TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF WRITTEN EXPRESSION: ADAPTATIONS USED IN THE CLASSROOM FOR STRUGGLING WRITERS

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LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

Written expression: The ability of the learner to communicate ideas through written language, forming letter and numbers, or writing words spontaneously.

The writing process: The process of writing that involves planning, composing, revising, editing, and publishing.

Methods for teaching writing: Ways in which educators teach the process of writing to all students within a classroom.

Adaptation: Changes to the learning environment which address particular student needs. These may include physical arrangements, assistive technology, particular instructional strategies and others. Such accommodations are available for students with exceptionalities in all areas of study whether prescribed, modified prescribed, or alternate (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education).

Executive functions: an umbrella term used to describe the set of cognitive abilities responsible for control and regulation of behaviours, such as planning/organizing, mental set shifting, inhibition, emotions, and self-regulation.

ABSTRACT

This study examined how teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia adapt teaching methods in the writing process to accommodate students who struggle with writing. Self-reported responses focused on feelings of preparedness to teach writing and writing strategies, specific writing adaptations being used, confidence to implement different strategies, and specific challenges encountered from 27 elementary and high school teachers were examined. Teachers were asked to complete a survey indicating specific strategies used to teach the writing process and adaptions used when students display writing difficulties. Teachers were also asked to rate their level of confidence to implement various strategies and concepts and to determine the level of importance for each in their own classroom while teaching the writing process. Teachers were also asked to include demographic information pertaining to gender, teaching experience, educational qualifications, etc. Open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively to determine common themes among participants. Results indicated that teachers are using evidence-based interventions to teach the writing process and help struggling students. However, the study did not inquire about frequency for each strategy. Most teachers indicated that not enough time was being spent teaching the process of writing. There were a number of strategies where participants indicated a higher level of importance than their confidence to implement the strategy, suggesting that more research is needed to clarify those reasons. Implications for teacher education preparation programs, high school teachers, understanding the increased demands of writing in other subject areas, and future directions are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Introduction to Written Expression

Researchers have indicated that writing is one of the most difficult academic skills for a student to master (Graham & Harris, 2005; Gregg & Mather, 2002). Given the importance of writing, it is alarming that much of the research has predominantly focused on other academic areas, such as reading and mathematics (Graham & Harris, 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hooper et al., 1994; McCurdy, Skinner, Watson, & Shriver, 2008; Myhill & Fisher, 2010). Recently, research within the area of written expression concluded that students are not learning how to master the writing process (Hooper et al., 2011). Research has also indicated that teachers are not spending enough time teaching writing after grade three and students are not devoting enough time to writing academically, in or out of school (Graham & Harris, 2013). In contrast, teachers are reportedly spending significant time and effort on improving student performance in the areas of reading and mathematics (Graham & Harris, 2013). A gap in the educational literature indicates that inadequate research is being conducted to account for the amount of students experiencing difficulty with writing. Additionally, there is little known about teachers' perspective on teaching the writing process and the specific adaptations and interventions they use when students are experiencing difficulty with writing (Graham et al., 2008; Myhill & Fisher, 2010).

Written expression is the ability to communicate ideas through written text using sentences, correct grammar, and spelling (Pennington, 2009; Scott & Vitale, 2003). As new writers, students transition through three stages of early development until they are considered a fluent writer (Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS). During the transition, students will begin as an *emergent* writer where they use symbols and letters to communicate and comprehend that oral language can be recorded in print (Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013; Teaching in Action Grades

Primary-Three, NS). From this stage, the student begins to understand some purposes of writing and basic writing forms. Classified as the *early* stage, writers tend to use simple sentences and invented spelling (Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS). During the final stage, the *transitional* writer will write for a variety of purposes and follow the steps of the writing process (Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS). It is important for teachers to be flexible with students progressing through each stage, as these skills are not developed evenly across all individuals (Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS). Learning the writing process allows students to become proficient writers while learning how to compose various pieces of writing.

Writing Difficulties

The process of writing employs a variety of complex psychological processes that include; formulating new ideas, using those ideas to generate sentences and paragraphs, using words to communicate and link main ideas, spelling and writing words using graphomotor skills, and evaluating and editing the final product as necessary (Hale & Fiorello, 2004; Pennington, 2009; Scott & Vitale, 2003). Dysfunction in one or more of these processes, which are correlated with different academic skills, may eventually lead to writing difficulties (Berninger, 1999; Hale & Fiorello, 2004). For example; fine motor, motor planning, and working memory skills affect handwriting; phonological analysis, visual-motor skills and knowledge of orthographic conventions affect spelling; and executive functions and oral language skills affect composition (Berninger, 1999). Additional research indicates that executive function and working memory deficits may be the fundamental basis of written language difficulties, as these deficits have been linked to poor sentence coherence, output, efficiency, lexical cohesion, and the generational component of writing (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007; Wilson & Proctor, 2002 as cited in Hale & Fiorello, 2004).

The ability to write not only involves comprehension of the writing process, prior knowledge and experience are required to guide the written product, as well as spelling visualizations and

spatial feedback to lead the hand during the physical composition (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Technology can assist with deficits within the areas of spelling and handwriting, however additional interventions are required to assist with deficits in written language composition (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). While some students with writing difficulties may experience some success in language and writing skills, the absence of proper interventions focused on written expression abilities may cause writing deficits to persist into adulthood and affect vocational abilities (Johnson, 1987 as cited in Hale & Fiorello, 2004).

Writing is a critical component that can influence student success (Graham & Harris, 2005). Not only does it provide students with an outlet to demonstrate their knowledge in academic subject areas, it also permits students to gather, remember, and share information while supporting the exploration, organization, and refinement of ideas (Graham & Harris, 2005). Additionally, it provides alternative methods for students to share thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Hooper, 2002).

As previously mentioned, the writing process involves a number of complex psychological processes and skills. Given this complexity, students with learning difficulties are likely to experience a variety of writing skill deficits and can become overwhelmed when faced with writing activities (Dunn & Finley, 2010; MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). Students struggling with the writing process frequently exclude a writing plan, tend to write a small amount of information, and do not revise the writing piece for grammar and legibility (McCutchen, 2006; Stevens & Englert, 1993).

Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of students experiencing writing difficulty, recent research has revealed that students do not tend to write well (Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham, et al., 2003; Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Since children with writing difficulties tend to write fewer words and sentences, evaluation of their writing is considered more difficult (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Additionally, these students generate a negative perception of the writing process, as

well as their own writing capabilities (Gregg & Mather, 2002). Teachers, administrators, and other school personal possess the adequate tools to support student writing difficulties (Graham & Harris, 2013). However, more time and research devoted to the area of writing difficulties and effective strategies could help educators assist students with the writing process (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Similar to the impact of word recognition difficulties on reading comprehension, difficulties with handwriting and spelling restrict written composition (Fletcher, et al., 2007). Studies have indicated that examining neurodevelopmental finger functions can predict levels of handwriting and spelling (Berninger & Rutberg, 1992). Fine motor functions help to formulate the actual construction of letters and words and the time it takes to construct them (Hooper et al., 2011). One study indicated that handwriting and spelling inadvertently accounted for 66% of variance within writing output (amount of written work) in primary students and 25% of the writing quality (Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, & Whitaker as cited in Graham & Harris, 2005). When handwriting and spelling demands are removed, struggling writers usually display improved writing output and/or writing quality (Dunn & Finley, 2010; Graham & Harris, 2005). Failing to master any of these skills can cause difficulty with writing performance (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Adolescents who have not conquered the writing process within the classroom are at a disadvantage before they graduate high school (Graham & Perin, 2007). Provided that a majority of universities use written applications and writing to evaluate applicants' qualifications, students with writing difficulties are less likely to apply for post-secondary institutions (Graham & Perin, 2007). Professors have indicated that students are not always prepared for the high writing demands placed upon them when entering post-secondary education (National Commission on Writing, 2003). One study revealed that ninety percent of jobs in today's professional market emphasize the necessity of effective writing skills as a requirement (National Commission on Writing, 2003).

With growing demands being placed on teachers within the special education field, classroom teachers are required to differentiate instruction to assist in providing support for students with learning difficulties. Given that classrooms incorporate a variety of needs, providing support for students with difficulties in writing can prove to be overwhelming and extremely difficult. With appropriate preparation and support, classroom teachers can effectively provide adequate instruction and strategies to assist with learning and writing difficulties (Westwood, 2004).

Executive Functions and Working Memory

In addition to spelling and handwriting, executive functions and semantic knowledge, both of which involve working memory processes, are required components of written language (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Models of written expression have been conceptualized as a 'problem solving process' (Hooper, Swartz, Wakely, De Kruif, & Montgomery, 2002), as the writer must connect different executive functions that guide the self-initiation of thoughts, affect, and behaviours that are used to complete writing tasks (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997 as cited in Altemeier, Abbott, & Beringer, 2008; Hooper et al., 2002). While research has indicated that executive functions are associated with written composition tasks, increasing interest in identifying the underlying neurocognitive processes has increased (Hooper et al., 2002; Hooper et al., 2011).

Executive functions are also responsible for planning, translating, and reviewing/revising during the writing process (Hayes & Flower, 1980 as cited in Altemeier et al., 2008; Hooper et al., 2002). Planning is a crucial component to writing composition, as skilled writers take more time to plan how and what to write (Graham & Harris, 2005). Additionally, these writers tend to be goal-oriented, moving from the translation of ideas to using text, into planning the next sentence or paragraph (Hale & Fiorello, 2004; Hooper et al., 1994). These writers will not only generate more ideas while writing, they have a clear understanding of the writing goals, the topic, and are aware of the intended audience (Hooper et al., 2002). Students who struggle with writing tend to spend less

time in the planning process (Dunn & Finley, 2010; Graham & Harris, 2005) and will typically generate less text and ideas, poorer sentences and paragraphs, and overall shorter essays (Hooper et al., 2002).

Working memory is thought to underlie the maintenance of ideas, the retrieval of writing rules from long-term memory, and the recursive self-monitoring process (Hooper et al., 2002, 2011, 1994; McCutchen, 1996). McCutchen (1996) concluded that students experiencing problems with writing appear to have a reduced working memory capacity. A written plan created in advance will provide these students with an "external memory", reducing the risk of losing stored ideas (Graham & Harris, 2005). In addition, this strategy will help writers who tend to lose composition ideas stored in working memory due to the intense concentration of handwriting and spelling demands (Graham & Harris, 2005).

A study by Altemeier and colleagues (2008) examined executive functions for reading and writing in typical children and those suffering from dyslexia. It was indicated that executive functions accounted for some of the variance in writing skills, however the specific executive functions could not be classified. Although Hooper and colleagues (2002) suggested that the executive functions involving initiation, set shifting, and sustaining separated strong and weak writers, the effect sizes were small. Similar research concluded that executive functions such as planning, translating, programming, reading, and editing, contribute to the writing process. Inhibition was found to contribute most to the task of note taking, while verbal fluency was significant to the task of report writing (Hooper et al., 2002; Hooper et al., 2011). One possible explanation is that report writing demands a greater breadth of language knowledge and generation than does note taking (Altemeier, Jones, Abbott, & Berninger, 2006).

Overall, difficulties experienced with executive functions, especially self-regulation, can potentially affect both higher-level composition processes and lower level processes, such as

handwriting and spelling (Altemeier, et al., 2008). Lower-level writing processes also include automatic alphabet writing from memory. Research in the area of executive function deficits in respect to written expression is necessary so that these children can be identified and receive early intervention (Hooper et al., 2011). Although research has indicated that executive functions are involved with the writing process, further research is required to determine the exact processes affecting writing skills.

Teacher Resources

Among certain Atlantic Provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador [NL] and Nova Scotia [NS]), documents among the Department of Education places an importance on writing instruction. Documents are available for teacher use that explicitly states how to teach the writing process, how to transition between the different levels of the writing process, and how to assess student progress (English Language Arts Curriculum Guide Primary, NL; Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS). Both provincial departments provide informative resources teachers can use to develop lesson plans targeted specifically to one area of writing or the overall writing process. Additionally, both provinces place emphasis on the developmental process of learning to write and how to effectively transition students through the various phases. The documents provide teachers with suggestions concerning organization of the writing environment, becoming comfortable with and how to effectively teach the writing process. Using the documents may increase a teacher's self-confidence and preparedness in the classroom. Overall, the curriculum guides and resource list for the provinces are sufficient and effectively provide teachers with a great resource.

Similar to research concerning the writing process, both provincial Department of Education documents emphasize the importance of the five key instructional approaches to writing; modeled writing, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing. However, there appears to be a lack of information pertaining to students who struggle with the writing

process (Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three, NS; English Language Arts Curriculum Guide Primary, NL). A document titled *Supporting Student Success: Resource Programming and Services* accessed through the Nova Scotia Department of Education, provides various tiers of overall differentiated instruction and assessment for classroom students. However, it does not provide focused strategies used to help students struggling with the writing process. Importantly, the Department of Education websites do not reflect seminars, professional development sessions, or conferencing with other teachers (i.e., special services teacher) that can be aimed at supporting writing difficulty.

While other counties have released documents suggesting the current disarray of the writing situation within classrooms, Canada has not released such documents (What is the research evidence on writing [United Kingdom]; The neglected "R." [National Writing Commission of United States of America]. Focusing on Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, there appears to be a lack of information assisting teachers with specific writing difficulties.

Responding to this gap in the literature, this research will address the relatively understudied topic of how teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia respond to the writing process and writing difficulties within their classroom. The sample used for the current study will focus on graduate level participants, as there is little research on the perceptions of graduate students in teaching written expression. The research will examine self-reported feelings of preparedness by teachers when they are required to teach writing and writing strategies. The specific writing adaptations being used in the classroom, how confident they feel to implement different strategies, and specific challenges will also be examined.

CHAPTER TWO

In spite of research dated thirty years ago that voiced concern and foreshadowed a major problem in the area of writing (Bridge & Heibert, 1985), districts and schools have only recently began making changes to help alleviate writing difficulties (Graham et al., 2003). Regardless of efforts to upgrade the quality of writing instruction within schools, there still remains a persistent gap between empirically supported methods to teach writing and the practices being used within the education system (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). Students are not spending enough time writing in or out of the classroom and therefore not mastering writing skills necessary to succeed (Graham & Harris, 2013). However, this should not distract from the incredible job some educators accomplish when teaching the writing process (Graham & Harris, 2013). Research has shown that teachers are usually successful when effective writing instruction is implemented (Graham & Harris, 2013). The idea of "effective writing instruction" depends on a number of different factors; teacher knowledge, attendance to different areas of language, appropriate timing, balancing the different processes that effect writing instruction, and using evidence-based interventions (Berninger, Garcia, & Abbott, 2009). In fact, while educators possess the 'know- how's and tools to improve students' writing that is necessary to become skillful writers, utilizing those tools effectively can be challenging (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Research has provided little data on the specific methods and adaptations teachers use in the classroom to teach and support struggling students. As a result, there is little known about how much time teachers spend on writing practices and how they adapt their instruction (Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham et al., 2003). One researcher, Pressley, has published numerous studies indicating that literacy teachers, who are considered to be outstanding, continually differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of students in their classroom (Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1997; Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). These teachers reportedly

provided more intense and individualized instruction with a focus on the basic skills of writing (Pressley et al., 1997, Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). Other studies indicate that typical teachers make few or no classroom adaptations to accommodate students struggling with the writing process (Graham, et al., 2003)

Student success largely depends on providing effective, differentiated instruction (Graham, et al., 2003) and whether the teacher perceives the adaptation as feasible and teacher friendly (Graham & Harris, 2005). Given the quantity of research and evidence-based adaptations to support individual learning styles, teachers possess the tools to effectively differentiate their instruction for struggling writers (Graham & Harris, 2005). While specific strategies are constructed for students who struggle with writing, all students benefit from direct, explicit teaching. One study indicated that most teachers use conferences with students, mini-lessons, re-teaching of skills and strategies, and modeling at least once a week to teach writing, while weaker students received additional instruction (Graham & Harris, 2005). These teachers also identified the importance of teaching basic writing skills (i.e., handwriting, spelling, and grammar) at least several times a week (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Teaching the Writing Process

Learning how to write is a difficult process (Hale & Fiorello, 2004; Graham & Harris, 2005; Gregg & Mather, 2002). Given the complexity and cognitive demand, educators should approach teaching the writing process as softly as possible (Graham & Harris, 2013). Fortunately, there are scientifically supported methods that make the writing process easier for students. These methods will be discussed in the following section. Additionally, a number of adaptations will be discussed that teachers can use to assist students who experience difficulty with some aspect of the writing process (i.e., planning, revision, handwriting, or spelling). To avoid student confusion, effective writing instruction includes an explanation of the purpose behind the method, as well as when and

where it should be used (Graham & Harris, 2013). Modeling the method should occur multiple times and provide students with support until they are effectively facilitating the method on their own (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Students learn more effectively when the classroom environment is supportive, non-threatening, and interesting (Graham & Harris, 2013). Student shutdown is likely to occur when the classroom is perceived as unfriendly, chaotic, or punitive (Hansen, 1989 as cited in Graham & Harris, 2013). To create a flourishing classroom, teachers can display student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007), allow students to write for a variety of purposes, and ensure access to a variety of books and writing materials (Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). In this environment, students have the opportunity to learn about the content, processes, and purposes of writing (Rowe, 1994 as cited in Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013).

Creating routines where students become accustomed to planning, revising, and editing their work is essential (Graham & Harris, 2013). Some educators use mnemonic devices to guide the process such as; *PODE,* planning, organizing, drafting, editing/revising writing (Stevens & Englert, 1993); and *SCOPE* (proofreading technique), spelling, capitalization, order, punctuation, and expressing thoughts (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). The students begin to grasp an understanding of the process as a whole and appreciate the final product. As the educator, providing support and praise to all writing attempts is likely to result in future similar behaviours, especially when that praise is targeted to a particular area (Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013).

Various studies suggest the importance of writing as frequently as possible and occasionally choosing the writing topic (Graham & Harris, 2013; Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). However, a study conducted by Graham et al. (2003) found that teachers were inclined to choose writing topics for struggling writers, therefore placing a limitation on writing topics. Teachers may also require students to write about content learned within the classroom to help solidify the information

(Graham & Hebert, 2010, 2011 as cited in Graham & Harris, 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007), although it can create more issues and frustration for those who struggle with the writing process.

The Planning Process

Although teachers report that handwriting, spelling, and the planning process of writing should be taught at least once a week, an emphasis is placed upon teaching writing skills rather than the planning process (Graham et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the same study also indicates that many teachers use common approaches for all students while teaching writing (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bishop, 1992; Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham et al., 2003). Research-based written language instructional methods should involve multi-step instructions and stress the importance of modeling (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Most instructional methods contain a planning, writing, and revising stage.

Students do not spend adequate time in the planning stage of writing. Most have a tendency to begin composition before brainstorming or organizing their ideas (Hale & Fiorello, 2004; Lassonde & Richards, 2013). Planning is important for all students, as some struggle with the concept of writing and planning simultaneously (Lassonde & Richards, 2013). Although there are various ways students can plan, research indicates that some aspect of planning will lead to effective writing (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). An explicit and modeled approach to teach planning usually results in a higher success rate with students (Lassonde & Richards, 2013).

There are many scientifically supported methods for teaching planning to all students. Teachers can use a sketch journal, where students are able to draw their ideas of characters, places, situations, and the evolution of the plot (Richards & Miller, 2005 as cited in Lassonde & Richards, 2013). A tape recorder is effective for students who experience transcription deficits (Richards & Miller, 2005 as cited in Lassonde & Richards, 2013). This is a way for students to record their verbal ideas without losing them during the cognitive demands of writing. Another effective way to plan writing is through the use of index cards. Students can place different ideas on different cards

allowing them to rearrange the cards to fit the development of the writing (Richards & Miller, 2005 as cited in Lassonde & Richards, 2013). Finally, a common method of planning is the use of graphic organizers that allow students to make connections among ideas and to visually represent relationships (Lassonde & Richards, 2013).

For students who struggle with writing, teachers can use think sheets, planning sheets, or prompt cards that provide a structure to complete the critical planning step during the writing process (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). Planning sheets (i.e., visual and graphic organizers) not only assist the student when they feel 'stuck', but it also provides a common language for teachers and students around writing tasks and assignments (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). Additionally, any strategy that encourages students to activate prior knowledge, talk to peers, or organize their ideas will be beneficial to the writing process (Lassonde & Richards, 2013).

Students who disregard the planning process may do so for a number of reasons, they may not know how to plan, they may not have found the best planning method that works for them, or they may perceive planning to be time consuming (Lassonde & Richards, 2013). There are a variety of planning methods and adaptations that can be used to assist students with planning and no one method is a best fit for all students. When given the freedom to choose a planning method, students usually encounter ideal results.

The Revision Process

After students have composed a piece of writing, it is essential for that piece to be revised. Revising is important in writing since it allows the student to evaluate for effective communication and flow, to reconsider the content or perspective, and to improve overall quality (MacArthur, 2013). Teachers are also able to guide students through their writing while learning about characteristics of effective writing to improve the quality (MacArthur, 2013). The difficulty experienced by educators to engage students in the revision process could possibly contribute to the

finding that most students do not engage in consistent revising practice within the classroom (Graham et al., 2003; Fitzgerald, 1987 as cited in MacArthur, 2013).

Although more research is required, some studies have determined effective revision methods to use with students. Teacher feedback is a consistent and effective method used within the classroom, especially when feedback is communicated verbally (MacArthur, 2013; Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). Any type of feedback that clarifies problems with writing, makes suggestions to increase quality, or allows the student to reflect on their own writing is extremely helpful to students (Bach & Friedrich, 2006 as cited in MacArthur, 2013). Even though research suggests written feedback is generally less effective, it most likely depends on the nature of the feedback (Hillock, 1986 as cited in MacArthur, 2013). Importantly, teacher conferencing is significant with revision, as one study revealed that over 85% of teachers use conferences to teach writing and more frequently conference with weaker students regarding revision (Graham et al., 2003).

Another common method is peer revision (MacArthur et. al, 1991). Teachers have indicated that students are generally encouraged to help other students write and revise (Graham & Harris, 2013; Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). Using peer review is an effective way for students to receive immediate critique about their writing and can provide recommendations (MacArthur, 2013). Given that some students have limited writing skills, it is important this process occurs under guidance so each student is contributing in an effective way (MacArthur, 2013).

An appealing method for students to become familiar with the process of revision is to establish a sense of critical literacy. Students have a tendency to believe everything in text without considering the authenticity of the information (MacArthhur, 2013). Students who become accustomed to reading texts critically and establishing problems within the text experience improved revising skills (MacArthhur, 2013). They are able to transfer those learned skills onto their own writing (MacArthhur, 2013). However, this skill is dependent upon the ability of the writer.

Students who struggle with the revision process should receive additional teacher conferencing, mini-lessons, and teacher modeling (Graham et al., 2003). Since cross-curricular activities provide students with multiple opportunities to use newly learned concepts, it is extremely valuable to constantly integrate revision instruction in all subject areas that require writing (MacArthur, 2013).

Spelling

Spelling skills are currently receiving less attention in the education system, with some classrooms omitting spelling from the curriculum altogether. Some educators perceive these skills to be unnecessary, leaving researchers to wonder where this information originated. All children are expected to spell throughout their lives, and failing to prepare students for spelling can limit their future potential (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). The evidence clearly indicates that spelling directly contributes to overall reading and writing ability (Schlagal, 2013).

Within the education culture, there appears to be an uncertainty about the English spelling system and the methods for teaching it (Schlagal, 2013). For students experiencing spelling difficulties, the conscious mental demand can affect processing memory to the point where they forget their ideas or plans for writing (Graham et al., 2008). Even when students are engaged in the writing process, they will avoid using words they do not know how to spell, sometimes negatively affecting their work (Graham & Harris, 2005). This can eventually lead to obstructed writing development. When students learn the spelling process, it allows them to gain insight about phonemic awareness, strengthen their grasp of the alphabetic principle, and sight words become easier to remember (Graham et al., 2008). Given this reasoning, spelling instruction is undeniably an important skill to teach during the primary grades (Graham et al., 2008).

Based on a lack of previous research, a strong foundation of classroom spelling skills has not yet been established. However, most researchers agree that writing instruction should be tiered and differentiated (Graham et al., 2008). Most teachers tend to rely on weekly word lists and teaching

phonological awareness, phonics, spelling rules, and strategies for spelling unknown words (Graham et al., 2008). Furthermore, teachers were reported to use mini-lessons, peer activities, and games to help students acquire new spelling skills (Graham et al., 2008). Similar to other writing areas, the use of praise and feedback when teaching spelling is valuable (Graham et al., 2013; Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). Some teachers depend on school district grade-level spelling books that fail to meet the needs of every student and can potentially cause frustration and disappointment (Schlagal, 2013). A study by Morris, Nelson, and Perney (1986) found that while poor spellers succeeded with the end of week tests, their level of retention and mastery was limited. One adaptation is to use a variety of word lists that are organized and adapted for individual students (Morris et al., 1986). This ensures that spelling is developmentally appropriate (Schlagal, 2013).

Research-based spelling adaptations may focus on constructing a spelling notebook of difficult words that can be used during the writing process and teaching spelling in the context of oral reading and semantic understanding (Harp, 1988). Another effective intervention is known as the cover and write method; the student looks and verbalizes the word, writes the word while looking, covers the word and rewrites it, and then uncovers to check correction (Mercer & Mercer, 2010). Additionally, many teachers indicate the use of invented spelling, particularly with those who struggle with spelling (Graham et al., 2003). A study by Graham and colleagues (2008) found that teachers were most likely to use certain adaptations with struggling writers; such as, reducing the number of spelling words per week, the frequency of student-teacher conferences, and the amount of time spent reteaching spelling skills.

Handwriting

When students experience difficulty with handwriting, they are less likely to engage in the writing process (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Students may be able to eloquently describe ideas and stories, but encounter frustration when asked to write about the same topic (Hale & Fiorello, 2004).

A student may become discouraged from writing when it physically hurts to write, takes too long, or illegibility of handwriting (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Handwriting is a practical skill necessary for note taking, forms of communication, standardized tests, and district-wide tests (Schlagal, 2013). Short, daily practice sessions for handwriting are more effective and interesting for students (Schlagal, 2013). As students begin to learn the mechanics of letter making, the common alphabetic route is not the most effective (Schlagal, 2013). Confusable letters and sounds should always be separated so students are able to learn the letters efficiently (Schlagal, 2013). Similar to other areas, teacher modeling is also quite effective (Schlagal, 2013).

When a student is experiencing difficulty with handwriting, it is important to determine the cause of the difficulty. The cause of the deficit will determine the adaptation used for the student. It may stem from a visual-spatial, somatosensory, motor, or integration deficit (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). A combination of deficits may require intense occupational therapy sessions (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Mercer and Mercer (2010) believe that letter shape, letter size, letter spacing, letter adjustment, and line quality should be examined during a handwriting assessment. Given the increase of technology within the classroom, some people insist that keyboard/typing skills be taught (Greenland & Polloway, 1994 as cited in Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Although technology and computers allow struggling students to experience some success, research indicates that judgments about education, intelligence, and professional competence are made based upon handwriting skills (Hale & Fiorello, 2004; Schlagal, 2013).

Like other academic areas, there are a variety of different skills and processes that must be mastered before a student can achieve competency in writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). When teachers establish writing routines, reinforce planning and revising, model strategies, and use specific, interesting assignments, students are more likely to use previously learned strategies (Gersten & Baker, 2001). However, some children are less likely to apply newly learned strategies

to alternative academic situations, especially those who struggle with classroom curriculum (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986).

Self Regulated Strategy Development

One writing intervention gaining attention is the research-based approach of self regulated strategy development (SRSD; Mason, Harris, & Graham 2011). This approach recognizes that "explicit, interactive, scaffolded instruction in strategies for planning, composing, and revising improves performance for students who struggle with writing" (p. 21, Mason et al., 2011). Throughout the writing process, a focus is placed upon the idea of self-regulation, which includes setting goals, self-instruction, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement, being explicitly taught and practiced (Mason et al., 2011). Similar to Baker, Gersten, and Graham (2003), the emphasis is placed on the planning, composing and revising strategies (Mason et al., 2011).

There is an extensive list of resources that teachers can access to devise a well-constructed planning strategy to help students generate their own ideas and organize their thoughts for the writing process (Mason et al., 2011). During instruction of the writing composition, the use of *POW* or *WRITE* can be used. *POW* (Pick my idea, Organize my notes, Write and say more) is a simpler strategy that can benefit younger writers (Mason et al., 2011). As the SRSD model has been proven to be effective with students of all ages, the strategy *WRITE* (Work from your plan to develop a thesis statement, Remember your goals, Include transition words for each paragraph, Try to use different kinds of sentences, Exciting words) can be used in classrooms composed of older students (Mason et al., 2011). Another main component of SRSD consists of the development of self-regulation, which involves explicit teaching and modeling of how to set goals, monitor performance, self instruct, and the ability to self reinforce (Mason et al., 2011).

The SRSD model involves six stages for strategy acquisition; (i) develop background knowledge, (ii) discuss strategies, (iii) model strategies, (iv) memorize the strategies, (v) support use

of writing and self-regulation strategies, and (vi) independent performance (Harris et al., 2008 as cited in Mason et al., 2011). Although it is a demanding writing instructional strategy, research indicates that students involved with this model experience more success with writing (Graham & Harris, 2013; Mason et al., 2011).

Although an abundance of information is becoming available to guide teachers with the writing process, the methods and adaptations that have proven successful in the past should not be dismissed. Teachers can combine personal effective methods with the adaptations previously discussed to create a successful learning environment (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Response to Intervention

Given the complications and controversies surrounding the Intelligence Quotient-achievement discrepancy model, researchers, school personnel, and clinicians have searched for other ways to identify students at risk of academic failure (McAlenney & McCabe, 2012; McMaster, Du, & Petursdottir, 2009). The discrepancy model has been labeled a "wait and fail" approach that ignores the role of frequent quality instruction and student progress monitoring (McMaster et al., 2009; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2006).

Recently, a new approach for identifying students with learning disabilities has gained attention; response to intervention (RTI) determines if a child responds to increasingly intense instruction that is scientific and research-based (Fletcher et al., 2007; McAlenney & McCabe, 2012). RTI strategies typically have three common characteristics; instruction is research based, there is a close monitoring of progress and results throughout the intervention, and tiered instruction with smaller teacher-student ratios and intense instruction is used (McAlenney & McCabe, 2012). RTI has a main focus of early prevention, as many writing difficulties go undetected until later elementary or intermediate grades (McMaster et al., 2009).

RTI universal screening strategies are provided to all students at an early age. Through screeners, students "at risk" for writing difficulties are identified. The first tier of RTI focuses on high quality core instruction using differentiated strategies to all students in the classroom (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Troia, 2013). A student not responding to tier one will receive the second tier of evidence-based interventions focused on writing difficulties. This supplements the core classroom time and usually consists of small group instruction. (Bradley et al., 2005; Troia, 2013). During this stage, it is possible to have multiple levels (Troia, 2013). Finally tier three, the most intense and specially designed evidence-based interventions are administered to the individual struggling students displaying minimal response within tier two (Bradley et al., 2005; Troia, 2013).

Early prevention provided by RTI can help prevent long-term writing difficulties that can result in negative life-long effects (McAlenney & McCabe, 2012). RTI models accept the notion of unexpected underachievement given a certain level of cognitive ability indicate difficulties, but are based around frequent assessment and progression over time (Fletcher, et al., 2007).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher education programs provide student teachers the opportunity to learn new approaches and polices necessary to become effective, comprehensive educators. However, some institutions have received recent scrutiny regarding the adequacy of teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). The perception of education programs is that of an archaic, self-serving structure refusing to prepare teachers with a skill set necessary to survive within the classroom (Lucas, 1999 as cited in Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Wang, & Odell, 2011).

Studies indicate that teachers are not sufficiently prepared for the amount of work involved and the realism of school culture (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Professionals are also expressing their concerns about the preparation level of teachers (Darling-

Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). These concerns have urged the redesign of education programs to strengthen the connection between theory and practice, to increase knowledge base, and to provide a supportive environment enabling powerful teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In order to provide an ideal teacher education program, an institution should address three major complications: learning how to teach is complex and requires tremendous effort and dedication, the clarification of information concerning how people learn to teach, and recognizing that learning to teach is a lifelong, enduring process (Spalding et al., 2011). Education programs should focus on scientifically proven methods that are most effective for improving student learning and achievement (Clark, 1988).

As with most programs, students begin teacher education programs with preconceived notions surrounding the idea of what it takes to become a teacher and the measures of being a successful one (Clark, 1988). Whether effective or ineffective, each person brings different opinions into the classroom. The responsibility of the education program is to structure and teach students the important aspects and preparation of becoming effective teachers (Clark, 1988).

Education programs usually prepare student teachers to write a lesson plan, to integrate topics across various curriculums, and the history of education, however it does not prepare for behaviour management within the classroom and exploring individual students for learning difficulties (Spalding, 2011). Education programs are out of touch with current issues experienced by teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Since the increase of social media and technology, many teachers use the Internet, twitter, and blogs to teach (Spalding, 2011). One study found that current teachers wished their education program had prepared them to motivate students in and out of the classroom, how to deal with parents, reading reports and contracts, and using classroom technology, including the boundary issues of social media sites (Spalding et al., 2011). Teachers who admittedly are displeased with their preparation are more

likely to experience difficulty in adapting instruction for individual needs to promote student success and blaming students when their teaching is ineffective (Darling-Hammond, 2000). A study by Coles and Knowles (1993) concluded that the reality of teaching shattered the idealistic imagery held by many student teachers, resulting in frustration, anger, and bewilderment (as cited in Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005).

Although education programs are inadequately preparing teachers for the realistic demands of a classroom, research shows that some level of preparation is required (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). In addition to teacher preparation, teachers who have a greater amount of knowledge of teaching and experience are usually more effective (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and tend to make more adaptations within the classroom (Graham et al., 2003). The way in which teachers perceive themselves can also affect their instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Teachers who consider themselves to be effective will adapt instruction and use other scientifically supported methods of teaching (Graham et al., 2003).

If teacher education programs continue to disregard current issues within teacher training, more problems may arise. Evidence indicates that short-term teacher programs less than one year in duration are particularly ineffective in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Since Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia do not allow short-term teacher education programs, this is not a concern. However, the length of teacher education programs within the province could be problematic. Countries such as Germany, Belgium, France, and Luxembourg require two-three years of graduate level training in addition to an undergraduate education degree and an intense school internship (Darling-Hammond, 2000). These students report a higher level of satisfaction with the preparation level and are viewed as better prepared and effective (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Additionally, these teachers are more likely to stay within the teaching profession than others who only completed a four-year undergraduate program (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Given this

information, educational institutes should reevaluate the length of their teacher education programs and the type and depth of information being instructed.

The current study was designed to address the lack of research in the area of written expression in the classroom. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1) What are teachers' perceptions of their level of confidence to teach and the level of importance they place on various areas of written expression?

2) What methods/strategies do teachers report using to teach students to write?

3) What adaptations/interventions are implemented to help struggling students with the writing process?

4) How much instruction time is devoted to the writing process?

Methodology

Participants

This current study included information from 27 participants enrolled in graduate programs at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Corner Brook, Newfoundland campuses.

Measures

Teachers were asked to complete the survey and provide demographic information about themselves and their teaching experience (i.e., number of years spent teaching and their level of education). The survey measures areas of teacher perceptions of preparedness for teaching writing, teacher's beliefs about writing instruction, and teacher adaptations made to writing instruction and the writing process in the classroom.

Procedure

Faculty members of MSVU graduate education programs were provided an explanation and purpose of the study along with information regarding student involvement (see Appendix A). Classes of the faculty members who expressed an interest were sent an email asking for student participation in the study. The email contained a letter describing the research project (Appendix B) and requesting they complete an online survey, accessible through a provided URL (Appendix C). After reviewing the information and providing informed consent by clicking on the link, participants were presented with the questionnaire. They answered demographic questions before completing a series of open-ended and Likert scale questions. Participants viewed one question at a time, and were not able to go back and change their previous answers. The survey was designed to obtain information on their perceived preparedness for teaching writing, beliefs about written expression, the adaptations they make and strategies used for learners with writing difficulties, and demographic information. Altogether, the entire process took participants between 20 and 30 minutes. Participants were not

provided compensation for completion of the survey and all participation was conducted on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Results

Overview

Results will be presented as follows: frequencies for demographic information, and a qualitative discussion of responses to open-ended questions and teacher preparation and confidence to teach different components of written expression.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

This current study consisted of 27 participants (n=25 female; n=2 male). Participation in the study was anonymous and therefore participants were not required to include identifying information (i.e., location of teaching position, name of school, etc.). Please see Table 1 for a comprehensive summary of demographic information. In terms of campus location, 14 (52%) participants were studying at the Halifax, Nova Scotia campus and 8 (30%) participants were studying at the Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador campus; 5 (18%) missing data values were revealed in response to this question. Twenty-three (85%) participants reported they were currently enrolled in a graduate program, while 4 (15%) indicated they had already completed their graduate program. Regarding current education, participants indicated the following: Masters of Education in Curriculum Studies (n=7, 26%), Masters of Education (n=6, 22%), and Masters of Education in Literacy Education (n=10, 37%); 4 (15%) missing data values were revealed in response to this question. The sample indicated that 12 (44%) of the total participants completed a specific course on teaching written expression, 14 (52%) of the total participants took a course that included teaching written expression, and 23 (85%) of the total participants took a course on teaching exceptional learners. Eleven participants (40%) indicated they were teaching Primary/Elementary grades, 10 (37%) participants indicated they were teaching Junior High/High

grades, and 6 (23%) participants fell into the Other category (i.e., Learning Resource Teacher, Vice-Principal, Librarian, and adult education).

Teacher Perception of Confidence Level and Importance on Areas of Written Expression

Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to rate their level of confidence to implement various concepts, strategies, and interventions pertaining to written expression (e.g., "I am confident using this principle in teaching written expression"). In addition, participants were asked to rate their perceived level of importance for each concept, strategy, or intervention, to as it contributes to the teaching of written expression (e.g., "This principle is important in teaching written expression").

Teaching written expression using different processes. Participants were asked to rate their perceived level of importance and level of confidence when teaching written expression using different processes (i.e., writing as an interactive process, writing as a strategic process, and using good characteristics of written expression). Chart 1 indicates that participants provided higher ratings for importance (n=26, 96%) than they provided for confidence (n=23, 85%) in the area of teaching writing as an interactive processes. Similarly, participants indicated higher ratings for importance (n=22, 82%) than they provided for confidence (n=21, 78%) in the area of teaching written expression as a strategic process. In the area of teaching characteristics of good writing, participants indicated a slightly higher level of confidence (n=26, 96%), than their perceived level of importance (n=25, 92%; see Chart 1 for importance and confidence ratings of different teaching processes).

Teaching specific written expression skills. Participants were asked to rate their perceived level of importance and level of confidence in regard to teaching a variety of written expression skills (i.e., mechanics, composing, editing, and drafting, composition, grammar, and spelling; see Chart 2 for importance and confidence ratings of specific writing skills). Although only 74% (n=20) of participants indicated that teaching mechanics of writing was important to written expression,

93% (n=23) indicated their confidence in teaching the skills. Fifteen percent (n=4) indicated this concept was not important when teaching written expression and 7% (n=2) rated themselves as unconfident to teach the mechanics of writing. Every participant (100%) indicated that teaching composition, editing, and drafting skills are important to written expression; however, 89% (n=24) rated themselves as confident in teaching the skills. In the area of composition skills, most participants indicated a similar level of importance (89%, n=24) and confidence to teach the skill (85%, n=23). Comparably, participants indicated similar results in regard to teaching grammar, as 82% (n=22) rated the importance of grammar, while 80% (n=21) indicated their confidence. Seventy-four percent (n=20) of participants indicated that spelling is an important skill, while 15% (n=4) disagreed to its importance. However, there was a higher level of perceived confidence (89%, n=24) to teach the skill.

Support provided to students. Participants were asked to rate the level of importance as it relates to various concepts, strategies, and interventions used to support students while teaching written expression and their perceived level of confidence to execute those skills (see Chart 3 for importance and confidence ratings in regard to different methods of support). When participants were asked to rate the level of importance for helping students identify writing goals, 100% provided a rating of importance; however, 93% (n=25) indicated a level of confidence. Similarly, all participants indicated that providing students with a variety of writing opportunities was important, while 94% (n=25) rated themselves as confident in providing those opportunities. Participants were questioned if behaviour management was important during the teaching of written expression. Eighty-one percent (n=22) indicated it was important and 78% (n=21) felt confident to implement behaviour management techniques. Ninety-six percent of participants rated the level of importance and their level of perceived confidence equally for integrating writing activities into other curriculum areas.

Various teaching strategies. Participants were asked to rate the level of importance for different teaching strategies and their perceived level of confidence (see Chart 4 for importance and confidence levels for different teaching strategies). All participants (100%) acknowledged the importance of student-focused learning; however, 82% (n=22) indicated their confidence in implementing the strategy. Participants indicated a slightly higher level of perceived confidence (82%, n=22) in respect to teacher-led instruction (sometimes known as direct instruction), rather than the level of importance (77%, n=21). Discovery learning was rated as important by 89% (n=24) of participants, while 77% (n=21) indicated their confidence to implement in the classroom. All participants (100%) acknowledged the importance of differentiating instruction to meet individual needs of students; however 82% (n=22) indicated they were confident implementing the concept while teaching written expression.

Delivering Early Writing Experiences

Participants were asked to rate the level of importance in delivering early writing experiences within the classroom. Ninety-two percent of participants (n=24) indicated they agreed with the importance of the strategy, however, 74% (n=20) felt confident to implement the strategy. The participants who identified themselves as intermediate or high school educators may not perceive themselves as confident to implement early writing experiences.

Open-Ended Responses

Methods and strategies used to teach the writing process. Using open-ended questions, participants were asked to discuss best practices that can be used when teaching written expression. Research has shown that using evidence-based practices is considered "best practice" in the classroom (Graham & Harris, 2013; Graham et al., 2003; Graham et al., 2008). Teachers were asked to indicate the best practices in teaching written expression. A percentage of responses indicated that providing extra support (n=13, 50%), teaching the process of writing (n=12, 46%), and using

difference resources (n=15, 58%) were best practices to use when teaching written expression. Providing extra support included responses that referenced technology, assistive technology, conferencing and feedback, and chunking writing activities. It is important to distinguish between assistive technology and technology. Assistive technology is an umbrella term that refers to any item, piece of equipment, or software that increases student abilities. Two participants referenced using "assistive technology", but did not provide specific reference examples. Since the term assistive technology can encompass many items, the study cannot presume the participant was referring to only technology. Teaching the writing process included responses pertaining to teaching grammar, sentence structure, essay writing, and peer and teacher editing. Participants who referenced using different resources included graphic organizers, writing checklists, word walls, workshops, guided lessons, etc. (see Table 2 for a list of best practices and corresponding themes and frequencies).

Participants also indicated that providing opportunities for extra support (conferencing, support, feedback, prompts; n=10, 37%), using organizers (anchor charts, graphic organizers, word walls, concept mapping; n=11, 41%), and modeling/guided writing (n=8, 30%) are strategies most useful when teaching written expression (see Table 3 for themes and frequencies of strategies most useful when teaching written expression).

Adaptations and interventions used to help struggling writers. Participants were asked to identify writing difficulties observed in their classroom. Three common themes that emerged from the responses were, the structure of writing, internalizing behaviours, and fine-motor difficulties. Participants who suggested the structure of writing was a common difficulty observed in the classroom, indicated grammar (n=8, 31%), spelling (n=12, 46%), sentence construction (n=6, 23%), and revision (n=1, 4%) as specific difficulties. Internalizing characteristics referred to difficulties such as, the ability to generate ideas (n=7, 27%), comprehension of written material

(n=8, 31%), off-task behaviour (n=7, 27%), lack of creativity (n=3, 12%), struggling readers (n=2, 8%) and lack of independence/motivation (n=1, 4%). Finally, 12% (n=3) of participants referenced fine-motor problems as a common difficulty observed in the classroom (see Table 4 for themes and frequencies of writing difficulties in the classroom).

Teachers were also asked to identify challenges while teaching written expression. They identified student demands (teacher to student ratio, student need, motivation level, and off-task behaviour, n=9, 35%), time constraints (n=7, 27%), and individualizing instruction to meet students' needs (n=8, 31%) as the major challenges while teaching written expression (see Table 5 for themes and frequencies for challenges).

Additionally, participants were asked to discuss how they first respond when dealing with a student exhibiting writing difficulty. A percentage of participants indicated they would first conference with the student (n=10, 38%), provide extra support through one-on-one time, small group instruction, and guided writing (n=7, 27%), and prompt and encourage the student (n=5, 19%). See Table 6 for themes and frequencies for first response to writing difficulties.

When asked to identify available resources designed to assist with teaching written expression, participants identified Instructional Resource Teachers (IRT), literacy mentors, and itinerants (n=18, 69%), books (n=8, 31%), technology (n=5, 19%), and professional development and courses (n=5, 19%) as the main resources used (see Table 7 for themes and frequencies of resources used to assist with writing difficulties).

Finally, participants were asked to identify resources in which they would like to have available for use in the classroom. Increased The opportunity for professional development/courses (n=6, 25%), the ability to use more technology (n=5, 21%), and to collaborate with other teachers, administrators, district personnel (n=1, 4%) were identified as resources participants desired in the classroom (see Table 8 for themes and frequencies of desired teacher resources).

Instruction Time Devoted to the Writing Process.

Participants were asked to identify the amount of time they spend teaching written expression in their classroom. Based on 22 responses, half of the teachers spend three to five hours per week teaching written expression (n=11, 50%). However, 56% indicated this was not an adequate amount of time (n=14).

Discussion

The current study had five main objectives. First, teachers' perceived level of confidence to teach written expression and their rated level of importance on different components of written expression were examined. Second, the study investigated common teaching methods and strategies implemented by teachers when instructing written expression. Third, adaptations and interventions used by teachers to help struggling students with the writing process were examined. Additionally, the study sought to determine how much instruction time was devoted to the writing process.

Writing Difficulties in the Classroom

Students are expected to engage in writing activities across various areas of curriculum. Writing via paper and pencil, using a keyboard, composing and planning a piece of writing, and summarizing previously read material require written expression skills. Teachers may encounter student-writing difficulties that require support for the student and/or adaptations to the material, classroom, or teaching methods. Based on the current study, teachers suggested the inability to understand the structure or writing (spelling, composition, characteristics of good writing, and grammar), internal student characteristics, and fine-motor difficulties are common problems observed in the classroom.

Teaching the structure of writing is an extremely important educational concept, especially during early literacy instruction (Wells-Rowe & Flushman, 2013). The current study indicated that 75% of teachers believe mechanics of writing instruction is an important area to teach. Interestingly, although a lower level of importance was placed on the mechanics of writing instruction, teachers placed a higher level of confidence in themselves to teach the concept. Since teaching specific skills within the structure of writing (e.g., handwriting, spelling, typing, and grammar) can significantly improve writing quality (Graham, in press as cited by Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009; Schlagal, 2013), it is surprising that 25% of teachers in the current study disagreed with the

importance of teaching spelling. However, most participants agreed with the importance of teaching grammar and felt confident to do so. Many of the teaching methods referenced by participants are considered tier one support of the RTI model (Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009).

Students with writing difficulties typically experience lower self-esteem and self-perception, in addition to lower motivation when engaged in writing activities (Berninger, Garcia, & Abbott, 2009). The current study supports that teachers experience difficulty with internalizing characteristics of students while teaching written expression (i.e., lack of motivation, comprehension, struggling readers, generating ideas, lack of creativity). Motivation concerns were acknowledged throughout different areas of the current study, as participants indicated difficulties keeping students motivated to write. Attempting to motivate students includes changing their negative beliefs about writing so they begin to identify writing as a meaningful activity (Boscolo & Gelati, 2013). While offering choice, providing reinforcement, and using technology are methods to motivate students, it would be interesting to survey specific motivational methods used by teachers during writing.

Students who struggle with reading tend to also struggle with writing (Shanahan, 2009). Participants of the current study reported that teaching students with writing difficulties was more challenging when the student also displayed reading difficulties. When teachers perceive the two as distinct and unrelated, it can be overwhelming to teach both processes. While the processes are closely-related, but considered different, Shanahan (2009) provides effective and scientific-based interventions that can be used to teach both reading and writing in combination. For example, using programs to ensure that children receive specific amounts of time devoted to strictly reading, and combining explicit instruction of reading and writing can result in a deeper understanding of knowledge, skills, and strategies and provide greater power and efficacy (Shanahan, 2009). At the

high school level, reading and writing instruction should be utilized to develop other abilities, such as historical reasoning, and complex analysis skills (Shanahan, 2009).

As previously discussed, students who experience handwriting difficulties are less likely to engage in the process of writing (Hale & Fiorello, 2004). Therefore, it is logical that many of the participants examined encounter fine-motor difficulties while teaching written expression. However, none of the listed strategies, interventions, or adaptations provided by the participants indicated they would focus on improving fine-motor skills, which could result in improved handwriting or writing quality (Graham et al., 2008). This finding could be attributed to that some teachers feel unprepared to teach handwriting, do not enjoy handwriting themselves, or have no desire to teach the skill (Graham et al., 2008). A study by Graham and colleagues (2013) surveyed teachers to determine the amount of time and methods used to teach handwriting. They discovered that although adequate time was devoted in teaching handwriting, some of the practices were being misused, which raised concerns regarding the quality of instruction.

Best Practices

There is an abundance of information relating to best practices that teachers could use in their classrooms. While one strategy or intervention improves writing skills, it does not suggest that it will produce similar results in all classrooms with all students (Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009). The classroom teacher must monitor the practice to ensure correct implementation, effects, and make any appropriate changes (Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009). The implementation of evidence-based interventions depends on a number of different factors; suitability, effectiveness, level of difficulty to implement, possible negative effects, and knowledge about implementation (Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009). If teachers perceive a “best practice or intervention” as unsuitable, it is less likely they will implement the strategy. In addition, teachers are more likely to

use evidence-based practices when there is a level of support from other teachers, administration, and district level staff (Graham, Olinghouse, & Harris, 2009).

Participants were asked to indicate best practices they use to teach written expression. Overall, using resources (i.e., graphic organizers, checklists, and word walls), teaching the structure and revision of writing, modeling, student choice, and providing extra support were the common best practices among participants. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) also consider teaching the structure of writing, editing skills, modeling, explicit instruction, and daily writing as best practice tier one strategies.

Not surprisingly, many participants indicated they use some form of explicit instruction while teaching written expression; modeling, providing assistance, brainstorming, or steps to writing. As with most subject areas, the writing process requires direct, explicit instruction for planning, drafting, evaluating, and revising, which is shown to strongly improve the quality of writing produced from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Graham et al., 2003; Graham & Harris, 2013). Explicit instruction also improves a student's composition ability (Graham et al., 2003; Graham & Harris, 2013).

One unexpected finding was the level of technology used by participants in the classroom, as five participants reported they used technology to help teach written expression (two of which indicated they used assistive technology). Technology in education has been on a steady increase, with computer labs, digital equipment, interactive whiteboards, and mobile learning devices becoming staples within the classroom (Karchmer-Klein, 2013). However, teachers continue to rely on traditional methods of teaching concepts of writing (Karchmer-Klein & Shinas 2012 as cited by Karchmer-Klien, 2013). Students may be unprepared for communication in the 21st century when technology is not efficiently integrated into writing instruction (Karchmer-Klein, 2013). Computer applications have been effectively developed; for example, word processing programs, spell-check,

word prediction, and speech to text programs designed to help students write, and mapping programs to assist with the planning process have been developed to support struggling writers (MacArthur, 2009; 2013). This is not to imply that technology can replace writing instruction, as research indicates that when technology and effective instruction are combined, the overall quality of writing increases (MacArthur, 2009; 2013). Examining how important and confident current participants are while using technology to teach written expression would have been beneficial to the current study. As teachers are the most important factor in technology integration, it would also be interesting to determine the reasons as to why technology was underrepresent in the sample. One participant indicated the lack of technology utilized in the classroom was beyond their control due to "…the limitations of school board purchased software, and the reluctance to allow students to BYOD [bring your own device] and connect with school WIFI."

Throughout the responses provided by participants, the English Language Arts Curriculum Guide Primary (NL) or Teaching in Action Grades Primary-Three (NS) was not mentioned as a tool to help teach or support written expression. It would be beneficial for future studies to examine teacher reasoning as to why the documents are not being used. No participant in the sample indicated the use of an RTI framework. Although some aspects of RTI were discussed, no participant indicated the use of the framework to teach the writing process and areas of written expression. Although RTI is a research-based method to assist with identifying struggling students, it is best practice to teach the whole group tier one strategies (Troia, 2013). The idea of RTI being under-represented will be discussed later.

Challenges During Written Expression Instruction

As previously established, best practice indicates that teachers use evidence-based interventions and adaptations to instruct and support students within written expression (Graham & Harris, 2005). Teaching written expression has become more challenging and inadequate instruction

can negatively affect students in other subject areas (Graham & Harris, 2013). The current study intended to reveal the foremost challenges experienced by participants while teaching written expression. Given the changes to education (i.e., high enrollment, inclusion, decreased money for extra support, etc.), it is not surprising that participants in the study reported that the individual demands of students, differentiation, time, struggling readers and writers, and lack of resources interfered with effective teaching of written expression.

In a system where inclusion is the norm, teachers and instructors can feel overwhelmed and struggle to address all concerns in the classroom (Tomlinson, 1999). They are expected to differentiate content, processes, and products for students so material can be accessible at the student's level (Tomlinson, 1999). In spite of available research indicating differentiation and individualized instruction is best practice, many teachers use common approaches for all students while teaching writing instruction (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bishop, 1992; Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham et al., 2003). Although most participants (86%) received training in teaching students who require individualized learning, 82% indicated they were confident in differentiation. In addition, 30% indicated individualized instruction/differentiation was a major challenge while teaching written expression. However, all participants acknowledged the importance of differentiation within the classroom.

The participants in the current study indicated the need for more professional development (25%), more technology (21%), and more overall support (13%). Given Westwood's (2004) research that teachers are more confident and willing to provide individualized instruction and strategies when they are adequately prepared and supported, it is not surprising that some teachers do not use or feel confident to implement individualized strategies that improve quality of writing. Additionally, more time, collaboration, and funding were referenced as desired resources. Participants indicated a common resource they use when students are struggling with the writing

process was an outside source or district personnel. Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they would use a resource teacher, literacy mentor, or district itinerant. Considering that collaboration was under-represented in participant responses, it is interesting that teachers place more responsibility on other people. It can be difficult to engage with district personnel, and some teachers may not be aware of specialized instructors on staff. Providing specific time within teachers' schedules for collaboration and consultation may alleviate some of the responsibility placed upon specialized support staff. Additionally, the use of an RTI framework would allow teachers to become efficient in implementing tier two strategies.

Finally, participants indicated the use of books, technology and professional development as other desired resources. The use of cross curriculum instruction can assist with providing students multiple opportunities to write, engage in meaningful writing activities, and alleviate time constraints. In the current study, most participants (96%) acknowledged the importance of cross curriculum writing activities and the confidence to implement. Two participants indicated they did not use resources to assist with supporting students with writing difficulties.

A time constraint to meet all the needs within the classroom was also indicated as a common difficulty. One participant indicated, "There is not enough time to help everyone in the classroom who lacks ideas to commit to paper even when class webs are displayed and teacher prompting is provided." Given that districts have implemented province or statewide testing, teachers feel compelled to "teach to the test." Teachers at the high school level feel so overloaded within the teaching environment that writing instruction, feedback, and assessment of writing occur minimally (Read, & Landon-Hays, 2013). Pressure from administration and/or the district for teachers to work more than they perceive as possible, can affect teacher instruction (Collinson & Cook, 2001).

Managing student behaviour can take away valuable instruction time. Participants (82%) in the current study indicated that behaviour management is important while teaching written

expression, and 78% feel confident in the implementation. The current study also indicates that challenges of teaching written expression can stem from student behaviours and difficulties, but also from a systemic level (i.e., pressure from districts and administration, funding, professional development, and technology).

Strategies Used to Support Writing Difficulties

While evidence-based instruction in the area of written expression has, and is currently continuing to increase (Berninger, 2008), research regarding how to adapt writing instruction for students with deficits in specific processes is less available (Berninger, Garcia, & Abbott, 2009). Specific evidence-based strategies to assist with individualizing instruction for struggling writers are tiered assignments, centers or groups, flexible grouping, and choice boards (Tomlinson, 1999). In the current study, participants indicated student conferencing and providing extra support (one-on-one, small group instruction, modeling, guided reading) as first-responses when students display writing difficulties. Most teachers indicated at least one evidence-based strategy to use with struggling writers.

Interestingly, one participant indicated a file review would be effective when a student is displaying writing difficulties. Being aware of pre-existing diagnoses, interventions, and history can help influence classroom instruction with specific students. Perhaps most teachers perform a file review of all students and did not consider it necessary to explicitly indicate a file review in the survey. In addition, two participants indicated they would collaborate with other teachers for help when students are experiencing writing difficulties. The profession of teaching can at times, become isolating and teachers may become removed from strategies being used in other classrooms. This area will be addressed in the implications section of this study. Two other participants indicated that conducting as assessment of skills could get a baseline of basic skills. By using CBM in the

classroom, teachers are able to quickly and efficiently determine basic writing skills (McMaster & Espin, 2007).

Although several tier two strategies were indicated, no participant explicitly stated they use an RTI framework. This could indicate disconnect from the RTI model on the east coast of Canada, or particular districts have not adopted the new theoretical framework.

None of the strategies listed by the participants received 50% of the agreement; however, there were some similarities within the responses. Graphic organizers are considered an essential teaching tool for students within the writing process (Englert, Okolo, & Mariage, 2013). The organizers concretely show the features of a given text, remind students of relevant information within the text, and refer to associations among the different components (Englert, Okolo, & Mariage, 2013). Forty-one percent of the current sample used graphic organizers to help teach written expression.

Newer strategies appeared to receive less attention (i.e., workshops, portfolios, and technology). Strategies, such as workshops and portfolio assessment, were reported but received low participant percentage. Workshops can vary in the implementation, however it typically contains mini-lessons (writing skills, spelling, grammar, punctuation, composing), daily writing for a specific time (20-30 minutes) where students are provided the opportunity for personally meaningful writing in varied writing tasks, teacher and student conferences, and frequent opportunities to share writing with others (Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2013). There has been confounding research within this area; however, similar to other strategies, correct and authentic implementation is critical for student success (Troia et al., 2013).

Portfolio assessment integrates writing instruction and assessment in a way that engages teachers, students, and parents (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993). Teachers can use portfolios to support and evaluate student progress; however, limited research has been conducted in this area and most of the

available evidence focuses around antidotal reports from teachers (Gerhart, 2009). Since portfolios contain writing from individual students who receive various levels of support, samples in one portfolio are not likely to be comparable to other students as evidence of whole class achievement (Gerhart, 2009). Portfolios are flexible to support and assess individual students' written expression, but recommended that teachers receive training, since the breadth and versatility can become limiting when used incorrectly (Gerhart, 2009). Because the questions were open-ended, a large number of strategies were reported. It would be noteworthy to determine if and how teachers are implementing these strategies by using more closed-ended questions.

Written Expression Instruction

Research has shown that teachers are not spending enough time teaching writing after grade three and students are not devoting enough time to writing academically, in or out of school (Graham & Harris, 2013). The current study asked teachers to identify the amount of time per week spent teaching written expression. Fifty percent of respondents indicated they spend 3-5 hours per week teaching the writing process, while two groups of 18% indicated they spend 1-2 hours or 6-10 hours. When asked if the time spent engaged in instruction was adequate, 56% said no. Much of the research states that writing should occur daily within the classroom across different subject areas, with many opportunities for feedback and extra support (Graham & Harris, 2005). Writing instruction appears to be placed on the sidelines to make way for instruction in mathematics and reading (Graham & Harris, 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hooper et al., 1994; McCurdy, Skinner, Watson, & Shriver, 2008; Myhill & Fisher, 2010), and the current study appears to replicate that notion. Given other variables involved with teaching written expression (i.e., teacher preparation, challenges, lack of resources, etc.), it is not surprising that participants in the study felt overwhelmed to provide and adapt effective writing instruction.

Limitations and Future Direction

The current study provides preliminary evidence regarding written expression instruction and teacher adaptions used to help struggling writers. The first limitation is with respect to the constructed survey. After the use and examination of the survey tool, further follow up questions would have added additional information to the study. For example, the survey questioned strategies and best practices used by participants; however, asking how often the strategies are used would have been beneficial. Participants may use the strategy in the classroom, but the authors are not able to determine if the strategies are being used consistently or once per year. Also, the study used open-ended questions to alleviate participant agreement with questions. Asking an open-ended question in reference to strategies and best practices and following with closed-ended questions about specific strategies may have reduced the amount of variance within the responses.

Despite attempts to increase the number of participants in the present study, the sample size remained small. This could be considered an additional limitation. Further examination with a larger sample would be beneficial to provide greater power in analysis. Additionally, the study involved a higher number of female participants (n=25) than male participants (n=2). A larger sample of males would provide better representation of both sexes.

The examination of teacher education programs and their ability to train teachers to teach written expression was not accomplished in this study. The study inquired if participants felt confident to implement the strategy, practice, or concept, but did not account for the reasoning of confidence. It appears unrealistic to attribute the confidence level with teacher education programs, as most of the teachers have been teaching over 5 years. Daily experience, professional development, and collaboration with other teachers, administration, and district staff can influence the confidence level of participants. Future research could focus on surveying teachers exiting from

an undergraduate education program, before an on-site practicum is completed. This will accurately depict their level of confidence as it relates to the instruction level from post-secondary institutes.

Future research on adapting instruction for struggling readers should build from the current study and take a more in-depth approach to examining the particular strategies and best practices. Specifically, using more closed-ended questions in regard to particular strategies may provide more information.

There have been many published reports regarding primary teachers teaching the writing process (Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, 2003; Graham, Harris, Mason, Fink-Chorzempa, Moran, & Saddler, 2008; Graham, et al., 2008). Future research could examine secondary and high school teachers exclusively to determine strategies implemented at that level. Some high school teachers have a misconception that writing instruction dissipates after a student leaves primary/elementary school; however, research indicates that writing is a developmental process and requires continued instruction and support as the student moves through the education system (Read, & Landon-Hays, 2013).

Lastly, future research of writing should examine writing difficulties and mathematics. Given the changing language of mathematics (increased writing and analytical component), students experience increased writing demands. Specialized mathematics and science teachers are not trained in teaching written expression; however, we expect students to intuitively grasp the writing concept in other subject areas. As one participant from the current study said, “I teach math and science courses only. Although we work on writing, I do not have any training in teaching written expression.” Additional thought and consideration should be given to writing difficulties experienced by students in all subject areas, and the ways to adapt writing instruction in mathematics versus language arts.

Clinical Implications

The main finding from this study suggests that teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia are using a variety of best practices and strategies to teach and adapt written expression instruction; however no particular strategy was determined as common or widely used. In addition, most teachers acknowledged the importance of certain processes, strategies, and concepts with reference to the writing process, and most teachers indicated their confidence to implement. There were a number of circumstances when participants indicated a higher level of confidence than level of importance, indicating that although participants felt confident to implement, the strategy may not occur in their classroom.

Another implication from the study is the need for professional development. Participants indicated professional development could assist with learning new strategies and introduction to new writing programs. Effective professional development is an on-going process in which teachers continually develop (NJCLD, 2000). Teachers should be granted opportunities to further their knowledge of the ever-changing education and research field. Professional development should also include expert sessions and follow up support sessions (NJCLD, 2000). Providing time for teachers to collaborate could alleviate some of the challenges expressed in the current study (i.e., time constraints, feelings of exclusiveness, and student demands), as teachers are more likely to work through instructional issues with a teacher, rather than district level staff (Poulos, Culberston, Piazza, & D'Entremont, 2014). Collaboration helps improve school environment and climate, improve teacher practice, and address diverse student needs (Poulos, Culberston, Piazza, & D'Entremont, 2014). Providing time outside a teacher's instruction schedule may benefit the school, students, and administration.

A main area of examination of the current study was to determine how effectively teacher education programs prepare teachers for real-life instruction of written expression. As previously mentioned in the limitations, the current study did not effectively question or examine this variable.

However, some suggestions were provided in the open-ended questions suggesting that participants do not feel prepared to teach all components of the writing process. For example, one participant reported a challenge as, "Not having adequate training to teach students who are not performing at grade-level." As previously mentioned, one participant indicated they had no training in teaching written expression based on their high school specialized area of mathematics and science. One study examined high school teachers involved with writing (Read, & Landon-Hays, 2013). The teachers reported ineffective instruction in their own Kindergarten to Grade 12 experience and ineffective teacher preparation training in the area of writing (Read, & Landon-Hays, 2013). If research shows that writing is an on-going process from Kindergarten to grade 12, should all teachers be trained in written expression instruction? According to the current study, only 45% (n=12) of participants completed a course specific to written expression and 54% (n=14) of participants completed a course that included an aspect of written expression. Literature acknowledges the importance of writing and the difficulties students experience, however, teachers are expected to teach the process of written expression with little or no training. Based on research and the current study, teacher education programs (at the Masters and Undergraduate level) for all grade areas should include a course regarding written expression instruction.

Another area of implication is technology. Although technology was not explicitly studied, the open-ended questions provided participant insight. With technology increasing, it appears that classrooms are not accommodating the change for all students (Karchmer-Klein, 2013). Technology is being utilized for students displaying difficulties, such as learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, and english language learners; however, the use of technology is not being used to its full potential to further the development of writing instruction (Karchmer-Klein, 2013). One participant of the current study indicated that the language of society is changing via text messages, social media, and emails. With the changing modes of communication, it is difficult for students to

express themselves through written word. Writing instruction should incorporate all modes of communication and effectively teach students to use alternate modes correctly.

Implications for School Psychologists

There are also important implications for school psychologists working within the education field. One participant indicated the review of a student's file would assist with struggling writers, as previous diagnoses, past interventions, and report cards would be specified. A file review is an integral aspect of knowing a student. As part of the Master's program, school psychologists become familiar with collaboration and consultation among school personnel (Mureika, 2007). This could be an area of professional development or consultation among school staff to identify the information that can be gathered.

Another area of implication for school psychologists is the lack of acknowledgement of school psychological services that can be used in the education system. Although some participants indicated base level assessment, no response included consultation with the school psychologist. School psychologists are primarily viewed as assessors, rather than consultants and collaborators that can provide professional development and resources for teachers (French & Murekia, 2002).

Although this study was designed to examine teachers' perceptions of written expression and the strategies they use to assist with struggling writers, it provided a foundation for further exploration in the field of written expression and classroom adaptations. With continued research, it will be possible to provide teachers with a foundation of best practices of written expression, and how to effectively engage in the process, as a whole. Continued research will enable teachers to better teach their students and provide the knowledge required for effective written expression.

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Table 1
Demographic Information for the Total Sample

	N	%
Sex		
Male	2	7
Female	25	93
Campus Location		
Nova Scotia	14	52
Newfoundland and Labrador	8	30
Missing value	*5*	
Current Program		
Masters of Education	6	22
Masters of Education (Curriculum Studies)	7	26
Master of Education (Literacy Education)	10	37
Missing value	*4*	
Teaching Experience		
1 – 2	1	4
3 – 5	1	4
6 – 10	11	40
11 – 20	11	40
20+	3	12
Grade currently teaching		
Primary/Kindergarten	-	-
Grade 1	1	4
Grade 2	2	7
Grade 3	4	15
Grade 4	2	7
Grade 5	-	-
Grade 6	2	7
Junior High School (Grades 7 – 9)	7	26
High School (Grades 10 – 12)	3	11
Other	6	22
Took course specific to written expression	12	44
Took course with written expression included	14	52
Missing Value	*1*	
Took course specific to teaching exceptional learners	23	85

Time spent teaching written expression		
0 – 0.5	1	5
1 – 2	4	18
3 – 5	11	50
6 – 10	4	18
Not enough	2	9
Missing Value	*5*	

Table 2
Best Practices Associated with Written Expression

	N	%
Additional Resources		
Graphic organizers, writing checklists, and word walls	6	23
Writing workshops	2	8
Guided lessons	2	8
Share writing	2	8
Daily writing	3	12
Teaching the Process of Writing		
Structure (grammar, sentence structure, essay writing)	5	19
Editing (peer and teacher)	7	27
Providing Extra Support		
Assistive technology	2	8
Technology	3	12
Conferencing and feedback	5	19
Chunking writing activities	2	8
Explicit Instruction	1	4
Communication and brainstorming	3	12
Modeling Written Expression	7	27
Student Choice	5	19

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one best practice of written expression.
N=26

Table 3
Useful Strategies to Teach Written Expression

	N	%
Organizers (anchor chart, graphic organizers, word walls, concept mapping)	11	41
Conference, support, feedback, prompts	10	37
Modeling/Guided Instruction	8	30
Communication (brainstorming, talking, sharing examples)	6	22
Writing Workshops	6	22
Using Technology	6	22
Folders (writing folders, notebook, goal booklet)	5	19

Editing	5	19

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one useful strategy.
N=27

Table 4
Writing Difficulties in the Classroom

	N	%
Structure of Writing		
Organization of writing	11	42
Grammar	8	31
Spelling	12	46
Sentence construction	6	23
Revision	1	4
Internalizing Characteristics		
Generation of ideas	7	27
Comprehension	8	31
Off-task behaviour	7	27
Struggling readers	2	8
Lack of independence /motivation	1	4
Lack of creativity	3	12
Fine Motor Difficulties	3	12

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one writing challenge in the classroom.
N=26

Table 5
Challenges While Teaching Written Expression

	N	%
Student Demands		
High student to teacher ratio	2	8
Students need more support	3	12
Unmotivated	3	12
Off-task behaviour	1	4
Time	7	27
Individualized Instruction/Differentiation	8	31
Weak Readers and Writers	5	19
Lack of Resources	3	12

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one challenge while teaching written expression.
N=26

Table 6
First Response to Writing Difficulties

	N	%
Student Conference	10	38
Provide Extra Support (one-on-one, small group instruction, guided writing)	7	27
Prompt/Encourage	5	19
Assess Writing Skills	4	15
Graphic Organizers	3	12
Consult with Other Teachers	2	8
Review Cum File	1	4

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one response.
N=26

Table 7
Resources Available When Teaching Written Expression

	N	%
IRT/Literacy Mentor/Itinerant	18	69
Books	8	31
Technology	5	19
Professional Development/ Courses	5	19
None	2	8

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one resource.
N=26

Table 8
Resources Participants Would Like to Have in Classrooms

	N	%
More Professional Development	6	25
Technology	5	21
More support	3	13
Collaboration	1	4
Lessons	1	4
Time	1	4
Funding	1	4

Note: It is possible that teachers indicated more than one resource.
N=24

Chart 1
Processes to Support Students During Written Expression Instruction

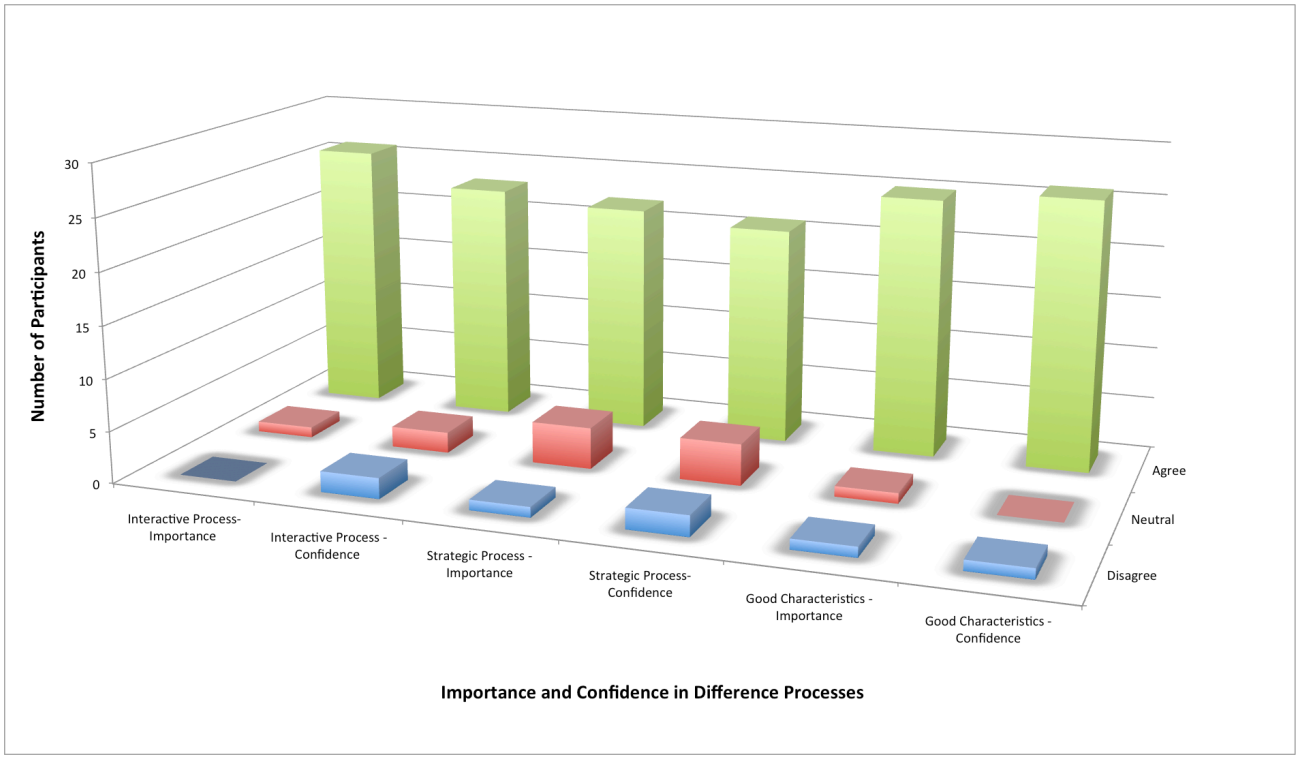


Chart 2
Specific Written Expression Skills

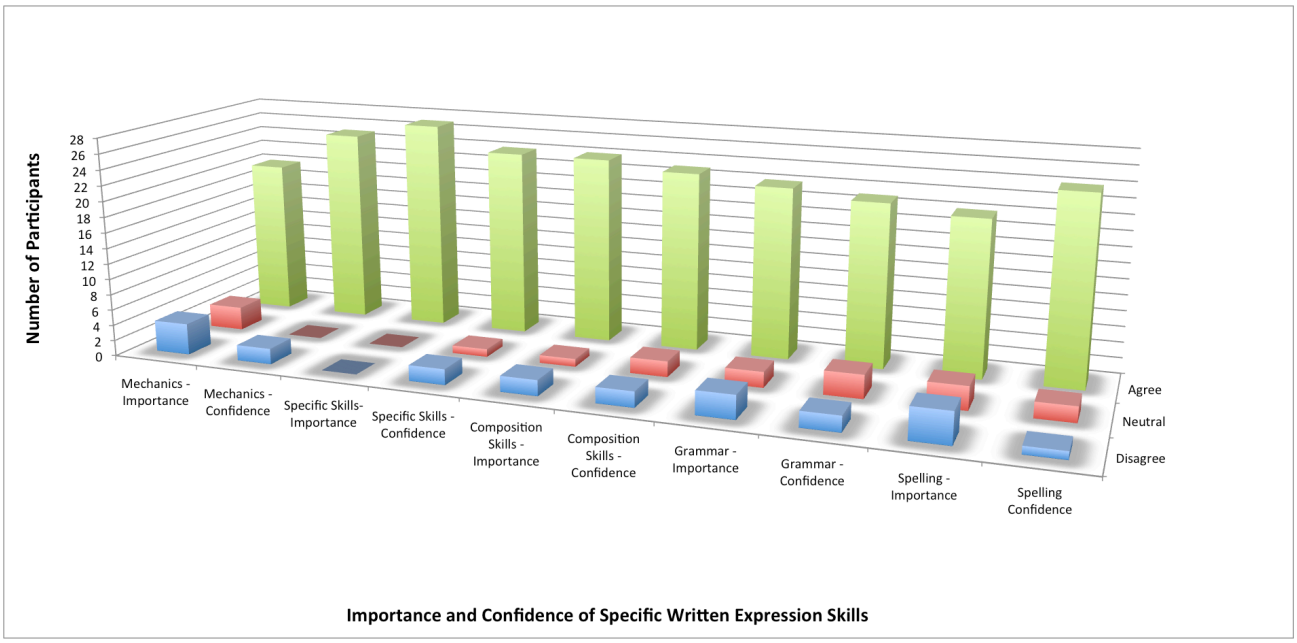


Chart 3

Methods to Support Students During Written Expression Instruction

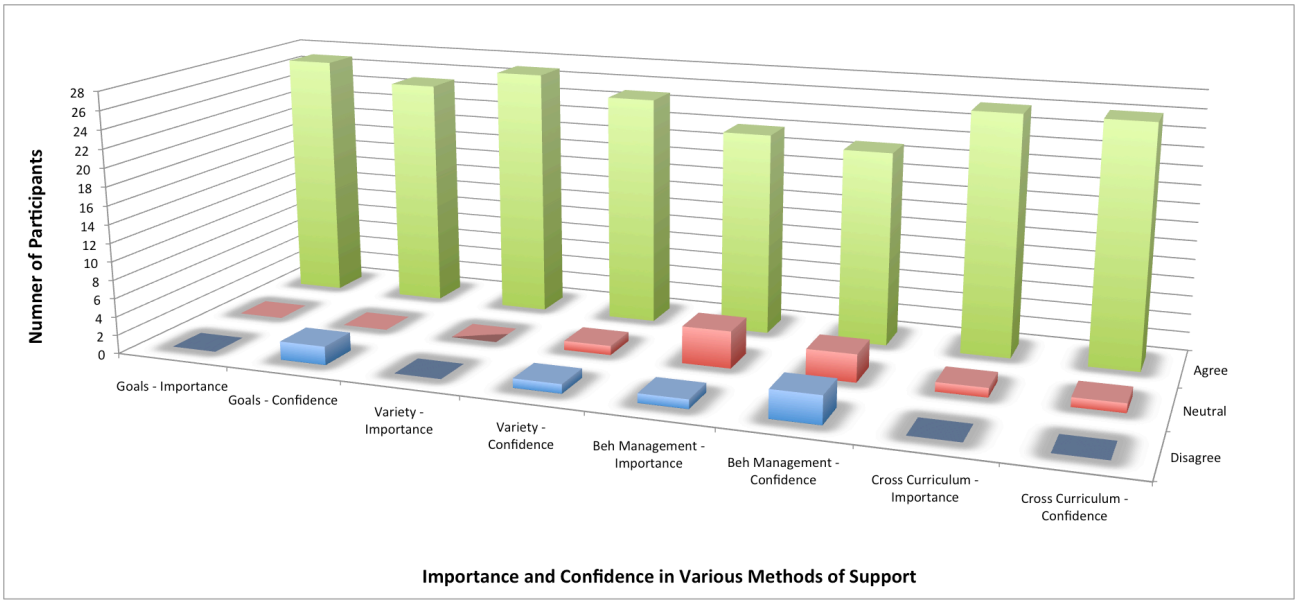
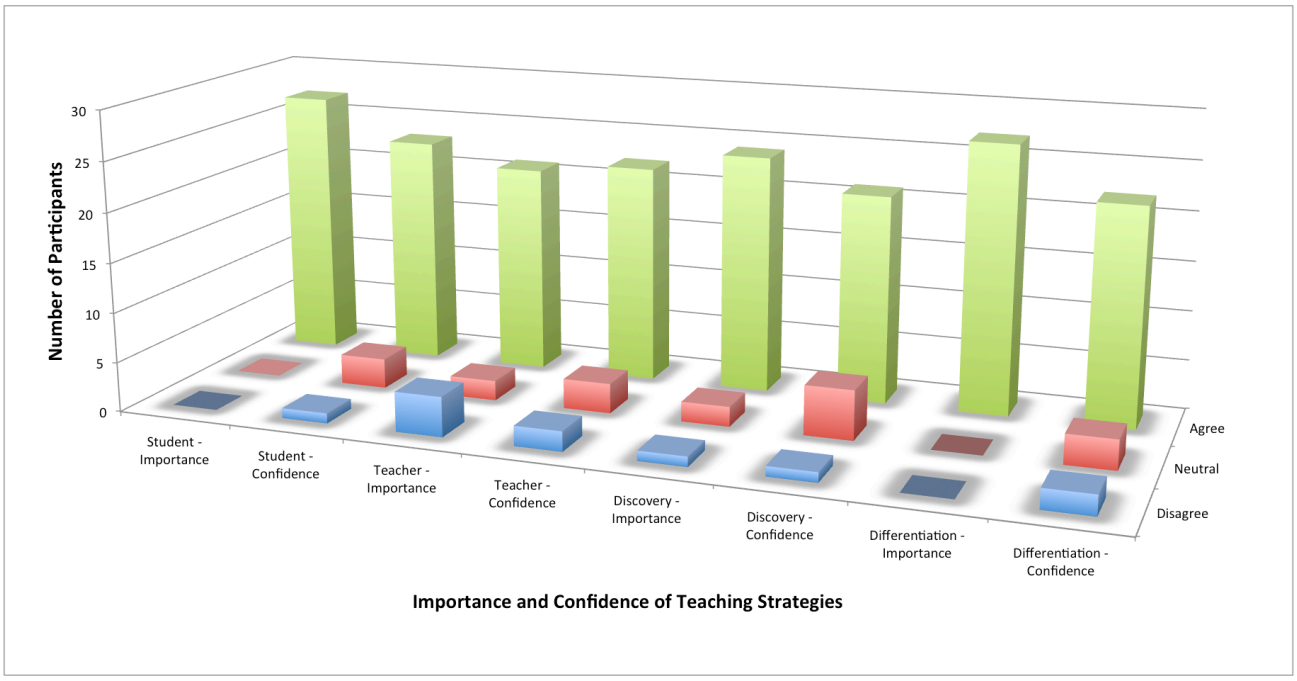


Chart 4

Strategies to Support Students During Written Expression Instruction


30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Number of Participants
Student - Importance
Student - Confidence
Teacher - Importance
Teacher - Confidence
Discovery - Importance
Discovery - Confidence
Differentiation - Importance
Differentiation - Confidence
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Importance and Confidence of Teaching Strategies

Appendix A – Email to MSVU Faculty Members

Letterhead

Dear Professor,

My name is Michelle Luedee, and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts (School Psychology) program at MSVU. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research on written expression, specifically the perceptions of teachers in graduate programs on their preparedness to teach written expression to struggling writers. The goal of this research is to expand current knowledge regarding teachers' readiness, awareness, beliefs, and practices in teaching written expression.

I am seeking permission to distribute an email to students in (class name/number/section to be inserted). Each email contains a letter noting the purpose of the research and outlining participants' rights and an online link to the survey. All measures require participants to respond using a Likert scale or short answer questions. Estimated time for completion is 15 minutes.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Students do not have to answer any questions on these measures that cause them discomfort. All information will be anonymous and no identifying information will be required on any measure. The focus is on group results. Data from the measures will be coded and stored on an encrypted data stick. To allow time for distribution of the information through conference presentations and published articles, electronic data files a will be kept for five years following the thesis defense. After five years, electronic files will be deleted from computer and storage devices.

Anyone can receive a summary of the research findings by contacting me at the email address noted below. Should you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me, Michelle Luedee at michelle.luedee@msvu.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Fred French, at frederick.french@msvu.ca. If you have any questions regarding how this study is being conducted, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International office at (902) 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca. If completing these measures caused any participant unexpected distress, they can contact MSVU Counseling Services at (902) 457-6567

Thank you for considering my research project. It is my hope that this research will result in more effective intervention programs for enhancing young adults' mental health.

Sincerely,
Michelle Luedee
Graduate Student, MSVU

Appendix B – Email to Students

Letterhead

Dear Student,

My name is Michelle Luedee, and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts (School Psychology) program at MSVU. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research on written expression, specifically the perceptions of teachers in graduate programs on their preparedness to teach written expression to struggling writers. The goal of this research is to expand current knowledge regarding teachers' readiness, awareness, beliefs, and practices in teaching written expression.

I am requesting that you complete an online survey that can be found by clicking the link at the end of this email. All measures require you to respond using a Likert scale, check box or short answer format. Estimated time for completion is 15 minutes.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question on this measure that may cause you discomfort. All information will be anonymous and no identifying information will be required. The focus is on group results. All measures will be stored on an encrypted data stick and entered on a password-protected computer**.** To allow time for distribution of the information through conference presentations and published articles, electronic data files of all measures will be kept for five years following the thesis defense. After five years, electronic files will be deleted from computer and storage devices.

If you choose to participate in this research, please complete the following survey. If you choose not to participate, just disregard the email. The process should take approximately 15 minutes. Please keep a copy of this letter. If you would like a summary of the results of the study, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

Please remember that you must be a MSVU education graduate student to be eligible to participate in this study. Completion of the online measure indicates that you have consented to participate in this research.

Should you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me, Michelle Luedee at michelle.luedee@msvu.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Fred French, at frederick.french@msvu.ca. If you have any questions regarding how this study is being conducted, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International office at (902) 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca. If completing these measures caused any unexpected distress, you can contact MSVU Counseling Services at (902) 457-6567

I would like to thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. It is my hope that this research will result in more effective intervention programs to enhance young adults' writing skills.

Sincerely,
Michelle Luedee
Graduate Student, MSVU

Appendix C - Survey

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN TEACHING WRITTEN EXPRESSION

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Completion of the survey should take approximately 15 minutes. Questions on the survey will tap into your opinion about written expression. All answers are confidential. It is my hope that this research will result in more effective intervention programs to enhance young adults' writing skills.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender _____
2. Educational Background: Please list your completed degrees
   _____
3. Are you currently completing further University studies? Yes ____ No ____
   If yes, please specify the program/degree and University:
   _____
4. Years of teaching experience _____
5. Current teaching grade(s) _____
6. Current approximate size of typical class _____
7. Current approximate number of students receiving specialized help within or outside the classroom
   _____
8. Please share a brief overview of the types of writing challenges experienced by students in your current classroom(s).
   _____
   _____
   _____
9. Have you taken a spcific course on teaching written expression? Yes ____ No ____
   If yes, please specify name and location
   _____
10. Have you taken a course that included teaching written expression? Yes _____ No_____
    If yes, please specify name and location
    _____
11. Have you completed course(s) on teaching exceptional learners or those who require more individualized learning? Yes ____ No ____
    If yes, please specify name and location
    _____
12. Do you currently teach in an area that you would describe as urban ___ or rural ____?

Section 2: Open Ended Questions.

1. What do you think are the main principles/best practices in teaching written expression?
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. What do you find most challenging in teaching written expression in your classroom(s)?

   _____
   _____
   _____

3. When a student in your class experiences difficulties with written expression, how do you first respond?

   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Please describe some of the techniques, strategies, methods and/or programs that you have found beneficial in helping to improve students writing.

   _____
   _____
   _____

5. What resources/supports are currently available to assist you in teaching written expression?

   _____
   _____
   _____

6. What additional resources/supports would you like to access to teach written expression?

   _____
   _____
   _____

7. a) Typically, how much time do you devote to teaching written expression in your classroom

   _____

   b) Do you believe this is adequate? Yes_____ No_____

8. In your opinion, what areas or topics do you wish your education program had better prepared you to deal with when in your own classroom?

   _____
   _____
   _____

9. Please comment on how you see yourself as a writer, your level of enjoyment of writing and whether you might have a specific gender that appeals to you.

   _____
   _____
   _____

Section 3: General Teaching Principles.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements for each of the general principles listed below. These principles are not mutually exclusive with the result that it is possible to indicate that more than one is important or used in your teaching.

1 – Disagree; 2 – Somewhat Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Somewhat Agree; 5 – Agree

This principle is important in teaching written expression	General Principles	I am confident using this this principle in teaching written expression
1 2 3 4 5	Behavior management	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Differentiating instruction	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Student focused teaching (constructivism)	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teacher led instruction	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Discovery learning	1 2 3 4 5

Section 4: Specific Instructional Strategies, Techniques and/or Methods

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements for each of the specific principles listed below. These principles are not mutually exclusive with the result that it is possible to indicate that more than one is important or used in your teaching.

1 – Disagree; 2 – Somewhat Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Somewhat Agree; 5 – Agree

This instructional strategy is important in teaching written ex.	General Principles	I am confident using this strategy in teaching written expression
1 2 3 4 5	Delivering a student centered model of writing instruction	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Delivering early writing experiences	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teaching the mechanics of writing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teaching writing as an interactive process	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teaching writing as a strategic process	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Enabling writing to be seen as an active attempt to convey meaning	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Enabling socially mediated language learning activities in the classroom that promote proficient writing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Enabling strategies that establish an environment to promote writing (i.e., publishing center, integrating technology, shared trust)	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teaching strategies that promote and enable narrative writing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teaching strategies that promote and enable expository writing	1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5	Teaching strategies that assist students in acquiring spelling skills	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Provide opportunities for a range of writing tasks	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Integrate writing with other academic subjects	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Provide focus on composing, drafting and editing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teach characteristics of good writing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Teach composing skills	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Help students identify goals for improving writing	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Provide instruction in grammar	1 2 3 4 5

Section 5: Knowledge Sharing

1. Please identify any two writing programs you use within your classroom:
   _____
   _____
2. Please identify your top three methods when planning to teach the writing process:
   _____
   _____
   _____
3. Please share with us an example of shared writing that you have fostered or undertaken with your students.
   _____
   _____
   _____

Section 6: Questions or Comments

Do you have any questions or comments for us that may not have been raised so far?

_____
_____
_____

Would you like a copy of the findings from this study? If yes, please send an email to michelle.luedee@msvu.ca.

Credits for Survey: This survey has utilized information from a variety of sources including: Vaughn, Bos and Schumm (2003); Bryant, Smith and Bryant (2008) as well as many other researchers and authors.