

How do teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers?

By: Paramvir Kaur Dandiwal

A Thesis

Submitted to Faculty of Graduate Studies

to Fulfill the Requirements for a

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Date: March, 2022

Copyright © Paramvir Kaur Dandiwal

ABSTRACT

Novice teachers start their careers under the false impression of being prepared to teach writing to a diverse group of students, but they soon discover that reality is different. As such, students who are struggling do not receive enough writing instruction to improve their writing skills. Yet, if students gain reading and writing skills in the early years, they will be more successful in higher grades. Advancement in the writing of students largely depends on the preparation of writing teachers, and the continuity of instruction they provide to improve their students' writing skills. Educators must thus reassess approaches to teaching writing and embrace a new pedagogical position for acquiring literacy, particularly for teaching writing. Teachers develop a sense of self-efficacy in different ways depending on factors such as preservice training, in-service training, independent learning, networking with colleagues, self-reflection, and feedback. The goal of my research is to discover how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. In this study, I conducted interviews with five educators and collected data using qualitative research methods, particularly grounded theory, which facilitates flexible analysis for making connections between the specific and general, and the individual and social (Charmaz, 2017). The study revealed teacher perceptions of receiving insufficient or inadequate preservice training. It is recommended that objectives be clearly defined in formulating preservice teacher training, novice teachers be mentored and relevant professional development be implemented to increase teachers' competence and confidence in teaching writing to all students.

Keywords: struggling writers, teachers' perspectives, teachers' experiences, adequate instruction, teachers' training, personal educational impacts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Rick Freeze, for affirming my belief in the importance of this study and in my ability to accomplish my goals. From the very beginning, Dr. Freeze has been exceptionally supportive with his constant feedback and guidance. I am very thankful to my advisory committee members, Dr. Nadine Bartlett and Dr. Shannon Moore, for their extensive guidance and for sharing their expertise. This thesis was only possible with the time and input of the interviewees, and I would like to thank them for devoting their time and sharing their experiences with me.

I dedicate this thesis to my family, especially my children Taranraj and Gurarpun, for their continued support and patience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Why Writing is Important	6
• How Writing is Related to Reading, Understanding and Thinking	7
• Writing as an Essential Life Skill	11
• Obstacles to Teaching and Learning to Write	14
• Statement of Problem	17
• Research Questions	18
• Significance of the Research	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
• Who are the Struggling Writers?	21
○ Learning Disabilities	22
○ Poverty	23
○ Language Delays	24
• Evidence Based Practices in Teaching Writing	25
• Writing Strategies	29
○ Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)	29
○ Units of Study	30
○ Reading Recovery	31
○ Serravallo: Writing Strategies	32
○ Six Traits+1	32
○ The Continuum of Literacy Learning	32
• Teachers as the Driving Factor	33
• Teachers' Use of Differentiation and Adaptations for Diverse Learners	36
• Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Writing Instruction	37
• Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Struggling Writers	38
Chapter 3: Methodology	42
• Research Method	42
• Participants	43
• Data Collection	44
• Data Analysis	46
• Reflexivity	46
• Trustworthiness	47
○ Credibility	47
○ Transferability	48
○ Confirmability	48
○ Dependability	48
• Risk and Benefits	49
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	50
• Findings	50
• Theme 1: Lack of Preservice Training and Experience	50

• Theme 2: Reliance on Professional Development and/or In-service Training	53
• Theme 3: Obstacles Faced by Teachers Teaching Struggling Writers	55
• Discussion & Recommendations	58
○ Supporting Struggling Writers	59
○ Teachers' Self-Efficacy Model	62
• Limitations & Implications	64
• Recommendations for Future Professional Development & Research	65
Chapter 5: Conclusion	66
References	67
Appendices	72
• Appendix A Consent Form	72
• Appendix B Semi-Structured Interview Guide	78
• Appendix C Recruitment Letter	82
• Appendix D Email Script	84
• Appendix E Recruitment Email Script	86

Chapter 1

Why Writing is Important

Writing is extremely important in communication. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), people write to communicate at both personal and professional levels, and writing skills are essential to do this effectively. As our world becomes increasingly digitized, communicating with one another remotely such as via email, and presenting and creating written materials in virtual spaces have become the norm. Graham et al., (2019) stated that “writing is an extremely versatile tool used to accomplish a variety of goals” (p. 4), as described:

We use writing to share information, tell stories, create imagined worlds, explore who we are, combat loneliness, and chronicle our experiences. Writing can even make us feel better, as writing about our feelings and experiences can benefit us psychologically and physiologically. Writing also provides a powerful tool for influencing others (pp. 4-5).

Writing is also an essential tool in learning. People use writing to collect, preserve, and transmit information to others (Graham et al., 2019). Writing skills are crucial for higher education, and in business and commerce. In my experience as an educator, I see students using writing skills in various forms to express their needs, wants and emotions, and to share their experiences. Walsh (2010) stressed:

If students don't know how to express themselves in writing, they won't be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else. Much communication is done in writing: proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, e-mails, and more part of the daily life of college students or successful graduates (p. 1).

Writing allows people to express themselves, sell their ideas, and achieve their goals. Yet, writing is more than a set of skills. The English Language Arts Curriculum Framework: A Living Document (2019) stated that “Language and literacy are symbolic of a socio-cultural system through which human beings create and share meanings. They do so by using the conventional meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices within their socio-cultural groups, while at the same time inventing new ones” (p. 5). Language and literacy allow people to expand socio-cultural systems meaningfully and share them with other socio-cultural groups. Additionally, writing allows socio-cultural groups to carry forward their socio-cultural values across generations through various written forms such as histories, stories, poetry, drama, journals, and so on.

People even use writing to know more about themselves and others. As Graham et al., (2019) have described, “students can use writing to help them better understand themselves. Writing also allows them to communicate with, entertain, and persuade others” (p. 6). Along with verbal communication, writing supports students in expressing their feelings, needs and wants to others, in activities such as journaling or penning their emotions and feelings to be put into “mood jars”. Writing thus allows users, especially students, to not only progress in their learning practically through daily writings in the various subject areas, but also express themselves extensively and psychologically.

How Writing is Related to Reading, Understanding and Thinking

Children learn best by making connections between listening, reading and writing. When students are exposed to a variety of writing strategies through reading books, they acquire expressive language skills, technical writing skills and vocabulary. In addition, they become familiar with six traits authors use to express themselves: ideas, organization, word usage, voice, writing conventions and sentence fluency. Culham (2006) explained that “the six traits represent

a language that empowers students and teachers to communicate about qualities of writing” (p. 53). Over time, students learn about broader constructs such as setting, atmosphere, plot, theme and character development, as well as more advanced writing traits such as the use of literary devices. When children listen to and read various genres, they imagine writing like the authors they admire. While reading a story, teachers often discuss, demonstrate and make students aware of the strategies used by authors in various genres. Students are also encouraged to use the above writing traits to develop their writing skills, which would move their learning forward in general.

Reading and writing are reciprocal. Children learn best when reading and writing are integrated and make connections throughout the process. Clay and Rumelhart (1991, 1994, as cited in Nancy & Briggs, 2011), have noted that “based on our work with children who struggle, we focus on reciprocal cognitive operations or strategies that draw on sources of knowledge used in both reading and writing” (p. 546). In my experience of teaching Reading Recovery and Leveled Literacy Intervention, it was found that reciprocal teaching supports students in consolidating their acquisition of reading and writing skills. For instance, once a student can read a word, they can be encouraged to write that word independently as well. Students can also use reading strategies to solve writing problems and vice-versa. For example, word segmentation (i.e., recognizing the prefix, root word and suffix) may help a student figure out the meaning of a new word in reading and how to spell it in writing. Children need to practice to become more confident in their reading and writing skills. Clay and Rumelhart (1991, 1994) also argued that children need to grow as both author and audience to broaden their knowledge of giving and receiving authentic responses that value their voices and choices. Through these interactions, they express themselves and assemble identities. Students' actions of thinking and expressing while reading and writing can provide proof of their higher-order thinking processes and mental activity (Nancy & Briggs, 2011).

Consequently, children not only need to learn to read by experiencing a variety of genres, they also need opportunities to write for authentic purposes, to be both author and audience of formal and informal texts.

Both reading and writing also require phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness allows students to separate words into sounds, and helps them with the acquisition and understanding of new words. Tierney and Shanahan (1991, as cited in Shanahan, 2019) noted that “scholars have long known that learning to read and learning to write are related processes” (p. 309). To bring automaticity to students’ learning, they should be encouraged to use their learned literacy processes to develop reading and writing skills, such as using a newly learned word, sentence structure, or expression from their reading in their writing, or vice versa. Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000, as cited in Shanahan, 2019) stated:

Reading and writing each depend on learning slightly different versions of the same linguistic and cognitive information, including meta knowledge (e.g., understanding the functions and purpose of reading and writing, monitoring comprehension and production), knowledge about substance and content (e.g., world knowledge, domain knowledge, content knowledge), knowledge about universal text attributes (e.g., graphophonics, syntax, text organization), and the knowledge and skill needed to negotiate reading and writing (e.g., procedural knowledge, communication strategies). Both reading and writing depend on a mastery of sound-symbol relationships (for decoding in reading and for spelling in writing), vocabulary, grammar/syntax, text organization, and the like. They both require knowledge of the world and the content of what we read and write about. Both readers and writers must recognize they are in a communicative relationship with the other - writers by anticipating the readers’ needs for information, readers by thinking about the

author's choices - and both need to be self-aware, monitoring their own actions and effectiveness (p. 309).

Reading improves students' writing skills, especially when students are made aware of the comprehension skills they are employing. Students can be encouraged to visualize what they are reading about, such as by asking them to make pictures in their heads. They can be supported using semantic scaffolds, to make connections with familiar concepts, prior knowledge, and real-world situations or scenarios. Once students can independently make connections between new information and prior knowledge while reading, they become more aware of how their audience might process what they write.

As Fried (2006) has explained: for many children, the knowledge they have in writing flows to and informs their understanding in reading, and what they learn in reading can help them to learn more in writing. This flow of knowledge is referred to as "the reciprocity of the two activities that both use written language" (Clay, 1993, as cited in Fried, 2006, p. 44). Reading and writing share rhetorical and communicative functions, knowledge, and cognitive processes (Nelson & Calfee, 1998). Since reading and writing are intertwined and integrated, an improvement in reading would improve writing, and vice-versa. Critical shared knowledge between reading and writing includes (a) knowing the functions and purposes of reading and writing, (b) phonological and graphemic awareness, and (c) procedural knowledge of the use of strategies (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).

Sometimes, students do not know how to bridge the gap in literacy or make a relationship between reading and writing. For example, students may know how to read many words, but when it comes to writing, do not have an idea how to compose a story using the words they can read. This is because writing is a complex process. Feifer and Defina (2002, as cited in Grunke &

Leonard-Zabel, 2015) explained that writing is a complex neurodevelopmental process and it involves brain-based aspects and executive functioning such as intact attention and concentration, spiral and sequential production, memory, higher-order cognition, and language involving vocabulary and spelling. According to Gibson (2008), this neurodevelopmental process is expressed when children learn to make connections and gain the confidence to compose stories by reading books. Clay (1998) also emphasized the reciprocal relationship between learning to read and learning to write, as well as the crucial role of strategic activity for both reading and writing acquisition. Reading and writing require the expansion of children's oral language resources and the application of these competences to understanding and constructing texts within a variety of genres (Gibson, 2008). In addition, Fried (2006) has argued that "teaching that supports the learner in using her knowledge of writing during reading and her understanding gained from reading in writing messages facilitates literacy development" (p. 12). Elaborating on this idea, Clay noted that "time, exposure, construction of words in writing and putting this to work in reading seem to bring the child to a knowledge of how words are made in English" (Clay, 1993, as cited in Clay, 2006, p. 43). In my experience, during shared writing, students were encouraged to use some new vocabulary that they will see in a new reading text. This reciprocal process helps them to make connections between reading and writing. In addition, when students are introduced to vocabulary before they read, and are encouraged to practice it orally, they find it easier to read, make connections between reading and writing, and develop their overall literacy skills.

Writing as an Essential Life Skill

Writing is the core academic skill that progresses us along the education stages, from primary to tertiary education. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that "effective literacy programs foster active, responsible learning. They help students begin to use literacy as a tool that gives

them the power to find the information they need, to express their opinions, to take positions” (p. 3). Writing skills are also essential in every job, every field and every industry. People use writing skills to report, share information, and communicate effectively. National Commission on Writing (2003, 2004, as cited in Coker & Kim, 2018) stated that writing is and will be an important skill for work, and students need to be competent in analytical and argumentative writing skills. Katusic et al. (2009, as cited in Coker & Kim, 2018) highlighted that writing difficulties may hinder students and therefore workers in their progress at school and work respectively. Graham (2006, as cited in Graham, 2019) also reinforced that “the importance, versatility, and pervasiveness of writing exacts a toll on those who do not learn to write well, as this can limit academic, occupational, and personal attainments” (p. 278).

Effective writing skills benefit all aspects of our lives. In learning, especially in the current pandemic circumstance of social distancing, writing is crucial as teachers and students are required to perform more written communication with one another during virtual teaching and learning. Writing advances education, as Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stressed:

We want them not only to learn to read and write but also to learn the many purposes of reading and writing. We want literacy to become an integral part of their lives. We’re constantly gathering ideas for writing planning, writing, conferring, and seeing our writing get things done for us in our real worlds (pp. 2-3).

Students’ advanced writing skills can support them to become more successful, but many students are struggling with the basic writing skills and requirements that are essential. According to Defazio et al., (2010), “students entering in graduate programs such as media, arts, science, health do not have necessary writing skills to become successful communicators, both during their studies and after graduation” (p. 34). They further suggested:

...the majority of students do not possess the skills necessary to effectively communicate in a written format that will enable students to become successful upon graduation. There is a significant need for students at all levels not only to be good written communicators, but also to understand the importance of good writing skills. In addition, an important facet of written communication is being able to critically assess the writing of others, particularly at the graduate levels as well as in professional programs (Defazio et al., 2010, p. 34).

In life in general, meaningful and extensive writing skills can save time, reduce misunderstandings, and improve the ability to fulfill demands or requests. Competency in writing opens up opportunities such as successfully applying for jobs and scoring interviews. According to Gallagher (2011), “writing has become foundational to finding meaningful employment across much of the workforce” (p. 3) and further shared that writing plays a very important role in gaining and keeping meaningful employment. Graham and Perin (2007, as cited in Gallagher, 2011) have stressed that:

Writing well is not just an option for young people - it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy (p. 4).

Without literacy, people struggle to find employment. Darling-Hammond et al. (2008, as cited in Calkins, 2013) reported that “whereas twenty years ago 95% of jobs were low-skilled, today those jobs only constitute 10% of our entire economy. Children who leave school today without strong literacy skills will no longer find a job waiting for them” (p. 2). Without writing skills, people struggle to compete in employment and may also find it challenging to fight for their own rights.

Obstacles to Teaching and Learning to Write

Writing is as important as reading, spelling and math. The foundations of reading and writing are developed concurrently in the primary grades. Early years writing instruction can help students develop their imaginative skills, enabling them to make vivid stories that will further expand their writing skills as they write more stories in greater detail. If students gain reading and writing skills in the early years, they will be more successful in higher grades.

However, if students' essential literacy skills are not addressed, it can hinder their future success. Many students struggle in writing in the early years and that affects their educational growth in the future. They struggle to form letters, compose words, and write sentences, as well as to spell words, organize their writing, employ plot and literary devices, or make logical arguments. Graham (2019) highlighted that concerns about students' writing are not limited to just the United States (US), but also across the globe, and reaffirmed that in order to be successful in school, at work, and in their personal lives, students must learn to write. He stated that "this requires that they receive adequate practice and instruction in writing, as this complex skill does not develop naturally", explaining that students are behind because many "do not receive the writing instruction they need or deserve" (Graham, 2019, p. 277).

According to Graham (2019), in 28 studies conducted in the US and Europe, comprising surveys, observations and interviews with more than 7000 teachers, writing instruction in most classrooms is not sufficient. One indicator of this inadequacy was that a majority of teachers did not devote enough time to teaching writing (Brindle et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2014; Kiuahara et al., 2009). According to Grunke and Leonard-Zabel (2015):

Composition writing is the act of transferring ideas or information into written text while following conventional patterns in order to achieve a communicative goal with a specific

audience. Even though the great significance of this skill for all different areas of life appears to be self-evident, it is a stunningly neglected aspect of education. Teachers usually focus on instructing children on how to read, spell and perform math during their elementary school education (p. 132).

Grunke and Leonard-Zabel (2015) argued that it is hard to differentiate which skill is more important: reading or writing, but expressed that writing is poorly assessed and inadequately taught, in that “standardized diagnostic instruments and curriculum-based measures (CBMs) cannot adequately grasp the essence of what constitutes a good written text” (p. 133). They also noted that students are not receiving adequate writing skill instruction in the classroom, and are being assessed only in how many words they write, and how many words they spell correctly, stressing that “without adequate skills in thinking on paper, students are bound to perform poorly in a whole array of subject matters” (Grunke & Leonard-Zabel, 2015, p. 134).

In addition, findings by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) suggested that “written language skills remain the single most challenging academic task to both teach and remediate successfully” (Grunke & Leonard-Zabel, 2015, p. 134). Children need explicit instruction, modeling, and consistent practice to develop their writing skills. Goldberg (1992, as cited in Gibson, 2008) explained that “children need explicit scaffolding, constructed within expertly delivered instructional conversations that address the language, knowledge, and strategies required for problem solving in writing. Effective writing instruction provides richly textured opportunities for students’ conceptual and linguistic development” (p. 324).

According to Parr and Jesson (2016, as cited in Graham, 2019), teachers placed little emphasis on two important types of writing: persuasive and expository writing. Primary grade teachers in the Cutler and Graham (2008) study overemphasized teaching basic writing skills of

grammar, handwriting, and spelling, while placing little emphasis on teaching students how to carry out critical writing processes such as planning and revising. This lack of attention to teaching students how to plan and revise was also a common theme in other studies (Dockrell et al., 2016; Rietdijk et al., 2018). Teachers must emphasize the development of students' writing skills through narrative and expository writing, as well as basic writing skills such as grammar, handwriting, spelling, planning, and revising. Students need extensive opportunities to write about their topics of interest, explicit and step-by-step instruction to support their progress along a learning continuum, and effectively constructive feedback to know the next steps, but it is not easy for teachers to provide these conditions since teachers may not have received enough instruction in teaching writing (Calkin, 2013).

Santangelo et al. (2007) explained that writing is a challenging process for many students due to difficulties acquiring, utilizing, and managing strategies used by skilled writers, stressing that students benefit from high-quality instruction that explicitly teaches the strategies used by highly skilled writers. As iterated by Graham (2019), “good instruction requires rich and interconnected knowledge about subject matter and content, students’ learning and diversity, and subject-specific as well as general pedagogical methods” (p. 283).

That being said, teachers have reported that they have not had adequate training to teach writing. Norman and Spencer (2005) stated that “school reforms have not given adequate attention to writing and recommend, for one, improvements in teacher education in writing across all disciplines” (p. 25). Writing practice in schools entails a complicated interaction between teachers and elements outside their control. As Myers et al., (2016, as cited in Graham, 2019) stated:

... writing instruction in schools involves a complex interaction between teachers and factors outside their control. Take, for instance, preparation to teach writing. Teachers can

and do learn how to teach writing through their own efforts and experiences, but their preparation also rests on institutional programs such as the preservice and in-service training they receive at college and as a teacher, respectively. Such institutional preparation is often viewed by teachers and those who deliver such instruction as inadequate, potentially undercutting teachers' own personal efforts to become good writing teachers (p. 282).

Statement of Problem

The above discussion surfaced the problem that teachers with limited knowledge of writing instruction face more challenges teaching writing in schools, while struggling writers require teachers with stronger skills to teach writing. This conflict creates an even more challenging teaching and learning environment for teachers and students. In order to inform improvements in future pedagogical practices in writing instruction, it is important to dig deeper and explore teachers' perceptions of how they understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers, so as to understand their competencies and training needs for becoming more effective instructors of writing.

Tschannen-Moren et al., (2011) have asserted that teachers and school leaders should pay close attention to and make decisions about the factors that initiate self-efficacy for literacy instruction such as “how efficacy beliefs are established, when they are most malleable, and what factors may lead to their improvement” (p. 760). Teachers could then be provided professional development to improve their self-efficacy beliefs. Ongoing professional development including book clubs and teachers-as-readers groups have been found to be very effective in promoting teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in relation to literacy instruction (Tschannen-Moren et al., 2011).

Research Questions

This study examines how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers, through the following research questions:

1. Do teachers feel prepared to teach writing and how do teachers understand their training?
2. How do teachers approach teaching writing?
3. Do teachers use particular strategies and programs to support struggling writers?
4. What obstacles do they face teaching writing?
5. What are the underlying factors that influence their feelings of self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers?

Significance of the Research

Advancement in students' writing competency depends on the attitudes and values of their teachers, their preparation as teachers of writing, and the continuity of instruction they provide to improve their students' writing skills. Existing literature reveals that teachers do not have enough training to teach struggling writers, do not devote enough time to teach writing, and lack differentiated instruction strategies to help struggling writers. Teachers' own beliefs also affect their teaching instruction in writing. As a school special education and support teacher, I feel that classroom teachers are often not confident about teaching writing and lack time to devote to writing instruction. In addition, I have observed that many do not know how to differentiate writing instruction for struggling writers, make connections between reading and writing, and integrate writing instruction within other subjects.

This study was built upon the premise that struggling writers are not receiving enough differentiated instruction to improve their writing skills. Literature reviewed indicated that the reasons for this include (a) schools not giving adequate attention to writing and students are

receiving minimal instruction and modeling in writing after Grade 3, (b) teachers not receiving enough training during their training years, and (c) teachers' attitudes and experiences affecting their teaching, and shaping and influencing their beliefs and values about writing. Some other factors such as oral language delay, intellectual disabilities, communication deficits, experiencing English as an additional language and poverty also contribute to the challenges that struggling writers face. According to Graham (2019), to be effective in school, at work, and in their personal lives, students need to learn to write, further asserting that "writing instruction in most classrooms is inadequate" (p. 279) and, with respect to effective writing instruction, "most of these procedures were applied infrequently, often less than once a month" (Graham, 2019, p. 280).

As mentioned in the article *What Works? Research into Practice* by Peterson (2014):

Writing is central to learning and to social interaction. Through writing, students not only demonstrate their learning but also deepen their understanding of new concepts, as they reflect on thoughts made visible on a page or screen. Sadly, some students struggle in their attempts to communicate what they have learned and to interact with others through writing. Research provides many strategies for addressing these students' specific writing difficulties and enhancing their motivation to write" (p. 1).

Weber (2010, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) informed that cognitive and linguistic theories show that writing is a cognitive problem-solving act. Prior (2006, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) discussed sociocultural frameworks that describe writing as a meaningful social activity between writer and audience, not just a means of communication. Thus, writing can be interpreted as a complex process involving motor, cognitive, linguistic, and social skills.

Since writing is a complex process, it is essential to examine further the importance of teachers' perspectives about struggling writers and to explore what teachers can do to best support

their students. This research thus attempts to supplement these findings by examining how teachers perceive their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers, through a surfacing and understanding of their approaches and strategies, obstacles faced and factors influencing their perceptions of self-efficacy in teaching such students, and provide insight to the programs, strategies and approaches that are effective.

In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature and connect the literature to the stated problem. In Chapter 3, the research methodology will be detailed. Following which the findings will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4 before the study is concluded in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Who are the Struggling Writers?

Many students struggle with inadequate writing skill acquisition. There are various underlying factors associated with writing skill acquisition that may affect students' writing performance. Some of the factors are oral language delay, intellectual disabilities, communication deficits, experiencing English as an additional language and poverty. However, as Dockrell et al., (2016, as cited in Kim & Schatschneider, 2017) stated:

Current writing models are informative about the predictors of writing skills, but they lack specificity about the relationships between text quality and productivity, and those highly related skills such as spelling, handwriting fluency and the wider measures of working memory (WM), oral language and reading (p. 75).

Dockrell et al., (2016) discovered that students' cognitive skills directly or indirectly impacted their writing processes and outcomes. They argued that the quality of students' writing and the fluency of their written expression depend on their writing automaticity, retrieval of accurately spelled words and oral language productivity. Oral language skills influence children's written outcomes. Children need to access cognitive representations in textual creation which involves fluent use of different levels of language to translate these into written form (Abbott et al., 2010; Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016).

Dockrell et al., (2016) explained that according to their preliminary evidence, oral sentence fluency supports generating written texts over time and across languages. Oral language directly or indirectly impacts students' written performance and sentence structure. Dockrell et al., (2016) also expressed that "reading also influences written text production. Word reading is associated

with transcription skills, and word recognition skills consistently predict spelling abilities at all elementary grade levels” (p. 76).

It can be said that struggling writers are those who tend to also have difficulties with other aspects of language acquisition. The following subsections discuss various groups of learners and their difficulties with learning to write.

Learning Disabilities

Graham and Harris (2009, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) and Pajares (2003, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) stressed that children with learning disabilities struggle with writing, affecting their school performance, causing negative psychosocial consequences, and affecting their development. They highlighted that writing requires both low-level transcription and high-level composition skills, where the former includes handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar, while the latter involves planning, organization, generating content and revising. Berninger (2009, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) further explained that “children’s planning is intertwined with composing because young children tend to think and write at the same time” (p. 212). Batorowicz et al., (2012) discussed the positive use of technology to support students’ writing productivity in children with learning disabilities and explained that technology not only assists students in writing but also has positive influences on children’s attitude towards writing. Children with learning disabilities struggle with this complex process of writing, so they suggest that technology use can support these students in this multifaceted writing process.

Kulkarni et al., (2001) highlighted that one of the causes of poor academic performance is learning disabilities, defining a learning disability as a disorder that "interferes with one’s ability to store, process or produce information" (p. 539) and that children who are struggling in reading and writing also have difficulty demonstrating expected progress in regular schools. They also

stated that “dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia denote the problem related to reading, writing, and mathematics” (Kulkarni, et al., 2001, p. 539), explaining that besides these learning disabilities, children also have other issues such as intellectual disabilities, poor concentration, and emotional disturbances. Dysgraphia, difficulty in learning to write, and dyslexia, difficulties in reading, spelling, speaking and listening, adversely affect students' academic performances. Zajic et al., (2020) also stated that “children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) demonstrate heterogeneous writing skills that are generally lower than their typically developing (TD) peers and similar to peers with attention difficulties like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)” (p. 14). They further shared that according to current evidence, children with ASD spend less time engaging in writing tasks compared to their peers. Unfortunately, according to Coker et al. (2018), students who are not formally diagnosed are not likely to receive writing support.

Poverty

Students who are from low income or struggling families often enter kindergarten or Grade 1 with low mean lengths of utterances. These students lack sufficient vocabulary to express themselves in speech or in writing. Living conditions, family life, and the health conditions of indigenous children have an impact on their academic achievements. Council of Minister of Education (2004, as cited in Ball, 2008) iterated that indigenous children face more challenges to fulfilling their developmental potential than any other population in Canada. Ball (2008) also highlighted that “overall, 52.1% of aboriginal children are living below the poverty line, and have the highest rate of poverty compared to other equity groups: visible minority children and children with disabilities” (p. 38).

Besides the indigenous peoples, the findings of poverty as an influencing factor on literacy also apply to all underprivileged children. Dickinson and Smith (1994) discussed the provision of

opportunities to low-income children to develop vocabulary and comprehension, detailing how reading stories to young children can impact language and literacy development skills. According to Beals and DeTemple (1993, as cited in Dickinson & Smith, 1994), “evidence for the role of particular kinds of interactions in supporting development comes from the finding that participation in mealtimes that are rich in cognitively challenging talk when children are four is related to growth of emergent literacy skills at the end of kindergarten” (p. 29).

Language Delays

Ball (2008) also expressed that indigenous children are at high risk for language delay and low language proficiency, factors that may contribute to a high rate of educational exclusion. These children are prone to health conditions, and may have a disadvantaged early childhood, a lack of educational opportunities and an impoverished home environment. Castro et al., (2011) also highlighted national studies showing that dual language learners (DLL) from low-income families fall behind compared to their peers when they enter kindergarten, even though they had attended early childhood programs. Ball (2008) stated:

...speech-language services are extremely limited for children living on-reserve, since they are not eligible for provincially funded services and this is a service that most First Nations do not contract; and, well over half of Aboriginal children do not have access to child care programs...(p. 38).

These children may miss opportunities conducive to developing early literacy that would later improve their reading and writing skill acquisition, such as early exposure to oral language and technology, and educational games. On the other hand, strong language proficiency can increase the rate of success in school. Campbell and Ramey (1994, as cited in Ball, 2008) iterated that “early interventions to increase language proficiency can significantly increase later success

in school” (p. 38). Castro et al., (2011) stressed that children are receptive language users when exposed to language through listening and reading, and this leads to the development of speaking and writing, explaining that reading is very important in the enhancement of oral vocabulary, which leads to the development of improved speaking and promotes writing.

Evidence Based Practices in Teaching Writing

According to Graham et al. (2014), there are 19 evidence-based practices: study and imitate models of good writing, teach strategies for writing paragraphs, teach sentence combining, summarize material read in writing, set writing goals, students work together to write, complete writing using word processing software, students complete prewriting activities, provide written feedback on students’ papers, implement a process approach to writing, teach strategies for planning, teach strategies for revising, engage in inquiry or research activities for writing, reinforce positive aspects of students’ writing, encourage students to self assess their writing, teachers assess students’ writing performance, use writing assessment data to shape writing instruction, use writing to support content learning, and provide direct instruction of basic writing skills (p. 1020).

Evidence-based practices in teaching writing complement a developmental model to support teachers that include (i) the writing process approach, (ii) scaffolding, editing and conferencing, (iii) time-on-task reading and writing across genres, and (iv) using technology. Berninger’s developmental model of the writing process (Berninger et al., 2009) is illustrated in Figure 1 below, with the replacement of the term ‘punctuations’ with ‘conventions’.

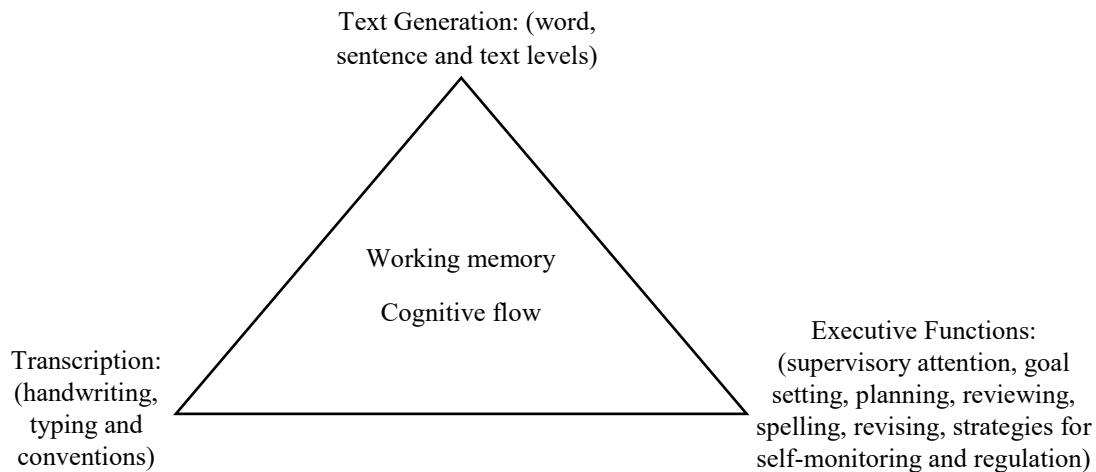


Figure 1: Berninger's Model

When teachers have a developmental model of writing in mind, they are able to understand writing development and provide appropriate instruction. Dockrell et al., (2016) noted that Berninger's model addresses writing requirements such as working memory, transcription skills and executive functions that students need to be effective writers. Specifically, writing development is described as the product of the development of (a) transcription skills, (b) text generation skills at word, sentence and text levels, and (c) executive functions including planning, reviewing and revising (Berninger, 2000; Berninger et al., 2002).

According to Dockrell et al., (2016), these different domains have potential foci that can be conceptualized for teaching the writing process. MacArthur et al., (2006, as cited in Batorowicz et al., 2012) explained that writing involves both high-level transcription skills of handwriting, spelling, punctuation or conventions, and grammar, as well as low-level composition skills of planning, organizing, generating content and revising, essential for the writing process, iterating that "writers must integrate both low-level and high-level skills while continuously monitoring their own performance" (p. 212).

Dockrell et al. shared that “encouraging students to write for audiences and purposes and regular and extensive shared, guided and independent writing have been shown to be effective” (Graham et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2011; Institute of Education Sciences, 2012, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016, p. 414). The Institute of Education Science (2012, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016) mentioned research support for direct instruction in writing, specifically directly teaching spelling, vocabulary and sentence-level skills to improve writing competency. Graham and Perin (2007c, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016) suggested providing children with daily opportunities to write.

Early writing can be supported through strategies like Rime Magic (Zinke, 2017), a collection of phonic-powered prevention and intervention strategies for all students. The strategies allow students to develop word segmentation, decoding and word-solving skills to improve their fluency in reading and writing, and strengthen their vocabularies. Zinke (2017) stated:

This will go a long way toward preventing the decoding problems many students carry with them into middle school. ... you can use the strategies in this book to quickly bring your students with low word recognition up to grade level in their decoding skills (p. 4).

It is important to bring reciprocity in students' acquisition of reading and writing skills and teachers should encourage children to print, write or type the words they can read. Combining reading and writing instruction can develop students' literacy skills and promote independence. Graham and Henert (2011, as cited in Turcotte & Caron, 2020) noted, “recent studies have shown that reading and writing use shared knowledge and cognitive process” (p. 243). Teachers should teach students that authors write with their readers in mind. They ensure their readers will understand and receive the message that they would like to convey by paying attention to organization, plot, expression, visualization, and literary devices. Haland (2017, as cited in

Turcotte & Caron, 2020) expressed that “interaction between reading and writing can scaffold students’ disciplinary writing and give them opportunity to position them as disciplinary writers” (p. 243).

Teachers’ direct and explicit instruction can support students in developing their literacy skills. For older students in Grade 3 and above, Precision Writing (Freeze & Freeze, 2018) strategies support struggling writers in their development of writing skills. Freeze and Freeze (2018) introduced well laid out, step-by-step instructional strategies that are especially helpful for novice teachers to employ in support of struggling writers. In Precision Writing, the following strategies are explained extensively: (i) identifying a topic (a topic planner allows students to use an inquiry framework to develop strong writing topics), (ii) clarifying the writing purposes (supports students with options for purposeful writing), (iii) gathering information (helps students to inquire thoroughly by gathering information from various sources), (iv) organizing information (using graphic organizers and other scaffolds and organizational tools), (v) using writing templates (a set of common writing formats), (vi) composing within a template (encourages students to write authentically by keeping their audiences in mind), (vii) revising the content (includes teacher-led editing, self-editing and peer conferencing to improve the quality of expression), (viii) revising the form (supports editing for spelling, punctuation and organization), (ix) peer editing (supports and extends students' editing skills), and (x) publishing (presents options for student publication). Precision Writing combines an inquiry-based approach with a skills-based approach, incorporating strategies that support students to write authentically and purposefully to become independent and confident writers.

Writing Strategies

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

Santanelo et al., (2007) introduced Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) as "a comprehensive, flexible model that explicitly helps students learn to manage the writing process" (p. 1). Their research has shown that the SRSD model supports students with learning disabilities in writing skills acquisition in areas such as content knowledge, writing quality, strategic behaviour, self-regulated skills, self-efficacy, and motivation. Zimmerman and Reisemberg (1997, as cited in Santanelo et al., 2007) stated, "even expert writers frequently lament the difficult and complex aspects of planning, composing, evaluating, and revising" (p. 1). The strategies and tools of the SRSD model allow students to simplify and organize the complex steps of a writing task. It provides strategies that students can use to define a course of action and complete a writing assignment successfully, supporting students' mental operations during writing sessions, including planning, composing, evaluating, and visible and concrete revising, and effectively enhances students' knowledge about writing genres and devices, the writing process, and their capabilities as writers (Graham & Haris, 2005; Graham & Haris, 1996).

In addition, the SRSD stages and components describe and provide descriptive plans to address the difficulties experienced by students during the writing process, not only supporting students with diverse needs, such as students with learning and intellectual disabilities, but also struggling non-disabled students. The SRSD intervention is designed to improve students' academic skills through a six-step process (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) identified 10 studies of SRSD that meet pilot single-case design standards and fall within the scope of students with specific learning disabilities topic areas. According to the What Works ClearinghouseTM Standards Handbook version 4.0, "What Works Clearinghouse

(WWC) addresses the need for credible, succinct information by identifying existing research on education interventions, assessing the quality of this research, and summarizing and disseminating the evidence from studies that meet WWC standards” (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017, p. 1).

Units of Study

Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) discussed the Units of Study program that offers students explicit strategy instruction in writing, which emphasizes a structured direct instruction approach to writing instruction, stating that “researchers today, however, also emphasize that effective writing instruction includes explicit strategy instruction” (p. 10), as this would increase the effectiveness of writing practices (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, as cited in Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016, as cited in Graham et al., 2016) specified that the conditions for students to become good writers include time to write, a supportive writing environment and feedback, explicit instruction, opportunities to use 21st-century writing tools, and opportunities to write for various purposes, including those supporting learning in other content areas.

Graham et al., (2016) have also supported this perspective in iterating that students require a supportive environment, constructive feedback and time to write to flourish as writers. They also recommended that students obtain detailed instruction, opportunities to utilize 21st century writing tools, and possibilities to use writing for a range of purposes, especially those that help them master content area knowledge. Graham and Sandmel (2011, as cited in Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016) suggested that the effectiveness of writing practices will increase with explicit and step-by-step instruction.

Units of Study provides curricular units, tools and methods for teaching reading and writing. Students are provided with explicit curriculum-based instruction on how to work collaboratively with their peers and carry this knowledge across the curriculum, through writing

workshops, mini lessons, conferences and small group work. Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) explained that “working within a shared genre-employing strategies and emulating mentor texts of that genre - teachers have a context within which to explicitly teach the craft and structure of that particular genre” (p. 10), further explaining that since all students are working within a shared genre, they can support and provide feedback to one another. Units of Study also provides assessment tools for children to work independently to achieve their learning goals.

Researchers in the Teachers Collage Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) highlighted meta-analysis in Graham et al., (2012) that supported this practice, in expressing that writing strategies and knowledge play an important role in developing students as writers. Instruction designed to enhance their writing skills, such as strategy instruction, and creativity or imagery instruction helps students become better writers, and students’ writing improves when they write more. Therefore, students need long stretches of time and specific feedback at each step of their writing to progress as writers (Graham et al., 2012).

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is an effective program designed to dramatically reduce the literacy difficulties of struggling readers and writers. Reading Recovery provides intensive small group and individual support to children who are having difficulties in reading and writing during the first grade at school. What Works Clearinghouse (2013) highlighted three Reading Recovery studies, involving 227 first grade students from at least 14 states, within the scope of the Beginning Reading topic area and meeting WWC evidence standards. Clay (1991) highlighted that learning to read and write messages provides word information from a slightly different perspective that could help children better understand how written words function, thus improving their literacy skills and developing independence and confidence.

Serravallo: Writing Strategies

Serravallo (2017) developed writing strategies in the following areas: (i) composing with pictures, (ii) fostering engagement, (iii) supporting independence, (iv) increasing volume, (v) developing a writing identity, (vi) generating and collecting ideas, (vii) developing a focus and creating meaning, (viii) creating organization and structure, (ix) elaboration, (x) word choice, (xi) writing conventions (including letter formation, spelling, grammar and punctuation), and (xii) collaborating with writing partners and clubs. The objectives of these strategies are to articulate clear goals to young writers, provide support in terms of strategies and feedback to accomplish these goals, and boost their ability to succeed (Serravallo, 2017).

Six Traits+1

The Six Traits+1 program by Spandel (2012) encourages teachers to focus on the power and strengths of a piece of writing. This is achieved by focusing on the following traits of good writers: (i) ideas, (ii) organization, (iii) voice, (iv) word choice, (v) sentence fluency, (vi) conventions, and (vii) presentation.

The Continuum of Literacy Learning

The Continuum of Literacy Learning by Fountas and Pinnell (2011) focuses on the writing process of (i) rehearsing and planning, (ii) drafting and revising, (iii) editing and proofreading, (iv) publishing, sketching and drawing, and (v) viewing yourself as a writer. Fountas and Pinnell (2011) explained that students learn by engaging in the writing process with the teacher's expertise and their peers' support. If students are provided with constant and explicit instruction, they can make extensive gains in their writing skills. According to What Works Clearinghouse (2017), two studies that included 747 grades K to 2 students from 22 schools in three school districts across three states employed Leveled Literacy Learning to meet their standards. All the above-mentioned

instructional programs offer strategies to support students' acquisition of reading and writing skills through reciprocal methods. For instance, if students can improve reading, it may also boost their writing.

Teachers as the Driving Factor

Struggling writers are not receiving enough differentiated instruction to improve their writing skills due to the inability of teachers to competently teach writing. This could be due to factors such as schools giving inadequate attention to writing, teachers not receiving enough preservice training, and teachers' attitudes and negative personal experiences with education impacting their confidence in teaching writing. These affect their instruction, and shape and influence their beliefs and values about writing. It was noted that there has been little change in teaching writing over recent years, while other studies had teachers reporting that they spend little time teaching writing beyond Grade 3, and that students do little writing in or out of school for academic purposes (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Brindle et al., 2016; Gillespie et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2014, as cited in Graham & Harris, 2019). Graham and Harris (2019) further highlighted that while some teachers have done a good job of teaching writing during the last several decades, the general lack of attention to improving writing instruction is still a nationwide concern.

Baker and Zigmond (1990) indicated that teachers in an urban elementary school generally provided undifferentiated large-group instruction, making little or no adaptations for struggling students. Likewise, McIntosh et al., (1993) found little evidence of teacher adaptations in 60 social studies and science classrooms. Peterson and Clark (1978) indicated that the 12 social studies teachers in their study made relatively few changes in their lesson plans in response to student difficulties. Finally, Fuchs et al., (1992) found that only 25% of the 110 general educators in their study made revisions in their six-week instructional plans for students with learning difficulties.

These studies revealed that teachers are under prepared to teach writing and may not know how to adapt writing instruction for struggling writers. Therefore, improved teacher preparation and knowledge of teaching adaptations in literacy instruction are needed to help students write better.

In their study, Baker and Cremin (2010) discussed the significance of teachers being also writers within and outside the classroom. Other studies have suggested that teachers' development as writers has the potential to enrich writing pedagogy and impact positively on young writers (Andrews, 2008a, 2008b; Cremin, 2008, 2006; Grainger, 2005; Ing, 2009). Students benefit when teachers model and share their thinking processes in front of them, yet many teachers hesitate to model writing, possibly due to negative personal experiences and memories of writing in school affecting their self-esteem and confidence as writing teachers. Baker and Cremin (2010) observed that while teachers are expected to model writing and demonstrate proficiency as writers, a lack of self-assurance and positive writing identities would render this difficult.

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003) stressed that schools and colleges have not given adequate attention to writing and recommended improvements in teacher training for both potential and current teachers (p. 30). This would remedy the limited instruction in writing theory and pedagogy for preservice teachers to counter the emphasis on reading instruction over writing, exemplified by the requirement of a writing course for teacher certification only in a few states despite widespread concerns about writing proficiency (Norman & Spencer, 2005). In addition, the emphasis is on teacher effectiveness in teaching reading rather than writing, resulting in teachers who are more confident about the former than the latter (Norman & Spencer, 2005).

In comparison, when teachers were provided with opportunities and exposed to various approaches to teaching writing, they became more confident and successful at teaching and

modeling writing in the classroom (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Thus, when educators develop their skills in teaching writing, their beliefs and values towards writing development and instruction change. Norman and Spencer (2005) stated:

Evidence suggests that even if these beliefs system are implicit, they serve to filter new information as candidates attempt to make sense of curricula that may or may not mirror their personal experiences. If beliefs remain unexamined, new learning afforded by preparation courses may not influence their views or be applied to teaching contexts (Britzman, 1986; Lortie, 1975, as cited in Norman & Spencer, 2005, p. 26).

Norman and Spencer (2005) stressed that preservice teachers are receiving limited instruction in writing theory and pedagogy, and that teachers must be provided with learning experiences that are supported by research to make their practices effective. Pajares et al., (1992, 1998, as cited in Norman & Spencer, 2005) suggested having candidates examine their personal theories and beliefs in relation to theory and practice, as effective teacher preparation, while Baker and Cremin (2006, as cited in Cremin, 2010) informed of recent research in the United Kingdom (UK) that advocated providing professional development time to ponder on writing processes and strategies.

These studies support my observation, in my capacity as a school special education resource teacher (SERT), that teachers who have extensive knowledge about literacy instruction at the beginning of their careers tend to provide better instruction to their students, such as making better reciprocal connections between reading and writing, and teaching writing in ways that are integrated throughout the curriculum. In addition, the above discussion also raises questions of whether providing extensive training to teachers on writing instruction makes a considerable

difference to struggling writers, and what supports and experiences teachers think they need to make their teaching practices more effective.

Teachers' Use of Differentiation and Adaptations for Diverse Learners

According to a survey of teachers by Graham et al., (2003), teachers made few or no instructional adaptations for weaker and struggling writers, even though they were very sensitive to their individual needs, and data collected as a part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Greenwald et al., 1998, as cited in Graham et al., 2003) revealed that this is a significant problem. Such data was obtained from teacher interviews, in which teachers were surveyed on curriculum adaptation for struggling writers. They were asked to indicate the types and frequency of usage of specific writing activities and instructional procedures for both average and weaker writers in their classrooms, such as conferencing, mini lessons, modeling and re-teaching, as well as elements of the writing process including planning, revising and text organization. The survey revealed that slightly more than 60% of Grade 4 students are basic writers who have only mastered a few of the skills needed at their grade level, as only the 'outstanding' teachers were making adaptations and tailoring their instruction according to the students' individual needs while teaching a common curriculum.

Based on this research, Greenwald et al. (1998) stressed the importance of improving the teaching of writing instruction in classrooms in the US. The success of that effort will depend, in part, on providing writing instruction that is responsive to children's individual needs (Graham & Harris, 2002a). Corno and Snow (1986, as cited in Graham et al., 2003) have also stated that improving educational outcomes depends on adapting instruction to individual differences among students. Graham et al., (2003) reinforced that children's poor writing performance not only calls for improvements to teaching writing, but also demands that school districts upgrade the quality

of teachers' writing instruction. This is to meet students' individual needs through differentiated instruction, as poverty results in greater academic diversity in the US and increases risks of school failure, and "over 70% of students with disabilities now receive all or part of their education in the regular classroom" (De Bettencourt, 1999, as cited in Graham et al., 2003, p. 279), and yet there is little empirical evidence of teachers making adaptations to teach low-achieving students.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Writing Instruction

The observation in the previous section that only the exceptional teachers were tailoring differentiated instructions to cater to their multi-ability classrooms provided insight into the positive correlation between teachers' lack of self-efficacy in writing and the non-differentiation of curriculum. This is reinforced by Graham, et al., (2003), in which teachers' efficacy for teaching writing was assessed and reported, revealing that teachers who are "more confident about their teaching abilities may make more adaptations", just as prior research showed that teachers with a high sense of efficacy are more willing to try new ideas to meet students' learning needs (Stein & Wang, 1998). At the same time, teachers often found "teaching writing challenging" and reported being inadequately prepared to teach writing (Graham et al., 2008, 2014, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016, p. 411). Writing is thus a very complex process that significantly demands teachers' expertise and time.

Dockrell et al., (2016) examined teachers' adaptive writing approaches and how often they implemented adaptations in the classroom. In the study, data was collected from 88 teachers, and results showed that 50% of them were experiencing difficulties supporting struggling writers. Teachers reported that planning, reviewing and revising occurred only once a month, and teachers who were teaching younger students focused more on teaching phonic activities related to spelling while the higher grade teachers focused more on "word roots, punctuation, word classes and the

grammatical function of words, sentence-level work, and paragraph construction” (p. 409). It was observed that teachers did not devote enough time to writing instruction and that students were not engaged in the process. Applebee and Langer (2011, as cited in Dockrell et al., 2016) also revealed that “students in middle and high schools were not engaged in much extended writing and only 50% of the observed English classes included specific writing-related instruction” (p. 410).

The above studies reiterate the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on their instruction, which would affect student performance and success. Students’ performance depends on the instruction that they receive, as there is a close link between teachers’ instruction and students’ performance. Explicit instruction differentiated according to students’ needs increases students’ engagement in learning.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Struggling Writers

Improvement in students' writing depends on teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, training and the consistency with which they implement programs to develop their students’ writing skills. Troia and Graham (2003) revealed that teachers are aware of their lack of knowledge, skills and strategies that they believe would facilitate students’ writing competency. From personal experience, some teachers struggle to teach writing as they had insufficient training during the course of their education degree and lacked knowledge in teaching writing. Particularly for novice teachers, writing performance depends on their beliefs about writing, which influence engagement in writing, commitment of effort, and application of resources (Graham, 2018a). Such self-efficacy beliefs are lost in flux early in training, and teachers tend to become resistant to change once their mindsets are set. For novice teachers who have few mastery experiences to draw upon, other sources of self-efficacy seem to be more salient in their self-assessment of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, as cited in Tschannen-Moren et al., 2011).

Graham (2019) emphasized that to be successful in school, at work, and in their personal lives, students must learn to write, yet most writing instruction is insufficient and procedures are infrequent. Addressing this requires effective and successful writing instruction through better teacher training, and teachers' practices need to change, such as including more explicit writing instruction, more quality writing time, and employing multiple writing tools including digital platforms. While teachers can proactively learn to teach writing, mastery also depends on the preservice and in-service training they receive at university and as in-service teachers, which, according to preservice teachers, were often inadequate and “potentially undercutting teachers’ own personal efforts to become good writing teachers” (Graham, 2019, p. 282). Effective writing instruction requires good pedagogical methods, extensive and interconnected knowledge about subject matter, and knowledge about how to teach struggling and diverse learners. If teachers acquire the necessary knowledge, and have a clear vision and commitment, they are more likely to become skillful, motivated and dedicated writing teachers. For example, teachers were able to implement new instructional practices as a result of follow-up coaching, and both self-efficacy and implementation of literacy instruction were enhanced (Tschannen-Moren et al., 2011). Policymakers, district personnel and principals also need to acquire specific know-how about writing to make writing instruction an educational priority, so that teachers’ efforts are valued and supported (Graham, 2019).

With comprehensive training, teachers will perceive their self-efficacy in a more positive light and be more confident in taking up the challenge of teaching struggling writers, as they shape classroom practices according to their beliefs and knowledge (Graham & Harris, 2018, as cited in Graham, 2019). Teachers devote more time and attention to teaching writing if they are better prepared to teach it, feel more confident in their capabilities to teach it, derive greater pleasure

from teaching it, and consider it an important skill (Brindle et al., 2016; De Smedt et al., 2016; Hsiang & Graham, 2016; Kiuahara et. al., 2009; Rietdijk et al., 2018; Troia & Graham, 2016). They are also more likely to apply specific writing practices that they consider acceptable (Troia & Graham, 2017). In turn, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have positive impact on students' success and motivation (Tschannen-Moren & Johnson, 2011), and students would have greater success when teachers believe in them. Thus, student achievement and teacher motivation are influenced by teachers' beliefs of students and themselves, which are in effect self-fulfilling prophecies (Tschannen-Moren & Johnson, 2011), validating competencies of both parties, or otherwise.

Bandura (1994, as cited in Donohoo, 2017) described four rich sources of self-efficacy beliefs: (a) mastery experience through which success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy, (b) vicarious experience through which people see others like themselves succeed, (c) social persuasion through which people convince others they have what it takes to succeed, and (d) physiological arousal through which people experience feelings of excitement or anxiety associated with their perceptions of their capabilities or incompetence. For example, it was found that vicarious experiences of modeling by teacher educators and master teachers positively influenced preservice teachers' self-efficacy for effective literacy instruction (Johnson, 2010, as cited in Tschannen-Moren et al., 2011). Tschannen-Moren et al., (2011) also highlighted "two interrelated puzzles associated with teachers' self-efficacy research concern the accuracy of teachers' self-perception in relation to external standards of knowledge and skills, and whether it is universally productive to try to increase their self-efficacy beliefs" (p. 753), explaining that when teachers experience accomplishments through improvements in their students' performances, their self-efficacy beliefs are raised.

Teachers need to make critical teaching decisions to make literacy instruction effective to meet the diverse needs of students (Tschannen-Moren et al., 2011). Teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to try various instructional strategies and approaches with their students, can provide better student and classroom engagement, and thus better nurture successful writers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter details the research method and data analysis procedure of this qualitative research study that explores how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers who have been teaching for more than five years, as they had enough experience to address the research topic, and were able to shed light on their own educational training in writing instruction, what knowledge and skills they already had as novice teachers to help struggling writers, what they had done to enhance their own learning and self-efficacy, and what they had learned through professional development or advanced in-service education to support struggling writers.

Research Method

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Board and employs grounded theory as methodology. Grounded theory is a systematic method consisting of “several flexible strategies for constructing theory through analyzing qualitative data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, as cited in Charmaz, 2017, p. 299).

Grounded theory starts with inductive data and depends on comparative analysis that includes simultaneous information collection and analysis. It also includes techniques for refining the emerging analytic categories. Grounded theory goes beyond data induction and its comparative method means successfully focusing data collection to elaborate the researcher’s emerging analysis. The methods and tools of grounded theory make its studying process and theory construction distinctive. Most qualitative research includes ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, but grounded theory, additionally, leads to ‘why’ questions (Charmaz, 2017).

Grounded theory allows a researcher to define, explicate and conceptualize what is happening in the data. It facilitates flexible analysis, which helps a researcher to make connections with the specific and the general, and the individual and the social (Charmaz, 2017). The researcher forms speculations and assembles hypotheses, and then checks them against the data.

Analysis was accomplished by initial coding, focused coding and comparison of interview transcripts. In initial coding, pieces of data were taken apart and labelled to find out the similarities and differences in them. Line by line coding allowed for understanding of participant experiences and perspectives. Comparisons were made within the interview data, between codes and categories, and collected data was compared to prior research and my pilot study which was approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) and conducted during previous coursework.

Participants

The inclusion criteria for participants in this study were:

- (a) general education teachers who had experience of five years or more teaching writing to grades 1 to 6 students in general classrooms in Manitoba,
- (b) teachers who have had direct interactions with students who are struggling with writing, and have a strong understanding of current programs and strategies being implemented in their classrooms, and
- (c) teachers who had access to a computer to participate in the interview via web conferencing platform Zoom.

All three criteria had to be met to participate in this study. Specialists such as reading recovery teachers, resource teachers, literacy support teachers, physical education teachers, art teachers, substitute teachers and retired teachers were excluded from the study.

The recruitment letter, shown in Appendix C, was sent to a few colleagues requesting that they distribute the letter to six or seven contacts to invite them to participate in the study, who were also invited to distribute the letter to their contacts to invite participation. Through this process, I was able to reach out to diverse teachers. When participants were confirmed, I went over the letter with them and completed the recruitment process.

Five female general educator interviewees participated in this study. At the point of this study, they had taught from six to twenty-five years in grades 1 to 6, the foundational years in school, and had expressed an interest in taking part in this study. Interviewee A had been teaching grades 1 and 2 for six years in a multi-age classroom. Interviewee B had been teaching grades 1, 2, 3 and 5 for the last twenty years. Interviewee C had been teaching grades 1 to 5 for fifteen years, switching between grades. Interviewee D had been teaching mostly grades 1 and 2 for ten years, and Grade 3 in one of the years. Interviewee E had been teaching Grade 1 for eighteen years and grades 4/5 and 5 for seven years. A phenomenon common among the participants from a broad range of contexts was discovered and categorized: the similar and unique experiences and perspectives they had about teaching struggling writers.

Data Collection

Data was digitally recorded and transcribed using the semi-structured interview approach, shown in Appendix B. Semi-structured interviews are used to gather focused, qualitative, textual data. This method offers a balance between the flexibility of an open-ended interview and the focus of a structured survey. Semi-structured interviews help to clarify the research domain or specific research questions. This method aligns with my research because interviewing teachers will allow me to uncover rich descriptive data on their personal experiences regarding how they understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. Such information gathered through semi-

structured interviews can move from general topics (domains) to more specific insights (factors and variables). It can be used to develop a preliminary hypothesis, explain relationships and create a foundation for further research. The data analysis was guided by grounded theory.

The five teachers were interviewed using the above-mentioned semi-structured interview guide and the interviews were conducted by me in Winnipeg. Due to university research regulations in response to Covid 19, all the teachers were interviewed on Zoom, the online conferencing platform. One online interview was conducted with each of the five educators, each with an average duration of one hour. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio voice recorder, following which the data was transcribed, coded and analyzed.

In the interviews, teachers were asked the main question: How do teachers understand their own self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers? Probing and follow-up questions were also employed; these can be found in Appendix B. Participants were asked if and how their approaches relate to their prior university education and professional development, in particular, whether they felt comfortable teaching struggling writers based on their training and experience, or if they think they need more professional development in order to help struggling students improve their writing skills. The teachers were not asked questions about their schools' or divisions' policies, or personal information about their students.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim, then shared with participants for review before analysis to ensure that I had accurately interpreted the participants' responses. Mistakes or misunderstandings were corrected and clarifications were sought from the participants. At this point, participants could choose to clarify, adapt or remove some elements of the transcript.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows the procedure detailed in Charmaz (2006), where data is read and themes identified and recorded, following which line by line coding is conducted by comparing the general type of thematic analysis most qualitative researchers conduct with grounded theory coding. Finally, the most significant codes are listed and compared with the themes.

Upon confirmation of data, initial coding was performed. Pieces of data were taken apart and labelled to surface similarities and differences. Line by line coding facilitated understanding of participant experiences and perspectives. As previously described, comparisons were made within the interview data, between codes and categories. Collected data was also compared to prior research and my pilot study which was approved by ENREB and conducted during previous coursework. The data was organized into general topics or themes, and relationships between specific insights, that is, factors and variables were discovered, substantiated by quotations from the interviewees' transcripts.

Reflexivity

The role of the researcher is an important consideration in research. All researchers live and work in cultural and social contexts that would determine how they understand the world. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers shape their writing, and qualitative researchers need to accept this and be open about it.

As an SERT, I have had various opportunities to try different programs to teach reading and writing to students who struggle to read and write, and who perform below their grade placements. I have had experience using various remediation programs and strategies and have been made aware of two major concerns while undertaking this study's literature review: (a) teacher preparation with respect to teaching writing (i.e., lack of preservice teacher training, lack

of in-service professional development, and lack of knowledge of teaching adaptations with respect to writing instruction), and (b) teacher consistency (i.e., inconsistent writing instruction for struggling writers and inconsistent implementation of adaptations according to students' needs).

A research log was maintained to record all details and interruptions throughout the interviews and coded as well, so as to engage in “self-understanding about the biases, values and experiences” I may bring to this qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 229). As a researcher, I practiced reflexivity by paying close attention to all the above-mentioned details during data collection.

Trustworthiness

The adequacy of qualitative studies is demonstrated by trustworthiness, the rigor of a study and how well the findings reflect the perspectives of the participants. The criteria for trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, achieved through methods such as verifying data with participants, comparing data with other research, analyzing data with an understanding of the literature in mind, providing a clear description of the study, and maintaining an audit process during the study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the quality of the findings and their analysis. Credibility has been strengthened by addressing triangulation and member checking. Transcripts were verified with participants to ensure accurate transcription according to provided data, and to ensure that any misunderstandings were corrected. Credibility was also enhanced by interviewing five teachers, each session of a duration of approximately one hour.

With respect to triangulation, the participants brought with them a wide range of valuable experiences from various schools. Consequently, I was able to find out more about whether the

teachers had enough training to teach diverse students (e.g., English as additional language students, and students with special needs such as autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, etc.).

Transferability

I enhanced transferability by comparing research data with other research and with my previous pilot research study that was conducted during my coursework. This pilot study was conducted with retired teachers to gather their perspectives towards struggling writers. I attempted to provide as far as possible a “baseline understanding” which subsequent work can be compared to (Shenton, 2004). In addition, I described my study with sufficient detail and clarity that replication by other researchers is facilitated.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the findings are grounded in the data and not the bias of the researcher. Shenton (2004) states:

The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity. Here steps must be taken to ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (p. 72).

As such, confirmability was ensured by maintaining impartiality during data analysis, with an understanding of the literature in mind.

Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which a study can be repeated by other researchers. A clear description of the methods and an audit process during the study are essential to establishing dependability. In line with recommendations from Shenton (2004), dependability was ensured by selecting a focus group of teachers teaching struggling writers, and obtaining data through

individual interviews. The procedures were reported in detail, enabling future research to replicate the work. Discussion was as detailed as possible to allow readers to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board and the ethical principles and guidelines as stated by the board were adhered to. I obtained informed consent from all participants in the study via a consent form, shown in Appendix A. Participants were also informed that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time by simply letting me know by email or a phone call, and that their data would be destroyed after the research process to ensure confidentiality. All participants, people mentioned in the interviews, schools, school divisions, and locations were given fictitious names in transcriptions, notes, and in the thesis.

Risk and Benefits

The risks to teachers participating in this study were no greater than those they experience in everyday life. The benefits were that teacher participants might reflect on their teaching practices, and better understand their own strengths and challenges, that is self-efficacy, in teaching writing. This in turn might enable them to improve their students' learning environments and plan better for their students' needs. For the education system as a whole, universities may gain insight on challenges teachers face in teaching writing, and identify areas for improvement in their teacher education programs. After all, from an inclusive education perspective, it is essential that teachers are adequately equipped pedagogically to effectively help struggling writers.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the data. Compared to other research which focused on struggling writers to discover teachers' understanding of self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers, this study focused on the teachers who teach struggling writers.

Findings

It was surfaced that teachers understand their own self-efficacy and what skills they need to develop to support students. They also detailed the challenges struggling writers face and their reasons. After coding the data, my analysis surfaced three main themes related to teachers' self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers.

Firstly, all five teachers felt that their self-efficacy was impacted from the beginning of their teaching careers because they did not have enough preservice training or experience with strategies to teach and support struggling writers. This adversely affected their self-efficacy in teaching writing. The second theme is the need for self-initiated professional development, where all participants indicated that at the beginning of their teaching careers, they had to learn on their own and through professional development to advance their skills in writing assessment, writing programs and writing strategies to teach struggling writers. Thirdly, there were barriers to effectively support struggling writers, with four teachers sharing that students were not receiving enough learning support and time in class because of big class sizes, which influenced teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. These will be detailed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Lack of Preservice Training and Experience

Teachers feel that they are not prepared to teach struggling writers based on their preservice training, thus they have to rely on other methods such as devoting personal time to develop

professionally through reading materials, conversations with colleagues, attending professional development seminars or attending in-service training.

As Norman and Spencer (2005) explained, when teachers are provided with opportunities and exposed to "a range of pedagogical approaches to the teaching writing", they are more confident and successful at teaching and modeling writing in the classroom. When educators develop their skills in teaching writing, their beliefs and values change towards writing development and instruction. Norman and Spencer stated:

Evidence suggests that even if these beliefs system are implicit, they serve to filter new information as candidates attempt to make sense of curricula that may or may not mirror their personal experiences. If beliefs remain unexamined, new learning afforded by preparation courses may not influence their views or be applied to teaching contexts (Britzman, 1986; Lortie, 1975, as cited in Norman & Spencer, 2005, p. 26).

The teachers informed that during the course of study for their Bachelor of Education degrees, their university did not provide them with adequate preservice training, experience and practice in teaching struggling writers. Interviewee A said, "My training has been pretty much non-existent, because most of my training was for the curriculum instruction and assessment. I also heard from the colleagues who went through university at similar time to me. It seems like there was not a huge focus on actual real-world instruction and assessment, working with struggling readers and writers. In the university they did not even teach how to do running records. Some of my colleagues had said they wish they had some of those real-world strategies going into work".

Interviewee B noted, "If I go back to my preservice training and teaching, we were never taught more of the subject area of writing, we might be learning a bit of how to support readers

but never struggling writers. We were never really taught writing and I was never in a classroom long enough to observe how a teacher supported struggling learners and how to learn myself, so as a preservice teacher I did not feel I was prepared at all, and I boggled through my first three years of teaching and never would want to meet some of my struggling writers now, because I just did not have tools and I was just a survival”.

Interviewee C shared that, “I still find writing challenging to teach and a challenge with struggling ones, specially when you get a move up different grade. Definitely in the university, I was not prepared for struggling writers. It would have been very beneficial for the universities to maybe collaborate, somehow there is consistency between the universities when teachers are graduating. In preservice teaching, I did not receive adequate information to help struggling writers and in fact with many curriculum areas”.

Interviewee D mentioned, “I don’t think universities prepared me much of the practical stuff in general, especially writing. It gave us [a] lot of philosophical hypothetical training but it didn’t teach me much of all about how to actually go in the classroom and specially work with the kids who may be struggling. I don’t think the university taught much in the way of practicum in the class”. Finally, Interviewee E said, “When I graduated and I would say not at all, NO, so my education at that point I don’t think was ideal for struggling writers”.

The teacher participants revealed that the university did not provide them with adequate training to teach writing and struggling writers. These findings are consistent with other studies, such as Graham (2019), highlighting that students are lagging behind because “many students do not receive the writing instruction they need or deserve” (p. 277), and National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003, as cited in Norman and Spencer, 2005) which

stated that “school reforms have not given adequate attention to writing and [we] recommend, for one, improvements in teacher education in writing across all disciplines” (p. 25).

Such lack of preservice training and experience results in writing being poorly assessed and inadequately taught, as students are not receiving adequate writing skill instruction in the classroom, and standardized diagnostic instruments and curriculum-based measures (CBMs) cannot identify the characteristics of good writing (Grunke & Leonard-Zabel, 2015), students being only measured in number of words written and spelled correctly. Yet, as Grunke and Leonard-Zabel (2015) rightly stressed, “without adequate skills in thinking on paper, students are bound to perform poorly in a whole array of subject matters” (p. 134). Many students struggle in writing in the early years and that affects their educational growth in future. All interviewees also shared that their students struggle to make connections between reading and writing, that is reciprocity. If such essential literacy skills are not addressed, students’ future success can be hindered.

Theme 2: Reliance on Professional Development and/or In-service Training

Teachers relied on independent learning and collaborating with their colleagues to enhance their self-efficacy. Teachers engaged in collaboration through various ways such as discussions with colleagues about differentiated instruction, sharing experiences about teaching different grade levels, participating in professional development team sessions, reading and learning about the same topic together in small teacher groups, and discussions about other trainings they have attended through their divisions. Teachers also attended divisional professional development sessions for instruction and assessment. Interviewee A explained, “A lot of professional development had been through our division, our school, and conversations with colleagues. I also learned so much from the reading recovery teacher”. Interviewee B said, “So as a classroom

teacher, there has been a lot of in-service training, sometimes maybe reading a book (Read, Talk, Write by Laura Robb and The Writing Power by Adrienne Gear), touching base with the resource teacher, working with the reading clinician, participating in professional learning communities (PLC), had other reading training workshops and PDs (Professional Developments). I have done things like 'Six Traits of Writing', different conferences, and participated in professional development teams”.

Interviewee C opined, “It is collaboration and also finding out from other teachers, reading articles online, and research on your own. Often, I have been faced with either teachers not have enough experience before, that you need to do research on your own. I faced with teachers who don't have enough experience before from previous training. You need to do some research on your own”. Interviewee D shared, “I think most of that learning came once I was already a teacher or in my practicum, I learned a lot from my practicum, but also once I started teaching, professional development and teacher talks and just trial and error in the classroom itself. Now [I] feel much more comfortable, I have done lots of professional development sessions over the years. We worked on a topic together, where we have a small group discussion with teachers. They seem to rotate professional development goal this year”. Interviewee D also shared, “I think the universities are very careful, there are lots of programs and things for writers and universities are careful not to introduce any of those prescribed programs”. Interviewee E said, “I kind of adapted myself, even just learning from other teachers (e.g., they share their resources and learning), conversations with colleagues and sometimes from staff meetings, someone has something to share at P. D.s”.

The fact that the interviewees all felt they had to learn on their own and seek out in-service professional development to bolster their skills in writing instruction may be due to an over emphasis on reading as opposed to writing in preservice teacher education. As Baker and Cremin

have indicated, “Canadian research in the elementary phase also reveals that reading, not writing forms the backbone of teachers’ literacy experiences and that this has an impact on their classroom practice where reading is profiled over composition” (Yeo, 2007, p. 125, as cited in Baker & Cremin, 2010, p. 9).

The haphazard approach to learning about teaching writing, reported by the interviewees in this study, has consequences. As Graham (2019) has stated:

If teachers acquire the needed knowledge, vision and commitment, they are more likely to become masterful, efficacious, and motivated writing teachers, devoting more time to teaching it. This is a necessary but not a sufficient solution for improving writing instruction in classrooms worldwide. Policymakers, district personnel, and principals also need to acquire specific know-how about writing in order to make writing instructional an educational priority so that teachers’ efforts are valued and supported (p. 283).

Theme 3: Obstacles Faced by Teachers Teaching Struggling Writers

All five interviewees reported similar obstacles such as (a) lack of support in teaching writing to struggling writers, (b) lack of time to teach writing to large classes, (c) students’ lack of exposure to a variety of writing strategies, and (d) lack of knowledge about teaching writing to students who are learning English as an additional language. Other concerns also emerged with respect to teaching struggling writers with special needs such as fine motor issues, students with speech impediment, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), students with Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and those with learning disabilities.

Interviewee A stated, “One of the biggest challenges is just finding that time in the day to be able to work with them, and class sizes are big and there is not enough support for those struggling writers. It can be a challenge when students are so far behind that they don’t have a

group to be in". Interviewee A also said, "I think support at home is [a] big one too, I would say some of my struggling learners would also just have different types of learning disabilities and challenges with that as well. Some students who had FASD, Down syndrome, Global Development Delay, autism, some are just generalized delays, they did not necessarily have a diagnosis, or the kids, often times in Grade 1".

Interviewee B said, "I want to be honest about what I was doing, I don't know, if I had tools, because I still find writing a challenge to teach with a struggling student. We might have been learning a bit of reading, how to support readers, but never struggling writers". This expressed that most teachers are more confident teaching reading. "The preservice teachers need more support and learning nowadays, the more support they can get during preservice training, the better it is, for example, because if I am going to go for teaching nowadays, it would be tough, because it is complex nowadays. The students we are receiving [are] much more complex, and we are having to do more with less. You have to be learning and you have to be involving the learner all the time. I have been at this school for the last five years, and it's a very high need school, and so a lot of stuff does fall on the classroom teacher. Unless you have a really high need student to help, we do have a support teacher, but if you don't have a child who has Level II funding, you really don't see your support teacher". Interviewee B also mentioned that they are not allowed to use the Level Literacy Intervention Kit in the classroom, because of the limited resources and the need in school, and also mentioned that students cannot use technologies because they are not independent and the teacher does not have adult support in the classroom.

Interviewee C related, "I have taught many different learners and specially [those] with autism, the spectrum's huge all across the board from non-verbal to highly functioning, dyslexia, cognitive, so I have to bring out the circus, such as differentiated instruction, strategies and

interesting ways of teaching and modeling, for instance, communicating using sticky notes with selective mute children, when it's time to help these children with writing and thinking or ideas. There is no literature to support your students with echolalia, so it's very hard to teach writing or to get into writing". Interviewee C also shared, "My struggling writers have ideas but they can't get their ideas down and a lot of time what may be effecting is they don't know how to, they don't have the stamina such as fine motor, and they may not have letter-sound connections even in Grade 3".

Interviewee D said, "There are so many different levels and their ability to write, so the biggest difficulty for me is I am just one person and they are twenty of them. It's just tiring to spread my time". Interviewee D also shared, "Children with speech [problems] or sometimes EAL students have trouble with different letter blends, because [of] the way they hear it [and] the way they write it, so these children need time and practice, such as one on one support". Interviewee E said, "Definitely children on the spectrum, or even students that don't read a lot, who knows, there are so many different factors, but writing is tough, and it's proven. I think there are lots [of] factors for every child. If there is a behaviour, all of [a] sudden you can't expect them to write, or for some kids maybe, previous teachers did not offer them lots of choices". Interviewee E also shared that, "I went to school where my teacher never taught me how to write. When I was in Grade 3, my teacher marked mistakes with red, that's all they did". On that note, it is observed that teachers' own writing experiences at school can impact their self-efficacy. Interviewee E also shared that now she is a better teacher because she did not like the way teachers used to treat students, and now would like to support and reach out to students where they can feel more successful with their writings.

Teachers are working with increasingly complex student profiles and lack necessary resources and support to address their needs. These students need individualized supports which often require a multi-disciplinary approach. This includes assessment and developing a student specific plan, along with time and school staff support such as from the resource staff, to implement the plan and evaluate student's progress. In the absence of these supports, even a teacher with high self-efficacy and training may feel overwhelmed because they may not have the ability to implement the plan with fidelity.

To conclude, when people need to manage difficult environmental demands under taxing circumstances, those who are doubtful about their efficacy become more erratic in their analytic thinking, their aspirations lower and the quality of their performance deteriorates (Bandura, 1994). As Interviewee D aptly sums up this theme, "The biggest obstacle is trying to get around all students, but I am still not hitting every child (e.g., the chance to teach or provide writing instruction one on one) every day". Addressing teachers' self-efficacy is crucial in helping not just struggling writers, but for the better of the education system as a whole.

Discussion & Recommendations

Struggling writers are not receiving enough differentiated instruction to improve their writing skills. The factors contributing to this have been identified as schools not giving adequate attention to writing and students receiving minimal instruction and modeling in writing after Grade 3, teachers not receiving enough training during their training years, and teachers' attitudes and experiences affecting their teaching instruction and shaping and influencing their beliefs and values about writing. Other student factors such as oral language delay, intellectual disabilities, communication deficits, experiencing English as an additional language, and poverty also contribute to the challenges that struggling writers face.

In addition, preservice training is not sufficiently preparing teachers to teach struggling writers. Initially in their careers, when teachers have the least amount of time, they are expected to figure out independently the strategies and resources required to teach writing to diverse groups of students. Eventually through their personal growth, in-service training, collaboration, and professional development, they were able to acquire some degree of self-efficacy in the later part of their careers. Through the discussions, the teachers shared that they felt teachers were not prepared after their university training. Since their skills for writing instruction were not strong, this impacted their self-efficacy. In the beginning of their teaching careers, they tried many methods and writing strategies learned through professional development, collaborating with colleagues and reading books. In the course of their service, they still felt insufficiently prepared, utilized a lot of personal time, and for some, still questioned their teaching and their degree of self-efficacy. As Interviewee E mentioned, “After 28 years of experience, so my education at that point, I don’t think was ideal for [a] struggling writer”. Their self-efficacy only improved in later years of teaching, after developing their teaching skills in literacy, especially in writing.

The next subsection details recommendations on supporting struggling writers, and from which, a teacher’s self-efficacy model will be presented.

Supporting Struggling Writers

The interviews surfaced suggestions on how teachers can support struggling writers. Firstly, interviewees mentioned that teaching for purpose increased students’ engagement. Interviewee A said, “I think from the Optimal Model by Regie Routman promotes [writing], but I think just having really authentic audience for kids to be writing for, so that’s something that I always find, the best writing for my kids. When they know why they are writing, who is going to be reading it, what is the purpose of this”. Interviewee B said, “The one that I do find most useful

is the Six Traits. Whatever trait you are working on, they have suggestions of books”. Interviewee B also felt writing purpose was important, saying, “I think authentic books are really good, last year when they were writing persuasive pieces then, we took to a step of, they write a letter to the prime minister, because they were studying about rights and we have been reading about lots of reservations, that they don’t have clean water, and we got into a big discussion, and we got into writing pieces that were really powerful for them, because they were interested in it. It was something that even [if] you are a struggling writer, we were interested in it, so their stamina was much better, because there was a purpose for their writing”. Interviewee D noted, “I found in general book making, like children authoring their own books, [it] has been a good writing activity. Book making is something that is broad enough to hit all the targets at once and the kids like it, they get excited when they finish a book, then they get to share a book, they can put in the library, the classroom library, so it gives them a purpose or goal”.

Next, when teachers utilized explicit teaching methods using visual supports, these helped to motivate students in their writing process. Children need explicit instruction, modeling, and consistent practice to develop their writing skills. However, it is not easy for teachers to provide these if teachers did not receive enough instruction in teaching writing (Calkin, 2013). Interviewee C said, “I remember [being] with grade ones and twos and having an object in the middle of the table, and just looking at the colour or just starting with words, doing a huge word splash, I find that is really helpful”. Interviewee E opined, “We need to pre-teach them and explicit teaching should be happening. If you ask them [to] go write, they don’t know, they don’t [know] when [to be] confident”. The interviewees spoke about explicit teaching, modeling, and giving students many writing options, such as providing them with technology, dry erase boards, word strips, buddy writing, and inviting authors to the classroom. They also stressed the importance of reading

different genres and promoting discussions about how and why writers use voice, organization, the conventions of print, and word choice to improve their writing.

These findings are consistent with my previous pilot study's analysis (Dandiwal, 2020) that indicated three main concerns expressed by the retired teacher participants. They suggested that students have difficulty writing when they do not have a purpose, do not understand the structural elements of composition, and are unable to understand that writing is communication.

Thirdly, teachers' feelings of self-efficacy also influence struggling writers in a positive manner, therefore teachers need to be affirmed in their self-efficacy. Even though all five teachers had experiences from different school divisions and different grade levels, they felt that they did not receive adequate preservice training. Thus, in the beginning of their careers, they were struggling to teach struggling writers. After developing their writing pedagogic skill on their own by reading, attending professional development sessions, discussing with other teachers, and experimenting in their own classrooms by trial and error, all five teachers were more assured of their teaching as they taught writing with a purpose and made writing meaningful for their students. It was then that they had some success developing effective writing skills in students.

The Ministry of Education should thus be providing clear instructional objectives to the university for programs and preservice training. Teaching candidates should be equipped with current teaching practices such as models of evidence-based practices like the Six Traits of Writing. Teachers should be encouraged to use these practices and models while at the university and during their practicum. Novice teachers should also have mentors who will support them in the first few years of their career, in the employment of writing strategies and programs to teach diverse writers and schools should have in place a literacy support team to support teachers.

The above insights inform the development of the teachers' self-efficacy model, discussed in the next subsection.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy Model

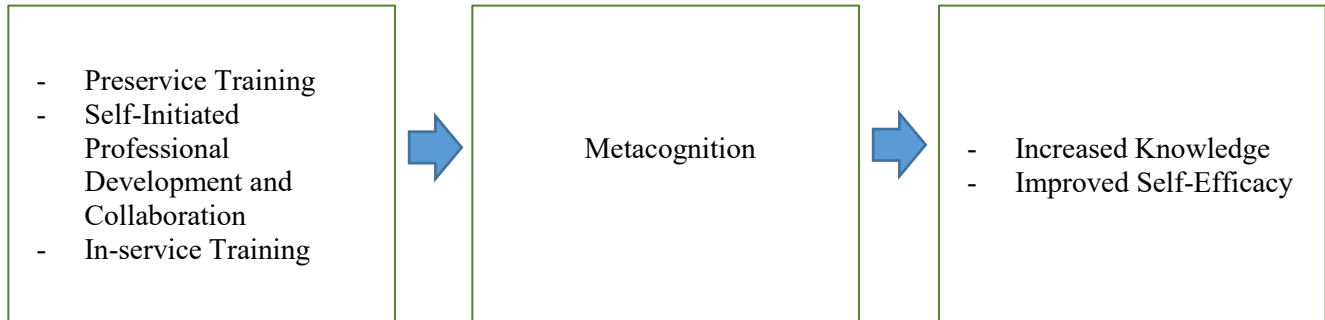
This study's above findings enhanced understanding of the current underlying issues on the topic, with all participants concurring on their limited knowledge of differentiated instruction at the beginning of their teaching career and developing their knowledge on their own to teach struggling students.

Findings revealed that teachers develop a sense of self-efficacy through preservice training, in-service training, and professional development and collaboration activities, which include independent learning, networking with colleagues, self-reflection, and feedback. This is achieved by developing teachers' metacognitive skills for teaching writing, thus developing their self-confidence and strengthening their self-efficacy. Teachers need to know what they are doing, and why they are doing, and be able to make connections between reading and writing, and throughout the curriculum. Teachers with enhanced metacognition would also be able to support students in developing their metacognition, that is understanding why they need writing skills, purposeful writings, and making connections with the real world.

Inspired by Bandura's self-efficacy model, grounded theory has been employed to develop a model of teachers' self-efficacy by adopting some of the elements from the original self-efficacy model and incorporating findings from the study, shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Teachers' Self-Efficacy Model

The above teacher's self-efficacy model details the process by which teachers can improve their self-efficacy. As illustrated, when preservice training, self-initiated professional development



and collaboration, and in-service training increase, metacognition is enhanced, which increases knowledge and improves self-efficacy.

Preservice teachers should be introduced to more prescribed programs and/or more evidence-based approaches to teach struggling writers, which will expand their knowledge about literacy, especially writing. This was supported by Interviewee B's response, highlighting that candidate teachers at her school likely had more exposure in their university work than they had, so they had a lot of exposure to different resources and strategies.

Novice teachers who have extensive knowledge about literacy instruction at the beginning of their careers will provide better instruction to their students. In-service teachers who have received in-service professional development, as shared by the interviewees, would gain more knowledge about reading and writing, increase their confidence in teaching struggling readers, and were able to support and develop students' writing skill acquisition, for instance, making better reciprocal connections between reading and writing, and teaching writing in ways that are integrated throughout the curriculum.

Limitations & Implications

The main limitations of this study were its small sample size, the use of remote interview technology rather than face-to-face interviews, and the breadth of grade levels represented by the interviewees. A small sample size may not be representative of all teachers, and at the same time, objectivity is limited by the personal experiences or opinions of the participants. The use of remote interview technology may hinder free expression, as it may be an unnatural and/or uncomfortable way of interacting for some. Finally, not all grades were represented by the participants and results may not as accurately reflect the actual teaching situation as when all grades would be represented.

Teachers too face limitations in their pedagogic journey that are out of their control, and dealing with these unexpected circumstances and pressures raise more questions about teachers' self-efficacy. Teacher faced unprecedented pressures such as large class sizes, lack of time, lack of resources, lack of in-service training, as well as high-needs students or diagnosed students for whom teachers may not have enough experience or training to support. With regards to training, whether teachers will receive training or support in the classroom to support diverse students depends on school administration or school policies. Even though teachers might have some knowledge to support these students, but these circumstances raise unpredictability and it becomes a barrier that negatively impacts teachers' self-efficacy. Based on the data collected, teachers feel that comprehensive preservice training can alleviate some of these obstacles and increase their confidence to support struggling writers. Thus, preparation of preservice teachers to teach writing needs to be strengthened. Teachers also need in-school supports to teach writing to struggling writers. Yet, even after receiving professional development and in-service training, and they feel more competent teaching writing, the above-mentioned external factors continue to be a challenging impact on teachers' self- efficacy.

Recommendations for Future Professional Development & Research

Preservice training is perceived by teachers to have the most impact on improving preparedness of teachers teaching writing, and it is imperative that novice teachers start their careers well-trained for success. Future professional development should thus focus on improving how teachers are taught to teach writing at both the preservice and in-service levels, and providing structured interventions in writing designed to include students who face challenges learning the language, particularly writing, in the regular classroom.

Future research might involve the comparison of teachers and students from similar grade levels in different areas, such as grades 4 to 6 in schools situated in rural, suburban, and inner-city areas. Further studies of how writing training and knowledge impact students' outcomes, or how teachers adapt writing instruction to students with special needs would provide greater insight into the pedagogic landscape of writing.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research attempted to surface how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. The data found that teachers are not receiving enough preservice training to impact teachers' self-efficacy and they have little control over the teaching environment. This includes lack of time, resources and support for struggling writers and/or other students who might or might not have been diagnosed with learning disabilities. Professionalism and self-motivation are also significant factors determining where teachers are on the learning curve to support struggling writers. From the findings, a teachers' model of self-efficacy was developed, with three components: training, metacognition and self-efficacy, which aspires to inform future teachers on the way to effective writing instruction.

As Bandura (1977, as cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) iterated, "teachers' self-efficacy beliefs would be related to the effort teachers invest in teaching, the goals they set, their persistence when things do not go smoothly and their resilience in the face of setbacks" (p. 2). Every student has the potential to develop good writing skills when they are provided with purposeful writing opportunities, within a variety of topics, subject areas, and genres. Whether each student gets to tell his or her story well then depends on the effectiveness and mastery of their writing teachers.

References

- Anderson, N. L., & Briggs, C. (2011). Reciprocity Between Reading and Writing: Strategic Processing as Common Ground. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(7), 546-549. doi:10.1598/rt.64.7.
- Ball, J. (2008). Aboriginal Young Children's Language Development: Promising Practices and Needs. Source: Canadian Issues. Retrieved from: <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.uml.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=2d74ec0b-993e-4661-9bc6-3972b6362295%40sessionmgr101>
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of human* 7(Ed.), *Encyclopedia of mental health*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1998).
- Batorowicz, B., Missiuna, A. C. & Pollock, A. N. (2012). Technology supporting written productivity in children with learning disabilities: A critical review. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 79(4), 211-224. doi: 10.2182/cjot.2012.79.4.3
- Bradley, H. D. (2001). 20 Ways to help students who struggle with writing become better writers. *Sage Journals*, 37(2), 113-121. <https://doi.org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/105345120103700209>
- Calkins, L. (2013). *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop: Primary Grades*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Calkins, L., & Ehrenworth, M. (2016). Growing Extraordinary Writers Leadership Decisions to Raise the Level of writing Across a School and A District. *International Literacy Association*, 70(1), 7-18. Doi:10.1002/trtr.1499
- Charmaz, K. (2017). Constructivist grounded theory. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 299-300. Doi:10.1080/17439760.2016.1262612
- Charmaz, K. (2006). Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis. *Coding in Grounded Theory Practice*, 42-71 (3). Retrieved from: <file:///D:/Users/pdandiwal/Downloads/Charmaz%202006%20Constructing%20Grounded%20Theory%20ch%203.pdf>
- Clay, M. M. (1991). *Becoming Literate: The Construction of Inner Control. Introducing Children to print at School*. Pearson, New Zealand Ltd. (pp. 91-112).
- Clay, M. M. (1993). *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Coker Jr, L. D., & Kim, G. Y-S. (2018). Critical Issues in the Understanding of Young Elementary School Students at Risk for Problems in Written Expression: Introduction to the Special Series. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 5(4), 315-319. Retrieved from:

<https://journals-sagepub-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022219417708168>

- Castro, C. Dina., Pa'ez, M. M., Dickinson, K. David & Frede, E. (2011). Promoting Language and Literacy in Young Dual Language Learners: Research, Practice, and Policy. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(1), 15-21. Retrieved from: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.uml.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=fea0c552-f231-422e-b41d-1220ab8c8286%40sdc-v-sessmgr01>
- Cremin, T., & Baker, S. (2010). Exploring teacher-writer identities in the classroom: Conceptualizing the struggle. *English Reaching: Practice and Critique*, 9(3), 8-25. Retrieved from: <http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/files/2010v9n3art.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W., Poth, C. N., & SAGE Publishing. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Culham, R. (2006). The Traits Lady Speaks Up. *Education Leadership*. 64(2), 53-57. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.uml.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=027331ce-4c32-46c1-be4a-f574ccdda617%40pdc-v-sessmgr01>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Barron, B., Pearson, P. D., Schoenfeld, A. H., Stage, E. K., Zimmerman, T. D., Cervetti, G. N., Tilson, J. L. & Chen, M. (2008). *Powerful Learning: What We Know About Teaching for Understanding*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Defazio, J., Jones, J., Tennant, F., & Hook, S. A. (2010). Academic Literacy: The importance and impact of writing across the curriculum-a case study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(2), 34-37.
- Dickinson, K. D. & Smith, W. M. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers' book reading on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29(2), 104-122. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/747807>
- Dockrell^a, E. J., Connelly^b, V., & Aafè^c, B. (2018). Struggling writers in elementary school: Capturing drivers of performance. *Learning and instruction*, 60(2019), 75-84. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc./2018.11.009
- Dockrell¹, E. J., Marshall¹, R. C., & Wyse¹ D. (2016). Teachers' reported practices for teaching writing England. *Reading and Writing*, 29(3), 409-434. Doi: 10.1007/s11145-015-9605-9
- Donohoo, J. (2017). *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact student learning*. Corwin A SAGE Company, Thousand oaks, California, SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
- English Language Arts Curriculum Frame work: A Living Document (2019), Retrieved from: <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/framework/index.html>

- Erikson, E., Boistrup, B. L., & Thornberg, R. (2018) A qualitative study of primary teachers' classroom feedback rationales. *Educational research*, 60(2), 189-205. Doi: 10.1080/00131881.2018.1451759
- Freeze, R. & Freeze, T. B. (2018). *Precision Writing: Instructions' Handbook*. Winnipeg, MB: D.R. Freeze Educational Publications (available at [www. Precisionreading.com](http://www.Precisionreading.com)).
- Fried, D. M. (2006), Reciprocity: Promoting the Flow of Knowledge for Learning to Read and Write. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 5-14.
- Gallagher, K. (2011). *Write Like This: teaching real-world writing through modelling & mentor texts*. Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, Maine.
- Gibson, S. A. (2008). An Effective Framework for Primary Grade Guided Writing Instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(4), 324-334. DOI:10.1598/RT.62.4.5
- Graham, S. (2019). Changing How Writing is Taught. *Review of Research in Education Sage Journals*, 43, 277-303. DOI:10.3102/0091732X18821125
- Graham, S., Capizzi, A., Harris, K. R., & Morphy, P. (2014). Teaching writing to middle school students: A national survey. *Reading and Writing*, 27. DOI: 10.1007/s11145-013-9495-7
- Graham, S., Harris, R. K., Fink-Chorzempa, B., & MacArthur, C. (2003). Primary Grade Teacher' Instruction Adaptions for Struggling Writers: A National Survey. *Journal of Education Psychology*, 85(2), 279-292. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.95.2.279
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2009). Almost 30 Years of Writing Research: Making Sense of It All with The Wrath of Khan. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 24(2), 58–68. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.uml.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=5081e2e0-ed12-426f-8fc5-363dd264d203%40sessionmgr103>
- Graham, S., MacArthur, A. C. & Hebert, M. (2019). *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press, New York, A Division of Guilford Publication, Inc.
- Grunke, M. & Leonard-Zabel, A. M. (2015). How to Support Struggling Writers: What the research stipulates. *International Journal of Special Education*, 30(30), 132-147. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284284605_How_to_support_struggling_writers_What_the_research_stipulates
- Kulkarni, M., Kalantre, S., Upadhye, S., Karande, S., & Ahuja, S. (2001). Approach To Learning Disabilities. *Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 68(2001), 539-546. Retrieved from: <https://link-springer-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/content/pdf/10.1007/BF02723250.pdf>
- Manitoba Education and Training (2019). English Language Arts Curriculum Framework: A Living Document. Retrieved from: <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/framework/index.html>

- Nancy, L. A. & Briggs (2011). Reciprocity between reading and writing: Strategic processing as common ground. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(7), 546-549.
- National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. (2003, April). *Report of The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges*.
https://archive.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp_file/21478/the-neglected-r-college-board-nwp-report.pdf?x-r=pcfile_d
- Norman, A. K., & Spencer, H. B. (2005). Our Lives as Writers: Examining Preservice Teachers' Experiences and Beliefs About the Nature of Writing and Writing Instruction." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 32.1 (2005): 25–40.
- Peterson, S. S. (2014, February). What Works? Research into Practice, retrieved from:
https://oere.oise.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/WW_Struggling_Writers.pdf
- Pinnell, S. G., & Fountas, C. I. (2011). *The Continuum of literacy learning Grades prek-8: A Guide to teaching* (2nd ed). Heinemann Portsmouth, NH.
- Research Base Underlying the Teachers Collage Reading and Writing Project Approach to Literacy Instruction (TCRWP), retrieved from:
http://unitsofstudy.com/shared/resources/UOS_All_Research-Base.pdf
- Sanrangelo¹, T., Harris, R. K., & Graham, S. (2007). Self-Regulated Strategy Development: A Validated Model to Support Students Who Struggle with Writing. *Learning Disabilities A Contemporary Journal*, 5(1), 1-20.
- Serravallo, J. (2017). Writing Strategies: Your Everything guide to Developing Skilled Writers. *Getting Started*. Heinemann Portsmouth, NH. (pp. 1-3)
- Shanahan, T. (2019). Reading-Writing Connections in S. Graham, C. A. MacArthur & M. Herbert (Eds.), *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Shenton, K. A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research project. *Education for Information*, 22 (2004) 63-75. IOS press
- Spandel, V. (2012). Creating Young Writers: Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classroom. *Foreword*. Pearson Education, Inc. (pp. ix-x)
- Tschannen-Moren*, M. & Johnson, D. (2010). Exploring literacy teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Potential sources at play. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2011), 751-761.
Doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.005
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), 944–956.
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.05.003

- Turcotte, C., & Caron, P-O. (2020). Better Together: Combining Reading and Writing Instruction to Foster Informative Text Comprehension. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 59(3), 240-259. Doi: [org/10.1080/19388071.2020.1752861](https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2020.1752861)
- The Importance of Writing. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274925223>
- Walsh, K. (2010). *The importance of writing skills: Online tools to encourage success*. Retrieved from: <https://www.emergingedtech.com/2010/11/the-importance-of-writing-skills-online-tools-to-encourage-success/>
- What Works Clearinghouse™ Standards Handbook (version 4.0). Retrieved from: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/referenceresources/wwc_standards_handbook_v4.pdf
- What Works Clearinghouse: WWC Intervention Report (2013). Reading Recovery Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_readrecovery_071613.pdf
- WWW Intervention Report: A summary of finding from a systematic review of the evidence: Leveled Literacy Intervention Retrieved from: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_levelledliteracy_091917.pdf
- WWW Intervention Report: A summary of finding from a systematic review of the evidence Self-Regulated Strategy Development Retrieved from: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_srsd_111417.pdf
- Zajic, C. M., Solari, J. E., McIntyre, S. N., Lerro, L., & Mundy., C. P. (2020). Observing Visual Attention and Writing Behaviors During a Writing Assessment: Comparing Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to Peers with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and Typically Developing Peers. *International Society for Autism Research and Periodicals LLC*, 14, 356-268. DOI: 10.1002/aur.2383
- Zinke, S. (2017). *Rime Magic: Teachers' Guide*. Published by Scholastic Inc.

Appendices

Appendix A Consent Form

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Research Project Title: How do teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers?

Principal Investigator and contact information: Paramvir Dandiwal
(dandiwap@myumanitoba.ca)

Research Supervisor (if applicable) and contact information: Dr. Rick Freeze, Professor, Faculty of Education (rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca)

Sponsor (if applicable): N/A

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Researcher:

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. As part of the requirements for my Masters program, I am conducting a small study as part of my thesis and I would like to interview teachers. I hope to use the data to inform my thesis, as well as for other presentations and publications.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to find out teachers' understandings of their own self-efficacy about teaching struggling writers. Do teachers feel prepared to teach writing and how do they understand their training? How do they approach teaching writing? Do they have particular strategies and programs they use to support struggling writers? What obstacles do they face teaching writing?

Appendix A Consent Form (cont'd)



University
of Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

Study Procedures:

I will interview five grades 1 to 6 educators (because these are the foundational years in school) who will express their interest in taking part in this study. The inclusion criteria for participants for this study are:

- (a) General teachers who have five years' or more of experience teaching writing to students in general classrooms from grades 1 to 6 in Manitoba. The teachers might have five years or more of teaching experience in one grade (e.g., Grade 1) or multiple grades, or might have taught different grades every year (e.g., in five years they might have taught three different grades such as Grade 1, Grade 3, or Grade 4).
- (b) Teachers who have direct interaction with students who are struggling with writing and have a strong understanding of their own current programs and strategies being implemented in their classroom.
- (c) Access to a computer in order to participate in the study because I will use the virtual tool Zoom to interview them.

All three criteria need to be met in order to participate in this study.

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in this study, by taking part in one online interview which will take about an hour. In the interview, you will be asked the main question: what are your perspectives on the challenges involved in teaching struggling writers? I will use probing and follow-up questions (e.g., Why do you think the students have difficulties? Please add more details about students that you have taught. What have you done to support them? What approaches, strategies and programs have you used to support struggling writers? What advice would you like to provide to other teachers?). Each interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews will be shared with you so that you can review it before analysis. At this point, you may choose to clarify, adapt or remove some elements of the transcript.

Description of the Recording Device:

I will audio-record the interview using Zoom. I will choose Zoom option "audio-record" only. I will record on my desktop and after finishing the interview I will transfer the recording to my encrypted USB and delete it from the desktop to protect the privacy of the participants.

Appendix A Consent Form (cont'd)



University
of Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

Benefits:

The participants may benefit from reflecting on their approach to teaching writing. These are no direct benefits to taking part in this study, however the participants are educators and may appreciate having the opportunity to think about and share their experiences. This research will allow teachers to understand their own strengths (self-efficacy) and challenges. Therefore, after reflecting, they might consider upgrading their skillset for struggling writers. The teachers may also rethink their pedagogy around teaching struggling writers. The participants will also be able to provide the best learning environment and plan according to students' needs. They might consider learning more about pedagogies once they hear about different writing programs during the interview. Universities will be able to find out what challenges teachers are facing and what changes universities could make to improve the programs or teacher training.

Risks:

Risks to teachers participating in this study are no greater than those in everyday life. I will not be asking for names, personal information about your students and school, or divisional policies. Although the participants are those who work with children, the topic and questions are very unlikely to invoke a disclosure of allegations of abuse or neglect of children. In that unlikely event, however, I am required to report such disclosures to the appropriate authorities (i.e., Child and Family Services).

Data Storage and Confidentiality:

The original audio recordings will be locked with a security code. The data will be kept confidential. I am asking you to be cautious not to provide identifying information of other people. I will replace your name and any identifying information with pseudonyms and codes. The codes and pseudonyms will be kept in a separate locked filing cabinet. I will keep these data confidential by storing them in a locked cabinet in my home office. They will be stored separately from the non-identifiable data. Information and transferred data will be shared with my advisor (Dr. Rick Freeze) and my advisory committee. All data will be stored on encrypted files using password protected devices. Any direct quotes I use from your interview will be attributed to your assigned pseudonym. All data will be completely destroyed by March 2027.

Appendix A Consent Form (cont'd)



University
of Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

Cost:

There are no costs involved in this study.

Remuneration:

There will be no compensation offered to the participants.

Withdrawing from Research:

Two weeks from the date of the interview you will receive an email from me with the transcription of your interview. Please read the transcription within two weeks of its receipt and contact me by email or phone if revisions/corrections/withdrawing is desired. It will be assumed that the transcript is accepted 'as is' if the two-week time period has expired without response or the withdrawing deadline is reached, whichever comes first. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time by letting me know. If you choose to withdraw, the audio and transcript of your interview will be destroyed. However, once I begin data analysis (two weeks after the interview is conducted), I will not be able to remove your data and you can no longer withdraw consent.

Debriefing and Verification:

You will be receiving an email approximately two weeks after the interview. I will send your transcribed interview to you electronically. You can read over the transcript to check that the transcript represents what you communicated in the interview and revise it if you so wish. If I have not heard from you for two weeks, I will assume that you do not wish to make changes to your transcript. Direct quotations will be used from the transcript, but all identities will be removed to protect your anonymity and confidentiality.

Dissemination of Results:

Only myself and my advisor Dr. Rick Freeze will have an access to my data, raw and coded. My committee members, Dr. Shannon Moore and Dr. Nadine Bartlett will have access to coded/anonymized data as they will be reading drafts of my work. I will use the data to inform my M.Ed. thesis as well as for other presentations and publications.

Summary of Results:

You will receive a brief summary of your findings by October 2022 once I complete my Master's thesis. If you wish to receive this brief summary of the results of the study, please choose one of the following options below:

Appendix A Consent Form (cont'd)



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

- Yes, I would like to receive the brief summary of the results of the study via Canada post or electronically.

For electronic copy: Please send me a summary of the findings of this research to the following email address:

Email: _____

- No, I am not interested to receive the brief summary of the results of the study.

Destruction of the Data:

I will destroy all data once I have completed my Master's thesis, estimated to be by March 2027. Digital data will be deleted and hard copy data will be shredded.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix A Consent Form (cont'd)



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

I agree to be audio-recorded for the interview through the use of Zoom audio-record only option.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B Semi-Structured Interview Guide



University
of Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd. Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

I would like to remind you that participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from participation at any time, even after having signed the consent form, with no prejudice or consequences. All efforts will be made to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. You are asked to be cautious not to provide identifying information of other people.

Introduction:

I will introduce myself. My name is Paramvir Dandiwal and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am working on my Master's thesis and I am in the process of conducting a small study to complete my thesis. Please tell me briefly about yourself.

I will ask about their experiences and how long they have been teaching. I will also ask what grades they have taught. I will also ask them to characterize their respective schools with respect to: (a) the socio-economic status of the catchment area, (b) the mix of student ethnicities in the school, and (c) the social geography of the area of Winnipeg in which the school is situated. Finally, I will ask what they love about teaching.

Problem:

What are teachers' perspectives of their own self-efficacy about teaching struggling writers?

Method:

Semi-structured interviews are used to gather focused, qualitative textual data. This method offers a balance between the flexibility of an open-ended interview and the focus of a structured

survey. They help to clarify the research domain or specific research questions. This method aligns with my research question because interviewing teachers will allow me to uncover rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of participants. Information gathered during semi-structured interviews can move the innovation process from general topics (domains) to more specific insights (factors and variables). It can be used to develop a preliminary hypothesis, explain relationships, and create a foundation for further research.

Process:

- I will ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with 'yes' or 'no' rather than close-ended questions to get lengthy and descriptive answers.
- I will use terms that can be easily understood and I will be mindful of social and cultural contexts.
- I will keep questions as short and specific as possible. I will also avoid questions with strong positive or negative associations.
- I will start with most concrete issues and move to the more abstract.
- I will use probing questions to gather as much information as possible.
- I will try not to interrupt participants (I will make a note and come back to the idea later).
- If a participant gives an answer relating to a question that I have not yet asked, I will record the answer and avoid repeating the question later.
- I will keep the conversation focused on the main domains, avoiding tangents. Time is limited, so completing the entire interview guide may not be necessary.
- Instead, I will spend time on key factors, including what the participant is interested in speaking about.
- I will close by asking if there is something I have not asked or touched on that they feel is important to share.

Record:

During the interview, I will take the time to check that the recording device is functioning properly throughout. Immediately after the interview, I will review the notes to fill in any gaps or add comments.

Interview Questions:

- How do you understand and feel about your training?

Prompt: How comfortable and prepared do you feel teaching struggling writers?

Prompt: Did you receive adequate preservice education or in-service professional development to cope with struggling writers?

Prompt: What was missing? What was useful?

Prompt: How did you develop your skills to work with struggling writers?

Prompt: How many years have you taught?

Prompt: What grades have you taught?

- What obstacles do you face teaching writing?

Prompt: Tell me a bit about the students you have been teaching who are struggling with writing.

Prompt: Why do you think they are having difficulties?

Prompt: How can teachers make a difference in their writing acquisition skills?

Prompt: When you are teaching, how are educational decisions made regarding students who struggle with writing? By yourself, or with others?

- What programs, strategies and approaches are you using? How do these strategies and approaches work?

Prompt: What strategies, tools and programs are you using to support struggling writers, choose below:

_____ Units of Study (Lucy Calkins)

_____ Writing Wheel and Level Literacy Intervention (Fountas and Pinnell)

_____ Writing Essentials (Regie Routman)

_____ Precision Writing (Rick Freeze)

_____ Writing Strategies (Jennifer Serravallo)

_____ Six Traits of Writing (Kelly Gallagher)

_____ Expending Expression Tool (EET Writing Tools)

_____ Technology (e.g., StoryJumper, etc.)

_____ Others (your own exploration or combined programs and strategies)

- What advice would you give to other teachers who also have students who struggle with writing?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

You will get a copy of the transcript to review by (date). You will have two weeks to review the transcript. During that time, you can clarify, elaborate, or delete elements that you would like to review. Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix C Recruitment Letter



University
of Manitoba

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

Paramvir Kaur Dandiwal (M.Ed. Student)

Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba

Email: dandiwp@myumanitoba.ca

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rick Freeze

Email: rick.freeze@umanitoba.ca

Dear educators,

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting a small research study. I want to learn about the perspectives of teachers who teach students who struggle with writing. I am seeking to interview five grades 1 to 6 general educators (because these are the foundational years in school) who will express their interest in taking part in this study. The inclusion criteria for participants for this study are:

- (a) General teachers who have five years' or more of experience teaching writing to students in general classrooms from grades 1 to 6 in Manitoba. The teachers might have five years or more of teaching experience in one grade (e.g., Grade 1) or multiple grades, or might have taught different grades every year (e.g., in five years they might have taught three different grades such as Grade 1, Grade 3, or Grade 4).
- (b) Teachers who have direct interaction with students who are struggling with writing and have a strong understanding of their own current programs and strategies being implemented in their classroom.
- (c) Access to a computer in order to participate in the study because I will use the virtual tool Zoom to interview them.

I am asking you to take part in one interview that will last about an hour. You will be provided with informed consent to read and sign prior to the interview on a separate day. It could be emailed to you if you prefer and you can fill it out and send it back to me.

All participant responses will be kept private and confidential. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and data will be kept securely. Participants can withdraw at any time and refuse to answer any questions they choose to. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus.

If you are willing to participate please contact me. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you.

Paramvir Dandiwal

M.Ed. Student

Appendix D Email Script



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

To: (Colleague Name)

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting a small research study to explore how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. I am seeking to recruit five teachers for my research study.

I am requesting that you distribute the recruitment letter and Appendix E, the recruitment email script, to up to six or seven contacts who meet the inclusion criteria for the study. I will select and interview five educators who will express their interest in taking part in this study. The inclusion criteria for participants for this study are:

- (a) General teachers who have five years' or more of experience teaching writing to students in general classrooms from grades 1 to 6 in Manitoba. The teachers might have five years or more of teaching experience in one grade (e.g., Grade 1) or multiple grades, or might have taught different grades every year (e.g., in five years they might have taught three different grades such as Grade 1, Grade 3, or Grade 4).
- (b) Teachers who have direct interaction with students who are struggling with writing and have a strong understanding of their own current programs and strategies being implemented in their classroom.
- (c) Access to a computer in order to participate in the study because I will use the virtual tool Zoom to interview them.

The first five eligible teachers who contact me and indicate their interest in participating in the research study will be included in the study. After completing and confirming the consent paperwork with them, and confirming participant agreement, the rest of the contacts will be informed and thanked for their interest. There will be no favouritism, breach of law or personal connection because the participants will be from different school divisions, and whom I do not know personally. I will then send the selected participants the consent letter and the interview questions by email. If this is not possible, I will mail the consent form to the participant with a return envelope with postage. Once I have received the signed consent letter, I will arrange for a convenient time for the interview to take place.



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

If any of the teachers wish to participate, or have any questions, they can contact me directly at dandiwap@myumanitoba.ca

Your help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Paramvir Dandiwal

M.Ed. Student

Appendix E Recruitment Email Script



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

To: Teachers

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting a small research study to explore how teachers understand their self-efficacy in teaching struggling writers. I am seeking to recruit five teachers for my research study.

I would like to interview five educators who meet the following criteria and will express their interest in taking part in this study.

- (a) General teachers who have five years' or more of experience teaching writing to students in general classrooms from grades 1 to 6 in Manitoba. The teachers might have five years or more of teaching experience in one grade (e.g., Grade 1) or multiple grades, or might have taught different grades every year (e.g., in five years they might have taught three different grades such as Grade 1, Grade 3, or Grade 4).
- (b) Teachers who have direct interaction with students who are struggling with writing and have a strong understanding of their own current programs and strategies being implemented in their classroom.
- (c) Access to a computer in order to participate in the study because I will use the virtual tool Zoom to interview them.

I will contact everyone after I have five general educators who have met the criteria and signed consent letters. Consent letters will be emailed or mailed to confirmed participants. You may give verbal consent during the interview. All five participants will receive a hard copy of the signed consent letter with both my signature and that of the participant's or their verbal consent noted. If you qualify the interview, questions will be sent to you by email. I will arrange for a convenient time for the interview to take place. Please note that you are advised to be cautious about not providing identifying information to others. All other contacts who have expressed interest will be informed after I have confirmed the participants.



**University
of Manitoba**

Faculty of Education

Educational Administration, Foundations &
Psychology

224 Dysart Rd

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Canada R3T 2N2

T: 204 474 9004

F: 204 474 7551

education@umanitoba.ca

If you wish to participate, or have any questions, you can contact me directly at dandiwap@myumanitoba.ca

Your help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you so much for taking part in this study.

Paramvir Dandiwal

M.Ed. Student