PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOURCES OF SELF-EFFICACY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

TEACHERS OF WRITING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jennifer Marlene Ludtke

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the perceptions of intermediate special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities rank at the bottom of national test scores for writing, resulting in a dire need for increased writing instruction (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011). Special education teachers may struggle to provide adequate writing instruction because of a lack of training, resources, support, or low self-efficacy (Graham, 2019; Hodges et al., 2019; Risko & Reid, 2019). Teacher self-efficacy influences student self-efficacy and positive student outcomes (Bandura, 1997). This study addressed the central research question relating to how special education teachers described the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy towards teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. A purposeful sampling of teachers participated in this study. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, audio journals, and online focus groups. Data was viewed through Bandura's theoretical framework of self-efficacy. Moustaka's (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of data analysis was applied. Data were initially read and reread through horizonalization and then coded using NVivo 12 qualitative research software. The following themes emerged: learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback. Special education teachers noted fewer experiences that developed high levels of self-efficacy toward teaching writing, creating a need for the development of teacher training and professional development opportunities specific for special education teachers for writing.

Keywords: self-efficacy, special education, teacher preparation, writing, students with learning disabilities, evidence-based practices

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my husband and children, without whom I would not have been able to complete this work. There have been countless days and nights that I have spent researching, interviewing, writing, and worrying over this dissertation. You have helped me through it all. Deena and Tyler, thank you for being "free-range children" these past few years and finding creative ways of getting to dance, swim, and lacrosse practice. I have often felt like I was missing out on watching you grow up but I am so thankful for the time you allowed me to have. I cannot wait to see what blessings God has in store for your futures. I have seen you both grow up to be gracious, caring, and thoughtful people. Thank you for making it easy to be a parent.

Drew, thanks for being there for all of us. Your willingness to keep my coffee cup filled, the kids occupied with endless bike rides, and a shoulder to lean on has carried me through. You have kept me focused and determined to stay the course and kill the snake. Thank you for allowing me to let some things go to focus on writing and for finding ways to make life easier for all of us. I would have never thought of pursuing this degree without you, and I am grateful that God has brought us together.

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I would like to acknowledge Dr. Battige for her encouragement throughout this process. There were several months that I did not have the finish line in focus, but you did, and I thank you for directing me toward it. Dr. Ryff, thank you for your comments and encouragement; I have been blessed by your thoughtfulness. Thank you both for you guidance and willingness to follow God's calling to support me.

I would also like to acknowledge the teachers that took time during a Pandemic to invest themselves into my life and allowed me to put an added burden of research on their plates. You did not have to, you were already overworked, but you took time to talk with me about what I was passionate about. Thank you for allowing me to interview you and for taking time to work with me, and thank you for all you do to support our students.

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are in this dissertation.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Institute of Education Sciences (IES)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Standards of Learning (SOL)

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

During the 2017-2018 school year, there were nearly seven million students with disabilities served in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Educational Science [IES], National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2020). Specific learning disabilities encompass 34% of all disability categories in school settings (IES, 2020). Students with specific learning disabilities are entitled to access the general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). Furthermore, these students are tied to the same rigorous standards as their same-aged, typically developing peers, including writing standards. However, the national report on writing stated that only five percent of eighth and twelfth-grade special education students performed at the proficient level in writing, while 29% of eighth and twelfth-grade general education students were performing at or above the proficient level (IES, 2011). Given that students with learning disabilities make up a significant portion of the public school student body and the low writing proficiency of this student population, special education teachers need to have the necessary skills to be successful as writing teachers.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) created policies that require special education teachers to "have a solid grounding in the liberal arts curriculum" (CEC, 2004, p. 7). Special education teachers should receive training in all curricular areas, including writing, so that they can either teach, co-teach, or provide the appropriate accommodations or modifications for students with disabilities (CEC, 2004). However, Bandura (1997) and Graham (2019) agree that the quality of instruction depends on the special educators' pedagogical knowledge of writing and efficacious beliefs toward teaching writing.

Decades of research on writing has lead Graham (2019) to conclude that students with learning disabilities are at a disadvantage in writing when they are instructed by teachers who are or feel they are inadequately prepared to teach writing. Researchers have agreed that teachers who receive purposeful training to teach writing have higher self-efficacy toward teaching writing (Brindle et al., 2016; Brock et al., 2017). Bandura (1997) postulated that higher self-efficacy correlates to an increase in the likelihood of teaching with evidence-based practices and increased student success. Additional research has shown a direct correlation between teacher self-efficacy and student success (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019; Pajares, 2003; Raymond West & Snodgrass Rangel, 2020). Furthermore, Raymond-West and Snodgrass Rangel (2020) found that teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to seek out new approaches and work through challenges that may occur when teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. However, the self-efficacy of special education teachers relating to teaching writing remains unknown.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of intermediate special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. Chapter One begins with the background of the study, including the historical, social, and theoretical contexts which form the foundation of the study. Following the disclosure of my philosophical assumptions, the problem, purpose statement, and significance of the study is presented along with the central research question and sub-questions. Chapter One concludes with the definitions used in the study, along with an overall summary of the information presented.

Background

The following section contains background on the historical context of special education and writing across America, including state and national writing assessment data expressing the need for further research on the perceptions of special education teachers who teach writing. The social context, citing the dire need for proficient writing skills from elementary through adulthood, is also explained. Finally, a brief review of the theoretical framework of this study will link Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy to teaching and writing.

Historical Context

How a society treats those that are weak and dependent is indicative of social progress (Winzer, 1993). As society changes its beliefs about people with disabilities, services and opportunities also change (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018). For centuries, people with disabilities were treated as inferior (Rossa, 2017). They were cast off, murdered, left to beg, or became entertainment (Winzer, 1993). Very few people considered people with disabilities as able to be educated (Rossa, 2017; Winzer, 1993). A gradual change began in the sixteenth century when Spain's wealthiest families finally began seeking education for their children who were deaf (Winzer, 1993).

Educational advances for people who were deaf and blind continued to evolve during the eighteenth century in France, Spain, and Germany, and by the end of the eighteenth century, Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard made an educational breakthrough with the idea of educating people with intellectual disabilities (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018; Winzer, 1993). Itard proved that people deemed intellectually or emotionally disabled and previously thought unable to learn, were indeed able to learn (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018). Edouard Seguin continued Itard's work toward understanding the capabilities of people with disabilities. Seguin believed in the importance of

understanding the strengths and weaknesses of a student to create an individualized learning program for children who were previously deemed unable to learn (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018). Sequin immigrated to the United States in 1948, where he helped establish the precursor of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018).

The creation of institutions to support people with disabilities emerged halfway through the nineteenth century, but despite a strong beginning, lack of funding, overcrowding, and stigma eroded the institutions created to provide support and education (Rossa, 2017). By the late 1800s and through the early 1900s, institutions that housed people with disabilities deteriorated and became places of isolation and neglect (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018; Winzer, 1993). However, the institution was not the only place where society was trying to support people with disabilities. The first compulsory education laws emerged in the U.S. in the mid-1800s, which made way for self-contained classrooms, separate classrooms within a public school, to help support the diverse student population (Osgood, 2008). The separate classrooms continued well into the twentieth century. Although a positive start for educating students with disabilities, self-contained classrooms continued to add stigma and isolation to many students with disabilities (Winzer, 1993).

Compulsory education laws were passed in all states by 1918, requiring all children to attend school (Swanson et al., 2013). Between 1947 and 1972, the number of students in special education programs in school rose by 716 percent because of the continued effort to educate all children (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018). Special education also evolved from self-contained classrooms to transforming into an educational program created specifically to meet the needs of an individual learner who has shown to have needs in academic, cognitive, behavior, or emotional areas that are significantly lower than the same-aged peers (Nuri et al., 2017). With

continued effort, the mid-1960s and 1970s brought about parent and researcher advocacy for students with learning disabilities as more notoriety of the disability came to light (Swanson et al., 2013). Finally, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was signed into law in 1975 by Gerald Ford, requiring schools to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities (Swanson et al., 2013).

With the rise of new legislation and stakeholder advocacy, the role of special education shifted from isolation to support, helping students with disabilities recognize and use their abilities to become productive members of society (Winzer, 1993). The deinstitutionalization of students with disabilities in the 1960s and 1970s began the movement for students with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, for inclusion in the general education setting (Swanson et al., 2013). The push for full inclusion gave rise to co-teaching in the 1990s, with general and special education teachers working together to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. Variations of the co-teaching model have remained a popular form of inclusion for students with disabilities (Swanson et al., 2013). Additionally, a variety of disability categories became widely accepted in public schools.

As early as the 1930s, it was believed that upwards toward 10% of school-aged children had some form of reading disability and promoted remedial practices in explicit phonics and blending instruction to help with reading and writing deficits (Swanson et al., 2013). According to the Society for Neuroscience (2020), about 80% of students identified with learning disabilities were identified as having reading or writing deficits. In 2003, the National Commission on Writing reported a lack of functional writing ability in graduating students and called for a shift in preparation of teachers and students in writing (National Commission on

Writing, 2003). The national writing project has spent the past 50 years promoting, training, and supporting students and teachers to become better writers (National Writing Project, 2019). Furthermore, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2015, includes writing as a component of increased rigor in educating all students (ESSA, 2015). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that have been adopted by over 40 states and the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) have specific writing components that require students to learn how to write across content areas (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Virginia Department of Education, 2019a). Despite attempts to increase awareness and add support for teachers of writing, teachers continue to struggle to teach writing, and students with learning disabilities continue to lack proficient writing skills (Graham, 2019; Myers et al., 2016).

Social Context

The social setting of a student, including personal beliefs, peers, and classroom environment, influences a students' writing (de Smedt et al., 2019; Wijekumar, Beerwinkle, et al., 2019). Langeberg (2019) suggested that writing helps students understand their thoughts, share their ideas, and experience the world. As students learn to write, they form beliefs about writing, themselves as writers, and the world around them (Wijekumar, Graham, et al., 2019). Wijekumar, Graham, and colleagues (2019) stated that these beliefs influence "how much effort is put forth and how fully children draw on available cognitive resources such as knowledge, fundamental writing skills, and the strategic processes needed to accomplish writing tasks successfully" (p. 1432). People use writing as a form of expression and communication every day, yet many struggle with fundamental writing skills such as correct capitalization and punctuation, grammar, and the writing process which includes strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing text (Daniels et al., 2019; Wijekumar, Graham, et al., 2019).

Outside factors also influence student writing, such as state standards and national government mandates (Wijekumar, Graham, et al., 2019). To help students become college and career ready, teachers must provide opportunities for students to not only learn the fundamentals of writing, but learn to become proficient writers inside and outside of school (Spencer & Petersen, 2018). Students must understand how to structure their writing, write in specific genres, and write for specific audiences so that they meet state standards and national mandates (Spencer & Petersen, 2018; Wijekumar, Graham, et al., 2019).

Although students must become competent writers in school, writing continues to be a struggle for students with learning disabilities (Graham, Liu, Aitken, et al., 2018). Numerous evidence-based strategies, such as providing time to write, explicit instruction in handwriting, spelling, writing mechanics, process writing, and teaching self-regulation in writing, have proven to increase writing ability and motivation for students with learning disabilities, yet research continues to be limited regarding how special education teachers feel about teaching writing (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Kiely, 2018; Wilcox et al., 2016). As national test scores continue to show minimal writing progress, it becomes imperative that special education teachers are prepared to teach writing and have high self-efficacy toward teaching writing to ensure the success of students with learning disabilities (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019).

A lack of teacher training may be part of the cause of low writing proficiency (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Curtis, 2017). Teacher preparation programs have historically spent more time teaching reading than writing (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Myers et al., 2016). Moreover, there continues to be a lack of research in special education teacher preparation for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities (Graham, 2019). Curtis (2017) suggests that underprepared teachers can face the same challenges as novice teachers, often leading to trial and error to

become master teachers. The difficulty in learning to teach writing can lead to lower self-efficacy because teachers may not feel they know how or what to teach for writing (Graham, 2019). Teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy as writers because of their own quality experiences may be better teachers of writing (Stites et al., 2018).

The stress and burnout rate of special education teachers also plays a role in the effectiveness and self-efficacy of special education teachers (Langher et al., 2017). Teachers working with the neediest students face burnout more frequently (Nuri et al., 2017). Teacher burnout becomes an issue for special education teachers because of the emotional demand for teaching students with disabilities (Langher et al., 2017). Further, Langher and colleagues (2017) found that students with disabilities often need significant support, resulting in increased special education workload and higher burnout rates among special education teachers. Curtis (2017) argued that as teacher shortages continue to rise while the writing proficiency of students with disabilities remains at under 10%, it becomes imperative that teachers are thoroughly prepared in all academic areas. Preparation can increase confidence in teaching abilities, which can increase self-efficacy, reduce teacher burnout, and provide better support for students (Curtis, 2017; Lombardo-Graves, 2017).

Theoretical Context

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's abilities to organize, execute, and accomplish a task, forms the structure of this study (1977; 1997). Efficacious beliefs help individuals determine what they will do with the knowledge they have (Pajares, 2003). Bandura (1997) believed that there would be little desire to act if people did not believe they could be successful. Thus, Bandura postulated that self-efficacious beliefs determine how much effort, time, and resistance to obstacles an individual has when pursuing a task. According to

Bandura's theory, individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more willing to attempt a variety of tasks or try inventive ways to accomplish a task than individuals with lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, those with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to view difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) believed that individuals with a lower sense of self-efficacy would be less likely to put effort into tasks they think they would not be successful in and would be more resistant to attempting new tasks. Research suggests that teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to have positive impacts on student learning (Bandura, 1997; Hodges et al., 2019). However, writing research has indicated that many teachers have a lower sense of self-efficacy because they are ill-equipped to teaching writing, especially to students with disabilities (Graham, 2019).

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is developed through four main sources, as shown in Figure 1.1, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological and affective states. Enactive mastery experiences build efficacious feelings from taking on challenging tasks and either succeeding or failing (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) suggested that results from enactive mastery experiences have the most influence over self-efficacy.

Vicarious experiences influence self-efficacy through a person's observations of others engaging in tasks that are "either intentionally or unintentionally being modeled" (Saine & West, 2017, p. 70). Vicarious experiences are based on inferential comparisons and are not as influential as enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). However, Bandura (1997) and Pajares (2003) agreed that observing role models or others who have been successful at a similar task as the observer, and making social comparisons, can increase a person's self-efficacy.

Like vicarious experiences, social persuasions influence self-efficacy beliefs but are not as influential as enactive mastery experiences (Saine & West, 2017). According to Bandura (1997), confidence in a task may develop when they are told that they can accomplish it through interactions that include coaching or constructive feedback. Constructive feedback provided by a trusted and respected individual can build efficacious beliefs, while feedback provided through an untrusted source will cause little effect on one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Physiological and affective states include the mental wellbeing of the self, such as anxiety, stress, or excitement, and influence self-efficacy, though not as significantly as enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Heightened negative states such as high anxiety, exhaustion, or fear can decrease the sense of self-efficacy, cause weakened task performance, and has a more powerful impact on self-efficacy than positive physiological or emotional states (Bandura, 1977).

Figure 1.1

Origins of Self-Efficacy
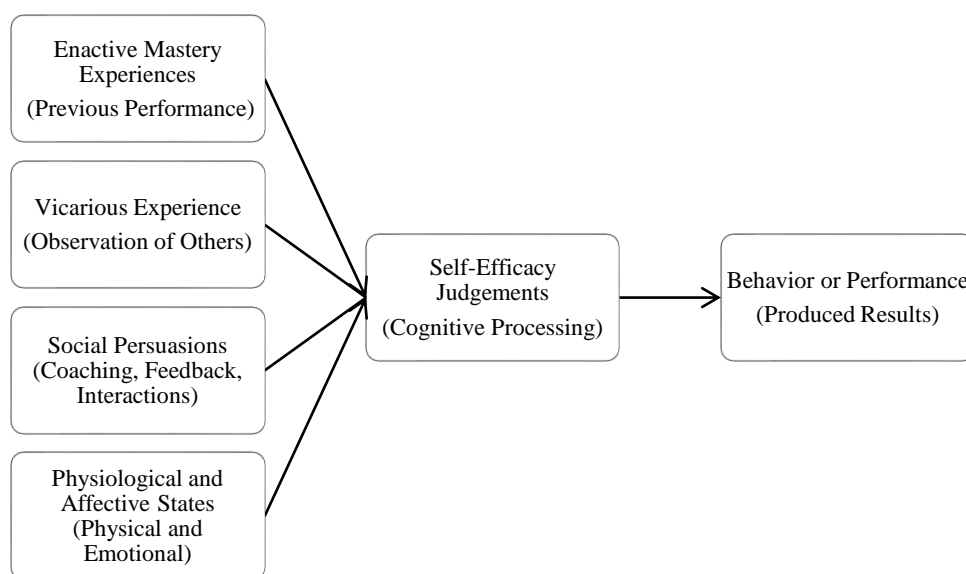
Note. Origins of Self-Efficacy Beliefs adapted from Bandura (1997) and Hodges et al. (2019).

The development of efficacious beliefs occurs through cognitively processing all four sources of self-efficacy and determining the weight and level of integration each source receives (Bandura, 1997). Information gleaned from the sources of self-efficacy has the potential to produce efficacious beliefs when integrated with previous experiences (Bandura, 1997). By understanding which activities teachers believe influence the development of their self-efficacy, schools can provide better training for those who work with students with disabilities.

Situation to Self

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it is important to situate my philosophy and theoretical assumptions into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I am an elementary special education teacher with an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in special education. My coursework, ongoing professional development, collaborative opportunities, and teaching experiences have influenced how I view writing instruction. I have been working with students with learning disabilities for many years and have seen an increased need to teach writing.

I realized that although I felt adequately prepared to make modifications to the curriculum, write Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and support students socially and emotionally, I struggled with teaching writing. Many of my students came to me with IEP goals that focused on writing, and I had little experience and no pedagogy for writing to support my students. Being in a rural school district, I did not have opportunities for professional development in writing, which necessitated researching on my own. As I began to construct my pedagogy for teaching writing, I wondered if other special education teachers faced the same problems that I do. I believe that there is not enough focus put on teacher training in writing, nor

is there enough time spent on learning to write and teaching writing, thus creating a nation that cannot write.

I situate my teaching and learning styles in the social constructivist format, understanding that the creation of meaning will occur through collaboration with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research for this study also aligns with the constructivist paradigm. The philosophy behind constructivism is that understanding is constructed through personal experiences and interactions with the world and upon reflection of those experiences (Adom et al., 2016). Individual experimentation, success, and failure lead to knowledge (Doğru & Kalender, 2007). Constructivism was appropriate for this study because it was the individual experiences and perspectives of special education teachers of writing that were being described. The participants' views of how their self-efficacy is built was vital to understanding their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, the interactions with the participants were an important aspect of this research. I also bring with me my background and experiences and understand that the interpretation of the experiences of the participants will be influenced by my personal beliefs, background, and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Holding to such beliefs, I will applied the following epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions to this research study.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, how knowledge is created, and how knowledge is distributed (Steup & Neta, 2020). A classic question in epistemology is, how do we know what we know? (Dillon & Wals, 2006). I assumed that knowledge is individually constructed through personal and observable experiences and social interactions. Additionally, I assumed that knowledge and experience are unique to each person, and knowledge constructed was different

for each person. Because I believe knowledge is constructed, I treated each participants' experiences as valuable to the understanding of the phenomenon.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions are ideas that one believes to exist and are true (Hofweber, 2018). Ontology refers to the "nature of reality" (Dillon & Wals, 2006, p. 550). My ontological assumptions relating to this study included my belief that God has created all people in His image and has given man free will (Genesis 1:27, English Standard Version). While I believe there is only one God, because of free will and the fall of man, people are allowed to make their own decisions regarding what they believe to be true, and not all people believe the same way I do. I acknowledge that my beliefs vary greatly from what others believe and that there are varying beliefs of what is truth in the world. My perception of truth may not be the same as my participants. I have respected the views of my participants, knowing that they have been created by God and are highly valued by Him (Luke 12:24, ESV).

Axiological Assumptions

Axiology is the study of values, ethics, and why the study should occur (Dillon & Wals, 2006). I have addressed axiological assumptions in this study by providing my background and biases that I brought to the study. Although I participated in the process of Epoché, or bracketing, Moustakas (1994) understood that a researcher could not fully separate all biases. The research and researcher are value-laden, and though I separated myself as best I could to provide a pure interpretation, some of my values and biases may have influenced the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, I believe that all people have value and should be allowed to be heard. My epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions align with the goal of this research.

Problem Statement

Students with learning disabilities are not progressing in writing as well as their same-aged peers. (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Myers et al., 2016; Wehmeyer et al., 2017). Brenner & McQuirk (2019) recognized that a child's ability to write directly supports reading, including decoding and word recall skills, as well as supports civic engagement as writing encourages the development of ideas and ability to communicate those ideas. Becoming a proficient writer is important because articulating thoughts and communicating with others is a vital skill in school and society. There is extensive research available on effective practices to teach writing to students with learning disabilities (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Ciullo & Mason, 2017; Toste & Ciullo, 2017; Gillespie & Graham, 2014). However, there continues to be a lag between evidence-based practices and implementation of those practices in the classroom, especially with students who have disabilities (Graham, 2019; Markelz et al., 2017; Troia, 2019).

Researchers have also agreed that there is a high correlation between student success and teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Hodges et al., 2019). Bandura's theory of self-efficacy suggests that highly efficacious teachers will be more likely to utilize evidence-based instructional practices, seek to support and build student self-efficacy, and attempt novel ways to support student learning than teachers with lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Bruning & Kauffman, 2015; Fenty & Uliassi, 2018; Lombardo-Graves, 2017; Pajares, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The problem is that special education teachers' perceptions regarding the experiences that influence the development of their self-efficacy toward teaching writing remain unknown.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the perceptions of intermediate special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with learning disabilities who reside in rural central Virginia. At this stage in the research, phenomenological perceptions are defined as the study of personal experiences through the individual's eyes (Moustakas, 1994). The perceptions of teachers' self-efficacy was analyzed through the lens of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which defines self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to organize, execute, and accomplish a task (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, the sources of self-efficacy include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977). Teaching writing included the following key elements of writing: taking time to write, basic mechanics and conventions such as handwriting, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, process writing, which includes planning, drafting, editing, and publishing, and writing for different audiences (Graham, 2019; Spear-Swerling, 2006). Intermediate grades were defined as grades four through six.

Significance of the Study

This research iss significant because students with learning disabilities continue to fall drastically behind their peers as writers despite the requirement of writing in federal and state standards and as a life-long skill (Brindle et al., 2016; Graham, 2019; Saddler et al., 2018; Toste & Ciullo, 2017; Troia, 2019). This research attempted to fill the gap in addressing the perceptions that special education teachers have regarding the experiences that influence their efficacious beliefs toward teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. The practical, empirical, and theoretical significance of the study are included next.

Practical Significance

As state and federal mandates require proficient writers, this study may encourage stakeholders to examine how districts are promoting teacher self-efficacy as teachers prepare student-writers (Graham, 2019; Stites et al., 2018). With the continued need for quality special education instruction and the continued low performance in writing among special education students, teachers, building administrators, school districts, and teacher preparation programs may find value in this study. Understanding what promotes high self-efficacy in special education teachers can provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to work together to build a community that supports self-efficacy within the school. Higher teacher self-efficacy can have positive impacts on students and help create positive relationships between schools and families (Bandura, 1997; Brenner & McQuirk, 2019).

Considering the sources of self-efficacy in teachers would allow district leaders to create training programs that would target the development of efficacious beliefs. Additionally, teacher preparation programs could use this study to develop classes and resources that align with the needs of the teacher and end programs that fail to support teacher self-efficacy (Fenty & Uliassi, 2018). Additional teacher support and training could help reduce stress and potential burnout, resulting in increased job satisfaction and teacher retention (Langher et al., 2017).

Empirical Significance

Numerous researchers have called for an increase in research in teacher preparation for teaching writing (Brennen & McQuirk, 2019; Curtis, 2017; Myers et al., 2016). Bruning and Kauffman (2015) suggested a need for further research in writing and self-efficacy, citing that "a greater emphasis on writing self-efficacy can be an important step forward for writing instruction" (p. 166). Bruning and Kauffman (2015) continued, "we need to know more about

how teachers' writing skills and self-efficacy, identities as writers, comfort with teaching writing, and outcomes expected for writing affect their teaching practices" (p. 169). This study will add to the literature foundation regarding the development of efficacious beliefs in special education teachers relating to teaching writing. Information in this study can help future researchers in the areas of self-efficacy, special education, teacher retention, and teaching writing to students with disabilities (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019).

Theoretical Significance

This study will expand upon Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy as teacher self-efficacy directly relates to student self-efficacy and success. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy has been widely researched and applied in the fields of education and writing (Graham, 2019; MacArthur et al., 2016). However, Graham (2019) suggested that research regarding the development and perceptions of the self-efficacy of special education teachers of writing is limited. Researching special education teacher self-efficacy can provide insight on ways to build the self-efficacy of special education teachers and students in the classroom (Langher et al., 2017). This study will add a component to the self-efficacy theory that can be utilized by future researchers.

<div align="center">

Research Questions

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The following research questions will guide this study.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions of intermediate special education writing teachers regarding the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy?

Four sources influence the development of self-efficacy: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997).

Teachers with higher self-efficacy toward teaching writing are more likely to continue teaching despite setbacks, use evidence-based research strategies, and provide additional support for struggling or unmotivated writers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Therefore, researchers need to understand how the development of self-efficacy is taking place.

Sub-Question One

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their past experiences with teaching writing?

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy states that enactive mastery experiences are the most significant source of self-efficacy. Past experiences as a student learning to write, preservice training, and other experiences can promote or discourage feelings of self-efficacy (Hodges et al., 2019). Curtis (2017) suggested that teachers with high self-efficacy as writers themselves feel empowered and are better able to support struggling writers.

Sub-Question Two

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their vicarious experiences of teaching writing?

Bandura (1977) stated that self-efficacy is developed through observing and learning from others who are more knowledgeable than oneself. Viewing the success or failure of someone in a similar situation can positively or negatively influence self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). When reflecting upon vicarious experiences, Neubauer et al. (2019) state the importance of learning from others to "discover information or to achieve a new understanding" (p. 91). Curtis (2017) found that modeling writing strategies promoted self-efficacy in kindergarten teachers. Thus, understanding how special educators experience the development of self-efficacy through mentoring, professional development, or observing other teachers in similar situations

and making judgments of personal success can help create a deeper understanding of special educators' self-efficacy.

Sub-Question Three

How do intermediate special education teachers describe the verbal feedback given to them regarding their writing pedagogy?

Receiving verbal feedback from a trusted source influences self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1997), positive feedback can influence a teacher's willingness to continue through challenging tasks. Additionally, positive feedback influences the amount of effort a teacher may utilize to develop their writing pedagogy and utilize evidence-based writing strategies (Ciullo & Mason, 2017; Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018; McLesky et al., 2019).

Sub-Question Four

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their physical and emotional states as they teach writing?

Emotional arousal occurs with every experience a person has, regardless of how minimal the experience (Bandura, 1977). Each physical or emotional state can have a positive or negative influence on the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Teachers who feel valued and are provided the resources they need to complete their job cite higher job satisfaction, are more likely to have higher self-efficacy, and are more willing to use a variety of evidence-based strategies to support student learning (Nuri et al., 2017).

Definitions

1. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy is one's perceptions of the ability to complete a skill or task (Bandura, 1997).

2. *Individualized Education Program (IEP)* – An IEP is the program designed by a team that explains the instruction, supports, and services a student needs to make progress in the school environment (IDEA, 2004).

3. *Evidence-based practices* – Evidence-based practices are strategies that have been found to have strong evidence of success using rigorous trials (MacArthur et al., 2016).

4. *Learning Disability* – A manifestation of an educationally significant difference between academic potential and actual performance not due to an intellectual disability, cultural or educational deprivation, or environmental factors. This disability is manifested "by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities" (Swanson et al., 2013, p. 26).

Summary

There is a gap in the research related to understanding the factors that support special educators' self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore those factors and provide a voice for special education teachers. Understanding the factors that contribute to the development of special education teachers' self-efficacy toward teaching writing will help stakeholders find ways to support special education teachers of writing and will add to the research base relating to writing, special education, and self-efficacy. Additionally, this study extends Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to special education teachers of writing. The following chapter will delve deeper into the four sources of self-efficacy, writing, and teaching.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review reflects upon the research behind teaching and writing using the lens of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Writing is required across all subjects and carries into life-long practices (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019; Graham, Collins, & Rigby-Wills, 2017). Teachers trained to teach writing have higher self-efficacy toward teaching writing, which correlates to higher student success (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019; Brindle et al., 2016). Chapter Two provides the theoretical framework used in this transcendental phenomenological study. Current research on writing will be discussed, including the challenges students with learning disabilities face when learning to write. Finally, teacher training for teaching writing and teacher self-efficacy will be examined.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy creates the theoretical framework surrounding special education teachers' perceptions of the sources of self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. Self-efficacy, an element of Bandura's social cognitive theory, is the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). These beliefs influence the courses people chose to take, the amount of effort willingly allotted to a given undertaking, perseverance despite obstacles, positive thoughts and self-talk, the amount of stress or depression experienced, and the success of the undertaking (Demirtaş, 2018). Bandura (1997) postulated that the formation of efficacious beliefs came from four main sources: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Figure 2.1 provides

examples of the sources of self-efficacy. All sources influence the creation or stunting of efficacious beliefs, although some sources have more influence over the development of self-efficacy than others (Bandura, 1977). As self-efficacy develops, it gives people a level of "control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Pajares, 2003, p. 139). Further, as sources of self-efficacy are deemed more dependable, those sources are more likely to have significant impacts of efficacious beliefs (Bandura, 1977).

Figure 2.1

Sources of Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Self-Efficacy

Enactive Mastery Experience	Vicarious Experiences	Verbal Persuasion	Physiological Feedback
• Previous Successes and Failures • Overcoming obstacles through perseverance • Produces the strongest form of efficacy beliefs	• Observing the performance of a mentor or master in the craft • Modeling • Comparing onself with others	• Feedback from a performace task • Realistic Praise • Constructive Critisizm	• Somatic Indicators • Strength/Stamina • Emotions/Stress/Anxiety Levels

Note. Sources of Self-Efficacy Beliefs adapted from Bandura (1997).

Enactive Mastery Experiences

Enactive mastery experiences are the most persuasive sources of efficacious beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Successful performance experiences occur through sustained effort and perseverance through achievement and obstacles (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Bandura (1997) postulated that successes that occur with little effort with not create a sustainable sense of

self-efficacy because when an obstacle takes extended effort, a person is more likely to become frustrated and give up. Conversely, people who experience only easy successes will expect quick and simple results and will become frustrated by obstacles or failures (Bandura, 2012). Bandura (1997) suggested that facing challenging obstacles and finding ways to overcome them would be more likely to produce long-standing efficacious behaviors. Reflecting upon mastered experiences will help individuals when facing harder challenges in the future (Morris et al., 2017).

Bandura (1997) continued that "it is not necessarily the performance success or failure that builds self-efficacy, but what that performance reflects about the persons' effort and capability" (p. 81). Mastering a challenging task may reveal aspects of a person that produces results, and rather than increasing self-efficacy may have the opposite effect, even when the task was completed successfully (Bandura, 1997). People with high self-efficacy believe their failures are caused by a lack of effort or external factors, while people with low self-efficacy attribute failure to their inability to complete the task (Morris et al., 2017). Additionally, if success occurred through significant effort, a person's efficacy may cause them, in the future, to put less effort into a difficult task (Bandura, 1997). Further, Bandura suggested that success at seemingly easy tasks yields little effect on self-efficacy, but failure at a simple task can have a devastating effect on the development of self-efficacy.

The development of self-efficacy through enactive mastery experiences is influenced by the bias of self-monitoring the performance (Bruning & Kauffman, 2015). Factors such as physical, mental, and emotional states, context, and situation affect the perception of the quality of the performance (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, how an individual remembers the previous experience will help build or tear down efficacious feelings (Arcelay-Rojas, 2018). For example,

Bandura (1997) suggested that if poor performance is remembered more often, efficacious growth may be stunted. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) proposed that efficacious beliefs built through mastery performance take time. People will experience success, failure, setbacks, obstacles, and bursts of success as they maneuver through mastery (Bandura, 1997). People who experience a series of successes and failures but see growth will be more efficacious than those who see their performance as gradual or leveling off (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

Vicarious Experience

Although mastery experience can help promote the efficacy for individual attainments, such as judging the success of a one mile run by running faster each time for many activities, judgments of attainment must be assessed in relation to the attainment of others because there are no concrete measures for competence (Bandura, 1997). In this way, vicarious experience, or social comparison, acts as a factor in self-assessment (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences influence self-efficacy by providing opportunities for individuals to see people similar to themselves perform a task, and through perseverance, find success (Bandura, 2012). People often compare themselves to each other in school, work, and athletics. When people perceive themselves as having a comparable ability level with their peers, visualizing or seeing someone succeed at a task will raise the self-efficacy of the observer (Capa-Aydin et al., 2018). The more similarly people perceive themselves to the performer, the more likely the success or failure of the performance will influence the self-efficacy of the observers (Bandura, 1997).

Modeling is the main tool through which vicarious experiences influence self-efficacy (Saine & West, 2017). People actively seek out models as someone to look up to or to whose skills they may aspire to possess (Morris et al., 2017). Bandura (1997) suggested that models with a high sense of self-efficacy portray positive self-talk, confidence, and determination in the

face of difficult situations. Often, models can teach already highly-efficacious people to change if they have viewed better ways of doing something (Raymond-West & Snodgrass Rangel, 2020). Although direct experiences are stronger influences on self-efficacy than vicarious experiences, modeling can supersede direct experiences if the vicarious experiences more fully align with the self-concept of the person (Bandura, 1997). If a person fails at a task but sees another succeed, the person who failed may use strategies learned through the modeled behavior and perceive future success (Bandura, 1997).

Observing failure and upward comparison also impacts the development of self-efficacy. Observing failure can promote self-efficacy when the observer notices the failure but realizes the skills they have may produce success in a similar situation (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Additionally, Bandura (1997) suggested that observing others who are highly successful but incompatibly comparable to oneself may not produce higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, Bandura being outperformed by those with a greater ability or outperforming those with a lesser ability will have little positive or negative effect on self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

Finally, building efficacious beliefs through vicarious experiences can be successfully done through modeling mastery or coping experiences (Bandura, 1997). Mastery modeling involves viewing a model who calmly and flawlessly completes a task. Mastery models may talk through each step to explain what they are doing (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Coping modeling is observing a model who may begin with struggles but completes the task successfully through utilizing coping strategies and trial and error (Bandura, 1997). Mastery models can build self-efficacy through observing flawless task completions while coping models can help build self-efficacy while instilling perseverance (Bandura, 1997). People need both types of models to build self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Social Persuasion

Social persuasion is also a method that builds self-efficacy (Raymond-West & Snodgrass Rangel, 2020). Self-efficacy is easier to sustain and increase when significant others express faith in the ability of the person completing the task (Bandura, 1977). However, providing unrealistic verbal feedback can undermine the recipient's beliefs and discredit the significant other (Bandura, 1997). Usher & Pajares (2008) suggested that encouraging people that they can achieve has less impact on self-efficacy than expressing doubt. Often poor performance is greeted with harsh criticism that provides little constructive feedback on how to improve performance (Bandura, 1997). Harsh criticism can undermine beliefs in oneself. However, Arcelay-Rojas (2018) found that constructive feedback on poor performance could help provide a renewed sense of self-efficacy and determination to continue trying. Unrealistic advances in self-efficacy are undermined quickly when the performer fails to succeed at a task, while action upon inflated efficacious beliefs quickly reveals actual capabilities (Bandura, 1997). However, providing feedback to an individual that persuades that person that they are not capable of performing will cause the individual not to attempt challenging tasks or to give up quickly when facing challenges (Bandura, 1997).

Similar to enactive mastery experiences, a person's self-appraisal influences the perceived quality of the feedback given by others (Bandura, 1997). If the performer believes their self-appraisal to be a more accurate judge of success, they will pay little attention to the feedback given by an observer. As a source of self-efficacy, social persuasion is best used to promote the success of skills just out of reach of the performer when provided with "specific and sincere" verbal feedback (Morris et al., 2017, p. 798).

Physiological and Affective States

Physiological and affective states also affect perceived self-efficacy. Positive and negative physical and emotional responses influence the development of self-efficacy (Morris et al., 2017). Physical responses in a stressful or taxing situation are often perceived as indicators of vulnerability or potential ability to succeed (Saine & West, 2017). However, situational factors and the meaning ascribed to those factors influence physiological reactions (Bandura, 1997). For example, a public speaker may be sweating due to nervous expression or the temperature in the room. Physiological experiences of "arousal come from environmental elicitors expressive reactions, and social labeling" (Bandura, 1997, p. 107). Because internal arousal cannot be interpreted through social labeling, the three factors must combine, and through experience, become labeled.

Affective experience and emotions become interpreted and differentiated through the continuous cycle of situational internal arousal (Bandura, 1997). High achieving people find arousal to be advantageous and stimulating, while low-achieving people find arousal to be limiting and debilitating. **"Efficacy beliefs are strengthened by reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength and stamina, and correcting the misreading of physical and emotional states" (Bandura, 2012, p. 13). Physiological and affective states are not as strong of an indicator of ability as mastery experiences or social comparisons (Bandura, 1986). As the four sources combine to create self-efficacy, varying weight is given to each for each unique situation. Every experience differs, yet are interrelated and co-reliant.

Efficacious beliefs are developed through the cognitive processing of all four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Through cognitive processing, varying weights are given to each source of self-efficacy for each specific experience. In some instances, efficacy developed through past experiences may be drawn upon, while in different instances, efficacy beliefs

formed through social persuasion may be necessary. Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs are specific for each task (Pajares et al., 2007). For example, a person may have a high sense of self-efficacy toward running a 5K, but have low self-efficacy toward running 100 meters.

Summary

The development of efficacious beliefs influences how people make decisions and carry out tasks (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2019). People with high self-efficacy are more willing to look for alternative ways to gain preferred outcomes and stick to them despite not seeing immediate results (Bandura, 1997). Because self-efficacy deals with perceived ability to complete a task, what a person thinks directly affects their capacity for achievement (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Perceived self-efficacy can predict the goals and levels of attainment for activities a person wishes to pursue (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy is a strong indicator of why there are behavioral differences despite people having similar knowledge. People with low self-efficacy will give up when they see that their attempts at a task do not produce the desired results (Bandura, 1997). Contrarily, people with higher self-efficacy will change their approach and try again in difficult tasks (Usher & Pajares, 2008). For example, two people may have a similar skill set, yet one person outperforms the other because he believed he could perform the task while the other person doubted his ability to complete the task. Additionally, efficacious people have been found to set goals that are more challenging and are more willing to try another approach when faced with setbacks (Yough, 2019).

Self-Efficacy in Schools

Self-efficacy plays an essential role in motivation and achievement for both teachers and students (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2018; Shunk, 2016). For students, school is a critical place to

develop self-efficacy skills (Bandura, 1997). However, Bandura (1997) suggested that some schools fail students by undermining the development of efficacious behaviors that support self-development. Schools are designed to support the average functioning student, but are often ill-equipped to support the needs of struggling or low-achieving students (Bandura, 1997). Students may perform poorly in school either because they lack the skills necessary for success or because although they have the skills, they lack the perceived self-efficacy to access the skills (Bandura, 1997). Perceived self-efficacy is also reduced for children who are tracked into lower-level courses where less is expected of them and where the achievement gap between them and their peers widens (Bandura, 1997). The resulting low-achieving students, in turn, grind down the efficacy of teachers, creating a cycle of low efficacious behaviors (Bandura, 1997).

Teachers play a vital role in the development of self-efficacy in students, especially for students who struggle in school (Bandura, 1997). The choices that teachers make, including classroom practices and strategies to encourage student development, are, in part, determined by a teacher's self-efficacy (Mahler et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Students, especially young students, learn more from teachers who believe in themselves and their students than from teachers who struggle with self-doubt (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy believe that challenging students or students that struggle in academics are teachable (Bandura, 1997). Researchers have also suggested that teachers with high self-efficacy positively influence students, especially those with disabilities, and have positive attitudes toward collaboration with other teachers and staff members (Stites et al., 2018). Teachers with high self-efficacy look for alternative ways to teach challenging or struggling students rather than blaming them for their lack of learning (Bandura, 1997). Further, teacher self-efficacy is a "significant predictor of student achievement" (Shunk, 2016, p. 149). Teacher self-efficacy influences efforts to create a

structured, goal-orientated, challenging classroom environment (Greco et al., 2018; Shunk, 2016). Teachers with lower self-efficacy are quicker to give up on challenging students, spend less time on academic tasks, and spend time criticizing students' abilities (Bandura, 1997; Langeberg, 2019).

Job satisfaction has also been found to correlate to feelings of self-efficacy (Infurna et al., 2018). Teacher efficacy can diminish due to strains in the workplace (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with low self-efficacy who face fatigue, emotional strain, or depersonalization may be unable to cope with their situations and become burned out (Bandura, 1997). However, teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to search for ways to manage school strains and solve problems, leading to success in the classroom and better support for students (Bandura, 1997; Mahler et al., 2017; Raymond-West & Snodgrass Rangel, 2020). Furthermore, the support of highly efficacious school leaders can enhance teacher and student self-efficacy. In highly efficacious schools, at-risk or low-achieving students are provided supports that encourage them to decrease the achievement gaps and resume regular classroom participation (Bandura, 1997). Highly efficacious school leaders support their teachers by finding and encouraging the use of evidence-based practices that are proven to support student learning (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy provides the foundation of this study, as self-efficacy influences all aspects of teaching and learning. This phenomenological study seeks to understand how the participants interpret the sources of self-efficacy so that stakeholders can provide the support teachers and students need to be successful. An in-depth review of writing, teaching, and the influences of self-efficacy on learning to write and teaching writing are provided next.

Related Literature

There has been an abundance of research relating to writing and supporting the writing of students with learning disabilities over the past several years (Graham, 2019). Additionally, with the struggle to retain special education teachers, there has been an increase in research relating to special education teacher preparation (Bruno et al., 2018). There is, however, limited research relating to the self-efficacy of special education teachers as it relates to teaching writing. This literature review reflects upon the writing deficits nation-wide, the writing needs of students with learning disabilities, evidence-based practices for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities, the training teachers receive, including training to teach writing, and how self-efficacy influences all aspects of learning to write and teaching writing.

Writing

The National Center on Improving Literacy (2018) defines literacy as the ability to read and write well. A literacy-rich environment is a place that encourages reading and writing, such as listening to stories read aloud, reading together, talking about ideas, and creating written responses (Wijekumar, Graham, et al., 2019). As a component of literacy, writing is a skill that challenges students across all academic and social settings (Graham, 2019; Hodges et al., 2019). Writing is used in everyday life for academics, leisure, and work as people communicate through social media, text messaging, and email (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019; Graham, Liu, Aitken, et al., 2018). The National Commission on Writing explained that writing is "how students connect the dots in their knowledge" (College Entrance Examination Board, 2003, p. 3). Writing supports learning across all academic areas as students are often required to create written responses to prove their understanding in science, math, social studies, and the arts (Graham, 2019). The ability to create ideas and articulate them in writing is a foundational skill utilized

across every academic subject and is required from pre-school stretching into adulthood (Bandura, 1997; Harris & Graham, 2013). School-focused writing is essential for learning, future life success, and a necessary form of expressing what is known (Rosário et al., 2019). When students lack necessary writing skills, it hinders their ability to meet their "educational, occupational, or personal potential" (Harris & Graham, 2013, p. 66).

Graham (2019) explained that there are many facets to writing that are influenced by federal, state, and local expectations that vary greatly from one another, causing discrepancies in how writing standards are interpreted and followed. However, according to Graham (2019), general writing guidelines include two levels: macro and micro. On the macro level, writing involves frequency, writing for real and made-up purposes, providing support and motivation for student-writers, and connecting writing, reading, and learning. Federal guidelines such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) drive the macro-level writing expectations. On the micro-level, with influences from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other state standards such as the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), evidence-based practices in basic writing skills such as handwriting, spelling, typing, sentence structure, learning about different types of text, characteristics of good written expression, and vocabulary are suggested (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Graham, 2019). Additionally, instruction in process writing, including planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and publishing as well as peer work, feedback, self-regulation, and differentiation, all play significant roles in the micro-level of writing instruction (Graham, 2019). Although numerous standards address writing skills, there is little guidance on how writing should be taught, leaving it to districts to interpret and design writing programs. Unfortunately, the inconsistency in writing guidelines and instruction across the U.S. has caused a deficit in the writing abilities of U.S. students.

The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) results for 2011 stated that only 27% of students in grades 8 and 12 met the proficiency standards while only 5% of students with disabilities in grades 8 and 12 met proficiency standards. (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011). Ciullo and Mason (2017) suggest that because of the lack of proficiency in eighth and twelfth-grade writers, interventions need to begin in early grades to prepare students for the rigors of writing in middle school and beyond. However, standards for teaching writing remain vague. Hodges et al. (2019) and Martin & Dismuke (2018) found that writing instruction and practice was inconsistent across schools due to a lack of cohesively utilized evidence-based practices as well as frequently changing educational policy. Graham (2019) concurred that there are only minimal federal and state standards that address writing, leaving it up to individual districts or teachers to determine how or what to teach.

Ciullo and Mason (2017) cited another issue with learning to write when they explained that as students move from lower elementary to upper elementary, they are no longer learning how to write, but are using writing to learn and express their competence in their learning. Researchers have found that writing deficits are easier to remediate at lower grades, yet after students have received instruction on how to write a basic sentence, writing instruction ceases for many students (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019). Additionally, students in middle school are often left as poor writers because fundamental writing instruction does not occur in middle school, with the assumption that it has already been taught in the elementary schools (Daniels et al., 2019). Students who struggle as writers but are given little to no instruction beyond basic sentence composition will continue to be struggling writers throughout their academic careers (Curtis, 2017).

Despite having general standards and research available on evidence-based practices, teachers are not utilizing these resources or do not have access to them (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Graham, 2019). Toste and Ciullo (2017) cautioned that when students have deficits in their academic writing, a lack of targeted intervention could be detrimental to the learning of students. The gap between expected skills and actual skills can grow as students fall farther behind their expected outcomes (Graham, 2019). Students with learning disabilities are at an even greater disadvantage when their disability is in writing, as researchers have found that students with disabilities perform lower than their peers across all aspects of writing from basic conventions to writing quality (Graham, Collins, & Rigby-Wills, 2017).

Writing and Students with Learning Disabilities

IDEA (2004) defined learning disabilities as a

disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (§1401).

Gargiulo and Bouck (2018) continued that a disability may be manifested when there is a significant discrepancy between a person's cognitive ability and his or her academic performance. The U.S. Department of Education (2020) suggested that there were over 2.3 million students identified with learning disabilities during the 2017-2018 school year.

Students with learning disabilities are expected to learn and master the same information as their typically developing peers, including writing (Gottfried et al., 2019). However, this population group can become overwhelmed, exhausted, and frustrated by the cognitive effort

required for writing (Gillespie & Graham, 2014). Because of this struggle, students with learning disabilities may cultivate adverse attitudes, lack of motivation, little improvement, and low self-efficacy toward writing (Gillespie & Graham, 2014). Santangelo (2014) suggested many reasons why students with learning disabilities fall behind their typically developing peers in writing include struggling with planning, idea generation, understanding genre, using conventions, and getting ideas down on paper. Students are often given little opportunity to increase their self-efficacy toward writing, leading to low confidence and low effort (Daniels et al., 2019). However, student self-efficacy for writing affects writing performance (Hier & Mahony, 2018). See Figure 2.2 for the sources that influence writing proficiency.

Figure 2.2

Impact of Writing Processes on Writing Proficiency
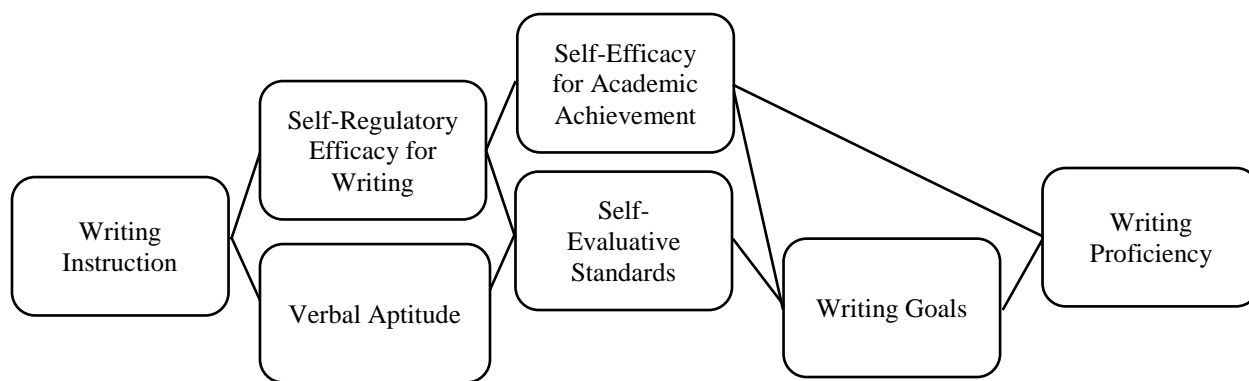
Note. Self-Efficacy and Writing Development adapted from Bandura (1997).

Students with learning disabilities often struggle with planning because of the cognitive load, physical effort, and inability to recall relevant information that is required when planning a writing task (Gillespie & Graham, 2014). Researchers have found that students with disabilities

often spend less than six minutes during the planning process, which is significantly less time than their peers (Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018; Santangelo, 2014). Grünke et al. (2016) suggested that for many students with learning disabilities, creating a piece of writing was simply a practice in writing down everything they knew as quickly as possible. The lack of planning results in limited writing, few connected sentences, and continued struggle for students with learning disabilities (Grünke et al., 2016).

Additionally, students with learning disabilities struggle to write because of the limited knowledge they possess relating to strategies for idea generation, the various writing genres, and writing conventions, including correct spelling (Santangelo, 2014). Because students with learning disabilities struggle with idea generation, they continue to have difficulty with how to get their ideas to make sense on paper. Many students with learning disabilities lack the knowledge of how to execute a writing plan once thoughts are generated (Saddler et al., 2019). When students do execute their writing plan, they often are hung up on spelling errors (Bahr et al., 2020). The focus on correctly spelling words takes away from idea generation (Harris et al., 2017). By the time students with learning disabilities have figured out how to spell a word correctly, they have forgotten what they were going to write (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016). The resulting writing has little coherence, readability, and depth (Santangelo, 2018).

Students with learning disabilities also struggle with the revising process of writing (Connelly & Dockrell, 2016; Graham, Collins, & Rigby-Wills, 2017). Santangelo (2014) said that much of the focus on revision for typically developing students was on the content of what had been written, elaborating on the text, and creating a more vibrant story. In contrast, the revision for students with learning disabilities focused on mechanics and spelling rather than content (Santangelo, 2014). Furthermore, Santangelo found that when the revision is complete

for students with learning disabilities, the most significant difference is not the quality of the text, but the quality of the handwriting legibility (Santangelo, 2014).

The combination of struggling with the planning, executing, and the revising process of writing for students with learning disabilities gives way to decreased motivation to write and limited academic success (Kaldenberg et al., 2016). Students with learning disabilities struggle across all stages and aspects of writing because it is difficult for them to not only process all the intricate steps required for writing, but to remember to utilize all the steps of the writing process (Datchuk & Rodgers, 2018; Santangelo, 2014). As struggling writers get older, writing motivation continues to decrease, along with self-efficacy toward writing and writing instruction (Ciullo & Mason, 2017; de Smedt et al., 2019). Researchers have found that providing explicit and intensive instruction for students with learning disabilities can help close the writing gap (de Smedt & Van Keer, 2018; McLeskey et al., 2019). Additionally, Kaldenberg et al. (2016) suggested that all strong writing interventions need a combination of explicit instruction, practice, and scaffolding. However, teacher access to studies that support evidence-based practices has been limited.

Kaldenberg et al. (2016) and Gillespie Rouse and Sandoval (2018) found that the numerous studies conducted to discover quality evidence-based writing instruction were difficult to unearth due to the inconsistency of each writing experiment and location in low-publicity journals. Furthermore, in a literature review conducted on writing research between 2008-2017, Gillespie Rouse and Sandoval (2018) found that only one-third of published research was conducted after 2012, suggesting a lack of current writing research. Kaldenberg et al. (2016) did find, however, that despite inconsistent measures and difficulty in finding the research, several evidence-based practices are effective for helping students with learning disabilities succeed as

writers (Kaldenberg et al., 2016). Additionally, MacArthur et al. (2016) and Graham (2019) have collected several evidence-based practices to support the writing of students with learning disabilities despite noting that teachers may have limited access to these resources.

Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Writing

Evidence-based practices are instructional strategies that have been proven effective through research in the field (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016). Toste and Ciullo (2017) suggested that "the lack of targeted intervention can have serious, detrimental effects on students with learning disabilities" (p. 251). Teachers need evidence-based writing practices that utilize numerous strategies that could be differentiated as needed to create a thriving learning environment (Brindle et al., 2016). Researchers, such as Finlayson and McCrudden (2019), found that because of the acute lack of writing interventions, most evidence-based practices, when done with fidelity, would result in student writing growth. However, researchers have also found several evidence-based practices specifically designed to target the writing needs of students with learning disabilities (Brindle et al., 2016; Curtis, 2017; Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019; Harris et al., 2017). Researchers have suggested ways to increase student achievement in writing, which include increasing time spent writing, explicit instruction in mechanics and conventions, process writing and self-regulation strategies, using a variety of tools for writing, and creating a supportive writing environment (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019; Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018; Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016; & Harris et al., 2017).

Systematic writing research has determined many ways to support student learning in writing, including increasing time spent writing (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016). Graham and Harris (2016) found that participating in writing for as little as 30 minutes per day could

increase student writing performance by 12 percentile points. However, surveys have indicated that most teachers spend less than 30 minutes per day on writing instruction (Drew et al., 2017; Hodges et al., 2019). Furthermore, Wijekumar, Beerwinkle, et al. (2019) found that writing instruction was limited to less than 10% of classroom activities and that most teachers in their study utilized worksheets for grammar and spelling as writing instruction. Brenner & McQuirk (2019) noted that primary school teachers reported spending only 10 minutes per day on writing instruction with limited use of evidence-based practices. Students are hindered in their abilities to make connections and build on their writing skills when they have few opportunities to write (Graham, 2019).

Along with time to write should be explicit instruction in word and sentence fluency to support students with learning disabilities (Datchuk & Rodgers, 2018; Harris et al., 2017). Bahr et al. (2020) suggested that students with learning disabilities often struggle with letter production because of deficits in phonological and orthographic processing. Williams et al. (2018) concurred that spelling significantly affects a student's success in writing. Harris et al. (2017) noted that students with learning disabilities often struggle with writing because they have difficulty with handwriting and spelling and spend so much time focusing on letter formation and spelling that they forget the content (Spencer & Petersen, 2018). Additionally, poor spellers tend to struggle with elaborating in stories and use simple sentences (Corkett & Benevides, 2016). Researchers recommended developmentally appropriate spelling instruction so that when students with learning disabilities are writing, spelling can be automatic so students can focus on the content rather than focus on how the words are spelled (Coker et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Explicit instruction through targeted learning in phonemics, orthography,

and morphemic elements of words in the English language help support students with learning

disabilities improve their writing (Santangelo, 2018).

Explicit instruction in phonetically regular words and commonly used words can be done

in isolation by lists, games, and peer collaboration; however, instruction also needs to be done by

using the words in sentences and paragraphs as they would be used during the writing process,

providing more authentic and meaningful instruction (Harris et al., 2017; Santangelo, 2018).

Providing opportunities for students to become better spellers frees up cognitive load so that

students can put more cognitive effort into writing composition rather than fundamental skills

(Graham, 2019). Additionally, Datchuk and Rodgers (2018) found that explicit instruction in

simple sentence composition also aids in writing proficiency.

Teaching process writing has also proven to be an effective strategy to help students with

learning disabilities. Process writing includes idea generation, drafting, revising, and repeating

the process until the writing is complete (Koutsoftas, 2016). Process writing incorporates writing

for authentic purposes and includes direct instruction, which would not only help with

motivating reluctant learners, but also provide instruction on needed skills (Gillespie & Graham,

2014). Gillespie & Graham (2014) caution that process writing must be taught at the pace and

needs of the learner and that teachers may have to make significant changes to their approach to

teaching. Explicit instruction in process strategies, and instruction in individual deficit areas are

vital in teaching process writing (de Smedt & Van Keer, 2017; Gillespie & Graham, 2014).

Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is an example of process writing that has

been proven to bridge the writing gap (Daniels et al., 2019). SRSD is a six-step instructional

process that includes giving background knowledge, instruction in a strategy, modeling the

strategy, helping memorize the strategy, scaffolding use of the strategy, and observation and

feedback for independent use of the strategy (Daniels et al., 2019). Using mnemonics, graphic organizers, and explicit instruction, SRSD's process supports struggling writers through the writing process (Harris et al., 2017). Ciullo and Mason (2017) agreed with Daniels et al. (2019) concerning the effectiveness of explicit instruction in SRSD and the benefits that SRSD has for students with learning disabilities. Students are provided goal-setting opportunities to track their writing progress (Harris et al., 2017). SRSD can increase student engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy toward writing (Harris et al., 2017).

Researchers also suggest that the use of technology could help increase student skills, motivation, and collaboration during the writing process and that the use of technology in school is imperative to student learning (Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016). According to the NAEP assessment report for 2011, students who used technology throughout the year to draft and edit their writing scored higher on the writing assessment. Milman et al. (2014) found that students could benefit from the use of online writing and editing programs, dictation software, and typing fluency programs. Students' self-efficacy and motivation could increase with the use of blogging and other online collaboration programs and interactive writing apps (Milman et al., 2014). Technology use to aid writers could be conducted through a variety of apps, programs, and software, increasing motivation, and providing differentiated support for the students (Regan et al., 2019). Technology can easily be collaborative using Google docs, for example, to allow students to work with peers and collaborate (Ciampa, 2016). Additionally, students who struggle with spelling would benefit from word dictation software or simple spell check software (Corkett & Benevides, 2016). Because most writing is conducted outside of school via social interests or for work, it becomes imperative that students learn how to use digital tools in school to support their writing acquisition (Freeman et al., 2016; Graham, 2019).

Bandura (1997) suggested that as skills are developed and mastered, students increase their self-efficacy. The development of self-efficacy of students is influenced by social interactions, comparison with other children, and positive and negative teacher responses to the child's abilities (Bandura, 1997). "A strong sense of efficacy fosters a high level of motivation, academic accomplishments, and development of intrinsic interest in academic subject matter" (Bandura, 1997, p. 174). Creating a supportive writing environment has proven to be an effective evidence-based strategy to support struggling writers and build self-efficacy (Graham, 2019). Students benefit from working on their writing in an environment that feels safe and supportive (de Smedt & Van Keer, 2017). Wilcox et al. (2016) found that high performing writers engaged in peer editing, collaboration, and feedback. Writing motivation is influenced when students compare their work to each other and through feedback from their teachers (Vaknin-Nusbaum et al., 2020). Additionally, positive and constructive teacher feedback helps to not only promote a supportive learning environment, but encourages writing development (Chambers Schuldt, 2019).

The use of peer-tutoring or peer-modeling can build self-efficacy and writing skills for students with learning disabilities. Grünke et al. (2016) conducted a small study in which a successful writer was paired with a struggling writer of the same age. The partnership not only helped increase the struggling writer's writing quality, but increased self-efficacy and motivation for the struggling writer (Grünke et al., 2016). Peer-tutoring can provide the necessary collaboration and socialization students need in school (Grünke et al., 2016). It can provide a guided environment where students can help one another become successful writers (de Smedt & Van Keer, 2017). Finally, peer-tutoring can offer struggling writers an opportunity to see how writers their age write (Grünke et al., 2016).

Despite the growing research base of effective writing interventions and strategies for struggling writers, national data continues to show that students are unable to write proficiently. If effective evidence-based strategies are available, but student growth is not occurring, teachers may either not be receiving adequate training to implement those strategies, may not be able to implement them with fidelity, or may simply not be spending enough time teaching writing (Brock & Carter, 2016; Graham, 2019; Myers et al., 2016). Brock and Carter (2016) suggest that there is a lag between evidence-based strategies and classroom practice. Understanding how teachers are receiving evidence-based strategies and their self-efficacy toward using them may be an effective step in helping reduce the writing gap (McLeskey et al., 2019).

Teacher Preparation

Teachers need training in teacher preparation programs and professional development in teaching writing to help students with learning disabilities overcome writing deficits (Brindle et al., 2016). Special educators have a daunting task to be able to intervene with such underdeveloped skills in writing (Toste & Ciullo, 2017). Additionally, in-service teachers need access to evidence-based practices, but researchers have found that few teachers gain the knowledge they need (Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018). Special educators must help bridge the gap between students' current skills and their expected outcomes, but with little teacher training in writing, bridging the writing gap becomes a challenge (Curtis, 2017). Unfortunately, Langeberg (2019) found that writing teachers who lacked training and self-efficacy in writing focused on minimal writing skills rather than building content, further discouraging student writers.

Pre-Service Training

Pre-service teachers receive training through either traditional or alternative programs. Most programs follow a general formula that includes learning content and pedagogical knowledge through coursework and participation in field experiences through apprenticeships such as practicums or student teaching (Langeberg, 2019). Pre-service teachers also learn content and pedagogy from policies, previous educational experiences, and other pre- or in-service teachers (Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016). Additionally, Barnes and Smagorinsky (2016) explained that

> The novice teacher's developing conception of effective instruction is mediated by their previous experiences in schools as students, the structure of their teacher education program, their cultural and social backgrounds, their various field-based experiences, and the students, teachers, and faculty involved in teacher preparation (p. 353).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has knowledge and skills standards that provide direction for the training that a special educator must receive, including knowledge of disability categories, grade and ability levels, and an understanding of how to provide accommodations/modifications across all academic areas (Bruno et al., 2018). The CEC states that a special educator should be highly professionally competent (CEC, 2018). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (2004) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) mandate that children with disabilities receive an education from a qualified teacher. Special education teachers must learn how to deliver instruction in a variety of settings, from self-contained settings to inclusion in co-taught settings, where special educators are expected to deliver instruction.

Special education teachers have the additional task of gleaning the understanding of how to differentiate instruction across multiple academic settings for students with learning disabilities to ensure that this student population receives quality instruction in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Bruno et al., 2018). Novice and seasoned special education teachers are required to be prepared to teach students with learning disabilities, yet research on teacher preparation continues to state that many special education teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach core academic content (Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018). Without proper training, special education teachers may not be prepared to teach students that have specific goals for writing on a students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval, 2018). Langeberg (2019) discussed the strong-holding myth that if one can write a coherent thought, one must be able to teach another how to write. This myth has caused a further gap in the instruction of pre- and in-service teachers in writing instruction. Thus, pre-service training has become essential in learning how to teach writing (Graham, 2019). Unfortunately, pre-service instruction in writing is limited, resulting in inadequate preparation and increased difficulty in becoming good writing teachers, which results in decreased self-efficacy toward teaching writing (Graham, 2019; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

There has been an increase in studies aimed at understanding the role of different forms of teacher preparation programs, including traditional and alternative, or online programs and what is taught in teacher preparation programs (Dunn & Rice, 2019; Risko & Reid, 2019; Whitford et al., 2018). Traditional route programs include four-year university preparatory programs for teacher candidates (Markelz et al., 2017). Included in traditional programs are extensive coursework, multiple practicums, and student teaching that can last from 12 weeks to an entire year (Juarez & Purpler, 2018). Traditional programs are typically more rigorous;

however, with the increasing need for qualified special education teachers coupled with the lack

of interest in more traditional routes to certification, potential special education teachers have

turned to alternative route programs to become qualified teachers (Markelz et al., 2017).

Alternative teacher education programs, or online programs, were designed to help

decrease teacher shortages (Bruno et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019). Teacher preparation programs

are considered online if 80% or more of the program is delivered in an online format (Graziano

& Bryans-Bongey, 2018). They typically include a shorter amount of time spent on coursework

with more time spent focusing on field experience (Bruno et al., 2018). Online programs have

grown significantly in the last decade to promote enrollment and create accessibility and have

become vital to increasing the number of public school teachers, especially in difficult-to-fill

teaching areas (Dunn & Rice, 2019). However, Ottley et al. (2019) suggested that although

online teacher preparation programs are essential for increasing the teaching population, there

can be a struggle with providing apprenticeship placements with supports from a mentor teacher

and university supervisor. This lack of support results in educators with little experience and high

teacher turnover rates (Bruno et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019). Furthermore, due to the rapid pace

of online programming, teachers may not have the self-efficacy to support their struggling

students adequately and may end up leaving teaching (Bruno et al., 2018).

The researchers found that despite the apparent equal success of alternative and

traditional programs, students in the United States were still lagging behind peers of other

countries and suggested that skill development become a focus in teacher preparation programs

(Whitford et al., 2018). Risko and Reid (2019) suggest that teacher preparation programs look

carefully at the content they are teaching and look for ways to improve teacher education. Barnes

and Smagorinsky (2016) suggested that novice teachers may only have a partial understanding of

how to teach because of the wide variety of teaching methods that are presented to pre-service teachers during coursework, practicums, and student teaching. Pre-service teachers seem to learn a little about many things, but often discover conflicting teaching methods or practices rather than universal evidence-based practices. Despite Whitford et al.'s (2018) suggestion that teacher preparation programs must change, other researchers have noticed positive changes in pre-service teacher instruction.

Scott et al. (2018) have found that pre-service teachers have increased literacy support and instruction, as well as added approaches to their literacy instruction options. Scott et al. (2018) noticed a positive trend in the growth and development of literacy programs over the past 50 years. Pre-service teachers are receiving better content training, practical training, and have been able to add more approaches to their list of resources (Scott et al., 2018). Although these are positive trends, Scott et al. (2018) did not include writing as an instructional approach that has seen positive change, and Langeberg (2019) suggested that teaching writing in teacher preparation programs continues to be minimal. Regardless of the program chosen by pre-service teachers, researchers have found a lack of cross-over between what is taught during pre-service coursework and what is practiced during a novice teacher's initial years teaching (Juarez & Purpler, 2018; Markelz et al., 2017).

McLeskey et al. (2019) suggested that the lack of cross-over between evidence-based practices and general use begins in ineffective teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs may talk about evidence-based practices, but Graham (2019) and McLeskey et al. (2019) found that they do not spend enough time allowing pre-service teachers to practice using evidence-based practices. Additionally, Juarez and Purper (2018) found no significant relationship between what is taught in coursework and what is practiced in fieldwork or in-

service teaching. Markelz et al. (2017) found that although generalization of newly acquired skills was an important skill for pre-service and novice teachers, generalization was not taking place in the teacher training programs sampled during their research. Moreover, special education teachers continue to cite a deeper need for content knowledge in pre-service training (Fenty & Uliassi, 2018). Hoffman et al. (2019) found that, although not a part of apprenticeship, tutoring or literacy mentoring was a positive method of supporting pre-service teachers as they bridge what they have learned in coursework and practice. Providing some hands-on work with students prior to having a classroom of their own helped teachers hone their skills, increase self-efficacy, and bridge the gap between what is learned in teacher preparation and what is practiced in the classroom (Hoffman et al., 2019; McLeskey et al., 2019).

Researchers found that some form of field experience was an important factor in teacher education programs that helped support new teachers' application of knowledge gained in the classroom setting to a classroom of their own (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Field experience occurs in varying degrees, depending on the academic program a pre-service teacher is in (Ergul et al., 2013). Experiences from observing a classroom to teaching lessons can occur during field experience (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Practical experiences are necessary to support content and pedagogical knowledge through practicing what has been learned through course work, learning from experienced teachers, and being provided performance-based feedback to hone teaching skills (Langeberg, 2019). Performance-based feedback provides pre-service teachers the opportunity to practice with support from a mentor teacher and a university supervisor and helps develop positive self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Ottley et al., 2019). Because of the value of practical experiences, teachers have reported wanting more field experience before graduation (Ergul et al., 2013). Participating in field experience allows pre-service

teachers an opportunity to see how teaching occurs in the field and to apply content learned in methods courses to the classroom (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Unfortunately, Brenner and McQuirk (2019) also noted the cross over between what pre-service teachers are taught and what they observe seasoned teachers do, may not align.

Another struggle with teacher training occurs because each teacher preparation program differs with expectations and outcomes, and it is difficult to expect equality and fidelity within the teacher training realm. The varying expectations make it challenging for administrators as they look for qualified teachers for their schools and make it problematic for novice teachers because the expectations are so vast. Although there are expectations in place through the CEC, IDEA, and ESSA, there continues to be great variability between teacher preparation programs and expectations within programs (Darling et al., 2016; Graham, 2019). What is taught in one teacher preparation program may not be in the next, apprenticeship expectations vary, and whether or not pre-service teachers are learning and able to practice evidence-based instructional practices may be undetermined, resulting in a lack of reliability and a mixed-bag of teacher candidates. Because teacher preparation programs are responsible for training new teachers and helping reduce the teacher shortage and burnout rate, understanding the self-efficacy of pre-service and in-service teachers becomes imperative to future teacher success (Lombardo-Graves, 2017; Stites et al., 2018; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Training to Teach Writing

What and how teachers learn to teach writing depends on their prior knowledge, teaching experience, and changes in policy and pedagogy (Kohnen, 2019; McQuitty, 2012). A lack of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs may be a contributing factor for the lack of kindergarten through 12th-grade writing instruction. Teachers are more likely to be successful

when they have access to high-quality education (Risko & Reid, 2019). Brenner and McQuirk (2019) conducted a review of 42 teacher preparation programs to determine the extent that the teacher preparation programs integrated or taught writing to teachers. The results indicated that although writing may be imbedded within literacy, reading, math, science, or social studies courses, writing may not be explicitly taught (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). Brindle et al. (2016) found that 76% of upper elementary teachers felt that their pre-service training inadequately prepared them to teach writing. Although Graham (2019) argues that some teacher preparation programs do adequately train teachers to teach writing, most teacher preparation programs lack time, resources, and effort in preparing teachers to be good writing teachers. Teachers need a strong conceptual knowledge of the content they are required to teach to be effective teachers (Risko & Reid, 2019; Wijekumar, Beerwinkle, et al., 2019).

Additionally, changing standards in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that require increased writing proficiency for all students, has created the need for writing instruction to be explicitly taught in teacher preparation programs (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019; Graham, 2019). However, some researchers suggest that the increase in standards and standard-based assessments have limited writing instruction (Graham, 2019; Kohnen, 2019). Federal and state educational mandates affect how writing is perceived in education. More emphasis has been placed on reading than on writing, as noted by Brenner and McQuirk's (2019) snapshot into literacy instruction in teacher preparation programs. The researchers also suggested that the term *literacy* more often refers to reading than to writing or to a combination of reading and writing, which may result in a skewed view of the prominence of writing in teacher preparation programs (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019).

The National Commission on Writing (2003) discussed the difficulty that pre-and

in-service teachers face regarding teaching writing because of the lack of time allotted for writing practice. Hodges et al. (2019) reported that teachers said a lack of time, training, personal skills, and resources were reasons why writing did not occur more often in classrooms. Langeberg (2019) found that pre-service teachers with little writing instruction fall back on personal writing experiences to fill the gap in writing pedagogy, resulting in feeble attempts at writing instruction and no use of evidence-based practices. Myers et al. (2016) stated that there was a gap in the research regarding the methods of teaching writing in university-based teacher preparation programs. Related, in a research study conducted by Brindle et al. (2016), teachers indicated that they received very little to no instruction on how to teach writing to students. Furthermore, Leko et al. (2019) reported that only 13% of secondary special education teachers received instruction in writing during their teacher preparation programs.

Brindle et al. (2016) said that teachers needed pre-and in-service instruction on how to teach writing. They also cited the need for well-rounded, multi-faceted, evidence-based writing programs that utilize numerous strategies to help differentiate in the classroom (Brindle et al., 2016). By providing special educators with strategies to teach writing, they would no longer have to lean solely on their own past experiences as writers, but could utilize evidence-based practices that have been proven successful in helping students become proficient writers. Finlayson and McCrudden (2019) found that teachers who received training through professional development were more effective in implementing evidence-based writing interventions with fidelity, felt a higher sense of self-efficacy toward teaching writing, and were better able to support their students. This led to an increase in student achievement for writing (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2019). However, special education teachers may not feel prepared to teach content to students with special needs, especially in the area of writing. Hodges et al. (2019) found that although

many pre-service teachers value writing, they lack self-efficacy toward teaching many writing skills to students and lacked enjoyment of writing.

Ergul et al. (2013) found that pre- and in-service special education teachers suggested they needed additional support or training to teach academic skills. In terms of writing skills, Brindle et al. (2016) found that although some special education teachers felt they were adequately prepared to teach writing, they did not get as much preparation in pre-teacher training as they received for other core subjects. Additionally, most special education teacher preparation to teach writing came from a collaboration with other teachers, professional development, or researching themselves (Brindle et al., 2016). Fenty and Uliassi (2018) had similar findings in their study, noting that teacher candidates expressed a need for better programming for writing coursework.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy is the belief a teacher holds about their "capabilities to carry out their professional tasks" (Morris et al., 2017, p. 796) and to "guide students to successful engagement and learning, even children who typically are more difficult to reach" (Tanaka et al., 2020, p. 1090). A teacher's self-efficacy influences efforts to create a structured, goal-orientated, challenging classroom environment (Shunk, 2016). Researchers have suggested that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy positively influence students, especially those with disabilities (Stites et al., 2018), are more willing to help their students through challenging tasks, and are more likely to encourage students when they struggle (Bandura, 1997; Shoulders & Krei, 2015; Yough, 2019). Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to build the self-efficacy of students, creating a learning environment that promotes student success, and find alternative ways to support struggling students (Bandura, 1997; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2018; Dursun, 2019;

Stites et al., 2016; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Furthermore, teacher self-efficacy influences the development of pedagogical practices and affective states of teachers (Glackin, 2019). Researchers believe that many efficacious beliefs for teachers are shaped during pre-service training, student teaching, professional development, in-service mentorships, or classroom practices (Bandura, 1997; Mahler et al., 2017; Moulding et al., 2014) and may be influenced by external factors such as school climate or the resources available to the teacher (Stites et al., 2018).

Research has also suggested that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Troia et al., 2013). Curtis (2017) proposed that teachers with high self-efficacy as writers feel empowered and are better able to support struggling writers. Additionally, Graham, Harris, et al. (2017) found a direct, positive correlation between self-efficacy and writing performance. Daniels et al. (2019) discussed the connection between self-efficacy and increases in ideas generation, writing stamina, and higher writing quality. Teacher perceptions of themselves as writers and their efficacy toward writing influences student ability to learn to write (Bandura, 1997; Curtis, 2017; Hodges et al., 2019).

Teachers who believe they are good writers and good teachers of writing are more likely to try different writing strategies and strive to be better equipped to help struggling writers (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with low efficacy toward witting have been found to spend less time providing writing instruction, especially when facing students with low motivation to write (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy toward writing are more likely to increase writing time, provide evidence-based writing instruction, and create writing-rich learning environments for students (Hodges et al., 2019).

Teachers and Enactive Mastery Experiences

Perceptions of both successful and unsuccessful performances influence the development of self-efficacy (Wilson et al., 2020). According to Morris et al. (2017), mastery experiences have been the most frequently evaluated source of self-efficacy in teachers. However, measures have been inconsistent, and researchers have had difficulty in understanding how teacher's perceptions of their performance influence their self-efficacy (Morris et al., 2017). Researchers have identified some sources of mastery experience for teachers, such as pre-service teaching, years of in-service experience, or years of experience teaching a specific content (Bandura, 1997; Morris et al., 2017). Furthermore, Mahler et al. (2017) found a positive correlation between perceived quality teacher preparation and increased self-efficacy. It has been noted that teachers often presume that the success of their experiences takes the form of student behavior, engagement, and understanding of the material (Morris et al., 2017). Additionally, understanding the pedagogy behind practice can create cognitive mastery experiences (Glackin, 2019). Morris et al. (2017) cautioned that although mastery experiences have been addressed in numerous studies, "without an evaluation of whether these experiences were successful or unsuccessful, little can be known about how they might influence self-efficacy" (p. 804). For teachers, it is important to identify which experiences were perceived as successful or unsuccessful and why teachers categorized those experiences the way they did (Morris et al., 2017).

Teaching and Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences can influence the development of self-efficacy in numerous ways, including actual modeling, symbolic modeling, self-modeling, cognitive self-modeling, and stimulated modeling (Glackin, 2019). Actual modeling includes mentors, co-teachers, or professional development (Bandura, 1997; Morris et al., 2017). Mentorships for novice teachers helps bridge the gap between what is learned in teacher training and what novice teachers

experience in the classroom (Bettini et al., 2017). Co-teaching or observing other teachers teaching has been proven to be an effective source of self-efficacy, yet Morris et al. (2017) and Yada et al. (2019) found that teachers were provided only limited opportunities to observe their colleagues. Professional development, observing masterful mentors, or attending workshops help provide content knowledge and pedagogical strategies to use in the future, increasing current self-efficacy (Mahler et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017). Symbolic modeling occurs through reading articles or watching videos or other media (Glackin, 2019). Yada et al. (2019), however, cautioned against the use of symbolic modeling as a factor for developing self-efficacy because of its lack of research-base. Self-modeling can be conducted through video recording oneself teaching and reflecting upon those practices while cognitive self-modeling is visualizing the successful performance of a task (Morris et al., 2017). Finally, simulated modeling occurs through role-play or teaching in virtual classrooms (Morris et al., 2017). The sporadic and sometimes contradictory research on the vicarious experiences of teachers requires further explorations for understanding how special educations perceive this source of self-efficacy.

Teaching and Social Interaction

Bandura (2012) suggested that when people are convinced to have confidence in themselves, they are more likely to persist when difficulties arise. Social interactions, such as verbal feedback, coaching, and praise, influence the development of efficacious beliefs (Bandura, 1997). "The effectiveness of verbal persuasion depends both on who delivers it and how it is delivered" (Yada et al., 2019, p. 20). Social interactions can come in the forms of classroom observations, student surveys, assessment of teachers' content knowledge, analysis of student test scores, self-assessment of teachers' work, surveys or discussion with parents, informal dialogue, and from principals or other administrators in a formal review (Morris et al., 2017;

Yada et al., 2019). Morris et al. (2017) suggested that evaluative feedback must be received and processed by the teacher for the sources of social interactions to have a role in the development of efficacious beliefs.

Teaching and Physiological States

Researchers generally tend to look at negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, and fatigue rather than positive emotional states (Morris et al., 2017). However, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization can create cynical attitudes or feelings about teaching and students (Morris et al., 2017). Additionally, anxiety strongly influences teacher capability to implement evidence-based practices (Cansiz & Cansiz, 2019). Because emotional states in teaching are ongoing and constantly changing, teachers often overlook them as factors for developing efficacious beliefs (Morris et al., 2017). Bandura (1986), however, suggested that the reflection upon emotional responses are vital to understanding and developing self-efficacy through the other three states. Burnout, for example, is an outcome of physiological and affective states such as exhaustion, stress, and depersonalization (Bandura, 1997). A more "true" understanding or feelings may emerge from reflecting on the effectiveness of a teaching exercise after it has been completed (Morris et al., 2017).

Even though mastery experiences remain the strongest source of efficacious beliefs, current research confirmed that the overall development of efficacious beliefs is not only specific to each task, but has a complicated interlacing of all four sources that are dependent on other factors such as age, gender, experiences, and personal beliefs (Glackin, 2019; Yada et al., 2019). Morris et al. (2017) specified that the sources of self-efficacy do not directly cause the development of self-efficacy, but rather, it is how individuals interpret their experiences that tempers the development of efficacious beliefs. Building special education teacher self-efficacy

can help increase student success and decrease teacher burnout and stress (Herman et al., 2018). Despite extensive research in writing strategies for students with learning disabilities, teacher preparation, and teacher self-efficacy, there remains little known about the perceptions of the sources of self-efficacy for special educators who teach writing. This study anticipates to fill the gap in the research and extend Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

Summary

Writing is an essential skill that is utilized into adulthood, but researchers agree that evidence-based instruction in writing is lacking in schools (Graham, 2019; Myers et al., 2016). Research shows that students with disabilities benefit from explicit instruction in evidence-based practices (Graham, 2019; Troia & Graham, 2017). However, if teachers are not being provided with adequate training, their job becomes difficult, often leading to trial and error to become master teachers and can lead to lower self-efficacy, added stress, and teacher burnout (Herman et al., 2018; Kohnen, 2019; Lillge, 2019). Furthermore, the growing research in teacher training, writing, and self-efficacy continues to lack research in the combined areas of special education teaching, self-efficacy, and teaching writing. The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions that intermediate special education teachers of writing have towards the sources of their self-efficacy for teaching writing to students with disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the perceptions of intermediate special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Presented in Chapter Three is the research design, questions, setting participants, and procedures, followed by a discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures. Concluding Chapter Three will be a discussion of the measures applied to increase trustworthiness and the ethical considerations applicable to the study.

Design

This researcher's ontological assumptions, which purport that the participants in this study hold unique perceptions of reality based on their experiences with the phenomenon, are situated within an interpretive framework. Interpretive data is typically collected via a descriptive design in an attempt to develop a "picture of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs" (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p.15). According to Denzin, & Lincoln (1994) qualitative research is well suited for this task because it "stud[ies] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2).

Within the qualitative tradition, phenomenology seeks to describe shared experiences that can help stakeholders develop appropriate policies or procedures in the future (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenology seeks to understand the relationship between objects and how the objects are perceived by those experiencing it. Neubauer et al. (2019) extend the description of phenomenology by explaining that phenomenology further seeks to describe what and how a phenomenon is experienced. Finally, the phenomenological

approach selected for this study was Hursserlian transcendentalism because it sought to describe the essence of the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology gives an understanding of the "essence of things" and will be utilized to explore the perceptions of special education teachers (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47).

Transcendental phenomenology was the best approach for this study, as Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as an illustrative combination of what is and what is perceived. Interviewing, as the main source of data collection, was appropriate because the interview was the process of gaining an understanding of the experiences directly from the participant and in the participants' words (Moustakas, 1994). The process of Epoché, or bracketing, was utilized throughout this study to ensure that the participants' experiences were being viewed and retold through pure and fresh insight (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology allowed the perceptions of special education teachers toward the sources of self-efficacy to be explored and described with fresh insight, providing the participants and this researcher a clearer understanding of how participant relationships with writing have evolved without the interference of researcher bias (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The focus of this transcendental phenomenological study was encapsulated in the central research question relating to how special education teachers describe their perceptions of the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing. The sub-questions addressed the development of self-efficacy through the four sources of self-efficacy, and the influence those sources have on efficacy for teaching writing. The following research questions were addressed using three qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, audio journals, and online focus groups.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions of intermediate special education writing teachers regarding the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy?

Sub-Question One (SQ1)

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their past experiences with teaching writing?

Sub-Question Two (SQ2)

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their vicarious experiences of teaching writing?

Sub-Question Three (SQ3)

How do intermediate special education teachers describe the verbal feedback given to them regarding their writing pedagogy?

Sub-Question Four (SQ4)

How do intermediate special education teachers describe their physical and emotional states as they teach writing?

Setting

Moustakas (1994) stated that although consideration for the setting and participants of a research study does not need to be predetermined to be included in a phenomenological study, some considerations should be made when selecting a site and participants. The sites for this study were two school districts in rural central Virginia. Clay County Public Schools, a pseudonym, has a student population of 2,832 students in kindergarten-12th grade. CCPS consisted of one high school, one middle school, and four elementary schools. The school district's leadership included a superintendent, assistant superintendent, K-12 curriculum

coordinator, director of special education, supervisor of elementary special education, and supervisor of secondary special education. The high school had a principal and two assistant principals, while the middle school and two of the elementary schools had a principal and assistant principal. The final two elementary schools were small and d a single principal. Student demographics included 87.8% White, 4.3%, Hispanic, 3.3% Black, and 3.6% with two or more races. The student population consisted of 14.4% students who had disabilities, 45.3% students who were economically disadvantaged, and 1.8% of students who were other language learners. There were 27 special education teachers, with 2% of special education teachers being provisionally licensed.

James City Schools, a pseudonym, had a student population of 503 students in kindergarten-8th grade. JCS consisted of one middle school and one elementary school with a combined high school with CCPS. JCS's leadership included a superintendent, K-8 curriculum coordinator, and director of special education. The elementary school and middle school each had a principal. Student demographics included 79.1% White, 7.6%, Hispanic, 6.6% Black, and 3.0% Asian, and 3.0% with two or more races. The student population consisted of 7.6% students who had disabilities, 26.0% students who were economically disadvantaged, and 6.2% of students who were other language learners. There were four special education teachers, all fully licensed.

These sites were chosen because of the large population of students with disabilities, the ratio of special education teachers, and my proximity to the districts. Creswell and Poth (2018) cautioned researchers regarding conducting research at their workplaces for fear of retribution, power imbalance, or negative influences. However, I have disclosed biases and relationships to the school district to ensure the validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During the 2018-2019 school year, the average writing assessment pass-rate for both school districts was 21% for students with learning disabilities, while an average of 75% of general education students passed between both school districts (Virginia Department of Education: Quality Schools Report, 2019). Additionally, the statewide average in Virginia for the writing assessment for students with learning disabilities was 39%, while 76% of general education students passed (Virginia Department of Education: Quality Schools Report, 2019). These sites, teachers, and student population provided me the opportunity to understand the experiences and self-efficacy intermediate special education teachers have toward teaching writing to students with disabilities.

Participants

A significant aspect of transcendental phenomenology is approaching the participant as a co-researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained the essential criteria for selecting participation in a transcendental phenomenological study included participant experience with the phenomenon, participant interest in understanding the phenomenon's meaning, and willingness to participate in a study, including audio recordings, data collection, and publication. Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that because phenomenology examines events at a specific time and location, ensuring that individual sites, as well as collective locations, are studied was vital to achieving sample saturation.

The sample pool is the total number of participants that were requested to participate in the study (Lavrakas, 2008). For this study, the sample pool was determined by ensuring there was at least one respondent from each school and multiple responses across the districts. This strategy was taken to ensure individual and site representation for the phenomenon and to ensure saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research generally utilizes purposeful sampling

to ensure that participants can reflect upon the phenomenon in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Criterion sampling, a subset of purposeful sampling that requires specific conditions to be met in order to participate in the study, was utilized to gather participants within my school district to ensure a shared experience was being explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant was required to meet the following criteria:

    a. Hold a current state-issued teaching certificate with credentials to teach students with disabilities

    b. Teach intermediate grades (4th grade-6th grade)

    c. Be currently assigned to teaching students with learning disabilities who have needs in literacy

The sample pool was collected from recommendations from each district's superintendent. There were 20 potential special education teachers across the districts. A detailed explanation of the steps taken to obtain participation is provided in the procedures section.

The sample size was gleaned from the sample pool. The sample size is the number of participants required to meet saturation and fully explore the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The anticipated response rate of 50% or ten teachers for the sample size met the saturation criteria for phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations throughout the study included gaining informed consent with the participant, maintaining confidentiality by using pseudonyms, and securing participant data (Moustakas, 1994). Participant demographics were collected during the interview and are found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Participant*	Age	Degree	Certification Type	Years of Experience	Grade(s) Taught	Current Teaching Position*
Amy	60	Masters in Teaching Masters in Special Education	Special Education Multiple Disabilities	25	6-8	Redbud Elementary
Bianca	58	Undergraduate in Elementary Undergraduate in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-6 Elementary Education	6	6-8	Mountain Laurel Middle
Cambria	43	Undergraduate in Public Administration in Politics/path to licensure	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	11	3-5	Sweetspire Elementary
Ella	48	Masters in Teaching	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	4	6	Mountain Laurel Middle
Kands	51	Masters in Teaching	ID and SLD K-12	21	6-8	Bluebell Middle
Kristin	30	Masters in Teaching Masters Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	6	4-5	Redbud Elementary
Marina	44	Masters in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	3	K-5	Coral Bell Elementary
Olivia	41	Masters in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	19	K-5	Sweetspire Elementary
Shelby	37	Undergraduate in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	15	K-5	Coral Bell Elementary
Sophie	60	Masters in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	18	6-8	Mountain Laurel Middle
Suzanne	45	Masters in Special Education	Special Education Cross Categorical K-12	24	2-4	Sweetspire Elementary

Note. Bluebell Middle School is in the James City School district. All other schools are in the Clay County Public Schools district.

*Denotes pseudonym

Procedures

Site permission was obtained from each school district from the district superintendents via email communication, then Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured. A copy of the IRB approval form is found in Appendix A, and the superintendent permission letter is

found in Appendix B. When IRB approval was granted, a list of potential participants was collected from each superintendent and the potential participants were emailed a letter introducing myself, the study, and asking for voluntary participation. The consent form was sent with the introductory letter or sent by Blue Ink, an online signing program, whichever the participant preferred. The consent form further outlined the study and provided information on how to opt-out of the study at any time. The introductory letter can be found in Appendix C, and the consent form is found in Appendix D. Eleven teachers that met the criteria responded to this researcher's invitation to participate. The initial interview date, time, and location was secured through email communication, and individual interviews begin. Due to COVID-19 social distancing expectations, the initial interviews were conducted online through Google Meet or Zoom, depending on participant preference. All participants were familiar with the meeting platforms and did not require directions to use them; however, directions for using Google Meet are found in Appendix E. Interviews were conducted at the convenience and comfort for each participant. Interviews lasted between 25 and 70 minutes and used a semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol is located in Appendix F. Interviews were digitally recorded through a hand-held recorder, uploaded onto a computer, and stored on a secured computer for hand transcription. As a human instrument in this study, this researcher believed it was vital that she transcribe all data personally. This allowed me the opportunity to intimately reflect on her time with the participants, especially their voice inflections.

After each interview, participants were provided with directions to complete the audio journal along with the protocol for responses. Audio journals for three lessons were recorded on the participant's cell phone or through Google Meet and emailed or texted to me when they were finished. However, two participants did not feel comfortable recording themselves and asked if

they could complete the reflections with a written response for which I was agreeable. They emailed the researcher the written responses that she then transcribed into her format and saved the originals on her secured computer. Audio journal protocols are found in Appendix G. Online focus groups were conducted to obtain further information and clarification from initial interviews and audio journals through Google Meet. I emailed the participants with two times that they could choose from to participate in the focus group interviews. Six participants chose to interview at time A and four participants at time B. One participant could not attend, but asked if she could complete a written response for the focus group questions for which I was agreeable. I added her responses to both focus groups and saved her original response on a secured computer. Focus group protocols are found in Appendix H. Additional questions for clarity were added to the focus group protocols after initial interviews and audio journals had been reviewed. Audio recordings were transcribed and reviewed several times to ensure their accurate transcription. Data was analyzed and coded for significant phrases and themes and were described. Participants received a copy of their responses, codes, and themes to ensure that I had accurately represented what each participant had experienced.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative studies, the researcher takes on the role of the human instrument, meaning that data analysis and interpretation occur through the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the human instrument, I utilized open-ended research questions during interviews to support data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this study, I was actively involved in all aspects of the research and was singularly responsible for all interviews and data collection. Additionally, at the time of this study, I was a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and a member of the CCPS community. As a member of the CCPS community, I understood that I had a working

relationship with many of the participants. I worked closely with many of the special education teachers across CCPS and was the educational diagnostician of the CCPS district. I did not have any relationships with special education teachers in the JCS districts; however, it was the school district that my children attended.

As a Christian with a biblical worldview, I believe that all students should be given every opportunity to learn and that teachers should be using the best resources to provide that instruction (2 Timothy 2:15, ESV; 1 Corinthians 12:25, ESV). With a Christian background and belief that knowledge is constructed, I attempted to understand the experiences that other special education teachers had regarding teaching writing in hopes that the shared experience may lead to increased student support and growth.

In transcendental phenomenology, it is the role of the researcher to be an outside observer (Moustakas, 1994). I engaged in the Epoché process, setting aside my beliefs and biases from the study, so that a fresh perspective could be explored. The Epoché process allowed for a clear report of the data that reflected participant experiences rather than researcher experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As the human instrument, I reviewed and reflected upon the data. After reviewing the data, I reflected upon my experiences as a writer and teacher of writing through the lens of participant experiences and emerged themes.

I made some assumptions relating to this study. First, I assumed that special education teachers would have had some experience with teaching writing to students with disabilities. Second, I assumed that, to the best of their ability, the participants would respond truthfully during the interviews and reflections. Finally, I assumed that although each participant would have a different experience, some experiences could overlap because all participants were in neighboring school districts that often worked together.

Data Collection

The data collection methods for this study were semi-structured interviews, audio journals, and online focus group interviews. These methods were consistent with methods for data collection for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Collecting multiple forms of data ensured triangulation and supported validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data triangulation is the process of collecting multiple sources of data and analyzing each piece of data to ensure an accurate portal of the data is presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All necessary documentation and consent was obtained from the Liberty University IRB before any data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted first as a way of eliciting information and providing opportunities for participants to reflect upon their experiences. Audio journals allowed participants to further reflect upon their individual experiences using structured prompts. Finally, the online focus group provided a follow-up opportunity for participants to reflect as a group who has experienced the same phenomenon.

Semi-Structured Interviews

"The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions" (Given, 2008, p. 881). Interviews are the main form of data collection for transcendental phenomenological studies with the purpose of understanding the experiences of the participants directly from the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 1991). Interviews were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements and at a mutually agreeable time for both the participant and myself. This technique was appropriate for this study, which sought to capture the experiences of intermediate special education writing teachers, because through guided questions, I asked participants to reconstruct their experiences.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for guidance with the flexibility for participants to provide in-depth responses that may not have otherwise occurred through surveys or questionnaires. All participants were provided pseudonyms, and personal descriptive data remained confidential. Each interview was recorded for hand transcription and coding. Member checking occurred after the interviews were transcribed to review for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were encouraged to notify me with clarifications or concerns; however, no participants made revisions to their responses. Interviews were semi-structured to allow for the natural flow of conversation. Because these interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, any misunderstandings that occurred were treated at the time of occurrence (Moustakas, 1994). During the interview, I participated in the process of Epoché by setting aside personal beliefs, clearing, and opening her mind to participant ideas to ensure that the data collected would be free from personal bias. Additionally, the interview questions directly related to the research questions, yet were phrased in a manner that were easily understood by the participant. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix F and below.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

I'd like to begin with a little background information about you.

1. Could you please tell me about yourself and your current position as a special education teacher?

2. Could you please describe your teacher preparation program or any training in writing instruction that you have had during your career?

Let's transition to some questions about you as an everyday writer.

3. What do you believe are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

4. Thinking back over your life as a writer, what significant events stand out to you, positive or negative?

5. Thinking about observing other writers and reading their work, what has influenced your writing development?

6. Regarding personal feedback relating to your own writing, what stands out to you as particularly impactful or important?

7. What feelings do you experience when you engage in writing activities?

I'd like to transition now to focus on your experiences as a writing teacher working with students who have disabilities.

8. How would you describe your past experiences teaching writing to students with disabilities?

9. Please think about previous opportunities to observe other special education teachers of writing; what stands out as particularly memorable?

10. What feedback have you received about your writing instruction for students who have disabilities?

11. How do you feel when you think about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

12. What advice would you give to a new writing teacher who works with students who have disabilities?

13. Is there anything else you would like me to know about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

Questions one and two were demographic questions designed to gather participant information and set the participant at ease in the discussion. Because interviewing is a social collaboration (Moustakas, 1994), ensuring comfort in the interaction is vital to subsequent

interviewing and observations. Question three was a transition question that prompted the participant to begin thinking and reflecting upon personal writing experiences. Questions four and eight were questions relating to enactive mastery experiences. Bruno et al. (2018) suggest that teachers have a variety of feelings of preparedness from their teacher preparation programs. Some teachers feel their teacher preparation programs did prepare them for the classroom, while other programs were lacking. Questions five and nine aligned with vicarious experiences. These questions supported the basis that observing the success of others more knowledgeable than one's self could build efficacious feelings (Bandura, 1997; Morris et al., 2017). Additionally, questions three through seven allowed the participant to reflect upon her writing as a learner and how interactions with teachers, mentors, and peers have influenced her self-efficacy toward personal writing (Daniels et al., 2019; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Questions six and ten related to social interactions through feedback or coaching (Bandura, 1997). Yada et al. (2019) suggested that feedback may come in many forms, including formal or informal classroom observations, dialogue between parents, students, teachers, and administrators, and surveys. Questions seven and eleven encouraged the participants to reflect on the physiological and affective states that are brought about through writing experiences. Although Morris et al. (2017) suggest that researchers tend to expose negative feelings such as stress or fatigue, personal writing experiences and teaching writing could also elicit feelings of pride or delight. Questions eight through eleven focused specifically on experiences with teaching writing to students with disabilities. Finally, questions twelve and thirteen provided the participants an opportunity to discuss anything else that was not brought up through the interview and finalized the interview process.

Audio Journaling

Audio journaling is the process of reflecting upon one's thoughts and experiences using a digital device. Reflective journaling provided a form of data that may not otherwise be gained through traditional interviews (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). Bashan and Holsblat (2017) and Boud (2001) agreed that reflective journaling is advantageous to the teacher and researcher because it provides an opportunity for the teacher to reflect upon teaching practices, performance, thoughts, and feelings, and can help the teacher learn from the lesson. Falk-Ross (2012) furthered the importance of reflection by noting that reflecting on teaching practices has been validated as an effective and meaningful method to improve teaching. Additionally, reflecting upon teaching practices has been found to lead to emotional responses that could affect efficacious beliefs (Hamel et al., 2019). Finally, Kiely (2018) noted that master writing teachers took the time to reflect on their teaching knowledge of content and pedagogy so that they could be more effective teachers. Reflective journaling through the use of audio journals was appropriate for this study because participants had an opportunity to conveniently and privately record their thoughts and feelings about a writing lesson they have taught. The audio journals provided data that may not be otherwise gained through interviews.

Participants taught three writing lessons and provided an audio journal for each lesson. Participants were provided the following questions that had been developed to arrange for a consistent starting point for responses from each participant while allowing room for each participant to respond as naturally as possible. The Audio Journal Protocol is found in Appendix G.

Audio Journal Questions

1. Would you please tell me about the writing lesson you taught today for your students with disabilities?

2. How did you prepare for today's instruction?

3. How do you feel about your lesson delivery?

4. How did your students with disabilities respond?

5. How does today's lesson compare to the outcomes of previous lessons you've taught?

Question one was a way to set up the journal responses, help ease participants, and encourage participants to reflect upon what they taught (Moustakas, 1994). Question two related to the level of preparation and sought to draw out how teachers feel about how they were able to prepare for teaching (Bruno et al., 2018). Question three related to physiological and affective states in relation to teaching writing (Bandura 1997; Graham, 2019). Question four related to social interactions through feedback from students. Researchers have suggested that feedback from students can affect teacher self-efficacy (Yada et al., 2019). Question five related to enactive mastery experiences and self-reflection (Bandura, 1997).

Directions for completing the journals were provided to the participants after the semi-structured interview and is found in Appendix G. Responses were recorded on the participant's cell phone or through Google Meet. The audio journals were emailed or texted directly to me to ensure confidentiality. Due to COVID-19, teachers in both districts were using hybrid models of online and in-person instruction and were familiar with Google Meet. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed through NVivo 12.

Online Focus Group

Focus groups are a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Drueger & Casey, 2000, p. 5). Focus groups have been a well-established qualitative method for collecting data and have been used for decades (Kite & Phongsavan, 2017; Matthews et al.,

2018). Additionally, focus groups allow the participants the freedom to discuss their experiences in a group of people with similar experiences (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). The use of the online focus groups were appropriate for this study because they provided additional data that may not have been considered by the participant or withheld due to discomfort through the individual interview process. Furthermore, the focus groups provided an opportunity for special education teachers from multiple districts to talk about their writing experiences in a non-judgmental environment. After the individual interviews were completed, I sent two times for the participant to choose from to participate in the focus group interview. Six participants chose time A and four chose time B. One participant, Amy, was unable to attend the focus groups, but volunteered to provide a written response to the questions. The online focus groups were conducted using Google Meet and lasted about 40 minutes each. The focus group recordings were hand transcribed and member checking occurred after the transcription to ensure accuracy. Online focus groups were utilized rather than face-to-face focus groups as a precautionary measure based on the social distancing requirements due to COVID-19. Directions for logging in and responding to discussion prompts were unnecessary as each participant was familiar with the platform.

Online Focus Group Questions

1. What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities?

2. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's beliefs in their ability to complete a skill or task (Bandura, 1997). How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities?

3. What factors have contributed to those feelings?

The first question encouraged the participants to explore their experiences as they prepare to and teach writing (Graham, 2019; Morris et al., 2017). The second question elicited a discussion into self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Prompt two helped participants understand how observing others affects their self-efficacy. The final question allowed participants to explore the sources of their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Because these were open-ended interviews, I added a fourth question to each focus group based on data collected from the interviews: If you had the magic teacher wand, what do you think would make a difference in how you feel about teaching writing?

Data Analysis

An accurate analysis begins with a detailed description of the data process, includes multiple forms of collected information, and requires a careful interpretation of the data while setting aside researcher bias (Moustakas, 1994). Care was taken through the data analysis process to ensure confidentiality and accurate disclosure of findings (Moustakas, 1994). All collected data was converted into digital files and processed through NVivo 12. NVivo 12 is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software program designed for classifying, sorting, and analyzing qualitative data (QSR International, 2020). Digital files, including audio recordings, audio lesson journals, and online focus groups, were organized with a naming system and stored on a password secured computer (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of Van Kaam's seven-step method for phenomenological data analysis for each primary data collection device in the order the information was obtained. The Van Kaam's method provided a framework for creating a vivid narrative that stayed true to the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Van Kaam's method allowed me to delve deeply into the experiences of the participants so that I

could understand the essence of the phenomenon. This section includes a description of the transcription process, Van Kaam's method of analysis, and memoing.

Transcription

An audio recording of interviews and focus groups occurred to ensure interviews addressed essential questions and maintained accuracy for transcription. The audio recordings allowed the participants and researcher to have a candid and smooth conversation that made room for asking further questions. Hand transcription of the audio recordings after the interviews and focus groups allowed me a deep understanding of the experiences that each participant had (Moustakas, 1994). Transcriptions were read several times, and resulted in memoing and coding of emergent ideas. (Moustakas, 1994).

Memoing

Memos are short phrases or key ideas that arise to the researcher that helps initially organize collected data and recognize reoccurring ideas that may emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Memos included reflective thinking and summarizing collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Memoing included initial ideas or correlations that were made throughout the data and between data or participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I continued memoing from the initial review of data through the final stages to track the development of horizons and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process for developing horizons and themes is outlined next.

Van Kaam's Method

Moustakas' (1994) modification of Van Kaam's seven-step method of analysis ensured that all data was thoroughly analyzed, synthesized across all data sets, and that emergent themes reflect participant experiences. The seven-step method includes:

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping

2. Reduction and Elimination

3. Clustering and Thematizing Invariant Constituents

4. Identification of Major Themes

5. Construction of Individual Textual Description

6. Construction of Individual Structural Description

7. Construction of Textual and Structural Description

First, the reseracher read through the data several times in its entirety to gain an understanding of each piece of data. Every relevant piece of data was listed through the process of horizonalization, or preliminary grouping (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained that horizonalization regards every statement as having equal value. Second, I narrowed the expressions through the process of reduction and elimination. Each expression was tested for two requirements: the expression should contain important information about the phenomenon and be necessary for explaining the experiences, and the expression should be able to be labeled (Moustakas, 1994). If those two requirements were met, I included the expression as a horizon. Expressions that did not meet the requirements were eliminated. The remaining horizons were identified as invariant constituents of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Third, the invariant constituents which passed the two-question test were clustered into themes (Moustakas, 1994). Fourth, a check of the themes against the data occured to ensure that the themes were representative of the participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This process involved a three-step check: (a) ensuring that the themes were explicitly articulated in the transcription; (b) if the themes were not explicitly articulated, were they compatible; (c) if themes were neither explicitly articulated nor compatible, they were not relevant and were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Fifth, I constructed an individual textural description for each participant (Moustakas, 1994). The

textural description was created from the invariant constituents and themes and included

verbatim examples from the interviews, audio journals, and online focus groups. Sixth, I created

an individual structural description for each participant (Moustakas, 1994). The structural

description was created using imaginative variation and the textural descriptions in order to

examine the emotional, social, and cultural connection of the phenomenon.

Finally, a textural-structural description was created for each participant that incorporated

the invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994). I created a detailed,

in-depth synthesis of the preceptions that special education teachers had toward the sources of

their self-efficacy. Additionally, a "composite description of the meaning and essences of the

experience, representing the group as a whole" was created (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) in order to

answer the research questions framing this study. NVivo 12 was used to assist during data

analysis as a way to store, organize, and code the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is demonstrating the truth and validity of the study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research to ensure that horizons and themes

that have emerged are representative of the data and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This researcher ensured that data was represented in a trustworthy manner by assessing

trustworthiness through credibility, dependability and confirmability, transferability, and member

checks.

Credibility

Credibility is the confidence that what is being reported in the qualitative study is true

(Moustakas, 1994). Credibility in this study was created by acknowledging researcher bias and

data triangulation (Moustakas, 1994). There are three methods a researcher can use to triangulate

data: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, and analyst triangulation (Patton, 1999). I cross-checked my data through triangulation of sources by conducting one-to-one interviews, collecting participant audio journals, and by conducting online focus groups. Additionally, I had a peer review of data which is allowing an outside observer to review the data with an unbiased prospective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A peer review provided the opportunity for the exploration of ideas that may not otherwise be addressed by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility allows the researcher, participant, and reader confidence that the phenomenon's essence has been accurately and richly represented (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, credibility can allow a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is showing that the themes of this study are consistent and could be repeated (Patton, 1999). Dependability is assessed through meeting the auditability criteria which requires a clear and succinct description of the research process (Patton, 1999). Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the study are the participants and not influenced by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability and confirmability in qualitative research are important for an accurate representation of the data that could provide a framework for future studies as well as maintain the integrity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability and confirmability have been established in this study by providing a detailed description of the research process and an audit trail through the research that can be found in Appendix I. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, including ensuring that only what was relevant to the study was reported (Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability for the findings in the research to be applied in other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability occurred through the purposefully rich description of the participants, setting, research processes, and the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that the nature of a qualitative research design is the specificity of the study rather than the ability to be generalized. This small-scale phenomenological study should not be generalized for large-scale applications. This study had taken place in two rural, central Virginia school districts. These districts were small, and though there were adequate participants to create a robust study, this research could only be generalized to teachers who may have similar settings as the one studied here. Additionally, this study considered special education teachers' experiences with teaching writing and may not be generalizable to other subject areas.

Member Check

Member checking involves taking "data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). I provided the participants with their transcribed interview and focus group interview to review for accuracy of transcription. Additionally, I brought the horizons and themes generated from the interviews, journals, and focus groups to the participants for review to ensure that data was represented accurately. Member checking ensured that I had collected and analyzed the data with fidelity toward the data and participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Though this study did not pose harm or significant risk to the participants, there were some ethical considerations that I noted. IRB approval was in place to ensure that human participants were protected, and ethical standards were being upheld (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additionally, informed consent occurred before conducting the study. I informed the participants of the voluntary nature of the study and the ability to withdraw at any time during the study. During the study, an issue that could have arisen was that participants may have provided limited or untrue responses to questions for fear of retribution by an administrator for negative responses. Pseudonyms were used to ensure that participants were protected. Additionally, the removal of identifiable factors of the participating districts helped protect anonymity if or when the research is published.

Another issue in conducting a phenomenological study could be the fidelity of the study due to working in the same field and possibly having similar experiences to the participants. I disclosed connections to the study and bracketed ideas and feelings associated with the study, through the process of Epoché, to ensure fidelity. Participating in Epoché provided me with a novel perspective toward the research (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I stored digital data on a password-protected computer. All data will be secured for three years and then destroyed.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted in two rural central Virginia school districts and reflected upon the perceptions of the sources of self-efficacy that special education teachers have towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. After obtaining IRB approval, I sent a letter of request to the superintendents of each school district for permission to contact district teachers, and upon receipt of permission, subsequent letters to gain participation from special education teachers in CCPS and JCS. A triangulation of data occurred through participant contribution in semi-structured interviews, audio recorded journals, and online focus group interviews. Data was analyzed through NVivo 12 and was memoed, coded, and analyzed for themes. A peer review of data and data triangulation occurred to ensure the

accuracy of reports. All data was secured, and personal identifiers were removed to ensure

confidentiality. Finally, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations where

outlined in this chapter to ensure the replication of this study for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe how intermediate special education teachers perceive the factors that influence their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Data collected from eleven special education teachers using individual interviews, audio journals, and focus groups created this description. From this data, the following themes describing influential factors of self-efficacy developed: learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback. Chapter Four presents a description of each participant and the process of reduction and elimination to allow themes to emerge. Then, illustrated is a textural and structural description of each theme and a description of the themes relative to the research questions. Chapter Four concludes with an overall portrayal of the perceived factors that influence special education teacher self-efficacy toward teaching writing.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used to gather participants for this research study, with the following criteria: hold a current state-issued teaching certificate with credentials to teach students with disabilities, teach intermediate grades (4th grade-6th grade), and be currently assigned to teaching students with learning disabilities who have needs in literacy. Initial permission was obtained from superintendents in Clay Country Public Schools and James City Schools. Along with permission, superintendents sent me a list of potential special education teachers across each district. I emailed each special education teacher with the criteria for participation, information on the study, and the consent forms. Fifteen special education teachers responded. Three of the teachers were not qualified due to not teaching intermediate grades, and

one teacher felt that this year was not the year to add more to his plate. Eleven special education teachers were willing and met the study's qualifications; one teacher from JCS and ten teachers from CCPS.

All communication with the participants occurred over email, through Zoom or Google Meet, or text messages. Due to COVID-19, all interaction was virtual. The special education teacher from JCS preferred to be interviewed through Zoom, which was password protected. Participants from CCPS participated in interviews through Google Meet, which was also protected. Two focus group interviews took place through Google Meet, and only participants in this study were included in the interviews. Participants were given a choice of two times. Ten special education teachers participated in the focus group interviews with one teacher requesting to answer the questions separately because the timing of the focus group interviews did not work for her. She emailed the researcher her responses to the focus group questions, which were stored on a password-protected computer. Finally, participants recorded audio journals either through Google Meet or on their cell phones and submitted them by email or text message. Two participants requests writing out the journals because they felt more comfortable and emailed the researcher their written responses. The following is a description of each participant.

Amy

Amy is a 60-year-old special education teacher who has been teaching for 25 years. She has a Master's in Teaching and a Master's in Special Education. Amy's teaching license is in multiple disabilities. She taught for 10 years as a fourth-grade general education teacher and has been teaching for 15 years as a special educator. Amy teaches mainly in a resource setting but occasionally works in the co-taught setting. She enjoys writing personally and loves teaching writing to her students. She has written several children's books (unpublished) and has many

more ideas for books that, if time allowed, she would pursue completing. She also enjoyed the technical writing that came with graduate school research, the challenge and critical thinking that came with research, and learning to become a better writer (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Her vast experience has taught her that it is okay if she lets go of the reigns a bit and lets her students drive the instruction. She knows that when students feel ownership, "they're going to be a lot more invested in something that they really want to write about." Of students with disabilities and writing, she says, "I think we underestimate what they can do. They do have really great ideas. So, it's sort of exciting when they are able to communicate that" (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Bianca

Bianca is a 58-year-old special education teacher who has spent her career serving students and adults. She began her service working with the pre-school population for about 10 years before moving into working with adult education and then landing as an instructional assistant for six years. When her son, who has Asperger's syndrome, went to college, Bianca decided it was time for her to go back to get her degree. She obtained a dual Bachelor's degree in Special Education K-6 and Elementary Education. Bianca worked in an inclusive elementary setting for two years and then as a kindergarten teacher for the same school. After that, Bianca moved into Mountain Laurel Middle School, where she has been for the past six years.

Bianca currently works as a self-contained teacher for 6th-8th grade students with multiple disabilities. Bianca said she felt like becoming a special education teacher was a perfect match for her. She "felt pretty well prepared for going into special education because of the background with my son," as well as her experience working with a diverse preschool population (personal

communication, April 16, 2021). Bianca has had some instruction in teaching writing as she pursued her degree and had the opportunity to attend writing professional development. However, more importantly to her, Bianca has had some opportunities to write and publish professionally. Bianca recalled writing an article for a magazine after an argument with her husband about bow hunting entitled "Bow Hunters are Morons," that, despite the title, discussed the hunting philosophies that both infuriated and inspired her (personal communication, April 16, 2021). Bianca has clipboards full of ideas for future articles when time slows down.

Her enthusiasm for writing trickles into her classroom. "Oh man! When it clicks, it's euphoric! It's wonderful! It's my best day!...You are always going to have those kids that you aren't going to get that day, but when you get most of them, and they truly get what you are doing through the writing, it's euphoric! It's the best ever" (personal communication, April 16, 2021). Bianca knows that writing is challenging for her students, but she is up for that challenge because she feels that "writing is the key to learning…it should be the focus of every single class...I think it's the most important thing" (personal communication, April 16, 2021).

Cambria

Cambria did not set out to become a teacher when she attended undergraduate school but wanted to become an attorney. The thought of serving her community was appealing, and she had the opportunity to work for the government for several years before the birth of her children. The 43-year-old mother of two decided that the field of education was a better fit for her after she had the opportunity to stay home with her young family. She said that she "loved government, but I also knew that serving kids just spoke to me more" (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Cambria began a path to licensure in a graduate program at a local university. Although unable to finish the Master's program, Cambria received her teaching license in

Special Education Cross Categorical K-12. She has been an elementary teacher for the past 11 years, working across the grades in both inclusion and resource settings. Now Cambria has the pleasure of watching her own child prepare for college through writing entrance essays.

> My daughter did her college essay last summer. You know you have to write an essay to get into college. So, she picked four or five topics and wrote about them. It funny when you write about something you care about rather than, "I think this is what they want to see." Her papers would come out so much better when she wrote about something that she had feelings on. So, I just try to remember that too with my own kids here. And it really doesn't matter what you write about, you know. If the goal is to become a good writer, I just think self-selecting topics is such a better path.

Cambria realized that creating interest and letting students have a choice had a big impact on the quality of writing she could elicit in her classroom. Cambria recognizes that writing can cause anxiety for herself and her students because they are putting so much of themselves into what you write. Cambria does not enjoy writing, and she understands how hard it can be for her students. She encourages her students to work step by step on larger projects, provides options for choice in writing to elicit enjoyment, and takes opportunities to review the long-term progress her students are making (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Ella

Ella is a first-year special education teacher who is passionate about reading and writing. She has an undergraduate degree in English, and early in her career, 48-years-old Ella had a provisional license and taught first, fifth, and sixth-grade students. After getting married and having children, she decided to stay home with her boys. Ella began looking for a full licensure program when her boys got older. She began taking online classes and working at the local

library, where she did literacy-based programming for babies through 18-year-olds. During that time, Ella wrote plays, which her students at the library performed. Ella received a Master's Degree in Teaching with a Post-Graduate Professional License for K-12 special education in May 2020.

Ella currently teaches 6th grade at Mountain Laurel Middle School, where she attempts to instill in her students a love of literature and writing. Ella's passion for writing and teaching writing is evident. Ella says, "I can't imagine life without writing. I need to write. I write every day. I journal every day. I work out problems on paper…I sort out my thoughts on paper. Writing is like breathing for me. I don't want to sound too sappy, but yea, for me, it's just a way of life" (personal communication, February 12, 2021). When talking about teaching her students writing, Ella said she is so fervent that she would be able to get her students excited to write through contagion (personal communication, February 12, 2021).

Kands

Kands has been a teacher for James City Schools for 16 years. She currently teaches at Bluebell Middle School but has spent time teaching in JCS's elementary school. Kands did not want to be a teacher when she went to college; she was pursuing a degree in biology to work in environmental and natural resources. Her life took a turn when she began to substitute teach for a neighboring school district, Magnolia Public Schools and was asked to work as a one-on-one paraprofessional for a student with disabilities. Her love for special education budded, and she began her path to licensure through MPS. Kands went on to teach at MPS for five years before settling at JCS and, eventually, BMS. While at BMS, Kands earned a Master's Degree with an endorsement in Intellectual Disabilities and Specific Learning Disabilities K-12. The 51-year-old

has over 21 years of teaching experience in grades K-8. Kands is currently working with grades six through eight in mainly a self-contained setting.

Kands did not receive training in her teacher preparation program to teach writing. She said, "So I've had no, no training in writing at all. What I teach and the way I teach is basically what I've gotten along the way from schools that I've worked in and then also too, remembering back to when I was taught writing as a student" (personal communication, November 18, 2020). Kands said she enjoyed writing growing up, having pen-pals, and writing to her family. Though she wishes she had kept a journal, especially through the COVID-19 Pandemic, she was able to find a couple of residents at nursing homes who needed some connection. Through the Pandemic, she was able to write to several of the residents. Kands said she holds positive feelings towards writing in circumstances when she can write about things she enjoys.

However, Kands feels stress when she is unsure of her audience and their expectations. She says,

> I have a callus on my finger because when I write I press really, really hard because that stress, where it has to be perfect. I've always had this callus on my finger that I can't get rid of. So, I mean writing has mixed feelings in that, as I've mentioned, in part, it's stressful because of that perfectionism but then, it makes you feel warm and fuzzy on the inside because you're writing to friends and family and pen-pals (personal communication, November 18, 2020).

Kristin

Kristin is in her sixth year teaching special education for CCPS. She has been teaching fourth and fifth-grade students at Redbud Elementary for the past five years. Originally setting out to become a physical therapist, the 30-year-old worked for a year on her doctorate in physical

therapy, holds an undergraduate degree in kinesiology, and dual Master's degrees; one in Education for Adaptive PE, and one in Special Education. She is licensed as a cross-categorical K-12 special educator.

Kristin reflected upon the pride and sense of accomplishment that she had as a high schooler writing her first 20-page thesis, which coincidently was on the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. She recalled the time and research she put into her thesis and how proud of herself she was when she finished it (personal communication, January 27, 2021). However, she says that writing can be an emotional rollercoaster. She wants what she writes, especially when she writes Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to be clear, concise, and free from potentially being taken the wrong way. She knows that if she feels that much anxiety, so do her students. Writing takes a lot of work, Kristin says, and she is frustrated that she does not know how to meet the needs of her students truly. She says, "I would love to know how to teach better. When you know better you do better. Until I know, I'm stuck doing the same things that are kind of spinning my wheels" (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Marina

Marina, a 44-year-old third-year special education teacher, began her career as a Therapeutic Day Treatment specialist. She worked for 17 years, supporting children inside and outside of the classroom. Marina decided to switch careers so she could have a larger impact on the children that she sees every day. Marina's undergraduate degree is in psychology, and she earned her Master's degree in Special Education. For the past two years, she has been working with a provisional teaching license but looks forward to the end of the 2020-2021 school year, when she will be awarded a license in Cross Categorical K-12 special education. Marina is unsteady in her ability to teach writing and relates to the struggles that her students face. She said

I guess I feel very empathetic towards difficulties just understanding that these kids are really struggling with…and writing is a huge cognitive process that involves a lot of different skills that come together and that's hard. Yea, I guess I just, I want the kids to see what stress level you can kind of take off of them and help them through that… It incorporates so much that they have difficulty with…the reading, organization, the structure. We have so many kids that are ADHD and carrying on a one-topic conversation is difficult for them, so thinking that they are going to write a one-topic paragraph, is that reasonable (personal communication, December 4, 2021)?

Marina wants to do her best to reach her students, but understands the multiple factors that each student faces. She has learned to celebrate the small moments of writing success she sees with her students.

Olivia

Olivia is a 41-year-old elementary teacher who has taught students with disabilities at all grade levels throughout her career. At the 2020-2021 school year, Olivia taught kindergarten through fifth-grade special education students through a virtual platform at Sweetspire Elementary School. She has an undergraduate degree in psychology and earned her Master's degree in Special Education in May 2020. Olivia did not start college with the intent to become a teacher. She dabbled in several fields, and while taking a class that required volunteer hours, she found herself as a reading tutor at a local elementary school. She began a graduate program for elementary education, but just a year and a half later, she got hired as a special education teacher on a provisional license. Olivia is into her 19th year as a special educator.

Although Olivia has an extensive educational background, she did not take any classes that prepared her to teach writing to students with disabilities and, since college, noted a lack of

professional development in teaching writing. She said that teaching writing to students with disabilities is challenging and that she feels unprepared and at a loss for how to even begin addressing the diverse writing needs of her students with no dedicated time for writing in her workday. Although she wants to do what is best for her students, she feels that she just does not have the strategies or resources to do so (personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Shelby

Shelby is a 47-year-old special education teacher who has worked at Coral Bell Elementary School for 15 years. Her focus was on fourth and fifth-grade students, but Shelby has been working with kindergarten through fifth grade for the last few years. Shelby wanted to become a teacher from day one. Her undergraduate degree was in education with a major in Specific Learning Disability and a minor in Special Education. She is licensed as a Cross Categorical K-12 special educator.

When talking about teaching writing, Shelby reflected on the changes from her first few years teaching to now. She said, "I don't think we write enough, and then I think we pay for it" (personal communication, January 26, 2021). Shelby recalled opportunities early in her career to participate in writer's workshop and the success her students had working with their peers. Shelby's frustration is evident in that she no longer has the time or resources to provide her students' instruction. She actively seeks ways to differentiate writing instruction but finds it difficult because of time constraints and a lack of available resources. She has to psych herself up when it is time to teach writing, saying things like, "OK, Shelby, buckle down." She noted that "Writing takes a lot of work. I mean, I can't say I've ever had a kid with an IEP who blew writing out of the water" (personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Sophie

Sophie has always had a heart for service and learning. Her undergraduate degree is in Human Services, Counseling, and Education as she considered becoming a psychologist. Sophie began pursuing a Master's degree in special education because of her experiences raising a child with disabilities, and she is licensed in Cross Categorical K-12 special education. Sophie worked for a year on her doctorate in Assessment and Measurement but due to family issues, she had to discontinue her education. At 60-years-old, Sophie has been teaching for 18 years and is currently working in a functional classroom for grades six through eight.

She feels at home in the functional classroom. She says, "it's a different kind of reward…I think the kids in my classroom all feel like they are a part of something…that they have a lot to contribute, and I think that's new for them. A lot of times, they don't feel that way. A lot of times, society doesn't make them feel that way" (personal communication, March 1, 2021). As a writer herself, Sophie understands the complexity of writing, and with her extensive background in special education, she is able to differentiate her instruction to support and encourage her students to become writers themselves. When reflecting on her teaching practices about writing, she said, "It's a whirlwind of emotions I think when you write. And I don't know if it's feelings I have, sometimes I'm scared, honestly, because I want to do well by them and I don't know that I have all the skills" (personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Suzanne

Suzanne knew she wanted to work with children after high school, but she wasn't sure what she would do. When she got her undergraduate degree, it was in psychology with an education minor. Suzanne earned a paraprofessional position at Sweetspire Elementary School in CCPS. The following year, a special education teaching position opened, and Suzanne was offered the job and district support to get her provisional license as a special educator. Suzanne

accepted the position, obtained her Master's Degree in Special Education in 2002, and has been working at SES ever since. At 45-years-old, the 2020-2021 school year was Suzanne's 24th year as a special educator.

Suzanne finds personal writing as stress-relieving but teaching writing stress-inducing. She spends time writing things she is grateful for to center herself and refocus her mind. Suzanne has personal experience with some of the underlining factors to affect student writing, including the inability to stay focused and on topic. As someone who struggles with attention issues herself, she is empathetic to the students whom she works with, knowing that the physical act of writing entails so many steps that, for students, it can be overwhelming to unpack. As a teacher, Suzanne has learned to support her learners with disabilities by breaking down each task so that they can focus on just one aspect of writing at a time (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Results

Each participant was asked to answer thirteen open-ended interview questions to address the central research question and each sub-question that drove this study. After the interview, participants were given instructions on completing the audio journals and then emailed the instruction and open-ended questions for the audio journals. Participants were able to freely answer the audio journal prompts, reflecting on their experiences and feelings teaching writing to students with disabilities. Two participants chose to complete written journals rather than audio journals, and two participants did not complete this portion of data collection. After the individual interviews, participants were emailed two times to select from for the focus group interview. One focus group had six participants, and one focus group had four participants. One participant was unable to attend the focus group and requested to respond in writing to the focus

group questions. Data was triangulated based on the participation of all three data collection methods, and themes were based on collective data.

Theme Development

The theme development utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the sources that influence self-efficacy in special education teachers of writing occurred through Moustaka's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's seven-step reduction process. During this process, I participated in Epoché to remove as much of my own experiences and biases as possible to allow the participants' voices to be heard. I set aside the experiences of being a special education teacher of writing. After the completion of data collection, I responded to the interview questions myself to bracket those experiences before analyzing the data. Responses to the interview questions are located in Appendix J. Additionally, memoing occurred throughout the research to include reflective thinking and emergent relationships between data points and participants.

Each interview and audio journal response was read for each participant several times to gain an understanding of each participant. Focus group interviews were also read in their entirety several times before adding them to NVivo for data analysis. I added memos about each participant and created initial links between what each participant said when phrases, sentiments, or words overlapped, such as teacher training or student support. Once all the data was uploaded into NVivo, I highlighted and created nodes for each data point and considered every node as important. An example of the initial coding is found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Example of Initial Coding

Initial Codes	Frequency of Codes
Past Experiences	1
Writing vital to communication	6
Writing is subjective	3
Writing has so many steps	12
Writing for a specific audience	5
Writing as component of reading lesson	1
We are not teaching kids to be good writers	1
Time Constraints	32
Teaching writing takes lots of planning and differentiating	3
Teaching writing based on personal experiences of writing	2
Teachers want strategies to teach writing	2
Teachers that motivate you	1
Teachers need training	1
Teacher is a writer	7
Professional writing	2
Teacher relate to student struggles	3
Teacher regrets on keeping a journal	3
Teacher perfectionist	1
Teacher not knowing how to teach writing	1
Teacher modeling for students	4
Hinders self-efficacy development	10
Builds self-efficacy	15
Teacher learning to be a writer in College	25
Teacher history	21
Teacher doesn't spend enough time writing	1
Teacher doesn't have skills to teach	1
Teacher compare lessons	11
Professional Development on writing	11
Past experiences of teaching writing	6

Reviewing each interview, audio journal, and focus group several times in the context of

the created nodes, I began looking at each highlighted text and node and reviewed it for

relevance to factors of self-efficacy for special education teachers of writing. I also reviewed

each node that had an overlapping sentiment and conducted preliminary grouping when participant ideas coincided. Repeated phrases or concepts were eliminated. During this time, I reviewed each node against each piece of data to ensure that direct quotes were not taken out of context. Initial groupings included teachers who were trained to teach writing and teachers who were not trained, types of professional development, sources of feedback including previous instructors, current students, mentors, peers, or administration, and knowing student needs.

I began clustering ideas into groups based on overall sources of self-efficacy. Several initial concepts emerged, including feedback as a student learning to write, instruction to teach writing, student engagement, and personal feelings of success with both positive and negative elements to each node. Moustakas (1994) encouraged multiple reviews of the data in its entirety throughout the data analysis process, which was adhered to. Imaginative variation was employed to review the data through multiple angles, and themes emerged.

Emergent themes were reviewed through the lenses of each interview, audio journal, and focus group to ensure that the themes aligned with each participant's sentiment. Within each theme, multiple elements intertwined with both positive and negative sentiments relating to the perceptions of self-efficacy for special education teachers of writing. These themes included learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback. Figure 4.1 shows how triangulation was employed to give voice to each theme and how each data point.

Figure 4.1

Data Triangulation with Themes
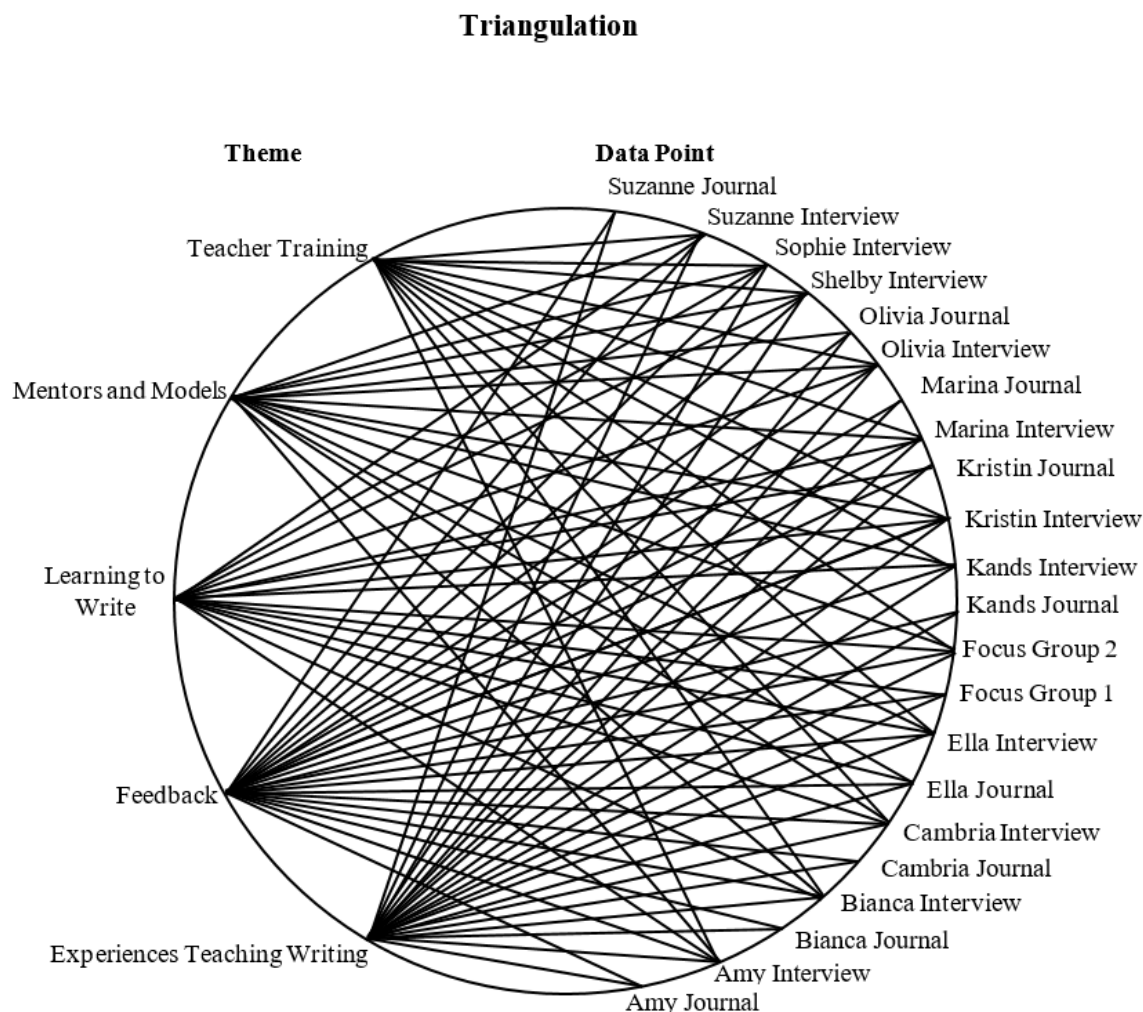
Note: Query search using NVivo 12.

Bandura (1994) explains that the development of self-efficacy is not isolated between separate experiences or feelings but rather intertwined. Although I has identified several themes relating to the development of special education teacher self-efficacy toward teaching writing, many of these themes overlap, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

Overlapping Themes
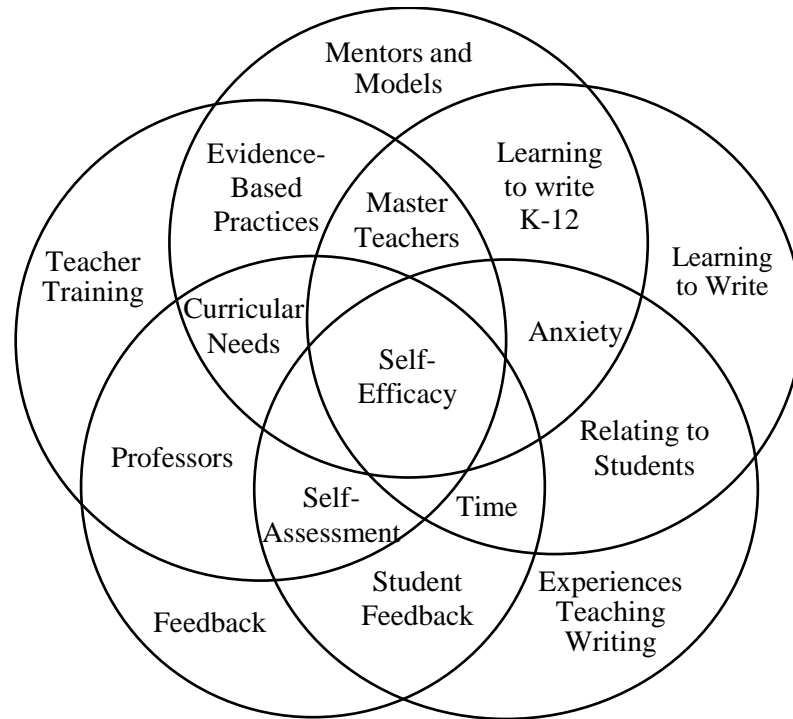
Finally, textural and structural descriptions were developed for each participant and theme (Moustakas, 1994). A composite description was created to describe the factors that influence special education teachers' self-efficacy toward teaching writing and to respond to the central research question and sub-questions. Table 4.2 represents the association of the central research question and sub-questions with each method of data collection.

Table 4.2

Research Question Correlation with Data Points

Central and Sub Research Questions	Interview	Audio Journal	Focus Group
(CRQ)What are the perceptions of intermediate special education writing teachers regarding the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy?	What do you think are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer? Thinking back over your life as a writer, what significant events stand out to you, positive or negative? Thinking about observing other writers and reading their work, what has influenced your writing development? Regarding personal feedback relating to your own writing, what stands out to you as particularly impactful or important? What feelings do you experience when you engage in writing activities?	How did you prepare for today's lesson? How do you feel about your lesson delivery? How does today's lesson compare to the outcomes of previous lessons you've taught? How did your students with disabilities respond?	What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities? What factors have contributed to those feelings?
(SQ1) How do intermediate special education teachers describe their past experiences with teaching writing?	Thinking back over your life as a writer, what significant events stand out to you, positive or negative? How would you describe your past experiences teaching writing to students with disabilities?	How does today's lesson compare to the outcomes of previous lessons you've taught?	What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities?

Central and Sub Research Questions	Interview	Audio Journal	Focus Group
(SQ2) How do intermediate special education teachers describe their vicarious experiences of teaching writing?	Thinking about observing other writers and reading their work, what has influenced your writing development? Please think about previous opportunities to observe other special education teachers of writing, what stands out as particularly memorable?	How do you feel about your lesson delivery? How does today's lesson compare to the outcomes of previous lessons you've taught?	How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities? What factors have contributed to those feelings?
(SQ3) How do intermediate special education teachers describe the verbal feedback given to them regarding their writing pedagogy?	Regarding personal feedback relating to your own writing, what stands out to you as particularly impactful or important? What feedback have you received about your writing instruction for students who have disabilities?	How did your students with disabilities respond?	What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities? What factors have contributed to those feelings?
(SQ4) How do intermediate special education teachers describe their physical and emotional states as they teach writing?	What feelings do you experience when you engage in writing activities? How do you feel when you think about teaching writing to students with disabilities?	How do you feel about your lesson delivery?	What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities? How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities?

Central and Sub Research Questions	Interview	Audio Journal	Focus Group
			What factors have contributed to those feelings?

Learning to Write

Teachers reported having both positive and negative experiences learning to write when they were growing up. Responses from participants included learning to write in elementary school, experiences in high school, and perfecting the craft in college and graduate school. Codes relating to the theme, learning to write, are found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Codes Addressing Theme: Learning to Write

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Learning to Write K-12	25	Learning to Write
Learning to Write in College	25	
Writing as an Adult	11	

These learning experiences shaped the self-efficacy of special education teachers who teach writing.

Learning to Write K-12. Several of the participants reflected upon their elementary years as writers and learning to write. Amy had positive memories of learning to write. She said, "Well, I loved creative writing, and a lot of kids do really like creative writing. That would be probably the thing that stands out. I used to write plays when I was in elementary school. I loved that (personal communication, February 19, 2021). Amy spoke fondly of a fourth-grade teacher

who encouraged Amy's playwriting and allowed her to put on plays for her class. Ella also recalled a sense of belonging and joy in her literacy classes.

> So, I can actually tell you it was 4th-grade 5th-grade that the teachers that would write little comments that they loved my poems or they loved my stories. That meant the world to me. I really kind of had a rough growing up. We moved a lot, and I went to many different schools before we finally settled around Junior High. It was my English teachers and my elementary classroom teachers that focused on the writing. Those are the ones…I remember them. I remember all their names. I have some of my old papers like from...I'm talking the 80s, I'm old. I remember 3rd grade. I can't remember before that but 3rd grade on I could tell you the teachers and the specific assignments up to high school. Up to my high school English teacher writing my letter to major in English (personal communication, February 12, 2021).

 For Ella, writing became a lifestyle and life-long love.

Olivia also enjoyed writing as a child. Although she did not remember learning to write other than learning cursive from copying sentences from the board, she reminisced on her time in elementary school. "I remember my friends and I decided to write a book together when we were in like 2nd or 3rd grade. We had a notebook, and we would all write a few paragraphs and then pass it on to the next person. It was so dorky" (personal communication, December 4, 2020). Suzanne also recalled writing stories with her friends. She spoke of a teacher who recognized her strengths in English and challenged her. "I loved writing. I really did. Seventh grade specifically, I remember my English teacher at the time said, "Wow, you are gifted in English; you need to be doing something different." Suzanne continued, "It was amazing to me because she recognized it was coming too easily to me" (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Not all of the teachers had positive experiences with writing growing up. Kands enjoyed writing and was an excellent speller but did not have confidence in herself as a young writer. She said,

I…growing up I did like to write. I was always down on myself because I didn't consider myself a good writer, but I loved being pen pals and writing family members. I never kept a journal or anything like that; that was not for me simply because I don't know. I did like to write" (personal communication, November 18, 2020).

Kands also tributes her excellent spelling skills and perfectionism in writing to an elementary teacher.

To this very day, I consider myself a very good speller because this first-grade teacher really taught me how to sound out words so I can spell. I was never in any spelling bees or won any spelling bees or anything like that, but you could give me just about any word, and I could spell it just because this first-grade teacher really taught me how to break words down into their different phonemes, and different parts. And so, I can spell (personal communication, November 18, 2020).

Cambria and Marina also explored negative experiences as elementary students learning to write. Cambria noted that it was discouraging for her to be given writing prompts without having a choice of topic or understanding of the expectations. She recalled that there was fear and anxiety when she did write. Cambria shared the following two experiences and how they shaped her teaching practices,

It was very old-school elementary where the teacher gets the red pen and hacks away at your paper. I saw that more of a failure when I would get my paper back and it would have red all over it. So, I don't necessarily have warm fuzzy feelings about learning to

write…it's still your words and your feelings that have been marked out…I remember it, it was second grade, Mrs. Hartford, I will never forget it. But...I don't know...I've always hated having to share. You are vulnerable in your writing and you kind of put your heart into your paper, and then you are required to stand up and read it in front of your class, which I always hated too. I think the option for sharing should always be there. Yea, so that is a memory. After being forced to share over and over I would never require that for my own student (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Marina shared a bit of Cambria's feeling of anxiety while learning to become a writer. Unlike Kands' positive and developmental experiences becoming a good speller, Marina's experiences were not as pleasant. Marina shared this experience,

When I was in second grade, we had spelling tests, and we also had dictation. At first, the sentences were given to us that she would read so that we could practice them. And then later on in the year, she said, "I'm going to give you a sentence just out of the blue, and you should be able to write it because we've had this practice." and I freaked out! I was like, "what do you mean I don't get to practice beforehand!?" So, that was a complete bomb. Yea, I did not like that. I would have to say that stood out as a negative. I wasn't ready for that. Yea and that wasn't a good way to start as a writer either. There was a lot of pressure (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Marina recalled that "Writing was never easy, and I was probably behind grade-level wise because I remember other kids saying 'That's not a big deal'" (personal communication, December 7, 2020). Marina's experiences in elementary school kept her writing reserved. Writing experiences began to change for Marina as she moved into high school. Marina shared that although learning to write in elementary school was a struggle; she had some positive

experiences in high school. Marina said, "I wrote a paper on pre-historic cultures. Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal individuals, and I got an A on that. So that was positive, and I enjoyed the research and all of that" (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Many participants explained that the teacher and writing experiences that were challenging had the greatest impact on them. Suzanne went on to reflect upon her time in high school and the teachers she enjoyed.

Yea, so my junior year in high school, I had a teacher who was very very strict the first week of school, and then she actually was one of my favorite teachers. But, she had us analyze poetry. That was my favorite in her room was analyzing poetry and coming up with your own sonnet. Just pushing us to think outside of the box but also deeper about something (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

As Kristin reflected upon her time in high school, her eyes lit up a bit. "This is kind of silly," she said, "but I can still remember in high school writing for AP History." Kristin explained the first time she wrote a 20-page paper and how proud she was of it. She continued,

It was the biggest thing I had ever written, and it was actually on the 1918 Influenza pandemic…who would have ever thought we would reference that again...(laughing)…I can remember just working so hard on that document, and when it was finally done, I was like "This is gold!" Like, I worked so hard on this we have to save it! That's probably like the biggest thing. My biggest accomplishment was just doing that. I can just remember it was the first time I had ever done anything like that (personal communication, January 27, 2021).

The sense of pride and accomplishment were evident in her voice and fond memory of writing a challenging assignment.

Olivia recalled her 11th grade English teacher that was brutally hard but inspirational, noting that the teacher, "…ripped my stuff apart." Olivia said she began to understand what the teacher was trying to do because she said, '…there was one point where she told me she was like 'Look, you have it in you to be a really great writer, and I'm pushing you really hard because I know you can do better than what you are showing me.'" Olivia reflected on her feelings of being a writer in high school recalling,

> I guess at that time, I never felt like I was a good writer. It was something I could do, and I always got good enough grades. It was never anything I was comfortable with or felt good about. I guess like she really made me believe in myself and kind of encouraged me to…but she was tough…she was not nice about it (personal communication, December 4, 2021).

Learning to Write in College. Although the participants' writing experiences and self-efficacy development varied greatly in elementary through high school, all of the participants agreed that overall, college-level writing had a positive impact on their personal self-efficacy toward writing. The participants had various experiences learning to write in college, from community college courses to doctoral level writing.

Kands recalls taking time off between high school and her four-year university. She took a few community college writing courses during that time where she said, "I think that's where my writing, my love of writing kind of took off because I had this professor" (personal communication, November 18, 2020). Although she does not go into much detail about why this professor stood out to her, Kands did say that she enjoyed the writing she did in his class. Shelby also recalled a professor in college, "So then in college, I had an English teacher who loved writing. She was just very, very into writing. So, she kind of sparked it for me that it wasn't this

laborious awful task. So yea." (personal communication, January 26, 2021). Marina recounted one of her positive experiences, "So in college we had to write…a short story and the college professor actually listed my short story and this other fellows' as being a short story that others should read. That was a big deal, I thought" (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Amy recalled spending a lot of time writing in undergrad, but it was not until Graduate school, where she really dug in. She said,

> Honestly, I wrote a lot in Undergrad but it wasn't until Graduate school that I really learned to be a really good writer. So, it took me a while. I'm almost 60 so when I went to school, there was very little emphasis on writing.

Amy recalled that she really did not like undergrad but enjoyed the research and technical writing she worked on in Graduate school. Part of that, she said was because, "I was more interested in the subject matter and I did feel like I got really good feedback from my professors" (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Cambria also took a lot of courses in undergrad to become a better writer, but unlike Amy, she did enjoy her undergraduate writing opportunities. Because Cambria's undergraduate degree was in Law, she spent much of her time writing persuasive essays. Cambria noted, "I didn't find that enjoyment in writing until I was in college and had that freedom to express my own ideas" (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Cambria reflected on the types of writing she enjoyed to write and the types of professors she enjoyed writing for. She said,

> I guess when I took classes that interested me, and we were challenged to share or defend a side or present an argument in two ways, those were the kind of classes that I would use a lot of description and I'd write it once and go back and add things to it, and it would become very layered. Whereas if it was a book in English that we had to write about and

I hated the book, I would just find myself struggling to get the minimum word

requirement done. I just think it's so interesting that some things you can just write pages

and pages without considering the requirements and then other assignments can just be so

difficult you know. I'm digging to find something to add to make this complete. Yea, It's

interesting to me how a teacher who motivates you or catches your interest you want to

work for differently than a teacher you are just checking a box for. So, trying to balance

all of that is hard and I think you know, writing in college, the teachers that would probe

with more questions. When they would read what I wrote and then stick a post-it on with

four other questions they had after reading it, those allowed me to take it further without

the process of red-pen slashing. So, I guess I just like the probing question in order to

continue writing as opposed to get rid of this, get rid of that, fix that paragraph (personal

communication, April 23, 2021).

Ella had always been on the writing path in college with her undergraduate degree in

English. Ella said, "I don't know if you know this about me, but I'm a writer. I write plays, and I

write short stories. My undergrad is in English, so I had a lot of writing coursework back in the

1900s (because I'm very old)" we both laughed (personal interview, February 12, 2021).

Although Ella loves writing, not all of her writing experiences were pleasant. When asked if she

had any negative experiences, Ella told a story about the first time she submitted a piece of

writing.

When I submitted a poem to a literary magazine in college, and I submitted it

anonymously, and I was on the team. I was part of the….literary magazine in

college…where we made all the decisions…what was going in. I submitted something

anonymously, and Oh my God! They Tore. It. Up! and I was like "I didn't think it was

that bad. I kind of liked this one. I kind of liked the imagery she used there." So yes, yes I do. I have never submitted anything again!

Olivia also took a lot of classes as an undergrad as well. She minored in English. Olivia thought back on all of the classes that she has taken in writing and said, "I would say probably, I'm a stronger writer than the average person just because of my…experiences, I guess" (personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Not all aspects of learning to write in college were positive. Cambria's earlier frustrations of not knowing the expectations when writing a paper were reflected by several of the participants as frustrations that they had in college and as dabbling in the professional field of writing. Kands recalled,

> Well, the one thing, the one thing that stands out is…I had to take a test. I don't know if it was the Praxis…I think it was the Praxis which was the teacher test years ago. A part of that was writing. I wrote something, and they sent it back and said that I, I don't think they said the word "failed" but it didn't meet their expectations. That, that really…burst my self-esteem because it was at that point that I really realized that writing was very subjective.

This experience was both devastating and encouraging for Kands. She said she had to retake the Praxis writing portion of the test until she passed it. Continuing her reflection, she said,

> I was devastated because you needed to pass that in order to go on to the next level, but it did…it did confirm that...I always believed that I was not a good writer. But then, it also encouraged me to become a better writer, you know to go kind of... "Kands, you can do this," because I knew as a child, I grew up writing, I grew up writing to pen pals, to family, to friends. So, I'm like, "Kands, you can do this." and I guess I eventually did, I

don't recall, but I do recall the one incident where it was sent back to me saying that I didn't meet the expectations of the writing part of the Praxis (personal communication November 18, 2020).

Writing as an Adult. When discussing who is currently writing and what that is like, Suzanne hilariously explained her transition from independent thinker and writer to having little free time to work on the craft. She recalled her early writing,

Well and we did the regular classes like the college-level writing classes which were good. I was definitely a better writer back then. When you're in your late teens and early twenties you're able to think through things better than you are when you are a parent because you don't have the mental capacity anymore to think. I just feel like my writing was a whole lot more, I go back and look at things that I have written and I think "Wow I was a really deep thinker back then. What happened?" Well, kids happened (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

On the other hand, several of the participants took what they learned in college and continued writing personally and professionally. Amy has written several children's books and sent them to publishers for feedback. Bianca has done quite a bit of professional writing as well. "I've had small articles published. I've been published in the newspaper, I've been published in a couple journals" (personal communication, April 16, 2021), and if she had the time, she would work on any of the numerous ideas she has written down in her journals. While working with youth in the library setting for numerous years prior to becoming a teacher, Ella wrote manuscripts and produced several of her own plays. Ella, Suzanne, and Sophie mentioned that they write daily as a way to organize their thoughts. Several of the participants mentioned the

necessity for writing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for their students. Sophie mentioned that writing IEPs was hard (personal communication, March 1, 2021). While Shelby said,

> I'm a dork. I like to write PLOPS. It's like my thing. I sat and typed one today. I like to be able to voice myself in words and hope that whoever is reading it will understand who that person is. I enjoy writing; although I do not do a lot of writing, I do enjoy writing. (personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Kristin and Marina both noted the importance of being thorough and clear with IEP writing. Kristin noted,

> What I write is important but at the same time it would also make me nervous because then I was always afraid that what I write, it could be taken the wrong way. I still think about that like when I'm writing IEPs. Choice of words. Is that going to hit a parent as a put down on their child or is it going to hit them in a way that provides meaning? Sometimes I really stew over PLOPs because I want to be concise with what I say (personal communication January 27, 2021).

The experiences that the special education teachers had while growing up shaped how they approached writing as an adult and shaped how they feel about writing. All of the special education teachers were able to recall and reflect upon both positive and negative experiences that were impactful in their writing development. Both early experiences and later-in-life experiences played a role in how the special education teachers feel about themselves as writers and the writing they participate in as adults.

Teacher Training

The participants had mixed experiences in their level of training to teach writing to students with disabilities; however, they attributed much of their feelings of self-efficacy toward

teaching writing to the quality and quantity of specific training they received. Special education teachers reported training received in teacher preparation programs and through professional development opportunities. Participants reported various teacher training programs, including paths to licensure, undergraduate degrees, and master's degrees in teaching. Some programs were entirely online, partially online, or in person. Several teachers mentioned receiving a class or portions of a class in teaching writing. Still, more teachers responded that they did not have formal training in teaching writing to students with disabilities. Codes relating to the theme, teacher training, are found in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Codes Addressing Theme: Teacher Training

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Teacher Preparation	19	Teacher Training
Professional Development	12	

Teacher Preparation Program. Several teachers reported getting training for teaching writing in embedded courses. For example, Ella, who graduated in May 2020 and completed her Master's degree online, said she only received a brief overview of teaching writing as a portion of her reading course (personal communication, February 12, 2021). Kristin, Olivia, and Marina had similar courses as Ella. Marina also completed her Master's degree online through a different university than Ella. Marina recounted in her program,

> There were different classes that touched on writing and different scaffolding and
>
> different supports to help with writing, like graphic organizers and things like that. It was
>
> usually in conjunction with reading though. So those two kind of worked together. I'd say

the emphasis was more on the reading. Then the writing was just something that kind of

worked into the reading (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Kristin also completed online work for her license and said,

I feel like there was maybe one chapter in a reading course that even touched on writing.

I was thinking about it the other day as we were setting up this meeting… "did you have

any instruction on how to teach writing?" and I think that there was maybe only a chapter

that I read and honestly I probably skimmed it (personal communication, January 27,

2021)

Two special education teachers did have an opportunity to have a writing course in their

teacher preparation program. Cambria recounted a class she took and reflected upon how

different learning to be a writer and learning to teach writing are,

They are [different], particularly with someone who struggles with a part of it [writing]. I

think my writing course was for K-8 and the rules of grammar and things of that sort, but

not "How to teach a kid who struggles with writing, how to write" (personal

communication, April 23, 2021).

Bianca was grateful for her teaching courses. She recalled taking three writing courses,

two that were geared toward teaching writing to students. Bianca noted that one of the classes

was specifically on teaching students with disabilities how to write (personal communication,

April 16, 2021). However, many other participants reported not receiving any formal training in

their teacher preparation program. Amy, Kands, Shelby, Sophie, and Suzanne all reported not

having any formal training to teach writing. Suzanne recalled this from her in-person teacher

preparation program,

When I was going through undergrad, I really don't remember doing a whole lot of writing instruction. It was more based on the reading and the math, how to write lesson plans, developing a unit. I really can't think of any instruction that they gave us (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Both Amy, who trained in-person, and Kands, who trained through a teletechnet program, reported not learning how to teach writing at all. Amy was disappointed. Looking back, she could see how detrimental it was that she did not receive the training she thought she should have. She said, "I think that's kind of a deficit in a lot of the programs that…it's not emphasized at all, and I think that's a shame because that's such a huge part of being able to read and write…communication" (personal communication, February 19, 2021). Shelby said, In my special edu. classes, I don't remember a lot about writing being taught, now that I'm thinking about it. Um, just more the focus on reading, obviously math, because I feel it's a little bit more concrete to deal with kids with disabilities" (personal communication, January 26, 2021). Although some training to teach writing to students was evident in coursework, most participants did not receive training to teach writing and missed that opportunity to develop their teaching skills and, subsequently, their self-efficacy toward teaching writing.

Professional Development. Professional development was also a vital form of continuing education for practicing teachers that played a role in how the participants viewed their self-efficacy toward teaching writing. Many of the teachers responded that they had received professional development on teaching writing that they had found helpful in filling the gaps that were created in their teacher preparation programs and meeting the needs of their students. They reflected upon the increased confidence in having a few tools to help them better support their students.

Bianca recalled taking two professional development courses on writing that had impacted her instruction, "There were two specific courses that I had taken in the last six years that really helped me… one particular course focused not on the mechanics of writing and all that, but how to create interest in different modalities" (personal communication, April 16, 2021). Bianca explained that these were opportunities that she had to seek out on her own but that they were instrumental in helping her better understand and work through her diverse classroom. Although Amy could not remember what she had taken, she noted that she, too, had taken professional development that was helpful for her teaching practices (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Numerous teachers from CCPS reported getting professional development in the 4-square method and writing across the curriculum several years ago. Still, since the initial training in both programs, changes in SOL requirements, and a lack of time, the consistency of using either model has waned. Suzanne noted that through CCPS,

> We've had lots of writing, I know that was the emphasis a couple years ago, you know we did the 4-square. You know just talking about...just different professional developments that we have had like on graphic organizers, ways for kids to brainstorm before they write. So that's probably been the majority of my writing instruction that I remember (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

 Oliva recalled some writing instruction provided by CCPS as well. She said,

> Through the school division, at some point early in my career, I was still at high school, so it was at least 10 years ago, we did like a school wide PD on writing across the curriculum. It was one of the school initiatives at the time. I feel like, so the fact that I can't remember much about it says a lot. I remember having a book about it…that's

all…it was like a professional development workshop and that's it. Nope…that all there

is then (personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Sophie and Kands recall professional development that was offered from previous school

districts that they carried into their current teaching positions. Sophie recalled this about working

in a previous district,

The school was in a crisis of writing scores, of course, so we had a lot of "training" then.

We did 4-square. We even had a professor from a university, who I absolutely loved,

come in and talk about words themselves and how to get students to like words. And we

did some of the most bizarre things I think… We did a little bit of everything. In a way, it

was fun (personal communication April 16, 2021).

For many of the teachers, professional development opportunities in writing have been

scarce. Cambria has not had any professional development in writing at all. Her frustration was

evident because she knows the needs of her students. Cambria noted the irony in not having

training to teach writing to students with disabilities. She said, "I probably have four or five IEPs

that have writing goals...so...it's just funny that it's such a part of our day but it's not focused on"

(personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Almost all special education teachers noted receiving professional development in

teaching writing, though not specifically for students with disabilities. However, the majority of

special education teachers reported that the professional development they had was so long ago

that they do not recall how to do it, it has been completely thrown out, or it has changed so much

that it is challenging to find success using that method. For many of the special education

teachers interviewed, the frustration was evident in that they know what their students need but

have not had the training to meet their students' writing needs.

Mentors and Models

Another theme that emerged from participant data was the importance of building self-efficacy through mentorship and models. Special education teachers of writing gain efficacious feelings through efforts of mentors, modeling from master writers, and observing other teachers or classes participating in writing activities. Codes relating to the theme, mentors and models are found in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Codes Addressing Theme: Mentors and Models

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Mentors	4	Mentors and Models
Models	9	
Observing Other Teachers	28	

Models. When thinking about writers who have perfected their craft and what draws them to their works, the participants had a lot to say about creativity, depth, imagery, and complexity. Writers that can make you think, challenge your ideas, or draw you in captured the participants' attention and, on occasion, inspired them to want to be writers themselves or helped them cope through difficult situations. This type of modeling impacted participant self-efficacy through observation of master writers.

Kristin discussed the complexity that a writer can develop. She said,

I think just reading how other people's work and seeing how it can make you think and put you in other place. That's always kind of inspiring like, "Wow, I wish I could come up with something like that." I wish I could create a story that made you keep going and you had all of these pieces that didn't fit together until the very end and then you saw

how everything comes together. I think that's kind of inspiring to read other people and like "Wow, there was so much work and thought that went into all of that" (personal communication, January 27, 2021).

Suzanne agreed that depth in writing can inspire someone to want to become a professional writer. She explained,

So, I definitely think when a writer is so vivid and they can paint that picture so that you can get lost in it. And you can't remember if you are watching it or if your reading it. That really inspires me. And then that's when I'm like, "Oh, what if I did this? What if I could write a children's book?" But it's one of those things that is kind of a pipe dreams (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Marina agreed when she said, "What's influenced me is probably engagement, being able to engage the audience in a story. I'd like to try to do that when I'm writing something, I don't have a whole lot of opportunity to do that but…" (personal communication, December 7, 2021).

Ella responded that she wants to know what inspires other writers and what makes them tick (personal communication, February 12, 2021). Bianca on the other hand, said she joys reading words that challenge her thinking. She reflected,

When I read other writing, I try to emulate...I guess there's a couple things. One is to make it full of depth in whatever way you are doing it…It's helpful to have...when you are reading something that you don't necessarily agree with. So, you read something and it's like, "That guy's a jerk." But, he makes good points. "Wow, that's interesting, I haven't though of that before. I still don't agree, I still think he's a jerk, but this was really interesting and that's something I can take away and use." So that's the kind...I do like it not always to agree (personal communication, April 16, 2021).

Sophie has had some pretty significant life experiences that she has journaled about. When

discussing works that influence her own writing, she had a wide variety of interests,

> I am a big fan of historical works. I love history, so to me, that has always influenced
>
> how I look at things today. I love to find the most obscure thing that happened in history
>
> or that someone has written about and read that. That excites me because to me, that's
>
> sharing something that not everybody knew that can influence how I feel about
>
> something. I like to read things that have a lot of pain in them. A lot of memoirs that
>
> show how people have coped and have gotten through things. That helps me to deal with
>
> certain things and move forward (personal communication, March 1, 2021).

On the other hand, sometimes reading good writing or seeing someone excel in the craft causes

anxiety. Kands said she has struggled to be a creative writer but continues to work on it. She

noted,

> Other people's writing has kind of influenced me, I guess both positively and negatively.
>
> When I see some people's writing I get, this is kind of a bad thing to say, I get envious
>
> because it makes me realize that I'm not as creative as I'd like to be, as far as coming up
>
> with ideas. When I see other people, even students, especially here at the middle school
>
> level. We have some great writers here and when I see some of their writings I think,
>
> "WOW! Why didn't I come up, why didn't I think of that? Why didn't I come up with
>
> that?" Because I see students that are very creative and I get kind of envious because all
>
> my life I've known I'm not creative. I really struggle and I really have to work at it to
>
> come up with creative things to write or creative things to do with my students. But then
>
> also, on one hand I get very down on myself thinking "Kands you're not creative, you're
>
> not a good writer." But then sometimes when I see some people's writings, I think "You

know, I can do that." You know I kind of self-talk. I tell myself "Kands, you can do that.

If they can do that you can do that." as far as coming up with creative things to write

about (personal communication, November 18, 2021).

The writing of others had positive and negative impacts on the participants, influencing how they

perceive themselves as writers.

Mentors. Mentors have also had an impact on special education teach self-efficacy

toward learning to write and teaching writing. Several special education teachers noted mentor

teachers that were impactful in their writing development and teaching practices. Bianca

admitted that she is not good at remembering people's names, but her teacher in high school,

Mrs. Donald, was one whom she could remember and tried to emulate. Bianca recalled, "This

woman was brutal and amazing, and I loved her when I was going through the course. It was in

ninth grade, actually. She didn't shy from the hard stuff. She brought it out. We explored really

intense themes in a very safe way." Bianca explained that she has tried to use what she learned

from Mrs. Donald to create an environment in her own classroom where students feel safe to try

the hard part of writing, to put their feelings into writing without fear (personal communication,

April 16, 2021).

Shelby also learned strategies for teaching writing that were passed on to her by her cooperating

teacher during student teaching. Her mentor told her,

"If I can teach you one thing in your life as a teacher, if a student with special needs asks

to go to the bathroom when they are writing you let them go because sometimes, as weird

as it is, they have to take themselves out of the room and they brainstorm in the

bathroom. They come back and all of a sudden, they'd know what to write." She said,

"you are taking the pressure off them. They can go." (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Shelby said that even though this seemed like a silly strategy, it really took the pressure off her students in times when her students could see that their typically developing peers were already into their writing but her students were struggling to generate ideas. Cambria also reflected upon teachers that she perceived as mentors. She said, "Yea, It's interesting to me how a teacher who motivates you or catches your interest you want to work for differently than a teacher you are just checking a box for" (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Observing Other Teachers. When it comes to mentorship and models, the participants noted that the best models and mentors they found were their fellow teachers. Whether the participants were a part of a co-teaching team, working with another special education teacher, or had the opportunity to observe another teacher, those opportunities provided real-time and hands-on experiences that they could emulate for their own students, or they could take note of as a strategy not to use. Amy recalled that what she found was, "that those teachers that [used] much more scaffolding, were more attractive to me because I thought it worked much better" (personal communication, February 19, 2021), and she was able to that scaffolding with her students.

Ella noted in her audio journals that she was able to prepare writing lessons with the teachers that she co-teaches with because of her co-teaching setting. She said that although each teacher she worked with had a different teaching style, and sometimes that made it a challenge for her, it was also beneficial for Ella to see the different perspectives and find out what worked and what did not.

I was working with my co-teachers, finding examples which was fun. One of the

co-teachers had a video that she used, which was cute. It was based on Disney movies and it just showed many examples of hyperbole with their songs. The other teacher did not do that which was fine. I don't think they really needed it (personal communication, April 26, 2021).

Sophie also appreciated working directly with a co-teacher who loves writing that she can bounce her writing ideas off of (personal communication, March 1, 2021). Kristin misses the teacher that she worked with and gained knowledge from. She recalled this about her,

So, thinking of one teacher in particular, this is the first year that I have ever not taught in the same classroom as her. So I've felt a little bit lost without her because my first year as a teacher, she was right there. She always did a really great job of breaking the task down into smaller steps so day one was always talking about it, in general, what we were going to write about but without any pressure of putting anything on paper, having the conversation, just talking with your friends, sharing your ideas. And then she would break down to the next step of the process like the 4-square or some other technique or pre-writing strategy. But I think that the biggest thing that I saw in all of her little steps was how important it was to break down this huge, what seemed as a huge piece, into something that had lots of little parts, because it's overwhelming. I know that for my students, that was really helpful too, because they could say "Oh, I've done that part. I've accomplished this. Look, I have a 4-square, I have this." Because when you just tell them to start writing, it's too much. And to have that final piece from nothing, there's too many in-betweens, you have to break it down for them (personal communication, January 27, 2021).

Marina had been working inside CCSP school for several years as a therapeutic day treatment facilitator before becoming a district teacher. Although the professional development on 4-square occurred before she became a teacher, she recalled observing teachers utilizing that strategies. She said, "I liked the idea of it in a practical sense, and this was with specific kids that I was working with. I didn't see a whole lot of success with it. That just may be the kids that I was working with" (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Although Olivia recounts that she has not had any formal opportunities to observe teachers, she has observed general education teachers in the co-taught setting. She said a teacher that particularly stood out to her made writing exciting. Olivia said,

> She used to talk up their writing assignment so much that it sounded exciting and fun. Then she would read some of her own writing on the topic so she would have a model for them. She would kind of let them all go to their areas wherever they were comfortable for them to do their writing. She had made these special journals for them that she then turned into real books.

Olivia said this teacher used her own money to create books of her students' writing and had them take them home. Olivia was inspired by the teacher's love of writing and how she got her students excited to be writers (personal communication, December 4, 2021). Shelby also noted observing a master writing teacher whose love and enthusiasm for writing was infectious to her students. Shelby noted that Nancy "just had a love of writing and would just...I mean she could take the littlest idea and just turn it into an amazing story. She just had inventive ways to write and do things" (personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Several special education teachers noted not having an opportunity to observe other teachers teaching writing, but they did observe students engaged in writing. Kands said, "Yea, at

the elementary school, I was in the classrooms…I can't say they were really teaching writing, the kids were engaged in writing but I can't say that the teacher was teaching writing" (personal communication, November 18, 2021). She also noted that because her district is so small (only an elementary school and a middle school), teachers are stretched thin, and opportunities to observe other teachers are scarce.

Cambria noted how important it has been for her to see general education students writing as a reminder that not everyone struggles with writing. She said,

> It's always been nice to see the general edu kids' writing because they, especially in a grade like 5th grade, to observe kids that have that zest for creativity and for writing and they've got four or five pages done in 20 minutes. To see that is still alive and well, because I don't see that a lot in my room. And I think too with the text to type, a lot of the new technology, I hope maybe that will spur some creativity with the writing. But at the end of the day, there's still a lot of work that has to go into their products and a lot of them are not capable or not willing yet to invest in work. In the gen ed class, it's great to see that they are still and to sort of look over at your neighbor and not use it as "look what they're doing vs look what you're doing." but more of like "Wow! Look what they've produced." and for them to read that story to the sped child. I think it's great for them to see "this is what my peers are doing and maybe one day I can do that too" (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Suzanne commented that she did not necessarily observe teaching writing but rather the students participating in writing. In several classes that she co-taught in, she would observe students work on journal writing, worksheets, or graphic organizers, but she has not had an opportunity to observe teachers teaching writing (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Whether observing professional writers, following mentor teachers or participating in informal or formal classroom observations, the special education teachers in this study were able to form some efficacious feelings based on what they observed. Bianca summed up the powerful impact from observing other teachers when she said,

> I love watching other teachers teach. I love it. I love picking up other nuances of how they say things and what I don't want to do in some cases. So like, "nope, never going to do that," because I know that that didn't come out very well. But mostly, to have them model without trying to. Just what they do. I can tell you Jennifer, that has been the best part of working in inclusion…I wish those were more of the professional development opportunities we had more of (personal communication, April 16, 2021).

Experiences Teaching Writing

Under the umbrella of experiences of teaching writing, the participants included several aspects of teaching that influence their self-efficacy as writing teachers, including understanding student needs, curricular supports, and time. These subcategories created both positive and negative feelings of self-efficacy for special educators as they prepare to teach, teach, and reflect upon their teaching practices. Because special education teachers reported having limited instruction in teaching writing and limited professional development, the past and present teaching experiences significantly impacted how teachers perceived their self-efficacy toward teaching writing. Codes relating to the theme, experiences teaching writing are found in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Codes Addressing Theme: Experiences Teaching Writing

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Understanding Student Needs	254	Experiences
Curricular Supports	79	Teaching Writing
Time	41	

Understanding Student Needs. What rang clear when talking with each participant was that they knew the needs of their students, not just collective student needs, but each individual student need. The special education teachers knew exactly where each student was at with their writing ability, whether the student was struggling with mechanics or composition, and were empathetic to each student's struggles. Amy said that most of what she teaches for writing has to be student lead, "A lot of times, it's the students informing me in what I need to do" (personal communication, February 19, 2021). She has tried to meet each student where they are at and provide the necessary scaffolding to move them forward. However, it is not always that easy. Marina summed up what she sees with writing during the focus group meeting. She said,

> I guess I see it as, it can be very frustrating because you're dealing with reading
> difficulties, writing difficulties, spacing difficulties, their inability to read what they've
> written. That's frustrating, all of those things, and did I mention spelling difficulties.
> (everyone laughs) All of those things go into writing. And getting something down and
> it's frustrating for them and it's frustrating to try to help them too. Because I'll say
> "Write a sentence." and they just look at me (personal communication, April 30, 2021).
> In her interview, Bianca noted that not only do you need to know each student need, but

you have to plan for everything. When reflecting on the preparation to teach writing, Bianca said,

You have to think about and walk through your lesson plan. It's not as simple...sometimes I wish I could just be a math teacher because it's as simple as "Here, we're going to learn about right angles today." and you're done, and you just have to tweek it. I've got to think about 10 different kids, their different abilities, how the approach is, at least four to five different ways of structuring it, and walk through each kid, how they are going to respond to it, which tends to be a lot of writing and it's very specific. I guess that type of writing is different (personal communication, April 16, 2021).

Amy explored the reasons why it is hard to prepare and teach writing lessons. She said,

they're struggling to write a sentence and there are a whole variety of reasons for that. Spelling, they don't have a good grasp of spelling. They don't have strong organizational skills. Sort of all the aspects of writing. So, that tells me that I just need to go back to a really basic level for them (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Although participating in separate focus groups, Kands had similar sentiments as Marina and Amy. She said,

Like all subjects and topics, students with special needs come in with all different levels. You may have a kid that comes in knowing how to write a paragraph but then you may have a student who may not even know how to put words together to write a sentence. It's very difficult when kids come in with all different levels of knowledge and understanding. Like I said, that with any subject, but especially with writing because some of them can write a paragraph and then others can't even write a sentence (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Shelby tried to stay positive during to focus group but summed up what many of the special education teachers were feeling as one could see nods going around the screen when she said,

It may be one giant long sentence, but then others can't even formulate a sentence exactly. It is frustrating and rewarding. Everyone is at a variety of levels and everyone has different needs. It would be better to meet with individual students rather than the whole group. In the group of kids you are teaching you may…like my 4th graders are all on different writing levels. So trying to help meet all their needs at one time is like...I sometimes dread writing days (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Ella noted that it is not just hard on the teachers to teach writing. She also sees how hard it is for students, saying,

I think that for a lot of these students with SLD, they don't think they have something to say or that anyone would want to hear what they want to say, so it's such a struggle to get them to take that chance and put themselves out there. When I was student teaching last year, the wonderful teachers that I worked with really created a safe environment for these students to take these chances and they wrote…they wrote such sweet stories (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

All of the teachers feel like they know what they should be doing to help support their students; make it fun, relatable, student-led, differentiated, use scaffolding, break down the individual tasks, provide models, conference, praise student achievements, but when it comes down to it, the teachers feel at a loss for how to even begin with all of the things they need to do, which leads into the curriculum.

Curricular Supports. Having the resources to support the writing of students with disabilities was impactful for special education teachers' feelings of preparedness. Although several teachers mentioned being trained in 4-square, writing across the curriculum, or having some instruction in their teacher prep programs to teach writing, none of the teachers mentioned using any curriculum well or applying what they learned in college. Additionally, none of the teachers discussed an adopted writing curriculum used by either school district or a writing curriculum that was common within an individual school. When talking about how they plan their writing lessons, most teachers said they looked to the internet and conducted their own research. What curriculum and materials that the teachers used they had to beg, borrow, or steal from others, or find and purchase on their own. Suzanne was the only teacher who talked about a reading curriculum with explicit instruction in dictation that was helpful for her students in writing, but it was not directly a writing program (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

During the focus group interview, Shelby noted that the 4-square was no longer a useful program for her students, putting it like this,

> Years ago the initiative with the 4-square model. I can go into 5 different classes on the same day in writing and the 4-square is taught differently and so it's hard, I mean as a kid if you learn that this box is what needs to go here and then but then the next teacher says no this box needs to go here. Since it's been so long since we've had 4-square training I think it's a modified type 4-square that we are using now sometimes. So, it's hard for a kid if writing is hard and you learn a 4-sqaure one way and then you go to the next room and it's a different way the next year, it can be very difficult (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Several teachers agreed that it was difficult to teach the 4-square model because of the

time-consuming nature of trying to teach what the model was prior to being able to use it as a resource.

A few special education teachers mentioned buying their own resources to help their students. Amy was matter-of-fact when she put learning to teach writing and finding resources this way,

> Honestly, a lot of it was sort of just wading my way through how to figure out really… I sort of found my own way. I've used different types of programs…they're not very sophisticated, but things like, the sandwich or different types of methods that you could use to teach kids writing… Like for right now, I just bought, with my own money, a writing program, and I like it because it's very specific. It's hard because kids don't understand the idea of brainstorming. but I like the approach to this, it's very laid out and very specific. (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Cambria also noted purchasing resources online to help support a writing activity with her student that involved creating interesting sentences based on uninteresting ones (personal communication May 5, 2021).

Using the internet to support instruction was common rhetoric among the participants. Everyone noted having to go online for at least some portion of her writing instruction. Bianca noted searching online and finding graphic organizers and poetry to help with her instruction (personal communication, May 13, 2021). When working with her co-teachers, Ella stated that they looked online for resources, videos, and examples to support their poetry lessons on figurative language (personal communication, April 26, 2021). However, not having the resources to support their students has been hard and a hindrance to building their self-efficacy toward teaching writing.

Many of the participants noted that having a curriculum would be nice, however, Kristin cautioned that pulling from several sources was necessary because having one general curriculum does not catch as special education students. It is important to have a variety of resources, she says, but it is difficult to try to come up with them all on your own (personal communication, April 30, 2021). Olivia disagreed to an extent saying,

I think it would be nice to have a writing curriculum…we don't have a writing curriculum in our county. I would appreciate that...or even some training. Real, not just "you should be doing this" kind of training, but something real and tangible that I can be doing with my students that might make a difference. Because it's hard knowing that they need help and having to pull…having to create things yourself or get a bunch or random hodge-podge of activities form teachers-pay-teachers…it's time consuming and it's expensive (personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Kristin agreed that it was frustrating not having the resources she needed, stating during the focus group,

Well, I think that I feel often unprepared or unqualified or like I really have no idea what I'm doing most of the time. I'm just kind of pulling from my personal experiences and not from any sort of background or research on what the best practices to help them (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Several other teachers nodded their heads in agreement and Olivia added,

I think I mostly feel unprepared, not knowing where to start and also having so many students starting at so many different points. When you have them all in a group together, they have so many different levels that they are beginning with. I have enjoyed teaching writing to kindergarteners because it's easy to know where to start, you start at the

beginning. You start at drawing pictures to help them illustrate and have them dictate to you. I feel better at knowing where to start with them as opposed to my 5th graders. Honestly, what I've done with my 5th graders is [that] I've just been giving them journal prompts and they write a couple times a week and just the act of writing, I don't critique them at all and I ask them if they want to share. Well, I shouldn't say at all. I do remind them that sentences start with a capital and end with a period, but otherwise we don't talk about structure or anything like that because I want them to feel confident and I want them to have an opportunity to get their thoughts out. It's more of a rough draft, I don't take it to competition of a full draft but just the act of writing and putting your thoughts down. They have gotten better. They have. Even my virtual kiddos have gone from being able to barely come up with anything to say to really elaborate about whatever the topic is, but overall, I do not feel very good about teaching writing (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Kands and Kristin said they have had to rely on trying to remember how they were taught how to write as a student to figure out how to teach their students (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

At the end of the interviews and focus group interviews, frustration and a sense of helplessness were evident. Sophie said "I want to do well by them and I don't know that I have all the skills. You know, it's not something I was taught, It's not my specialty" (personal communication, March 1, 2021). While Kristin reiterated, "I would love to know how to teach better. When you know better you do better. Until I know, I'm stuck doing the same things that are kind of spinning my wheels" (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Despite feeling unsatisfied and feeling like they do not know how to teach their students, the special education teachers have been using several research-based strategies that have been proven to be helpful in teaching writing to students with disabilities. Teachers have found that some tools have been especially useful for their students such as talk-to-text, using predictive software, and typing in general to reduce the strain of handwriting, spelling, and idea generation.

Time. One of the greatest current factors that influence the feelings of self-efficacy while teachers are teaching writing is the time constraints. Less and less time has been dedicated to writing. Olivia commented that the focus is so narrowed to math and reading that teachers are lucky to steal time from reading to add in writing (personal communication, April 30, 2021). Shelby summed up the discouragement with lack of time during the focus group interview.

I feel like at the elementary level we don't teach writing as much as we probably should. Sometimes it like "Alright, it's Thursday and we write on Thursdays." and I don't think that grammar, really it's all about reading now. I don't think the grammar lessons, this is my 15th year and if I think back to my 1st year, we had 30 minutes where we were doing a grammar lesson. It just doesn't…or "here's a 10-minute lesson about run-on sentences." and then we expect them, when they write their paper with us, to "oh this is a run-on sentence well I taught that lesson one time for 10 minutes." I think if there were more, and now coming into this Pandemic experience, now it's reading, reading, reading, reading, and now sadly that's kind of...and I know you write all the time but I'm talking about a lesson where you sit down and you go through the writing process. I think about, again when I first started, we did writers workshop and they rotated through, and they did peer editing and teacher conferencing and that's gone. It's sad but it's gone and we wonder why they can't write. Well, the answer's there. I feel like probably now, I

wouldn't be able to teach it as well as maybe back when I first started. I think if I had the

time and I had the opportunity to do writer's workshop and stuff, because there was

nothing more that I loved then two students who struggled with writing to sit down and

help each other because those were the lightbulb moments. Like "You spelled this wrong

I think." or "I think you need something here." so they weren't intimidated by their peer

who was peer editing with them because they were at the same level, but that time is just

not in the schedule anymore (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Bianca agreed that the schedule had been pared down so much and the focus is on math

and reading, that if writing even occurs at all, it is because it is a response to a reading prompt.

Kristin and Suzanne concurred. Kristin was forthright but a bit embarrassed to say,

Honestly, I think when I do teach writing, it's as a component of a reading lesson, and I

don't put a whole lot of...I mean it's terrible to say, but it's just as a small portion of

something else. So, there's not a lot of thought that goes into it. That's probably not what

anyone would want to hear...but (personal communication, January, 27, 2021).

Sophie noted that reading and writing are connected, and there should be time dedicated

to writing because it builds on reading skills. She said, "I can't wrap my head around why we

don't' spend as much time with writing as we do on reading because it's a critical way of

expressing yourself whether it's for an academic purpose or a personal purpose. It's frustrating to

me" (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Marina and Amy made similar comments that writing takes students with disabilities so

long from start to finished product with so many things in-between, that time and patience fall

short or, as Olivia noted we take time from other vital skills (personal communication, April 30,

2021). As Cambria noted earlier, several of her students have IEP goals dedicated to writing

development, yet there is no dedicated time in their IEP to work on writing. Olivia said to fit in writing, she has to take time from reading. She said,

> They'll have a writing goal, but they won't actually have separate service time for writing. So, we're often trying to do reading and writing together in a half an hour, or 45 minutes, or whatever the time frame is. I just think that it's really hard to get what they need in that amount of time (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Ella noted that it was difficult to teach writing specifically to her students because the only time they had writing instruction was in the general education classroom, leaving little time for her to target specific needs (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

A few teachers felt differently about the time constraints. Shelby felt like students still write about the same amount that they did when she first started teaching, but she felt like the grammar component was missing. Rather than being able to spend 30-minutes several times a week on grammar, grammar has become a 15-minute video on Fridays with no time for practice (personal communication, January 26, 2021). Bianca is grateful for the teaching situation she is in this year because she and Sophie are able to take the time needed to finish writing projects, no matter how long they take (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

All of these sub-themes created an overall sense of self-efficacy towards teaching writing. Teachers reported feeling unprepared, unqualified, limited by resources and time, and like they were oftentimes pushing against a brick wall. However, the special education teachers continued to pursue strategies to support their students, even if it was on their own time and at their own expense, creating a sense of resiliency within the teachers that were interviewed.

Feedback

Special education teachers noted feedback as a potential source of their self-efficacy. Many teachers noted the importance of constructive feedback from previous instructors, administration, peers, professionals in the field of writing, students, and feedback through self-assessment. As seen in Figure 4.2, feedback as a source of self-efficacy is intertwined with the other four themes that emerged in this study. Codes relating to the theme, feedback are found in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Codes Addressing Theme: Feedback

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Feedback from Administration	9	Feedback
Feedback from Previous Instructors	17	
Feedback from Peers	3	
Feedback from Students	60	
Self-Assessment	14	

Most of the feedback that participants received was either from learning to write themselves, self-reflection, or from students. For example, Ella recalled positive and negative feedback growing up as a writer, but her fondest memories came from feedback from her 4th and 5th-grade teachers who commented that they loved her stories or poems (personal communication, February 12, 2021). Amy noted the feedback she received from her Graduate school instructors challenged her to become a better writer. She said, "There was a higher level of expectation too. So, I kind of had to up my game" (personal communication February 19, 2021). Kands' community college writing experiences gave her more confidence in her writing (personal communication, November 18, 2020). Kristin has taken what she learned from a writing professor in college and used that knowledge every day. She said,

I remember in college I had a professor who was always all about "words are power." She would repeat that all the time. I know that was impactful for me because if I was not concise with my wording, she would misconstrue what I was intending to write. I would have to be really purpose and make sure what I was communicating was accurate and was as detailed and concise as I could be. And I think that it was powerful (personal communication, January 27, 2021).

Suzanne, Olivia, and Sophie recalled teachers that were brutally hard on them but had a huge impact on their writing. Olivia discussed a teacher that challenged her to be a deeper thinker. Olivia did well in writing but never felt like she was good at it. That teacher "made me believe in myself and kind of encourage me" (personal communication, December 4, 2021). Sophie also recalled both positive and negative feedback from her professions. She recalled

The first paper I wrote in my Doctoral program. I got slammed. Oh, it was bad. I think it was the first time that I ever saw so much red on a piece of paper. And it was brutal. Again, but I had too much of me and that academic writing was really different. And it took awhile to get a hang of that. I still think about that. I was devastated. (personal communication, March 1, 2021).

On the other hand, a profession that encourage provided meaningful feedback to her at a time when she felt like her life was falling apart.

Her feedback was not gooie, it wasn't false, but it was extremely helpful criticism. It wasn't this shredding. It was "Look, this was a good part, but this is not." and I remember her saying "You know I really wish you would continue." and I thought "oh great. yea yea". But then when my son died, I will never forget this. She came to the funeral, it was done grave-side. I hadn't seen her in years. And I was in the car and she came up to the

car and tapped on it and she said "I'm very sorry, but you need to write this." and I was just like "what?" out of nowhere I hadn't seen this woman in God-knows how long. And she had given a gift to a group that trains dogs for kids with special needs in honor of my son. And I hadn't talked to her in years. And just that feedback of "You can express yourself. It doesn't need to be perfect but you do need to keep going." That was amazing to me. I will never forget her (personal communication, March 1, 2021).

Suzanne agreed that the professors that were hard, but that gave you constructive feedback were the ones that made the difference.

The professor was pretty hard and she was the department chair, but she gave us really good feedback as far as "how about taking it this direction? Or have you thought about?" and so just that feedback to say "have you thought about this angle?" cuz a lot of times when you get into something, you are trying to focus on only one direction and it seems kind of overwhelming to think about all these directions you could take it in. Sometimes you just have to pick a direction and go with it. But for me, I struggled with some attention issues, not knowing until I got out of school that that's what it was. I just always thought that was the way that I was wired. I guess when they would give me a structure, the most helpful thing for me was for somebody to give me a project, not so much a scaffolding, but an example and from that example I could go like "oh, this is what I need to do." but when I was left to my own devices, I just couldn't focus it in to actually do anything. Does that make sense? Like it was really hard for me not to have some sort of structure to go by. It just made the project or the writing too big. (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Many teachers had feedback from professors that impacted their writing development and how they teach writing. Reflection on writing lessons was also a powerful tool for teachers in developing their self-efficacy. Several reflections on writing lessons were positive. Special education teachers reflected on the challenges that they faced preparing to teach, the struggles their students had, and what they could do differently. Many teachers reflected that although it was hard, they were happy with the outcomes and proud of their students. Marina recounted,

> I think it was interesting to see where the kids struggled and where the kids shined in writing this paragraph. I think it compares pretty much to some of the other lessons, although with this book that we are writing, the kids are more engaged and it's not as difficult to get them to write a paragraph (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Sophie noticed that "...I find that when I'm also enthused about writing, that helps my classroom" (personal communication, March 1, 2021). Olivia was not as enthusiastic with her lessons she said,

> It was mediocre. The task proved to be much harder than anticipated and the students struggled significantly. I probably should have done more teacher modeling and even used a missing word format prior to asking them to write an entire dictated sentence. The students both struggled to remember the words in the sentence while working to encode the individual words. There were just too many pieces (personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Another source of feedback came from the administration. However, many special education teachers noted that they had never received feedback on their writing instruction from their administration. Cambria and Marina were the only teachers that mentioned getting feedback specifically on writing instruction, and for both of them, the feedback was positive. Their

administration was happy with how the lessons went but did not give specific feedback, either positive or negative. Marina recalled

> The first year I was here, the principal was doing an observation of me and we was doing a writing activity. And it was a scaffolding writing activity where we had, the group had come up with a Venn diagram and we moved it into the sentences, and we had a topic sentence, it was all written out. The kids just had to write it. Lots of scaffolding to see if that would work. The principal wrote positively about the scaffolding. It wasn't an overly successful activity. I think I got one sentence out of a student. Which may be more that he had given at other times so, I guess I should chalk that up to successful, but that wasn't quite where I was hoping to get with them (personal communication, December 7, 2020).

Suzanne and Shelby noted that feedback only came from reading instruction. Sophie and Bianca noted positive feedback from their administration, but only in general terms, nothing specific towards teaching writing. While Ella, Kands, Amy, Olivia, and Kristin have never received feedback on their writing instruction. Olivia said it simply, "No. Nope. None" (personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Feedback from students is another form of feedback that influenced the efficacious feelings of the participants. Many teachers noted that it made teaching writing less stressful and difficult when students responded positively through excitement, engagement, or work completion. However, when student responses were negative, such as refusal to work, lack of engagement, or student frustration, teaching writing was more challenging, and teachers reported having more negative feelings toward teaching writing. Bianca noted positive student engagement in her writing lesson and, when reflecting upon her lesson, said,

Strangely enough, the kids, they really liked this lesson. I received some very good

paragraphs from them. One was a story, one was a poem, one was trying to figure out

why the dog was so ugly yet so happy. A few were simple descriptions of the photograph.

One was a skating commentary on why it took so long for the owner to let this dog taste

ice cream (personal communication, May 13, 2021).

Other times, Bianca noted that feedback from students was really just that they were

finished with the work that they were asked to do for which she said she was happy about

(personal communication, April 16, 2021). Marina and Kands also noted student engagement as

a source of feedback, concluding that the students that were not engaged had more negative

feelings toward writing and it was more challenging for the teacher to teach writing. Olivia noted

that "I definitely think kids give us feedback all the time when they refuse to write or they avoid

it. I mean that's definitely feedback. Not the feedback that you want but…it's communication"

(personal communication, December 4, 2021).

Suzanne, Kristin, Cambria, and Shelby noted that often students have negative feedback

toward writing. Cambria noted that teaching writing is "kind of like pulling teeth" and that the

feedback she gets from her students is,

Stress. Looking at the clock going "oh my gosh" There's a groan. There's an automatic

groan. "We're going to write today." "Oh, I'm tired, I don't' want to." They are very

hesitant about writing, and I guess I remember that too, but I feel like that's more

widespread, that's more of a negative than it used to be. I mean like I said, I think that if

it's hard if letter formation was hard and I didn't know how to spell, you know trying to

approach it from their perspective. I think about all of the things that come to their head

when I ask them to write, I get why they don't like it. I understand why it's a task …I

don't think it comes naturally to most people. And especially if you don't know how to

spell and you don't know how to read and letter formation is challenging and their hand

is tired, and they've written one sentence. It's grueling at times. I also don't want them to

feel defeated before they even start, but they struggle with writing a word in a lot of

instances so the idea of writing a paragraph or two-three sentences about something is

daunting for some of them (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

Cambria mused that it was difficult for students with disabilities to write and feel good about

writing because, unlike reading or math, there is no instant feedback (personal communication

April 23, 2021). At the same time, Marina noted the mutual feedback of frustration. She said,

"It's frustrating for them and it's frustrating to try to help them too, because I'll say, 'Write a

sentence,' and they just look at me" (personal communication, April 30, 2021). Shelby agreed

that feedback from her students generally comes in the form of not wanting to write. She

explains her struggle and her students' struggle

Writing takes a lot of work. I mean I can't say I've ever had a kids with an IEP who blew

writing out of the water. It's like emotionally exhausting sometimes, because when it's

writing time they feel it just like I feel it. And it's kind of like "uh, well, here we go." and

I don't mean to be a Debby Downer about it, but it is. They don't want to do it, I get it. I

don't know, I think we just have to get over our own fear and try to help them see it as

more as some way to communicate than "I need 5 sentences about a dog." I don't know,

but I'm struggling with that myself (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Ella also sees how difficult and defeating it can be for her students, and she tries to tackle those

struggles. When reflecting upon her writing lesson, she said,

There was no right or wrong. They got to be creative, they got to show their

individualism. And at the end of this one lesson, they had each written a poem. And they

felt pretty good about themselves. And it was a good day (personal communication, April

26, 2021).

Ella tries to build the self-efficacy of her students, but that also affects her self–efficacy.

She said, "I get sad when kids tell me they hate writing and I try to find places, little, little chinks

where I can show them how it really can help them and it really can improve their lives, just to

try it!" Ella continued that they felt that many of her students with disabilities "don't think they

have something to say or that anyone would want to hear what they want to say so it's such a

struggle to get them to take that chance and put themselves out there." Ella tied to quantify what

she sees with her students. she said, "Some students seem to like it but not many. I'd say like

80% are like 'UUUHHH!' and like 20 % like it. I'm a cheerleader for writing. They know that.

They tease me about that. Some of them come around" (personal communication, February 12,

2021).

The sources of feedback from previous instructors, administration, self-reflection, and

students influence how teacher perceive their self-efficacy toward teaching writing. Positive

experiences can yield increased self-efficacy, but negative experiences can hinder efficacious

development. All of the special education teachers were able to recall instances of learning to

write that promoted or hindered the development of their self-efficacy toward writing.

Additionally, all of the special education teachers cited lower self-efficacy toward teaching

writing due to lack of instruction, student needs, and curricular and time restraints.

Research Questions

This study was driven by the central research question and related sub-questions. Each theme directly relates to the central research question and one or more of the sub-questions. Several of the themes intersected in their relationships to the sub-questions. This section includes a description of the relationships between the themes and the central research question and sub-questions with an explanation of the coding process for each theme.

Central Research Question

The central research question driving this study was: What are the perceptions of intermediate special education writing teachers regarding the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy? Bandura (1997) explained that four main factors influence the development of self-efficacy with both positive and negative outcomes. As the participants explored their experiences of learning to teach and teaching writing, the themes of learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback emerged and directly related to one or more of the sub-questions, providing a descriptive response to the factors that influence the self-efficacy of special education teachers who teach writing.

Sub-Question One (SQ1)

Sub-question one was: How do intermediate special education teachers describe their past experiences with teaching writing? The participants described their past experiences of teaching writing as generally challenging due to a variety of factors including student need, access to curriculum, and time constraints. Table 4.8 addresses the frequency of codes relating to the experiences of special education teachers relating to writing.

Table 4.8

Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question One

Horizons	Preliminary Grouping	Frequency of Codes	Theme
	Lesson Delivery	12	Experiences
	Lesson Comparisons	11	Teaching
Understanding Student Needs		254	Writing
	Students with Disabilities	160	
	Feelings About Teaching Writing	78	
	IEP Writing	16	
Curricular Supports		79	
	Technology	28	
	Pedagogy and Curriculum	51	
Time		41	

The largest horizon was understanding student needs. All of the participants noted that they knew where students with disabilities struggled within the writing process and that the best thing they could do for their students was to meet each student where they were at, scaffold, and ensure that writing was fun and engaging. Kands eloquently stated,

Like all subjects and topics, students with special needs come in with all different levels. You may have a kid that comes in knowing how to write a paragraph but then you may have a student who may not even know how to put words together to write a sentence. It's very difficult when kids come in with all different levels of knowledge and understanding (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Several teachers noted that students with disabilities struggle with handwriting, spelling, mechanics, grammar, idea generation, and organization. However, knowing what to do and having the ability to do it were different things. Again, several teachers felt overwhelmed and discouraged by the fact that they do not have the resources they need to meet the needs of the students. All of the special education teachers have researched on their own, and several have

spent their own money on resources to meet student needs, but still, they feel like inadequate teachers with minimal self-efficacy toward teaching writing. Amy noted that she has been "wading my way through how to figure out really" and that she purchased her own curriculum this year because she wanted something to explicitly target her students' needs (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Teachers also noted time constraints as a limiting factor in teacher self-efficacy towards teaching writing. Special education teachers explained that they just do not have time to research best writing practices, nor do they have adequate time to address the needs of their students. They cite stolen moments from other content areas, but that that has never been effective or enough time. Bianca and Sophie reflected upon how time-consuming it was to research a lesson and then to differentiate it for each student. However, they both noted feeling happy that they were able to meet their students' needs. Additionally, Marina noted,

> I think that sort of feeds back into the time loop. Because you want a finished product, and to get to a finished product you have to have time to do ideas and then sentences and corrections and all of that and I find myself getting to one sentence and then going "ok, that's all we have time for." and there's no finished product there. There's not a whole lot to be proud of (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Overall, special education teacher noted that their past experiences of teaching writing were frustrating and limited by access to resources, time, and student needs although some teachers noted that they did feel good about what they were doing or attempting to do.

Sub-Question Two (SQ2)

Sub-question two was: How do intermediate special education teachers describe their vicarious experiences of teaching writing? The codes in Table 4.9 provided the information for sub-question two relating to observed experience.

Table 4.9

Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question Two

Horizons	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Mentors	4	Mentors and Models
Models	9	
Observing Other Teachers	28	

Although it was coded least frequently, the information provided from mentors, whether from teachers, professors, or cooperating teachers during student teaching, provided a foundational structure on the development of efficacious feelings toward writing. Cambria and Bianca noted previous teachers that were able to not only present challenging material within a safe learning environment but created interest in writing where there may not have been any before. During Cambria's interview, she said, "It's interesting to me how a teacher who motivates you or catches your interest, you want to work for differently than a teacher you're just checking a box for" (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Both teachers expressed being able to take what they saw their teachers doing into their own classroom. Shelby reiterated the same sentiment. A takeaway from student-teaching was what her cooperating teacher told her about allowing students with disabilities time to think *outside of the classroom* so that they can work on idea generation without the pressure of their peers around (personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Many of the teachers reflected upon professional writing that they read and what builds their efficacious beliefs about themselves as writers. It was clearly stated that writing that was saturated with imagery, captivating, and deep drew the special education teachers in, creating a desire to emulate that type of writing. Ella, who is a writer herself, loves the conversation that classical works create over time (personal communication February 12, 2021) and Sophie, who journals every day, enjoyed reading works that help her cope with the painful situations in her life (personal communication, March 1, 2021). Sometimes, the modeling of professional writing created envy or the desire to pursue writing further. Suzanne confided that reading works filled with imagery to the point that her mind cannot decipher between movie and book creates a desire to write children's books (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Kands noted that she often self-talks, telling herself that if others can create writing like that, so can she (personal communication, November 18, 2021).

A final source that develops efficacious beliefs through vicarious means is observing other teachers. Although not many teaches have had formal opportunities to observe other teachers teaching writing, there have been several informal opportunities to observe other teachers teaching writing and general education students working on writing. When discussing the efficacious benefits of observing other teachers, Bianca said that she wished that was the type of professional development CCPS offered because it was highly valuable. She described times that she observed other teachers and took ideas with her to help support her own students (personal communication, April 16, 2021). In their individual interviews, Kristin, Amy, Marina, and Olivia all discussed inspirational teachers that they observed teaching writing and how powerful it was to see the teachers make writing exciting and accessible to all students. Kands responded that even though she has never had the opportunity to observe a teacher give a lesson,

she has had several opportunities to watch students during the writing process. (personal

communication, November 18, 2021). Cambria discussed the importance of observing general

education students participating in writing activities because it gave her hope and helped remind

her (and her students) that it can be done and that students can write (personal communication,

April 23, 2021)

Sub-Question Three (SQ3)

Sub-question three was: How do intermediate special education teachers describe the

verbal feedback given to them regarding their writing pedagogy? Codes addressing this theme

are found in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question Three

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Feedback from Administration	9	Feedback
Feedback from Previous Instructors	17	
Feedback from Peers	3	
Feedback from Students	60	
Self-Assessment	14	

Teachers received both positive and negative feedback from previous teachers and

professors, administration, peers, students, and self-reflection that influenced the development of

their self-efficacy. Unfortunately, very few of the teachers in this study were provided feedback

on their writing instruction specifically.

Marina, who has been teaching for three years, was one of the few teachers who had

received feedback from an administrator. Her administrator had positive things to say about the

scaffolding she used during a writing lesson in her first year of teaching (personal

communication, December 7, 2021). Bianca and Sophie mentioned positive feedback from their administration, but nothing focused on writing instruction. Many teachers reported getting feedback from past teachers regarding their personal writing development that shaped their feelings towards writing. Special education teachers reported that the best feedback was from instructors who were hard on them, but that challenged the special education teacher to dig deeper into her writing quality and become a better writer. Amy recalled the best feedback that she received was from professors who used "open-ended questions that made you think about your writing" (personal communication, February 19, 2021).

Ella and Kands recall feedback that was detrimental to the development of their self-efficacy toward writing. In her interview, Ella discussed a time she submitted a poem to a literary magazine and was denied (personal communication, February 12, 2021). Kands spoke about the devastating feelings associated with writing an essay for the Praxis that was returned because it did not meet the requirement (personal communication, November 18, 2020). Sophie recalled getting "slammed" on her first paper written for her doctoral program. She laughed, "I think it was the first time that I ever saw so much red on a piece of paper. It was brutal" (personal communication, March 1, 2021). A couple of teachers mentioned the importance of having a peer or co-teacher to discuss lesson ideas was helpful and formative. When thinking back to when she was sharing a room with another special education teacher, she said, "I think it's helpful to have someone to talk it through with or bounce ideas off of. I miss having someone to bounce my ideas off of" (personal communication, December 4, 2020). Olivia found it beneficial to work with a peer on creating lessons to ease the load and decide what would work best. Ella is currently working on writing a novel but years for peer feedback.

I'm trying to find a writer's group now so that I can get feedback. I'm not in one right now. So, I'm like hungry for feedback. Is it enough that I know that I want more, that I want to be a part of a little community (personal communication, February 12, 2021).

All of the participants talked about feedback from students as being impactful in how they felt about teaching writing. Several special education teachers mention student engagement and work completion as a source of nonverbal feedback on writing lessons, while other teachers mentioned verbal feedback on lessons. Bianca, Ella, Amy, Cambria, and Marina noted positive feedback on occasion from students in the form of engaging with the writing and appearing to enjoy what they were doing. In these instances, student responses included seeming to enjoy writing and creating and completing the tasks without complaint, for which the special education teachers seemed happy themselves. However, the same teachers noted when the students were not engaged or were frustrated with the difficulty of the writing lessons, causing the teachers to have lower self-efficacy toward teaching the lessons. Cambria talked about the "audible groan" that can often be heard from her students when it is time for a writing lesson (personal communication, April 30, 2021), and Suzanne felt like the feedback she gets from her students is summed up with this comment, "It's more of a punishment I feel like for them" (personal communication, April 23, 2021).

A final source of efficacy through feedback comes from self-reflection. Nine of the teachers participated in reflecting upon three lessons that they taught to their students with disabilities. In these open-ended reflections, the teachers were allowed to take any direction they chose. In reflecting on how they felt about the lessons, all of them were satisfied with the outcomes of most of the lessons. Bianca and Ella were most excited about the quality of work and positive results from poetry lessons that they taught to their students, while Olivia and

Suzanne reflected on the challenges of writing a sentence with their students. Olivia responded that the lesson was "mediocre. The task proved to be much harder than anticipated, and the students struggled significantly…There were just too many pieces" (personal communication, April 29, 2021).

Sub-Question Four (SQ4)

Sub-question four was: How do intermediate special education teachers describe their physical and emotional states as they teach writing? Codes leading to the general sentiment for sub-question four are found in Table 4.11. The special education teachers in this study had many strong feelings towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. Some of the feelings were positive, but most were negative.

Table 4.11

Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question Four

Horizon	Frequency of Codes	Theme
Feelings about Teaching Writing	78	No theme, but general sentiment toward teaching writing
Feelings about Lesson Delivery	12	
Self-Assessment	14	

Ella has kept a positive perspective toward teaching writing. She said, "If anyone can get kids excited about writing just on sheer contagion, it is I" (personal communication, February 12, 2021). She loves everything there is to do with writing, even the hard stuff and wants her students to learn how powerful writing can be. When talking about getting ready to teach writing, she said, "I'm so excited! I'm so excited I can't even tell you! I'm so excited I was skipping in the hallway!" Ella's love for writing emanated through her words, face, and posture

during the interview. She finished with this emotional response that summed up her perspective of teaching writing to students with disabilities,

> There is joy to be had in writing and in expressing yourself….and find topics that they care about, you know, meet them where they are. Let them write about their dirt bike. Let them write about their goldfish. Whatever it is that they truly love…their dragon…oh, I miss T. And if they write a three-page long sentence and you can't understand what it says, have them read it to you" (personal communication, February 12, 2021).

Amy also shared that she loved teaching writing while Bianca had mixed feelings toward teaching writing, saying,

> It's the thing that I love to teach the most besides science. I just love teaching writing… It's fun! It's just fun. It's frustrating, it will make you absolutely insane…Oh man, when it clicks, it's euphoric! It's wonderful! It's my best day (personal communication, April 16, 2021)!

> Most of the sentiments toward teaching writing were feelings of frustration, apprehension, and the stark awareness that the special education teachers were unqualified to teach such a specific and diverse skill. In her focus group interview, Olivia said,

> I know that things that make me feel uncomfortable, I typically avoid. So, I like writing myself and I never minded it as a student, and I don't mind writing right now. But, I don't feel like I know how to teach it and I don't feel like I teach it well, so I kind of avoid teaching and I don't find the time to squeeze it into my lessons as much as I should. I think as a whole, people just avoid things that they don't like and don't feel like they are good at. So, if lots of us don't feel like we are good at teaching writing, then lots of us are

probably not doing it and lots of kids are probably not learning it (personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Suzanne agreed. She said, "Oh gosh, it makes me super anxious because I know that it's going to be a battle. I know that they're going to ask a hundred questions. 'What do what I do now? What do I do now? How do I spell this word?'" Suzanne continued that knowing that students in her group struggle with writing make it, "very painful to try to teach writing" (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Cambria could relate to Suzanne's sentiments and explained it this way, "It's a lot of work and a lot of emotion and it's like pulling teeth some days with these kids… It's grueling at times. " (personal communication, April 30, 2021). However, Cambria, as a way to remind herself and others, said that those negative feelings needed to be put into perspective. "Day to day it's frustrating because you feel like we're not getting anywhere, but I guess when you look at the beginning to the end there's always progress. So, I just try to focus on long term not the short term." (personal communication, April 23, 2021). Still, that constant stress and frustration are will her when she plans and executes writing lessons. Although some teachers were able to find joy and satisfaction in teaching write, the majority found teaching writing frustrating, exhausting, overwhelming, and anxiety-provoking. Really, the teachers just felt defeated.

Summary

Chapter Four began with an outline of how I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of Van Kaam's process of data analysis and how the following themes emerged: learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback. These themes created the backdrop through textual and structural descriptions for how special education teachers perceive their self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities.

Additionally, these themes became direct responses to the central research question and related

sub-questions. The codes that were used to develop each theme were also presented in this

chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions of self-efficacy that special education teachers have towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. This chapter includes a summary of finding to state how this study responded to the research questions. Following the findings is a discussion and implications as they relate to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and the literature on writing. Methodological and practical implications are next, with the delimitations and limitations of the study to follow. Finally, recommendations for future research and a summary conclude Chapter Five.

Summary of Findings

This study examined how 11 central Virginia special education teachers perceived the sources of self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Themes evolved from data provided through individual interviews, audio journals, and focus group interviews. The following section includes a description of the themes relative to the central research question and four sub-questions.

Central Research Question

The central research question was, What are the perceptions of intermediate special education writing teachers regarding the factors that influence the development of their self-efficacy? There are four sources of self0efficacy that can influence or hinder the development of efficacious beliefs, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997). Themes of learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing, and feedback emerged as influential sources that develop the self-efficacy of special education teachers who teach writing.

Sub-Question One (SQ1)

Sub-Question one was, How do intermediate special education teachers describe their past experiences with teaching writing? All of the participants described their past experiences of teaching writing as generally challenging because of student need, access to curriculum, and time constraints. Several teachers noted that although they wanted to have a positive perspective toward teaching writing, they struggled to teach because their students had a variety of needs and starting points. Additionally, all of the special education teachers noted that they had to either conduct their own research to figure out how to teach writing and/or purchase their own writing materials because there was no district-wide curriculum available, making it difficult and frustrating to know how to teach. Finally, all but two of the teachers felt limited by the time they had to teach writing. Most of the writing instruction was taken from a part of the reading instruction provided rather than dedicated writing time. Again, several teachers mentioned that not only did they not have a lot of time to teach writing, but researching, planning, and differentiating writing lessons was time-consuming and frustrating. The understanding of student needs, lack of curricular support, and time constraints lead to a generally lower feeling of self-efficacy toward teaching writing to students with disabilities.

Sub-Question Two (SQ2)

Sub-question two, How do intermediate special education teachers describe their vicarious experiences of teaching writing? was answered through the theme of mentors and models. All of the participants recalled teachers or professors they had growing up or cooperating teachers during student teaching that impacted the development of their self-efficacy toward writing. Three teachers noted teachers or professors that created a safe learning environment that allowed them to take risks while writing. Observations of professional writing

also influenced the self-efficacy of teachers. One teacher noted that sometimes observing other writers made her feel envious and down on herself that she could not do what they do while other teachers felt inspired by the writing of others to pursue professional writing themselves. Observing other teachers was a final source of efficacious beliefs through vicarious experiences.

All of the teachers cited that they wanted the opportunity to observe teachers more often so that they could learn new writing strategies. Five teachers noted that they had observed excellent writing instruction and wanted to emulate that in their classrooms but lacked the time and resources to do so. The rest of the participants noted that they were encouraged by observing general education students participating in writing but had not had the opportunity to observe the teachers teaching a writing lesson.

Sub-Question Three (SQ3)

Sub-question three was, How do intermediate special education teachers describe the verbal feedback given to them regarding their writing pedagogy? In this study, the special education teachers noted that they received both positive and negative feedback from previous teachers and professors, administration, peers, students, and through self-reflection that influenced the development of their self-efficacy. Only two teachers noted feedback on writing instruction from their administrators, both receiving positive feedback but not directly related to the writing lesson. Several participants noted positive feedback from previous instructors that allowed the participant to become better writers. Three participants reported feedback from instructors or through college that hindered their feelings of self-efficacy toward writing. Several teachers mentioned the importance of peer feedback in developing their writing and teaching skills but noted that they are not getting that feedback. Special education teachers noted the feedback from their students as a source of self-efficacy. Teachers noted that in general, students

were discouraged and frustrated with writing and provided negative feedback, though on occasion, the teachers did receive positive feedback on their lessons. Finally, self-reflection was a source of feedback that although there were moments of self-reflection that elicited positive efficacious feelings, the general consensus was that the special education teachers did not feel good about the lessons that they taught because they felt ill-prepared and unknowledgeable about teaching writing.

Sub-Question Four (SQ4)

Sub-question four was, How do intermediate special education teachers describe their physical and emotional states as they teach writing? Two of the teachers cited positive feelings related to teaching writing to students with disabilities, saying that they enjoyed teaching writing. However, the rest of the participants noted that although sometimes they felt content or happy about teaching writing, teaching writing to students with disabilities was challenging and discouraging, resulting in a sort of fear and reluctance toward teaching writing. The teachers cited that the vast student need, lack of knowledge, resources, and time, and negative feeling toward writing created a distrust in themselves that they were good writing teachers and therefore, taught writing as a last-resort, often reflecting their negative feelings towards writing into their lessons and subsequently to their students.

Discussion

This study brought about a connection between the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in chapter two. This section continues the discussion of Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy as it relates to special education teachers of writing. Furthermore, this section includes a discussion on the themes that emerged relating to the empirical literature of writing, students with disabilities, and teaching writing.

Theoretical

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy was the driving theoretical framework for this study. The theory of self-efficacy states that there are four main sources of self-efficacy: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 2012). Varying weights are given to all four sources of self-efficacy and each sources is drawn upon at different times to develop or hinder efficacious feelings (Pajares et al., 2007). This study followed Bandura's theory of self-efficacy because all participants reflected upon the development of their efficacious beliefs toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. As Bandura (1997) suggested, enactive mastery experiences were the strongest indicator of efficacious beliefs as participants discussed positive and negative experiences learning to write and learning to become writing teachers. Arcelay-Rojas (2018) said that how these experiences were remembered influences the development of self-efficacy. The participants also discussed how mentors, feedback, and emotional states influenced their efficacious beliefs toward teaching writing. Teachers shared both positive and negative experiences growing up learning to write that led to both the development and hindrance of efficacious beliefs. As teachers of writing, the special education teachers noted lack of training and mentorship and negative or no feedback that resulted in lower efficacious beliefs.

As all of the participants reflected upon the sources that develop self-efficacy, they noticed that in general, they do not have high efficacious feelings toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Saine and West (2017) noted that modeling was the main source of influence for efficacious beliefs developed through vicarious experiences. Several of the participants recalled observing other writing teachers or other writers and attempting to emulate what the special education teachers perceived as successful. Capa-Aydin et al (2018) said that

observing the success of comparable others can promote the development of self-efficacy. However, not many of the participants were able to develop efficacious beliefs in this manner as they seldom had opportunities to observe their peers.

Bandura (1997) suggested that when others believe in what someone is doing, efficacious believes can grow, however, unrealistic or continued negative feedback can hinder the development of self-efficacy. All of the participants were able to cite past feedback that was beneficial to the development of their efficacy toward learning to become a better writer, but few were able to cite current feedback that supported the development of their efficacious beliefs toward teaching writing. The majority of feedback was negative in nature and came from student reluctance to work on writing and through self-reflection.

Finally, this study also included physiological and affective states that influenced the development of self-efficacy. Most participants responded with stress and negative feeling towards teaching writing which suggested lower self-efficacy toward teaching writing (Sain & West, 2017). However, three teachers cited that they felt excitement and joy when teaching writing, indicating that they may have higher efficacious beliefs towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. Bandura (1997) suggested that the development of efficacious beliefs influence how much effort a person is willing to put forth in performing a task. Presumably, special education teachers with higher self-efficacy toward teaching writing will be more inclined to put in the effort to continue to work on writing despite the challenges they face.

Empirical

This study addressed the current literature that suggested that special education teachers may not be prepared or have the resources necessary to teach writing to students with disabilities. Furthermore, this study underscored the importance of writing, teacher preparation, and teacher

self-efficacy. All three factors influence the classroom and how teachers present writing lessons, interact with their students, and perceived their effectiveness and thus their resilience toward teaching writing to students with disabilities.

Writing

In their 2017 article, Ciullo and Mason cautioned that lack of intervention in elementary and early middle school would continue to perpetuate the low writing scores that are seen across the nation. This research brought to light that some teachers were able to utilize evidenced-based writing practices, including the use of graphic organizers, technology, and repeated instruction (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). However, without having the instruction themselves, the special education teachers continue to perpetuate the low writing abilities of students with disabilities because they were unable to access other evidence-based practices that could make a significant impact on student learning (Graham, 2019). Some special education teachers conducted research to find the evidence-based practices to support student learning. They scoured the web endlessly for ways to support their students and often spent time and money on resources that they hoped would be effective. Nevertheless, most of the teachers struggled to know and use what research says helps students become better writers.

This struggle stemmed from, in part, not having curriculum, resources, or professional development from the school district that they worked for, and in part, from not knowing how to teach writing to students with disabilities and therefore, not having a starting point for research. As noted by Santangelo (2014), the participants found that their students with disabilities struggle from skills as elementary as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation to sentence structure and paragraph development. Students with disabilities has so many diverse needs and even though every one of the special education teachers in this study knew exactly what their

students needed to be successful writers, the teacher ended up feeling defeated because of the lack of available resources. The lack of opportunity to develop student writing skills propagate student feelings of lower confidence, effort, and self-efficacy toward writing (Daniels et al., 2019; Gillespie & Graham, 2014).

Student spelling was also an issue that arose for the participants as another reason that teaching writing was a challenge. Several of the special education teachers noted how difficult it was for their students to spell, causing the students to get hung up on correct spelling which took away from idea generation as noted in the article by Harris et al. in 2017. Additionally, the quality of the handwriting for some teachers was also an issue which resulted in lower quality text as Santangelo noted in a 2014 article. Some of the special education teachers used assistive technology such as talk-to-text applications to help eliminate issues with spelling and handwriting as suggested by Graham, Harris, and Chambers in 2016. Some of the participants noted that by allowing their students a variety of tech tools allowed for a more dynamic writing experience.

Many special education teachers noted the importance of peer writing and modeling in the general education classroom. These teachers found that peer modeling not only help the special education teachers see that successful writing was possible, but it allowed the students to see what they could do with continued practice. Grünke et al. (2016) noted the importance of peer tutoring and modeling as a way to increase self-efficacy and motivate struggling learners. The special education teachers also noted that when their students had time in the general education setting to plan, even if it was time outside of the class, they were more successful writers and felt comparable to their peers rather than feeling stigmatized by their disability.

Finally, Graham (2019) discussed the issue of time constraints in the writing classroom, which all of the participants noted as a hindrance to teaching writing and developing teacher and student self-efficacy toward writing. All of the special education teachers noted the struggle to find time to teach writing to their students and when time was found, to have enough of it to create a successful lesson. The special education teachers noted that even though their students had Individual Education Program (IEP) goals for writing, there was no dedicated time to teach writing within the IEP. Additionally, even when in the co-taught setting, all of the teachers noted not having enough time to support their students' writing because there was little dedicated writing time in the general education classes.

Teacher Preparation

The long-standing myth that Langeberg (2019) discussed how people who can write must be able to teach writing struck a chord with the participants was evident in the discussions of the participants. Of the eleven participants, only two special education teachers noted that they had taken courses to teach writing to students with disabilities. In contrast, the rest of the special education teachers indicated that they had to rely on their past experiences learning to become writers to teach their students. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 and the Council for Exceptional Children (CDC) reiterated in 2018 that all special education teachers must be highly competent and qualified instructors. Special education teachers in this study noted that they had not received instruction in teaching their students to write, and thus felt unqualified and unprepared to teach writing.

In addition, because teaching writing to students with disabilities was not addressed in their teacher preparation programs and most of the special education teachers noted not receiving professional development on teaching writing, the special education teachers were left on their

own to conduct research and find and purchase resource to support their students. Fenty and Uliassi (2018) came to the same conclusion that because of the lack of instruction toward teaching writing in teacher preparation, teachers learned to teach writing from collaborating with other teachers, professional development, and personal research. Finally, Gillespie Rouse & Sandoval (2018) noted that unprepared teachers may struggle with meeting (IEPs) that address writing and need additional support. Several teachers in this study noted that they had students with writing goals, but no resources or dedicated time to teaching writing to their students.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

As Bandura (1997) stated, schools have been designed to support the average functioning student, and as evidenced by the participants, are ill-prepared to teach to the needs of students with disabilities. This lack of preparation, resources, and time gives way to lower self-efficacy in teachers, which impacts the self-efficacy of students with disabilities. As noted earlier, teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to continue working on challenging tasks despite having setbacks, and teacher self-efficacy as a predictor of student achievement (Shunk, 2016). Additionally, teachers with higher self-efficacy have a positive influence on their students (Stites et al., 2018). In the focus group interviews, most of the teachers agreed that it was challenging to teach students with disabilities to write, and therefore, they put little effort or time into teaching writing. Furthermore, those teachers who believed they were good writers and enjoyed writing themselves, such as Ella and Amy, were more willing to push through difficult times with their students and were more willing to continue to help their struggling writers (Bandura, 1997). On the contrary, teachers such as Kands or Cambria, who noted negative experiences learning to write, may be more likely to spend less time or energy on teaching writing.

The lack of evidence-based practices, teacher training, and professional development can limit the development of efficacious beliefs in teachers which can reflect into the classroom and directly impacts student learning. Teachers who are not proved the necessary pedagogy, resources, and ongoing professional support may be hindered in their abilities to teach writing to students with disabilities and may be less willing to put forth effort in their instruction resulting in the perpetuation of low writing abilities of students with disabilities (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019).

Implications

This transcendental phenomenological study discovered findings that have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for researchers, higher education, school divisions, policymakers, special education teachers, parents, and students with disabilities. These finding align with previous findings from researchers and reiterate the need for higher education reform to support the self-efficacy and pedagogical foundation of special education teachers of writing. Additionally, these findings lead to the need for ongoing support for practicing teachers to reduce stress and burnout and to increase student success.

Theoretical Implications

This study expanded upon Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy relative to the relationship of teacher self-efficacy and student self-efficacy and in the perceived development of self-efficacy towards writing for special education teachers. Overall, the special education teachers in this study had limited opportunities to develop their self-efficacy toward teaching writing, resulting in feeling unprepared and unqualified to teach writing to students with disabilities. The special education teachers often felt anxious and stressed when having to teach writing to their students because of the variety of unique needs in their classroom. These feelings

resulted in lower efficacious feelings towards writing. Previous research on the development and perceptions of special education teacher self-efficacy toward teaching writing was limited (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019). This research added to the theoretical research base in this area. Understanding the self-efficacy of special education teachers towards writing can help future stakeholders provide opportunities to develop efficacious beliefs.

Empirical Implications

This study answered the call from many researchers who suggested increasing the research surrounding teacher preparation for teaching writing (Brennen & McQuirk, 2019 and Curtis, 2017). In this study, it was noted that only two teachers received direct instruction in their teacher preparation program that was geared toward teaching writing to students with disabilities. Four teachers mentioned receiving some information on teaching writing as part of a reading course, and five teachers reported not receiving any instruction at all. Additionally, Bruning and Kauffman (2015) and Graham (2019) suggested further research in the area of teacher-self efficacy toward teaching writing, which this study has done. Based on this study, intermediate special education teachers need more thorough teacher preparation programs, ongoing professional development in writing, and resources in the classroom to support their students with disabilities. Information in this study can help future researchers develop programs and resources to help support the areas of self-efficacy, special education, teacher retention, and teaching writing to students with disabilities (Bandura, 1997; Graham, 2019). Finally, this research can provide information to policyholders and school personnel to create opportunities and resources to promote self-efficacy for both teachers and students in the area of writing.

Practical Implications

Special education teachers in this study had students with disabilities that had IEP goals that focused on writing development but the teachers did not have dedicated writing time, resources, or knowledge to support their students. However, state and federal mandates continue to require proficient writers, yet student writing proficiency continues to be low. This study may encourage stakeholders to examine how districts are promoting teacher self-efficacy as teachers prepare student writers (Graham, 2019; Stites et al., 2018). Quality special education instruction continues to be a priority, yet special education students continue to score at the bottom of national assessments in writing. Special education teachers, building administrators, school districts, and teacher preparation programs may find value in this study.

Additionally, by understanding the role self-efficacy plays for special education teachers of writing, teachers and administrators can work together to build a community that develops self-efficacy within the school. High teacher self-efficacy positively impacts students with disabilities and can help build positive relationships between schools and families (Brenner & McQuirk, 2019). This research also correlated with the existing research in that the special education teachers in this study did not receive adequate training in their teacher preparation programs to teach writing to their students with disabilities. With that knowledge, teacher preparation programs and professional developers can use this research to add classes that are dedicated solely to support teaching writing to students with disabilities rather than be embedded within a reading course (Fenty & Uliassi, 2018). Special education teacher support and training can be developed based on this research that could help reduce stress and potential burnout and increase job satisfaction and teacher retention (Langher et al., 2017).

Delimitations and Limitations

This phenomenological study was designed to fill the gap in the literature by describing the perceptions of the sources of self-efficacy for special education teacher of writing. The delimitations included limiting this study to intermediate grade (4th-6th) special education teachers utilizing criterion sampling with additional requirements of teaching students with disabilities and currently having students with reading goals. Additionally, the school districts that were selected were neighboring districts that shared a high school. These school districts were selected because of the larger student with disability population and their similar demographics. A transcendental phenomenology was utilized because of the desire to hear the voices of the participants while bracketing researcher bias. Additionally, all of the participants had experience with the phenomenon, as required by phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

There were limitations to this study. First, the geographic location of the participants limits the generalizability of this study. The participants came from similarly located, rural, central Virginia school districts. Second, this study explored the lived experiences of 11 people which, for phenomenology, is an acceptable number of participants for research, but because of the small research sample, should not be generalized to larger populations. Additionally, there was only one participant from James City Schools. Third, due the specific participant requirements of being special education teachers, the findings should not be generalized to general education teachers. Fourth, the data in this research was transcribe and analyzed by the researcher. To alleviate potential bias in analysis, the researcher provided transcribed interviews, descriptions, and themes to the participants for member checks to ensure that no piece of data was misrepresented and so that all themes were richly described and representative of participant

experiences. Finally, Covid-19 provided an additional limitation in that all interviews and focus groups had to be conducted virtually. Although this may have provided opportunities for flexibility in scheduling, body language and discussions may have been limited due to the conventions of virtual meetings. To ensure that the themes were rich descriptions of the experiences of the special education teachers, data triangulation was utilized.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted to describe the perceptions of the sources of self-efficacy of special education teacher who teach writing to students with disabilities. Graham (2019) noted a need for further research on teaching writing to students with disabilities and Bandura (1997) noted the need for further research on self-efficacy. This small study sought to make a connection between the importance of building the self-efficacy of intermediate (grades 4th-6th) special education teachers of writing so that stakeholders may have an understanding of what is needed to provide better supports and resources for educators and subsequently increase student performance. However, this was just one small study with delimitations and limitation. With the delimitations and limitations in mind, there are several recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

First, other phenomenological studies should be conducted in other regions of Virginia to create an in-depth description of the phenomenon of self-efficacy of special education teachers of writing. Research across the state could provide a deeper understanding of the needs of special education teachers relating to writing. Additionally, expanding the study to include Kindergarten through 3rd grade and 6th-12th grade special education teacher could provide more extensive data on the self-efficacy of special education teachers of writing so that stakeholders could plan programming to support both teachers and students. Although some studies indicated research on

teacher preparation programs, further research could be conducted within Virginia universities and teacher preparation programs that review courses to determine how special education teachers are taught to teach writing because several of the teachers who where education in Virginia noted not receiving training in their teacher preparation programs (Graham, 2019; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Finally, a study into rural districts in how they provide professional development and feedback to special education teachers may be beneficial. A study of this nature could provide answers to ways special education teachers can be better supported during their teaching careers and thus create more proficient writers.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study provided a voice for special education teachers regarding the factors that influence their self-efficacy towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. Eleven special education teachers were asked to participant in interviews, audio reflections on writing lessons, and focus group interviews with questions relating to self-efficacy and writing. Although some special education teachers had positive efficacious feelings towards teaching writing, the majority of special education teachers felt overwhelmed and anxious when teaching writing to students with disabilities. The development of self-efficacy toward teaching writing was hindered due to not receiving training in teacher preparation programs, lack of feedback from administrators, inability to have meaningful observations or collaboration between practicing educations, time constraints two deliver lessons and spend time writing, and the diversity student needs in writing. Although all of the teachers knew the ability levels of their students, the special education teachers felt like they lacked the pedagogy and access to evidence-based strategies to teach writing.

The findings of this study added to the body of research for the self-efficacy of special education teachers and for special education teachers of writing. The themes that emerged as influential sources of self-efficacy were learning to write, teacher training, mentors and models, experiences teaching writing and feedback. The findings indicated that special education teachers had positive and negative experiences learning to become writers, had limited exposure to methods for teaching writing, have had limited feedback toward teaching writing, and feel unprepared and unqualified to teach writing to students with disabilities. All of these experiences and feelings directly influence special education teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) and Graham (2019) cited that highly trained and efficacious teachers of writing positively impact student learning, are more resilient, and feel less stress and burnout than teachers with lower self-efficacy.

Further research should be conducted across Virginia to create a more detailed and in-depth description of the experiences that special education teachers have towards teaching writing to students with disabilities. Having more information, stakeholders can develop programs or resources that can fill the gap that special education teachers feel relating to teaching writing as all of the special education teachers felt like they did not know how to teach writing to their students.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

2020-10-22

Jennifer Ludtke
Sandra Battige

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-84 Perceptions of the Sources of Self-Efficacy in Special Education Teachers of Writing: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Jennifer Ludtke, Sandra Battige:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. MICHELE BAKER, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICE

APPENDIX B: DISTRICT RECRUITMENT LETTER

, 2020

Dear Superintendent,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. I am writing to request your permission to ask your 4th – 6th grade special education teachers to participate in my study on the experiences of special education teachers as they teach writing to students with learning disabilities.

If permitted, I will be asking your teachers to participate in a face-to-face or online, recorded interview, participate in three audio journals of writing lessons, take part in an online focus group, and reviewing their transcribed responses for accuracy. The teachers should be able to complete their participation in approximately two to three weeks, with it taking three to four hours of time to complete all procedures. Their names and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of their participation, but the information will remain confidential. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or response by email to ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Please also send me a list of names with email address of special education teachers who may be interested in helping with this study. I will reach out to them with a description of the study and consent forms. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ludtke
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX C: TEACHER RECRUITMENT LETTER

, 2020

Dear Teacher,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in curriculum and instruction. You have been identified by your district's superintendent, school principal, or a colleague, as a potential subject for study. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study on the experiences of special education teachers as they teach writing to students with learning disabilities.

If you are currently licensed to teach students with disabilities, are currently teaching as a 4th-6th grade special education teacher, are currently assigned to teach literacy, and you are willing to participate, I will be asking you to participate in a face-to-face or online recorded interview (60 minutes), participate in three audio journals of writing lessons (5-15 minutes each entry), take part in an online focus group (30-60 minutes), and participant in transcript review and member checking (10-30 minutes). You should be able to complete your participation in approximately two to three weeks. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please review, sign and return the consent form to the researcher at ███████████████ by December 15th, 2020.

The consent form is an attachment to this email, and it contains additional information about my research. Once I have received your signed consent form, I will contact you to schedule the interview.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ludtke
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM
PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOURCES OF SELF-EFFICACY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHERS OF WRITING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Jennifer Ludtke
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the experiences special education teachers have relating to teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently licensed as a special educator who works with students with learning disabilities for 4th-6th graders in literacy. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jennifer Ludtke, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of self-efficacy that special education teachers have as they teach writing to students with learning disabilities.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a recorded interview that would last 60 minutes.
2. Participate in an audio journal for three writing lessons taught (5-15 minutes each entry).
3. Participant in an online focus group with other participants, which would last about 30-60 minutes.
4. Review my written account of your experience and provide feedback on its accuracy, which would take 10-30 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. The greater community may receive a better understanding of what special educators need to teach writing and how they teach writing.

Compensation: Participants will be provided a $50 Visa gift card for contributing to this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a computer with a password lock. Data will be kept for three years and then deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then erased. Audio lesson reflections will also be stored on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Ludtke. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ███████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Sandra Battige, at ███████████.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX E: DIRECTIONS FOR GOOGLE MEET

1. Go to **meet**.**google**.com (or, open the app on iOS or Android, or start

   a **meeting** from **Google** Calendar).

2. Click Start new **meeting**, or enter your **meeting** code.

3. Choose the **Google** account you want to use.

4. Click Join **meeting**. You'll have the ability to add others to your **meeting**, too.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Liberty University
Date:_____   Code#:_____
Interview start time:_____   Interview end time:_____

I'd like to begin with a little background information about you.

1. Could you please tell me about yourself and your current position as a special education teacher?

2. Could you please describe your teacher preparation program or any training in writing instruction that you have had during your career?

Let's transition to some questions about you as an everyday writer.

3. What do you believe are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

4. Thinking back over your life as a writer, what significant events stand out to you, positive or negative?

5. Thinking about observing other writers and reading their work, what has influenced your writing development?

6. Regarding personal feedback relating to your own writing, what stands out to you as particularly impactful or important?

7. What feelings do you experience when you engage in writing activities?

I'd like to transition now to focus on your experiences as a writing teacher working with students who have disabilities.

8. How would you describe your past experiences teaching writing to students with disabilities?

9. Please think about previous opportunities to observe other special education teachers of writing, what stands out as particularly memorable?

10. What feedback have you received about your writing instruction for students who have disabilities?

11. How do you feel when you think about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

12. What advice would you give to a new writing teacher who works with students who have disabilities?

13. Is there anything else you would like me to know about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

APPENDIX G: AUDIO JOURNAL PROTOCOL

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER AUDIO JOURNAL PROTOCOL
Liberty University

Date:_____

Audio Journal Directions:

You will be participating in creating an audio journal for three writing lessons that you

have taught. After you have taught a writing lesson, please take a few minutes to reflect upon the

lesson and respond to the provided questions. You may use your cell phone to record the

reflections. If you do not have a cell phone with recording features, please let me know and I will

provide you with a recording device. There are no time constraints for each reflection. After you

have completed the three reflections you may email them to me at ███████████. If I will

be providing you with a recording device, we will schedule a time that is convenient for both of

us to pick up the device. If you have any questions, please email me. Thank you for your time in

completing this activity.

Audio Journal Prompts:

Self-Efficacy is one's belief in his or her capability to succeed in a certain task. There is

no time or length limit for these reflections. Please record three audio reflections for writing

lessons taught using an electronic device.

1. Would you please tell me about the writing lesson you taught today for your students

   with disabilities?

2. How did you prepare for today's instruction?

3. How do you feel about your lesson delivery?

4. How did your students with disabilities respond?

5. How does today's lesson compare to the outcomes of previous lessons you've taught?

When you have completed the reflections, please submit the audio files via email to

APPENDIX H: ONLINE FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER ONLINE FOCUS GORUP PROTOCOL
Liberty University

1. What is it like to teach writing to students with disabilities? When you teach a lesson, how do you determine that you have been successful?

2. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's beliefs in their ability to complete a skill or task (Bandura, 1997). How do you feel about your ability to teach writing to students with disabilities?

3. What factors have contributed to those feelings?

APPENDIX I: AUDIT TRAIL

AUDIT TRAIL
Liberty University

Date	Action
04/23/2021	All Individual Interviews conduced
04/28/2021	All individual interviews transcribed
04/30/2021	Focus group one interview conducted
04/30/2021	Focus group two interview conduced
05/03/2021	Focus group interviews transcribed
05/16/2021	All audio journals collected
05/16/2021	All audio journals transcribed
05/16/2021	All transcriptions provided to participants for member checks
05/20/2021	Interviews uploaded to NVIVO for coding
05/20/2021	Horizons created
05/20/2021	Audio journals uploaded to NVIVO for coding
05/20/2021	Horizons created
05/20/2021	Focus groups uploaded to NVIVO for coding
05/20/2021	Horizons created
05/24/2021	Reduction and Elimination process completed

APPENDIX J: EPOCHÉ JOURNALING

Researcher Response to Interview Questions

1. Could you please tell me about yourself and your current position as a special education teacher?

   This is my eighth year in education and fifth year working at CCSP. This past year I have been working as the elementary diagnostician for our district. Previously, I was an elementary special education teacher at Sweetspire Elementary School working with K-5ᵗʰ grade students with disabilities. I am 37 years old and have an undergraduate degree in elementary education. I did not complete my student teaching due to getting married, moving out of state, and beginning a family. My husband worked at a university which allowed me to take courses for free. So while we started our new family, I took courses towards a secondary degree in English. Several years later, I went back to get my Master's degree in Special Education and have a current teaching license in Cross Categorical Special Education K-12.

2. Could you please describe your teacher preparation program or any training in writing instruction that you have had during your career?

   I do not remember much of my undergraduate teacher preparation other than completing volunteer work in a 2ⁿᵈ grade elementary classroom. I took several classes in writing to become a better writer while attending classes for my second undergrad. My Master's program was more remarkable, where I learned about behavior management, disabilities, the legal and ethical concerns in the classroom, and things of that nature. I do not remember taking classes in teaching writing. I remember taking classes in strategies to differentiate across subjects, but nothing specifically for teaching students how to write.

Let's transition to some questions about you as an everyday writer.

3. What do you believe are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

   I enjoy writing and supporting my ideas with research. I am a terrible speller and often find myself choosing different words because I cannot spell the words I want to use. I think I also struggle with clearly articulating what I want to say.

4. Thinking back over your life as a writer, what significant events stand out to you, positive or negative?

   I enjoyed writing as a child and remember writing a story in 4ᵗʰ grade. I was so proud of writing a "chapter book". My mom was super supportive and sent it to a publisher. Although it was denied, the publisher sent me a really nice note about continuing to pursue writing. I have always enjoyed writing and editing, although I am not very good at the grammar component of writing.

5. Thinking about observing other writers and reading their work, what has influenced your writing development?

   I have mostly been influenced by the depth and descriptions from people I read. When I am reading fictional text, I love being able to be carried into the story and have an emotional response to it. I enjoy being able to read and not realize I have been engrossed in the story for hours. On the research side, I enjoy reading work that has a solid connection to the research base, is clearly articulated, and is something that I can say "Yes, I can use this or that in the classroom because there is solid research backing it up."

6. Regarding personal feedback relating to your own writing, what stands out to you as particularly impactful or important?

I don't recall a lot of feedback on writing growing up other than that 4th grade experience of the "positive letdown."

7. What feelings do you experience when you engage in writing activities?

I enjoy writing but don't write personally. I have tried several times to keep a journal, but lose interest quickly. I sometimes get overwhelmed with research writing because I know what I want to say, but cannot always make my words match my thoughts. In the past with IEP writing, I have tried very hard to be subjective and create a PLOP that is a clear picture of the student with data to support what I am saying. It really bothers me when I read a student's PLOP that has "feelings" all over it rather than data to support student growth and needs.

I'd like to transition now to focus on your experiences as a writing teacher working with students who have disabilities.

8. How would you describe your past experiences teaching writing to students with disabilities?

Because I personally enjoy writing, I really have wanted to encourage my students to enjoy writing because I know it is so hard for them. I have not had any training to teach writing nor have I had any professional development on teaching writing, so my experiences have been based on what I could research myself online, snag from picking other teacher's brains, or things that I felt the students should be learning. It's frustrating at times because I would have students with IEP goals to address writing but not know where to begin. In the past few years, I really encouraged my stents to just write. I would give them journals each year, and we would do several writing prompts a week. Sometimes I would choose the prompt, but most often, I would give the students a choice

of several prompts to chose from or let them write whatever they wanted, just so they would write. Some students required accommodations like larger paper or use of tech. Almost all of them struggled with spelling and the mechanics. I really had to work on building their stamina, so we would start with writing for just 2 minutes and then slowly increase until many of them were able to write for 20 minutes. However, time often did not allow for a lot of writing because I didn't have "writing time" built into their IEP minutes. I had math and reading, so I included writing within the reading time, but then that took away from learning to read. It's a double edged sword. Overall, it has been a hodge-podge experience, sometimes overwhelming and often unsatisfying. I often felt like I had to do just a little bit when I really wanted to dive in with them but just couldn't.

9. Please think about previous opportunities to observe other special education teachers of writing, what stands out as particularly memorable?

    I have not observed any teachers teaching writing. I have observed some students working on writing, but I have never had an opportunity to observe a teaching lesson.

10. What feedback have you received about your writing instruction for students who have disabilities?

    I have not received any formal feedback from the administration or other teachers on my writing instruction. Sometimes students will complain about having to write, so that's feedback in itself.

11. How do you feel when you think about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

    Overwhelmed and underprepared. There were no resources to teach writing at the school I was at. I had to find everything on my own and didn't even know where to begin. I researched resources, but was never sure if they were good resources, or just resources I

chose because I had nothing to begin with. I did love teaching writing though. Once I felt like I had the tools I needed, I really enjoyed teaching and trying to get the kids excited about writing. Writing is powerful. I wanted to help my students see that they have a voice that the world needs to hear. I wanted to encourage them to be proud of who they are and to know that they are not just a "disability category". I feel like writing can do that for students.

12. What advice would you give to a new writing teacher who works with students who have disabilities?

I would tell first-year teachers to ask around and find out what resources other teachers have used and found successful, collaborate with other teachers from day one, write every day even if it's just a word or sentence, be patient with yourself and your students, remember that your students will need lots of repetition, but keep writing fun, give them lots of choices whether its paper type, writing tools, writing spaces, or technology. Try to make writing fun for you and your students. Let your students know that you are learning right along with them.

13. Is there anything else you would like me to know about teaching writing to students with disabilities?

I feel like writing is being lost in schools, and there should be a renewed focus towards it. It may just be the district that I work in or my limited experience, but I do feel like our kiddos cannot write like they should be able to. Every profession has a writing component, and students of all abilities need to be proficient writers. Too much time is taken for assessing students and not enough time on working on vital skills.