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First Year Teachers' Perspectives of Their Self-Efficacy to Teach Writing in Elementary

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Walden University

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Angelica Felicia Givler

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

First Year Teachers' Perspectives of Their Self-Efficacy to Teach Writing in Elementary

School

by

Angelica Givler

MA, Idaho State University, 2011

BA, Idaho State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

With the introduction of Common Core State Standards in 2009, there has been an increase in the expectations for writing instruction in the United States. Writing instruction standards are now part of language arts and other content areas, but many teachers feel unprepared to teach writing. There is limited research on teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing upon completion of a teacher preparation program. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their ability to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. Vygotsky's theory of constructivism and Bandura's self-efficacy theory were used to examine how teachers constructed their knowledge during teacher preparation programs and how that impacted their perspectives of their self-efficacy to teach writing. The study included 10 first-year teachers who participated in semistructured interviews. Thematic analysis yielded five themes: teachers' feelings of unpreparedness to teach writing, teachers' insecurities to teach writing, desire for writing courses, examples of student writing and expectations, and desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation programs. Most participants did not feel prepared to teach writing and attributed this to a lack of preparation. The findings may impact social change by providing leaders of teacher preparation programs with data that support the inclusion of more writing courses in training curricula. This preparation may foster greater teacher self-efficacy in teaching writing that leads to improvements in instruction and student learning.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my boys. Asher and Greyson. Although young, they were supportive and a driving force throughout this process. I was able to show my boys what hard work, dedication, and dreams look like. When times got hard, they would remind me that I would not get my “hoodie” if I didn’t do my homework. I hope that one day when they are trying to accomplish their dreams they remember when their mom worked hard for hers.

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My friends who constantly encouraged me provided the love that I needed to continue on my journey. Knowing that those around me believed in me and had faith that I would finish this helped in the darkest times. My principal and coworkers who encouraged, provided answers, and allowed me the time and space that I needed during the process were invaluable.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Writing is a form of communication that is used daily by most people. Individuals write to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, and information. Teachers are expected to teach writing in different content areas, which include different forms of writing. Writing instruction also includes syntax, spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Wang & Matsumura, 2019). Considering all the aspects included in writing instruction, adequate preparation is necessary for teachers to be effective. Teacher preparation programs are expected to address this need, but research shows that many programs have limited, if any, courses specific to writing instruction (Brenner & McQuirck, 2019). This study needed to be conducted to provide insight into teachers' perspectives on their ability to teach writing (Clark, 2020). Understanding teachers' perspectives on their self-efficacy and how their preparation programs influenced them could result in the improved design of teacher preparation programs. Implications for positive social change include greater teacher self-efficacy to teach that may lead to improvements in students' writing ability and general communication.

Major sections in this chapter include background on writing instruction, teacher preparation programs, and standardized tests in the United States. I also address the purpose of the study, problem statement, and research questions (RQs). I will also identify the conceptual framework and discuss how this framework relates to the study approach, as well as discuss the nature of the study and provide key definitions. Finally, the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance will also be discussed.

Background

Writing instruction and assessment have varied throughout the years. The focus on writing instruction in the United States has grown from a focus on handwriting, spelling, and language ability to writing within content areas to relay information, ideas, syntax, grammar, and expression (National Education Association, n.d.). Although there has been an increase in writing, the United States is still considered a reading-centric nation, focusing on comprehension, fluency, and retell (Troia et al., 2016). Limited standardized testing leads to a lack of information to inform instruction (Behizadeh & Pang, 2016). From the limited data, in 2002, only 28% of 4th-grade students who participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress were proficient or higher in writing (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.).

In 2009, Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted across the United States, and with those came an increased focus on writing. The standards increased focus on writing, not only in literacy, but in all content areas (Kelly-Riley, 2017). With the increased focus on writing outcomes, teachers were expected to deliver instruction that met these expectations. However, there was little time to prepare teachers for the new standards. Troia et al. (2016) noted that with the new standards teacher preparation programs needed to address them. As late as 2019, Brenner and McQuirk (2019) found that few preparation programs included courses specific to writing, and only a limited amount included writing within other literacy courses. Ten years after the implementation of CCSS, the increased need for writing instruction preparation is not being addressed in these programs.

Teacher preparation programs provide a learning experience for future teachers and set a foundation for their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy in writing instruction impacts not only the teacher but also the students. Troia and Graham (2016) noted that the more prepared teachers felt to teach writing, the higher their self-efficacy was for performing that task. Understanding how self-efficacy is gained and how it transfers into the classroom helps clarify the importance of adequately preparing teachers for writing instruction.

This study was needed to fill a gap in the research on teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing. With little research specifically on this phenomenon (Clark, 2020), there is not enough data to understand how teacher preparation programs impact teachers' perceived abilities to teach writing. Because teachers include writing instruction in literacy and other content areas, having a lower perceived ability to teach writing can affect a range of students.

Problem Statement

There is limited research on teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing upon completion of a teacher preparation program. Brenner and McQuirk (2019), Friedland et al. (2017), Hodges et al. (2019), Myers et al. (2016), and Saine and West (2017) all concluded that the lack of exposure and preparation for teaching writing negatively affected teachers' perspectives on their ability to teach writing. Helfrich and Clark (2016) noted that 75% of fourth, eighth, and 12th-grade students received partial mastery on national tests for writing skills indicating a need for improved literacy instruction. This study fills a gap in the research by examining teachers' perspectives of

this phenomenon within the research state. This study provides information to understand teachers' perspectives on their abilities to teach writing and help provide stakeholders with information from teachers to identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their ability to teach writing.

The problem is that many teachers do not feel prepared to teach writing after completing their teacher preparation program, and there is limited research on why they feel unprepared. In one study, teachers stated that the primary reason that they do not teach writing, at the level expected of them, is a lack of preparation from their teacher preparation programs (Hodges et al., 2019). Studies by Brenner and McQuirk, (2019) and Myers et al. (2016) found that there is a lack of courses in teacher preparation programs that explicitly teach writing instruction. Myers et al. found that out of 60 literacy courses surveyed across the United States, only 17 focused solely on writing instruction. The instructors from the remaining 43 courses noted there was no time in their literacy courses to teach writing to the extent necessary (Myers et al., 2016). Brenner and McQuirk (2019) found that out of 155 courses from 42 teacher preparation programs, only two focused on writing even with the change in standards and increased pressure to teach writing in k-12 schools. This inattention is concerning because of the impact of writing instruction, even if limited, on teachers' knowledge. Friedland et al. (2017) found, for instance, that providing just one literacy course to content area teachers increased their understanding of the definition of literacy and the importance of literacy in their classes. Research continues to show that there is a lack of writing instruction

courses provided for teachers (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Myers et al. 2016). This research may be beneficial to prepare teachers to teach writing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their ability to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. By using a constructivist and self-efficacy lens to examine the experiences of participating teachers, I gained insight into the phenomenon of writing instruction in the elementary classroom and how those experiences were influenced by teacher preparation programs. Clark and Newberry (2019) found a positive correlation between teachers' self-efficacy in writing instruction and their effectiveness in the classroom. I sought to identify the extent to which teachers feel prepared to teach writing and ways to better prepare them upon completion of their coursework.

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following two RQs in the study:

RQ1: What are teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school?

RQ2: What coursework do the teachers believe would have better prepared them to teach writing?

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework for this study, I used Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory and Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory. Social constructivism

states that humans construct knowledge through their experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, children learn from social interactions that include their peers and teachers. Similarly, first-year teachers acquire experience in teacher preparation programs through interactions with peers and teachers, among other learning opportunities. Setlhako (2019) stated that teachers' professional identities are constructed through knowledge gained and interactions with other people in their educational setting.

Bandura (1982) stated that people are more likely to work through difficulties when they have a higher sense of self-efficacy. When they approach a situation with low self-efficacy, people tend to put in less effort or give up when things become difficult (Bandura, 1982). Mitchell et al. (2019) stated that when students had higher self-efficacy in writing they made self-regulatory efforts to increase their writing skills. Smith and Robinson (2020) noted that when teachers are expected to attend professional development for literacy their previous experiences impact their self-efficacy and that can help or hinder their progress in the training. Self-efficacy theory informed this study through the understanding that preservice teachers who have high self-efficacy towards writing instruction will be more likely to persevere.

Language is a major contributing factor to develop a deeper understanding of the world. Written language is a way for students to express their ideas, ask questions, and develop understanding as part of their experience to construct meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Kosnik et al. (2017) suggested that teaching and learning in a constructivist environment should include social interactions, collaboration, and dialogue. These experiences are necessary for both students and teachers. A basic qualitative approach allowed for

interviews to gain teachers' perspectives to answer the RQs and gain insight into the experiences that affected participating teachers' perspectives. By using thematic analysis informed by constructivism and self-efficacy, I was able to understand participants' perceptions of their writing instruction ability and what led to those perceptions. The framework will be more thoroughly explained in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative study featuring interviews. This approach allowed for the opportunity to gain practical knowledge of how teacher preparation programs affect teachers' self-efficacy towards writing instruction. A basic qualitative study allows researchers to explore the experience of participants (Patton, 2015), which, in this case, was participants' experiences and perceptions of teacher preparation programs. I chose a qualitative research design over a quantitative design to allow for participants' experiences to be understood. Interviews were conducted with 10 participants who completed their first year of teaching. I conducted interviews until saturation had been achieved. These interviews occurred on Zoom because of the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Writing instruction was the study phenomenon, and teachers' perspectives of their ability was the object. A qualitative approach was appropriate because I attempted to understand new teachers' perspectives on their abilities through interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the research data. I sought to identify codes and themes to develop an understanding of teachers' perceptions.

Definitions

Preservice teacher: A future teacher who is taking courses to become a teacher or who is participating in a student teaching experience (Helfrich & Clark, 2016).

Self-efficacy: People's beliefs in their ability to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 2003).

State standardized test: A test issued throughout an individual state to evaluate students' ability level at set grade levels within different content areas to include English language arts (ELA; National Education Association, n.d.).

Teacher preparation program: A program designed to prepare teachers for teaching in a classroom setting, also referred to as "teacher education programs" (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

Teacher self-efficacy: A teacher's belief about their ability to affect learning. (Clark & Newberry, 2019).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I assumed that all participants would be honest about their classroom experiences and teacher preparation programs. I also assumed that participants were teaching writing, to some extent, within their classroom. Other assumptions were that participants would have a shared experience of teacher preparation programs and writing instruction in the classroom and would be interested in participating in the study. These assumptions were necessary to achieve an in-depth understanding of the writing instruction phenomenon under investigation (see Patton, 2015).

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to examine first-year teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. I designed the study to understand how participants' experiences of their preparation programs influenced their beliefs about their abilities to teach writing instruction. I studied writing instruction because of the increase in writing expectations in the classroom and the lack of research available to understand these experiences (Behizadeh & Pang, 2016).

I used the snowball method to obtain participants in their first year of teaching after their preparation program. Participants taught at the elementary level, which is kindergarten through fifth grade in the research state. The selection of elementary teachers helped ensure that the preparation programs would be current and fresh in the participants' minds. First-year teachers were chosen to limit the amount of additional professional development and training for writing instruction in which they have participated. The semistructured interviews I conducted reflecting the participating teachers' perspectives of their ability to teach writing and the coursework that influenced those perspectives. The scope of the study was confined to one city in the research state. Transferability issues may occur in that first-year teachers' experiences of programs within the United States may differ based on setting.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include geography and a lack of diversity. Using the snowball method resulted in participants who were in a similar location. This limited the

variety of teacher preparation programs in which the participants were enrolled. The city that the research was conducted in is not very diverse. The majority of teachers fall in the same category for race, gender, and age. This led to a lack of diversity among participants. To address this issue, I tried to find participants from different programs and who varied in terms of race, gender, and age. I provide more information on participant demographics in Chapter 4.

First-year teachers are in a year that is full of uncertainty. Bias could have occurred if the participating teachers did not feel comfortable being honest with me or if they were in a position where we worked together. To avoid bias, I encouraged complete honesty and attempted to make the participants as comfortable as possible. Explaining the goal of the research may also have increased participants' comfort level. I did not choose participants who I knew through the student teaching program for which I am a cooperating teacher. Avoiding teachers whom I worked in close contact with also decreased the possibility of bias.

I addressed transferability by having a common setting for and structure for each interviews. Also, I obtained detailed descriptions of participants' experiences and used approved research strategies. The use of a reflexive journal and secure document trails helped to increase dependability, as I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. All information shared with participants was kept and secure.

Significance

This study may fill a gap in the research on teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to

teach writing. Although there is research on self-efficacy, teacher perspectives, and writing instruction (see Clark, 2020), there is currently limited research on teachers' perspectives on writing instruction specifically, according to my review of the literature. In conducting this study, I wanted to further research on this important topic.

The results of this study may be used to inform leaders of teacher preparation programs regarding writing instruction courses. A better understanding of teachers' perspectives of their coursework would be beneficial when making decisions. Positive social change may be affected by informing institutional leaders of the need to better prepare teachers to teach writing upon leaving teacher preparation programs. Better preparation may benefit teachers and students through improved teacher self-efficacy and improved student learning outcomes.

Summary

Administrators, regulators, and other stakeholders are increasingly focusing on student writing outcomes with the introduction of CCSS. Teachers are being asked to provide writing instruction in all content areas. The problem is that little is known about how teachers perceive their ability to teach writing in the elementary classroom (Behizadeh & Pang, 2016). Using constructivism and self-efficacy theories, I attempted to understand how teachers' experiences in teacher preparation programs affect their self-efficacy. With greater understanding of these experiences and how they affect self-efficacy, administrators and educational researchers may be able to revise teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers for writing instruction. In the next chapter, I will review the literature related to this study. This will include an in-depth

look into research on teacher preparation programs, writing instruction and preparation, Common Core State Standards, and self-efficacy in writing.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. This study addressed the problem of not having enough data on why teachers feel unprepared to teach writing after completing their teacher preparation program. Current research shows that there is a lack of writing instruction courses provided during teacher preparation programs (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). CCSS increased focus on writing in the classroom while assessments continue to focus on reading (Behizadeh & Pang, 2016). A lack of preparation for writing instruction combined with a lack of support in the classroom is impacting teachers' perceived ability to teach writing, leading to a lack of effective writing instruction (Hodges et al., 2019).

I begin Chapter 2 by describing the literature search strategy and providing an overview of the conceptual framework, which centered on social constructivism as a way teachers develop an understanding of instruction and the self-efficacy that emerges from these experiences. An exhaustive review of the current literature to support the RQs for this study and a synthesis of studies on writing in the elementary classroom, teacher preparation programs, and teacher self-efficacy for writing instruction are also included. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points and a transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I used Education Source, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases. The areas of research included are writing in the U.S. elementary education system, CCSS, teacher preparation programs, and teacher self-efficacy. The conceptual

framework was supported with articles focused on teachers' construction of knowledge and the effects of self-efficacy on teaching. In addition to journal articles, I obtained data from national and state assessment websites to support current statistics on writing in the elementary classroom. Key terms included the following: *Common Core writing standards, Common Core and elementary school or primary school or grade school and writing, writing and elementary and the United States and scores or grades or academic achievement or results, teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers, constructivism, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher writing self-efficacy.*

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework for this study, I used Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism and Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory. Although Vygotsky suggested that experiences lead to a person's construction of knowledge, Bandura suggested that these experiences contribute to self-efficacy, which in turn affects a person's ability to perform a task. Together, these theories can be used to examine how teachers' writing experiences in a preparation program can influence their self-efficacy and impact their writing instruction in the classroom.

The theory of constructivism includes the notion that learning is an active process rather than a passive one. Scholnik et al. (2016) stated that knowledge is pieced together through interactions with the environment and is not transferred directly from the teacher to the learner. This conceptualization supports the ideals of Vygotsky as summarized by Kretchmar (2019) when she stated that constructivists argue that knowledge is constructed through the learner's experiences and is not necessarily representative of the

world. The experiences that preservice teachers have in their preparation programs determine in part how this information is constructed.

In teacher preparation programs, the first step is to complete teacher instruction courses, or method courses, followed by a student teaching experience. Some courses include observations or short teaching experiences in conjunction with the coursework. From a constructivist perspective, Scholnik et al. (2016) noted that learning is constructed through active engagement in the environment. Understanding the teacher preparation program experience of first-year teachers through social constructivism lens provides an understanding of how teachers develop their knowledge from that experience and how capable they feel in teaching.

Although teaching and learning go hand in hand, constructivism does not focus on teaching. A framework for working with students is provided in constructivism, but it does not tell teachers how to teach (Kretchmar, 2019). Understanding that learners may not learn directly from teachers allows teachers to move past the assumption that knowledge will be automatically understood through explanation (Kretchmar, 2019). Teacher preparation programs are unique as they teach learners to become teachers. Therefore, understanding how learning happens can provide insight into their future roles because it affects them in their programs.

When teachers start their first year, they are in a classroom alone and expected to achieve the same results as more experienced teachers. Bandura (1977) stated that if a person believes that a particular action will lead to the desired outcome, but they do not believe that they are capable of performing those actions, the knowledge on the action

does not influence their behavior. Personal efficacy is broken into four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977). A study by Bandura (1982) suggested that the most influential source of information comes from performance accomplishments. In this study, those who had more success in an authentic mastery experience obtained higher self-efficacy than those who did not. Although Bandura recognized that mastery experience is most influential, he noted that vicarious experience can increase a person's self-efficacy if they believe that they are also capable of performing that task. Social persuasion is useful in a short-term situation. The person can use that to accomplish the task at hand, but unless they achieve mastery, the long-term effects are limited (Bandura, 1982).

Teacher preparation programs can influence teachers' self-efficacy in writing instruction. Clark and Newberry (2019) stated that teachers' self-efficacy affected their ability to influence learning, confidence, and teacher effectiveness. Bandura (1986) stated that the most important aspect of self-efficacy is mastery experiences, suggesting that for teachers to have high self-efficacy in writing instruction, they must have writing instruction mastery experience in the field. Without the opportunity to participate in mastery experiences specifically for writing, preservice teachers are not able to develop the mastery-level experience necessary to develop self-efficacy within writing to use later in the classroom.

I constructed this study's RQs to understand the participating teachers' experiences as learners and educators and how those experiences affected their

perceptions of their ability to teach writing. Teacher preparation programs vary widely. Therefore, understanding that learners construct their knowledge through experiences is imperative to understand the experiences of teachers (du Plessis, 2020). These experiences contribute to their self-efficacy. Active engagement in writing instruction during teacher preparation programs is necessary for teachers to develop the self-efficacy necessary to teach writing effectively.

Literature Related to Key Concepts

Writing in Elementary School

A reading-centric educational system has led to a lack of focus on writing instruction leading to poor student performance in writing across the United States (Troia et al., 2016). Bresina and McCaster (2020) noted that with increased knowledge of writing instruction and intervention, teachers are better prepared to teach writing. Risko and Reid (2019) stated that high-quality literacy teachers come from high-quality teacher preparation programs, and many teachers do not have access to such programs. Additionally, the research on literacy focuses on reading instruction with limited data for writing (Bresina & McCaster, 2020). State assessments are widely used to determine students' understanding and growth within a specific area. Administrators and teachers then use this data to improve or guide instruction. Standardized tests for ELA are used across the United States (Troia et al., 2016). However, the writing portion of the test is not consistent. Behizadeh and Pang (2016) noted that there is a lack of recent research on

writing assessments at the state level. This finding is consistent with the findings of this literature review.

According to the Colorado Department of Education (n.d.), to receive federal funds, states are required to test students in math and ELA for third through eighth-grade and at least once in high school. Science is required to be tested at least once in elementary and high school. There are no requirements for social studies, and the ELA tests do not have to have a separate writing component (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.). Behizadeh and Pang (2016) stated that the goal of writing assessments is to inform teaching and learning, but how writing is assessed is not widely agreed upon. State assessments demonstrate this disagreement in how writing is assessed.

In Colorado, writing is broken into two sections: writing expression and writing knowledge of language conventions (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.). These skills are assessed in short responses from reading passages within the ELA assessment (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.). The ELA's overall score is public and available on the website, but the data for the subcategory of writing are not. The Idaho Department of Education (n.d.) stated that the Idaho State Achievement Tests focus is on reading comprehension in elementary school and reading and writing for content in secondary school. Writing skills are assessed similarly to Colorado's Colorado Measures of Academic Success for elementary students. The Louisiana Education Assessment Program includes an essay portion of the test, which receives a separate score (Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.). Although this is not a complete overview of how writing

is assessed in the United States, it shows the discrepancies in expectations for, and focus on, writing.

In 2002, the NCES reported that only 28% of 4th-grade students who participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress for writing were proficient or above (NCES, n.d.). In 2011, the Writing Computer-Based Assessment was introduced to 8th- and 12th-grade students, and the assessment was conducted on a computer for the first time (NCES, n.d.). In 2017, the assessment was given to 4th-grade students on tablets. However, the results have not been released because of discrepancies in the scores. The NCES (n.d.) stated that 47% of the students tested said they had not used a tablet for writing before the test. The Writing Computer-Based Assessment is the only national test to measure student success.

Common Core Writing Standards

The CCSS were first introduced in 2009. The implementation of CCSS was the first time there was a nation-wide adoption of standards for ELA and math (Kelly-Riley, 2017). According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.), 42 states, the Department of Defense Education Activity, the District of Columbia, and four territories are currently using the ELA CCSS, with most of them adopting the standards in 2010.

With the CCSS came an increased awareness of writing in schools. The standards emphasize writing in all grade levels and content areas, including history/social studies, science, math, and technical subjects (Kelly-Riley, 2017). The inclusion of writing standards in all content areas created a shift in content area teaching to include teaching the craft of reading and writing within the specific contents (Gleeson & D'Souza, 2016).

There also came a fear that with the introduction that teachers were not prepared. The standards did not address the complexity of writing instruction, and underprepared teachers would become more confused about writing instruction, causing a more significant gap between teacher instruction and student learning (Martin & Dismuke, 2016).

The standards not only included more writing focus, but there was also a shift in the types of writing. Wilcox et al. (2016) noted that with the implementation of CCSS writing focus shifted from narrative, personal, or imaginative writing to include more informative and argumentative writing. The focus shifts more as the students' progress from kindergarten to 12th-grade, culminating with approximately 80% of their writing focused on explanation or persuasion (Wilcox et al., 2016). Kosko and Zimmerman (2019) noted that with the new standards, mathematical writing expectations increased with little research on how elementary students develop mathematical writing. With writing expectations in all content areas increased, Gleeson and Andries D'Souza (2016) stated the need to push interdisciplinary boundaries. During their study, it became evident that teachers' ideas of incorporating writing into content areas included only short answers and direct recall of information. Gleeson and Andries D'Souza noted that in future courses their focus would include writing as a process that extends across a unit. The increased expectations and focuses shifted teaching and learning for all teachers and students regardless of grade or content area.

The implementation of the new standards was quick, and many teachers were unprepared. Troia et al. (2016) examined the impact standards have on instruction in the

classroom. The study showed that the most significant impact came from the assessments rather than the standards themselves. However, the standards guide the assessments, and with the change in assessments came a change in writing instruction (Troia et al., 2016). While Troia et al., stated that change in instruction impacted teacher instruction, the lack of focus on writing in state assessments does not support the importance of writing in the standards. Teachers indicated that writing was more challenging when following the CCSS than with previous standards (Wilcox et al., 2016). The lack of training before the implementation of the standards, lack of understanding of the standards, and curriculum that did not align to the standards upon implementation contributed to these challenges.

Since the implementation of CCSS, there have been several changes in the standards themselves as well as how states utilize them. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.), all changes to standards have been and will continue to be done at the state level with the guidance of the Council of Chief State School Offices (CCSSG) and The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA). This will allow states to make individual changes to meet their state's needs.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Troia et al. (2016) stated that with the introduction of CCSS, there were implications for teacher preparation programs as well as professional development, curriculum materials, and pedagogy. In a survey conducted by Troia and Graham (2016), teachers with more writing instruction courses in teacher preparation programs held a firmer belief about their abilities. Many of the teachers surveyed did not have coursework dedicated to writing instruction, so the authors suggest a need for additional coursework

to be offered (Troia and Graham, 2016). Clark and Newberry (2019) noted that increased hands-on experiences and the ability to engage in mastery experiences impacted preservice teachers' self-efficacy. Using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, Clark and Newberry stated that as mastery experience is the most influential aspect of self-efficacy teachers must be provided with sufficient opportunities to be successful teaching an individual student and whole class lessons. Vicarious experiences were found to be the next most important aspect indicating that preservice teachers should be offered opportunities to observe successful lessons and teach lessons to their peers (Clark & Newberry, 2019). These experiences allow learners to construct knowledge within the content area and build self-efficacy.

In a recent study by Brenner and McQuirk (2019), 155 literacy courses were examined to identify how often writing was included in these courses for teacher preparation programs. Of the 155 courses examined, only five included "writing" in the title, and 38 included "writing" in the course description. Teachers reported at a 75% rate that they did not feel their teacher preparation programs prepared them to teach writing, according to Brindle et al. (2016). While studies show that there is a need for additional writing instruction courses, Brenner and McQuirk found that many teachers reported their preparation programs focused on reading with little instruction focused on writing.

Teacher preparation programs play an important role in the success of teachers, therefore the success of students. Risko and Reid (2019) noted that policymakers often blame teacher preparation programs for a lack of literacy instruction preparation. An example was found in a study by Brenner and McQuirk (2019) when the preservice

teachers could not translate the writing skills learned to their classrooms. Preservice teachers as well as professional English teachers are not providing necessary feedback for writing according to Langeberg (2019). The professors that are supposed to provide instruction on writing feedback are not properly trained and therefore fearful of providing feedback. This in turn has led to preservice and first-year teachers that are also not providing writing feedback (Langeberg, 2019). Writing instruction courses should provide opportunities for engagement with students in a writing experience.

While writing is often altogether left out of coursework, what is available regarding writing instruction is limited. Sanders et al. (2020) found that writing pedagogy is often missing even within writing coursework. This is often in part due to time constraints within courses. Myers and Paulick (2020) noted that course instructors are left worrying about what they failed to cover during a course, even after trying to squeeze in as much as possible.

Writing in content areas at all grade levels are expected with CCSS. However, Mitton-Kukner and Murray Orr (2018) stated that after taking a course on content literacy, student teachers could not utilize these techniques and strategies in their cooperating teachers' classrooms because of lack of support and time restrictions. Rainey et al. (2018) supported the importance of content area literacy with research that suggested students were better able to deepen their understanding through writing to learn within content area courses. Lipp and Helfrich (2016) also found that when student teachers were able to practice writing instruction in a field experience placement while taking a writing course, the preservice teachers' self-efficacy for writing instruction

increased. When in a field experience that supports the student-teacher during writing instruction, and valuing writing as a learning experience in all content areas, student teachers can engage in the experience, construct knowledge, and develop a higher self-efficacy. These experiences and the support that is provided during them are crucial.

Kosnik et al. (2018) stated that including experiences for the preservice teachers to interact with children for literacy provided an opportunity to experience the complex dynamics of working with children. Du Plessis (2020) noted that all programs that intend to prepare teachers should evaluate their ability to empower them to endure the many facets of the profession. Scales et al. (2019) examined courses that did include writing focus and found that teachers felt more prepared when the courses focused on their development as a writer and being a teacher of writing. Building new teachers' self-efficacy as a writer initially helped them to understand what was needed by students (Scales et al., 2019). The best way to prepare teachers for literacy instruction is a national struggle and one that has been grappled with by educators, governments, researchers, and many others through the last several decades (Kosnik et al., 2018). Understanding teachers' experiences in these programs and what led to their perceptions of their abilities can influence programs.

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Writing

When considering teacher outcomes, it is essential to consider teacher self-efficacy. Zee and Koomen (2016) stated there are implications that teachers with higher self-efficacy create lesson plans that increase student knowledge more effectively.

Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's belief about their ability to teach or influence learning

(Clark & Newberry, 2019). While Wilcox et al. (2016) noted that teachers found writing instruction more difficult with CCSS, Clark and Newberry (2019) noted that teachers with higher self-efficacy were more likely to believe that they can accomplish difficult tasks. Troia and Graham (2016) found that teachers' preparedness to teach writing impacted their self-efficacy towards writing instruction. As previously stated, many teachers are leaving their teacher preparation programs without courses dedicated to writing instruction.

Including more opportunities to practice writing and writing instruction is necessary, according to Cook and Sams (2018). Their study indicated that preservice teachers benefited from a course on writing but were still struggling to view themselves as writers. A similar study conducted by Helfrich and Clark (2018) suggested that when preservice teachers were provided with a course focused on writing instruction, their self-efficacy increased towards writing instruction. Self-efficacy can be portrayed as a cyclical event, including different sources of efficacy continually influencing self-efficacy (Warren & Hale, 2016). The more opportunities preservice teachers have to gain efficacy, the more opportunity they have to increase their efficacy beliefs.

While courses directed at writing instruction increased self-efficacy, Lipp and Helfrich (2016) found that pairing writing courses with field experiences directed at writing instruction increased preservice teachers' self-efficacy. It also increased their understanding of writing instruction and a willingness to use these strategies in their classrooms while pairing writing courses with field experience allows for opportunities to construct knowledge from different experiences. Yilmaz (2020) stated that students who

have difficulty in reading and writing also have difficulty in other subjects. This research also indicated that teachers that have low self-efficacy in these areas have a difficult time transferring these skills to their students (Yilmaz, 2020). These additional courses directed at writing instruction could increase self-efficacy and make teachers more effective at transferring those skills to students.

When considering the importance of experiences on the construction of knowledge and self-efficacy, it is important to include writing opportunities not limited to only one type of writing or in one context. Rainey et al. (2018) found that when students were provided opportunities to use literacy strategies in content areas, they could develop questions and relay the results more effectively within the specific content areas. When teachers were asked to assign tasks within writing, each task's rigor was based on their perception of text-based writing which left many of the tasks lacking in rigor (Wang & Matsumura, 2019). Being allowed to learn the importance of literacy in content areas and text-based literacy strategies are necessary for increased use of these skills in the classroom. Ciampa and Gallagher (2018) noted that there appears to be a positive correlation between self-efficacy in literacy instruction, coursework, and field experience. While this study examined reading and writing, it demonstrates that with an increased focus on literacy for coursework and fieldwork self-efficacy improved.

Coursework that includes writing instruction, watching effective writing instruction, and engaging in writing instruction would be valuable to increase self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences, such as watching a successful writing lesson, increase teacher self-efficacy (Warren & Hale, 2016). Observing successful writing lessons is

important to preservice teachers, just as observing successful writing is important to students in the classroom (DeFauw, 2016). Preservice teachers need time to observe effective writing lessons, teach writing lessons, as well as write themselves. As teachers model writing for their students, students' perceptions of their teacher's writing skills increase and positively impacts their beliefs about their ability (DeFauw, 2016).

As self-efficacy is increased, teacher effectiveness also increases (Helfrich & Clark, 2016). Warren and Hale (2016) stated that teachers with higher self-efficacy were more likely to encourage students to work together, and they were more likely to provide extra assistance to students that require extra support. Zee and Koomen's (2016) examination of previous self-efficacy studies led to the discovery that some studies show a causal relationship between teachers' self-efficacy (TSE) and student outcomes, while others showed an indirect relationship between the two. Whether the relationship is direct, or not, TSE influences student outcomes.

Teacher Perceptions of Preparation Programs for the Teaching of Writing

It is crucial to understand how teachers perceive their preparation programs supported their ability to teach writing. Clark (2020) stated that it is necessary to understand how teachers perceive their abilities to support instruction that is effective. In a study conducted by Miller et al. (2016) teachers that participated in a writing training had a different perception of their role as a writing instructor. After the training they perceived themselves as leaders in the writing process (Miller et al., 2016). The teachers also discussed how they were excited about writing and how their excitement influenced the perceptions of the students. Zumbrunn et al. (2019) found similar results and noted

that as teacher writing enjoyment increased, student writing enjoyment increased, writing self-regulation increased, and therefore writing grades increased.

Marsh et al. (2019) examined teachers' perceptions of the supports they received to support writing instruction. The study found that teachers need administrators that value writing, allocate for writing resources, know about effective writing instruction methods, protect writing time, and support language (Marsh et al., 2019). If teachers are not being properly prepared for writing instruction, there is a chance that administrators are also not being prepared. Meyers et al. (2019) found that perceptions of preparedness varied between professors and preservice teachers. While the majority of professors believed the universities were doing an adequate job in preparing students, the students did not have the same perceptions. This study recommended that the perceptions of the students must be considered to increase preparedness (Meyers et al., 2019). While perceptions often vary, the teachers' perceptions have a direct impact on students in their future classrooms. To meet the needs of the students the teachers must be adequately prepared.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review explored themes related to self-efficacy, writing instruction and assessments in the United States, teacher preparation programs, and the impacts of CCSS on writing instruction. Researchers showed that self-efficacy impacts achievement, while demonstrating a need for more writing instruction in teacher preparation programs. CCSS increased the focus on writing across all content areas, while assessments that guide instruction do not focus on writing outcomes. Teacher preparation programs are

critical in preparing teachers for writing instruction in the classroom by allowing teacher candidates opportunities to construct beliefs about writing and practice authentic writing instruction experiences that contribute to their self-efficacy. The studies examined courses within teacher preparation programs, but very few examined the effects of these programs on the teachers' perceived ability to teach writing.

This study will further the understanding of how teacher preparation programs impact teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach writing. The gap in the literature was addressed by focusing specifically on writing in the elementary classroom. Open-ended questions were used in semistructured interviews with first-year elementary school teachers to provide insight into teachers' experiences in the classroom and their preparation programs that may improve writing instruction courses in said programs. Research design, the rationale for choosing qualitative research, and the role of the researcher will be addressed in Chapter 3. Data collection, participant selection, and methodological issues will be described. This includes trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability. Ethical procedures will also be explained.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing in the elementary classroom. Using Braun and Clark's (2012) six-step method to analyze the data, I identified five themes related to first-year teachers' experiences of preparation programs and their perceptions of writing instruction in their first year. The procedures used to select participants, interview protocol, and data analysis will be explained. In this chapter, I will also discuss the research design, role of the researcher, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What are teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school?

RQ2: What coursework do the teachers believe would have better prepared them to teach writing?

The central concepts in this study are self-efficacy, teacher preparation programs, and the implications for writing with CCSS. The phenomenon in this study is teachers' perceptions of their abilities to teach writing. Qualitative researchers aim to understand a phenomenon within a specific group of individuals (Burkholder et al., 2016). I conducted a basic qualitative inquiry. This approach was chosen because it allowed me to gain practical knowledge of how teacher preparation programs impact teachers' self-efficacy towards writing instruction. I was able to make meaning about the effects those programs

had on teachers' perceptions and experiences. Interviews are the primary data source for a basic qualitative inquiry and are helpful for understanding the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I conducted individual, semistructured interviews to gain insight into the participants' current beliefs about their ability as well as the impact their teacher preparation had on that belief. Using semistructured interviews allowed me the flexibility to ask more probing questions, when necessary, to gain the best understanding.

There are many design choices for qualitative research. I chose a basic qualitative design after considering other possibilities. Grounded theory was not chosen as this could have led to saturation issues. Grounded theory develops theories from the data, often requiring a large sample size. Two theories were used to view the data rather than theory emerging from the data (see Patton, 2015). A phenomenological qualitative case study would have allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. However, it would have limited the number of participants and led to a narrow analysis of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Regarding methods, I considered quantitative research, but due to the study focus and research questions, concluded that the qualitative method was more appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

As an elementary school teacher, I am familiar with writing instruction and coursework to help facilitate teaching writing. Through conversations with teachers throughout the years, in a variety of states and schools, it became evident to me that experiences varied in teacher preparation programs, but many teachers struggled with writing instruction. I am sometimes a cooperating teacher for student teachers. I

conducted interviews with other teachers. I interviewed first-year teachers, whom I was not a cooperating teacher for, and who are not in the same building. It was imperative that I not let my bias from personal experience interfere with the participants' interviews. Reflexivity was managed by journaling throughout data collection and analysis. Maintaining a professional, yet comfortable environment, and allowing participants to talk about their own experience was important to minimize bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants were first-year teachers who have recently completed their teacher preparation program within the research state. I used the snowball method to identify participants. This method is often used to find populations that are hard to find (Babbie, 2015). First-year teachers can be difficult to locate, as they are often spread out within a district or city. I am familiar with several first-year teachers who I have mentored and used them to locate participants. I first contacted the first-year teachers I know and asked for names of other first-year teachers. Using their email address, I contacted individuals to determine if they were interested in participating. The snowball method allowed me to ask for additional names of first-year teachers in the area.

During the recruitment process, I identified potential participants by years taught and year of program completion. Diversity in age, gender, and race were accounted for. The number of planned participants was a minimum of 10-12 or until saturation had been met. Saturation was met when no new information was collected during interviews and

no new codes were needed. Sample size was dependent upon saturation. I analyzed data during the interview process to determine when saturation had been met (Babbie, 2017).

Instrumentation

I collected data using an interview guide (see Appendix). The interview questions are aligned to the RQs. I developed open-ended questions to provide consistency between interviews and allow for participants to provide insights into their personal experiences. I developed the interview questions from the RQs.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected data from first-year elementary school teachers who teach in a general education, self-contained classroom. Participants needed to have completed their teacher preparation programs within the last 2 years through a traditional teacher preparation program. Teachers who obtained certification through alternative certification programs were not included in the study.

I collected data by conducting one-on-one interviews. I used open-ended questions in each semistructured interview. The location of interviews was decided by the participant and me. Possible choices were a local coffee shop, the library, or a virtual interview depending upon COVID-19 restrictions at the time of interviews. Due to COVID-19, I conducted all interviews virtually. Interviews were expected to take approximately 1 hour. Data collection took place in one setting for each participant over the course of 2 months. Interviews were recorded for later transcription. If saturation had not been met after all participants had been interviewed, I intended to ask participants to refer additional potential participants per the snowball recruitment method.

At the end of the interview sessions, I debriefed participants as a form of participant exit and member checking. Debriefing included thanking the participant and reminding them of the interview process and how their answers would be used. Participants were provided with a summary of the study findings after data analysis. They were also reminded of their consent to participate and to be recorded.

Data Analysis Plan

I recorded the interviews and then transcribed them using Otter.ai. Participants received a two-page summary of the findings for member checking. Once transcribed, interviews were coded as themes emerged that identified the participants' beliefs of their ability to teach writing and courses that influenced that ability. Codes arose from the interview data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This model for coding helped me to identify themes across interviews that were revealed as shared experiences.

After transcribing the interviews, I read the transcriptions several times to understand the overall feeling of the interview and to identify concepts that were repeated throughout individual interviews and across interviews. Responses that contained words in the RQs were coded. Any concepts that were brought up repeatedly by interviewees were also coded as recommended (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Coding both types of concepts helped me to gain insight and understanding into the experiences shared by the interviewees.

I used inductive analysis to code the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2012) recommended using a six-step process to code and analyze interviews. To use this process, I first familiarized myself with the data, as recommended in Phase 1, by listening

to the interviews, making notes, and rereading the transcriptions. Phase 2 included generating codes by highlighting data that answers the RQs. In Phase 3, I captured the answers to the RQs by using axial coding to create categories of the open codes. Phase 4 included analyzing emerging themes, using a quality check that helped to ensure that the themes included meaningful data, were not too diverse, were useful to answer the RQs, and were themes rather than codes. The naming of the themes occurred in Phase 5 after the quality check. Then, a report was produced in Phase 6 (see Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, I recruited an appropriate number of participants. I would have added participants if saturation had not met upon completion of the interviews. I made efforts to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. I provided thick descriptions for transferability.

Reflexivity during qualitative research ensures that the researcher is aware of their biases and is honest about their feelings (Babbie, 2017). To establish confirmability, reflexivity was addressed throughout the study as I used a journal to address biases. I used hand coding to code the interviews. Software was used for data storage and graphical purposes. To establish dependability, I used audit trails and provide detailed descriptions of the research. Member checking was used to ensure trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before conducting the study and heeded its other requirements to ensure that ethical procedures were followed. Recruitment materials were only shared when appropriate

with participants and necessary university staff. Participants provided informed consent through email. Participants were made aware of the protection of their responses and the procedures in place to protect confidentiality. I changed participants' names to protect their privacy. All collected data will remain password protected to protect confidentiality for 5 years. Participants were not recruited from within my school building, and all participants were not in direct contact with me at work.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the research design, role of the researcher, and the research methodology. Participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis strategies were also discussed to provide insight into the research plan. Issues of trustworthiness and a plan for ethical procedures were evaluated to ensure the researcher took appropriate steps to minimize potential harm to the participants. Chapter 4 will discuss in detail the data collection and data analysis methods. The chapter will conclude with the results of the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and to identify coursework they deemed useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing in the elementary classroom. I examined the first-year teachers' experiences of preparation programs and their perceptions of writing instruction in their first year using thematic analysis to analyze the data. My examination of teachers' perceptions was focused on answering two RQs. The RQs were

RQ1: What are teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school?

RQ2: What coursework do the teachers believe would have better prepared them to teach writing?

This chapter includes a description of the setting, the demographics of the participants, and data collection and analysis. I will provide evidence of trustworthiness and present the results of the study.

Research Setting

The setting for this study was a state in the western United States. Participants had just completed their first year of teaching in an elementary classroom. Participants were in a unique situation as they experienced their first year of teaching during a pandemic. They taught writing in person, virtual, or hybrid throughout the state the entire school year. Regardless of the setting, all of them taught writing consistently throughout the school year.

Demographics

Ten first-year teachers participated in this study. All the participants were women in their 20s. All taught in the same western state for the 2020-2021 school year. Each participant had completed their teacher preparation program in the last 2 years and just completed their first year of teaching. Participants taught full-time in general education elementary classrooms. Participants were asked to self-identify a race or ethnicity. The reporting of the demographic information was written as the participants identified themselves.

Participant 1 (P1) was a 23-year-old woman. She stated that she is White. P1 just completed her first year of teaching second grade. Her teacher preparation program was completed in 2020. P1 stated that she taught writing 35 minutes every day in a specific writing time. She reported teaching writing in science and social studies in a less direct writing instruction manner. Writing in other content areas included written responses, and it varied depending on the day.

Participant 2 (P2) was also a 23-year-old woman. She stated that she often says she is White, but she reports her ethnicity as Latina. Her first year of teaching was just completed in a third-grade classroom. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2020. She stated that her writing blocks are 30 minutes, but the number of days she teaches writing has varied throughout the year. P2 stated that her school does not use a writing curriculum making it difficult for her to teach. She found writing prompts that align with the standards and used a modeling approach to go through the writing steps. P2

said that she attempted to add writing in other content areas, especially on nonwriting days through summaries and written responses.

Participant 3 (P3) was a 23-year-old woman. She stated she is Hispanic and just completed her first year of teaching in second grade. Her teacher preparation program was completed in 2020. She indicated that she teaches writing about 40 minutes every day and includes writing in all other content areas through journal responses. P3 stated that she used the POW and TIDE, or pull apart, organize write and topic, important details, and ending, models to teach writing. She started by modeling the writing and using a questioning strategy to include the kids in the process. She stated she then gave time to work with partners on their writing.

Participant 4 (P4) was a 27-year-old woman. She stated she is White and Native American. She completed her first year in a fourth-grade classroom. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2020. P4 stated that she did not have a set writing time but estimated that she spent 45 minutes per day in writing. She indicated that her school does not have a writing curriculum. She presented writing in a modeling format with a weekly prompt. Writing was also used during novel studies, math, science, and social studies.

Participant 5 (P5) was a 22-year-old woman. She stated that she is White and taught fifth grade for her first year. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2020. P5 said that she starts every day with a journal writing time when the kids arrive. She also taught writing explicitly for 30-45 minutes twice per week, as time allowed.

Writing was included in all other content areas because students had written responses that were expected to be done in a paragraph format.

Participant 6 (P6) was a 26-year-old woman. She stated she is White and completed her first year of teaching in fifth grade. Her teacher preparation program was completed in 2020. P6 stated that the writing block was typically 30 minutes on the days that students worked on writing. She also indicated that the students did writing-based projects throughout the year for all content areas and there was also a set writing block almost every day. Written responses were used in all content areas as well.

Participant 7 (P7) was a 25-year-old woman. She stated that she is White. She taught third grade for her first year of teaching. Her teacher preparation program was completed in 2020. P7 stated that she does not have a specific writing time. A writing prompt is presented once per month, and the students engage in writing-specific activities approximately 1 hour per week. She stated that she taught writing using the district-issued curriculum. The only other writing time in the day was during quiet time, but students were not required to choose writing.

Participant 8 (P8) was a 24-year-old woman. She stated that she is White and just completed her first year teaching kindergarten. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2020. P8 stated that she spent 30 minutes per day in a specific writing block. Students wrote throughout the day in workbooks for reading as well.

Participant 9 (P9) was a 24-year-old woman. She stated that she is White. She completed her first year of teaching in a kindergarten classroom. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2020. P9 stated that she taught writing about 30-45

minutes per day, but it was mixed in throughout the day as well. She indicated that writing was also included in writing sight words, their names, stations, and math.

Participant 10 (P10) was a 25-year-old woman. She stated that she is Hispanic and taught first grade last year. She completed her teacher preparation program in 2019. P10 stated that she taught writing approximately an hour to an hour and a half each week. She also indicated that she incorporated writing throughout the day in other content areas.

Data Collection

The data collection process began on June 22, 2021, after I received Walden IRB approval (#06-10-21-0759381) on June 10, 2021. I posted on Facebook, using the approved social media post, asking friends and family to refer me to anyone they knew who just completed their first year of teaching in the elementary classroom. Once names were provided, I emailed each potential participant the consent form. Once I received consent, I scheduled interviews on Zoom. Using the snowball method, I asked participants at the end of each interview if they knew any other first-year teachers who might be willing to participate. This method proved successful in finding participants.

I conducted interviews on Zoom with 10 participants. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data that relayed the experiences of each participant. The interviews lasted, on average, about 20 minutes, but 60 minutes was available to each participant. Interviews were recorded on Zoom and then transcribed using Otter.ai. To provide the safest and most consistent atmosphere, all interviews were conducted over Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the beginning of each interview, I thanked the participant for their willingness to engage in my study. Informed consent was sent and completed before the meeting. I stated the purpose of the study and reminded them that the interview would be recorded. All consented to the interview being recorded. At the beginning of each interview, I asked demographic questions to ensure that each participant met the requirements and to gain more insight into their background. One individual stated that she taught at a middle school, and we had to end the interview process because she did not meet the required qualifications. The other participants met the requirements, and the interviews proceeded as planned.

During the interviews, several participants answered questions regarding what they thought teacher preparation programs could do to improve before I asked them. Instead of asking them the planned question, I restated their statements to ensure that was how they would like to answer that question. All interviews were transcribed using the software Otter.ai. After reviewing the transcriptions, I noted that some words were transcribed incorrectly and made corrections when necessary.

Data Analysis

To complete the thematic analysis, I used inductive analysis to code the interviews. Using the six-step process recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012), I coded and analyzed the interviews. I first familiarized myself with the data, as recommended in Phase 1. I started by listening to the interviews, adding to the notes I took during the interviews, and rereading the transcriptions. I printed each of the interviews to highlight data as I analyzed responses. I made notes of common vocabulary and phrases used by

participants at this stage. Each of the participants was also given a code to protect their privacy.

During Phase 2, I generated codes by highlighting data that answered the RQs. A yellow highlighter was used to highlight data that answered RQ1. A blue highlighter was used to highlight data that answered RQ2. The transcripts were reread, and the codes were written in brackets next to the highlighted data. During open coding, 22 codes emerged. Table 1 provides examples of those codes.

Table 1

Examples of Open Codes

Code	Participant	Excerpts
Writing hard to teach	P3	“Not a strict curriculum...made it harder for me just as a first-year teacher, not exactly knowing where to start.”
	P7	"I do find that teaching writing is the one place I struggle the most"
	P8	"Writing is actually, and I've heard this from other colleagues is like one of the hardest things to teach."
Not prepared to teach writing	P2	"I just didn't feel prepared"
	P4	“I enrolled in a master's program for literacy because I didn't feel like I got what I needed in my undergraduate.”
	P6	"I don't feel like it did a super amazing job teaching me how to teach writing, because I still struggle with the subject"
Examples of student writing	P2	“But like, especially as a first-year teacher, just having something to kind of go off of and build from makes me feel a lot more confident in what I’m doing.”
	P7	"I feel like there should be like, examples of student writing"

To complete Phase 3 and capture the answers to the RQs, I used axial coding to create categories of the open codes. I created a spreadsheet to place quotes from each participant for answers to the RQs. Using the spreadsheet, I started to note responses, words, and phrases that were similar and put them into categories. Table 2 includes examples of open codes and categories.

Table 2*Examples of Open Codes and Categories*

Category	Code	Participant	Excerpt
Unprepared	Lack of coursework	P1	"I don't think I had any specific writing lessons."
	Limited explicit writing instruction	P10	"If there was, it wasn't a whole lot."
Insecurities	Writing is hard to teach	P1	"It was really tricky and difficult to learn."
	Insecure about teaching writing	P3	"So right now, I would say that my ability to teach writing is pretty limited at this point."
Courses	Direct Instruction	P6	"I don't feel like we had a lot of writing instruction during our preparation course."
	More support	P3	"I could have used a little more support in that area."
Examples	Examples of student writing	P1	"I would love to know what writing looks like in a fifth-grade classroom compared to a seventh-grade classroom compared to this first-grade classroom."
	Models of teaching writing	P2	"Back to this whole model structure, that's what I think needs to have been done."
Experiences	Lack of experiences	P2	"So, I didn't get a lot of time to do whole class instruction with writing."
	More practice teaching writing	P7	"I wish there was like opportunities.... where they would let new teachers practice teaching [writing]."

Phase 4 included a rereading and reviewing of the categories and identifying emerging themes. Categories were separated by the teachers' perspectives, their feelings of preparedness, desire for examples or models, requested coursework, and experiences. As I reviewed the categories, I began to identify emerging themes. During Phase 5, some of the themes were renamed to explain the participants' experiences better. Themes were changed from *perceived abilities, preparedness, courses, examples and models, and experiences* to *unprepared, insecurities, writing courses, examples, and experiences*. Table 3 shows the relationship between categories and themes.

Table 3*Categories and Themes*

Category	Theme
Unprepared	Theme 1: Teachers' feel unprepared to teach writing.
Difficult Insecurities	Theme 2: Teachers' feel insecure teaching writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program.
Challenging Struggled Courses	Theme 3: Teachers desire for writing instruction courses to be included in their preparation programs.
Methods of instruction Opportunities for practice Examples	Theme 4: Examples of student writing and expectations need to be included in the writing courses.
Models Experiences	Theme 5: Teachers desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation program.
Support for writing instruction	

Phase 6 is completing a final review and write a report from the data. This phase also included describing how the data were collected and analyzed. During analysis, most of the participants stated that they did not take a course for writing instruction. Although two participants noted a course, they stated that the course was not sufficient in preparing them to teach writing. In turn, the data still indicated that teachers did not feel prepared to teach writing and continue to request more coursework on the subject. This phase has been completed by writing the report for Chapter 4.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, saturation was achieved by recruiting an appropriate number of participants. Efforts were made to diversify the sample. This resulted in four participants being from diverse races.

Transferability allows for research findings to be generalized to other settings. I provided thick descriptions for transferability. These descriptions came from the semistructured interviews that allowed participants to convey their experiences during their teacher preparation program and their first year of teaching.

All interviews took place over Zoom, allowing participants to join from a location that was comfortable for them. To establish dependability, an audit trail was used. Member checking was used to ensure trustworthiness, and participants were allowed to clarify or expand on their answers during the interview. Participants were allowed to add any additional comments. None of the participants added any new information at this point. Two of the participants restated their desire for writing specific coursework. A two-page summary of the findings was also provided to ensure member checking was completed.

To ensure confirmability, reflexivity was used during my qualitative research, I was aware of my biases and feelings. I noted my feelings in a journal before and after each interview. I used hand coding for the interviews after they were transcribed using the Otter.ai software. Software was used for data storage and graphical purposes.

Results

I used the RQs to organize the data. The results presented in this section are aligned with the research questions. Codes were identified that developed into categories, and themes emerged that supported each of the RQs. RQ1 was addressed with two themes: (a) teachers feel unprepared to teach writing and (b) teachers feel insecure teaching writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program. RQ2 was addressed with three themes: (a) teachers desire writing instruction courses to be included in their preparation programs, (b) examples of student writing and expectations need to be included in the writing courses, and (c) teachers desire experiences to teach writing during preparation program.

Research Question 1: What Are Teachers' Perspectives of Their Abilities to Teach Writing in Elementary School?

This question concerned the participants' experiences in the classroom during their first year of teaching. Interview questions focused on teaching writing in the classroom and how they feel about their ability. Themes that emerged for RQ1 were teachers' feel unprepared to teach writing and teachers' feel insecure teaching writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program. All participants discussed teaching writing explicitly throughout the day and incorporating writing in other content areas.

Theme 1: Teachers Feel Unprepared to Teach Writing.

When participants were asked questions about their teacher preparation programs, they responded negatively. Words that were used to describe their writing instruction courses included: *not*, *wasn't*, *no*, and *didn't*. These words occurred repeatedly

throughout all the interviews. Categories that made up theme one included *unprepared* and *difficult*. Negative words were used repeatedly when discussing feelings about teaching writing.

P1 indicated that she participated in one course on writing instruction but that it was focused on how to use technology. P1 stated, “My emphasis in college was new literacies, which is essentially language arts, but it was more technology-oriented.” P3 indicated that she also took one writing course. However, she stated, “That one focused a lot on doing like Writer’s Workshop and giving the kids a lot of free-range to just write on their own.” Neither participant felt that the one course they participated in gave them instructions on how to teach writing directly.

When asked to describe the extent specific writing instruction was included in courses during their teacher preparation program, P2 stated,

I don’t actually, I can’t. I don’t think so. I’m trying to think if we did. I had a lot of reading courses and like phonics and things like that. Um, they were heavy on teaching us math and like flipped math classes in college, where I learned it as the student and then have to teach it, but truthfully, I do not.

P4 stated, “If you want honest, true, honest, I do not remember any specific writing being taught, like how do you teach this to children.” P9 said, “I wouldn’t say much writing was really incorporated in my program.”

While P1 and P3 stated that their teacher preparation program included one course on writing instruction, the other eight participants indicated that they did not have a writing instruction course. However, all 10 participants stated that they did not feel

prepared to teach writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program. The participants were all general elementary teachers who were expected to teach all content areas and include writing in those content areas as well as its own content. These statements indicate that the programs did not ensure that was possible for writing instruction.

Theme 2: Teachers Feel Insecure Teaching Writing Upon Completion of Their Teacher Preparation Program.

First-year teachers have recently completed their teacher preparation programs. These programs should prepare them to teach the content required in the elementary classroom. Theme 1 indicated that many of the teachers did not feel prepared to do so because of a lack of coursework. Theme 2 specifically addresses their perspectives of their ability to teach writing.

When asked about their perceptions to teach writing, the common terms used were *hard, confused, don't, tricky, difficult, struggled, and insecure*. When analyzing responses, categories that emerged included *insecurities, challenging, and struggled*. These categories developed into Theme 2: Teachers Feel Insecure Teaching Writing Upon Completion of Their Teacher Preparation Program. Nine of the 10 participants indicated that they felt insecure about teaching writing. P4 stated,

I've always enjoyed writing as a kid. And I think that I did fairly well at it growing up and in college and stuff. So, I think that I do okay. But again, I'm, you know, I'm just still learning."

P4's statement indicated that she was more confident than others but did not indicate that she was overwhelmingly confident.

Common answers indicated a sense of insecurity when speaking about writing instruction. P6 stated, "I didn't realize how hard it was when I went into this year." "I do find that teaching writing is the one place I struggle the most," said P7. P7 continued,

I feel like it's hard for me. I don't know how to grade it without being, I guess, biased. Because I don't know, we're taught to differentiate everything, all kids learn differently.... And I don't know how to help each kid when almost every kid is in a different place. With their writing. I feel like that. Like, even thinking about it kind of overwhelms me.

P1 stated, "I was super excited to teach it, but it's definitely hard." P3 stated, "I think writing was definitely an area that I wanted to work on this year, because I didn't feel as confident in it compared to some of the other subjects that I kind of felt more equipped for." This trend continued throughout the remainder of the interviews. Many stating that there was coursework for all other subject areas, and they were better prepared for those. Only one of the 10 participants felt only okay about teaching writing.

Research Question 2: What Coursework do Teachers Believe Would Have Better Prepared Them to Teach Writing?

RQ2 focused on the experiences of participants during their teacher preparation program. Classes that they were offered that they felt were beneficial, and coursework that they believe would have been beneficial for them to adequately teach writing after completion of their program. Themes that emerged include: teachers desire for writing

instruction courses to be included in their preparation programs, examples of student writing and expectations need to be included in the writing courses, and teachers desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation program.

Theme 3: Teachers Desire for Writing Instruction Courses to Be Included in Their Preparation Programs.

When asked what can be done to improve teacher preparation programs, all the participants stated that they should add a course specific to writing. This was stated 14 times from only 10 participants, indicating that this was a highly desired change. P10 stated, “I think having a course specifically designated to writing and how to teach that.” P8 agreed, “So I think if they just included something about how to teach writing and like different strategies on how to teach writing, it would be really helpful.”

P8 also stated that it would be beneficial to have writing classes that focused on kindergarten through second grade and one for third through fifth grade. This was mentioned by participants P1 and P10 as well. P6 added to this by stating, “I definitely think there needs to be more instructions and influence and courses and teachers who, you know, teach that [writing instruction] for the future educators.” P2 stated directly, “But I think the most basic answer is there should be a writing course.” Every participant answered that a writing course would have improved their teacher preparation program. Not often do you find that students would like additional work to complete their degrees, thus indicating that the importance of that course outweighs the desire for completion of the program.

Theme 4: Examples of Student Writing and Expectations Need to Be Included in

Writing Courses.

While all the participants desire a writing course, it was also noted that all the participants desired either examples or models of student writing within those classes. Examples of student writing were mentioned by eight of the 10 participants, and models was mentioned by nine of the participants, with participant P4 mentioning it three times.

P4 stated, “Other than hefty, hefty modeling, that just kind of where I’m at right now. If I could sit down with all of my professors and tell them that I would absolutely love that opportunity.” P7 said, “I feel like there should be like examples of student writing,” while P9 echoed that statement and said,

Really showing like the basics of like, at the end of kindergarten, they need to be writing just writing one sentence, but then at the of first grade writing a paragraph, you know, that’s such a big jump, but really seeing it.

P8 also felt that examples and expectations for different grade levels would be beneficial. She stated,

I would definitely say like explicit classes like even doing if from like K to two or three, like a K to two writing course or like a three to five writing classes. I know my colleagues that teach up in three to five, they deal with a lot of the things that I don’t ever have to deal with.

Courses that include writing examples and explanations of where students should be at in each grade level are highly desired.

Theme 5: Teachers Desire Experiences to Teach Writing During Teacher Preparation Programs.

The final theme focused on the desire for experiences to teach writing during the preparation course. While some participants were given the opportunity to teach during student teaching, only one participant had the option to teach writing during their preparation coursework. P2 stated, “My semester before student teaching, it was my methods course. I chose writing, but it wasn’t like you need to do writing.” P2 indicated that this was her literacy course and her lesson involved her reading a story to the class, and then a writing assignment followed.

P1 indicated that in courses for other subjects such as math and social studies she was expected to write and teach lesson plans. She then stated,

I honestly think that writing those lesson plans really helped. So being able to, like physically, like, write a lesson plan and say, alright this is like how I would teach it. And these are what I use, and this is how the day would go. I think that was really helpful.

She continued repeating that this was not the case in her writing courses, however. Other participants simply stated “no” when asked if they were given the opportunity to teach writing in their programs. When asked how to improve the preparation programs, P7 stated,

I wish there was like opportunities for like, even if like there was like other schools and like [local district] what wanted to partner with [university] for like some sort of after school program where they would let new teachers practice teaching.

Summary

Using semistructured interviews, I was able to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing after completing their teacher preparation program. The interpretation of results of my study indicates that first year teachers feel unprepared to teach writing. This study also allowed me to identify coursework that teachers believe would have led to higher levels of self-efficacy for writing. The participants indicated that having coursework explicitly for writing instruction would have been beneficial.

The results of data collection were shared in Chapter 4. Using thematic analysis, I was able to identify five themes that answered the RQs. The themes that emerged during analysis were (a) teachers' feelings of unpreparedness to teach writing, (b) teachers' insecurities to teach writing, (c) teachers' desire for writing courses, (d) teachers' desire for examples of student writing and expectations, and (e) teachers' desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation programs.

Regarding RQ1, participants overwhelmingly felt unprepared and insecure when it came to writing instruction. Participants mentioned a lack of coursework and examples during their preparation programs. This lack of coursework and experience led to feelings of insecurities when teaching writing.

In reference to RQ2, participants spoke of the need for coursework to include explicit instruction in writing. These courses should include examples of student work, modeling, and experiences for the teacher candidates.

Writing is important in all aspects of the elementary classrooms. These teachers are expected to teach writing independently but also within all content areas. Participants

indicated that teacher preparation programs are not meeting this need and desire more emphasis on writing instruction. Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. Using semistructured interviews, I collected data from 10 first-year teachers in a state in the western United States. The themes that emerged during the analysis were (a) teachers feel unprepared to teach writing, (b) teachers feel insecure teaching writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program, (c) teachers desire for writing instruction courses to be included in their preparation programs., (d) examples of student writing and expectations need to be included in the writing courses, and (e) teachers desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation program. This study helped fill a gap in the research on teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing.

In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings and examine how the results furthers the understanding of the phenomenon. The findings will be compared to the literature in Chapter 2 as well as the conceptual framework. I will also explain the limitations of the study, provide recommendations for further research, and discuss the implications of the findings.

Interpretation of Findings

After obtaining IRB approval (#06-10-21-0759381) from Walden University, I started the data collection process. Ten semistructured interviews were conducted. I based the interpretations of the findings on data from these interviews, the literature review from Chapter 2, and the conceptual framework of Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy

theory and Vygotsky's (1978) theory of constructivism. I sought to answer two RQs: (a) What are teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school? and (b) What coursework do the teachers believe would have better prepared them to teach writing?

Theme 1: Teachers Feel Unprepared to Teach Writing.

Participants reported feeling unprepared to teach writing after completing their teacher preparation program. These results mirror the results from Risko and Reid (2019) who found that many teachers do not have access to high-quality teacher preparation programs that can increase their knowledge of writing instruction and intervention. The participating teachers noted that their programs did not prepare them to teach writing as they were not provided writing instruction courses.

Troia and Graham (2016) indicated a need for additional coursework to be offered for writing instruction. The courses that the participants in this study were provided with included writing but were often about the writing process and how to be successful as a college student rather than how to instruct writing. P2 stated, "But I don't think I had one [course] pertaining specifically to teaching writing." Participants noted that instructors would indicate that they should incorporate writing. However, the courses did not discuss how to teach others to write or to provide support when students were struggling.

Vygotsky (1978) discussed the importance of experiences to construct knowledge. The teachers in this study noted that they were not provided opportunities to take writing courses, learn different methods for writing instruction, observe writing lessons, write writing lessons, or teach writing lessons. In 2016, Brindle et al. found that 75% of

teachers did not feel as though their preparation program prepared to teach writing. Although my study had a smaller sample size, the percentage of participants who said they did not feel prepared was even greater at 100%. This indicates that in the 5 years since Brindle et al.'s study was published, preparation programs have not responded to the needs of preservice teachers. The lack of experiences to construct knowledge about writing instruction led to poor self-efficacy for writing instruction.

Teacher preparation programs are intended to prepare teachers to teach independently immediately upon completion (Clark & Newberry, 2019). CCSS include a strong focus on writing standards across all content areas (Kelly-Riley, 2017), yet the preparation programs do not prepare teachers for these tasks, according to researchers (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). My findings also indicate the same; P2 said, for instance, "I just didn't feel prepared."

Although the participants reported feeling prepared to teach subjects such as reading and math, they continued to report a lack of preparation for writing instruction. This focus on reading rather than literacy, as a whole, supports the research conducted by Troia et al. (2016). Studies such as Troia et al.'s continue to reflect the importance put on reading and a lack of importance for writing instruction. Standardized tests reflect this same lack of focus on writing, even though CCSS emphasize writing in all content areas as well as stand-alone standards (Kelly-Riley, 2017).

Theme 2: Teachers Feel Insecure Teaching Writing Upon Completion of Their Teacher Preparation Programs.

Although one participant stated that they felt decently prepared overall, none of the participants stated feeling secure about teaching writing. Self-efficacy contributes to a person's ability to perform a task, according to Bandura (1982). The participants in the study did not report having high self-efficacy for writing instruction. P2 stated,

So, I always feel a little insecure when writing or grammar time comes around and like school, and that is one subject that I myself take out of school a lot. And I read up and do research as much as I can just because that is the one that I'm less confident with.

These insecurities were reinforced by P3 who stated, "I think writing was definitely an area that I wanted to work on this year because I didn't feel as confident in it compared to some of the other subjects that I felt more equipped for." P4 said, "So right now, I would say that my ability to teach writing is pretty limited at this point." These sentiments were included in all of the interviews when discussing teaching writing. Zumbrunn et al. (2019) found that as teacher writing enjoyment increased, student writing enjoyment increased, writing self-regulation increased, and therefore writing grades increased. When teachers do not feel secure in their ability to teach writing, they are less likely to enjoy the process.

Vicarious experiences are also important for self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) found that if a person does not believe they can perform a certain action, then their knowledge does not influence their behavior. Therefore, if a teacher has the knowledge to understand

the importance of writing instruction but does not feel as though they can perform the action, they may not perform the action. Warren and Hale (2016) stated that teacher self-efficacy increased with vicarious experiences, such as watching a successful writing lesson. These teachers may not be as effective as writing instructors as they should be. According to Yilmaz (2020), when teachers have a low self-efficacy in writing it is difficult for them to transfer writing skills to their students.

Theme 3: Teachers Desire Writing Instruction Courses to be Included in Their Preparation Programs.

Participating teachers expressed a strong desire for writing courses within the teacher preparation programs. Of the 10 participants, only one stated that they attended a writing course. However, this course focused on only one writing instruction type and did not provide opportunities to teach writing or observation time for writing instruction in the elementary classroom. P3 took one writing course. However, she stated, “That one focused on a lot on doing Writer’s Workshop and giving kids a lot of free range to just write on their own.” Pedagogy and time are often missing in the limited writing courses available, according to Myers and Paulick (2020). This is reflected in the statements provided by participants in this study.

Participants noted that methods courses were offered for a variety of content areas. Math and reading were heavily emphasized while writing courses were not offered and were often not prioritized. Writing is an essential aspect of teaching. Du Plessis (2020) stated that teacher preparation programs should evaluate their ability to prepare teachers for all facets of teaching. Yet, the participants in this study reaffirmed the notion

that teacher programs are unable to provide that preparation. P1 stated, “I don’t think I had any specific writing lessons.” This is not only a lack of courses dedicated to writing but also suggests that writing was not included in literacy or content area courses either. Bandura (1982) categorized self-efficacy into four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Even knowing the importance of self-efficacy, the importance of self-efficacy, and how to achieve self-efficacy, these preservice teachers were not given the tools necessary to accomplish such levels in writing.

P3 indicated a desire for classes, “So, I feel like it would have helped more to have a little bit more classes on just the best methods for kids to use in different ways, instead of just focusing on this one method....” The focus on reading rather than literacy as a whole has continued throughout the years. Troia et al. (2016) found that this was leading to poor student performance in writing. Preparation programs are still not provided necessary coursework for teachers to be successful in the classroom. This study supports findings by Risko and Reid (2019) who found that, even though data support the need for high-quality preparation programs, many teachers do not encounter such programs.

Theme 4: Examples of Student Writing and Expectations Need to be Included in Writing Courses.

Not only did participating teachers desire writing courses, but they also expressed a desire to be provided with examples of student writing and expectations. Several participants noted that writing expectations are very different between kindergarten and

fifth grade. Not only do writing expectations vary by grade, but they also vary within each content area. The CCSS contain writing standards for every grade level and content area (Kelley-Riley, 2017). Wilcox et al. (2016) noted the shift from narrative writing to explanatory or persuasive writing as students progress through the grade levels.

Preservice teachers should have access to writing across grade levels and content areas.

The participants desired examples of how writing varied at every grade level. P9 asked to see kindergarten compared to first grade while P1 said, “I would love like to know what writing looks like in a fifth-grade classroom compared to a seventh-grade classroom compared to a first-grade classroom.” According to Bandura (1982), vicarious experience can increase a person’s self-efficacy as well. If teacher preparation programs, at minimum, provided preservice teachers with examples of student work and modeled the instruction for them, they might be able to increase self-efficacy.

Student writing examples would provide teachers with examples of what to expect from a typical student at that grade level. It would also provide them a target for their instruction. Going from letter formation to a five-paragraph essay requires several steps and growth over the years (Wang & Matsumura, 2018). Understanding how students progress through this process at each grade level would be beneficial. P4 stated, “So that’s kind of what I feel comfortable with is when I actually feel like I have a good model to go off of. And that’s kind of what helps me the most in my class.” Having models of student work or expectations would provide teachers with a starting point and an end goal. Ciampa and Gallagher (2018) found a positive correlation between coursework, field experiences and self-efficacy in writing instruction. Coursework and

field experiences provide opportunities to see student work in action and watch instruction is delivered while also supplying them with opportunities to instruct writing. Having never seen what writing should look like at each grade level makes it difficult to meet the standard.

Theme 5: Teachers Desire Experiences to Teach Writing During Their Preparation Program.

Teachers' desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation programs was echoed throughout the study. Participants spoke about the complexities of writing instruction. This was discussed by Kosnik (2018) when examining the importance of allowing preservice teachers to work with students in literacy. This would allow them to experience the complex processes involved with writing instruction. P1 stated,

But I experienced a lot this past year of students that would write one long sentence, and it would just be and, and, and, and so at the beginning of the year, it was okay, but then it was just a lot harder to teach them that, you know, they can't do that. I asked for five sentences; this is one. And so, it was really tricky and difficult to learn. And kind of adjust to what I can let slide and what I have to continue to teach and help them with. So, things like that were really, really tricky, especially with the different levels of kids that you can have.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory was supported by Clark and Newberry (2019), stating that mastery experience is the most influential aspect of self-efficacy, and these experiences impact teachers' self-efficacy. While the importance of experience to obtain mastery is supported by research throughout the years, the participants were provided

with little to no opportunity to teach writing in their preparation programs. P3 indicated that she was expected to teach some writing in her literacy and writing practicum. However, she stated, “That was pretty early on in my schooling. So, we were doing a lot of it was like observation. And then towards the end, we had to teach maybe like, two lessons. So, it wasn’t a lot of time.” Achieving mastery to increase self-efficacy and using experiences to construct knowledge is impossible with little time to practice the skills.

While self-efficacy is gained through experience, it is also important to construct knowledge through experience. Scholnik et al. (2016) discussed the importance of interacting with the environment to piece together knowledge. They found that knowledge is not passed directly from student to teacher. Experiences teaching writing while being supported by cooperating teachers and professors is highly valuable to preservice teachers. This lack of experience was noted by Milton-Kukner and Murray Orr (2018) when they found that even the preservice teachers that had literacy courses were unable to practice these strategies during student teaching because of a lack of support and time. In 2016, research by Lipp and Helfrich found when preservice teachers were able to participate in a writing course during field placement, their self-efficacy was increased depriving preservice teachers of the important experiences of interacting with writing lessons and students is depriving them of the ability to construct that knowledge.

Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations of this study included a lack of diversity. Using the snowball method resulted in participants that are in a similar location. This limited the variety of teacher preparation programs in which the participants were previously enrolled. The city

that the research was carried out in is not very diverse. Most teachers fall in the same category for race, gender, and age. According to a demographic survey information on the board of education website, the majority of first-teachers in this region are White women who are in their early to mid-20s. This led to a lack of diversity among participants. Efforts were made to find participants from different programs and with more diversity including different race, gender, and age.

To avoid bias, I encouraged complete honesty and attempted to make the participants as comfortable as possible. I explained the goal of the research to increase their comfort level as well. I have mentored several teachers during student teaching and I did not choose participants I previously mentored. Avoiding teachers that I work in close contact with also decreased the possibility of bias.

As a teacher, I began the research with my personal views and beliefs about teacher preparation programs. To maintain trustworthiness, I used a reflexive journal to avoid inferring biases. I used a secure document trail to increase dependability. All information shared with participants will be kept and secure. Transferability was addressed through thick descriptions to ensure that other researchers might be able to replicate the study in other locations. Approved research strategies were used, and the context was described.

Recommendations

This basic qualitative study examined teachers' perspectives of their ability to teach writing and coursework that was deemed helpful. The participants indicated that

they did not feel prepared to teach writing and found it difficult and a struggle. Participants attributed this lack of preparedness to the lack of coursework, student examples, and teaching opportunities that the universities provided for writing instruction. Participants indicated that they felt more prepared to teach other subjects and were presented with many opportunities to learn, observe, and teach in those subject areas.

I recommend an additional study that includes participants throughout the United States. Examining the experiences of additional participants on a larger scale may provide similar results or provide information on how to prepare teachers better. There have been several studies in the last five years that supply relevant data, but only on small scales. Most of the research found took place in 2016. While this data are helpful, more current and widespread data would be useful to ensure that the information is still accurate.

The second recommendation is to examine writing curriculum, professional development, and support for writing once teachers are in the classroom. Many teachers mentioned a lack of support and curriculum for writing. The CCSS make writing the center of all the standards, increasing the demand on time, and producing a wide variety of texts (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). This demand has not been met with adequate preparation and support for the teachers to implement. Myers et al. (2016) stated that neither preservice teachers nor current teachers are provided with the necessary support. My study finds that five years later this is still a problem.

The third recommendation is to include coursework specifically for writing instruction during teacher preparation programs. Participants mentioned a desire to see writing instruction modeled in a variety of ways, strategies to help struggling students, and experiences to teach writing. Lipp and Helfrich (2016) stated that when literacy classes, incorporating writing instruction, were paired with field experiences to observe and practice these skills that the preservice teachers developed a higher self-efficacy for writing instruction. These changes could help new teachers feel more prepared to teach writing when they step into their classrooms.

Implications

This study may contribute to positive social change by informing institutions of the need to better prepare teachers to teach writing upon leaving teacher preparation programs. Understanding the teachers' perspectives of their writing instruction ability may affect teachers and students by informing stakeholders on how to prepare better teachers to teach writing. Universities may develop coursework that focuses on writing instruction and increase experiences for preservice teachers.

Teachers in this study indicated that due to the lack of coursework and experiences in writing instruction, they did not feel prepared to teach writing in the elementary classroom. Vygotsky (1978) stated that knowledge is constructed through experiences, and this study found that the participants were not provided with the opportunities necessary to do so. High self-efficacy increases the likelihood of teachers persevering when faced with difficult tasks (Bandura, 1982). Without the necessary

experiences to construct the knowledge and build self-efficacy, these participants do not feel confident in their ability to teach writing.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school and identify coursework they deem useful for enhancing their abilities to teach writing. Limited research exists on teachers' perspectives of their ability to teach writing. Much research has been done in other content areas, but perspectives on writing instruction was limited. I interviewed 10 participants and examined their perspectives of their ability to teach writing after completing their teacher preparation course. Participants recommended changes to preparation programs that they felt would help future teachers prepare for writing instruction.

The themes that emerged during analysis were: (a) teachers feel unprepared to teach writing, (b) teachers feel insecure teaching writing upon completion of their teacher preparation program, (c) teachers desire for writing instruction courses to be included in their preparation programs, (d) examples of student writing and expectations need to be included in the writing courses, and (e) teachers desire for experiences to teach writing during preparation program. The findings in this study fill a gap in the research by increasing understanding of teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy to teach writing in the elementary classroom in a western state.

Teachers are entering classrooms with the expectation that they can teach the CCSS that are heavily saturated with writing expectations. The participants in this study

indicated that writing instruction was often not included in their coursework. Coursework that did include writing instruction was limited. There is limited research on teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy to teach writing and this study increases that knowledge. The results from this study may encourage institutions to change their coursework to include writing instruction and experiences for future teachers. These changes may produce teachers with higher self-efficacy in writing instruction.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

The study will be guided by the following two research questions: What are teachers' perspectives of their abilities to teach writing in elementary school? What do the teachers believe would have better prepared them to teach writing?

Demographics:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Grade taught
- Completion year for teacher preparation program

Questions:

1. Tell me how you teach writing in your classroom.
2. How much time do you teach writing in your classroom?
3. Do you incorporate writing in another way?
4. Is it contained to only a specific writing time?
5. Describe your perceptions about your ability to teach writing.
6. Tell me about the aspects that make you feel more comfortable about teaching writing. Can you give reasons for your answer?
7. What about those that make you feel uncomfortable. Can you give reasons for your answer?
8. Describe the extent to which specific writing instruction were included in courses during your teacher preparation program?

9. Were you given opportunities to teach writing in any of these courses? If so, how was that formatted? If not, what was the approach to writing instruction for the courses?
10. How was writing taught in regard to writing in multiple content areas?
11. How do you feel your teacher preparation program prepared you for teaching writing?
12. What do you suggest can be done in the teacher education program to improve preparation for teaching writing?