A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY FOR TEACHING WRITING

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APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of Abby Waldorf affirm that the dissertation, *A Qualitative Examination of Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy for Teaching Writing*, meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Doctor of Education Program in Curriculum and Instruction and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine self-efficacy levels of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers attending two public universities concerning writing and the teaching of writing. The study found that pre-service teachers were confident and identified as writers, but they felt uncertain as teachers of writing. Past teachers' praise was found to positively increase writing self-efficacy. Even though pre-service teachers enjoyed and looked forward to teaching writing, they felt they needed more time in the classroom and preparation from college courses. College courses were found to be lacking in the preparation needed for teaching writing. Pre-service teachers did not spend as much time having students write as read, and when they implemented writing practices, it was a piecemeal approach.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What are Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' levels of self-efficacy where the teaching of writing is concerned? Many factors can affect pre-service teachers' self-efficacy which can then affect their teaching effectiveness. There is mounting pressure to *teach to the test* where writing is limited to two genres—informative and argumentative. There are frequent changes in standards and curriculum (Gallagher, 2015). There is a lack of teacher preparation programs that included courses that focus on writing (Gillespie et al., 2014). All these factors may, unfortunately, contribute to a lack of teacher self-efficacy in the teaching of writing.

Statement of Problem

If a person was asked what students are to learn in school, they would likely say the old and familiar adage, "Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic." However, it seems that more and more skills and topics are added to the curriculum each year. As more and more time and money are invested in these additions, writing is squashed to the bottom of the curriculum (Gallagher, 2011).

National and state assessments depict a problem with student writing scores (Poch et al., 2020; Culham, 2014; Gallagher, 2011). Scores in the United States have long been dismal. Results published by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that in 2011 just 27% of America's students in the eighth grade scored at or above levels considered proficient (Culham, 2014). Surprisingly, the score results were the same for our nation's 12th graders. This indicates that students did not improve in writing in four years of education. One can assume this could be due to a lack of remediation efforts or even a lack of writing practice and instruction in general.

Even more devastating, these results mean that over 70% of our students, according to published test results, are underachieving writers (Culham, 2014). Scores are also low for students with disabilities, with an astounding 97% of 8th graders and 95% of 12th graders receiving below basic level scores on the standardized test at the end of the year in 2014 (Poch et al., 2020). Data show that writing scores across all grade levels and types of students could use improvement (Poch et al., 2020).

NAEP, or the Nation's Report Card, provides 2019 testing data, which shows that only 27% of the nation's 8th graders are at or above proficient in writing (NAEP, n.d.). Even by the 12th grade, students did not improve and still, only 27% of students achieved proficient scores in writing. NAEP reports data from 2011 being the same percentage for students in the 8th and 12th grades (27% proficiency), proving that writing scores have remained stagnant for nearly a decade and, unless changes are made, will most likely continue.

These scores depict no change despite regular curriculum and standard overhauls over the years. Teachers learned the initiatives of *No Child Left Behind*, then were required to switch to the Common Core (which has since changed to College and Career Readiness Standards in West Virginia). Gallagher (2015) says that during this changing curriculum, some standards would not be tested, including some crucial writing standards. This caused teachers not to spend as much time teaching writing, which leads to another problem.

One of the best ways to improve students' writing skills is by giving them time to write. For many years, emphasis has been placed on reading comprehension in schools. Reading has been viewed as more critical to students succeeding in the real world. However, writing is just as crucial to long-term success. According to Gallagher (2011), "Writing has become foundational to finding meaningful employment across much of the workforce" (p. 3). He goes on to say as

technology use is increasing and expected in the workplace, writing skills have become even more important for basic job requirements. Despite this, writing has taken a backseat in many school curriculums.

> Writing—arguably one of the most important skills students will need upon entering adulthood, a basic requirement for participation in civic life—is getting placed on the back burner. If I may extend the metaphor, in some cases writing is actually being removed from the stove completely. (Gallagher, 2011, p. 4)

Some teacher researchers, such as Gallagher (2011), attribute poor student writing scores to increased demands on teachers:

> The conundrum here is evident: In a time when the ability to write has become not only a "predictor of academic success" but also a "basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy," writing seems to have gotten lost in many of our schools. Buried in an avalanche of standards, curriculum pacing guides, huge class sizes, worksheets, over-the-top testing, and, yes, even more testing (one teacher in Texas told me she now spends fifty-five days a year testing her students), writing—a necessity, a prerequisite to living a literate life—is not being given the attention it deserves. (p. 5)

However, there may be another factor lurking beneath the surface—a lack of teacher writing self-efficacy. It is no secret teaching a student to write is difficult. Writing is the most complex skill to teach a student (Fletcher, 1993; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). Students become easily frustrated and so do teachers. Often teachers have had an unfortunate past with writing when they were students. Maybe a teacher or professor was too harsh with their criticism. Maybe they never felt like good writers themselves. Writing is also very personal, so it is difficult as the receiver of criticism to

not take it personally. It is no wonder teachers who may lack self-efficacy in their own writing or their teaching of writing are being sent to schools.

Purpose of the Study

It has been proven that teachers' self-efficacy is linked to their ability to impact student learning through their actions in the classroom.

Teachers make judgments of their self-efficacy based on verbal encouragement that they have received, the success or failure of teacher models, perceptions of past experiences of teaching, and the level of emotional connection they feel when they anticipate and practice teaching. (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011, p. 150)

Because of this, it is paramount that pre-service teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy involving teaching writing be examined.

Though some studies have been conducted exploring the teaching of writing, low writing test scores, teacher writing preparation programs, and teacher perceptions on writing, more research is required to truly discover implications that could affect teacher preparation programs and writing instruction in schools. Research shows how crucial the development of writing skills is for students and how necessary time to write is for children (Gallagher, 2015). It is evident that teachers with negative feelings towards writing do not spend enough instruction time on writing. Is this why American students continually score poorly on the writing sections of standardized tests? Perhaps by identifying the issue's root, student learning and even teacher enjoyment can increase where writing is concerned.

Writing is a crucial indicator of school and workplace success (Gallagher, 2011; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). Even though there have been initiatives at the national level to put more emphasis on writing in schools-- most likely due to poor student writing test scores-- it was

discovered by Richard Sterling, the National Writing Project's past director, that it is the teachers who make or break these initiatives (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). In other words, if a teacher does not feel comfortable teaching writing, they most likely will not spend much, if any, time on it. Moreover, on the other hand, if a teacher enjoys, feels prepared, and is confident in writing instruction, more time will be given to students to write.

In the Hall and Grisham-Brown study (2011), teachers surveyed reported positive feelings towards creative writing opportunities and certain teaching strategies such as journaling and receiving meaningful feedback. However, the same teachers reported negative feelings towards writing when they received harsh criticism from instructors and just a general lack of interest in writing assignments. The teachers also reported that the only personal uses they have for writing are to communicate with others, self-expression like journaling, and social networking. Most teachers did not choose to write for fun. Teachers also reported a lack of self-efficacy specifically in the teaching of spelling and grammar, knowing which teaching strategies to use, and providing adequate feedback for their students (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011).

One focus of the Hall and Grisham-Brown study (2011) is how past teachers' actions can impact self-efficacy. A particularly relevant finding is how teachers' actions can positively and negatively impact pre-service teachers' writing self-efficacy. "Teacher actions (e.g., showcasing work, giving positive feedback) not only affect the self-confidence of developing writers but may also affect the self-efficacy of future teachers" (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011, p. 155). This study will investigate Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' prior writing experiences in K12 education and their experiences as both students of writing and teachers of writing.

Rationale for this Study

Burke (2017) writes about the need for continued research on teacher writing self-efficacy. While there have been studies conducted on similar topics, the teacher persona as a writer needs to be further explored to improve classroom practice. Burke's study of the "writing-teacher identity" suggests a need for further research as 30% of the 47 teachers surveyed indicated both positive and negative experiences with the teaching of writing.

There are other areas that need exploring, such as what the specific negative feelings are toward the teaching of writing. As quoted by Burke (2017), "Some studies suggest that teachers who lack confidence in their perceived ability to write and teach writing may transmit negative judgments about writing that have '…consequences for classroom practice'" (p. 20). A major aspect of this study seeks to explore how pre-service teachers' self-efficacy levels may affect efficacy when teaching writing.

Significance of the Study

A study by Gillespie et al. (2014) suggested a lack of teacher writing self-efficacy could be due to not receiving enough pre-service or in-service writing instruction preparation. This could have significance to pre-service education programs at the university level. Although writing is crucial to a student's learning in all subjects as it can help students make connections, analyze information, and clarify their own ideas (in other words, writing helps with learning that is more abstract), what some research suggests is that writing is not being emphasized in teachers' pre-service and in-service educations (Gillespie et al., 2014). The lack of focus on writing in pre-service teachers' education could contribute to a lack of self-efficacy in writing.

Even though the benefits of writing are well-known, Gillespie et al. (2014) found that teachers were still only using 7.7% of the instructional day for students to write. Teachers of all

grade levels reported that students spent very little time composing in class despite the Common Core Standard's emphasis on writing. Additionally, high school teachers frequently suggest that they have not received appropriate training for how to successfully teach writing.

Because of limited training, teachers spend writing time on other literacy skills. Gillespie et al. (2014) also found that time spent teaching certain modes of writing such as persuasive, informative, descriptive, or narrative, was dependent on teachers' personal experience with that type of writing. Most teachers in this study said that they had not received enough writing instruction support either in college or through in-service educational experiences. However, many teachers also indicated that they tried to learn how to teach writing more effectively through personal preparation and research. Though time spent writing varied among subjects, the most prevalent writing activity reported on the survey was note-taking. Gillespie et al. (2014) concluded that writing preparation for teachers needs to take a bigger role in higher education. They also recommended more targeted writing professional development for teachers, as teachers who felt more prepared and confident teaching writing employed writing activities in their classrooms.

So, what should colleges be teaching pre-service teachers in the way of writing? Reid (2009) argues for a challenging writing-based curriculum where teachers of writing are required to write for a variety of purposes from exploration to critical reflection. They should have room to make mistakes and learn in a supportive and caring environment. They should be prepared adequately enough to then help their own students become confident, lifelong writers. As Reid reflects:

> Consider, for instance, the teachers who might be created by the nightmare versions of
> writing teacher preparation programs that we hope to avoid: institutionalized boot camps

where new teachers are quickly indoctrinated into a curriculum, with all decisions made for them leaving as little space as possible to fail or grow (the two are related); or conversely, laissez-faire programs lacking any guidance, which results in new teachers teaching on their own using a patchwork of pedagogies assembled from what they vaguely remember their own teachers doing. Such visions make us wince, though elements of such programs are often pressed upon us by institutions, or even requested by novice writing teachers themselves as they work through their own confidence and fears. (p. W199)

It is evident that some higher education programs are lacking in their ability to produce confident teachers of writing. Reid (2009) argues for programs that are rigorous and that instructors who purposely assign difficult writing tasks make their students more empathetic learners and teachers of writing, thus later being able to identify with their own students when tasks become difficult. Good teachers of writing must also write along with their students. Reid explains, "Teachers who experience writing difficulty not only connect emotionally to their students, something they might do after writing *what* their students write, but they gain clarity about how students learn to write better" (p. W201). In other words, teachers of writing must be writers themselves. And there need to be pre-service programs that emphasize this.

This study will be significant to all involved in making decisions for educators, as well as the educators themselves. College and university education programs may need to add or revise writing courses to their plans of study for education majors. State departments of education may need to revise current writing curriculums to ensure more classroom time is dedicated to student writing. Teachers of writing with high self-efficacy ratings may need to conduct widespread

professional development sessions for all pre-service teachers. English teachers and even pre-service teachers may need to be given a writing mentor.

Findings from this study could be used to revamp all writing programs or lack thereof at the university or public-school level. If most teachers interviewed and surveyed do indicate a lack of self-efficacy where writing is concerned, this study will seek to provide answers for why they may lack self-efficacy. If a link can be determined between low self-efficacy levels and inadequate training levels, conclusions can be drawn. If, on the other hand, there is not a majority of low self-efficacy ratings, then the study results may show current writing pre-service programs and professional development offerings are adequate. If this is the case, then other factors need to be examined to determine why student writing scores remain poor across the United States.

This study could lead to other studies in the future. The hope is for this study to dig deeper at the issue involving why teachers are spending less time teaching writing skills all with the purpose of providing teachers with appropriate support and giving students the best learning opportunities. Writing seems to be a forgotten subject. Research shows how important writing is, and this study aims to provide answers as to why writing time and instruction can be seen less and less in the K-12 classroom. Teacher self-efficacy will be determined through a set of research questions about their perceptions of their own writing and writing instruction as well as how much and what kinds of writing instruction are delivered.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own writing efficacy?

2. What type and how much training do Secondary English Education pre-service teachers receive for writing instruction?

3. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own efficacy to teach writing?

4. What kinds and how much writing instruction is delivered to students in a sample of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' classrooms?

Operational Definitions

1. Pre-service Teachers - university students enrolled at either Marshall University or West Virginia State University majoring in an education degree.

2. Efficacy - the ability to produce a desired or intended result.

3. Perceptions - the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something.

Delimitations and Limitations of this Study

Delimitations:

1. Only pre-service teachers who were currently attending West Virginia State University and Marshall University were included in this study.

2. Only qualitative data was collected.

3. Data collection measures only included qualitative surveys and focus groups.

Limitations:

1. Education courses and writing training offered and required differ per university.

2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participation was limited, and focus groups had to be conducted via Microsoft Teams rather than in person.

Chapter Summary

Student writing scores are suffering across America (Gallagher, 2015). Teachers report teaching writing as an area of weakness. Time devoted to writing is becoming less and less in public schools today (Gillespie et al., 2014). Writing is necessary for lifelong learning and achievement for students and teachers (Gallagher, 2011). The reasons for this study are plentiful, and the results can have powerful implications on teacher preparation programs and professional development and support. When teachers benefit from increased self-efficacy in their areas of study, their students benefit. If it is discovered that most teachers lack self-efficacy in writing and the teaching of writing, change must occur to address this issue. Research and literature suggest a need for increased writing instruction and confidence among teachers and students (Poch et al., 2020). This study seeks to identify the self-efficacy levels of pre-service teachers as writing teachers and how teacher training has an impact on teacher self-confidence and on classroom writing practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, research related to writing in public education will be presented. Themes emerged that contributed to how the study is performed and reported. A summary of themes includes the importance of writing, product-to-process writing, the writing workshop model, piecemeal writing instruction, test-driven curriculum, pre-service teacher writing preparation, teacher writing self-efficacy, teachers as writers, and teacher and student enjoyment in writing.

The Importance of Writing

It is no secret writing is important. Writing is not only needed for students' success in school and in their futures, but it can even contribute to empowerment (Sanders et al., 2020). Teacher educators "…believed that when people possess the ability to write well, they can choose how their identity is portrayed, take action to make changes in the world, and communicate effectively with others" (p. 404).

Writing instruction is crucial for students' success in school and beyond (Graham et al., 2017). Studies show that writing instruction directly impacts reading achievement as well (Coker Jr. et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2017). Coker et al. (2018) makes the argument that writing and reading instruction should be integrated. This is true across grade levels. Coker et al., whose study focused on a group of first graders, reported:

> Strengthening students' composing is likely to impact reading achievement through several paths. First, composing requires the application of both transcription skills and text generation. The transcription skills would contribute to decoding, as described previously. Instruction in text generation could strengthen a range of knowledge sources

that could contribute to reading achievement, including background knowledge, oral

language skills, text structure knowledge, and executive functions. (pp. 503-504)

They go on to say that while this is a long-held belief by many in education, writing still

sometimes takes second place to reading. Coker et al. (2018) state, "Although writing practice

figures prominently in many instructional interventions, researchers have devoted less attention

to it with young writers" (p. 504).

Furthermore, two types of writing practice and instruction contribute to reading

achievement: correct and copy and generative writing where students produce longer texts such

as narratives (Coker et al., 2018). Having students produce longer writing helps students create

ideas and practice syntax skills that could lead to better reading achievement. Even without

specific instruction in writing by the teacher, when given time for writing practice, reading

achievement improved. While the link between reading and writing has always been known,

most assume better readers make better writers. Though this is incontrovertible, better writers

also make better readers (Coker et al., 2018).

According to Graham et al. (2017), several facets of writing can enhance students'

reading skills. Their study sought to find out if balancing both reading and writing instruction and

practice at no more than 60% each improved student achievement. Interventions included direct

writing instruction and increasing student time to write Their findings suggest, "In each of these

cases, the tested writing interventions had an overall positive impact on reading" (p. 280).

Theoretically, reading and writing are some of the most complex tasks students complete

during their K-12 education requiring them to draw on multiple knowledge banks. Readers and

writers must use several knowledge sources to effectively engage in either task. They must be

able to access and apply background knowledge, comprehend, and create text, understand

reading and writing procedures and strategies, and know the structures and qualities of the text. All these sources of knowledge can be used interchangeably with reading and writing to increase achievement in both. For example, in-depth knowledge of text structure can improve student performance in both reading and writing (Graham et al., 2017).

Balancing both reading and writing instruction is supported by educational models. In fact, Graham et al. (2017) point out, "A program that combines both reading and writing instruction increases the likelihood of teachers using reading and writing together in a supportive way as envisioned by the functional model of reading-writing relations" (p. 281). This is important because functional models promote equal reading and writing instruction and many students and teachers devote less time to writing. Evidence supports an overall positive improvement in reading and writing skills when literacy programs balance both reading and writing instruction. Even though there is much research, previous and current, proving the importance of writing time and instruction in K-12 schools, sufficient writing is still not occurring (Coker et al., 2018).

Writing not only helps with reading achievement, but it even helps learners develop their own voices and celebrate their own cultures (Duarte & Brewer, 2019). Teachers who provide their students the opportunity for self-reflective writing also help their students, "…think more critically about their situations, their decision making, and their futures" (Duarte & Brewer, 2019, p. 91). Writing helps students become more self-aware and can help them interpersonally, benefits that are not just academic in nature.

Writing is crucial for students' success inside and outside of school. As stated by Poch et al. (2020), "In school, weaker writing skills are typically linked to retention, failure, increased risk of school dropout, and reduced opportunities for attending college" (p. 498). When students

try to become employed after school, they must have competent writing skills. In fact, according to Poch et al., employers in America try to help their employee's writing skills by spending billions of dollars on writing training for their employees. This shows that students are graduating from public school with inadequate writing abilities and are unable to perform basic work requirements.

Product-to-Process Writing

Though writing instruction is paramount, the way to implement writing is often controversial. A reason for the confusion over how to teach writing could be perhaps due to the differing opinions regarding the importance of teaching grammar and composing (process writing). For example, most teachers agreed before the 1960s that the focus of writing instruction should be on grammar (Soven, 1999). This belief began to change years later when teachers were frustrated that students could not create or compose writing. A new model of writing to discover was born and advertised at the 1966 Dartmouth Conference (Soven, 1999).

It was difficult for teachers in America to move on from the emphasis placed on grammar, though. As Soven (1999) found, "This overemphasis on correctness has had several negative consequences for writing instruction. Teachers view writing instruction as a looming set of papers to be 'corrected' and students become convinced that the process of writing is similar to walking through a minefield" (p. 13). However, after the Dartmouth Conference, educators learned there was more to teaching writing than grammar. Writing should also be transactional, expressive, and poetic, and teachers needed to teach the entire composing process. Again, teachers moving through the challenging writing process with their students helps teachers connect to the challenges their students also face when writing. And while many teachers and

schools have progressed past the over-emphasis on grammar, many teachers still focus on teaching grammar today.

As Soven (1999) explains, "The new paradigm was to teach writing as a process and to emphasize writing as a mode of discovery." In other words, instead of being teacher-centered and directed, the findings from The Dartmouth Conference put emphasis on the personal growth of students (Zancanella et al., 2016). The conference even inspired the creation of English electives such as Creative Writing in schools in the 70s. Grammar would no longer be taught in isolation but as part of the writing process, and contemporary literature would replace some of the classic literature found in textbooks. Zancanella et al. (2016) said about the Dartmouth Conference,

> It may have been made even more potent because English as a subject in American schools had its historical roots in English—suddenly here were educators from England presenting not the stuffy, Oxbridge version of the subject American teenagers might well have expected them to promote, but something open, student-centered, even liberating, as an alternative to the back-to-basics ideas about English that had been emerging in the United States post-Sputnik years. (p. 17)

In the 1990s, more and more teachers were using process writing that stemmed from the growth and student-centered model of English that developed from the Dartmouth Conference as well as from influential teachers like Donald Graves (Routman, 1995). Some teachers viewed process writing (what the writer does) as just another fad that would come and go. At first, the workshop model (what the teacher does) was widely used and accepted by secondary English teachers and encouraged by The National Writing Project. "By the end of the decade, however, writing workshop pedagogy had been co-opted and commoditized with approaches that lent themselves to superficial application" (Routman, 1995, p. 18). Process writing subsided into a

more standardized approach due to high-stakes testing. Though the 90s began celebrating student-centered, diverse, and growth-model approaches to writing, the decade ended with the pressures of skill-based standardized writing practices. This mindset carried on until the 2000s with the additions of No Child Left Behind, the Common Core State Standards, and College and Career Readiness, and strict teacher evaluations (Routman, 1995).

Writing Workshop Model

While what is required for writing instruction can seem unclear, there is a writing program that has been proven effective (Routman, 2005). The writers' workshop model, for example, uses a formula for introducing new strategies and then gives students time to apply or practice the new skills. In *Writing Essentials*, Routman, (2005), paints a picture of what an ideal writing workshop should and should not be. A teacher decides on a writing purpose and audience for students and then shows students quality writing examples. Next, the teacher uses conferences to address skills and weaknesses in student writing. Finally, the students get to apply what they have learned through independent practice. Arguably, the most paramount piece of the reading and writing workshop model is the time given to students to practice writing daily. As Routman, (2005) notes, "It's impossible to get a flow without revisiting and thinking about writing every day" (p. 175). In the writing workshop model, teachers provide students with new knowledge they need by sharing writing strategies and exemplary writing pieces either written by themselves or another writer (mentor texts), then give students the time to practice that new knowledge.

Many teachers have found the workshop model for teaching writing successful in their classrooms. For example, Kissel and Miller (2015) followed two prekindergarten teachers who

wanted students to find their own voice through writing workshops. This was something they collaborated on and identified this purpose for their specific group of students:

> When young children connect their reading and writing experiences, they listen to their own voices, notice decisions peers make in their writing, read texts written by published authors and emulate their writing techniques, seek and accept evaluative responses from others, and maintain self-discipline when composing texts. (p.3)

This writing workshop method helped these teachers identify their purpose which was to help students find their voice, they identified experiences needed to achieve that purpose--the reading and writing workshop model, they organized the experience which was also the workshop model, and they evaluated this purpose through conferencing with students about their writing.

Because of this success and teacher leaders and researchers such as Donald Graves, several teachers have chosen to explore the workshop model. Routman (2005) reminds us that writing workshop does not have students practice skills in isolation, but rather integrates a specific skill within students' choice of writing.

Additionally, the workshop model can help students become more autonomous. If the goal of education is to help students become independent thinkers and doers, then the writing workshop model also serves this purpose. Writing workshop will allow students to gradually become more independent writers (Routman, 2005). This produces students who stop relying on the teacher for writing ideas, etc. It also has the potential to make them leaders, such as what Kissel and Miller (2015) found while visiting Ronda's classroom (a participant in their 2015 study). In this classroom, they met two students, Talisha and Lisa, who shared their writing ideas with other classmates and encouraged them to share their own with them. During Kissel and Miller's observations in that classroom, they watched Talisha's and Lisa's writing improve from

first seeing mainly pictures to then seeing words. In this classroom, students found their voices. A student named Jared wrote about seeing his dog killed in a dogfight his parents planned. This is something that probably otherwise never would have been known or brought up had the teacher not encouraged students to write about meaningful events. While devastating, Jared was able to express himself even at four years old, proving writing is powerful.

A critical step in the writers' workshop is that students can write about what interests them. As noted by Routman (2005), "Students need to be able to choose most of their writing topics if they are to take writing seriously, take pride in their work, and write with strong voice" (p. 177). This sets up a curriculum that can be implemented anywhere, at any age level, in any population, or demographic.

Writing workshop not only serves to improve student writing through *Gathering Experience* where teachers might discuss or show an example of good writing skills with their students, but also serves to help students find their voice, gain social skills, increase independence, and self-evaluate (Kissel & Miller, 2015). During the *Author's Chair* segment in the writers' workshop, students share their writing and respond to their peers. In *Student Writing*, students are granted choice while writing independently. Through conferences, teachers and students discuss what was good about the writing and what could be improved. Each step of the workshop model serves a different but important purpose that isn't all about gaining writing knowledge through skills in isolation.

Largely credited for being a pioneer of the reading and writing workshop model, Atwell (2014), with the help of other educators, founded The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) school. Inspired by Donald Graves, the CTL uses the workshop model in reading, writing, and math. What Atwell and the other teachers at the CTL have learned is that providing time to read

will help students read on grade level. And it is paramount that students read on grade level as this will help students in every school subject.

In the end, all teachers and schools are reaching for the same goals; they want their students to become independent, productive members of society. Where educators differ, however, is how they get there. The workshop model has made students independent learners because students are practicing reading and writing on their own. Students are given the choice and the power to make decisions. Students are engaged and motivated. This is a very different picture of a classroom than the sit and get model. Students are doing the work, students are growing, and students are on the road to independence. As Graves, the founder of the workshop model, says in the foreword to *In the Middle* by Atwell (1998), "The key word is *works*" (p. ix). This model works—the teacher implementing the workshop works hard to produce and share reading and writing experiences with the students, the students work hard to become better, more independent readers and writers, and the model works to improve reading and writing skills. This is a model for teaching writing that works and can be implemented anywhere. English instruction through the decades after the Dartmouth Conference has proven to be contradictory. While the ideas that emerged from the conference still ring true for many English teachers, they are also under intense pressure to teach in a more skill-based way for students to perform satisfactorily on standardized testing.

Piecemeal Writing Instruction

One reason writing scores could be suffering is due to there not being a common curriculum for the teaching of writing (Culham, 2014). Professional development and pre-service trainings are hit-and-miss. Teachers are given a piecemeal approach that mainly causes confusion and leaves teachers wondering what the best way to truly teach writing is. Writing

programs also come and go. Within the span of six years, one district used and then abandoned four separate programs for teaching writing. This both exhausted and frustrated teachers (Routman, 2005). Routman writes, "Rather than developing professionally into better writing teachers, these teachers were learning how to use a program" (p. 7). These programs were intended to increase student writing scores. However, Routman also discovered that the districts that had more successful writers did not use any program. Instead, these teachers taught writing every day. Routman adds, "To be effective writing teachers, we must become aware of our beliefs and how they drive our teaching and assessing. We must also be writers ourselves and advocate for saner teaching of writing" (p. 7). But can teachers be writers themselves if they have lost all joy in writing? Can they be writers themselves if they lack self-efficacy?

> As Fletcher (1993) states,
>
> Teaching writing is hard work. As writing teachers, we come upon every imaginable kind of thorny problem: students who hate to write, who lack confidence and write poorly, who love to write but can't read back what they have written, who can't spell, can't conjugate, can't punctuate. (p. 1)

To be effective at helping these students, teachers must truly understand how to best teach writing and know about the act of writing. The problem is, there is no recipe book for writing instruction. There are several ways to approach it and so many different facets of writing to teach: grammar, spelling, vocabulary, the writing process, etc. Teachers are often limited to picking and choosing what they believe to be most important.

Test-Driven Curriculum

Additionally, the curriculum is driven by testing. Gallagher and Kittle (2018) believe this could be due to school districts placing the emphasis on preparing students for standardized testing and writing tasks. They state,

> Students are too often denied the opportunity to write from their own experiences, a paradox since writing what is personally meaningful is where writers invest the most. Curriculum that is narrowly focused on traditional genres stunts the creativity and flexibility we want our students to acquire. (p. 15)

Because informational and argumentative genres are tested, these genres alone become the focus of writing practice and instruction, making writing more formulaic and robotic (Grady & Moore, 2018; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Similarly, teachers also invest more in their teaching when they are personally invested. It is difficult for teachers to become invested in writing tasks for standardized testing.

High-stakes testing has been shown to have several detrimental effects on students. Grinell and Rabin (2013) argue for a school culture that focuses more on the socio-emotional learning of children than on test scores. They write,

> In short, we have stopped paying attention in schools to children as whole people with rich and complex interests, desires, and skills, and in so doing, we have made schools ill-suited to the task of teaching children how to become the adults we should hope they become. (p. 749)

The authors blame the student disengagement and negative attitude about school on the schools because of the emphasis on testing and lack of care. For students to truly learn or want to learn, they must feel cared for first. The over-testing has contributed to students feeling a lack of

genuine caring from teachers because students see the testing as having no meaning to their lives and interests. Testing benefits no one except for private testing companies and politicians who are in the market for school reform efforts (Grinell and Rabin, 2013). Students can suffer from low self-esteem and stress due to testing. It seems schools have taken the joy away from writing by placing so much importance on standardized testing that students perform poorly on anyway.

According to Routman (2005), these standardized tests do not improve the quality of the writing of students. While their purpose is to hold teachers, schools, and students accountable, there is no evidence that classroom instruction is improved by these measures. Teachers are judged more by the test scores their students produce than if their students are involved in meaningful writing experiences in the classroom.

It is a well-known issue in education that teachers simply do not have enough time to teach all they need to teach in a day, a learning unit, or even a year. As previously mentioned, teachers are also under tremendous pressure to have their students pass standardized testing each year. Due to this pressure, teachers are not given the choice to teach writing in the way they would prefer. Instead, teachers must focus on the writing that is tested. This makes writing much more presubscribed, technical, and teacher-lead (Duarte & Brewer, 2019).

The standardization of writing, however, threatens the positive influence writing can have on students. This kind of writing is formulaic and not meaningful to students who could use a way to reflect and be given a voice. If a genre of writing is not being tested, teachers usually will not spend time on it (Duarte & Brewer, 2019). However, despite what is mandated, some teachers do find ways to have students write creatively and less just for the test. On the other hand, if teachers feel as though they are being closely monitored by the administration, they will often abandon creative writing assignments and teach only to the test.

Fear is a major driver of test preparation. Teachers are often torn between what they love about teaching and want their students to know and pleasing the administration. Teachers often succumb to the pressures of the test, both due to their own accountability to perform well, but also due to wanting to maintain their careers. For example, Duarte and Brewer (2019) state, "Despite deviating in some way, all participants admitted also giving in to the pressures put on them. In addition, they all felt the need to justify their actions" (p. 104). Even more poignant, the study mentions a participant who had a strong opinion about testing: "Mr. Guerrero called the test an 'infection' and stated that even though he is a 'voice of dissent' against the test, he is not able to fully escape it" (p. 104).

Pre-Service Teacher Writing Preparation

Despite efforts to make writing improvements in the curriculum for the past 20 years, most teachers still report feeling underprepared for the teaching of writing (Poch et al., 2020). Math, social studies, science, and English middle (48%) and high school teachers (71%), report getting little to no training in the teaching of writing. This among other factors causes some secondary teachers to not spend time teaching writing or the writing process. There also seems to be a belief in education that students learn to write in elementary school and as much writing instruction is not needed in secondary school. As stated by Poch et al., "Such assumptions erroneously discredit the role of writing across the secondary content areas and potentially positions secondary educators to overlook the importance of teaching writing within their content domain" (p. 498).

Reid (2009) argues that most teacher preparation programs are lax when it comes to writing. He writes:

Consider, for instance, the teachers who might be created by the nightmare versions of writing teacher preparation programs that we hope to avoid: institutionalized boot camps where new teachers are quickly indoctrinated into a curriculum, with all decisions made for them, leaving as little space as possible to fail or to grow (the two are related); or conversely, laissez-faire programs lacking any guidance, which results in new teachers teaching on their own using a patchwork of pedagogies assembled from what they vaguely remember their own teachers doing. (p. W199)

Reid believes writing teacher preparation programs that are too strict or do too little in the way of writing do not work, although they are widespread. Instead, Reid argues, teachers need to become immersed in the writing process and face and overcome difficult challenges to be effective writing teachers. Overcoming challenges builds confidence. Not only should preparation programs teach teachers how to teach writers, but they should teach writing teachers how to "become confident, lifelong writers" (Reid, 2009, p. W199). Just as in public K-12 schools, colleges and universities face the problem of mandated pedagogy pressures and provide more information to pre-service teachers than discovery and practice.

According to Reid (2009), "Teachers who experience writing difficulty not only connect emotionally to their students, something they might do after writing *what* their students write, but they gain clarity about how students learn to write better" (p. W201). This makes them better teachers of writing and have more empathy for their students. Pre-service teachers need to be taught and go through the complete writing process like they will ask their own students to do. They must spend time going through the painstaking process of revision that their students will be expected to do. The reason Reid provides for increasing the writing difficulty of writing pedagogy courses can be explained as follows:

Our goal in designing assignments to favor writing difficulty, of course, is not to make the whole course more difficult, but to privilege the kind of difficulties that increase new teachers' experience of being writing-learners and thus strengthen their engagement with the teaching of writing. (p. W207)

Not only may writing pedagogy in colleges and universities need to be revised but writing pedagogy may be nonexistent altogether. According to Sanders et al., (2020), "Writing pedagogy is too often missing from US K-12 teacher preparation programs, with one study finding that only one-fourth of programs surveyed had a writing methods course" (p. 392). This is despite research and scholars showing how much it is needed. Significantly they report, "only five course titles across three states were dedicated specifically to writing, while 61 course titles referred only to reading," (p. 392-393) showing once again that writing is not receiving enough attention. In fact, it is the opinion of Sanders et al. that teachers are lacking in writing preparation.

For decades, the emphasis has been placed on reading instead of writing in teacher preparation programs. In the 1970s, Donald Graves investigated this imbalance of reading and writing instruction and found it detrimental (Routman, 1995). As Sanders et al. (2020) states, "Teacher education programs would significantly benefit from additional scholarship on models and methods of effective writing teacher education" (p. 393). And even when writing is taught in K-12 schools, teachers tend to focus on grammar, spelling, and mechanics versus process writing. Routman (1995) suggests that there are better ways of teaching writing such as providing students with time to write every day, writing choices, and directly teaching writing strategies. These categories are a part of the larger concept and writing pedagogy known as the writing workshop. As Sanders et al. found, "The teacher educators reported that candidates began

seeing themselves as writers through the writer's workshop, where they drafted, revised, and published their own writing" (p. 401). However, many teacher education programs do not currently offer writing pedagogy courses such as these due to time constraints and other restrictions. More importantly, "The educators held a common philosophical belief that candidates (and in-service teachers) needed positive perceptions of themselves as writers with agency, authority, and self-efficacy in order to teach writing well" (Routman, 1995, p. 401-402). This finding directly links effective teacher preparation programs with teacher writing confidence and the ability to teach it with efficacy.

By interviewing successful teacher educators in the field, Sanders et al. (2020) found that an effective curriculum model for writing teacher educators does indeed exist and can and should be employed in all teacher preparation programs. These educators in the field suggest a writing workshop model where students are given choice, authentic purposes for writing, and models or mentor texts to inspire writing. Sanders et al. suggest the following pieces make up effective writing pedagogy: "writing process approach, writing as a means of empowerment, complex conceptions of assessment, and the building and maintaining of K-12 connections" (p. 412). Perhaps if more higher education faculties employed these methods of teaching, there would be an improvement in pre-service and in-service writing teachers' confidence.

There is a need for more supportive writing programs for pre-service teachers (Street & Stang, 2009). According to Street and Stang, "…many classroom teachers do not feel comfortable teaching writing, nor do they feel knowledgeable about how to use writing with students" (p. 75). These researchers believe teachers' feelings towards teaching writing could be because of their own personal experience writing when they were students themselves. In other words, pre-service teachers come to teacher preparation programs with preconceived notions that

are hardwired into their writing personas. Additionally, the teachers' own school experiences had a markedly profound effect on teachers' writing confidence levels. For example, in the Street and Stang (2009) study, "…the majority of the school experiences recounted by the 12 teachers from the poor self-confidence group were quite poor, reflecting years of 'criticism,' 'harshness,' and 'resentment'" (p. 84). As also noted by this study, however, after the completion of a master's level writing course, "…teachers from all three confidence groups reported that the course significantly improved their self-confidence as writers" showing that teacher professional development can have positive effects. (p. 87).

Fortunately, this research shows that effective writing courses in higher education can repair years of damage done to students' writing confidence by teachers in their past writing experiences. Though it should be noted that, "It is often a challenge for university faculty and staff development professionals working with such teachers to overcome these negative attitudes" (Street & Stang, 2009, p. 90). With programs and influence from the National Writing Project, however, it is possible. Teachers need a learning community where they are free to develop their personal writing identities. As Street and Stang stated, "If we want teachers to see themselves as members of both writing and teaching communities, we teacher educators would do well to consider issues of biography, self-confidence, and proficiency with writing in our courses" (p. 91). It should be a goal of writing preparation courses to increase the self-confidence of pre-service teachers.

Teacher Writing Self-Efficacy

It is not only students who may lack writing self-efficacy, but teachers themselves. And if teachers have had any negative experiences with being critiqued by their own previous teachers, they run the risk of doing the same harm to their students. As Fletcher (1993) says, "…young

writers are deeply vulnerable to teachers' appraisals of their stories, poems or essays. We must speak to our students with an honesty tempered by compassion: Our words will literally define the ways they perceive themselves as writers" (p. 19.) Teachers need training on how to give appropriate feedback to students, which takes time and compassion.

Culham (2018) states, "Everywhere I go, I hear how discouraged teachers feel as they approach the teaching of writing" (p. 1). If teachers are this universally discouraged, it is any wonder why Gallagher (2015) says that there is not enough time given to students to practice writing in school. He states, "Writing instruction should be a non-negotiable core value in any classroom, and teachers should not have to be concerned with fitting it in" (p. 7).

Due to the field of teaching constantly changing in both practice and policy, teachers, now more than ever, must be confident enough in their teaching abilities to employ new ideas in their practice (Nolan & Molla, 2017). For teachers to truly be effective, they must be confident. Confidence can inform professional practice decisions and proactiveness to find professional development opportunities. Mentoring has been a successful factor in building teacher confidence. It was also noted that the concept of teacher confidence in relation to professional growth still needs to be researched further. Nolan and Molla (2017) state, "…confidence is a key factor in growing and enacting the professional capital of teachers; and professional development programs such as mentoring play key roles in building the confidence of novice and professionally isolated teachers" (p. 12). Collaborative opportunities and good models also inspire confidence in teachers. They found that teacher professional learning, teacher professionalism, professional capital, human capital, social capital, decisional capital, and teacher confidence are all interconnected.

Nolan and Molla (2017) explain raising confidence levels in terms of increasing "knowledge and skills acquisition" (p. 13). And for knowledge and skills acquisition to increase, teachers must have access to and attend professional development and feel as though they received an adequate education. As Nolan and Molla (2017) state, "Teacher confidence is vital for effective teaching and improved student achievement. The level of knowledge and skills at their disposal determines teachers' confidence in making sound judgments in their practices" (p. 14). All these findings suggest that a teacher cannot be effective unless confident in their practice. They must have high levels of self-efficacy. They must feel acknowledged and validated. Though this study involved early childhood education teachers, confidence is an abstract that can be applied across subject levels.

Teacher confidence can also be linked to teacher empowerment. According to the National Writing Project, "gaining knowledge and finding voice can empower teachers, having choice and control of classroom practices can empower teachers, and creating networks of support can empower teachers" (Dierking & Fox, 2013, p. 130). Teachers who display high confidence levels are more effective and have more of a positive impact on students. Confidence can be observed through teacher voice and self-efficacy rating. As Dierking and Fox (2013) stated, "Teachers' knowledge, then, teamed with the people surrounding them, determine in large part their self-efficacy" (p. 131). For teachers to feel confident, teachers must have a network of support and high subject knowledge. The National Writing Project strives to provide teachers with those supports. However, the National Writing Project is also an optional program for teachers. Those who do not seek out professional development opportunities such as the National Writing Project may not benefit from increased levels of confidence. Therefore, for teachers to be

confident, they must have had an adequate education for their undergraduate studies and have developed a network of support themselves.

In fact, Dierking and Fox (2013) found that when teachers' confidence increased in the teaching of writing, they had their students write more and more meaningfully. For example, before being involved with the National Writing Project, the teachers in the Dierking and Fox study had most students write regurgitated text. After participating in the National Writing Project, "more students wrote with original thought" (Dickering & Fox, 2013, p. 136). Also due to increased confidence, teachers in the study wanted to share their knowledge with other teachers. This confidence can lead to school-wide growth and improvement. It is not knowledge alone that increases confidence and efficacy but as Dierking and Fox (2013) state:

> Instead, we must also consider that knowledge—combined with support and an extended process of learning, not only how to teach writing but also how to be writers ourselves—can help us become confident, persistent, and powerful. In this era of increasingly scripted classrooms, teachers may need this sense of confidence and efficacy to step outside of what others think should be done and rely on our own knowledge and experience of "best practices." (p. 140)

Teachers must have a combined experience of all the above factors to see real gains in confidence. Teachers involved in the Dierking and Fox study all noted increased confidence and self-efficacy after participating in the National Writing Project literacy academies. This shows that teachers need to have access to meaningful professional development activities, a supportive network of educators, and enough freedom in their schools to demonstrate writing competence.

The level of a teacher's confidence is vital in the classroom and can affect many facets of a student's education. According to Martin (2006):

Confidence or self-efficacy (a) constitutes a generative capacity such that individuals high

in self-efficacy tend to generate and test alternative courses of action when they do not

meet with initial success; (b) can enhance one's functioning through elevated levels of

effort and persistence; and (c) can also enhance one's ability to deal with a problem

situation by influencing cognitive and emotional processes related to the situation. (p. 75)

Teachers with higher confidence levels can work towards finding the best practices to enhance

student learning. With higher confidence, teachers can find solutions in an ever-changing and

demanding world of education. Steps taken towards solutions can then resolutely positively

impact students.

It has also been discovered that when teachers enjoy teaching and have confidence, their

attitudes toward their students are more caring and engaged (Marin, 2006). Students respond to

the positive and confident affectations of their teachers that depict increased motivation.

Increased student motivation leads to higher student achievement. As Marin (2006) postulates,

"Hence, students' motivation and engagement are related to their teachers' enjoyment of

teaching, pedagogical efficacy, and affective orientations in the classroom" (p. 75). More

research needs to be conducted, however, to specify the different links between student

motivation and teachers' happiness levels in the classroom. Marin (2006) sought to discover, "To

what extent are specific facets of student motivation and engagement associated with teachers'

enjoyment of and confidence in teaching?" (p. 76). An interesting discovery of this study is that

the more teachers notice high levels of student motivation and mastery, the more confident and

content they become in teaching. As with other studies, Martin (2006) found that "Enhancing

student motivation and engagement and increasing teachers' enjoyment of and confidence in

teaching is achieved by not only focusing on students themselves but also building teachers'

capacity through professional development" (p. 90).

There is no doubt teachers' self-efficacy is paramount to their success in the classroom

and their impact on students. As Poch et al. (2020) says,

> Teachers with a stronger sense of self-efficacy are more likely to be willing to try
>
> different practices to support student learning, are typically better organized, plan more,
>
> provide higher quality instruction, attend longer to students who are struggling, are less
>
> critical of students when they make errors and are less likely to refer students for special
>
> education services. (p. 499)

Helping teachers achieve higher self-efficacy also helps students. More time and emphasis

should be placed on helping teachers become confident in their pre-service teacher education

programs.

Teachers as Writers

Mcconn (2020) notes that for teachers to be effective teachers of writing, they must be

writers themselves. Teachers who write alongside their students are masters at showing how

everyone struggles with the writing process, even experienced writers and teachers. Students are

thus able to learn humility from their teachers. Mcconn (2020) writes, "I appreciate and admire

the excellent teachers I work with who are continuously honing their craft as writers and writing

instructors, accepting the challenging complexities inherent in the process" (p. 21).

Before all else, "…teachers of writers should be writers themselves" (Soven, 1999, p. 4).

Soven explains this is true for many reasons. For teachers to have any understanding of what

their students are going through during the challenging writing process, teachers must also know

what it is like to have to write. Teachers must have empathy for their students going through the

writing process. It is even important that teachers of writing like to write so that students can absorb a positive attitude towards writing. When students enter middle school, writing assignments become more challenging and students often begin to dislike writing. It is unlike elementary grades where writing is more creative and exploratory. Due to this, it is even more crucial that secondary teachers allow their students to have fun while writing. Writing must also be student-centered, authentic, and varied for students to truly take ownership and feel that writing is a meaningful process.

Teacher and Student Enjoyment in Writing

Grady and Moore (2018) followed a group of five elementary teachers who attended a professional development workshop sponsored by the National Writing Project. These teachers shared ideas, used mentor texts to model good writing, and simply gave students time and choice for their writing.

During the workshop, one teacher observed, "Maybe my feelings about writing hindered my students' writing. I enrolled in this class to improve student writing and their attitudes toward writing, but it was my attitude that needed adjusting" (Grady & Moore, 2018, p. 36). This poignant reflection shows just how crucial the teacher is as a writing model. By the end of the workshop, teachers and students reported experiencing joy while writing. Writing scores even improved during the 2018-19 school year when teachers employed more joyful writing activities in the classroom: "The higher writing scores on these standardized tests validated the teachers' discovery that, if students learn to enjoy writing, they will successfully show what they know in their writing" (Grady & Moore, 2018, p. 37).

Research even shows that when students observe their teachers experiencing joy, their own joy and learning increase (Zumbrunn, et al., 2019). This also increases student motivation in

the classroom. And just why is joy important for writing instruction? Zumbrunn, et al. (2019) state, "Positive emotions, like enjoyment, may be particularly important in cognitively taxing tasks, such as academic writing" (p. 2). The act of writing requires more time and attention than most academic subjects making it especially paramount that students find joy in the task. However, more research is needed to make the connection between student writing success and enjoyment. There is some evidence to indicate that teacher enjoyment increases student enjoyment in writing. Zumbrunn, et al. provided similar results showing that students who perceived their teachers as experiencing writing enjoyment also enjoyed the writing process and even achieved higher scores in writing.

Other factors involved in creating writing joy for students include activities and classroom environment. To experience the most joy, Zumbrunn (2019) found that students needed to have autonomy and be able to write about what was interesting to them, and that they preferred creative writing opportunities and a quiet environment with plenty of time to write. Interestingly, students also needed to be in the mood to write, and if students did not report a high self-efficacy rating, they did not want to write. Additionally, students loved when writing was a social process and everyone in the room was excited to write. Unfortunately, these aspects of writing reported by students in this study are not what is tested on the standardized tests each year. It is also evident just how big a role teachers play in the learning and joy of writing for their students. Teachers who can successfully create positive writing communities in their classrooms make the process of writing most enjoyable for their students.

In summary, there has been some research conducted that explores and relates to the issues of writing in university education programs, public schools, and writing confidence and self-efficacy in teachers. Currently, research shows that there could be several factors keeping

teachers from teaching writing, such as standardized testing demands, other curriculum demands, a lack of appropriate teacher preparation in pre-service training, and a possible lack of teacher confidence where writing is concerned. There are some writing programs and organizations that have been effective at helping teachers gain self-efficacy and confidence. There are also writing programs teachers can use in the classroom that students can benefit from such as the writers' workshop model. The themes that emerged from the review of literature that have relevance to this study are teacher writing self-efficacy, pre-service teacher writing preparation, teachers as writers, and teacher and student joy in writing.

Much of what Routman said concerning writing instruction in 1995 is still true today. As she states,

> I'm still very concerned about how little writing is taught; how little time is provided for children to write. And when time is provided, I don't see children challenged by teachers who have been prepared to teach it through the teacher's own high level of literacy.
>
> (Routman, 1995, p. 524)

Things can and must get better. Further research is needed, however, to determine specific factors contributing to teacher self-efficacy levels for writing and the teaching of writing. To the researcher's knowledge, this research has not been conducted using participants at West Virginia public universities. This study will address this need.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, plans for data collection and analysis are discussed. The research questions were investigated using qualitative data collected through a survey consisting of open-ended questions and focus groups. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for the study. Survey responses and focus group discussions were analyzed for common themes through relevance to the research questions using content analysis. The goal of the research was to discover pre-service teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy for teaching writing and how those perceptions affected writing instruction in the classroom.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own writing efficacy?

2. What type and how much training do Secondary English Education pre-service teachers receive for writing instruction?

3. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own efficacy to teach students writing?

4. What kinds and how much writing instruction is delivered to students during a typical school day in a sample of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' classrooms?

Research Design

This study was a qualitative study that used open-ended surveys and focus groups to collect data. In general, qualitative studies are more literary, creative, and interpretative (Schwandt, 2007). "To call a research activity *qualitative* inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the *meaning* of human *action*" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 248). This explanation relates to this study as it examined how teachers' perceptions of their own writing efficacy concerning the teaching of writing. The primary methodology used was qualitative content analysis. Because this study sought to discover pre-service teacher perspectives of self-efficacy, qualitative data painted a broader picture of their level of writing efficacy. Through their short, open-ended responses in surveys and focus groups, participants had the opportunity to tell their own writing stories and describe their self-efficacy in teaching writing and personal writing.

Qualitative content analysis was suited to this study because it is a naturalistic methodology that relied on the analysis of qualitative data. Content analysis was an appropriate form of methodology for the analysis of open-ended responses and interview questions posed to focus group participants (Cho & Lee, 2014). Content analysis required the coding of data as well as the noting of themes that emerged from the data. Qualitative content analysis was appropriate for the research instruments used in this study—open-ended survey questions and focus groups. Additionally, data were analyzed for categories that emerged with the purpose of gaining knowledge regarding teacher perceptions of self-efficacy (Cho & Lee, 2014). Qualitative content analysis is different from grounded theory. As stated by Cho and Lee (2014), "Although both grounded theory and qualitative content analysis follow coding processes, content analysis does not focus on finding relationships among categories or theory building; instead, it focuses on extracting categories from the data." Additionally, data are analyzed only in relevance to the

research questions. This is a data reduction process, while grounded theory involves much more interpretation of data. As Cho and Lee (2014) state, "The analysis process in qualitative content analysis comprises selecting the unit of analysis, categorizing and finding themes from categories."

Population and Sample

For this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling from two different public universities in southern West Virginia. In purposeful sampling, participants are chosen because of the appropriateness of the study's purpose and research questions (Schwandt, 2007). Data were collected from two different universities to help provide a fuller picture of writing education courses offered to pre-service teachers. This was a sample of convenience due to the proximity of the two local universities. Participants were chosen based on their major, Secondary English Education, and their year in the education programs, junior or senior.

At the time of the study, the first university chosen had five Secondary English Education majors in their junior and senior years. The second university had 42 Secondary English Education majors in their junior and senior years. This resulted in a total of 47 surveys being distributed. Sixteen were returned attributing to a 34% return rate. Of the 16 respondents, 8 respondents (50%) were juniors, and 8 respondents (50%) were seniors. Four were students at the first university (0.08%), and 12 at the second university (25%). Additionally, of the 16 surveys returned, 6 volunteers participated in one of the two focus groups, giving it a 37% participation rate.

The first focus group consisted of one student from the first university and two students from the second university. The second focus group conducted a week later consisted of three

students from the first university. This resulted in 66% of participants being from the first university and 33% of participants being from the second university.

Instrumentation

Surveys

The Pre-service Teacher Survey (Appendix B) was designed to collect individual data: grade and subject taught, college attended, major, year in the program, and any writing courses or professional development taken on the topic of writing. Other content on the survey asked participants about their perceptions of self-efficacy as writers and teachers of writing (how effective they feel).

The survey consisted of three demographic and seven open-ended questions. The first three questions on the survey pertained to identifying the appropriate university major and university attended. These questions were included to ensure those who responded to the survey were of the proper participant base required for the research study (Secondary English Education students in their junior or senior years attending one of the two chosen public universities in the state) which have been reported through descriptive statistics. The remaining questions on the survey included open-ended questions with the purpose of gleaning perceptions of self-efficacy for the writing and teaching of writing.

Focus Groups

Interviewing focus group participants is crucial to qualitative research. As Campbell and Lassiter (2015) explain, "Perhaps most importantly, our ideas about the value of interviews are rooted in the notion of authenticity, the idea that individuals become more fully present and authentic selves via public (and, especially, publicly confessional) discourse" (p. 88). Through this discourse of the focus groups, more accurate data were collected.

Focus group questions were all open-ended. The focus groups were semi-structured and emergent in design, with questions developed to expand on the initial survey questions. The focus group questions (Appendix D) were designed to provide insight into the pre-service teachers' levels of confidence in writing, the teaching of writing, and past and present writing experiences. The participants were encouraged to share stories about their writing experiences inside and outside the classroom.

Data Collection Procedures

Two research methods, a survey and focus groups, were used to collect qualitative data related to the research questions. The survey was distributed electronically to Secondary English Education majors in their junior and senior years attending two West Virginia public universities through their school email addresses. Responses were collected using Qualtrics, an online survey tool, which participants accessed through the link sent to them in email. Qualtrics stored their responses.

The second method for data collection was focus groups with a smaller sample of respondents who volunteered to participate. Participants interested in participating in a focus group were taken to a separate link on Qualtrics after completing the initial survey. Due to the availability of participants, two small focus groups consisting of three participants in each group were conducted at different times. Both groups met virtually using Microsoft Teams with the meetings lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The recording feature on Microsoft Teams was used during the focus groups, and the participant responses were later transcribed and indexed to discover themes or patterns with relevance to the research questions.

Data Analysis

As Cho and Lee (2014) state, "The analysis process in qualitative content analysis comprises of selecting the unit of analysis, categorizing and finding themes from categories." The researcher determined the data type, in the case of this study transcripts and survey responses, chose categories of data and discovered themes from the data. The inductive approach was used to pull specific text from survey responses and focus group transcripts to identify themes.

Data analysis for the surveys consisted of reading through each question's responses several times and pulling text from survey responses to discover themes. The survey responses were then read for meaning and identified common themes. Responses were analyzed according to commonalities and placed into categories according to the research questions.

The data from the focus groups were collected through transcription and then analyzed for themes and patterns, which shed light on the research questions. Schwandt (2007) says, "Transcription is the act of recording and preparing a record of a respondent's own words, and it yields a written account—a text—of what a respondent or informant said in response to a fieldworker's query or what respondents said to one another in a conversation" (p. 296). The data collected from the survey responses and focus groups were organized into themes when patterns came to light. These themes would be used to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

National student writing scores are consistently low and not progressing, showing that work needs to be done to address this issue in schools (Culham, 2014). In fact, as of 2019, our last average year of school before the COVID-19 epidemic, only 27% of the United States' eighth graders were found to be proficient in writing. Data were similar for our nation's twelfth graders, showing that growth was not occurring between these grade levels. Now more than ever, schools must dig deep to discover the root of this problem. Previous research has shown that many teachers did not receive sufficient preparation for the teaching of writing and that there is a link between teacher self-efficacy and their performance in the classroom (Gillespie et al., 2014). This qualitative study aimed to examine the perceptions of self-efficacy for the teaching of writing of pre-service Secondary English Education majors in their junior and senior years attending two West Virginia public universities to discover if this could contribute to how and how much writing was taught. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their writing efficacy?

2. What type and how much training do Secondary English Education pre-service teachers receive for writing instruction?

3. What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their efficacy to teach students writing?

4. What kinds and how much writing instruction is delivered to students during a typical school day in a sample of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' classrooms?

Findings from the data analysis are presented in this chapter and are organized according to themes. As a reminder, data were collected from qualitative surveys and two focus groups and were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis methodology. To better organize participant responses, participants from the survey were assigned a random number when referenced, and participants from the focus groups were given a pseudonym when referenced.

The Pre-service Teacher Survey was analyzed using qualitative content analysis using indexing for commonalities in relevance to the research questions. Focus groups were analyzed through the transcription process and indexed according to themes that emerged through qualitative content analysis. This section is divided into keywords or phrases developed from the research questions. Underneath those key categories are themes that emerged throughout the data from the surveys and two focus groups.

Personal Writing Efficacy

Identification as Writers

The intrinsic rewards of writing were found in the survey responses. Participant 1 said, "I am a writer because writing is something that I love doing." Participant 5 responded,

> I am a writer because it has been easier to make my voice heard through writing than out
> loud. Being someone who is often outspoken as well as extremely blunt when speaking,
> my tone and demeanor often make people uncomfortable or scared. I am a very
> opinionated person, as well as a woman who stands strong with their priorities and ideas.
> I have noticed that people will listen to me better when I write or use writing as a form of
> expression, rather than just verbally speaking.

Participant 14 stated, "I am a writer because I write and enjoy writing. I write using multiple mediums and in differing genres and styles." Several participants reported that writing was a way to express themselves emotionally and creatively.

Question nine of the survey asked participants to complete the sentence stem that most applied to them: "I am a writer because" or "I am not a writer because." Responses were divided into whether participants responded with the "I AM a writer" or "I am NOT a writer" sentence stem. Of the 16 respondents, only one chose the "I am not a writer" sentence stem. The other 15 respondents chose the "I AM a writer" sentence stem. Participant 15 said, "I am not a writer because I am focused on teaching children how to read." Only Participant 9 related their sentence stem to teaching, "I am a writer because I have learned that the better I am at showing others that it is okay to be open and real about topics, the better I can reach others." The other responses discussed what the participants enjoyed about writing, such as Participant 7's response, "I am a writer because I enjoy writing, storytelling, and the art of creating." Based on this question, most participants reported enjoying writing and seeing the importance and possibilities of writing.

In the focus groups, all six participants could cite a positive experience they encountered with personal writing. Most listed specific courses or experiences in college, while others made more general statements. Betty even reported that every experience she has had with writing has been positive. George said,

> Throughout primary schooling, secondary, and college as well, I just usually had an easy time with writing. That's just my experience, and I'd never really had any problems with different parts of the process or different ways of approaching writing. So, I've had a lot of exposure to different ways to do it, depending on the teachers, and I've appreciated that.

John even said he was able to get out of taking quizzes in college by writing Shakespearean sonnets. Only Brynn replied that she didn't have a specific experience to mention because "writing is not my strong suit or was my strong suit." However, she went on to say that she has had good professors who have helped her grow and pointed out her strengths in writing. In turn, that has made her feel more confident in writing. She said she was excited to teach writing because she is still learning along with her students as she is teaching it.

In the second focus group, Sarah discussed the use of journaling in her personal life and school career. She said that the frequency of journaling and writing in composition notebooks at school became intrinsically rewarding, causing her to want to write more.

Impact of Past Teachers on Identity as Writers

In the focus groups, when asked, "What would you say has contributed the most to your confidence or lack of confidence in your writing?" Brynn responded that positive experiences with professors increased her confidence. She said,

> And so for me, I just I've had really good professors that have helped me grow and pointed out my strong suits in writing. I guess that makes me feel more confident, but there's always room to grow, and so that's why I'm really excited to teach it because I'm also like learning as I'm teaching it.

Two participants cited an increase in self-efficacy when they received positive teacher feedback.

In the focus groups, participants were asked to discuss their negative writing experiences and if those experiences had affected their writing efficacy. All but two students could list specific negative experiences. Three of the four students reported that their negative experiences had to do with the grading procedures of teachers and professors. Two students cited that their negative experiences stemmed from teachers or professors grading too harshly or too much in the

teacher's own way. To elaborate on this point, John recalled, "I had an experience once with a

paper in college where the fault was partially on me, but the way that she graded it was very

utilitarian. They were very focused on the formatting of it." Betty reported that she worked very

hard on a 12-page paper for college but received no feedback. She said, "I wasn't able to improve

or anything. It was so really upsetting because I couldn't go back and improve or build my

skills." George elaborated on this point,

> I think one takeaway is that how a teacher goes about looking at your work can be very
>
> unpredictable. Of course, you have rubrics most of the time, and you should, but even
>
> when you do follow these things to the letter, there's always that factor of teachers
>
> looking at things with a bias.

Sarah added,

> Uh, I remember one time in high school, I had a teacher that was really all about things
>
> being done her way. And I think that's not really right to do because I feel as if, as a
>
> writer, you should have the freedom to be open with how you write and about whatever
>
> you're writing about. So, she was just very strict about how she wanted things done, and
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> it was it felt like I was in n a cage, I guess you could say.

Professional Preparation

The Weakness of College Training on Teaching

Five of the fourteen survey responses were positive in nature, involving pre-service

teacher preparedness, indicating that some form of training, mainly focused on courses they have

taken for their major, was beneficial for teaching writing. Participant 8 stated, "The training I

have received so far that I feel like has been helpful has been my Education classes and my

English classes along with observations." Participant 1 wrote, "I took a tutoring writing course,

and it helped me see different ways to help students improve their writing skills." Most responses mentioned a course or two they have taken, but one mentioned specific strategies learned from training. This participant, Participant 12, wrote,

> The only focus I believe I had teaching writing was my first Methods course, the second being focused on teaching reading. We looked at different strategies specifically related to grammar, writing specific narrative types, the creation of projects, etc. I enjoyed the course and have used the zero drafting strategy I learned in said course in my actual teaching.

> Participants in the survey were also asked to describe any courses they had taken on

teaching writing in schools and how they were helpful or not helpful. A course mentioned in several responses was ENG 402, which participants described as their writing methods course. Participant 3 said of this course,

> I've had one class that has specifically taught me how to teach writing in schools, and it has been the most helpful class I've taken so far—so helpful that I've become frustrated with and resentful of my other classes for not meeting the standards of this one course [ENG 402].

Another participant, Participant 13's response read,

> The only course I have taken on teaching writing in schools has been ENG 402, which I am currently still in. It has been helpful because it is giving me the perspective of a teacher but showing me through the ways of learning as a student.

Many participants mentioned that they have only taken one course about teaching writing.

> In the survey, responses varied when asked about how prepared participants felt to teach

writing. The results show that of the 14 answers, 5 depicted an unhelpful or negative rating of the

training they received or that they received no training. Instead of training, some participants

mentioned specific courses they have taken in their pre-service teacher programs. Two

participants listed N/A for this question. These were coded as unhelpful (unfavorable) since that

would indicate that they have not yet received any training. One negative response was directed

towards the participant's coursework for their program. Participant 13 stated,

> I went through all of [school's] methods courses for teaching English. Those were the
>
> classes primarily focused on how to teach writing. At this point, they don't seem like
>
> they're going to be extremely useful to me in the actual workplace. They were too
>
> conceptual in nature to truly glean experience from them, and I primarily learn through
>
> experience.

Lastly, four neutral responses from the survey did not clearly state whether participants

had received helpful or unhelpful training. Participant 5 discussed advice a professor had

provided. Participant 10 mentioned that doing lesson plans was helpful yet did not indicate any

type of training. Two participants mentioned how some of their training was helpful and

unhelpful in different ways. For example, Participant 6 said,

> Currently in ENG 402, where I am learning the basics of genre and how to compose
>
> writing within that genre. I would say it is helpful in having me see the process of writing
>
> but lacks in teaching me how to approach the lesson with students.

Another was similar in response—that the classes have been helpful but not realistic for the

actual teaching of writing.

The influence of college courses, whether helpful or lacking, was expanded on in the

focus groups. Sarah said that she had not taken any courses focused on writing. She said that

there is a class on writing but that it is only offered to elementary education majors, not

Secondary English Education majors. She went on to say, however, that she doesn't think any course could truly prepare her for teaching writing and that only classroom experience could. The other pre-service teachers from the same university said the same thing—that while they could mention writing in a lesson plan, the methods course mainly focused on reading. Brynn and Devin said they had not taken a writing course and did not know if one was offered.

In the first focus group, however, two pre-service teachers who attended the other university spoke of courses they felt helped prepare them to teach writing. These two participants (John and George) recalled two methods courses that addressed the teaching of writing in some way in addition to teaching reading. They both spoke of the courses positively but said the main aspect they took away from them was which books and resources to buy for their future curriculum. While both reported positive experiences, they did say they had forgotten most of what they had learned. John said, "I think I'm like a year and a half to two years out from methods courses now, so most of those procedures are out the window." Both pre-service teachers said that the professors used a teacher-resource text in which students had to learn one or two lessons or teaching ideas from each section.

Betty, also in this focus group, could cite specific courses she had taken that addressed the teaching of writing in some way—English 303 and English 421. English 303 is an expository writing class, and English 421 is called "Teaching English in Secondary Schools."

She said that her education classes have helped prepare her, however. For example, she mentioned learning the importance of using rubrics and quick writing in the classroom. At the same time, she noted that there is a difference between reading and learning about something and being about to do it. Lily pointed out that an expository writing class she took was beneficial as she could use her writings as models for her students. She explained,

Like I could go back and read my papers… like I'm a long-term sub in right now, and I

went back, and we're like we're writing expository pieces right now. And I actually gave

them my sample and I was like critique this and like go through and check it and stuff,

but I've loved that class.

All six participants responded that they had not received any training for writing or the

teaching of writing outside of the required university courses for Secondary English Education.

One of the focus groups mentioned that the only kind of training they attended outside of regular

courses was training for their Teacher Performance Assessments (TPA's), a project pre-service

teachers must complete during their final semester.

To wrap up final thoughts in the second focus group, the participants all agreed that they

would have liked to have taken a college course that focused solely on the teaching of writing

and that it was a little more accessible to them. They discussed that certain courses were only

offered at certain times, making it difficult to schedule classes. One participant made the point

that because the university is so small and there is not enough interest in Secondary English

Education, there aren't enough classes focused on writing.

Learning Through Teaching

In the survey, Participant 2 stated, "I have had several classes but no clinical experience

teaching writing in schools due to COVID. The classes have been helpful, but do not feel

realistic." In addition, Participant 7 said,

I took several courses that taught strategies to teach reading and writing, and how to

formulate lessons for writing in the classroom. They have been helpful when it comes to

learning the formatting of lesson plans, methods for teaching different grades, etc.

However, it feels like more conceptual learning because I have no way to put it to the test.

In the focus group, John described his feelings of preparedness as a number of 6 ½ or 7 out of 10 because he felt that most of his knowledge would be gained from being in his classroom. He said, "Getting into the classroom reminds me how much I've forgotten." The first focus group mentioned that they did not feel prepared to teach grammar just because they did not remember the technical knowledge needed. No pre-service teacher said that they felt 100 percent prepared to teach writing. In the other focus group, two of the three pre-service teachers had not gotten to experience much classroom time yet. When asked how prepared they feel for the teaching of writing, Devin replied that she feels "A little bit prepared, but not enough to go into the classroom and teach students what they need to know."

John also explained that there is a difference between course preparation and classroom experience. He said,

I was worried that things would not be successful, or they would fall apart because I didn't remember these things [from his courses]. But after being in the classroom, I realized that it's not nearly as structured as they make it out to be in your methods courses. Like it is a day-by-day thing, and a student-by-student thing, and there's not a single thing that's going to work for everyone, and that's something that I've learned over the course of this student teaching, and I feel pretty good about it now because that's the kind of stuff I'm good at. I'm not good at memorizing theories and methods, but I'm good at jumping in and seeing what people know and trying to help them with it. So, I feel a lot better about it. That was definitely something I learned in my Level Twos was that it is an everyday battle really. It's not as clinical as the system at […] makes it out to be.

John went on to say,

> I found that I had completely forgotten almost any buzzword that I had learned in the past
> four years because I'm in the middle of trying to do this, but like when you're actually in
> the classroom, and you have your resources at hand, it makes it a lot easier to figure out
> what it is you're going to do.

Betty echoed this point by saying, "When you actually have to start teaching it, it never goes the way that the lesson plan goes." She also stated,

> I don't think I've had anything in any of my courses that really prepared me to teach
> honestly in general because, as we've talked about, you know nothing. You learn in the
> class… like we need to actually get in there in the classroom.

Additionally, Lily stated, "It was kind of just getting out into the schools and figuring out like how my cooperating teacher did things and then thinking about whenever I was in high school and the cool things that we did."

Learning from Expert Texts

Participants of one focus group discussed specific strategies taken from their courses. The book the participants spoke about was by Kelly Gallagher called *Write to Learn,* which was full of writing strategies. George responded,

> Yeah, and it was just filled to the brim with really cool activities. Once we had gotten
> into the class and already rented the book, I was like man, I should use this zero drafting
> from *Write to Learn,* and it is something that I've actually used in both of my placements.
> When asked what the Zero Drafting strategy was, he described,
> Zero Drafting is when you just have the students write for a certain amount of time, say
> five to ten minutes. You put on a timer, and the point is that they don't think about what

they're writing, they just feel it out. They just keep going. They put their pencil to their

paper, and they just keep going. That's the whole point. I think it's better handwritten

than it is typed as well.

He continued that brainstorming is usually a challenge for students, but this strategy helps them

with that first step of the writing process. Brynn agreed that the most useful tools from her

courses were the texts she could use in her future classroom. Devin mentioned a grammar

exercise book she learned about through a course she took.

Teaching Writing Efficacy

Dueling Voices: Confidence and Uncertainty

In the survey, six participants responded with confidence when asked if they felt effective

as writing teachers. Participant 4 could even cite specific strategies that helped him or her feel

effective as a writing teacher. The participant explained,

I feel more confident than I used to, but I feel that there is still so much for me to learn. I

know plenty of workshopping, discovery writing, and revision/editing techniques to teach

students, but I have so little experience in actual classroom settings that I'm not sure how

effective I'll be.

Participant 12 noted, "I do. I have been trained by great professors, with exceptional peers, and

have created a multitude of pieces of writing and lesson plans."

In addition, Participant 13 explained that they felt effective at teaching argumentative

writing; however, not so much creative writing. They wrote,

I feel like I am effective in teaching the format of "academic writing." For example, I

believe I can teach argumentative and informative writing well because, at least at the

middle school level, those modes of writing tend to be somewhat formulaic. When it

comes to creative writing, however, I do not feel nearly as effective. I try to encourage my students and give them opportunities to write creatively; however, I do not feel I am effective in teaching strategies and structure for creative writing.

The response was still positive, as they listed some types of writing they felt they were effective at teaching.

On the other hand, Participant 14 wrote,

Having just finished a unit on narrative writing with two classes of freshmen, I believe my instruction was a success. I focused on the steps of the writing process and, given the nature of my student teaching, had the students follow a rubric that asked for very specific things from their stories. Given that framework, I think I should have success continuing teaching writing in the future.

In the survey, when asked if participants felt effective as writing teachers, most responded positively yet unsure due to lack of time in the classroom. For example, Participant 5 explained, "I feel like I am still working on becoming a better teacher. I have a difficult time trying to explain concepts without rambling or making it more confusing than it should be." Participant 16 said,

As of right now, I am not extremely confident in my effectiveness because, as I said, I learn best from experience. My second clinical placement was cut short due to COVID before I was able to teach the students anything, so my first experience teaching ANYTHING was the first half of this semester in my first placement. I taught argumentative essays, and it felt effective, but it is my only experience, so I do not yet know how to gauge my abilities.

Participant 2 stated, "Yes and no. I feel like I am equipped with the right tools, but no scaffolding to actually be in the classroom." Participant 6 showed confidence in personal writing efficacy but not teaching writing efficacy by explaining, "I do, but only because I feel confident in my writing, not because I feel confident in my teaching style." This shows a difference between personal writing efficacy and teaching writing efficacy.

The focus group's confidence in teaching writing efficacy was not as clear. However, Lily did explain to the other participants in the focus group that the experience made her feel more confident. She explained,

> It does get better. You'll feel more confident and get used to kind of being thrown out there a little bit and just see if he can fly. I'm sure in like in all the situations that I've been in, none of the kids are like, you obviously don't know how to teach, you know, teach me how to write, but they are, I mean, they're just as you know, confused as what we think that we are so it does get better promise.

The most overwhelming theme to emerge from teaching writing efficacy was that preservice teachers feel they need more experience in the classroom to gauge their effectiveness as teachers of writing.

The focus group participants further elaborated on this point. The first focus group discussed how sometimes if a teacher or pre-service teacher is good at something, it is more challenging to teach. John responded, "I feel like we're almost at a disadvantage when we have our experts teach beginner-level students. I feel like it would almost be better if, in our education system, experts taught experts and beginners taught beginners." The other two students in the focus group agreed. This discussion derived from what participants found challenging about teaching writing.

Betty agreed and said,

You can say a big struggle for me is that writing comes pretty naturally, and I've never

done like the writing process step by step. I usually just like make notes and then go for

it, like I have one draft, and that's it. And so it's really aggravating to teach that and have

to break it down and teach something that I didn't really have to learn. That just kind of

happened for me. I'm dreading teaching the writing process at all because I don't use it,

so I can't just pull out like my own examples, and things that I know helped me because I

don't use that. It is difficult to teach students what comes naturally to the pre-service

teachers.

George said,

When I was teaching the writing process at my first placement, I had students who had

trouble brainstorming like the very first thing, and I just couldn't even put myself in a

headspace to be like, well, what is it that stopping them? Because I couldn't even imagine

not being able to sit there and come up with ideas.

Furthermore, while three of the six participants in the focus groups responded that they

had not had the chance to teach writing yet due to not being in full-time school placement, they

were still able to discuss how they imagined the teaching of writing to be in their future

placements. The three participants who have taught writing did not clearly state whether they felt

effective as teachers of writing or not but did offer scenarios of writing in the classroom that they

have experienced that may lend to self-efficacy levels. None of the six reported high self-

efficacy levels.

For example, John recalled that he did feel effective while teaching writing during his

first placement but that his feelings changed at the subsequent placement. He reported that his

self-efficacy depended on the grade level. The lesson he taught to a ninth grade class went much differently than when taught to an eighth grade class. Betty added, "I feel like based on what I've done so far, I feel pretty okay, but I just haven't done enough to really know."

Additionally, participants were asked to discuss whether they felt successful as teachers of writing. None of the six participants could say they felt successful because it was too early to tell. They wanted to have more time in the classroom. John said, "Teaching writing successfully is something that happens over an entire semester or even an entire year," mainly because the entirety of the writing process takes much time. In addition, George responded,

> I would answer by saying I'm confident enough that I don't want to not teach writing again; you know, I know that what I have done has worked in some way, even if not all of it works. But I know that as a teacher, I have the capability to adapt.

Challenges and Joy of Teaching Students Writing

A theme that emerged during the focus groups but not the surveys was the influence of K-12 students on pre-service teachers' self-efficacy levels. Lily equated her self-efficacy for teaching writing with how the students perceived the writing instruction. A participant from both focus groups mentioned that asking students to write was like pulling teeth. A few participants, John, Betty, and George noted that students were easily overwhelmed with writing and needed the writing process steps broken down for them. Lily further explained,

> So, I'm actually teaching the final for my class. It is an essay, and so right now, I'm having a hard time with the kids who just simply don't care and don't really like to write. I let them choose their topic; I had to approve it, of course, but I thought that was going to help a little bit, but it's still like pulling teeth trying to get them to, you know, get some thoughts on a paper. But teaching them like the process of writing, like just giving them

five minutes just to like brainstorm. But I don't think that they've been taught the process of writing, like how to actually develop an essay. And so whenever I said that at first, it was like they were super overwhelmed, and so breaking it down, I think has been better for them.

John continued,

But that's something that a lot of students have problems with, and I had students here who had issues with it too. It helps to be able to think like they do, I suppose. And a huge problem is the iPad with writing or with teaching. The process itself is that everything builds from step to step, and so when my students don't do any work in this step or they don't take their work home and do it, and then the next day, I'm supposed to be teaching the next thing. But I've only got a handful of students who are ready. I tried to give up on homework. I've never really assigned homework. It's like you know you should do this at home. You know, I think it'd be good if you did this at home, you know. Or, like you know, if you're gonna do it then you'd have to make it a grade at the beginning of class or something like that. But even then, that's a huge thing I've learned with students this year. A lot of kids don't care about their grades. They don't care about the zeros; they don't care about 0 out of 100. Why would they care about that homework, right?

On the other hand, participants also recalled what was enjoyable about teaching writing. Overwhelmingly, both focus groups mentioned that having students write in class helped them to get to know the students better. Lily recalled,

There are kids who aren't as outgoing or as well-spoken, and so I have gotten to know them well just by reading their papers. So, although they're not super expressive verbally, whenever they write, it's just like, "Oh my gosh," I did not know.

She went on to say that this writing helped her to learn about what the students were interested in and that this is her favorite part about teaching writing. John echoed this point, "When you read those things about a student's life, uh you, you inevitably know them better as well, and I feel like the whole course of my student teaching has just been getting to know students better." He said that students were more comfortable telling him about issues in their personal lives through writing; therefore, he could be there for them if they needed it. Overall, the consensus was that teaching writing and having students write helped the participants to connect with their students more.

Betty discussed that teaching writing is enjoyable when students are proud of what they have written and want to show her their results in class. She likes seeing students become more creative while writing. Additionally, a participant in the same focus group responded that it is so fulfilling and exciting to see students succeed at writing because he realizes writing can be difficult for them.

A couple of the participants, Lily and Devin, mentioned that having students write in journals is enjoyable because it was a writing activity they found enjoyable when they were K-12 students. They plan to utilize journal writing in their classrooms. Brynn said that teaching grammar was enjoyable because that is her strong suit. Though other participants mentioned reading talented students' writing was enjoyable, Brynn said,

> It's a beautiful thing when people are good at writing, but I think seeing people who struggle with it whenever they finally figure out their topic or they finally figured out how they're going to write the paper... I think seeing that moment is going to be really cool as well.

Participants felt connections or saw students excited about writing, which increased their self-efficacy for teaching writing.

Classroom Writing Practice

The Status of Writing in the Literacy Curriculum

The final discussion in the focus groups revolved around writing instruction in pre-service teachers' classrooms, whether they were observing or teaching. The questions asked were related to the types of writing taught and observed in pre-service teachers' classrooms, the types of writing they enjoyed teaching, and how much writing instruction and practice occurred. A list of specific questions addressed can be found in Appendix C.

Four of the six participants said that they mainly observed and taught writing as a bellringer, despite writing standards being cited as used most frequently on the survey responses. Several participants noted this commonality of writing used as a short bellringer. John said,

> Bellringers is definitely the big consistency. We had those at the high school, and my cooperating teacher wasn't doing bellringers when I started here, and I didn't do bellringers during my unit because I was pressed for time. But since she has started doing bellringers, and that's partially on part of the demands for the administration for different reasons, different programs that this school is going through at the moment.

In the second focus group, Lily also mentioned writing to begin class. She recalled,

> They probably wrote for, I don't know, maybe 5 of it [the 47-minute class periods]. Well, it depends. So, it was like three different little sections of their warmup, and for, like the last part it was kind of just like a free write—a little bit. We didn't time it or anything, but it was just usually related to like a comprehension question related to the content that we

were covering that day. And so they wrote for probably 10 minutes as soon as we got in there, and then we discussed and then depending on what we were doing that day.

John went on to say that writing instruction is mainly about writing exposure at the middle school level. He said, "The main type of writing that I see being used in our class is just exposure. Uh, because I feel like the kids are lacking quite a bit, so we're doing. Basically, it's just bellringers every day."

He continued,

We're not trying to get them to write anything specific. Just write, write something up, and reading is a really big thing here too. And I think that counts as exposure for writing as well because you're reading good writing.

Betty agreed, saying, "Yeah, it's about the same dealing with writing prompts, you're just getting them exposed to writing and getting them to just work on building their skills and get used to writing." In the second focus group, Lily also mentioned this point. She said that while reading is taught maybe a little more than writing overall, it also depends on the specific class. She said that writing is more "time-consuming, and it's a little bit deeper." Because of this, she had her students write for the first 5 minutes of class to get more accustomed to writing

However, John also said that his experience was different in his high school placement where he taught a unit on argumentative writing. He felt at that level, more writing structures and techniques were taught due to the foundation of writing students should have received in the earlier grade levels. Another example of writing mentioned in this focus group was a research project taught by George.

The answers varied when both focus groups were asked about the amount of time spent on writing instruction and the students producing writing each day. In the first focus group, the

participants agreed that writing occurred around 30 minutes daily. One participant in the second focus group responded that it was about 10 minutes a day. However, all participants said that the time spent writing could depend upon the current learning unit. If a writing unit was occurring in the classroom, up to 70 minutes of writing could occur. For example, George mentioned that writing took up more time in his placement when he was teaching narrative and informative writing units. In other words, when writing is the lesson's focus, it takes up more time.

To continue this focus group discussion, participants were asked which activity, reading or writing, was taught more in their placements. All participants said that, in general, they witnessed reading skills being taught more frequently than writing skills. However, Betty, in the first focus group, did say she saw a "pretty decent mix" where she witnessed writing every day. When asked why they thought this, Betty said, "It's because they [students] pitch a fit when you try to tell them to write because they're not used to it." John echoed this point, saying that he has mainly seen activities related to reading, such as students reacting to what they've read or watched in class. John made the point that he felt reading is much more passive, so students do not fight that process as much.

John also said COVID-19 could be an issue because students could get away with doing less than is usually expected in school. George said, "Every class that I've had this semester has been very resistant to writing." Betty agreed, saying,

> They're definitely more resistant to writing than reading because with reading, a lot of the time, you can kind of fake your way through it. You can sit there and just stare at the page and flip a page every few minutes. Whereas with writing, it's very obvious if you're not doing anything you know because there are no words appearing on your screen or on your paper.

Lily said that many times getting students to write was "like pulling teeth." They just need so much help even getting started with the brainstorming process.

The participants in the focus groups were asked which topic of English Language Arts they enjoyed teaching most. When asked if Lily enjoyed teaching reading or writing more, she replied that in her honors class, she preferred teaching reading due to the interpretive nature of reading. She enjoys seeing the "lightbulb clicking on" when her students finally understand the deeper meaning of the text. Another participant in this group, Brynn, though she has not yet had a chance to teach in her placement, said that she anticipates enjoying teaching reading better because that is more of her strong suit. She continued that she does see the importance of writing and has grown in this skill, so she thinks that will be enough fuel for her to want to teach it. She said, "You don't have to love it, but writing is very important."

In contrast, another participant in the second focus group responded that she thinks once she can have more experience in the classroom, she will prefer teaching writing. She says this because

> That's where you get to see how students think and how they want to put things together and how they will put everything they know into their writing. And I think that's really cool to see how everything goes on in their head and how they feel towards certain things.

Interestingly, the consensus of the first focus group, when asked which activity they enjoyed teaching more, reading or writing, was writing. Although they mentioned it was a little more challenging to teach due to students being more resistant to it, they felt it was more fun and meaningful. John said,

For me, it's writing. Helping students fall in love with reading is really romantic and nice, but it never happened for me in public school. I still enjoy it, but I don't get to do it very much, and it's not a huge part of my life. But writing always has been like, I can read well enough to write and I like teaching writing as well.

George continued,

You can almost always strike some sort of personal cord with writing, whereas I mean anything you choose to read with a group, there's going to be a naysayer. It's not going to be a hit with everybody, but you can almost guarantee that there's some way that you can get to each of them by writing.

Betty added to the conversation, saying, "I like writing because you can give them all the exact same prompt in a room of 20 students, and there's going to be 20 completely different unique pieces produced. Because they're all different."

Awareness of Writing Activities and Strategies

The participants in the focus groups were eager to show writing instruction successes they had seen in the classroom. John said,

And I just enjoy teaching, writing in general, at least, the way that I've done it, 'cause I'm not much of a lecturer as teaching goes, and I enjoy giving them an activity to do. And then, I walk around while they do it, and I interact with them one-on-one, which is something that I've done since the beginning of my student teaching, even a couple years ago. Just walking around, and they get very comfortable with me easily and ask me questions even when I wasn't teaching back then.

Betty added,

We haven't done like any like long-term intense writing stuff, but like with the No Red

Ink writings, it's been really interesting to see students just develop, and they're getting

more creative. And they're putting more into it as they go along. Like, I'm really excited

to read the one they did today. Like in the beginning, they weren't super eager to show

like me this, like their individual sentences, or be like, "Oh, I just wrote a really cool

paragraph," but now they'll be like calling us over and want us to look at their paragraph.

And say, "I'm really proud of this." This is awesome, and they just get so excited. I love

seeing like that shine when their eyes when they are proud of themselves for writing

something really interesting or creative.

George recalled a specific writing strategy he learned about in his writing methods course

that he used with his students. He explained,

Zero drafting. Zero drafting is when you just have the students write for a certain amount

of time, say 5-10 minutes. You put them on a timer, and the point is that they don't think

about what they're writing, they just feel it out. They just keep going. They put their

pencil to their paper, and they just keep going. That's the whole point. I think it's better

handwritten than it is typed as well. And you encourage them to just keep going. It's

about getting ideas down. It's not about thinking because, like I said, they had problems

brainstorming. I have them do the zero drafting afterward, and I asked them, "Did you

prefer that?" And a lot of them said I think we should have done that first.

John's favorite writing activity he did with students was an argumentative writing unit.

He described,

My favorite that I did with the argument writing was one that I think we went over in at

one of our methods courses. It was like a Twitter activity where you have a post from

Twitter, and the students were learning argument and counterargument. Uh, and they

wrote their thesis for their argumentative essay on that tweet. They could do it in a social

media post format and make it really informal if they wanted to and have fun with it. But

then I went around and taped those all around the room, and then everybody else got

three post-it notes, and they had to do a post-it note on different Twitter posts. They had

to come up with a counterargument to their post, so each student would get three

counterarguments and they had to each used to in their paper. So, it was giving them

ammo for their paper, and they were learning about argument and counterargument at the

same time. They had a lot of fun with it, and I think they got the point across. And the

counterpoint across.

George said making lessons have some element of physicality also motivates students. Betty

agreed and described her favorite lesson taught as a descriptive writing lesson where students

wrote on whiteboards using as much descriptive language as they could and then held their

boards up to share with the class.

Devin, who has not yet had a chance to teach said that she plans to use a daily journal

with her future students, stating that it would most likely be centered around their personal lives.

Brynn said, "I think that the grammar and mechanics part of it is my favorite because that's my

strong suit." She continued,

Also, it's a beautiful thing when people are good at writing, but I think seeing people who

struggle with it, whenever they finally figure out their topic or they finally figured out

how they're gonna write the paper, I think seeing that moment is gonna be really cool as

well.

Lastly, Lily said her favorite writing instruction used pictures. She explained,

And so I did this really cool thing that I am planning to do with my kids where I'm at now

and we were doing a history lesson. It was around February, so around the time the

school was dedicating some time to Black History Month. And so I had put some pictures

up on the board and had them write what they thought you know was going on or like the

background story of you know-- the main subject in the picture and they really really

really liked that because it was kind of like we get artistic kids who were like noticing

things in the background and they were able to kind of put their own little twist on their

stories, and then write about it. And so then they shared those, and that was really fun.

Then most recently in October we did like a spooky unit, and we had scary pictures, and

they were able to write a back story for that one, which is a different group of kids, but

they really really liked that.

All participants were able to name a creative activity they did or wanted to do with students in

their teaching of writing.

Conclusion

The themes that emerged for the research question related to personal writing efficacy

included: Identification as Writers and the Impact of Past Teachers on Identity as Writers. The

themes that emerged from the research question related to professional preparation included:

Weaknesses of College Training on Teaching, Learning through Teaching, and Learning from

Expert Texts. The theme that emerged from the research question related to teaching writing

efficacy was Dueling Voices: Confidence and Uncertainty and Challenges and Joys of Teaching

Writing. Finally, the themes that emerged from the research question related to classroom

writing practice included: The Status of Writing in the Literacy Curriculum and Awareness of

Writing Activities and Strategies.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to determine the perceptions of self-efficacy for writing and the teaching of writing in pre-service teachers attending two West Virginia public universities with a broader goal of uncovering training experiences and writing practices. According to the literature review, many studies related to writing and the teaching of writing found a link between the self-efficacy levels of teachers and their ability to teach writing effectively. A study by Nolan and Molla (2017) found that this link involves several factors from teacher confidence to teacher professional learning. A study by Martin in 2006 also echoed the importance of teacher self-efficacy. Dierking& Fox (2013) found that the more confident teachers felt in teaching writing, the more frequently writing was taught and to a better quality. Research also suggests that schools focus more on teaching reading than teaching writing (Gallagher, 2011), so another purpose of this study was to determine how much writing instruction was occurring in a sample of pre-service teachers' classrooms. Research shows there are many different models for writing instruction (Gallagher, 2015), so a goal of this study was to discover which writing strategies and models pre-service teachers were using and observing in their placement classrooms. Lastly, this study sought to determine if pre-service teachers felt prepared to teach writing and if so, what preparation courses helped them the most. Literature suggests that many university programs do not offer many, if any, courses in writing preparation, which may leave students feeling unprepared for the classroom (Gillespie et al., 2014).

Summary of Population and Samples

A total of 47 surveys were distributed to the appropriate participant base (Secondary English Education majors in their junior and senior years at two public universities) through

email and 16 of the appropriate participant base completed the survey, attributing to a 34% return rate. Six participants agree to participate in a focus group meeting, making it a 37% participation rate.

Summary of Instrument and Design

The Pre-service Teacher Survey (Appendix B) was designed to dig deeper at these issues facing college students going into the field of education and teaching writing to determine what may or may not be contributing to self-efficacy levels. Many questions designed for the survey and focus groups derived from the related research showing not only the importance of writing instruction but the ways that it may also be challenging. Focus groups were comprised of six participants from two different public universities. Participants were asked questions that allowed them to go more in-depth than the survey questions. Data were coded by reading the survey results and focus group transcriptions and highlighting information that formed common themes.

The analysis of the data uncovered themes relevant to the research questions that informed this study (content analysis). The emergent themes relevant to Research Question 1 were Identification as Writers and Impact of Past Teachers on Identity as Writers. Three themes related to Research Question 2 emerged from the data: The Weakness of College Training on Teaching, Learning Through Teaching and Learning from Expert Texts. Related to Research Question 3, two themes were revealed: Dueling Voices: Confidence and Uncertainty and Challenges and Joys of Teaching Writing. Lastly, two themes emerged relevant to Research Question 4: The Status of Writing in the Literacy Curriculum and Awareness of Writing Activities and Strategies.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own writing efficacy?

The complex skill of writing is crucial to students' academic and career success (Gallagher, 2015). Unfortunately, writing scores have been low and stagnant for years across K-12 schools in the United States (Gallagher, 2011). Teachers make judgments of their self-efficacy based on "verbal encouragement that they have received, the success or failure of teacher models, perceptions of past experiences of teaching, and the level of emotional connection they feel when they anticipate and practice teaching" (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011, p. 150). Previous literature determined that teachers needed to feel confident to be effective teachers in their subject (Nolan & Molla, 2017). As Nolan and Molla (2017) state, "Teacher confidence is vital for effective teaching and improved student achievement. The level of knowledge and skills at their disposal determines teachers' confidence in making sound judgments in their practices" (p. 14).

This research question refined existing research by specifically examining participants' perceptions of their writing efficacy. Two themes emerged from the surveys and focus groups that shed light on the perceptions of teachers regarding their writing efficacy: Identification as Writers and the Impact of Past Teachers on Identity as Writers.

Identification as Writers

The theme of identification of writers emerged in the study of Research Question 1 because most participants in both the surveys and focus groups felt that they were writers. Previous literature shows that writing teachers should be writers (Stoven, 1999). Though research shows that many teachers lack self-efficacy in writing in previous studies (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Burke, 2017), 15 out of the 16 survey participants responded positively to the "I

am a writer" sentence stem revealing high self-efficacy levels for writing. Only one respondent had a negative response to this question due to focusing his or her time on teaching reading. Most participants cited finding joy in writing. Writing was something they liked to do and how they could express themselves creatively.

Similarly, five out of the six participants in the focus groups could recall a positive experience with writing, often reporting that they have always had a relatively easy time with writing. All but one participant in the focus groups said they felt strong as writers, and that writing is one of their best skills. A few participants spoke of how writing comes naturally to them, so they never really struggled with it. The implication of this finding suggests that pre-service teachers are not lacking self-efficacy when it relates to writing, and literature suggests this should have a positive impact on teaching. Previous research shows that teachers who are confident in writing spend more time on and are more enthusiastic teachers of writing (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Burke, 2017).

Impact of Past Teachers on Identity as Writers

A second theme to emerge in relation to Research Question 1 was the impact of past teachers on identity as a writer, as previous research shows this could impact a pre-service teacher's self-efficacy. As Fletcher (1993) says, "Young writers are deeply vulnerable to teachers' appraisals of their stories, poems or essays. We must speak to our students with an honesty tempered by compassion: Our words will literally define the ways they perceive themselves as writers" (p. 19.) A study by Street and Stang (2009) also reiterates this point—most teachers reporting low efficacy levels had a past of harsh criticism from their own teachers. When participants in the focus groups were asked to discuss any negative writing experiences they had in their own education experience, four of the six participants were able to do so. Three of those

four participants' negative experiences had to do with their teachers' lack of feedback or overly harsh feedback on their writing. One participant specifically mentioned a teacher that was "too set in their own way" in their grading style. This finding supports previous literature which shows that students' confidence is affected by their teachers' support or criticism and that students carry this feedback with them years later. Through participant discussion, it is evident students remember the kind of feedback they receive long after it was given. Participants were also able to recall positive feedback they received from past teachers.

The problem of low writing performance does not lie with the self-efficacy for writing of the pre-service teachers who participated in this study. In fact, participants reported high self-efficacy levels for writing. They enjoy it and enjoy teaching it. Many responded they are excited to teach it and would still prefer to teach writing over reading due to its more personal nature and helping them to get to know their students. The group of participants was highly positive about writing and the teaching of writing. This differed from previous research showing that the participants of this study did have a positive view of themselves as writers and that while past teachers' feedback stayed with them, it did not impact their own self-efficacy levels. The implication that emerged from these data shows that pre-service teachers are more resilient than past studies have shown. While past teacher feedback is important, it does not prevent pre-service teachers from feeling effective as writers.

Research Question 2: What type and how much training do Secondary English Education pre-service teachers receive for writing instruction?

Literature suggests that teacher preparation programs do little to prepare their students for teaching writing (Gillespie et al., 2014). Despite the known importance of writing and efforts to make writing improvements in the curriculum over the past 20 years, most teachers still report

feeling underprepared for the teaching of writing (Poch et al., 2020). Professional development and collaboration are paramount to feeling effective as teachers of writing. This research question added to existing literature that documented teacher unpreparedness for teaching writing by uncovering pre-service teachers' perceptions about the types and quality of writing training they received.

Three themes emerged that have relevance to the question of teacher training related to writing instruction: The Weakness of College Training on Teaching, Learning through Teaching and Learning from Expert Texts.

The Weakness of College Training on Teaching

Most of the survey results suggest that college training was mostly inadequate. However, there were also five positive ratings of training from survey participants. Some participants mentioned that their methods course was helpful. Lastly, there were four neutral responses, mentioning both the positives and negatives of their courses. A couple of respondents said that while a course was helpful in learning information, they do not see its application in the classroom.

The focus groups discussed that only one course they have taken was helpful for the teaching of writing (if they could recall any course at all), showing that there is still a definite need for more writing training for students to feel adequately prepared for the teaching of writing. Two focus group participants said they did not have any courses specifically related to writing. One focus group participant said that while she did have a methods course, it focused mostly on the teaching of reading. Even two focus group participants who did have positive learning experiences from their methods courses said that they felt nothing was going to truly prepare them for teaching writing except for more experience. Due to literature that suggests the

positive effects of training such as the National Writing Project, even pre-service teachers could benefit from training outside of their university courses (Dierking & Fox, 2013). Dierking and Fox (2013) found that 98% of teachers who attended National Writing Project training stayed in education until retirement. Results from this study show that more training outside of the required college courses, such as that provided by organizations such as the National Writing Project, could be helpful for pre-service teachers.

Learning Through Teaching

Overwhelmingly, the results from both the survey and focus group show that pre-service teachers want and need more classroom experience. Each focus group participant explained that where most of their learning occurred was in the classroom. Even the participants who have not had classroom experience yet agreed that they needed more experience to make a judgment about their competence in teaching writing. Survey participants agreed, many saying that they have not had classroom experience yet to truly know if they will be effective teachers of writing. For example, one survey respondent said, "I feel like I am equipped with the right tools, but no scaffolding to actually be in the classroom." The implication is that pre-service teachers could benefit from more time in the classroom throughout their preparation program as supported by research from Clandinin and Connelly (1991).

Learning from Expert Texts

Another theme that emerged from the data that relates to Research Question 2 is that during their professional training, participants latched onto ideas and strategies presented in the texts required and recommended in their college courses. For example, two participants mentioned learning from Gallagher, a published teacher, and writer. One participant said what he learned most from his education courses was which books to buy as classroom resources. While

this same focus group participant mentioned a specific strategy, the zero-drafting strategy from Gallagher, in the survey, this was a finding mainly discussed in the focus groups by other participants as well. This finding suggests that the texts professors choose for their students to read as part of their course do indeed make a lasting impression and students consider these texts when planning their own teaching. No previous research was found to support this finding in the literature review. It does indicate, however, that quality literature and texts should be thoughtfully chosen by education professors when preparing pre-service teachers for the teaching of writing. Research on texts about teaching writing should be investigated to determine what texts are having the most impact on teacher development.

While most participants were able to recall one or two helpful university courses, none of the classes focused solely on the teaching of writing and were reported to be too technical in nature. All respondents said they felt they could be better prepared to teach writing.

The results from this study echo and add to previous research that shows how and why pre-service teachers feel unprepared to teach writing (Poch et al., 2020). Participants were able to explain how and why they felt unprepared but also what helped prepare them for the teaching of writing, such as expert texts. Expert texts chosen by the professors of college-level courses seem to have made a positive impact on pre-service teachers heading into the classroom. Pre-service teachers might not remember specific strategies from their college courses, but they take note of the texts used and add them to their repertoires for use in their pre-service classrooms. Results from this study show the importance of giving pre-service teachers more time in the classroom as also reported in research by Clandinin and Connelly (1991). Lastly, pre-service teachers could benefit from having more courses devoted to the teaching of writing, as the pre-service teachers

in this study echoed what other previous studies have shown about writing teacher preparation (Poch et al., 2020).

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers regarding their own efficacy to teach students writing?

Culham (2014) discusses that she has encountered teachers who are discouraged to teach writing everywhere she visits. There are many reasons this could be possible. Research shows this could be due to high stakes testing and curriculum mandates (Gallagher, 2011). Nolan and Molla (2017) reiterate how crucial teacher self-efficacy is for being effective teachers and helping students achieve. Additionally, Dierking and Fox (2013) found that the more effective teachers felt, the more positive impact they had on students. They found that by teachers increasing their knowledge through such organizations as the National Writing Project, teachers increased their self-efficacy and increased their writing instruction in the classroom. The results from this study show that there are indeed challenges that stem from writing instruction, but even if not extremely confident yet, pre-service teachers are excited to take on the challenge of teaching writing.

In Research Question 1, participants from both the surveys ad focus groups felt confident as writers, even despite certain negative experiences with past teachers. The theme that emerged in answering this research question is a paradox—pre-service teachers are confident, yet uncertain when it comes to teaching writing. This theme is called Dueling Voices: Confidence and Uncertainty. Another theme that emerged related to this research question is the Challenges and Joys of Teaching Writing.

Dueling Voices: Confidence and Uncertainty

According to survey results, most pre-service teachers felt effective, or that they would be effective, teachers of writing. Due to these results, conclusions can be drawn that most participants did not feel ineffective as teachers of writing, yet it is not clear if the majority felt effective either. One participant said, "I feel like based on what I've done so far, I feel pretty okay, but I just haven't done enough to really know." This finding shows that pre-service teachers need more time in the classroom.

The focus group expanded on these voices of uncertainty. The focus group participants could not clearly state whether they felt completely effective or ineffective, however, they provided ways that teaching writing can be both challenging and rewarding, which could account for their teaching writing efficacy. The implication of this finding is that while pre-service teachers feel effective as writers and are excited to teach writing, they still need more time in the classroom to really know. More experience in addition to quality professional development such as the National Writing Project will be beneficial in increasing pre-service teachers' self-efficacy levels in teaching writing.

Challenges and Joys of Teaching Writing

In the focus groups, nearly all participants mentioned that teaching writing can be challenging, mostly due to student resistance to writing. While most of the participants themselves felt effective in writing personally, they described trying to teach writing as "pulling teeth" and cited seeing resistance to it from students. Several participants also mentioned brainstorming as the part of the writing process students struggled with the most and that it was sometimes difficult to help students with this step because it came so naturally to them as writers.

On the other hand, the sample of pre-service teachers explained that they in fact enjoyed teaching writing for many reasons, even if it could be challenging. All participants agreed that teaching writing was an effective way to get to know students. As one participant framed it, "You can almost always strike some sort of personal chord with writing." The pre-service teachers enjoyed teaching writing because it helped them to learn more about their students—their interests, or even a problem that was occurring in their lives that they could help with. One participant cited the example of a shyer student being more comfortable expressing herself through writing than through speaking, so writing was a way to get to that student. They agreed that writing was very personal, and they liked that it helped students be unique in what they produced. Another participant said it was fulfilling when students showed excitement and were proud of what they had written.

All participants in the focus groups said they were most excited to teach writing (in comparison to reading) in their future classrooms and current placements, which was an unanticipated finding. Literature suggests that it is paramount that teachers enjoy what they are teaching, as teacher enjoyment can lead to more student learning and motivated students. As Martin (2006) found, "Hence, students' motivation and engagement are related to their teachers' enjoyment of teaching, pedagogical efficacy, and affective orientations in the classroom" (p. 75). This is good news for the future of writing in the classrooms of these participants.

This extends current research that says that teachers should enjoy teaching writing to make an impact on students. A major finding of this study shows that pre-service teachers do enjoy teaching writing despite its difficulty and their self-efficacy to teach writing. Even if pre-service teachers could not say they felt effective as teachers of writing, they still enjoy teaching it and look forward to teaching it even more than reading in their future classrooms. This was a

surprising finding not linking self-efficacy to the desire to teach writing. The participants of this study also agreed that teaching writing is difficult, and students also find writing challenging.

Research Question 4: What kinds and how much writing instruction is delivered to students during a typical school day in a sample of Secondary English Education pre-service teachers' classrooms?

The purpose of this question was to see if results from this study echoed findings from previous studies which show that many times reading instruction takes the forefront in English Language Arts classrooms across America while writing instruction is put to the side (Gallagher, 2011). The themes that emerged related to Research Question 4 are The Status of Writing in the Literacy Curriculum and Awareness of Writing Activities and Strategies. The themes tie back to this research question through the perceptions pre-service teachers have concerning the decisions they make around writing instruction.

The Status of Writing in the Literacy Curriculum

In the focus groups, participants explained they mainly saw reading taught in the classroom while either observing or teaching. More time was spent on reading instruction, while. writing was limited to about 10 minutes a day. This finding does support previous research which reports that reading instruction is taught more overall in secondary classrooms (Gallagher, 2011).

Five out of the six focus group participants said that they mostly saw or used reading instruction more often than writing instruction occurring in their placement classes. Several said that it depended on the unit whether reading or writing was taught more often and that most of the time, writing was used mainly in the first 5 to 10 minutes of class as a journal entry or bellringer. This data finding contrasts with the focus group participants' positive feelings and excitement toward teaching writing. While they are excited to teach writing, the evidence shows

that they still are not teaching it as frequently as reading, which is an issue that could use further research.

Awareness of Writing Activities and Strategies

The theme of awareness of writing activities and strategies relates to the fourth research question which sought to discover what kinds of writing instruction were occurring in a sample of pre-service teachers' classrooms. One focus group participant was able to name Kelly Gallagher, an expert source used in the literature review, as an example of someone who inspired him to use the Zero Drafting strategy he found successful with his own students. The Zero Drafting strategy, just allowing students to write about their chosen topic for a set amount of time, is related to the workshop model, which is supported in previous literature. Participants in the focus group also mentioned journal writing and letting students write about their personal lives and interests as something they have utilized and found successful, which are pieces of the writer's workshop model cited in the literature review. This shows that the pre-service teachers in this study are using research-based strategies when they do teach writing in the classroom.

Extending on the research, participants were also able to cite more specific writing assignments such as a descriptive writing unit where students wrote detailed sentences on individual whiteboards, an argumentative unit involving a fake Twitter post, and a research unit where students could choose their own topics. One participant even said that she shared some of her own expository writing with her own students when she taught that form of writing. This participant also mentioned using pictures as a great way to get students to write. Another participant mentioned using incorrectly written sentences to have her students improve as a daily warm-up. All these activities are rooted in the writing standards required by the state.

The major finding that emerged from the analysis of data pertaining to this research question was that while participants were able to name writing activities and agreed that they enjoyed teaching writing, reading was still being taught more in their classroom placements. Though survey results showed more writing standards being taught in the pre-service teachers' placements, the focus group revealed that writing is not receiving the same amount of instruction time in the classroom. Writing is usually used as a bellringer unless a specific writing unit, such as argumentative writing, is being taught. Reading seems to be occurring every day, while writing is hit and miss. Additionally, focus group participants cited observing many students resistant to writing. This extends on current research that also identifies reading as being taught more than writing (Gallagher, 2011). This is interesting because it contrasts with the finding in Research Question 3 that indicated pre-service teachers are more excited to teach writing and even find it more enjoyable than teaching reading.

Ancillary Findings

Though this study sought to discover the perceptions of self-efficacy for the teaching of writing in pre-service teachers, it also found that writing instruction was not occurring as much as reading instruction in participants' placement classrooms taught by their cooperating teachers. Since much of pre-service teachers' training relates to observation hours, pre-service teachers could not specifically mention many other writing strategies occurring besides bellringers and sometimes writing units such as informative and argumentative writing (mentioned by one focus group participant). It was also found that there is a difference in writing instruction depending on the grade level.

In addition, though participants were not asked to describe their students' reactions to writing, participant responses indicate that it is challenging to teach students writing due to

student resistance. While pre-service teachers were found to not be resistant to writing instruction, according to the discussion in their focus groups their students were resistant. This finding relates to literature that suggests that writing is a complex skill to teach.

Implications for Action

The findings of this study could help assist public schools to support their new teachers and the local universities to better prepare their pre-service teachers through more training and/or more classes related to the teaching of writing. Teacher preparation programs may also want to begin pre-service teachers' time in schools earlier than their junior year. The juniors who were surveyed and interviewed could not respond to many of the questions due to not having enough experience to have perceptions of the teaching of writing in schools yet. The seniors could respond to more questions but still reported needing more time in the classroom.

Possible implications could lead to these improvements and/or solutions:

1. The National Writing Project or other writing professional development organizations could get involved with pre-service teachers and create collaboration with the local universities. Professors could offer writing training outside of the regular coursework for certain incentives and/or major requirements.

2. Secondary English Education students could have access to a writing support club or organization- such as the National Writing Project and Professional Learning Communities focused on writing could also be implemented in schools where pre-service teachers are present.

3. Pre-service education programs could develop more courses that have teaching writing as a focus due to most students not feeling completely prepared to teach writing.

4. Education programs could allow students to get more experience in the schools before their senior years because many survey and focus group responses cited that the pre-service teachers felt that they learned most through experience in the classroom.

5. The public school system could intervene with beginning teachers, allowing them time for professional development on the topic of writing since writing is not being taught as much as reading in schools, according to study results.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative study determined perceptions of self-efficacy for teaching writing in a sample of pre-service teachers attending two universities. The results of this study revealed reasons why pre-service teachers may or may not feel as though they are effective teachers of writing. Data were collected through surveys and small focus groups and organized by results for each research question. However, there are other aspects of the writing problem in schools that are not explained or answered by this study. Possibilities and recommendations for further research include:

1. Conducting similar research at other universities in the same state, but also across the United States to discover if there are any similar themes in perceptions of self-efficacy for writing in pre-service teachers.

2. Conducting similar research with these same participants after their first year of real teaching to see if any of their perceptions have changed from their student teaching experience to their own classroom experience.

3. Conducting similar research with a group of Secondary English teachers who have taught for one to five years to determine if their perceptions of self-efficacy differ

from the perceptions of pre-service teachers due to the pressure of standardized

testing, other mandates, etc.

4. Include actual teacher lesson plans as data in further studies.

5. Include specific school, county, and state writing test data in further studies.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Anna Robinson < no-reply@irbnet.org>
Mon 7/26/2021 10:25 AM
To:
- Allen, Tina;
- Abby R Waldorf

Please note that Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1762370-1] Qualitative Examination of Pre-Service Secondary English Teachers' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy for Teaching Writing
Principal Investigator: Tina Allen, Ed.D.

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: May 28, 2021

Action: APPROVED
Effective Date: July 26, 2021
Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Anna Robinson at robinsonn1@marshall.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

APPENDIX B

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER SURVEY

1. Grade level taught: _____

2. Subject taught: _____

3. University major: _____

4. Please describe any training you have received to teach writing in schools and how it was helpful or not helpful.

5. Please describe any courses you have taken on the teaching of writing in schools and how they were helpful or not helpful.

6. Do you feel effective as a teacher of writing? Please describe why or why not?

7. Please list the WV College and Career Readiness Standards for writing that you have addressed the most in your lesson plans/lessons.

8. Please list the WV College and Career Readiness Standards for writing that you have addressed the least in your lesson plans/lessons.

9. Please complete the following sentence stem that most applies to you: "I am a writer because…" OR "I am not a writer because…"

University Code: (to be completed by researcher): _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Interview Protocol:

Date: _____   **Participant Code:** _____   **School Code:** _____

Interviewer: Abby Waldorf (Researcher)

Opening Statement:

_____

_____

_____

Questions to address Research Question 1: *"What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding their own confidence in writing?"*

1. Please describe any positive writing experiences you have had in your own school career or personal life? How did these experiences make you feel?

2. Please describe any negative writing experiences you have had in your own school or personal life? How did these experiences make you feel?

3. What would you say has contributed the most to your confidence or lack of confidence in your own writing abilities?

Questions to address Research Question 2: *"What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding confidence in their own ability to teach writing?"*

1. How do you approach teaching writing?

2. What do you find enjoyable about teaching writing?

3. What do you find challenging about teaching writing?

4. How successful do you feel about teaching writing? Why or why not?

Questions to address Research Question 3: *"What type and how much training for the teaching of writing do pre-service teachers receive?"*

1. How prepared do you feel for the teaching of writing?

2. Which courses did you take in your education program that addressed writing instruction? How many?

3. What did you learn from your writing courses?

4. Which strategies or ideas from your writing training have you used in your internship classroom?

Questions to address Research Question 4: *"What types and how much writing instruction is delivered in a sample of pre-service teachers' classrooms?"*

1. Describe the kinds of writing you have your students do each day and why.

2. How much time do you have students write each day?

3. How do you choose which writing activities to do with your students?

4. How do you enjoy teaching writing?

5. How do your students enjoy writing activities?

6. Which activities and subjects do you spend the most time teaching each day?

7. Which subjects or activities do you feel are the most important to teach each day and why?

8. How would you describe your writing philosophy in the classroom?

9. What strategies do you employ when teaching writing?

10. What writing activities have you found to be successful in the classroom?

11. What writing activities have you found to have not been successful in the classroom?

12. Please describe a successful writing day in your classroom.

13. Please describe an unsuccessful writing day in the classroom.

14. How do your students respond to writing?

15. How do you respond to writing or the teaching of writing?

16. Do you prefer teaching reading or writing? Why?

APPENDIX D

WV COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS STANDARDS

Reported by Participants to be Used Most

ELA.6.22: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective

technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. Engage and

orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters;

organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Use narrative techniques,

such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or

characters. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and

signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another. Use precise words and phrases,

relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events

ELA.6.23: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style

are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing

types are defined in Text Types and Purposes.)

ELA.9.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a literary text and analyze in detail its

development over the course of the literary text, including how it emerges and is shaped

and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the literary text.

ELA.9.22: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective

technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. Engage and orient

the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple

point(s) of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression

of experiences or events. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description,

reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences events and/or characters. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole. Use precise words and phrases, effective details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

ELA.9.24: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of all Language standards up to and including grade 9.)

ELA.9.30: Initiate and effectively participate in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 9 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly and persuasively. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, or presentation of alternate views); set clear goals, deadlines, and individual roles as needed. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; summarize points of agreement and

disagreement and, when warranted, qualify or justify views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

ELA.9.38: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. Write and edit work so that it conforms to the guidelines in a style manual (e.g., MLA Handbook or APA Handbook) appropriate for the discipline and writing type.

ELA.11.20: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s); establish the significance of the claim(s); distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases. Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

ELA.11.21: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas,

concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures and/or tables), and multimedia when useful to aid comprehension. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic. Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

ELA.11.23: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in Text Types and Purposes.)

ELA.11.24: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of all Language standards up to and including grade 11)

ELA.11.33: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning; alternative or

opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

ELA.11.40: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole or paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

Reported by Participants to be Used the Least

ELA.6.25: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type efficiently and accurately.

ELA.6.26: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

ELA.9.14: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific literary work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible, or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

ELA.9.17: Analyze influential U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address or The Gettysburg Address), including how they address related themes and concepts.

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH QUESTION ALIGNMENT TO SURVEY

AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Survey Questions	Focus Group Questions
Research Question 1: Perceptions of Personal Writing Efficacy	Question 9: Please complete the following sentence stem that most applies to you: "I am a writer because…" OR "I am not a writer because…"	Please describe any positive writing experiences you have had in your own school career or personal life? How did these experiences make you feel? Please describe any negative writing experiences you have had in your own school or personal life? How did these experiences make you feel? What would you say has contributed the most to your confidence or lack of confidence in your own writing abilities?

Research Question 2: Perceptions of Teaching Writing Efficacy	Question 6: Do you feel effective as a teacher of writing? Please describe why or why not?	How do you approach teaching writing? What do you find enjoyable about teaching writing? What do you find challenging about teaching writing? How successful do you feel about teaching writing? Why or why not?
Research Question 3: Teaching Writing Training	Question 4: Please describe any training you have received to teach writing in schools and how it was helpful or not helpful. Question 5: Please describe any courses you have taken on the teaching of writing in schools and how they were helpful or not helpful.	How prepared do you feel for the teaching of writing? Which courses did you take in your education program that addressed writing instruction? How many? What did you learn from your writing courses? Which strategies or ideas from your writing training have you used in your internship classroom?

| Research Question 4: Writing Instruction | Question 7: Please list the WV College and Career Readiness Standards for writing that you have addressed the most in your lesson plans/lessons.

Question 8: Please list the WV College and Career Readiness Standards for writing that you have addressed the least in your lesson plans/lessons. | Describe the kinds of writing you have your students do each day and why.

How much time do you have students write each day?

How do you choose which writing activities to do with your students?

How do you enjoy teaching writing?

How do your students enjoy writing activities?

Which activities and subjects do you spend the most time teaching each day?

Which subjects or activities do you feel are the most important to teach each day and why?

How would you describe your writing philosophy in the classroom?

What strategies do you employ when teaching writing? |

		What writing activities have you found to be successful in the classroom?
		What writing activities have you found to have not been successful in the classroom?
		Please describe a successful writing day in your classroom.
		Please describe an unsuccessful writing day in the classroom.
		How do your students respond to writing?
		How do you respond to writing or the teaching of writing?
		Do you prefer teaching reading or writing? Why?