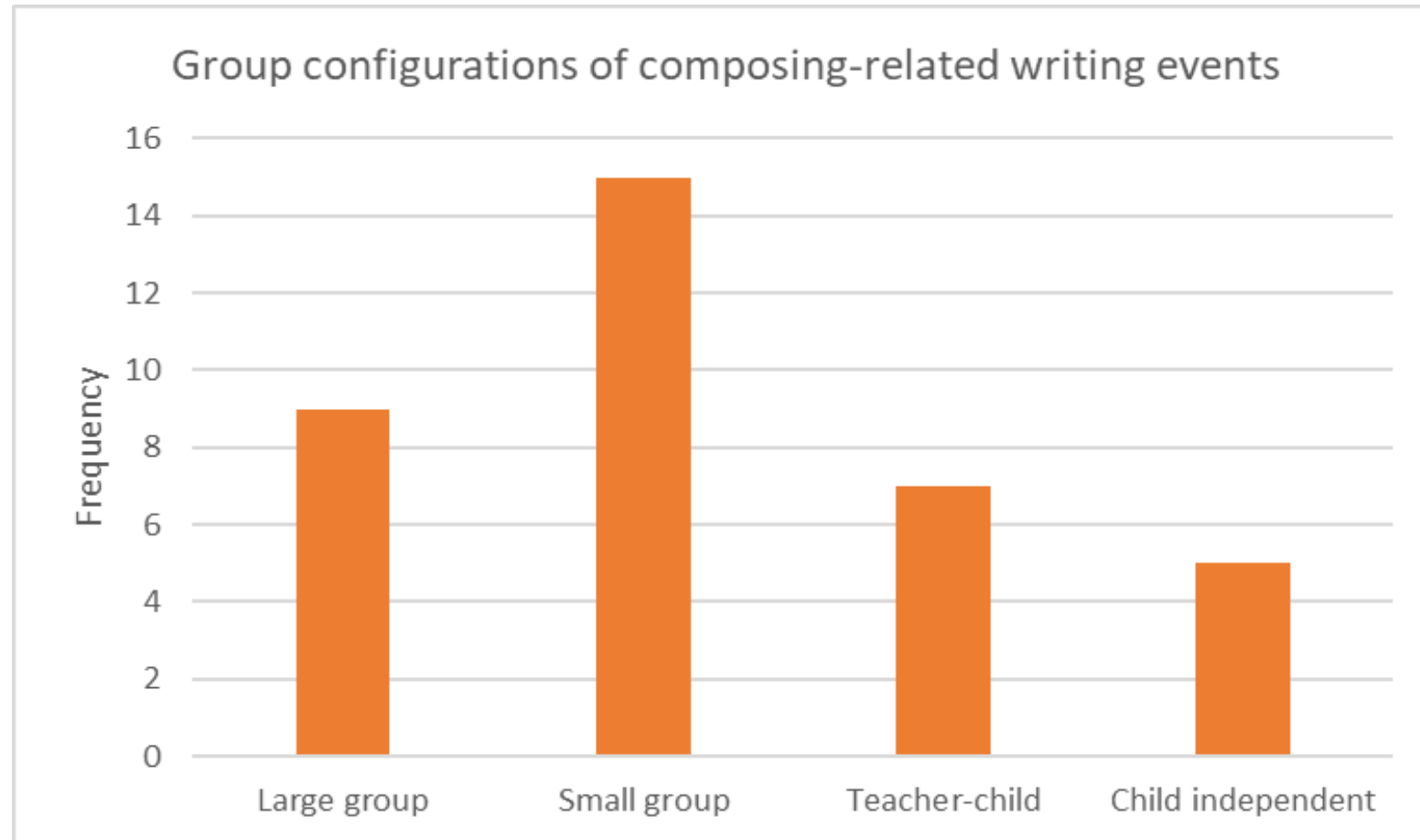


**17 (57%) classrooms** included at least one composing-related writing event

**30 (59%) composing-related writing events** across both timepoints



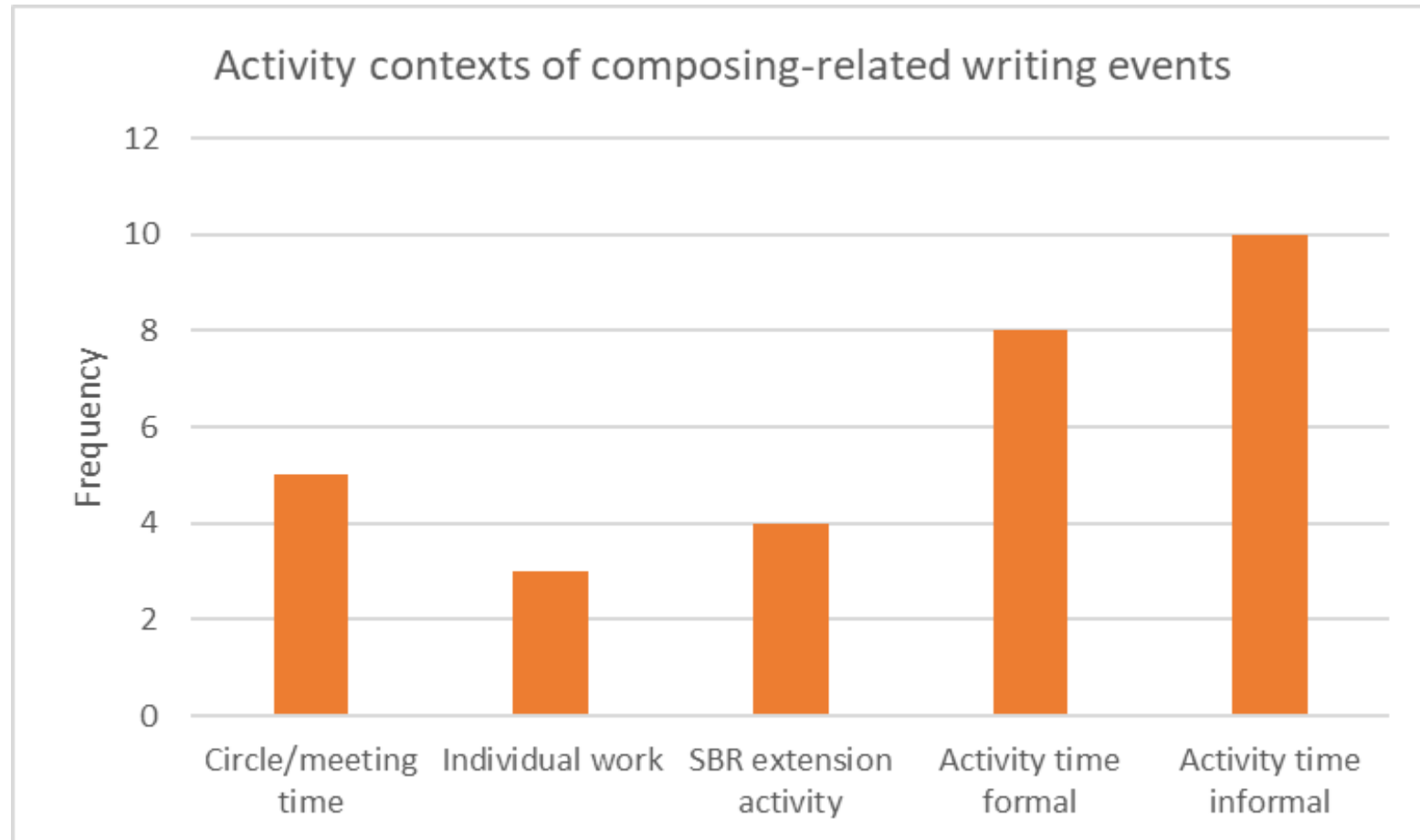
## RQ2. What were the group configurations when composing-related writing events occurred?



**50%** ( $n = 15$ )  
occurred in small  
groups

**17%** ( $n = 5$ ) occurred  
in child independent  
groupings

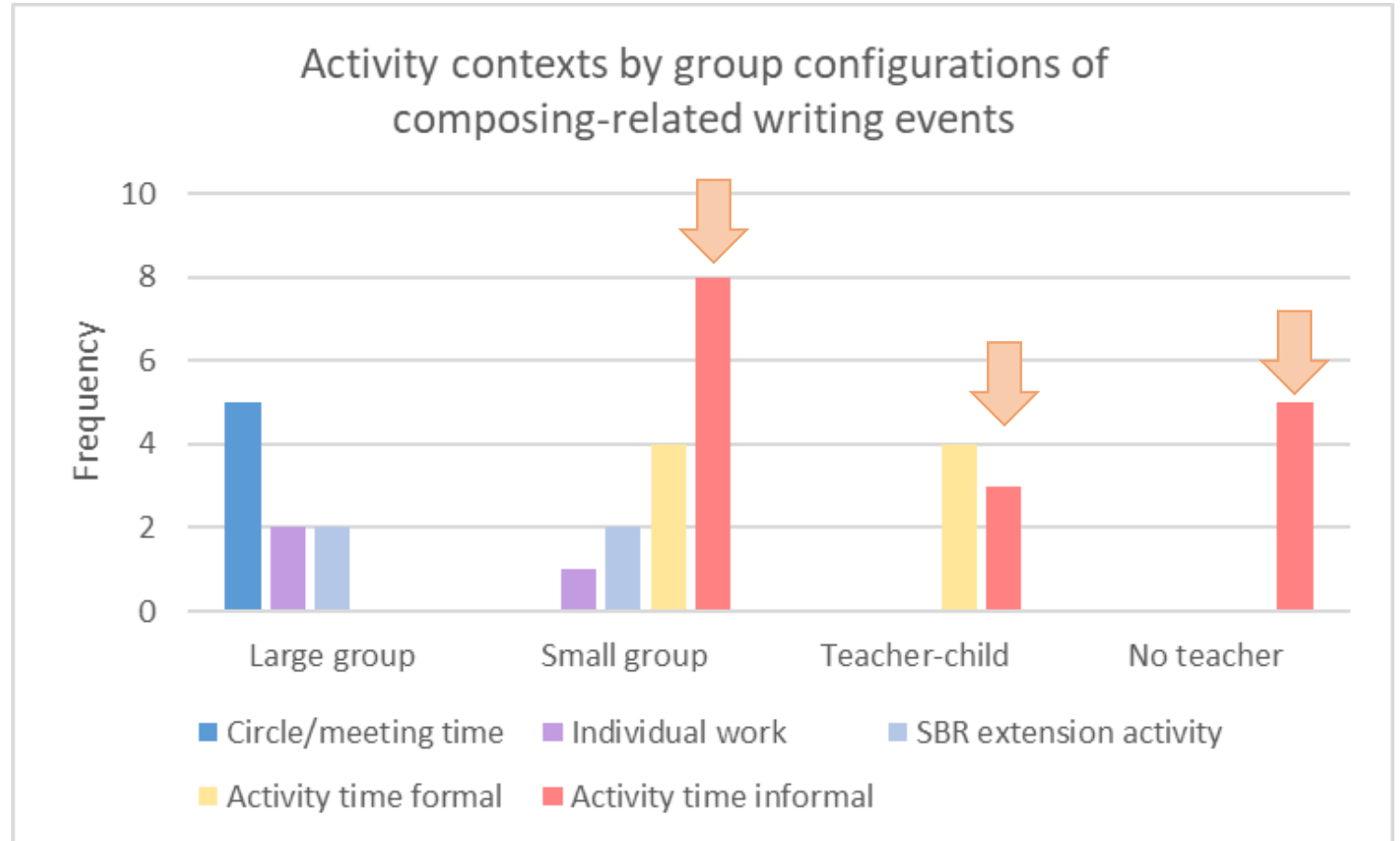
# RQ3. In which activity contexts did composing related writing events happen?



**33%** ( $n = 10$ ) occurred in activity time informal contexts

**27%** ( $n = 8$ ) occurred in activity time formal contexts

## A closer look at activity contexts by group configurations



RQ4. What kinds of compositions were produced?



Writing in play





Writing in play



Note-taking



Writing in play



Note-taking



Writing notes and cards

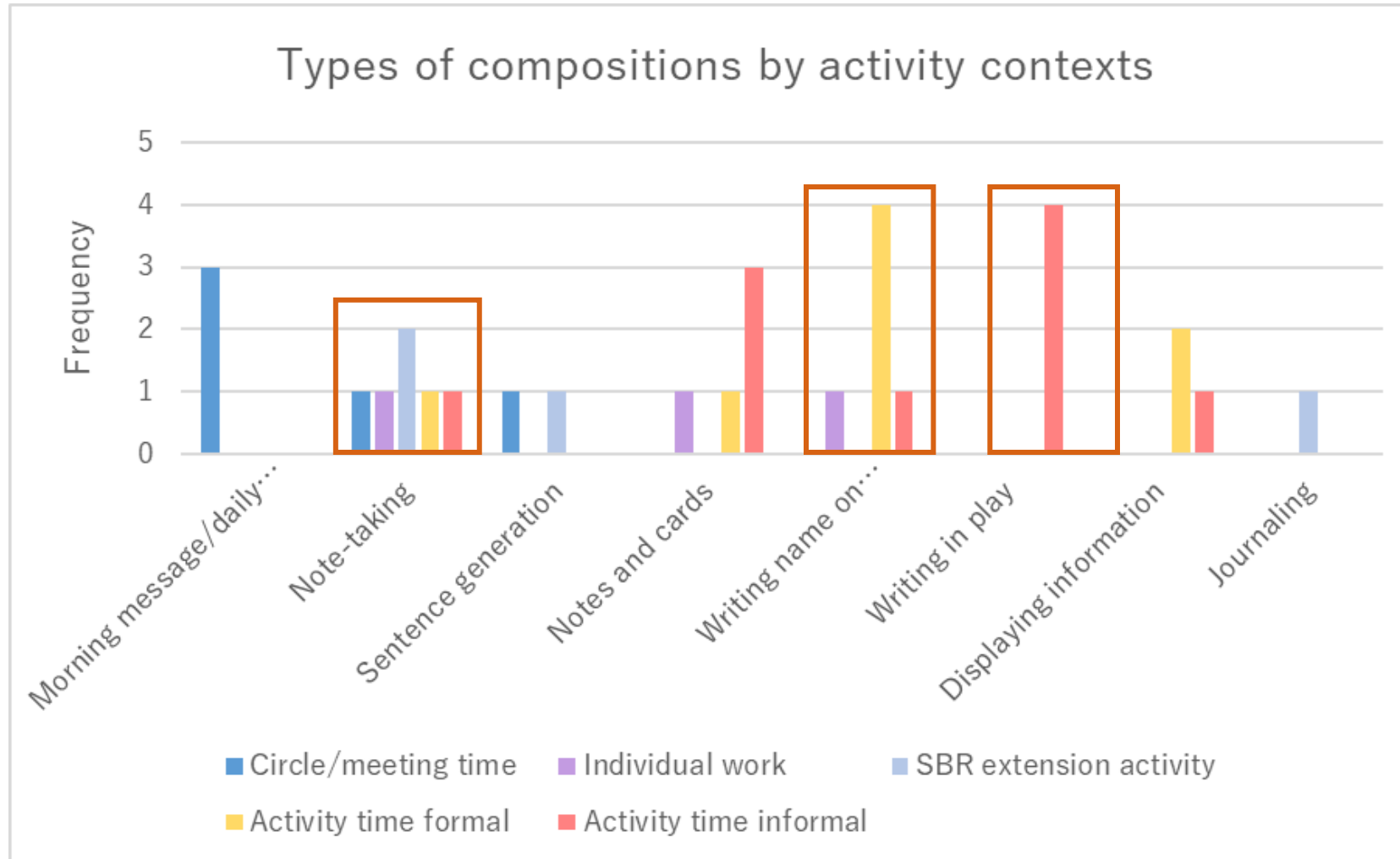
## RQ4. What kinds of compositions were produced?



Type of composition	Freq	%	Example
Note-taking	6	20	Teacher doing shared writing to generate a list of things plants need to grow
Writing name on individual work	6	20	Having children write their names on their artwork
Notes and cards	5	17	Mother's Day note with the message: "I love you"
Writing in play	4	13	Writing orders for a restaurant in dramatic play
Morning message/daily news	3	10	"Today is Tuesday. Today is snowy."
Displaying information	3	10	Writing children's names on a graph titled: "What is your favorite fruit?"
Sentence generation	2	7	"Goodnight gorilla. Tiptoe, tiptoe. Goodnight _____. Tiptoe tiptoe. Shhh."
Journaling	1	3	Having children write a sentence about their day in their journals

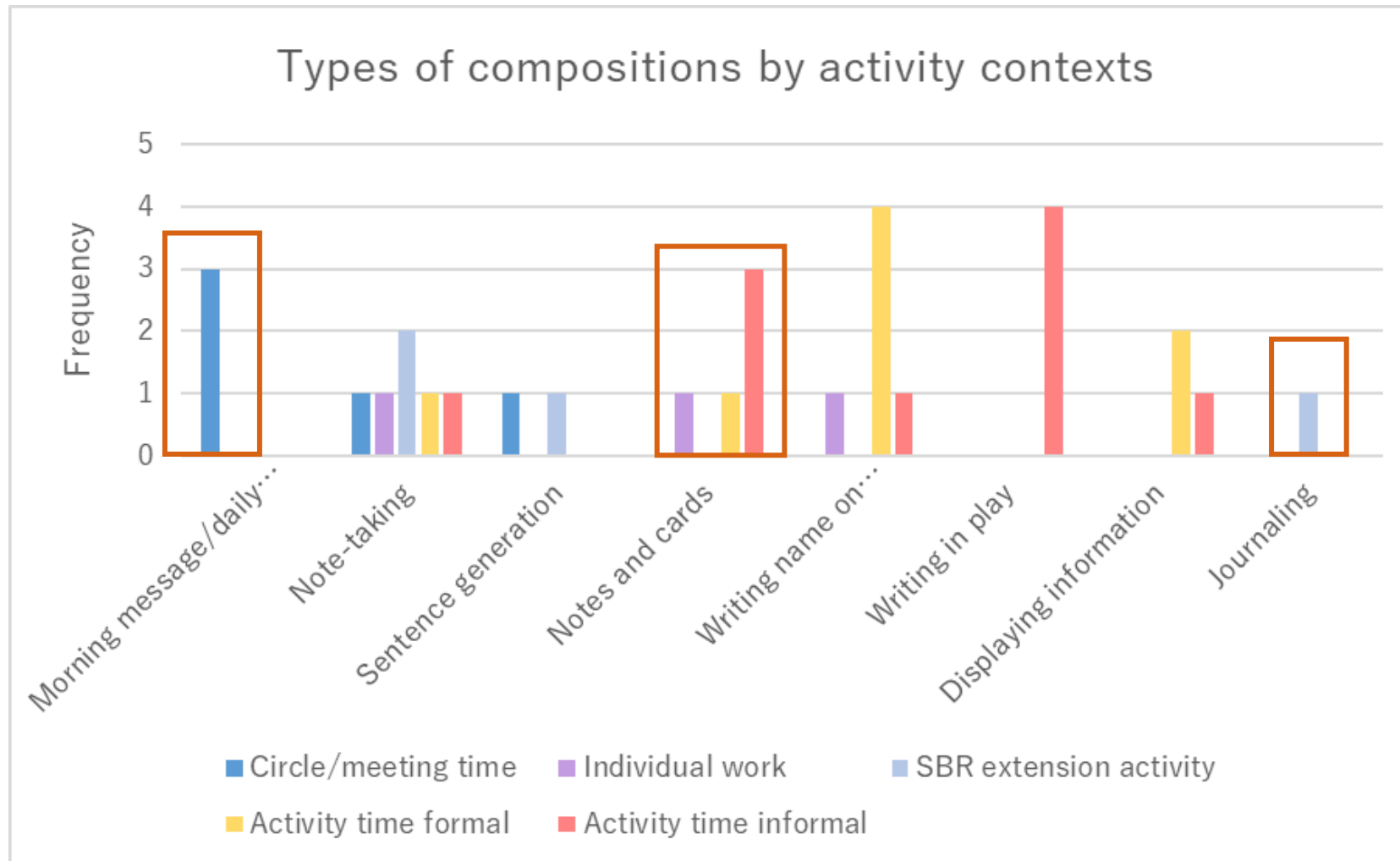


# RQ4. What kinds of compositions were produced?



Although note-taking, name writing and writing in play occurred most frequently, these compositions tended to stay at the **word level**.

## RQ4. What kinds of compositions were produced?



There were **few opportunities** to produce longer compositions.



Discussion

A **diversity** of composing-related writing activities were observed.

- Incorporating diverse writing experiences affords opportunities for children to write and for teachers to scaffold children's writing (Rowe, 2009).



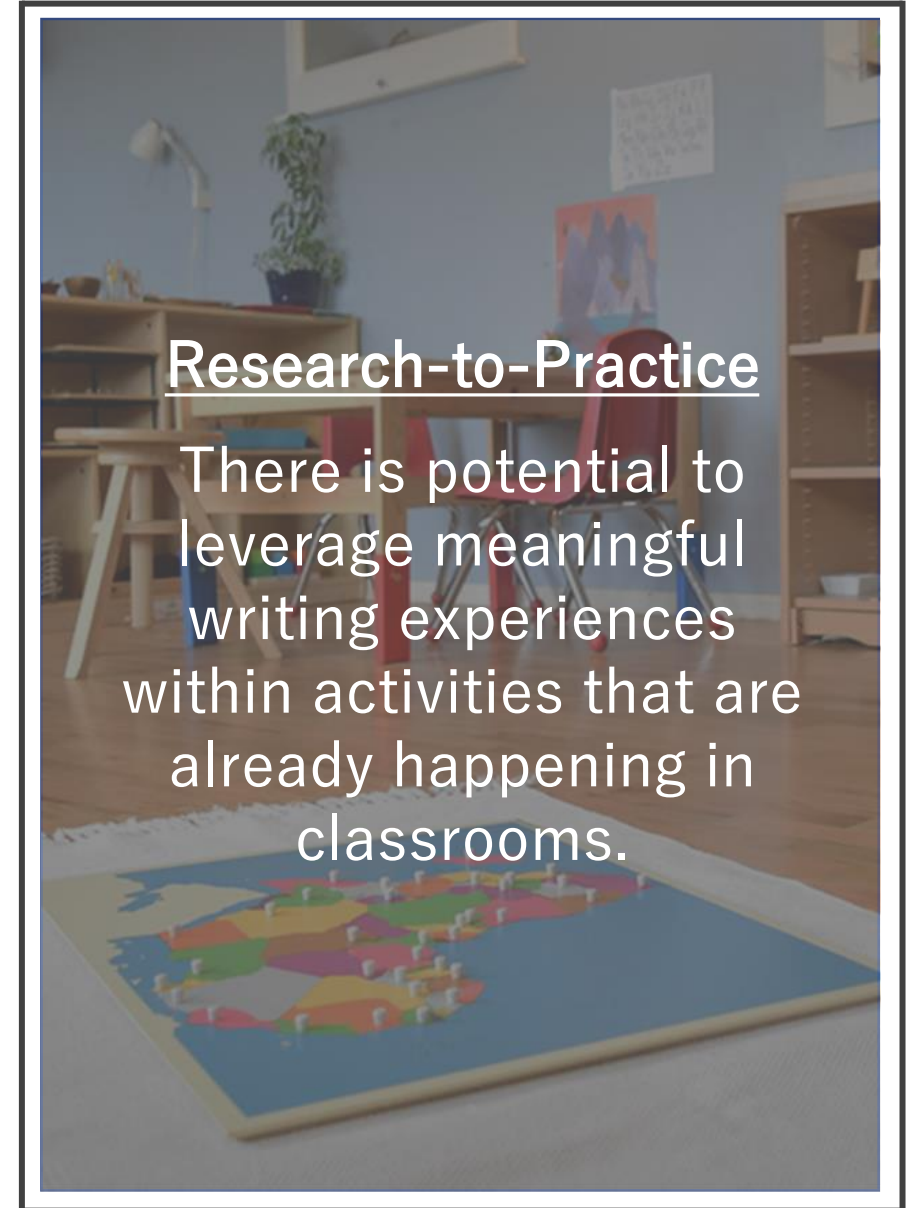


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### Research-to-Practice

There is potential to leverage meaningful writing experiences within activities that are already happening in classrooms.



Children's opportunities to write for meaning were **limited in scope and focus**.

- Name writing and writing that primarily involves single words may not be sufficient to promote children's composing (Rowe, 2018).

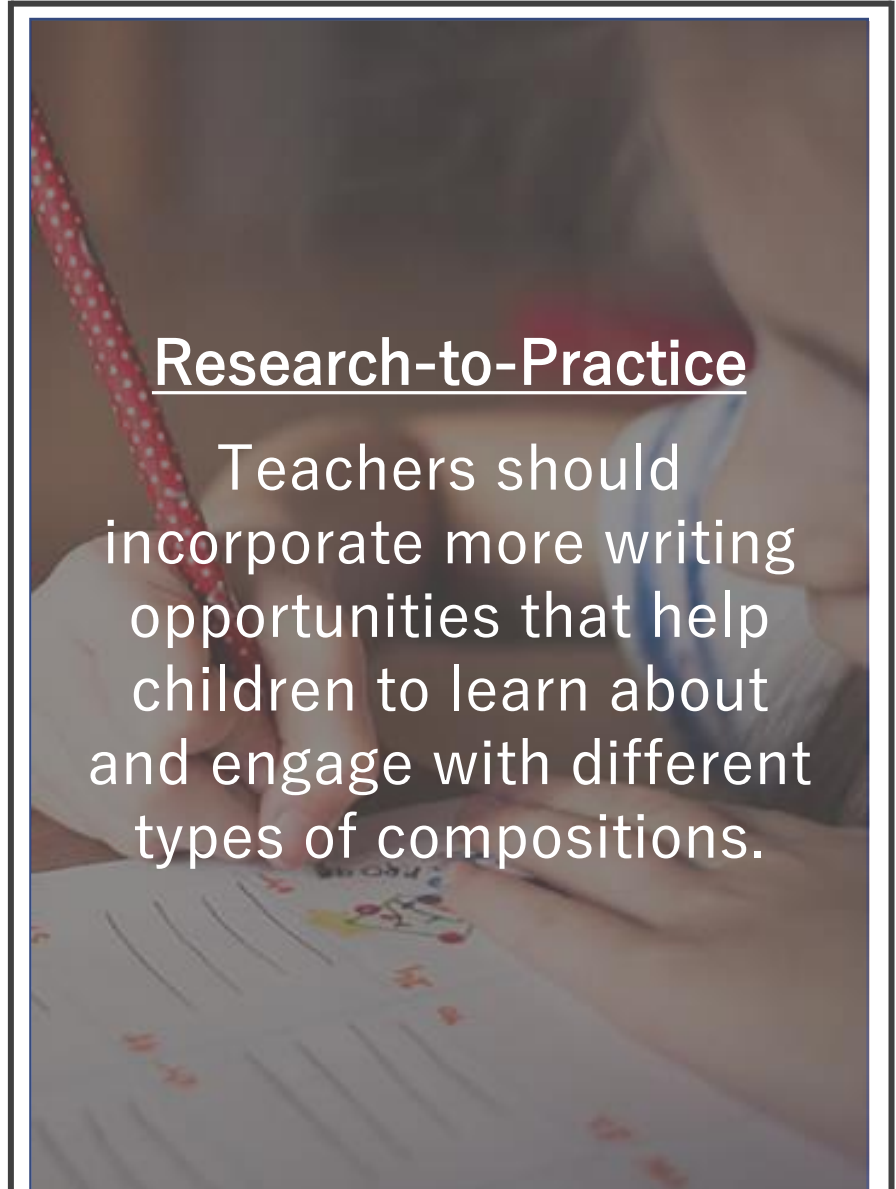


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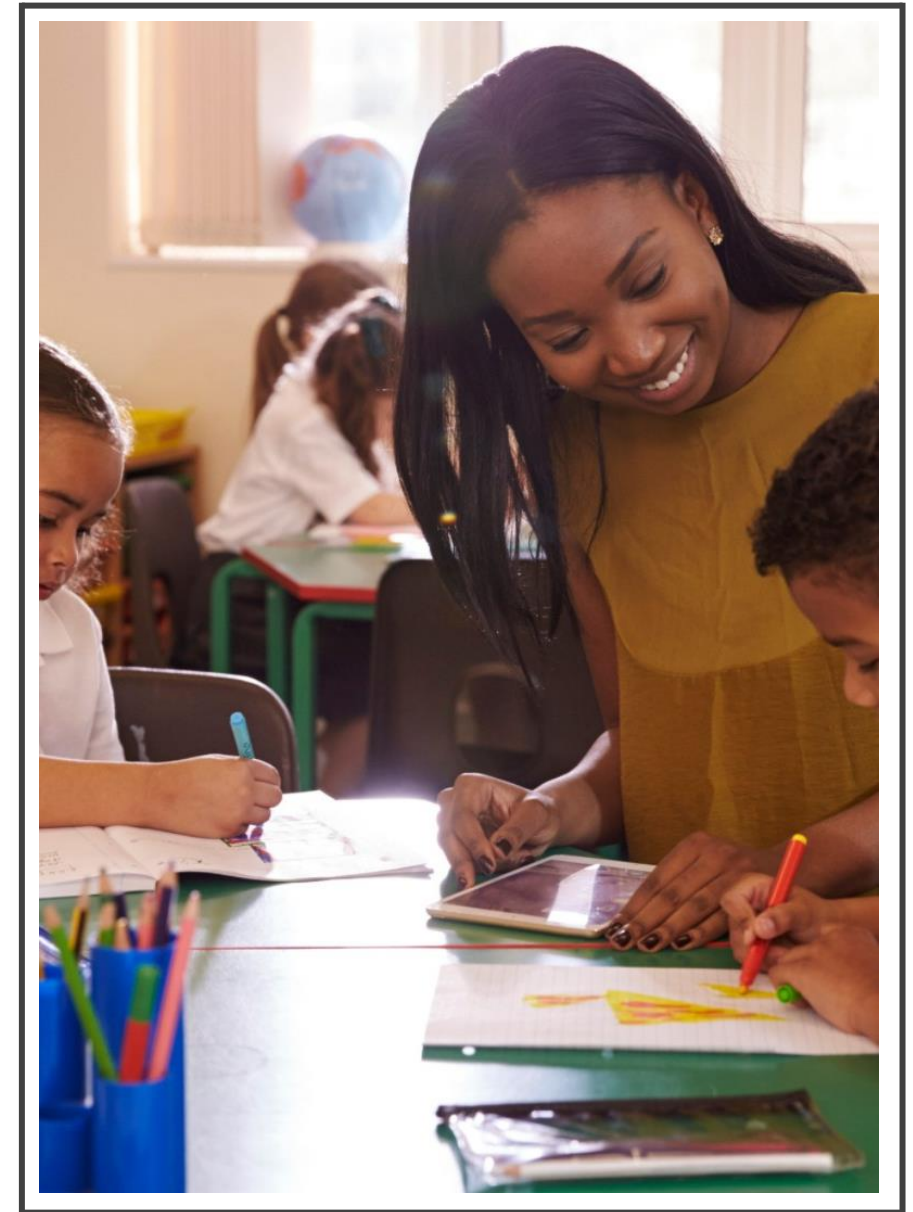
### Research-to-Practice

Teachers should incorporate more writing opportunities that help children to learn about and engage with different types of compositions.



There are still **barriers** to creating an enriched writing environment in the classroom.

- Misconceptions about early writing development and how it provides a foundation for literacy development
- Narrow focus on transcription to the relative exclusion of composing
- Access to strategies and materials for supporting writing (Hall, 2019).



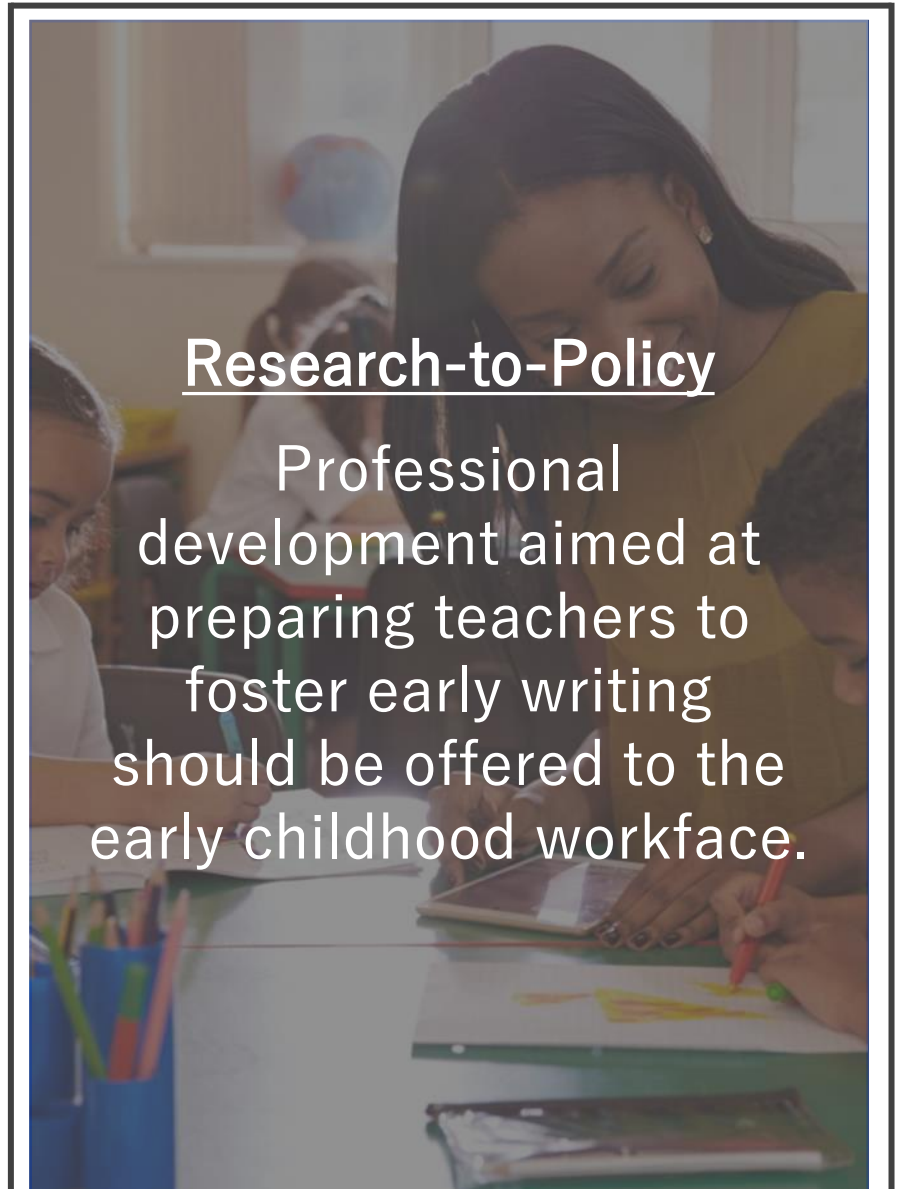


There are still **barriers** to creating an enriched writing environment in early childhood classrooms.

- Misconceptions about early writing development and how it provides a foundation for literacy development
- Narrow focus on transcription to the relative exclusion of composing
- Access to strategies and materials for supporting writing (Hall, 2019).

### Research-to-Policy

Professional development aimed at preparing teachers to foster early writing should be offered to the early childhood workforce.



## Grouping configuration and activity context may matter for writing interactions.

- Teachers' supportive strategies for writing may differ according to the structure and content of activities and who is involved in the writing (Aram & Besser-Biron, 2017; Quinn et al., 2021; Turnball et al., 2009).

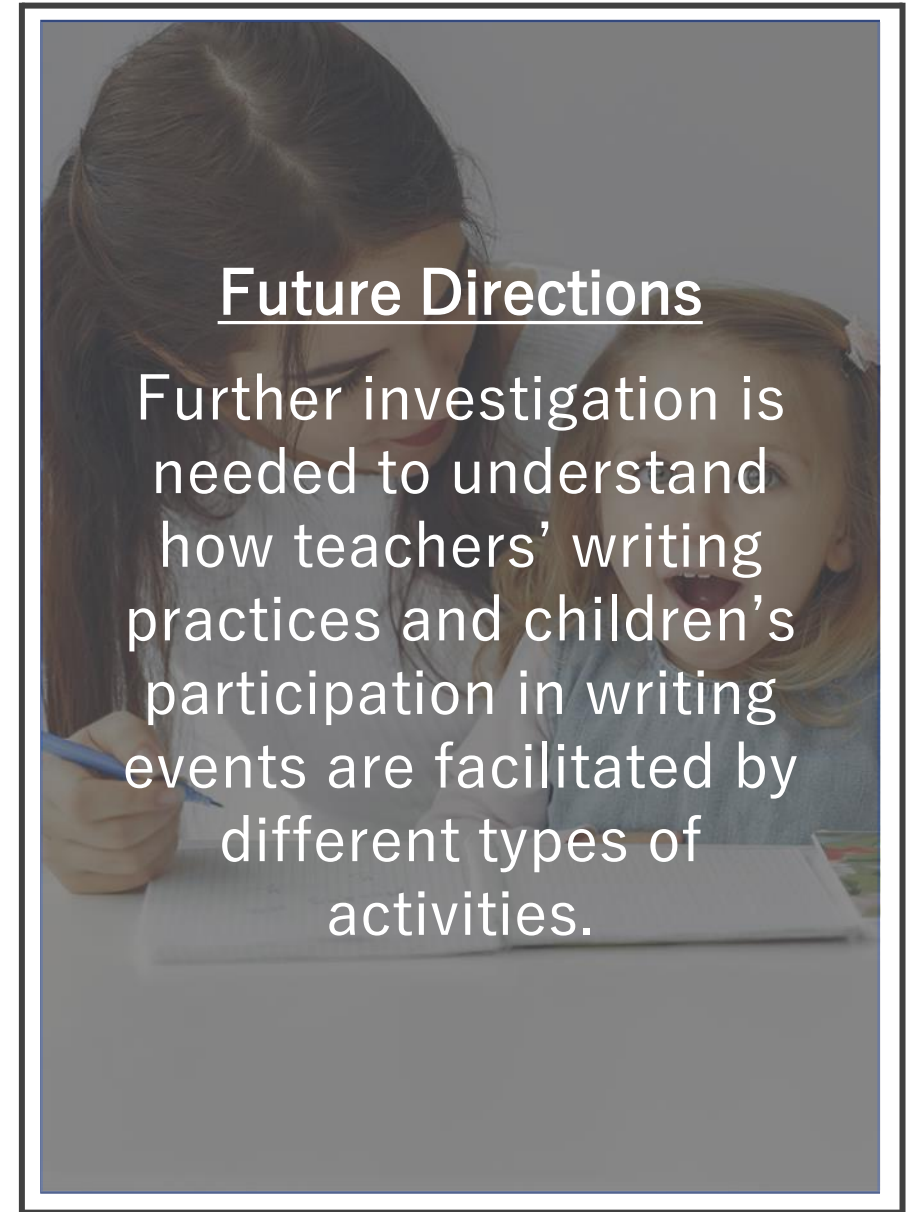


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### Future Directions

Further investigation is needed to understand how teachers' writing practices and children's participation in writing events are facilitated by different types of activities.





# Questions?

<https://crane.osu.edu/our-work/propell/>

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