



2013

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Christine E. Tulley
University of Findlay

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Recommended Citation

Tulley, Christine E. (2013) "What Are Preservice Teachers Taught about the Teaching of Writing?: A Survey of Ohio's Undergraduate Writing Methods Courses," *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol2/iss1/9>

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What are Preservice Teachers Taught About the Teaching of Writing: A Survey of Ohio's Undergraduate Writing Methods Courses

Christine E. Tulley
The University of Findlay

As writing teacher education emerges as a growing area of study, one of the richest areas for exploring our methods and history is the undergraduate writing methods course. In a 1977 landmark essay, Richard Gebhardt distilled the key features of an effective undergraduate writing methods course (WMC), asserting secondary writing teachers should be taught “the *structure and history of the English language*,” “a solid understanding of *rhetoric*,” “some *theoretical framework* with which to sort through the ideas, methodologies and conflicting claims,” and “*reliable, productive methods* to help students learn to write” (emphasis Gebhardt’s) (134-135, 137). To integrate practice and theory further, Gebhardt also called for students of writing methods to write “*about the teaching of writing*” (emphasis Gebhardt’s) (139), understanding writing as a germane process teachers must participate in to understand student needs. For the successful writing teacher, pedagogical methods and theoretical training are equally inseparable parts of effective writing teacher education.

Though only 24.6% of English departments offered courses in the teaching of writing to preservice teachers since the late 1970s (Werner, Thompson, and Rothchild 208), there has been a rapid increase within the past 30 years. This increase can be likely attributed to factors such as the increase of faculty available to teach such courses as well as the growing presence of rhetoric and composition as a field. More likely, in today’s age of accountability, English teachers are increasingly held responsible for students’ (lack of) writing skills (National Commission on Writing, 2003; Sheils, 1975). Though alarmist calls for better preparation of writing teachers have persisted from 1923 (Breck) and were encapsulated in the famed “Why Johnny Can’t Write” (Sheils, 1975), more recent correlations have shown that teacher credentials and training affect student performance (see Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, 2007; Kennedy, 1998). Researchers “[conceptualize] the ‘writing crisis’ essentially as a methodological problem... a problem in the teaching methods used by teachers vis a vis writing” (Parker 19). In one study, the National Commission on Writing (2003) specifically calls for a WMC within college English departments as a remedy to poor student writing, arguing “successful completion of such a course in writing theory and practice” should be required for licensure. Without the background the WMC provides, the Commission surmises, “No matter how hard they work, these instructors, lacking any understanding of what good writing is or looks like, are often ill-equipped to teach it” (23). George Hillocks found practicing writing teachers are often unaware of effective writing pedagogy techniques, and because teacher education programs have largely failed to convey these, there is a “poor showing of American students on various writing assessments” (75). As these representative studies illustrate, the assumption has persisted that teacher training in writing methods affects the quality of student writing. The addition of a specific course within the English department designed to provide expertise in the subject of writing pedagogy and theory, and the hiring of rhetoric and composition PhDs (i.e. “the experts”) to teach it, is the logical response by undergraduate teacher preparation programs. Within my home state of Ohio over 64% of all four-year institutions now offer at least one undergraduate WMC within secondary teacher education programs (see Appendix A). In an effort to provide a broad picture of the WMC as a course of growing importance within the English curriculum, I surveyed all WMC instructors about their qualifications, content, activities, and strengths and challenges of the course in an effort to provide a broad picture of the WMC within writing teacher education.

Survey responses reveal that today’s undergraduate WMC is taught by experienced rhetoric and composition faculty, who make a concerted effort to link composition theory with practical strategies for teaching writing under challenging conditions. These findings from survey results span across teacher education programs at liberal arts colleges, private institutions, and public universities. At the same time, repeated studies (McCann et al., 2005; Naylor and Malcomson, 2001; Smith, 1969) suggest that new writing teachers ultimately have difficulty transferring theoretical and pedagogical information gleaned in the WMC to new teaching contexts. Using survey responses as evidence, I suggest this disconnect stems from two related challenges inherent in the design of the WMC. One, the WMC often lacks opportunities for concept development because theory and practice, though taught, aren’t necessarily integrated. Two, underlying disciplinary tensions between theory and practice within the field of rhetoric and composition and within English studies as a whole hinder conceptual development. Rather than using the WMC as a vehicle to present a cohesive introduction to writing studies, I advocate using disciplinary tensions to open conversation spaces for preservice teachers and to build on existing strengths of the WMC.

T/W

Methodology

To determine who is teaching the undergraduate writing methods course and what content is covered, I surveyed all undergraduate writing methods course instructors within the state of Ohio. Ohio is an appropriate site of study for several reasons. One, nearly 73% of all Ohio four-year institutions offer teacher licensure programs and of these, the majority (66.6%) offer at least one undergraduate writing methods course (See Appendix A for a complete list). These institutions are of a wide variety, consisting of state schools, private schools, liberal arts colleges, and religious schools. This scope lends itself to a broad picture of how the writing methods course is taught across institutions. Two, Ohio has fairly rigorous accreditation standards within the area of teaching writing, making it more likely that statewide teacher preparation programs pay particular attention to how writing methods are taught. Ohio NCTE accreditation specifically asks programs preparing teachers for preservice candidates to “Explain and apply, as writers, important models, theories, and techniques of effective written discourse and describe the implications of these theories for practice” (NCTE 26). If theoretical and pedagogical knowledge is deemed necessary by field experts, Ohio, at least according to the *Neglected ‘R’* report, is potentially doing something pedagogically sound by offering the course to the majority of its traditionally trained preservice teachers. The survey then, is an instrument designed to look at the WMC from a variety of teacher preparation programs taught across a single state in a state-supportive environment. More broadly, the survey offers initial insight to where and how this course fits in with the emerging discipline of writing teacher education.

Participants and survey distribution, development, and limitations

All Ohio WMC instructors teaching at four-year baccalaureate granting institutions were sent a link to an electronic survey embedded within an introductory email about the purpose of the study. I purposely chose an electronic survey format due to ease of transmission, low cost, and high response rate (see Schuldt and Totten, 1994; Thach, 1995) to obtain the broadest sample possible from a variety of institutions. The survey consisted of nine closed-ended response choices (some permitting respondents to “check all that apply”) and an optional, open-ended final comment box. Survey respondents could choose to identify themselves or remain anonymous. The survey was designed to be concise to encourage completion upon initial opening, as well as to focus on initial, broad instructor impressions of the undergraduate WMC.

To find institutions offering an undergraduate WMC for preservice teachers, I reviewed each institution’s online course catalog and schedule of classes to find 1) if a teacher training program in secondary/middle English education was offered 2) if an undergraduate writing methods course for preservice teachers was offered and 3) contact information for the instructor(s) on record for these courses. To determine what courses counted as “writing methods” courses, I surveyed course catalog descriptions to find courses that taught composition theory and/or writing pedagogy for preservice teachers seeking to teach grades 4-12. I examined both the course titles and their descriptions to guard against misleading titles, and all courses had to connect content to the teaching of writing to be considered a WMC. After establishing a list of schools offering undergraduate writing methods courses, I searched for instructor contact information and found information for 38 instructors teaching 30 courses. In eight cases two different instructors taught the course depending on semester, and in two cases no instructor contact information could be found. I emailed an electronic survey to instructors with available contact information a link to a 10 question electronic survey. After the 38 surveys were sent, two surveys were returned due to the instructor no longer teaching at the school. In all, 17 faculty from 17 different institutions completed the survey. Faculty respondents hailed roughly equally from four-year public institutions (6), four-year private universities (6), and liberal arts colleges (5). This represents a 44.7% response rate to the survey.

The survey (see Appendix B) asked instructors about their credentials, the primary focus of the course, and types of assignments given to support this focus. In addition, WMC instructors were asked to comment on the presence of historically cited strengths and weaknesses within their specific courses noted in the previous section. Though WMC instructors historically agree on some fundamental areas of study for the class illustrated by Gebhardt (see also Larson 1969), the survey also examined whether writing methods courses within Ohio provided similar levels of emphasis as well as overall trends with course design.

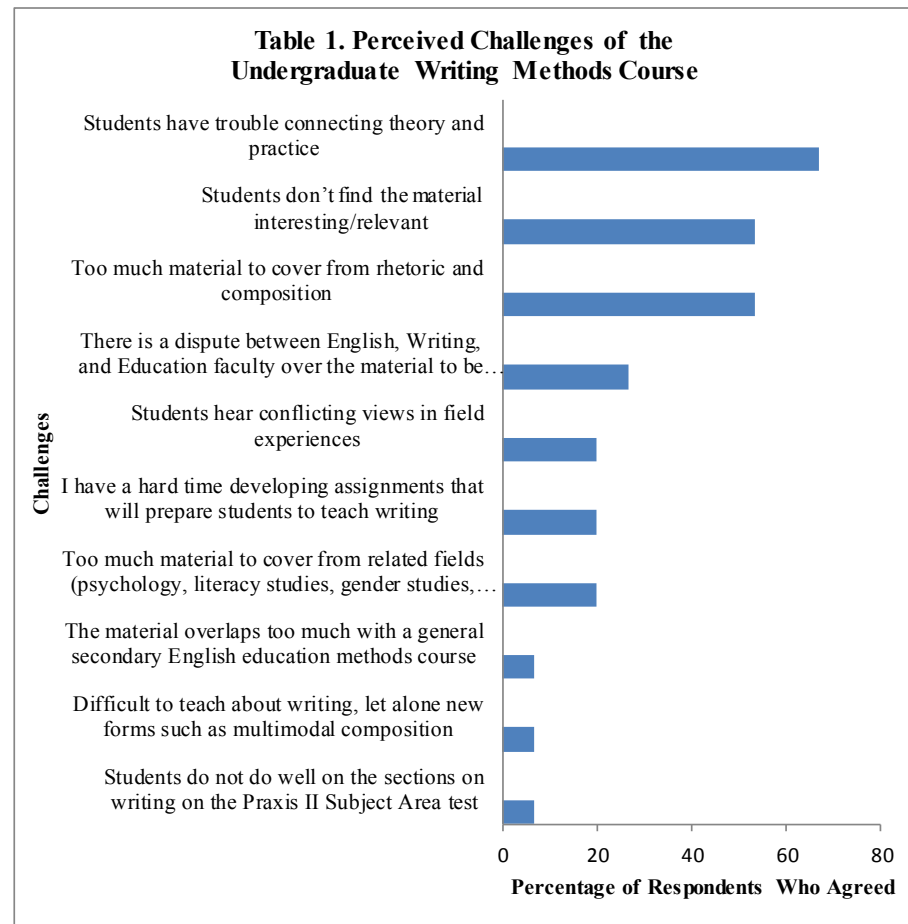
As with any survey, limitations exist as to what conclusions can be drawn from participant responses. For example, I don’t attempt in any way to evaluate the quality of *individual* undergraduate writing methods courses. Moreover, because the focus of the survey was on *instructor* feedback about the WMC, the survey does not describe whether preservice teachers felt the writing methods course improved teaching, the trickle-down effect of the course on the writing skills of secondary students, or how that improvement is linked to the design of the WMC, though certainly these projects can build on the results uncovered here. What survey results do provide is an initial pedagogical overview of what traditionally trained, preservice teachers are taught (and not taught) within an undergraduate WMC across a variety of institutions, the credentials of those providing such instruction, course strengths, and the challenges blocking effective teaching of the WMC. Because writing methods course instructors provide a first “professional” look at the discipline of composition studies for the majority of traditionally prepared preservice teachers in Ohio, they ultimately present a particular meaning of how writing should be taught, assessed, and theorized to future teachers within the course.

Results

Responses revealed several trends about instructor expertise. First, experienced, qualified instructors teach the undergraduate WMC within the state of Ohio. Of those who responded, 64.7% hold PhDs in Rhetoric and Composition and nearly 59% are at associate professor rank or higher. Moreover, over 94% of all respondents have a PhD in some area of English (64.7% Rhetoric and Composition; 29.1% other English fields). In addition, a significant portion have some additional practical training with the teaching of writing—nearly 30% hold a middle or secondary teaching license in English Language arts and over a third (35.3%) are past or current directors of the writing program.

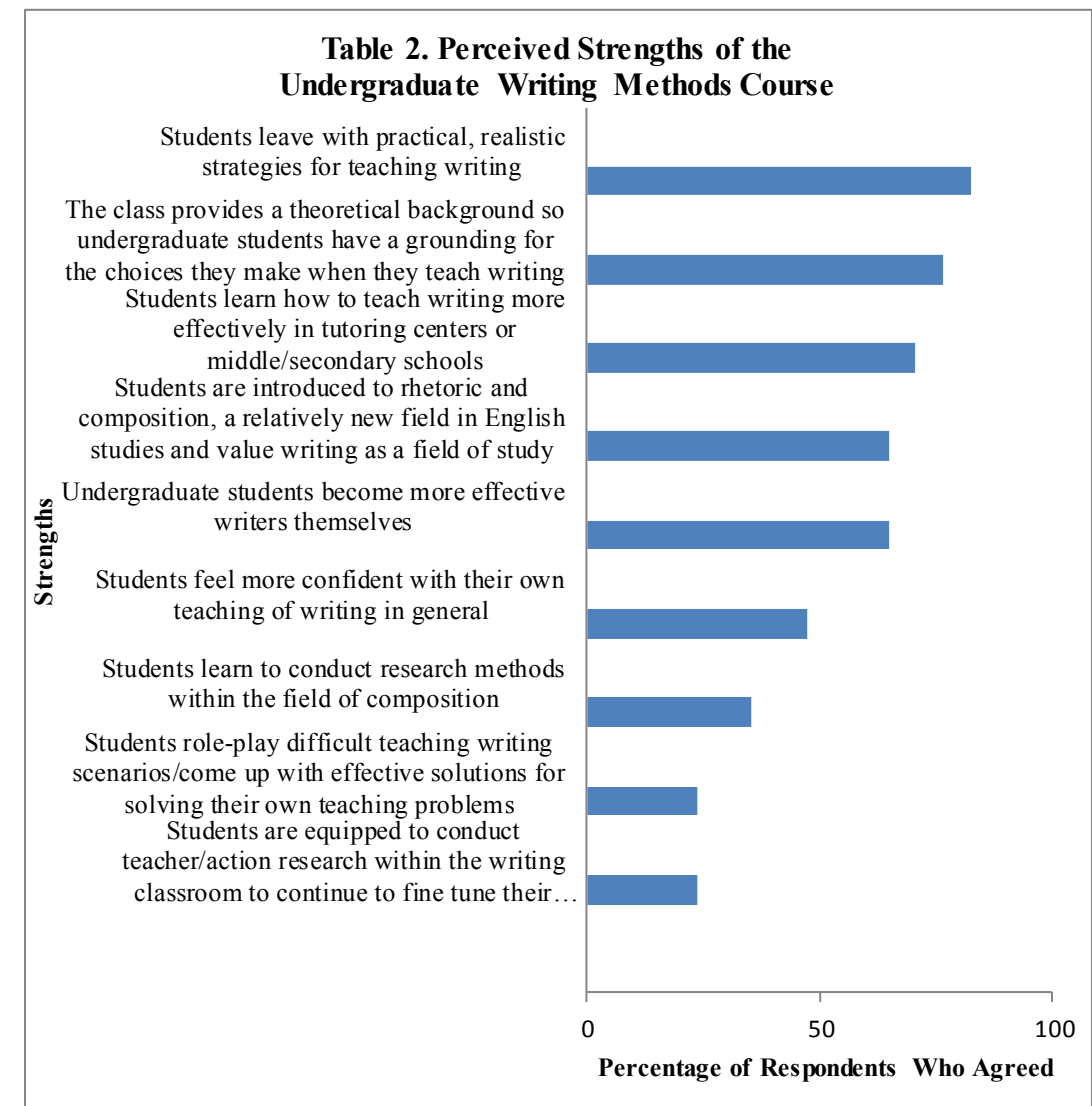
As a group, instructors agree with Gebhardt’s 1977 assessment of the most necessary course components. This congruity would suggest that as a whole, WMC instructors attempt to provide the blend of theoretical instruction and reliable productive teaching methods that Gebhardt called for, and this may be a direct result of having experienced faculty teach the course. Nearly 64.7% cite a blend between theories from rhetoric and composition and practical application as the dual primary emphases for the course, while only 11.8% each cite grammar or a focus on the teacher’s own writing process as the main focus (though 52.9% do get supplementary instruction in grammar, which Gebhardt also deems essential). In addition, 82.4% agree that preservice teachers must write and be aware of their own writing processes to support secondary writers most effectively.

Paradoxically, despite a concerted effort to balance theoretical and practical instruction, 66.7% cited “students have trouble connecting theory and practice” as the number one challenge for the WMC. Two additional, and potentially linked, problems stood out as potential challenges to an effective WMC. Over 53% noted that “Students don’t find the material interesting /relevant” and an equal number found that the course curriculum was overstuffed due to “Too much material to cover from rhetoric and composition.” In addition to the wide range of composition specific topics covered, one quarter of respondents suggest that territorial disputes between education and English departments over what material to cover in the course often affect course content, and 20% note that topics from other related fields such as psychology further crowd the curriculum. Still, in comparison to these three top cited problems of theory/practice integration, lack of student interest, and overstuffed agenda, other issues were cited by less than a third of faculty as significant challenges (see Table 1).



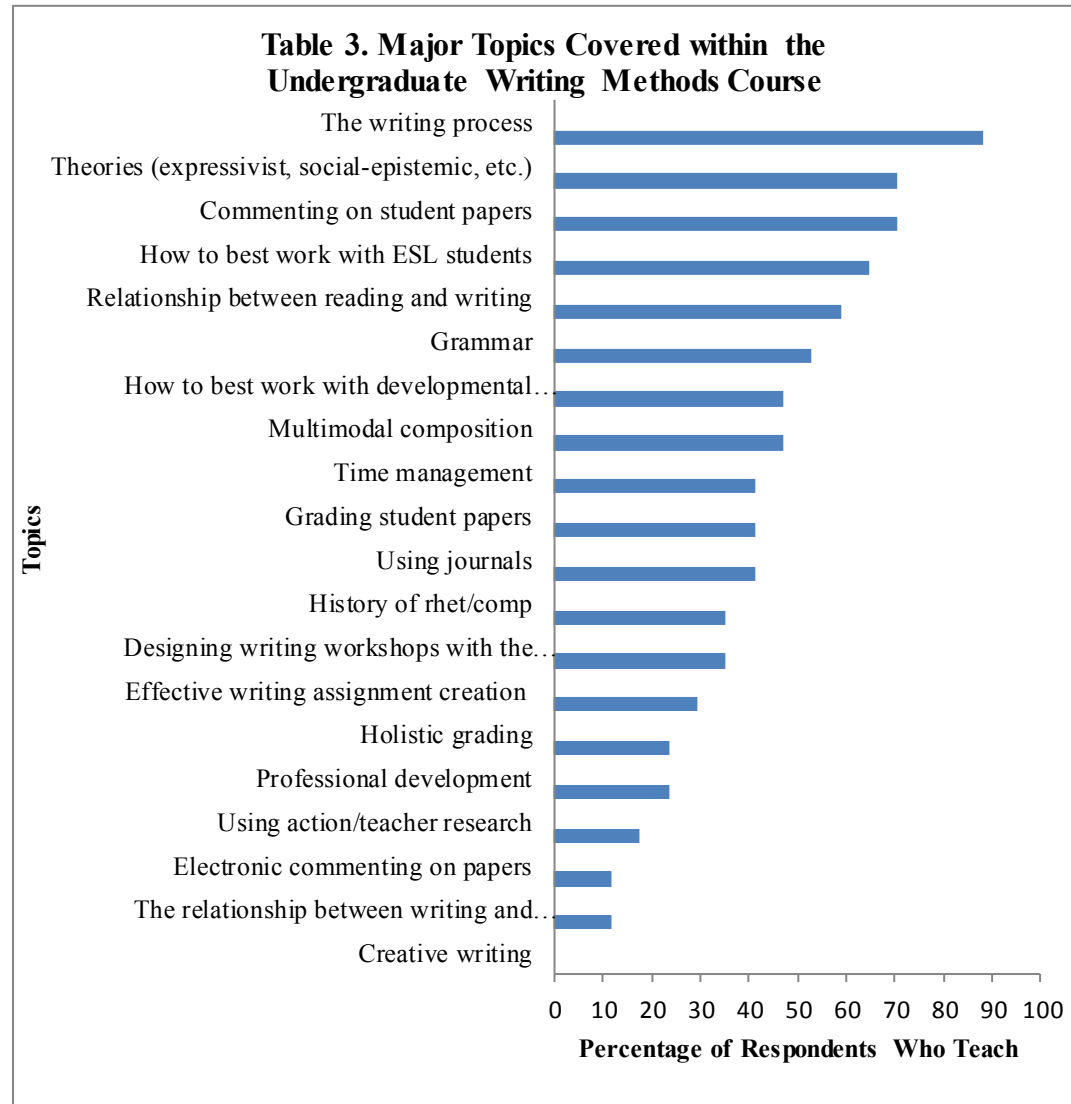
Despite these pressures, instructors remained positive about the overall usefulness of the WMC. Unlike the distinct agreement on the three most pressing challenges, a variety of course strengths were cited by the majority (see Table 2). Over 82% claimed “Students leave with practical, realistic strategies for teaching writing” as the most significant strength of the class, followed closely by 76.5% who felt “the class provides a theoretical background so undergraduate students have a grounding for the choices they make when they teach writing.” Regardless of concerns over the *connections* made between theory and practice by students in the WMC and in affiliated experiences, these results signal writing teacher educators feel that students leave with adequate knowledge of both areas even if connections are imperfect. Over 70% felt that the WMC also prepared students for current and future field experiences including preservice teaching or tutoring.

Finally, despite concerns over student disinterest in the material, 64.7% of WMC instructors noted that that the WMC remains valuable because “students are introduced to rhetoric and composition, a relatively new field in English studies and value writing as a field of study” and “Undergraduate students become more effective writers themselves” as a result of taking the course. In other words, the knowledge of writing as a field of study and not an ancillary activity to the study of literature or general education courses provided clear value for preservice teachers, according to these writing teacher educators.



Though many WMCs differ in topic coverage (see Table 3), commonalities do exist across courses. The majority of WMC instructors teach the writing process (88.2%), commenting strategies for student papers (70.6%), and major composition theories such as expressivism and cognitivism (70.6%). In addition, 64.7% offer instruction as to how best to work with ESL students, recognizing that today’s secondary teachers work within increasingly globalized contexts. There was also agreement about useful class activities.

the most popular activities used to cover material included class discussion (100%), observation of personal writing practices (82.4%), research papers (70.6%), journals (58.8%), and field experiences (58.8%). Perhaps due to the 82.4% of English education majors populating the course, activities within the undergraduate WMC also offer some focus on the types of teaching of writing activities needed for work in secondary schools. These include application of WMC material in field experiences (58.8% of all writing methods courses in Ohio do this) and development of a writing-focused lesson plan (47.1%).



Discussion

Overall, survey results illustrate an interesting paradox within the undergraduate WMC that can be distilled here: despite the fact that the most knowledgeable teach both the theoretical and practical aspects of writing instruction, and feel students leave with theoretical knowledge of and practical strategies for teaching writing, preservice teachers continue to have trouble making sense of the theory and practice relationship both within the WMC and within later professional contexts that follow. In this section, I unpack the various threads of this contradiction to illustrate current configurations of the WMC face two distinct challenges.

Robert Tremmel makes the case that rhetoric and composition as a field experiences “unevenness, ambivalence, and lack of commitment connected to writing teacher education” (9). However, within the state of Ohio, undergraduate WMC instructors appear to be a stable, well-trained and insightful group. Survey results suggest that the majority are teaching the course because they have been appropriately trained in rhetoric and composition. Confirming findings by Baker et al. that many writing teacher educators have firsthand knowledge of the challenges preservice writing teachers face, survey results indicate a significant portion also has middle or secondary teaching experience in the schools, making them, in theory, ideal candidates for providing writing methods instruction.

And because more than a third has experience as writing program directors, they are likely familiar with transitional issues between secondary and college level writing and can share such experiences with WMC students who later teach in college preparatory classrooms. In sum, Ohio preservice teachers are learning from the most educated, a group well-versed in the challenges of teaching writing and perhaps best able to prepare them to teach it. This is promising.

Also promising is the dedication of WMC instructors to balance theoretical and practical instruction. Although the field of rhetoric and composition has recently “boomed” by demonstrating that it has what it takes to fit in with its disciplinary siblings: a growing body of scholarly research and publications, graduate programs, national conferences, journals, and book series,” as Sheri Stenberg notes, “our scholarship is often, explicitly or implicitly tied to the classroom” (34-35). Survey results confirm this dual emphasis; the overwhelming majority of WMC instructors cite theory and practice as the primary, inseparable focuses of the course since both are considered essential to writing studies (see North, 1987; Parker, 1982; Ruth, 1986). This emphasis on pedagogy informed through theory is also evidenced by the top two strengths cited: students leave the course with practical strategies for teaching writing as well as the theoretical grounding behind these writing strategies to understand (ideally) why the strategies work. Activities cited by the majority of instructors support this mix of theoretical and practical instruction as students explore theory through research papers but also apply teaching methods within field experiences and in-class activities such as commenting on student papers. These strengths indicate that a solid knowledge base is currently in place and lab type activities are available for students to practice the various skills to teach writing prior to entering the field.

Though this strong framework offers the possibility of praxis, WMC instructors remain concerned that students understand the interdependent *relationship* between theory and practice and are prepared to use practice to fine tune theory and vice versa. Survey findings offer initial insight to two possibilities where the connection may falter: 1) the WMC generally lacks opportunities for concept development and 2) by trying to present rhetoric and composition as a coherent field of study, the course works against rhetoric and composition’s fluid nature. Both challenges may hinder the possibility that preservice teachers transfer information learned to secondary contexts.

Challenge #1: Lack of opportunities for concept development

Peter Smagorinsky, Leslie Susan Cook, and Tara Star Johnson argue that teacher education courses in general suffer from a lack of understanding of how theory and practice work together. Though theory and practice are interdependent, they are often categorized as hierarchical, with theoretical knowledge valued over practical lore, or as separate, even oppositional, domains. Instead of positing this simplistic dichotomy, they argue teacher educators should strive to teach concepts because “one’s development of an approach to teaching stands in dialectical relation to one’s development of a conception of teaching” (1401). As defined by Vygotsky, concepts develop from generalizable, abstract knowledge (i.e. theories) but “require interplay” with practice in the field to reinforce and refine this knowledge (Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson, 1399). A need for conceptual development may be particularly acute within the WMC, as it borders the fields of English education and rhetoric and composition more generally. Despite a common interest in training writing teachers, and a shared history of marginalization by English departments (Bush 27), the WMC often serves as site of territorial marking rather than a bridge between English and education areas. The disciplines of English education and rhetoric and composition are sometimes presented as at odds over the design of the WMC, divided along a theory-practice split “with EE most often associated with ‘practice’ (hands-on work) and RC with ‘theory’ (intellectual work)” (Alsop 31). Survey results suggest a course such as the WMC may experience a breakdown in concept development because concepts are not taught from one perspective or even one field and often contradict. This is a common problem for teacher education courses, as Smagorinsky et al. note that various stakeholders emphasize different goals and methods of practice (1411).

Survey results suggest that it is possible that the theory/practice relationship is difficult for WMC instructors to teach because a true “relationship” is not fully established through existing class activities. While nearly 60% of WMCs offer a field experience where preservice teachers can apply theories learned in class, other types of integrated activities are used far less often. Instead, over 70% of WMC assign a research paper and more than a third assign quizzes and exams. These may be efficient methods of studying how well preservice teachers learn the broad base of material but these practices are problematic because “pedagogy is conflated with ‘teaching’—understood as the set of practices by which we transmit our knowledge” despite the fact that “pedagogy cannot be finished; we cannot ‘finally’ learn to teach” (Stenberg xviii).

In general, opportunities for bringing fieldwork back to discuss theory and vice versa to establish conceptual development are somewhat uneven. For instance, only 29.4% of WMC instructors require case studies and less than a quarter (23.5%) ask students to role play, though research confirms that these two activities help preservice teachers articulate theory-practice relationships (see Johannessen and McCann 2002; Rose and Finders 1998), particularly when field experiences are not available. Even fewer WMC instructors (17.6%) require an action research project, yet research repeatedly shows when one is required students are better able to see how theory and practice inform each other (Kutz 69). Projects grounded in action research force students to explore why a teaching strategy works through reading about it, testing it, developing a theory based on it, and placing this theory within other existing theories. Foregrounding an interdependent relationship through fieldwork, case study, and role-play help students make sense of course readings and the daily practicalities of teaching writing work together. Development of concepts requires the give and

take between theory and practice because “formal, abstracted knowledge of a concept enables one to reapply it to a new situation” increasing the likelihood of transfer (Smagorinsky et al. 1403).

Lack of opportunities for concept development might also explain why students struggle to see theoretical material as relevant to daily concerns within the writing classroom, even though preservice demand more practical strategies earlier in coursework as they take on tasks once reserved for the student teaching experience only (Alsup and Bernard-Donals, 2002; Johnston, 1994). The WMC is the ideal location to address these concerns because the “What do I do on Monday?” question is a primary concern for new teachers (Alsup and Bernard-Donals 2002) and students often have a natural interest in the material. Yet preservice teachers may quickly lose interest when the WMC emphasizes coverage over a broad base of material. Hillocks (2009) notes that as part of understanding a concept testing and application are essential, noting “If a teacher does not know how to use any given approach, especially a complex one, it is likely to fail in terms of student learning. No question.” (26). While application activities are used in current WMCs, they are not used evenly. Therefore, when preservice teachers graduate, some have more developed conceptual knowledge than others.

Challenge #2: Current WMC designs don’t embrace the fluidity of rhetoric and composition as a discipline leading to fragmentation

Survey results suggest that though WMC instructors agree on teaching writing processes and theory for instruction, there is a lack of agreement on what other knowledge is essential for teaching writing effectively. I argue that this lack of a clear curriculum actually is a reflection of current disciplinary tensions in the larger field of rhetoric and composition. The field has long struggled to establish a disciplinary identity within English studies as a past history of “anti-theory” composition teachers (Sommers 46) competes against the present pressure of increased professionalism as a field (Dobrin, 1997; North, 1987). Moreover, as Jonathan Bush argues, the subfield of writing teacher education reflects tensions within rhetoric and composition and between rhetoric and composition and English education (342). Understandably, WMC instructors have trouble introducing the field of writing to preservice teachers when there has yet to be an agreement over key concepts and practices. Students learn about concepts such as freewriting at the same time they learn about holistic scoring, leaving them understandably confused as to benefits and drawbacks of each and how and why both or neither might be used within the schools where they teach. Smagorinsky et al. (2003) suggest that “the development of concepts involves growing into a culture’s values and practices, with the culture in turn growing and changing as its practitioners contribute their understanding of its concepts” (1403). If rhetoric and composition is still growing as a field (culture), then the unclear relationship between theory and practice in the WMC is not just a struggle, but an accurate representation of, and introduction to, the field of writing theory and pedagogy. It is not surprising that the undergraduate WMC is a site of disciplinary struggle with preservice teachers caught in the crosshairs and the effects to streamline the WMC into a coherent conversation repeatedly collide with disciplinary debates.

Survey results suggest that we *do* have some of the tools to work at concept development (and thus concept refinement) within the current WMC even as the field of writing struggles with disciplinary boundaries. For example, Dan Royer and Roger Giles present composition as a “living history” where theories become popular, get modified, and/or fall out of favor. Using a counterbalance approach, they introduce students to specific tensions within the field of composition studies through a pared down list of landmark works and invite students to write about these tensions using specific samples of student writing for analysis and develop personal theories from this combination. This approach allows WMC students to “think of the subject of composition as an evolving history of competing ideas about literacy and learning and not as a catalog of methods and approaches that can be chosen from a bookshelf” (Royer and Giles 115). Working to develop a conversation about theory and practice allows students to use application activities such as field experiences more effectively and talk over their findings with others. Preservice writing teachers can ask “How does theory X explain what I saw in the field today?” as well as “How does what I saw in the field confirm, deny, and/alter theory X?” This type of approach seems to deliberately counteract any attempt at coverage and makes learning a social activity among practitioners. When social practice happens, “practice contributes to learning and thus to concept development, working in dialectical relations with the principles that bring order and unity to concepts” (Smagorinsky et al. 1406).

Another possibility for WMC instructors is to develop more action research projects within the course so students research a particular pedagogical strategy and the theory behind it simultaneously. I currently require an action research project within the WMC where students attempt to solve a writing challenge such as how to comment effectively on papers with a volunteer student from a first-year writing course. The WMC student reads several theories about a particular issue (for example, journaling or paragraph develop) tries a strategy with a first-year writing student and then rewrites a fine-tuned “personal” theory of teaching using this approach based on actual findings. One useful resource that I use to develop this line of thinking is Ann Blakeslee and Cathy Fleischer’s *Becoming a Writing Researcher* (2007) as it guides students through both the theoretical and pedagogical steps necessary to develop writing-focused action research projects. WMC students already come to class with theories about how to best teach writing (Parker 18). Integrating more action research opportunities within the WMC could build on this natural interest and candidates’ early theories of teaching writing through confirming the idea that practicing writing teachers are writing researchers who actively

contribute to and refine the field of writing studies. This strategy might be useful for Ohio WMCs in particular as the majority already require research papers as well as have field experiences. The combination could be modified to teach the thinking strategies of action research that successful teachers already use (see Argyris and Schön, 1981; Kutz, 1992).

A third possibility might work with Robert Scholes’ recent call to teach textuality versus a narrowly defined rhetoric- or literature-based curriculum and work to incorporate WMC course material over the span of several courses. He argues that all English teachers share the “responsibility to teach all the aspects of textuality — the production, consumption, and history of texts in English” (239). If textuality is used as the link between the fields of writing and literature, rhetoric and composition and English education, etc. then the WMC might offer opportunities for preservice teachers to explore what elements go into producing both traditional print-based and emerging digital texts, to find commonalities of effective communication, and to develop pedagogical approaches based on these commonalities. One method for doing this could be to consider essays by writing theorists as texts that share many elements with literary pieces to aid in both comprehension of the theory as well as to develop a broader understanding of how writing theorists function as writers. Bill Green (2010) does an excellent job of modeling how this approach might work in his recent textual analysis of James Moffett.

Concluding Thoughts

Anne Gere and Daniel Berebitsky point out that teacher expertise is the single most important attribute of successful English teachers. Survey results confirm the majority of traditionally prepared preservice teachers in Ohio do gain some initial “expertise” in the teaching of writing. However, the picture of what this expertise looks like is mixed as students have theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching writing but lack instruction in thinking strategies and activities to help them integrate and interrogate writing instruction from both angles. As a result, the WMC may be less effective in training future writing teachers because, when the pieces don’t connect, under pressure, novice teachers often return to models they remember experiencing as students—even after completing teacher preparation programs (see Kutz and Roskelly, 1991; Smagorinsky, 2010). This contributes to a cycle where the course likely has little to no effect on the teaching of writing within secondary schools despite calls for additional teacher training. Smagorinsky et al. point out the teaching of concept development is especially challenging in teacher education programs when approaches may not be presented evenly across courses, when courses can be taken in varying sequences, and the lack of correlation between university teaching and realities of schools. Even when the same concepts are taught, meanings differ, and thus preservice teachers tend to “[gravitate] toward the prevailing norms held by the schools in which they taught in their first jobs” (1403).

Ultimately, theory and practice must be developed as interrelated concepts for the WMC to have any real effect. It is not enough to cover theories and to provide some hands-on opportunities for practice unless both areas are explicitly linked. The best solutions, Robert Parker argues, “aim primarily at assisting teachers in re-theorizing writing instruction, and in changing their methods in the light of this re-theorizing, may end up having more fundamental and permanent effects” (120). To develop concepts as fluid, instructors must be prepared to recognize that composition “is a field that tends to resist unifying notions” (Bush 342).

WMC instructors *do* recognize the inherent paradox of attempting to neatly dovetail theory and practice within a sixteen week course when the disciplinary identity is in flux. As one respondent surmised, “I struggle to neatly package theories and pedagogies of teaching writing (that often contradict each other!) into a coherent ‘take this with you when you graduate’ message. I just don’t think it can be done within composition studies.” Other respondents noted that though composition theory anthologies sort landmark essays into categories such as “expressivism” or “assessment”, the essays within the sections contradict each other leaving new teachers understandably confused as to the “right” way to teach writing rather than viewing their writing teacher education as a space where they can contribute to the conversation.

Joe Hardin suggests, “the theory/praxis split may be particularly embedded in rhetoric and composition precisely because both theory and practice are so much a part of how the field identifies itself” (36). Smagorinsky et al. reimagine the theory and practice relationship as not so much as split but as fluid as the boundaries between both rely on each other for meaning (1432). Therefore, rather than trying to present rhetoric and composition as a coherent discipline worthy of study similar to literature, it might be worth making the pedagogical and theoretical gaps the focus of the WMC. The most competent writing teachers already adapt teaching practices to changing teaching conditions and new research (Argyris and Schön, 1981; Kutz, 1992). They live with the contradictions inherent in secondary writing instruction, working to improve what they can by adjusting practice based on theory and theory based on practice, in one classroom at a time. Rethinking what we already do in the WMC means inviting new writing teachers to see themselves as part of the ongoing negotiation within the field of teaching writing.

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Additional materials cited in this article are available at <http://homepages.findlay.edu/tulley/professional/default.htm>

About the Author

Christine Tulley is an Associate Professor of English and Director of Writing in the Department of English at The University of Findlay. She is the founder of the new MA in Rhetoric and Writing beginning Fall 2013 at The University of Findlay Her work has appeared in *Pedagogy*, *Computers and Composition*, *Enculturation*, and *JAC* and she is co-editor of *Webbing Cyberfeminist Practice* (Hampton Press, 2008). Her research interests include writing teacher education and connections between classical and digital rhetoric.



All Hands on Deck: Bringing Together High School Teachers and Adjunct Instructors for Professional Development in the Teaching of Writing

Jennifer S. Cook and Becky L. Caouette
Rhode Island College

For the past eight years, Jenn has worked at Rhode Island College (RIC), as a joint appointment in the English and Educational Studies Departments as an English teacher educator and as a First Year Writing (FYW) instructor. She is also the Director of the Rhode Island Writing Project (RIWP), Rhode Island's only affiliate of the National Writing Project. For the past three years, Becky has worked as the Director of Writing, an administrative challenge for anyone but surely even more of a challenge for a new professor just out of a doctoral program. We are among the small group of "new hires" in our department and are among an even smaller group of faculty who have devoted our careers—both in research and practice—to the teaching of writing. Out of a shared passion for writing and the teaching of writing, and out of what we might call a necessity for collaboration, we began to talk about how our programs—the College's First Year Writing Program and the RI Writing Project—might support each other. After all, just as Becky is constantly challenged by the daunting task of building community, developing practice, and maintaining a cohesive program when between 80-90% of her instructors are adjunct faculty, Jenn is feeling continuously challenged as the director of an organization that has lost its federal funding and that is seeking ways to bolster its affiliation with the host institution. We are each in charge of writing programs on the RIC campus, and in an effort to grow our programs and to collaborate, we created and co-facilitated the first ever "One-Day Summer Invitational Institute for Adjunct Faculty of First Year Writing at Rhode Island College" in June 2012. Nine Rhode Island College adjuncts participated in the day, as did three high school English teachers and the two of us, college English professors.

This is our story, a story that we are presenting here as a vision of what is possible if we start to act collaboratively across the traditional academic silos that keep us separate from one another, isolated in our practice, and unaware of what has come before (or what comes after) our instruction of the students in front of us. This article is not intended to be prescriptive or reductive, as it is primarily a report of how we collaborated to address a specific and yet generalizable problem across college campuses and writing project sites: an absence of non-evaluative forums, spaces, and opportunities for adjunct faculty and secondary teachers to come together to talk about the teaching of writing. We have chosen to begin by presenting the contexts in which we each find ourselves as well as the various historical and institutional factors that affect our work. This background information may be familiar to some, especially our National Writing Project readers, but we provide it here so that you can see how our work is connected both in substance and status.

The Rhode Island Writing Project (RIWP)

For nearly 40 years, the National Writing Project (NWP) has grown an incredible network of classroom teachers and researchers and has provided hundreds of thousands of hours of professional development. Under Jim Gray's model, professional development for teachers was turned on its head when the NWP was founded in 1976. Where there once were highly-paid consultants delivering lectures to teachers on assigned readings, now there would be classroom teachers, steeped in their own expertise and knowledge, sharing with their colleagues their practice and methods. At the heart of this model is a deep respect for and honoring of teachers' experiences, their wisdom, and their relationships with their students. Also at the heart of this model is the idea of partnership: university researchers and professors working side-by-side with K-12 classroom teachers, a collaboration that Jim Gray was smart enough to see would have the greatest potential for transformation (of students, of schools, of selves):

By the late 1970s, the idea of the writing project seemed to be catching on. Faculty members at colleges and universities throughout the country understood that if significant educational change was to take place, schools and universities would need to form partnerships based on respect for each other's knowledge. (59)

Bringing people together from across a great divide has indeed, in these 38 years, lessened the gap between the ivory tower and the K-12 classroom. And, yet, the historical, deep-seated tensions between "education" and "liberal arts," between "scholars" and "teachers," are still there, the chasm still wide, working to divide folks instead of bringing them together, even in this new era of networks, collaboration, and open access. The Rhode Island Writing Project has been located on the RIC campus for 27 years where, most notably, RIWP teacher consultants played an instrumental role in helping the RI Department of Education (RIDE) develop Rhode Island's first statewide writing assessment. But, that was nearly twenty years ago, and in the time since then, the relationship between the RIWP, the RIC campus and administrators, and RIDE has been strained for various reasons that the scope and length of this article