



# Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

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# Teaching/Writing

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*The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*

*T/W*

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# Teaching/Writing

*T/W*

*The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*

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# Teaching/Writing

*The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*

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*Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* is an independent peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, theory, and practice in the preparation, training, support, and continued education and professional development of teachers of writing at all developmental levels and educational contexts.

The journal is available at no-cost at <http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte>.

Opening Editorial

Jonathan Bush and Erinn Bentley, Co-Editors

It is with great pride that we publish this issue of *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*. Just as our field has grown over the past decade, so has the scholarship that has driven it, as the wide range of articles and discussions we have the privilege of publishing in this issue shows. This is a pretty large issue – 10 articles, 21 authors, and nearly 100 pages of academic text. This is a representation of the growing and vibrant scholarly community of writing teacher education. We reviewed and responded to nearly 40 submissions during this cycle. To be fair, some of those were not within the scope of the journal, but the vast majority provided a focus into writing, the teaching of writing, and the education of those who teach writing – and all the various aspects that occur within those contexts. That’s pretty exciting. Not only is the word about our journal getting out to readers, but also to scholars and other professionals who guide the teaching of writing teachers. This issue presents a strong set of outstanding authors from a wide range of institutions and academic positions present discussions relevant to all aspects of teacher development and composition at all levels.

The issue begins with Michael Sherry and Ted Roggenbuck and their piece, “Reframing Responses to Student Writing: Promising Young Writers and the Writing Pedagogies Course,” where they present their work involving preservice teachers with the NCTE Promising Young Writers program and showing the importance of giving these young teachers the opportunity to engage in real-life work. From his perspective as a composition program direction, Justin Young further connects the college and K-12 contexts through discussion of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and argues that such work “can help us understand the strengths and weaknesses of beginning college writers, from the perspectives of both high school and college teachers.

In “Re-thinking Personal Narrative in the Pedagogy of Writing Teacher Preparation Introduction” Mary M. Juzwik, Anne Whitney re-imagine the uses and purposes of narrative writing in methods contexts. As they conclude, “we wonder what could happen if we as teacher educators made a commitment to designing narrative writing invitations – explicitly with students, not just in our own minds – as opportunities to do something important with others?” Denise Comer focuses on the first-year writing context of writing teacher education and argue for the importance of valuing the multidisciplinary nature of composition in teacher mentoring and support. As she states, “infusing deep-time, multidisciplinary dimensions into first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support—unveiling and creating contact zones within a deep-time framework, where first-year writing faculty can meet, clash, and grapple with the pedagogies, writing, theories, and practices of many disciplines—will enrich the ways faculty and students think, write, and talk about first-year writing.”

Denise Ives and Cara Crandall continue the issue in “Writing for the Audience that Fires the Imagination: Implications for Teaching Writing” and invoke concepts of audience, rhetoric, and culture as they apply in a diverse middle school classroom. Erin Laverick considers the intersection of ESL pedagogy and multimodal technologies at her institution and provides insight in providing her students with “multiple tools for communicating with diverse audiences.” In “*Where Writing Happens: Elevating Student Writing Through Digital Storytelling*,” Jane Saunders writes about digital storytelling and shows how it can both complicate and enhance writing in secondary classrooms.

Kelly Tracy, Roya Scales, and Nancy Luke forward the notion of teacher as writer and place it in online contexts for the graduate student instructors. From their study, they find that “teachers’ perceptions of themselves as writers influence their confidence and sense of self-efficacy for teaching writing, thus shaping their writing instruction.” Sarah Hostetler, Leah Zuidema, Mark Letcher, and Kristen Hawley Turner present their nascent blog “Writers Who Care,” an advocacy and outreach aspect of the NCTE CEE’s Commission on Writing Teacher Education. This blog is designed to reach outward and give scholars and teachers the opportunity to act as public intellectuals, using their skills and knowledge to speak directly to parents, community members, and others who care about writing and literacy. The issue concludes with Erin Williams and Frank Farmer’s “Of Thresholds and Springboards: Teaching Them, Teaching Each Other” and exploring the professional relationship and combined and growing knowledge of the instructor/professor and the advanced graduate students that assist them, and, what each learn from each other as they work and mentor together.

We welcome you to engage in another issue of *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* and look forward to continuing to assist in the development and dissemination of this vibrant area of research and discussion. We Our next peer reviewed issue is due for publication in Summer/Fall 2014. Submission information is available at the end of this issue.

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## Reframing Responses to Student Writing: Promising Young Writers and the Writing Pedagogies Course

Michael B. Sherry, *Bloomsburg University*  
Ted Roggenbuck, *Bloomsburg University*

Recent research (Beach and Friedrich 2008; Graham and Perrin 2007) has suggested that writing instruction can affect secondary school students' success in college and in the workplace. An essential component of this instruction is how teachers evaluate and respond to student writing. However, while teacher candidates in English teaching methods courses sometimes have opportunities to practice designing writing assignments (e.g., Smagorinsky and Whiting 1995), they often have few opportunities to practice evaluating and responding to the writing of actual students. Moreover, Sommers (2006) describes the challenges in offering feedback that can successfully promote collaboration between teacher and writing student, as well as the level of engagement necessary for students to act as partners with their teachers in their own development. Research remains to be done on how to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to practice responding to student writing in ways that both challenge their assumptions about their roles as teachers and help them to connect theory to practice. In this article, we begin this inquiry by describing our attempts to provide such an opportunity in a university writing pedagogies course for teacher candidates and creative writing students. This opportunity arose from our efforts to pilot a revision to a longstanding National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) program for middle school writers, called Promising Young Writers (for which we both serve on the national committee), by including opportunities for the middle school student participants in that contest to receive formative feedback on the writing they submitted from college students enrolled in Ted's writing pedagogies course. Because the course included not only teacher candidates, but also students from our university's creative writing program, the conversation about how to evaluate and respond to the middle schoolers' writing provided valuable opportunities to surface and discuss assumptions about the teacher's role and the nature of feedback in responding to student writing.

Below, we first provide background about prior research into teacher feedback on student writing and then offer a framework that responds to this prior research. This framework informed our piloted revision of the Promising Young Writers program, as well as the portion of that revision that involved having the writing pedagogies course students evaluate and respond to the middle schoolers' writing. In particular, we analyze the evaluations of the middle schoolers' writing made by the college students (teacher candidates and creative writers) and the eventual feedback they provided, with an eye to what this feedback revealed about not only their assumptions about responding to student writing, but also the difficulty many had putting into practice the theory they were exploring in the writing pedagogies class. We conclude with reflections on how this analysis informs prior research on English writing teacher education.

### Background

According to national studies, many secondary students are not prepared for the demands of writing in college (ACT, 2005) or the workplace (Achieve, Inc. 2005). A 2007 Carnegie Corporation report and meta-analysis has suggested that effective writing instruction in secondary schools can impact students' success in school and beyond (Graham and Perin 2007). In particular, teacher feedback on student writing can affect whether and how students make substantive revisions to their writing during the composing process, which involve not only surface level changes but also rethinking the content (Beach and Friedrich 2008). However, because English teaching methods courses are often separated from field experiences in local secondary schools (Smagorinsky and Whiting 1995), they may provide few opportunities for teacher candidates to practice this important skill.

We do not mean to suggest that English teaching methods courses ignore the importance of responsive writing instruction. Indeed, we acknowledge that English teaching methods courses, in general, and writing pedagogies courses in particular, often address the design of writing assignments and rubrics; this approach is supported by a long tradition of research which has demonstrated that teachers' design and implementation of assignments shapes the written work students produce (Freedman, 1987), and that successful writing teachers identify patterns in student writing to address in subsequent lesson plans (Newell, 2008). Moreover, one recent study of writing methods courses in Ohio (Tulley 2013) indicated that 70.6 % of such courses address strategies for commenting on student writing; however, the same study also found that only 58.7% of writing methods courses included application of feedback strategies to field experiences<sup>1</sup>. This disparity suggests that in many such courses, discussion of response to student work happens only in the abstract, without reference to the writing of actual students.

<sup>1</sup> Tulley's (2013) analysis of survey results does not provide details about what this application entailed, nor is the survey instrument included as an appendix. We can imagine a variety of possibilities that might or might not "count" in the eyes of survey respondents, including feedback on samples of student writing not associated with local field placements. Nevertheless, we believe these percentages point to a significant lack of opportunities to apply feedback strategies to actual student writing in writing pedagogies courses.

There are many reasons why opportunities for teacher candidates to practice responding to the writing of actual students might be valuable to provide. Prior research has suggested that teacher feedback depends on the teacher's conception of students as represented by their writing (Murphy and Yancey 2008; Taylor 2002). Discussion of commenting strategies and their potential effects, in the abstract, does not easily allow this aspect of giving feedback to be addressed. Opportunities to respond to the writing of actual students may thus provide valuable opportunities to surface assumptions about student writers, and to practice avoiding detrimental feedback, such as teacher comments based on stereotypes about students' language use associated with race (Ball 2009), gender (Haswell and Haswell 2009) and class (Seitz 2004).

However, a practical obstacle to providing opportunities for teacher candidates to give feedback on student writing concerns the nature of the students who enroll in a writing pedagogies course. At our university (as at many others), the writing pedagogies course is open not only to students majoring in English education, but also to those studying creative writing or professional writing. For these students, readings from English education and discussion of practical strategies for giving feedback on student writing may be less relevant than readings and discussion that address composition theory; indeed, much research has described the tension between these two strands of such a course (e.g., Alsup 2001; Bush 2002). From an instructor's standpoint, the presence of other students besides English education majors in the writing pedagogies course makes it especially difficult to create opportunities for field experiences in local schools where feedback strategies might be applied. However, a potential benefit of the dual audience for the course is that creative writing and professional writing students may bring different perspectives than teacher candidates to discussions of key course issues. Research has suggested that teachers' conceptions of writing shape their feedback on student work (Fitzgerald 1992); non-education majors may have different perspectives on what makes good writing (and good feedback on writing), if only opportunities can be created to enable discussion of these different perspectives.

In short, despite the importance of teacher feedback on student writing to secondary students' success in college and beyond, writing pedagogies courses (though they may include opportunities to discuss commenting strategies) may provide relatively few opportunities to practice giving feedback on writing to actual students and thus to surface assumptions about writers, writing, and the teacher's role in responding to them.

### Theoretical Framework

Given our particular interest in how opportunities to practice teacher feedback on student writing might surface assumptions about students, about writing, and about the roles, relationships, and responses available to teacher candidates, we elaborate below a framework that addresses how participants in social interactions come to understand the nature of those interactions, and how to take part in them.

This framework is informed by a basic assumption that has long been held by composition theorists (e.g., Lucas 1987; Gottschalk 2003): that interactions around writing (such as those in which a teacher writes feedback to a student writer) are socioculturally and historically situated activities. Although each interaction is dynamic and different in terms of its embeddedness in place and time, participants naturally draw on their experiences with other, similar kinds of situations to formulate a definition of the interaction; this definition is called "the interactional frame" (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1986). The frame shapes and is shaped by participants' sense of their roles in an interaction and what is possible and appropriate to say or do. Over time, such frames become more established, determining the possibilities for participation. In order to change their sense of the roles, relationships, and responses available in such situations, participants need experiences that redefine or "reframe" the nature of the interaction.

The concept of the interactional frame helps to explain stories like the one related by Lad Tobin (2001) in his chapter "Process Pedagogy," from *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (a text used in Ted's writing pedagogies course). Tobin admits that when he first taught writing (despite the fact that, as a student, he had found his own experience with writing instruction "exceptionally uninspiring"), the courses he taught were much like the ones he had experienced (2). In our terms, Tobin's past experiences as a student, despite his lack of enthusiasm for them, had contributed to an interactional frame for writing instruction that shaped his future interactions as a teacher. Like Tobin, many of our teacher candidates approach writing instruction based on their own experiences as students. Although many have experienced having their most important ideas seemingly ignored while their lexical mistakes received significant attention, those same prior experiences can strongly influence teacher candidates' feedback practices. As a result, when faced with students' texts for the first time, many teacher candidates fall into the types of responses they themselves have described as particularly unhelpful. In short, prior experiences as a student can frame writing instruction in powerful ways, defining the roles, relationships, and responses available to one as a teacher.

Tobin claims that upon discovering process pedagogy through scholars like Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, he learned to think of his students as "*real writers*" (2) rather than just students. But whereas Tobin began with students and instructional practices, and then encountered composition theory, we believe our students need opportunities to connect the theories they have read about to teaching practices via experiences with 'real writers' in order to frame what is possible and appropriate.

### Methodology

The idea of reframing writing instruction by providing experiences with authentic audiences in a community of writers informed not only our work with teacher candidates in the writing pedagogies course, but also our redesign of the Promising Young Writers program, for which Mike serves as chair of the national committee. In this section, we describe our pilot of that

revision, focusing in particular on the part of the process that involved college students in Ted’s writing pedagogies course as respondents to the writing submitted by middle schoolers to this contest.

Since the 1980s, the Promising Young Writers program has each year offered middle school teachers the chance to nominate eighth grade students who then submit two pieces (one written to a themed prompt, and the other of their own choosing) to be judged by a selection committee of teachers from across the country. At present, each year’s winners are nationally recognized on NCTE’s website. However, participation in the program has declined. As members of the committee charged with conducting the Promising Young Writers program (and as colleagues at the same university), we set out to revise the program, enlisting the help of middle school students and their teachers in Michigan and Pennsylvania (both longtime mentor teachers and collaborators with Mike) to help us pilot this revision.

Our thinking about reframing writing instruction by creating an authentic audience prompted us to make several changes to the original Promising Young Writers contest in our pilot. Whereas the program has typically invited teachers to submit their students’ work for review by a panel of invited judges, we created an online wikispace where students could post their submissions themselves. In addition to simplifying the submission process for our busy teacher collaborators, we thought situating the action in an online space would distinguish participation in the program from students’ experiences with school writing assignments (e.g., Pascopella and Richardson 2009). Indeed, we hoped to foster the feeling that students were participating in an online community of writers (like, for example, <http://youthvoices.net/>). In this way, we also sought to create an authentic audience for the work students would produce, something encouraged by NCTE’s standards (2012) and position statements (e.g. NCTE 1991, NCTE 2008), and that we know from experience often creates more incentive than the prospect of writing for a teacher (or an anonymous judge).

We envisioned three rounds of judging, each by a different audience, for whom student writers would need to revise their submissions. First, students would submit their writing to the wikispace for other middle school writers (outside of their home state) to read, respond to, and vote for; those who received the most votes would move to round two. Next, students would revise the same piece for judging by college students in the writing pedagogies course at our university; it is on this second round of the pilot revision to the program that we focus in what follows. Finally, the writers ranked most highly from round two would revise their submission again in preparation for a response in round three by a famous (published) author familiar with the medium/genre each finalist had chosen, who would then select the winners.

Our changes to the platform and process in an effort to reframe school writing for the middle school students seemed to be relatively effective at inviting a variety of participation. More than 70 students in six classes across the two states expressed initial interest in submitting writing, and each had a personal page on the wiki for his/her work. Although only 23 students posted writing to their personal pages by the first round deadline, we were pleased overall with the quality and the personal investment apparent in the work these writers had produced, as well as the variety of genres students submitted: the entries included memoir, historical fiction, romance, science fiction, crime/thriller, sports stories, essays, and poems.

The second round of judging by college students in the writing pedagogies course that is the focus of our analysis occurred late in the semester, after the class had read and in many cases responded positively to landmark essays from Nancy Sommers, Richard Fulkerson, Peter Elbow, Joseph Harris, Donald Barthelme, Rebecca Moore Howard<sup>2</sup> and other composition theorists as well as the “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” and several of NCTE’s position statements. The original plan was for Ted’s students to choose five middle schoolers’ submissions from each state to send to the final judge, and also have each group from the writing pedagogies class respond through the wiki to several writers so that each middle schooler received feedback from two groups of college students.

The college students first read and ranked the middle schoolers’ drafts independently, and then met in groups of three to determine rankings as a group. Then, the groups who ranked the Pennsylvania middle schoolers met in one half of the room to agree on rankings for those students, and the other groups discussed the Michigan students’ rankings. As it happened, though, on the day the groups were assigned to rank either the Michigan or the Pennsylvania students, nearly all of the creative writing and professional writing majors were inadvertently assigned to the Michigan writers while nearly all of the future teachers were assigned to rank the Pennsylvania students. Based on issues that arose from the initial scores and responses of these two groups, Ted had them switch: the teacher candidates scored the Michigan submissions, and the creative and professional writing majors scored the Pennsylvania pieces. With two sets of scores, which they had developed in groups, the class convened to discuss and compare. After discussion, the college students each used an individual student response device, or “clicker,” to assign a new score; these scores were automatically tallied into rankings around which the class eventually came to consensus. Then, each initial group of three composed responses to the middle school writers to whom they had originally been assigned and posted this feedback to each writer’s wiki personal page. Afterwards, the college students wrote individual reflections on the entire process.

In what follows, we thus draw on several sources of evidence in our examination of how the second round of the Promising Young Writers revision pilot surfaced teacher candidates’ assumptions about the roles, relationships, and responses available to them in responding to student writing. First, we make use of data from some of the student writers’ submissions, summarizing when possible (to preserve confidentiality), but also quoting to show the craft and content of the work to which teacher candidates responded. Second, we address the three sets of scores assigned by future teachers and by creative and profes-

sional writing majors to each group of middle school writers (an initial set, a set after switching groups, and a final set tallied by clickers); we also draw on anecdotal evidence from class discussions of these scores (and the similarities and differences among them). Third, we analyze the actual feedback the groups posted to the wiki for each student writer. Throughout our analysis, we include excerpts from the reflections composed by the college students at the end of the process. In addition, one middle school student’s writing, in particular, serves as a provocative point of intersection across the stages of this process.

### Reframing Responses to Student Writing

#### *Paper Jellyfish and Raisin-y Babies: Initial Perceptions of Student Submissions*

Ted was surprised by the remarkable quality of the writing from the Pennsylvania students. Students submitted detective fiction, dream sequences, fantasy and futuristic fiction, as well as sophisticated memoirs. For example, one student, Grace, from whose text we have permission to quote, submitted a memoir about adjusting to moving and to changes in her family. Her text demonstrates originality and humor as well as trust in her readers.

Everyone loved [baby brother]. When we brought him home from the hospital a bunch of people came to see the bright blue eyed baby boy with a crop of pale blond hair and my exhausted mother. Ignoring me in the process, naturally. Just like people always had since they had brought [younger sister] home from the hospital when she was a baby. I didn’t care for hospitals. That’s where all the babies came from. Some babies were cute and very pretty to look at and adore, like dolls. Others had red, raisin-y, faces and cried too much. They smelled especially undesirable when they needed changing. I never quite understood why my mother loved babies so much. Still don’t.

She also demonstrated excellent control of syntax in constructing a sophisticated authorial voice: “Later, when I got to Pennsylvania it was still hot but there it was very humid. Sticky hot. Hard- to- breathe- in my- chest hot. Help me, the sun is beating down on me to kill me hot.” Most of the texts from this group revealed students who seemed to enjoy writing and who were writing to engage and entertain their readers, not just to earn the approval of a teacher. One student created adult characters of all of the other students in the group and wrote a fictional story of a class reunion gone awry. Another piece ended with a sophisticated reprisal of a beautifully described image from an arts festival of handcrafted jellyfish with candles inside floating up into an evening sky. As one college student would later write in a reflection on the experience,

Some of [the students’ stories]...I could never think of even if I tried. [One] boy wrote a science fiction short story in which he made up words and mentioned hilarious details that made me chuckle. One writer played well with dialogue and demonstrated its importance in storytelling in general. Another writer used absolutely stunning imagery and captured a scene that I can picture looking at through a photograph from a polaroid camera. In all, Pennsylvania demonstrated some excellent storytelling.

The overall quality of the student writing would, we hoped, reframe teacher candidates’ idea of what eighth grade writers are capable of, and encourage them to respond to these students as “real writers.”

#### *Fall from Grace: Scoring Student Submissions*

Despite our perception of the quality of the student writing (especially from the PA group), the second surprise in this round of judging came when the rankings for the Pennsylvania writers from the group of future teachers were in some instances nearly reversed from what we would have given. The future teachers’ highest-ranked submission had been ranked near the bottom by Ted. Ted’s highest-ranked submission, which included the beautiful image of candle-lit paper jellyfish floating into the evening sky, had been ranked 6th by future teachers. The submission from Grace, which Ted had ranked second-highest had been ranked 8th of 10 by future teachers. Ted wondered whether the difference in rankings had resulted from his graduate training as a creative writer, rather than a secondary teacher educator: perhaps teacher candidates were judging based on a different frame for what makes good writing, and of their responsibilities as teachers to foster certain kinds of writing.

In response, and to see whether or not the rankings would differ, Ted reassigned the groups so that future teachers scored the Michigan students, and creative and professional writing majors scored the Pennsylvania students. Although professional and creative writing students arrived at rankings similar to what the future teachers had, Grace’s text was a notable exception on which we focus further attention below.

In subsequent class discussions, many of the college students reported that their rankings had been influenced by what seemed to them “appropriate” for school, or that they had rewarded texts that presented “good” values over those that demonstrated sophisticated craft but may have challenged traditional ways of thinking. Grace’s text, for example, was ranked lower because of her use of sentence fragments and because many had found her cheeky style in some ways inappropriate. These responses to Grace’s text suggested a framing of the role of teacher as moral authority charged with correcting not only a student’s sentence structure, but also the respectfulness of her tone (regardless of the rhetorical situation). Thus though many of the college students had faulted their previous writing instructors for not valuing their work as writers or thinkers, and instead, for imposing invisible criteria upon their work and viewing their texts as only the products of students completing writing assignments, many had done exactly that to these promising young writers’ texts. Despite their dissatisfaction with the feedback they had received as students, those experiences had powerfully framed their sense of their role as teachers responding to these students’ writing.

Ted reviewed with the class the instructions for judges (included as Appendix 1) that encouraged them to look for

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<sup>2</sup> These authors are represented in two of the required texts for the course, *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, and *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*.

the ability to “inform and/or move an audience through control of language” and to avoid “applying formulaic standards.” As many college students began to realize that they had overvalued correctness or imposed formulaic standards, students from both groups wanted to start over and score all of the submissions again so that they could this time treat these texts as the thoughtfully created products of active young thinkers and writers. A creative writing student approached Ted saying that when he was in middle school, a contest like this would have really mattered to him, and that he might have been dissuaded from continuing by the judgment arrived at by our class. A future teacher worried that, whereas we were supposed to be creating an opportunity outside of school for students to invest themselves into kinds of writing they most wanted to do, in fact, we were imposing school-based notions of what qualified as good writing rather than responding to the texts as we encountered them. As she later wrote in her reflection about the project:

Assig[n]ing a writer one and only one number was difficult to do, especially when I had the mindset of of [sic] having to grade it according to the genre. (I thought that’s why the genres were provided, so that we can assess how well that writer worked within that genre). I wish I would have had a different mindset than that from the get go....

As this comment indicates, many of the teacher candidates had framed the task of scoring and responding as an evaluation of the writer’s execution of a generic form, on which the teacher was an expert. However, when confronted with the differences among their scores, and the different perspectives offered by their classmates, they began to realize that another frame was possible.

To reassess the students’ submissions, Ted assigned the class to individually rank again any submission that had been considered in the top six by either group. To do this, the college students used individual student response devices (“clickers”), rather than group consensus, to arrive at initial rankings. The clickers automatically tallied individual scores, calculating the top five from each group, and then the class scored the top five against each other again to arrive at a final ranking. Ted again offered the class the opportunity to argue for or against the results arrived at through the clickers, but all seemed satisfied that our final results reflected the collective judgment of the group.

Table 1  
*Initial and Final Rankings by the Groups*

Pennsylvania				Michigan			
Student	Future Teacher Ratings	Creative and Prof. Writers’ Ratings	Final Rating with Click-ers	Student	Future Teacher Ratings	Creative and Prof. Writers’ Rating	Final Rating with Clickers
A	<b>8th</b>	<b>2nd</b>	2nd	N	13th	12th	
B	10th	10th		O	12th	9th	
C	<b>3rd</b>	<b>3rd</b>	3rd	P	<b>2nd</b>	<b>8th</b>	3rd
D	<b>1st</b>	<b>1st</b>	Tie-4th	Q	<b>6th</b>	<b>5th</b>	5th
E	7th	8th		R	9th	11th	
F	9th	9th		S	10th	10th	
G	<b>4th</b>	<b>7th</b>	Tie-4th	T	<b>8th</b>	<b>6th</b>	
H	<b>6th</b>	<b>6th</b>	1st	U	<b>4th</b>	<b>7th</b>	
I	5th	4th		V	<b>7th</b>	<b>2nd</b>	2nd
J	<b>2nd</b>	<b>5th</b>		W	<b>1st</b>	<b>1st</b>	1st
K				X	<b>5th</b>	<b>3rd</b>	4th
L				Y	11th	13th	
M				Z	<b>3rd</b>	<b>4th</b>	

*Note:* Scores in bold are those that differed between the two groups, or from first to final ranking.

Several changes from the initial to the final scores are worth noting for what they suggested about how this experience reframed the college students’ sense of what makes good writing, and what roles, relationships, and responses are available to a teacher-reader of student writing. The text in the Pennsylvania group originally ranked highest by both groups, was ranked tied for fourth in the final tally. Students reported that in their original scoring they had valued it highly because of the heart-warming and reaffirming (appropriate) content, but upon review, it did not demonstrate the level of craft evident in many of the other texts. As one college student wrote in her reflection: “I think that our group ending up choosing the ‘safe’ ones (that were actually rather generic) because we thought that they did the best job within that genre.” The sophisticated memoir with the image of jellyfish floating in the sky went from sixth to first when judges focused on craft and approached it as respectful readers rather than enforcers of predictable tropes and gestures.

Grace’s text, which the instructor and the professional and creative writers had admired initially, was ranked second of

the group in the final score. One teacher candidate reflected, “I admired her voice, but [initially]...I dubbed it as ‘too random’ or ‘not strong’. However, after reading it a second time...I noticed the craft in her language. She had a sarcastic, comedic voice which was absolutely appropriate to the material she wrote about—that life throws annoying things at us that we have no control over.” These changes in scores, and the accompanying comments from their reflections, indicate a change in teacher candidates’ framing of the teacher’s role and the possibilities for response available to them as readers of student writing. Whereas they initially seemed to frame the teacher as regulator of the generic appropriateness of students’ content and language, their later scores and comments suggested more attention to sophistication and the rhetorical effectiveness of the writer’s craft at accomplishing her purpose.

On the day the class arrived at consensus for the final ranking of middle schooler’s texts, Ted overheard one future teacher tell another that she couldn’t believe that she might have gone into a classroom without first having had an important experience like this one. Future teachers also reported in their reflections how important it was for them to have experienced slipping into evaluating students’ texts in ways they themselves had resented and had felt were unhelpful to them, and then going back to re-experience the middle schoolers’ texts as readers rather than evaluators before scoring them as artifacts of invested writers. “Just like students who are exposed more to writing write better, teachers who are exposed more to students’ work as-sess better. It is so important for me to know how to give good feedback to my students. I feel like this project helped to prepare me for this task as a teacher, but I wish I had been exposed to more projects like this before now.” This future teacher recognizes how her prior experiences framed her sense of the teacher’s role and how she encountered the students’ texts, as well as how the Promising Young Writer’s pilot provided opportunities to reframe the evaluation of student writing.

**Between Roles: Attempts at Providing Feedback**

After the scoring of submissions, Ted asked the initial groups of three to compose feedback to each middle school writer and post it to the wiki. This final stage of the process was an opportunity to put into practice the idea that the goal of providing feedback was to encourage writers in their development, to recognize particular strengths and features of a text, and also to motivate writers to continue to revise. However, rereading middle schoolers’ texts and recognizing what was laudable in them did not automatically allow future teachers to produce feedback likely to promote growth or development. Though re-ranking the texts helped to reframe college students’ encounters with those texts, and although their attempts at providing feedback revealed progress in applying concepts from course reading, the feedback the groups offered indicated that many of them were still struggling to reimagine their roles as responders. To one middle schooler’s personal narrative, a group of future teachers offered the following feedback:

We thought that you wrote a very heartwarming story, which made us genuinely happy. One of the writing techniques that we really enjoyed was your ability to reflect on the thoughts you were having as a five-year-old, now that you’re in 8th grade. For example.... It takes courage to write about a personal experience, and you did it very eloquently. Your piece was very organized and easy to follow. Something that you could think about if you are to continue working on this piece is incorporating more descriptive language to paint a more vivid picture of your experience. Overall, we thought this was a wonderful example of a personal narrative and you should definitely continue writing.

The first half of this response focused on the teachers’ reactions as readers to specific techniques the writer had used. However, the second half was still tinged with evaluations of how effectively the writer executed the genre of the personal narrative. One teacher candidate noted in her reflection the difficulty in reconciling these two frames for responding to writing. “I think this was a good experience for me because I need practice switching between evaluating as a teacher and evaluating as a fellow reader. Up until college, I read things as a peer but the [education] major has really changed my ways of looking at things, and it’s hard to revert back to a persona you left behind when you entered the major.” This future teacher also recognized the challenges and benefits of the Promising Young Writer’s pilot for reframing the evaluation of student writing. However, the roles of teacher and fellow reader, for her, remained in opposition.

In addition, some of the creative writers sometimes seemed to forget the audience for the feedback they offered. For example, one group wrote: “You exercise a wealth of creativity. Your attempt to mimic the chaotic nature of a dream sequence is evident through abstract and surreal imagery.... Though this is a dream-like piece, this piece could serve well to explain the context of the world in a way which serves as a bridge between reality and the dream. This would make this piece more accessible for the reader.” Though the feedback was positive and might give the writer a sense of accomplishment, the syntax alone would make it challenging to use this response to continue to revise the text. Indeed, the tone suggested that the college students were more concerned with framing themselves as sophisticated readers than with making their comments accessible to eighth grade writers.

Future teachers generally proved more adept than creative and professional writing majors at enacting the role of enthusiastic readers and offering specific feedback. Whereas in the original scoring, creative and professional writers seemed to more readily recognize the sophistication and craft in some of the stronger texts, when it came to responding, groups composed of future teachers typically responded more adeptly as readers rather than authority figures. But the group that provided the most effective feedback was comprised of both future teachers and creative writers. To a futuristic fiction piece, this group responded: “We found your story to be engaging and exciting. You gave a compelling account of a man trying to escape [...] by focusing on the man’s actions, and keeping the action of your story fast-paced. The details of description about the man gave us a sense

of his emotions; we were able to connect with him and experience his fear. We particularly enjoyed the ending. The decision to end the story with Dan’s demise was excellent. It was a brave choice, and added finality to the tale which would not have been possible had he escaped.” Though they offer no advice for revision, the specific praise and the weighing of alternatives in this response provided the writer with a sense of the text’s potential effects on his readers. This comment framed the responder’s role not as expert evaluator of the genre, but rather as expert reader who can help the author appreciate the rhetorical effectiveness of certain techniques. Thus, in the examples above, teacher candidates’ initial attempts at providing feedback, though imperfect, bode well for their future effectiveness.

#### *“Eye-Opening”: Reflections on Theory and Practice*

In their reflections, future teachers also commented explicitly on how the Promising Young Writers pilot related to their previous experiences with the theories and practices of writing pedagogies. One future teacher wrote: “I feel like one of the biggest flaws in my college education to become an educator is that I have not been given more experience assessing student work. We’re taught all of the theories about how to do pre-, formative, and summative assessment, but we haven’t been given the opportunity to actually put the theories of assessing into work. Getting the chance to finally interact with and evaluate student work was an eye-opening experience.” For this teacher candidate, as for many in Ted’s class, our Promising Young Writers revision pilot was her first opportunity to respond to the writing of actual students. Her comment suggested it was also a chance to implement theories of student assessment that had heretofore been abstractions. At the beginning of the semester for the writing pedagogies class, this student’s reflections and contributions to class discussion suggested that her interactional frame for enacting the role of responder to student writing was highly formalist--she intende to thoroughly mark the lexical features of her students’ texts so that they could see and correct their errors. She had an excellent grasp of the mechanics of language, and was grateful to the teachers she felt had helped her achieve that by marking her texts. She had thoughtfully engaged with the theories provided in the writing pedagogies class, which offered her alternative visions of her role as a writing teacher, but it was in her evaluations of students’ texts (and in discussing those evaluations with others), as well as in composing feedback to post to the wiki, that she was able to realize the practical value of what she had learned mostly theoretically to this point.

Another teacher candidate offered a more plaintive reflection along the same lines: “I wish that Bloomsburg would make a course based off of students’ work for the sake of future teachers. How am I supposed to prepare myself to correct [*sic*] students’ work as a future teacher when I have never had to do it before until now?” These comments suggested not only the value of the Promising Young Writer’s pilot as an opportunity to connect theories of assessment to teaching practices, but also how challenging it can be for English educators to provide such opportunities for reframing response to student writing.

#### **Discussion**

In the preceding sections, we have addressed the problem of how to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to practice giving feedback on student writing in ways that both challenge their assumptions about their roles as teachers and also help them to connect theory to practice. One such opportunity arose from our piloted revision to the Promising Young Writers program, for which Mike serves as chair of the national committee, and for which college students in Ted’s writing pedagogies course served as judges during one round of the contest. Above, we have analyzed how evidence from this experience contributed to reframing the interaction of teacher response to student writing. That evidence included examples of middle school students’ writing, as well as the scores, discussions, and written feedback Ted’s class generated in response to the writers’ submissions. The difference between evaluations and feedback from college students of different majors, as well as the difference between their initial and final scores, suggested that the Promising Young Writers revision pilot provided opportunities to challenge assumptions about the roles, relationships, and responses available to teacher-readers of student writing. Below, we discuss these findings in relation to prior research on English writing teacher education.

#### *“Good” and “Appropriate”: Framing Response as Regulation*

Teacher candidates in Ted’s class initially assigned low scores to some of the middle school submissions we felt were strong pieces. Their comments in discussions and in their reflections indicated that their evaluations were based less on craft and more on the writer’s execution of a genre or the appropriateness of her tone. This evidence suggests that the teacher candidates’ were operating from an interactional frame in which the teacher’s role is that of expert evaluator, and response to student writing is an assessment of generic and moral appropriateness. Prior studies have suggested that teacher feedback can be an attempt to “regulate” student writing based on “genre and mode rules” (Haswell 2006) and on conceptions of students as represented by their writing (Murphy and Yancey 2008; Taylor 2002). Our experience affirms this previous research and adds that such regulatory practices may stem from the way teacher candidates’ prior experiences have framed response to student writing.

#### *“When Others Could See Something Special”: Reframing with the Help of Other Perspectives*

When future teachers and creative writers in Ted’s class rescored student submissions, their evaluations of some texts (like Grace’s) differed. After discussion and rescoring, teacher candidates’ evaluations changed. Other students’ different rankings of the texts, especially Grace’s, helped future teachers to more readily recognize the roles they had unconsciously donned to encounter those texts. Those differences also helped future teachers to revisit the same texts with a different frame offered by the

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other students for how to read the writing of middle schoolers as an appreciative audience. The Promising Young Writers’ texts, and the experience of reading them differently, seemed a particularly important opportunity for future teachers to benefit from the presence of other students. As one teacher candidate put it, “Seeing some of the differences in evaluations, make[s] me nervous for when I am a teacher. I would hate to think that a piece of work wouldn’t get the recognition deserved because I was not particularly captivated by the writing when others could see something very special in it.” In short, hearing others’ perspectives contributed to reframing the teacher’s role and the responses available to them in responding to student writing. Although previous studies (e.g., Bush 2002; Tulley 2013) have found that competing agendas from Composition Studies and English education in a writing pedagogies course like ours can lead to tensions and disunity, our findings suggest that there are benefits to having students from different majors react differently to the theories and practices presented in the course.

#### *Students as “Real Writers”: Connecting Theory and Practice*

Although teacher candidates, like most students in Ted’s class, had reacted vociferously against accounts of formalist writing pedagogies in course readings from Composition theory, they admitted in discussions and in their reflections that their initial responses to the middle schoolers had applied similar practices to the students’ writing. This disconnect between theory and practice echoes other experiences we (and others) have had with future teachers in the writing pedagogies class (e.g., Alsup 2001; Bush 2002), who often ask, “But will it work with real students?” (Alsup and Bush 2003). Though exploration of how to offer effective feedback has been an important aspect of the writing pedagogy course, not until Ted’s class had the opportunity to respond to actual student texts through the addition to the course of the Promising Young Writer’s pilot, were they able to put into practice the concepts and principles from the course material. More important, they had the opportunity to clearly recognize that the theories they were encountering could be applied to actual texts from actual students in the future. Previous research has suggested that field experiences are often separated from university coursework (e.g., Smagorinsky and Whiting 1995), and that when discussions of strategies for commenting on student writing appear in writing pedagogies courses they may be confined to the abstract (Tulley 2013). Based on our experience with the Promising Young Writers pilot, we argue that concrete experiences with an audience of “students as *real writers*” (Tobin, 2) may be important to reframing future teachers’ conceptions of what is possible for teachers of writing.

#### **Boundaries and Limitations**

In addressing the disconnect between theory and practice in our teacher candidates’ initial responses to student writing, and the possibilities for reframing their sense of the teacher’s role afforded by the Promising Young Writers revision pilot, we do not mean to reinforce a dichotomy between theory and practice. Nor do we suggest that the inclusion of writing by actual students would “fix” the difficulties encountered by instructors of writing pedagogies courses. Indeed, responding initially to the middle schoolers’ writing, alone, was not enough to reframe teacher candidates’ conception of their role or the responses available to them as teachers. Some researchers (e.g., Grossman 2000; Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson 2003) have found that classroom experience can cause beginning teachers to forsake the principles they learned in teacher methods courses and revert back to more traditional practices for teaching writing; likewise, Smagorinsky and Johnson (2013) has suggested that, far from challenging their prior experiences, fieldwork during teacher preparation can sometimes encourage teacher candidates to assimilate. We make no claims about the future effectiveness of these teachers as responders to student writing, but we emphasize that the thoughtful integration of practical experience with an audience of student writers and discussion of composition theories and pedagogies is what allowed for our students to reframe response to student writing.

The college students’ prior experiences with writing instruction were not the only influence on their frame for responding to the texts submitted by the middle schoolers. We acknowledge that the nature of the contest, itself, may have contributed to their judgments about the appropriateness of content and form. Their role as judges, and the requirement of ranking students, likely contributed to the initial framing of their responses. Indeed, one of the teacher candidates wrote in her reflection that she had understood the inclusion of a genre label on a list of the students’ submissions as an invitation to evaluate their execution of a generic form. On the other hand, the nature of the three rounds in our piloted revision to the Promising Young Writers program, and the instructions for college students to respond in the second round, suggested the importance of revision for particular audiences, and encouraged responders to assist writers in their development and to recognize particular strengths and features of a text. In class, Ted reminded college students of their role as judges and *not* teachers, and his invitations to reexamine the middle schoolers’ submissions certainly implied his own values as a reader of student writing. That college students noted and reacted to both types of influences in their responses to student writing only reinforces for us the way classroom discourse--including assignments, instructions, and teacher feedback--can contribute to framing (and reframing) responses to student writing.

Finally, while we continue to recognize the potential advantages for writers of providing them with real audiences outside the classroom (e.g. Pascopella and Richardson 2009), our efforts to use real external audiences did not spur the focus on revision we were hoping to see during each stage of the Promising Young Writers project. In part, logistical challenges of coordinating classrooms at three institutions limited the time middle schoolers had to revise their texts based on feedback from their peers in a different state. In most cases, college students had already completed scoring before peers had provided comments or voted. Also, though college students did provide feedback that could have potentially motivated middle schoolers to revisit their texts and revise in earnest, with the idea that the text had been considered seriously and was about to go to the next level to

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a “famous” author, little or no revision was evident on the wiki. It is possible that middle schoolers found confusing the prospect that they should revise a text that had been read enthusiastically by college students. It is also possible that middle school teachers were not in position to devote class time to helping middle schoolers reframe their experience of receiving feedback from college students in ways that may have helped them to act upon that feedback in revising their texts. However valuable the Promising Young Writers experience may have been for teacher candidates, its potential value to the middle schoolers involved seems much less clear.

Implications

Teacher candidates’ comments during discussions and in their reflections suggested that their prior experiences had powerfully framed writing teaching as the evaluation of generic form and content. While this may not be surprising in the era of standardized testing, one student’s comments suggested that she needed practice “switching between evaluating as a reader and evaluating as a teacher” because it was “hard to revert back to a persona you left behind when you entered the [education] major.” What other experiences before, during, and after writing teacher education might contribute to framing writing instruction as a regulatory practice? What reframing experiences might English educators provide to teacher candidates? How might one measure the effectiveness of those reframing experiences?

In Ted’s writing pedagogies class, the dual audience of teacher candidates and creative writers provided a useful opportunity to compare different perspectives on the submissions to the Promising Young Writer’s contest. However, we recognize that the competing agendas of college writing, rhetoric and composition, and English education present many other challenges to instructors of a writing pedagogies course. We, ourselves, continue to explore possibilities for a section of the course created exclusively for future teachers, which could focus more precisely on the needs of these students and could potentially provide them more field experience opportunities than does the current, primarily theoretical, course designed to support future teachers, creative writing majors, and professional writing minors. Who are the various college student audiences for the writing pedagogies course? How do those audiences frame the interaction of response to writing? What other opportunities (like the one afforded by our piloted revision to the Promising Young Writers program) might allow instructors to bring those audiences’ different frames for response to writing into useful relationship?

For many, if not all of the teacher candidates in Ted’s class (some of whom were about to graduate from college and begin student teaching), this was their first opportunity to bring theories of writing pedagogy into relationship with the practices of evaluating and responding to actual student writing. Although we know many wonderful teachers who continue to read theory to inform themselves and to modify and adopt practices that seem promising, we have also witnessed, during professional development presentations to secondary teachers or college faculty, how challenging it can be for teachers who have clearly defined their roles within the interactional frame for response to student writing to reframe those roles and to break long-established habits of response. What earlier reframing experiences might we offer to teacher candidates during teacher preparation? How might the opportunities we provide to beginning and to more established teachers differ? In short, what experiences might we offer (and when) to help teachers at different stages of their careers to reframe response to student writing?

Conclusion

In this article, we have addressed the problem of how to provide English teacher candidates with opportunities to practice giving feedback on student writing which surface and challenge their assumptions about the roles, relationships, and responses available to them as teachers. Our pilot revision to NCTE’s Promising Young Writers program, for which Mike chairs the national committee, provided such an opportunity for Ted’s writing pedagogies class, as college students evaluated and responded to writing from middle schoolers in Michigan and Pennsylvania. To the scores, the discussions, and the reflections from Ted’s students, we applied analyses that drew on the concept of the interactional frame: the definition of an interaction (like teacher response to student writing) that shapes and is shaped by participation in other, similar situations. Our analyses suggested that teacher candidates initially approached responding to student writing as evaluators of the appropriateness of form and content, framing the interaction as regulatory practice. The difference between their initial scores and those of their creative and professional writing classmates helped the future teachers begin to reframe response to student writing. Their participation in the Promising Young Writers revision pilot also provided the students in the writing pedagogies course with a valuable opportunity to connect theory and practice. Research remains to be done on what kinds of experiences before, during, and after English teacher preparation might contribute to framing (and reframing) response to student writing for teachers at various stages of their careers.

Appendix 1

NCTE PROMISING YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM  
INSTRUCTIONS FOR JUDGING STUDENT WRITING

ROLE OF THE JUDGES

The National Council of Teachers of English thanks you for the time and interest you are devoting to this program. Without your support, this program could not be offered to students, teachers, and schools. The role of judges in selecting outstanding eighth-grade writers is paramount. Students may receive special attention from their local schools, state and national officials, and NCTE state affiliates. NCTE recognizes each student with Certificates of Recognition or Participation and their names and school are posted on the NCTE website. It is very important for judges to meet the deadline so schools can be notified in time for end-of-the-year awards ceremonies.

JUDGING PROCESS

Each team of two judges will work independently to evaluate the same students’ papers (Best Writing and Themed Writing for each student). **Score** each paper between 0 and 3 based on the criteria which follow (that is, one score for each Best Writing and one score for each Theme Writing). **Record** the scores for the two writings from each student.

EVALUATING THE WRITING SAMPLES<sup>3</sup>

In evaluating the two pieces of writing (described below), judges should consider the effectiveness of each piece for its intended audience. The comprehensive question is whether the writer exhibits power to inform and/or move an audience through control of language. Fuzziness should not be mistaken for profundity, nor mechanical sloppiness for originality. Although editorial correctness is a virtue, meaningful variations should be allowed and the absence of mechanical error should not be overvalued. As a rule, flawed brilliance is to be preferred over correct dullness.

**Best Writing Evaluation:** Judges have the opportunity to read a wide variety of writings students have chosen as their best. More than one poem or prose work will be accepted as long as the entry does not exceed ten pages. We do not accept research papers, novels, or novelettes. A judge may ask, “How can I compare the relative worth of a poem and an essay?” The only honest answer is that one cannot. Yet the piece of writing may be judged in terms of itself and how it compares to the writing evaluation rubric. (It is possible to adapt the descriptions in the rubric to submissions in various genres/media.) The major question to ask is whether the sample, whatever its type, reveals high achievement in writing for a student at this grade level. In many instances, the best writing samples will have been examined by a committee of teachers, or a committee of teachers and students, who have judged the writings of these students. A teacher’s corrections or remarks should not be on the paper.

**Themed Writing Evaluation:** Judges have the opportunity to evaluate writing done on the same topic. Judges are reminded that this writing is done by eighth-grade students, and their responses to the assigned topic may not be the equivalent of those written by more mature writers. However, having one composition on the same topic by each participating student does provide a point of comparison not only between that individual student’s two submissions but also across all the writings being evaluated.

HOLISTIC WRITING EVALUATION

Use the Holistic Writing Evaluation Scale below to score papers. Scores of 3 and 2 should be reserved for those writings that are clearly outstanding and that could be printed in a magazine or local newspaper as representing the best junior high/middle school writing in the state. However, it is possible that judges may select a winner who is not equally good on both writing samples.

To recognize varied achievement, judges are urged to:

- 1. **Read supportively in order to reward students for what they have accomplished.** Eighth graders include a wide range of writers, including English Language Learners, all of whom are developing their writing in different ways.
- 2. **Avoid applying formulaic standards** (for instance, insisting that compositions follow a specific essay format such as the five-paragraph paper; or that one kind of error is automatically disqualifying [e.g., “alot” rather than “a lot,” or English Language Learners’ errors in the use of the articles *a*, *an*, *the*]).
- 3. **Recognize that a 3, like other ratings, represents a range, not a pinnacle**—high achievement, not flawlessness—and must therefore be used ungrudgingly if those who deserve to be winners are going to get the score necessary to qualify them.

<sup>3</sup> Note that while these instructions for the national program address two writing samples (a themed and a “best writing”) for each student, in our piloted revision we asked for only one best writing sample.

**NCTE PROMISING YOUNG WRITERS PROGRAM**  
**HOLISTIC WRITING EVALUATION SCALE**

**Submissions that receive a 3, 2, or 1 should meet a certain level of effectiveness with regard to organization, content, style, usage, and writing process. Submissions that do not meet this level should receive a 0.**

**3** Submissions scored as a 3 tend to employ an organizational framework that is especially effective for the topic/genre. The content is particularly effective throughout the piece because of its substance, specificity, or illustrative quality. The work is vivid and precise, with distinguishing characteristics that give the writing an identity of its own within the conventions of the genre/medium, though it may contain an occasional flaw. The work is polished and impressive for the eighth grade.

**2** Submissions scored as a 2 are organized effectively for the topic/genre. The content is effective throughout the piece, though the paper may lack the substance, specificity, or illustrative quality of a 3. The stylistic/surface features of the genre/medium are consistently under control, despite occasional lapses. The potential in the writing is realized, though not to the degree that further revision would allow.

**1** Submissions scored as a 1 show evidence of the writer’s attempt at organization. Content, though effective, tends to be less consistent or less substantive, specific, and illustrative than that found in papers scored as a 3 or 2. The writer generally observes the stylistic conventions of genre/medium but unevenness suggests that the writer is not yet in full command of his/her voice. Some errors are usually present, but they aren’t severe enough to interfere significantly with the reader’s experience. The potential in the writing is evident, but the work would clearly benefit from further revision.

**0** Submissions scored as a 0 either do not meet the requirements for consideration, or do not achieve an acceptable level for one or more of the criteria above. The organization of the work is not effective for the topic/genre; or the content lacks substance, specificity, and illustrative value; or the writer does not observe the conventions of the genre/medium in ways that do not seem consistent (vs. variations from standard written English that are intentional or associated with a dialect or with ELL writing); or the amount of errors interferes significantly with the reader’s experience. The writing requires substantial revision.

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About the Authors

*Michael B. Sherry* is Assistant Professor of English Education at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. His research addresses how classroom discourse enables and constrains teaching and learning (of both secondary school students and English teacher candidates). His work has appeared in journals like English Education, Teachers College Record, and American Educational Research Journal.

*Ted Roggenbuck* is Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Bloomsburg University Writing Center. His research addresses university and high school writing centers, writing programs, and Writing Fellows programs.

*First-Year Composition and the Common Core:  
Educating Teachers of Writing Across the High  
School-College Continuum*



Justin Young, *Eastern Washington University*

An effort is now underway in America’s public schools to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); these assessment standards seek to align K-12 exit standards with college level entrance requirements, thereby producing high school graduates that are, according the architects of the CCSS, “College and Career Ready.” This article will discuss the implications of the CCSS on the teaching of writing instructors at the college level. I will argue that, with the nationwide adoption of the CCSS, the most effective models of the training of writing teachers in higher education will now include collaboration with educators at the K-12 level; I will also offer a model for this kind of collaborative work, based on an effort I am currently leading as the Director of English Composition at my institution. I will begin with a brief overview of the CCSS, and the shifts in the teaching and learning of English Language Arts at the K-12 level they suggest. I will then suggest a model for teaching teachers of first year composition, based on recent collaborative efforts with high school teachers and administrators involved in my institution’s Concurrent Enrollment Program. Specifically, I will discuss how this collaborative model can help us understand the strengths and weaknesses of beginning college writers, from the perspectives of both high school *and* college teachers, and how this understanding should then inform our instruction of first-year composition teachers. Finally, I will suggest that it is essential that the education of secondary and post-secondary writing teachers be grounded in current theories and practices of the field of composition and rhetoric.

The Common Core State Standards and English Language Arts: Background and Shifts

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor’s Association jointly initiated the Common Core State Standards, and began work on the standards in 2009 (Common Core Background). A final draft of the CCSS was published in June 2010. According to the official website of the CCSS, sponsored by the CCSSO and the NGA, the CCSS, “define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs” (About the Standards). The CCSS set standards of “College and Career Readiness” only for English Language Arts and Mathematics, although they establish literacy standards for science, technical subjects and social studies in grades 6-12 (ELA Standards). As of the middle of 2013, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards.

The CCSS for ELA suggest several significant shifts in standards for language arts in K-12; these shifts that will impact the way that literacy is taught and learned across the K-16 continuum. As the purpose of this article is not to provide an analysis of these shifts, only a brief discussion of these shifts is necessary, in order to establish context for the discussion. According to Student Achievement Partners, a non-profit founded by the chief architect of the CCSS, David Coleman, these shifts can be reduced to three major changes: 1. “Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction,” 2. “Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational,” and 3. “Regular practice with complex text and its academic language” (Common Core Shifts). Of these shifts, the move towards the inclusion of a higher percentage of “informational texts” in the K-12 language arts/English classroom has generated the most controversy. The architects of the CCSS, most visibly David Coleman, argue that students need to spend less time reading and writing narratives (or about narratives), and more time reading and writing what the CCSS terms “informational texts.” As *The New York Times* notes, in the newspaper’s account of an incident representative of the controversy over this aspect of the CCSS, Coleman himself ignited a storm of criticism when he argued against the use of personal writing in English classes by saying, that, in the business world, no one ever tells an employee, “Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday, but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood” (Lewin). The *Times* notes that progressive educators reacted strongly to this comment; this upset is part of a generally negative reaction among progressives<sup>1</sup> and some conservatives<sup>2</sup> to the CCSS emphasis on informational texts over literary texts. An understanding of the major shifts brought about by the CCSS for ELA, how these shifts are presented by the backers of the CCSS, and an awareness of the controversies over those shifts, is particularly essential for those teaching writing in K-12. An understanding of these issues is also important to anyone preparing writing teachers at the college level, as these changes will have an impact on what incoming students know, and don’t know, about college writing.

<sup>1</sup> See Diane Ravitch’s blog, for the progressive perspective on the ELA shifts.  
<sup>2</sup> See Sandra Stosky’s post on the website of the Heritage Institute, for a conservative perspective on the ELA shifts.

A Collaborative Model for Teaching Teachers of Writing Across K-16

As the CCSS are an attempt to improve the effectiveness of K-12 public education by targeting a closer alignment between high school exit standards and college entrance standards, along with an increased emphasis on “college readiness,” in order to effectively teach teachers of writing at the college level, it is increasingly essential to connect the theory and practice of teaching college composition with the current theories and practices surrounding writing instruction at the high school level. Specifically, the effective teaching of composition instructors should involve direct collaboration with local K-12 educators; college writing teachers need to learn from the experiences and observations of secondary school English teachers, and vice-versa.

As the Director of Composition at my institution, I recently participated in the College Board’s “Affinity Network,” as an “English Language Arts Team Member” representing my university in a collaborative, year-long initiative, which brought together educators in my region across the K-16 continuum. This effort focused on the likely implications and shifts brought about by the implementation of the CCSS, just recently underway in the public schools in our region. The Network provided the opportunity for those in higher education to get together with high school teachers, principles, and curriculum developers, for the purpose of identifying likely impacts of CCSS implementation and to collaboratively develop a shared response. This initiative suggested that not only did this kind of collaboration amongst educators across the K-16 continuum have the potential to be powerful and effective, it was going to become increasingly necessary in the midst of a national effort to improve the transition between high school and college. The Affinity Network also offered a model for the kind of collaborative professional development that would be needed for teachers of writing at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Concurrent enrollment programs offer a unique opportunity for this kind of collaborative learning about the teaching of writing to occur. At my institution, we currently employ and prepare local area high school teachers to teach our introductory English Composition course in the high schools. In other words, teachers already employed at local high schools teach our “English 101” curriculum, and students receive college credit and high school credit for this course. This collaborative venture provides an opportunity not only to help teach local high school instructors about the expectations and practices that define college level writing, it also provides an opportunity to learn *from* high school teachers about the practice of teaching high school composition, as well as the weakness and strengths of high school writers.

Over the course of an academic year, I have, as the Director of Composition at my institution, led a series of workshops on composition pedagogy, the CCSS, and writing assessment for both our college instructors, as well as the high school instructors that teach in our Concurrent Enrollment Program. I believe that this series of workshops can serve as a model for other college composition programs to establish professional development programs focused on the CCSS, and based on collaboration across the K-16 continuum. This approach to teacher preparation, as well as the content of the workshops themselves, is grounded in foundational and current college composition theory. Specifically, the preparation is grounded in the theory and practice of the scholars that James Berlin identified with Social Epistemic Rhetoric, a paradigm of rhetoric and writing that continues to inform much of the field of composition and rhetoric. It is also informed by the current scholarship of academic literacies, an approach to the teaching and learning of writing in higher education originally developed by Mary Lea and Brian Street. The sequence of teaching workshops noted below suggest the kind of content that could be covered in this kind of collaborative endeavor:

- 1. The CCSS for ELA and Student Learning Outcomes for First-Year Composition
- 2. Defining College Level Writing: The Strengths and Weakness of our Student Writers
- 3. Minding the Gap: Using Composition Theory to Understand the Differences Between High School and College Writing

I will now provide a brief account of the how these workshops can be run, as well as an account of the preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from these experiences.

CCSS Anchor Standards for Writing and Outcomes for First-Year Composition

This workshop brought together high school English teachers and first-year composition instructors to discuss the CCSS “College and Career Ready Anchor Standards for Writing” in comparison with our own program’s Student Learning Outcomes for English Composition 101, our university’s first-year composition course. The goals of this workshop were to:

- 1. Introduce the CCSS to our college level first-year composition instructors and have them apply their understanding of best practices in the assessment of writing to these standards.
- 2. Introduce and discuss the SLO’s of our institution’s first-year composition course to our high school instructors and have them relate their experience of teaching high school writing to the outcomes.
- 3. Have instructors at the college and high school level compare writing standards at the secondary and college level, note similarities and differences, and discuss implications for writing instruction and learning at both levels.

The group consisted of just over twenty college composition instructors, and under ten high school instructors; it met for over two hours.<sup>3</sup> The participants noted a great deal of overlap between the two sets of standards. (See Table 1, below.) Indeed, an examination of the CCSS standards for the assessment of writing ability at the secondary level suggests that there are several

3 Other versions of this workshop have been held, with different sets of college and high school instructors. In some cases, the workshop was held with roughly the same ratio of high school to college instructor. In other cases, the workshop has been held with more than 10 high school teachers and 3-4 college instructors.

important areas of alignment between CCSS and discipline-approved college level student learning outcomes, such as the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.<sup>4</sup> Shared terminology and similarity amongst learning targets in the CCSS and first-year composition outcomes can clearly be seen, and, in a collaborative workshop setting are quickly noted by both secondary and post-secondary writing teachers.

A similar focus and comparable language exists in our first-year composition outcomes and the CCSS regarding the writing process, argumentation, and information literacy. For example, regarding the writing process, the College and Career Ready (CCR) anchor standards for writing state that students must be able to, “Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach” (Anchor Standards for Writing). Similarly, our program’s composition outcomes state that students must be able to “develop a recursive and collaborative writing process that includes planning, drafting, revising, organizing, editing, and proofreading.” Both sets of standards include language about developing arguments and finding and using appropriate evidence to support claims.

An analysis and discussion of this example of post-secondary composition student learning outcomes in *contrast* to CCSS the points up a number of compelling dissimilarities between the two sets of standards.

Table 1  
Comparison of Concepts and Terms in Sample College Composition Outcomes Statement and The College and Career Ready Anchor Standards for Writing

Shared Concepts/Terms	Terms Not Included in CCR Anchor Standards for Writing
“Write arguments to support claims” “analysis of substantive topics or texts” “Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources”	scholarly rhetorical situation academic discourse implicit/explicit theses

As is illustrated in the above chart, a comparison of a specific set of first-year composition standards and the CCR Anchor Standards for writing suggest that the CCSS do not include terminology and concepts common, and in many cases central, to the teaching and learning of first-year composition. While some cases of omission of terms from the CCSS may simply be a case of differing terminology, in other instances, the absence of terms central to composition theory and practice may suggest a contrast between the CCSS and expectations for what constitutes a college ready writer held by college writing teachers and administrators. Awareness of and engagement with these contrasts, and the possible gaps between how the CCSS and college instructors describe college ready writers implied by these contrasts, are essential to the successful preparation of writing teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

A collaborative analysis of these standards by high school and college writing teachers suggests that a shared understanding of the terminology of the CCSS in relation to the discourse of first-year composition standards across both levels will be important to the successful training of composition teachers, as well as the success of their students. The CCSS and FYC standards should be compared and discussed as the products of specific discourse communities.<sup>5</sup> Understanding that the two sets of standards have been composed by different communities using differing—though many times similar, or even overlapping—discourses, can help us note areas of shared concern, even if identical terminology has not been used in both sets of standards. An excellent example of this is reflected in the use of the term “claim” in the CCSS, in contrast to the common usage in the composition field of the term “thesis.” The CCR anchor standards for writing state that students should be able to, “Write arguments to support *claims* in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence...” (Anchor Standards for Writing). The absence of the term “thesis” in the CCSS does not mean that students will not be expected to develop and support thesis statements if they meet the CCSS writing standards; “thesis statements” are represented as a *type* of claim in the standards. It is important, however, that teachers of writing at both the high school and college level are prepared to communicate this difference in terminology to students. High school teachers need to help make students aware that central claims will often be called thesis statements in college; college writing teachers need to be sure to connect the term “claim” to the use of the term “thesis” in college. Similar instances of concepts that are shared by Common Core and FYC standards, but that have been articulated using different terminology, should be noted and discussed with writing teachers; these instances should subsequently be noted and discussed with students.

The recognition by workshop participants of the absence of the term “thesis” from the CCSS, and the varying reactions to this absence provides an illustration of the benefits of bringing together instructors across the K-16 continuum. Composition instructors, as a group, were very surprised that the term was absent from the standards; some even expressed a level of dismay over this fact. An experienced high school teacher, who had been involved in state-level efforts to refine early drafts of the standards, however, was able to step in and explain the rationale (based, at least, on his experience) for leaving the term out of the standards. This provided useful information for the college instructors. On the other hand, the concern expressed by the

4 This article will focus on comparing a specific institution’s first-year composition standards with the CCSS writing standards; similar conclusions could be drawn from a comparison with the WPA outcomes statement, as my institutions standards are based on the guidelines established by the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

5 For a discussion of the discourse communities and their relationship to the composition process, see Patricia Bizzell’s “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know About the Writing Process.”

college instructors about the absence of the term, made it clear to the high school teachers in attendance that they still needed to use the term “thesis” in their classes, so that students would be familiar with it, when they encountered the term at the college level.

In addition to identifying and discussing terminology that is shared between the CCSS and first-year composition outcomes, the effective teaching of writing teachers should include an effort to identify and discuss any terms common to college composition but absent in the CCSS writing standards. The term—readily identified by the college instructors in our workshop— with the most noteworthy absence in the CCSS anchor standards for writing is a term and concept essential to the field of college writing: “rhetoric.” The CCR anchor standards for writing do not include the term rhetoric, or imply its importance as a concept or area of study. The absence of the concept of rhetoric from the CCSS suggests a major gap between the CCSS and the goals and outcomes supported generally by the field of composition and rhetoric. To be fair, the CCSS standards do note that students should be able to produce texts appropriate to task, purpose, and audience, elements of what those in composition and rhetoric might call (at least part of) the rhetorical situation. However, the fact that the term rhetoric itself is absent in the writing standards that will be used to assess and determine a students college readiness is worth noting and discussing with English teachers at the secondary and post secondary level. This kind of collaborative work across the K-16 continuum offers the opportunity for high school and college instructors to discuss the issue of audience in the teaching and learning of writing. In one case, such a collaborative meeting pointed to the gap between what can be reasonably accomplished in the high school writing classroom, versus the college writing classroom. A college instructor who suggested, with a level of distress, that first year college students couldn’t create narrow topics targeted towards specific audiences—in other words, her students weren’t thinking and writing *rhetorically*— was met with a response from a high school teacher that provided needed perspective. This teacher suggested that while it would be important, at some point, to teach students how to come up with narrow topics, targeted to a specific audience, her current job as a high school English teacher was to *open* up the world of her students. She noted that her students see things very narrowly and have little awareness of the national and global issues that impact them; her work, therefore, is focused on broadening her students’ perspectives through writing. The opportunity to discover disconnects between the aims of high school teachers and college writing instructors is another benefit of facilitating collaborative opportunities for ELA educators across the K-16 continuum.

More importantly, perhaps, than the absence of the term rhetoric from the CCR anchor standards for writing, is the absence of values and perspective that rhetoric carries in the field of composition and rhetoric. The notion that every discursive act is situated within a specific material and cultural context is central to our field’s conception of rhetoric; this conception can be traced to the classical rhetoric of Isocrates,<sup>6</sup> it is central to formation of the field itself,<sup>7</sup> and it can also be found in more recent work in post-process theory and eco-composition.<sup>8</sup> This formulation of rhetoric and discourse is reflected in the agreed upon outcomes for first-year writing in the field of composition and rhetoric; the Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition of the Council of Writing Program Administrators requires that students “Understand the relationships among knowledge, language, and power.” This kind of outcome, as well as any kind of articulation of rhetoric as a socially and ideologically situated practice, is absent from the CCSS. As such, it is essential that this absence, and its implications for the teaching of college level writing to beginning college students be noted and discussed in writing teacher preparation. It may be useful to ask beginning and continuing college composition teachers whether an awareness and basic understanding of the term rhetoric is essential to college readiness. Further, it is worth asking composition teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level at what point students should be introduced to the idea that discourse is socially, culturally and ideologically situated. Should educators wait until students reach college to share this knowledge?

Defining College Ready Writing

The current national implementation of the CCSS, and promotion of these standards as creating “College and Career Ready” students, offers the opportunity to teach writing teachers by collecting information on and discussing how they themselves define “college ready” writing. Such a workshop can, in fact, begin with data collection: secondary and post-secondary teachers can be surveyed on their perceptions of student ability in specific areas of writing competency established by the CCSS. This data collection from educators in a local region can then be used as a starting point for a collaborative workshop focused on defining “college ready writing.” While this data cannot necessarily be extrapolated in order to make observations about national perceptions, it does provide insight into perceived college readiness of first-year college writers at the college or university in question; if data is also collected from high school teachers, a better understanding of the *region’s* students can be gained. In other words, this data can therefore be used to better understand the students in a given local community, and to therefore better train writing teachers at the high school and college level in that area. As writing teachers, we find ourselves at an important historical moment. Before the CCSS have been fully implemented in the high school classrooms, secondary and post-secondary writing teachers as well as program administrators need to develop a shared understanding of the areas of writing where their local soon-to-be and entering college students are currently falling short of college readiness. This collaboratively developed, shared understanding can then inform the collaborative development and implementation of targeted curricular

6 See Kathleen Welch’s *Electric Rhetoric* on the relationship between the classical rhetoric of Isocrates and contemporary rhetorical theory.  
7 See Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics and Cultures* for a historicized theorization of the field of composition that situates rhetoric within ideology, power and culture.  
8 See Thomas Kent’s *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm*, and Dobrin and Weisser’s *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition* for recent articulations of rhetoric as radically contingent and ecologically situated.

changes at the high school and college level, designed to address these areas of low college readiness.

To this end, at my institution, data was collected from both college writing instructors and high school English teachers, primarily through surveys; data was also collected from instructors through focused discussions and writing samples.

Table 1: Instructor Perceptions of the College Readiness of First-Year Composition Students

Area of Writing Instructors indicate the level of their student’s college readiness in each task below.	Average of Level of College Readiness One indicates least college ready, and ten indicates most college ready.
Q1. Write arguments to support claims in analysis of substantive topics	3.53/10
Q2. Write argumentative texts with clear focus	4.2/10
Q3. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience	4/10
Q4 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.	4.2/10
Q5. Gather relevant info from multiple sources	4/10

The majority of composition instructors at my institution completed a survey of instructor perceptions of the college readiness of first-year college students in several areas of writing identified by the CCSS. (See Table 1.) Language taken directly from the CCR Anchor Standards for Writing was used in the survey to identify the writing tasks in question. If a student who meets the standards for writing set by the CCSS upon his/her graduation is supposedly “college ready” according to the architects of the standards, it is important to know whether the students now entering college are currently meeting these standards, and if they aren’t, how close they are to meeting them. Most importantly, it is essential that teachers of writing identify the areas of writing where students are least college ready, so that new and continuing writing teachers can be better prepared to address—and emphasize—those issues in the secondary and post-secondary writing classroom. The results above suggest that the college writing instructors at my institution believe that our university’s first-year students *do not* demonstrate college readiness in a number of writing skills included in the CCSS for writing.

In order to develop a shared understanding of college ready writing, we need to learn whether high school writing teachers and college instructors agree about the strengths and weaknesses of their students as writers. Areas of agreement can lead to targeted intervention, at both levels, via training, curriculum development, and assessment. Areas of disagreement between high school and college writing teachers may point to the need for better communication and continued focused collaboration across the K-16 continuum. For example, both area high school instructors and college instructors were asked, in our workshop on college ready writing, to provide a written response to the question:

*In what area of college composition are students **least** college ready? Briefly explain.*

While the teachers provided a range of responses to this question, different focuses of concern emerged from the two groups. The ability of students to establish and maintain a clear focus in a given piece of writing was the weakness that the highest number of high school teachers identified. In contrast, the highest number of college-level instructors identified *reading* ability as the greatest weakness of beginning college writers. We cannot draw general conclusions about the weaknesses of beginning college writers from these results; however, these responses do help writing administrators and writing teachers in our specific region begin to develop an understanding of the weaknesses of our students, as well as possible disconnects between the perceptions of high school and college teachers. In this case, these results may suggest that *college* instructors believe that their students enter college lacking the functional and/or critical literacy skills necessary to a successful college writer, while *high school* instructors are focused on the weaknesses of their students in performing specific college-level writing skills. It could be said that, in this particular case, the college instructors expressed the most concern about their students’ pre-college skills, and the high school teachers focused their concern on specific areas of writing they believed to be most important to successful college-level writing. Regardless of the conclusions that might be drawn from these responses, the feedback, if shared in a workshop environment can certainly provide the basis for a productive, collaborative discussion amongst high school teachers, college teachers, and writing administrators, about the strengths and weaknesses of the beginning college writers with whom we all work.

Impacts on Writing Curriculum at the High School and College Level

Once, through the collaborative dialogue described above, high school and college writing teachers can identify and agree on specific areas of writing where students are commonly falling short of college-readiness, it is essential to continue this collaborative work with the goal of developing curricular responses that address these areas at both the high school and college level. If the first step is defining terms and identifying problems, the second step needs to be an effort to determine appropriate classroom responses at both levels. In other words, the development of a shared understanding of college readiness in writing across the college-high school continuum, should next lead to targeted intervention, at both levels, via curriculum development and assessment according to the CCSS and college level learning outcomes.

One form that such an intervention can take is the recent effort in my region and state to develop a new Grade 12 ELA course targeted towards students who do not pass the Grade 11 Smarter Balance Assessment (which, in my state, will be the standardized assessment of student achievement under the CCSS). In fact, the collaborative development of this course will be the next step taken by area educators at the high school and college level following our participation in the Affinity Network, as well as a statewide initiative “Core to College.” At my institution, we will follow the workshop described above, with another collaborative workshop focused on the development of this Grade 12 course; it will be an opportunity to again bring together composition instructors and high school teachers from the local area and work together towards a specific curricular response to the issues of college readiness raised by the workshop described above. Based upon the results of the earlier workshop and the data presented above, it is clear, for example, that such a course will need to include in depth instruction on and the practice of developing focused, thesis driven texts; this area should be addressed in order to respond to the concerns of the local high school teachers represented above. Additionally, in response to the concerns of the area college instructors represented above, it is also clear that instruction on and the practice of critical reading of texts with academic language, be another important focus of such a Grade 12 ELA course. The development of this Grade 12 course is an excellent example of the kind of impactful product that can result from facilitating the collaboration between high school and college English instructors in response to the CCSS. High school teachers can help college level writing instructors better understand the challenges faced by high school writers, as well as their teachers; composition instructors and administrators at the college level can play an invaluable part in the development of ELA curricula that will help to better prepare students who will soon make the transition into their college classrooms. If such efforts are to truly impact student writing ability and strengthen student literacy skills, however, it is essential that this work be informed by current composition theory and practice, as discussed in the following section.

### Using Composition Theory to Address Weakness of Beginning College Writers

*Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement*, by Calkins et al., a book that aims to enthusiastically promote the effective implementation of CCSS by K-12 educators, suggests that starting district-wide across the curriculum writing initiatives is an excellent way to begin the implementation of CCSS. The authors assert that starting CCSS implementation via writing is particularly advantageous because they claim that in “In the field of writing, there are no substantial debates over how best to proceed” as even conservative textbooks support “a writing process approach to the teaching of writing, as do the standards” (16-17). The idea that there “are no serious debates” over how to proceed in the teaching of writing is likely to be dismissed by anyone in composition and rhetoric, familiar with ongoing debates in the field over, for example, the post-process movement, genre studies, or multiliteracies. It is clear, however, that the CCSS have been informed by the research in composition and rhetoric conducted and put into practice in institutions of higher education over the last thirty to forty years. Most in the field certainly *would* agree that writing must be taught as a process of *some* kind, and would strongly support efforts in K-12 education to promote this approach. An analysis of the CCSS does suggest however, that there are certain foundational concerns, central to the theory and practice of composition and rhetoric in higher education, that are either absent or undeveloped in the CCSS. As we prepare both high school and college teachers to work with soon-to-be and/or beginning college writers, it is essential that we: 1) Ensure that all writing teachers have an understanding of how approaches and practices suggested by the CCSS contrast the theories and practices commonly shared within the field of composition, and 2) Apply the assumptions, theories and practices of composition and rhetoric in higher education to the preparation of writing teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Those who teach writing to students who will soon enter college, should, like college level writing teachers, be prepared to teach writing through the development and application of knowledge in the field of composition and rhetoric. High school teachers must learn to identify what their students will not know about college writing, in terms of familiarity and practice, even after they exited high school, just having met the standards for “college and career” readiness established by the CCSS. College writing teachers must become familiar with the CCSS and establish expectations for what these first-year college students will know and not know about *college composition and rhetoric*.

Some predictions can be made about the what beginning college students will know about and be able to do effectively in the college writing class, based on an analysis of what is, and isn’t, included in CCSS themselves. The CCSS do promote the notion of writing as a process— a foundational assumption shared by much of the field of composition and rhetoric. In fact, proponents of the CCSS, such as Calkins et al., recognize this approach as the universally accepted writing pedagogy. Analysis of the CCSS in relation to the theory of “academic literacies” (ACLITS) can help provide a framework, which can be applied during teacher preparation, for exploring the differences and similarities in the treatment of writing process by the CCSS and the field of composition and rhetoric. As noted by Lea and Street, ACLITS approach differentiates between three approaches of writing pedagogy: study skills, socialization and academic literacies. These authors note that the academic literacies model draws from the other two models, but that it is best able to effectively address student writing. Like the paradigm of writing and rhetoric, “social-epistemic rhetoric,” promoted by Berlin, an ACLITS approach suggests that writing cannot be reduced to a single, universal or transferrable process. Both theories of writing suggest that writing must be researched and learned in a way that takes into account “institutional practices, power relations and identities” (Russell et al. 400). Both the social-epistemic and academic literacies approaches operate on the epistemological assumption that knowledge and discourse is a social process and that discourse is always ideological. The principles of these two models of writing and writing pedagogy—principles that underlie much of the field of composition and rhetoric and the field’s agreed-upon standards for assessment (WPA Outcomes)—

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do not appear to have informed the CCSS. The two other common approaches to writing articulated by proponents of ACLITS — the “study skills” and “socialization” model—are, however, reflected in the CCSS.

Discussion of the study skills model and socialization model can be useful for illustrating differences between the CCSS and accepted college composition theory. The study skills model treats writing as an autonomous act, separate from subjective positions, and cultural or material contexts (Lea and Street). Writing is treated as a set of practices that are transferrable from one situation to another; writing is treated as something to be “fixed” and instruction is focused on the mastery of rules and the correctness of surface features. In the model of socialization, writing is a process of engaging in and eventually internalizing the discursive practices of the academic community, or more specifically, the disciplinary community. The CCSS can be understood as an effort to improve student success (at least partially) through an academic socialization model. As noted above, the ELA shifts include a move toward “complex text and academic language” (Common Core Shifts). Further, the CCSS do promote writing as a context specific process and they require students to write in relation a manner appropriate “to audience, purpose, and task.” The socialization model, however, can still be criticized on a number of grounds, including, Lea and Street argue, its tendency to treat academic discourse as homogenous and/or transparent and its failure to adequately address the relationship between the development of disciplinary discourses and institutional practices and power. And so, while the CCSS do improve upon the current-traditional or study skill model of writing pedagogy, they fall short in exactly the way that Lea and Street suggest that the socialization model falls short.

The CCSS English Language Standards admirably emphasize the importance of process and audience, they appear to operate off of several assumptions about the nature of writing and writing pedagogy, that have been challenged by the field of composition and rhetoric. While the standards promote writing as a process, this process is represented as universal—applicable to all individuals and situations; this perspective is reflected in the notion promoted by CCSS advocates that a single, universal approach to writing pedagogy has been settled upon. As noted above, absent from the standards for writing however, is any mention of the relationship between language use and power. Nor do the standards articulate a connection between individual student experience, home language use and academic discourse. The CCSS for ELA reinforce a model of competency that takes the ability to complete a range of autonomous, universally-transferrable tasks as evidence of academic or job preparedness, while failing to acknowledge the cultural situatedness of every literacy act as well as the cultural and economic contexts that surround the standards themselves. This acknowledgement of cultural situatedness of every discursive act is foundational to the field of composition and rhetoric. Writing teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level must be aware of this, as well as the fact that new college writers will not have been introduced to this idea, even if they have met the anchor standards established by the Common Core.

Further research must be done to determine the specific ways in which we find students, who have graduated and met the CCSS, excelling and struggling in the college writing classroom. Data are obviously not available on students who have been schooled for any length of time under the CCSS. We now, instead, must gather and share information on how our students are currently excelling and struggling in writing as they transition from high school to college. This will help us identify whether and how the CCSS contribute to a higher level of college readiness in writing. We must now also gather and share information as we prepare writing teachers on the contrasts that will still remain between the teaching of writing at the high school and college level, even after the CCSS have been fully implemented. The kind of collaborative teacher preparation, described above, offers a model for doing both of these tasks. As the Common Core is put into practice across the diverse states that comprise this country, we need to bring together educators who span the K-12 and higher education continuum, but who share a local community, in order to share in the task of teaching those who will teach writing to the kids, young adults, and college students who help make up that community.

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**About the Author**  
*Justin Young* has taught writing at City College of New York, the University of Oklahoma, and Claremont McKenna College. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern Washington University, where he directs the composition program and Writers’ Center. His research focuses on literacy instruction at both the K-12 and college level. Specifically, his work explores the ways that improved reading and writing instruction can better prepare students across the K-16 continuum to communicate effectively in both print and in digital environments and to succeed in college.

*Re-thinking Personal Narrative in the  
Pedagogy of Writing Teacher Preparation  
Introduction*



Mary M. Juzwik, *Michigan State University*  
Anne Whitney, *Pennsylvania State University*  
April Baker Bell, *Michigan State University*  
Amanda Smith, *Michigan State University*

The role that personal narrative writing should play in the teaching of English in secondary schools is a question that members of our field have returned to again and again. Further, it is a question that onlookers of our work—both critical and supportive—have argued about. At one extreme, David Coleman, the dominant figure behind the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, has notoriously said about personal writing that “as you grow up in this world you realize people really don’t give a shit about what you feel or what you think” (10). Yet multiple voices in the field of English education have drawn out the complex connections between personal and academic writing, making compelling arguments for the importance of the former, both in its own right and as a contributor to developing competence in the latter (see as just a few examples Hillocks, *Narrative*; Fredricksen, Wilhelm, and Smith; Kittle; Smagorinsky, Augustine, and O’Donnell-Allen). We find their arguments compelling. We see personal narrative as one of the many ways people make arguments in the world of discourse in school and beyond; further, we have seen how students engaged in personal narrative writing so often find themselves drawn into experimentation with different approaches in a text, deep revision, and a commitment to precise expression that we see as critical to learning writing.

Our own desire to prepare English language arts teachers to teach personal narrative well stems also from our sense of the socially mediated identity work that written and oral narrative texts accomplish in people’s lives. Narrative is one of the primary ways that people understand, experience, and create reality (Bruner). As described by Bakhtin, narrative is dialogic. Any utterance made in speech or in text emerges as a part of an ongoing conversation, begun long before an individual speaks (or writes!) and carrying on long after. In this way, all stories respond to previous stories and anticipate stories that will be told in the future. Our narrations join other narrations in a tangled web of dialogue through which we take up, reject, and re-appropriate the words of others while inviting listeners to do the same with our words. Further, they vary in shape and function according to culture (Cazden). In addition to being dialogic and contextually embedded, narratives are also “intersubjective--belonging to the context as well as to the author,” (Daiute 113). In this way, narrative is implicated in self-authoring. Mead suggests that, in part, we author ourselves as a result of our own objective introspection regarding our thoughts and behaviors. In order to accomplish this work, we must become an ‘other’ to ourselves. That process of self-consciousness, Mead contends, remains social in nature as we human beings take up the position of an “other” to interrogate ourselves (215). Viewing narrative in this manner, as socially and dialogically shaped in the context of culture and instrumental to a process of self-authoring, pushes us to re-consider narrative writing in terms of what it might *do* for students, both in and beyond classrooms.

However, understanding personal narrative in these ways is not the same as teaching it well—or of preparing teachers to do so. As Hillocks reminds us in his introduction to a book for teachers on teaching narrative (*Narrative*), too often we “teach” narrative by reading examples of narratives and then assigning narratives, failing to teach strategies that might result in good narratives. Even more rarely do narrative texts written in school (or any other kinds of texts written in school, for that matter) actually go anywhere beyond the teacher, thus failing to offer students experience in negotiating meanings with readers, working out the versions of self in context that narrative writing can foster. Teaching personal narrative well, in ways that are consistent with our view of personal narrative’s value and the identity work it can support, has proven challenging. In the pages that follow, we describe and reflect on one effort to do so in a teacher education setting, in a class-to-class partnership between teacher candidates and first-year college writers. We introduce the example not as a success story or an exemplar, but rather as a problematic case (Bush) causing us to reconsider a) our sense of the purposes and possibilities of personal narrative writing in secondary schools and b) the uses and pedagogies of personal narrative writing in English teacher education.

**A Narrative Writing Partnership**

The writing partnership discussed here occurred in and across the English education and first year writing programs at a large public university. Mary taught a writing workshop course for secondary English teacher candidates in the English department, and April taught a first year composition course that was a university requirement for undergraduates (most, but not all, were first year students; we call these students “first-year writers” for simplicity). Through narrative writing, Mary wanted the teacher candidates to a) write narratives, b) critically reflect on and expand their own processes as narrative writers and

c) learn to teach narrative writing.<sup>1</sup> A goal across the course was to expand students’ repertoires for teaching writing beyond the 5-paragraph theme that historically pervades secondary schooling and which was likely to be emphasized in many of their school placements (Johnson et al.). Throughout the semester, she asked students to don different perspectives: as writers, as students of writing, and as teachers of writing. Teacher candidates wrote “In the moment” narratives (Assignment included in Appendix A).

April embedded narrative writing within a semester-long inquiry into cultures that had been silenced, misrepresented, or ignored. In most cases, students chose to study cultures they in some way identified with— such as Black culture, Asian American culture, Turkish culture, Chinese culture, etc. Learning about the culture drove all major assignments in the course.<sup>1</sup> The narrative assignment gave students an opportunity to share and interpret individual experience(s) with the culture in light of and in ways that responded to or talked back to themes in other texts they had read and/or written (Assignment included in Appendix B).

Although Mary and April sought to frame narrative writing as purposeful social and dialogic work, we did not always realize our goals. Those missed opportunities become fodder for thinking about the challenges facing instructors trying to facilitate rhetorically purposeful narrative writing in formal educational settings including secondary English courses, first year composition courses, and writing teacher preparation courses. A few specific challenges are shared in more detail below.

### Vulnerability in Writing the Narrative

Writers on both sides of the partnership described feeling vulnerable or fearful about narrative writing and the partnership work. It is true that the teacher candidates seemed grateful for the opportunity to write narratives, especially in the course context of reflecting more on their writing processes. They reported enjoying the “freedom” or “liberation” of the invitation to write personal narratives (vs. academic arguments). Yet despite their enthusiasm for exploring their “own personal writing style[s],” teacher candidates were also worried about sharing their narrative writing with colleagues and with first-year writers: it seemed to up the ante for the writing, creating a feeling of “vulnerability” that they were not accustomed to as (mostly) high-achieving students. One teacher candidate connected this feeling to a scarcity of invitations for personal writing as a secondary and college student: “First of all, this is probably the only personal narrative I have written during my pursuit of higher education. Prior to this paper, I had not written any form of personal essay since my freshman year of high school. Second of all, I am not accustomed to feeling vulnerable in my writing.” Emotions of fear, judgement, and sorrow (i.e., the reference to potentially making writers cry through harsh critique) lace through teacher candidates’ and -- to a lesser extent -- first-year writers’ reflections and responses to the narrative writing and to their roles in the narrative writing partnership.

The phenomenon comports with Brandt’s finding that while reading is associated with favorable memories (e.g., sharing books at bedtime), writing is more often associated with negative emotions and with painful memories. We are left wondering how we can design narrative writing invitations and partnerships that respect and acknowledge potentially painful or negative memories and associations with writing while constructing a new – and perhaps, more positively emotionally valenced – set of experiences and identities with writing? What set of conditions might make it possible for teacher candidates to undertake the painful emotional work that narrative writing may invite in the context of a class required for teacher certification? Yet we also find value in the discomfort that students, particularly candidates, felt in the exchange: we value the opportunity for teacher candidates to feel vulnerable as writers and students, because it is a position in which teachers so often place students.

### Framing Purposeful Contexts for Narrative Writing

Mary and April strove to frame purposeful contexts for students to compose narratives in both courses, paying particular attention to audience and to topics and content. We addressed audience differently across the two assignment invitations. Mary explicitly discussed audience on page 2 of her assignment, listing “go public” as part of the process for completing the assignment and elaborating, “We will share drafts of our narratives with our writing groups and with our [first year] writing partners. If you like, distribute your narrative to other audiences beyond our class.” Rather than framing the writing partners as the chief audience for the assignment, then, she invited students to imagine their classmates, their writing partners, and others beyond either class as equally relevant audiences for the writing. April’s assignment, on the other hand, named the chief audience for the cultural narratives as pre-service English teachers interested in “(1) learning how first-year writers use narratives to write about cultures they belong to, (2) understanding the experiences of cultures that are often excluded from popular culture, and (3) considering how this experience would help them to think about how to teach narratives in their future classes.” Thus the first-year writers were asked to focus on the teacher candidates as their primary audience, whereas the teacher candidates were told that they would be sharing with the first-year writers but were asked to think about audience more broadly.

We also framed the topics of the narrative and the processes of inquiry or invention differently across the two assignments. Mary asked teacher candidates to write a personal narrative about a brief moment within their own life experience. She prompted, “What vivid moments do you remember? Bad memories? Good memories? Puzzling memories? Can you pinpoint moments that have been turning points or especially significant for you? Why? How? Write in your exploratory writing forum about these and related topics to get your juices and memories flowing.” These were followed with a series of in-class activities – adapted from ideas found in Dornan et al. and Lamott, two course texts – to facilitate invention. April embedded the task within a semester-long cultural inquiry project, organized around the theme “(Un)silencing, (Re)representing, and (Un)

ignoring Voices from Excluded Cultures.” The first-year writers engaged in ongoing reading, research, and writing about the culture they chose to study, and the narrative was then framed as one way – among many possibilities – for representing for others what they had learned through their cultural inquiries.

It is reasonable to read Mary’s assignment sheet as inviting students to write narrative for the sake of crafting a narrative text (See Goal 1 on assignment sheet), rather than for the sake of accomplishing the identity work we have committed ourselves to accomplish. Yet her assignment was also situated within the course as a whole, a goal of which was to challenge candidates to envision writing as a structured process -- with different processes appropriate for different purposes and different genres appropriate to accomplish those purposes. She wanted students to grapple with what it might mean to become a teacher of writing who does not rely primarily on the 5-paragraph theme so engrained in the “apprenticeship of observation” in school (Lortie). Thus the primary purposes of the narrative assignment included a) developing identities and repertoires as narrative writers and teachers of narrative writing, b) developing rationales for the teaching of narrative writing, and c) sharing and developing interpretations about the significance of specific moments in life (i.e., the moments in time about which student wrote). It is an irony, then, that the invitation to work through these purposes via narrative reduced these purposes into an invitation simply to compose a personal narrative. We note similar ironies in April’s assignment for first-year writers. Students choosing to study a culture with which they themselves affiliated seems to build in an opportunity for the kind of identity work that narrative writing can involve. Yet in the text of the assignment, that identity work remains tacit rather than explicitly named, and we still read the title “cultural narrative” at its top.

In crafting assignments, then, both Mary and April faced challenges as they worked to create a purposeful context for narrative writing. To different degrees, the assignment texts obscured the potentially powerful purposes by asking students to “write narrative for the sake of writing narrative.” Admittedly, powerful factors shape our choices to label assignments as invitations to write “narrative,” rather than as invitations to do some sort of identity work advancing the purpose of becoming writing teachers or becoming cultural activists or advocates. Among these are a) writing standards, such as the CCSS and the first year writing program curriculum guidelines, decreeing that secondary and college students must learn to write a proper narrative text, b) accountability pressures facing schools and universities (including the testing regimes in which writing teacher education occurs), and c) students’ learned legacies of writing to give the teacher what she wants for the good grade, rather than writing to accomplish meaningful work in the world.

In retrospect, we see that one helpful move toward a more fully social, dialogic, and purposeful approach to personal narrative writing would have been to make the identity work more explicitly a part of the assignment, for example articulating that a key assignment aim is to move forward on the journey toward “becoming a cultural activist” (April’s assignment) and to “becoming a narrative writing teacher” (Mary’s assignment). How we present that goal matters, though, lest the assignment simply invite a perfunctory identity performance, again for the grade (Newkirk). The challenge is to create a pedagogical situation where students are persuaded that narratives can accomplish meaningful social work for them, rather than a more didactic pedagogical situation where students digest and produce the narrative form in ways described and prescribed by a teacher on an assignment sheet.

### The “expert” writing partner

Having drafted their respective personal narratives, the teacher candidates and the first-year writers met for a face-to-face workshop session, five weeks into the fifteen-week semester. As you will see, the ironies that characterized Mary and April’s initial assignments carried forward into this encounter. In the description, we quote from notes made by both instructors on sessions before, during, and after the workshop as well as students’ written reflections on the process.

Writers approached the workshop with different aims. For the first-year writers, it was a chance to work with their designated audience for the writing; for the teacher candidates, it was an encounter with an audience for their writing but also an encounter with a version of the audience for their emerging identities as teachers. The purpose of the workshop conversations, as set by the instructors, was for the first-year writers to receive feedback – from both their own classmates and the teacher candidates – on the first drafts of their narrative. Although teacher candidates were also beginning to write in-the-moment narratives, discussed above, they were not invited share their own drafts with the first-year writers, though they would eventually share revised versions with the first year writers on a wiki space, to which their partners would respond with comments. This decision positioned the two groups of writers asymmetrically, much more so than their different levels of experience would have already produced. And from this decision followed several problems.

The teacher candidates felt nervous before leading the workshop with the first year writers. In the class session before the workshop, they talked through their fears and brainstormed strategies for addressing them and making it maximally helpful. One candidate confessed concern about how the first year writers would perceive her. Several admitted they did not feel comfortable setting themselves up on a pedestal as “writing experts.” The first year writers, too, were anxious about working with the teacher candidates. While many looked forward to receiving feedback that would help them improve their cultural narratives, they feared receiving corrective feedback that was all too familiar to them.

The first-year writers posted their narratives to blogs. As the writers read their pieces aloud, the teacher candidates and their colleagues followed along with the narratives on the blog. After reading aloud, the groups discussed the pieces, for example what was working well in the narratives and how they might be strengthened. Mary and April overheard some animated,

substantive conversations, such as one group discussing different ways of defining the term “culture” and what the implications might be for narrative writing.<sup>2</sup>

The workshop certainly accomplished one identity-mediating goal for teacher candidates: it provided an opportunity for them to gain experience – and in many cases, confidence – in leading conversations about narrative writing. As one teacher candidate reflected:

I’ve been sort of afraid that I wouldn’t know how to respond, because I really haven’t done that much in terms of responding to students’ [narrative] writing...but it was really encouraging to realize that I do know a fair bit about the subject ... There were definitely times when I was at a loss of how to express myself...but even then I knew what I wanted [to] say. It was a good taste of what responding to students will look like...

In leading conversations with first year writers about their narratives, teacher candidates had an opportunity to see that they knew more than they realized – it offered an opportunity for them to make their tacit knowledge about writing more explicit. In a similar vein, one teacher candidate said to Mary afterward, half-joking, “Success! I didn’t make anyone cry!” Thus the teacher candidates’ experiences leading a conversation with first year writers seemed to offer a space for taking up a new teaching identity. Teacher candidates could re-story themselves in response to their experiences leading talk about narrative writing, while anticipating future interactions with imagined students. Therefore, the first year writers’ narratives become artifacts mediating the performance of expertise for teacher candidates.

Yet it was not only teacher candidates who sometimes reported finding a more authoritative, “expert” place to stand via the workshop experience. Though the design of the activity explicitly cast teacher candidates into the role of experts, at least one first-year writer also saw herself as an expert who was teaching the teacher candidates. For her, writing and sharing the narrative about her cultural experience with others was “not simply about telling the story,” but also it was about using narrative writing to “teach the culture” to the teacher candidates. The student was thus able to move beyond simply telling a story or striving for self-expression; rather, she articulated the value of the narrative sharing in relation to the culture she selected to study, her own life, and the lives of others. Further, though the student did not say this, she and her first-year classmates were also “teaching” the teacher candidates about teaching writing by making themselves available to the partnership in the first place.

Though they were not asked to evaluate their partners’ work but instead provide feedback, as teacher candidate donned the “mantle of the expert” (Bolton and Heathcote) they deployed a good deal of evaluative language, much of it praise. For example, as one teacher candidate put it, “I’m very much impressed by the level of skill in the freshman students. Not only were they proficient writers on a structural and grammatical level; they were also capable of creating work that was evocative and engaging. Color me impressed” (underlines added). We use the underlining here to emphasize the overtly evaluative language, which Mary and April noticed across many of the teacher candidates’ responses to the workshop. Another teacher candidate commented:

The students were much better writers than I anticipated. I thought that they would have problems with structure, organization, etc. On the contrary, their writing was very natural. The main problem was grammar and run-on sentences. The narratives were engaging and enjoyable. I tried to encourage them. I also tried to show them their strengths and how to build upon them.

Here again, the teacher candidate evaluates the first year students as “much better writers than I anticipated” and “very natural,” enacting a stance of primarily positive evaluative judgment. Yet this positive evaluation and the role into which it cast her seemed to preclude a more substantive reflection about how and why the narrative pieces, especially such global aspects as structure, work well for her as a reader. And the stance, at least as articulated in this example, did not reflect hard thinking about how the narratives might work better – and how she might help others grow as narrative writers by describing her responses to their writing – what the writing does for her – more thickly.<sup>3</sup>

If a goal of our writing assignments and cross-class exchange was to foreground the social, dialogic purpose of narrative writing, then our set-up fell short. The two teacher candidates quoted here seemed to fall back on a historical script that typically defines student-teacher relations in school. The teacher issues an invitation (whether that is an oral question or a written assignment), the student responds (whether with a verbal answer or a piece of writing), and the teacher evaluates that response (whether in writing or verbally) (Mehan; Nystrand; Sinclair and Coulthard). The two teacher candidates quoted here, at some level, seemed to experience the partnership as practice in responding to writing as an evaluative act. Thus if they are engaged in identity work here, learning to inhabit the role of teacher of writing, they seem to be developing a writing teacher identity oriented more toward evaluation than to dialogic exchange.

What might disrupt that pervasive evaluative script that saturates most teacher candidates’ experiences of schooling? One possibility is a partnership where teacher candidates workshoped their own papers with the first year writers, positioning the two writers more as peers than as teacher and student. Similarly, if the candidates and the first-year writers were working on the same assignment, that too might help to push candidates away from evaluative language toward the exchanging of lives and the dialogic identity work that narrative is so well-suited to accomplish. Re-framing their role in the exchange that emphasized their identities as writers and de-emphasized their identities as future teachers might have helped enact a more intersubjective stance toward narrative writing and de-emphasized the evaluative stance. Yet even here the differences in sophistication as writers between a college freshman and a college senior, combined with the candidates’ own awareness that they will soon be classroom teachers of writing, made it difficult to move beyond the evaluative paradigm so closely linked to the teacher role in candidates’

imaginations (Whitney). Even a teacher candidate who expressly reported feeling uncomfortable with evaluation somehow felt it was her task, though that task had not been assigned: “My only problem? Erm...My own babbling and my own disinclination to critique the work of others. What right do we have to judge a personal narrative? What right does anyone? I suppose, as readers, we are granted that right. In that case, this reader was entertained.”

### Re-Framing Personal Narrative Writing as Identity Work

If what writing teacher educators value in narrative writing is its potential effects on the writer – in this case to foster identity formation, to promote the development of values as writing teachers, and a set of classroom approaches consistent with those values – then what would happen if we attended first and foremost to what Yagelski and Whitney have called “the transformative power of writing”? What if we focused on what the act of writing – connected to, but non-synonymous with, the text produced – does to and for the writer? Yagelski gives an example of a student who writes a narrative about a confrontation with her mother, a moment in which her mother’s alcoholism finally became too great a burden for her to bear and in which she took control of the relationship’s boundaries in order to protect herself (a story strikingly similar in theme to one written by a teacher candidate in the partnership we have discussed). As Yagelski explains, “Typically, we value the honesty and the raw power of such writing but focus on how students tell their stories—that is, on the ‘quality’ of their texts”. Where the student is using the writing to get life work done, the teacher – even a teacher who cares about the student’s purpose and would consider fostering such work as one of her primary goals as a teacher – ends up framing the writing experience, both in instruction and in response, as an experience (perhaps an aesthetic experience) in writing narrative rather than as an experience in identity formation or any of the other goals to which the student writer applies the act of composition.

Instruction, in turn, focuses more on the text (describing it, altering it, improving it) than on the composing process (what it was like to produce the text and what happened to the writer in producing it). In light of what we learned from our students about emotional vulnerability surrounding narrative writing, focusing attention on the text itself may well be a mechanism for distancing oneself from the loaded emotionality of narrative text production. However, when our goals for a writing assignment in a teacher education course are centered on helping teacher candidates to get some of the “life work” of becoming a teacher done, and we make available to students a particular form (like narrative) which we imagine will be useful in getting that work done, we err if we then allow the focus to slip to the form of the text. As Yagelski observes, the important insight here is that the form of the writing doesn’t matter, for it is the act of writing that teaches, no matter the form, if we pay attention to it. An obsession with the product of writing, with the “quality” of the text, however, obscures the insight that might be gained from writing itself (20).

We, as a group of English educators, want to resist this temptation toward obsession with text quality, to which we know we are prone despite our best intentions. We are pushed to ask ourselves: Am I asking students to write things that have important points or to do important life work? Have I made the case for doing that work in the courses, assignments, and partnerships I design with beginning teachers I teach? Have I made my invitations to them important in this way?

Bonnie Sunstein has commented that partnerships can focus the writing efforts of achievement-oriented teacher candidates more squarely on communicative purpose and on accomplishing something in the world besides winning them a good grade for a class, a language game which – at institutions like ours, anyway – they are quite adept at playing. Following Sunstein’s lead, we are experimenting with other partnerships across disparate groups (“unequal partners,” in her words), for example between teacher candidates and sixth graders. While we find value in building partnerships beyond schools (e.g., between teacher candidates and prison inmates), we speculate that school-based partnerships may be especially powerful for teacher candidates and their urgent concern to get “real-world experiences” in schools.

We do recognize the many obstacles to framing writing in the way we suggest, especially in the context of teacher education. The standards documents with which teacher candidates are becoming familiar (e.g., the CCSS) treat forms of writing – like narrative – as ends, rather than as tools to accomplish broader life purposes. Since writing is too rarely framed in this purpose-driven way in schools, it is – without a powerful intervening experience – difficult to persuade teacher candidates that doing important identity work is *possible* in secondary writing classrooms. Certainly powerful legacies and rationales sustain the enduring practices of form-obsessed writing instruction (e.g., Johnson et al.). It is also the case that most of us teach within programmatic constraints, whether in a composition program, in an English education program within an English department, or in a teacher education program housed in a department or college of education. Certain institutional restraints (for example, the First Year writing requirement at Michigan State University, Standards for Teacher Preparation, or a limited number of English language arts methods courses) may make writing partnerships difficult to accomplish. Moreover, in an era of resource scarcity – both in higher and K-12 education – the logistical work required to collaborate in a writing partnership can be downright frightening.

As we critically reflect on our efforts to work toward a dialogic, identity-constructive approach to narrative writing teacher preparation, we wonder what could happen if we as teacher educators made a commitment to designing narrative writing invitations – explicitly with students, not just in our own minds – as opportunities to do something important with others? Would it be possible or desirable to re-frame the assignments we’ve discussed here? What if we developed opportunities for exploring identities through narrative collaborations, rather than assigning exercises in narrative writing, the content of which is personal or cultural? If we were to make such a shift, does it then make sense to focus in a more strategic way on specific forms, framed

as helping our future teachers think about some social-purpose-driven questions: “How does narrative do important work? What is it helpful for? For making certain kinds of points? For making points in certain contexts? For performing certain kinds of selves in given contexts?” Such an approach – focusing less on narrative *qua* narrative – has the merit of letting us and our teacher candidates see narrative writing much more expansively than we (and the standards discourses surrounding us) often do.

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Appendix A: Mary’s Narrative Assignment

English 400 Personal Narrative Assignment: “In the Moment”

“To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wildflower” – William Blake

Full Draft DUE: 2/17 Final DUE: 2/27 at 12:30 PM EST

Goals:

- 1. To write a personal narrative
- 2. To reflect on your process(es) as a writer and, more generally, on what has been called “the writing process”
- 3. To generate understandings of a) teaching the personal narrative and b) teaching (with) the “the writing process.”

Assignment:

Write an “In the Moment” narrative. In writing, place your readers into an intense moment you have experienced. Narrate the most dramatic, focused moment of your intense situation, 10 minutes or so. Matters to consider when drafting, writing, and revising include:

- ☐ “Art is *selectivity*. You cannot re-create every minute detail about anything, neither about an event nor about a person; therefore, that which you choose to include, or to omit, is significant—and you have to watch carefully the implications of what you say or omit” (Ayn Rand). Narrow your focus from the start. Select a story out of one, tiny, narrow corner of your life and avoid expanding on all the details around the story. Do not provide an introduction or an explanatory epilogue conclusion that explains what it is all about. Let the story speak for itself and trust your readers to make sense of your situation as described. Telling about a time when you had to make a quick decision, for example, can work very well. Or you may try telling about a life-and-death moment or a turning point in your life.
- ☐ Relate your experience in a way that begins to reveal its *significance* to you. In other words, don’t simply write about the event; show us how it affected you and why it was a significant experience. This is very tricky to pull off successfully. On the one hand, you don’t want to over-tell the story in such a way that gives your readers nothing to make sense of on their own. On the other hand, you don’t want to alienate your readers by confusing them with not enough information to comprehend your situation. And further still, you don’t want to simply state the facts of your situation without embedding some sort of context which lends meaning and depth to your situation.
- ☐ I recommend that you not choose to write an experience that is deeply distressing to you, such as the death of a loved one. In the past, I have found that many students struggle to craft such events into compelling narratives.
- ☐ Try to stick to using *first or third person* and experiment with *dialogue* as dialogue always brings your story into active, present tense which is enlivening for your readers. On a related note, successful dialogue on the page is not merely an accurate representation of what people say in real life; rather, it is oftentimes pared down to, or reconstructed as, the most essential, well-stated utterances.
- ☐ Use *concrete and specific detail* to represent your point of view and your situation. Avoid direct explanation in favor of concrete details that show – rather than tell – the reader what you mean. Attach your ideas to visible things. Dramatize your situation so that your readers experience it as though it were happening before their eyes, so that the readers become an observer at the scene. This is different than telling or narrating in which you offer a synopsis, in effect telling the reader about something which has happened to you rather than letting the reader be a witness to the event.
- ☐ Eventually, if not before you begin writing than before you finish, decide what type of “*voice*” you will be adopting. Decide, for example, if you will sound young or wise or ironic or bitter, angry or energetic. By doing so, you are not only selecting tone, but attitude. Remember: you become a *character* in the narrative!
- ☐ As you undertake this writing, separate the *creator from the editor*. In drafting, work toward that high-velocity writing discussed by Murray writes, so you can stay ahead of that internal censor, who could very well keep you from exploring intriguing memories, ideas, characters, plot possibilities, dialogues, sentence structures, word choices, and so on.
- ☐ Once you have a fairly complete draft, however, do take a look at the mechanical aspects – spelling, sentence and paragraph construction, punctuation, diction.
- ☐ The final (for now) draft should be 1000-1500 words in length, posted to google docs and labeled “your last name\_ ENG413 \_Narrative.” Do not include a cover page, but do include a title that reflects the piece as a whole or even adds something significantly new. On the date the draft is due (Feb 17), bring 3-4 hard copies to class to share with the

members of your writing group and with me. On the date the final (for now) draft is due (Feb 24), post your narrative to google docs and share your document with me (and your group members, if you like) – **NOTE: This instruction may change; please stay posted!**

**Procedure:**

1. *Invent and inquire:* What vivid moments do you remember? Bad memories? Good memories? Puzzling memories? Can you pinpoint moments that have been turning points or especially significant for you? Why? How? Write in your exploratory writing forum about these and related topics to get your juices and memories flowing.
2. *Analyze genre:* What are the characteristics of the personal narrative genre? How does Lamott’s book help you understand the genre? Find and post examples that serve as models for our narrative writing. Study several examples and consider “What makes a personal narrative effective?”
3. *Draft:* Drawing on your own invention work as well as the models we have considered, draft your “in the moment” narrative.
4. *Respond and Revise:* What can you learn by reviewing and responding to others’ narrative drafts? How can you strengthen your writing through this process? Engage in on-line peer review with your colleagues. In dialogue with these responses, revise your narrative
5. *Go Public:* We will share drafts of our narratives with our writing groups and with our Tier 1 writing partners. If you like, distribute your narrative to other audiences beyond our class
6. *Situate your narrative:* While personal narratives tend to be expressive, they also sit within broader cultural and social dialogues. Can you read your narrative, or that of a colleague, as a cultural or social artifact? Why did you choose to tell this tale, in response to this prompt? Is your narrative a story you have told before? To whom? How, if at all, does its telling change in this new setting of English 413 and the audiences you are writing for? How did the instructor’s prompt influence your choices as a narrator?
7. *Reflect:* What have you learned about how to write a personal narrative? What new puzzlements or questions have been raised? Consider how you might explain to your own students not just *what* this genre includes, but how they might approach it by describing and reflecting on your own writing process during this assignment.

**Appendix B: Writing (first year writing) Sequence One Narrative Assignment**  
**Writing 150 (first year writing) Sequence One: Cultural Narrative Project**

**Background:** This semester you have been asked to select a silent, silenced, misrepresented or ignored culture to study for the duration of this course. In accordance with Michigan State University’s Shared Learning Outcomes and the theme of this course, you will write, read, research and share this culture in many different ways. It is my hope that you will bring voice to your culture selection by tracing it through an assortment of writing projects.

**Assignment:** Project One gives you an opportunity to reflect on your individual experience(s) with the culture you selected to focus on this semester. Since the assignment is a narrative piece, you may consider telling a story that gives voice to your selected culture. In other words, how could you use this space to tell a story that (un)silences, (re)represents, or (un)ignores your culture of choice? At the same time, your narrative should move beyond simply telling a story or striving for self-expression; your narrative should also stress the value of this experience in relation to the culture you are studying, your life, and the lives of others.

**Audience:** For this project, you are writing for students who are studying at MSU to be English teachers. These pre-service teachers are interested in learning about how tier-one writing students use personal narratives to write about the cultures that they are part of. Your narrative will help these students generate an understanding of: 1) cultures that have been excluded from popular culture, 2) how to teach a personal narrative, and 3) how to teach the “writing process” in their future classes.

**Requirements:**

- ☐ 3-5 pages, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, double spaced, typed in Microsoft Word

Rubric: This project is worth 10% of your overall grade. The following criteria will be used to assess your final draft:

- ☐ Focus: staying on topic/ purpose visible (20 points)
- ☐ Development: details/ examples/ well supported (20 points)
- ☐ Arrangement: effective arrangement strategies/ make sense/ supports purpose and audience (15 points)
- ☐ Audience: audience awareness, ethos-pathos-logos, voice, tone (20 points)
- ☐ Language: free from surface errors/ sentence structure, (15 points)
- ☐ Overall: met the requirements of the assignment, including drafting, page requirements, footer, IRA activities, (10 points)

**End Notes**

1. For more information about the course conceptualization and organization, see [wra150023.wordpress.com](http://wra150023.wordpress.com)
2. We did not have permission to video or audio record the conversations, so we rely on our notes.
3. We do think practicing evaluation is necessary work for future writing teachers. Indeed, later in the semester, teacher candidates worked with April’s rubric to assign grades to the final narratives of the first-year writers, an exercise the first year writers and April never saw.

**About the Authors**

*Mary M. Juzwik* ([mmjuzwik@msu.edu](mailto:mmjuzwik@msu.edu)) is Associate Professor in the department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University and co-editor of Research in the Teaching of English. She is studying moral, rhetorical, and dialogic dimensions of literate practices, pedagogies, and traditions surrounding the Bible in American evangelical sub-culture.

*Anne Elrod Whitney* ([awhitney@psu.edu](mailto:awhitney@psu.edu)) is Associate Professor of Education at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research addresses how people use writing in living and learning, crossing disciplinary boundaries of composition studies, professional development, teacher education, and English language arts education.

*April Baker-Bell* ([adbell@msu.edu](mailto:adbell@msu.edu)) is a PhD candidate at Michigan State University in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures. Her research interests are situated in critical studies of African American Language at the intersections of literacy and pedagogy.

*Amanda Smith* ([smit1552@msu.edu](mailto:smit1552@msu.edu)) is a PhD candidate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Her research considers the everyday language and literacy practices of youth with particular interest in affect, embodiment, and multimodality.

## “This Erstwhile Unreadable Text”: Deep Time, Multidisciplinarity and First-Year Writing Faculty Mentoring and Support

Denise Comer, *Duke University*

I propose to say a few more words about this erstwhile unreadable text, in order to lay out some thoughts about writing and literacy in what I like to call the contact zones. I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power. (33)

Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 1991.

Mountains are not somehow created whole and subsequently worn away. They wear down as they come up, ... rising and shedding sediment steadily through time, always the same, never the same, like row upon row of fountains” (47).

John McPhee, *Basin and Range*, 1981.

Having worked with a multidisciplinary first-year writing faculty for over ten years now, across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, I am somewhat accustomed to Pratt’s concept of “erstwhile unreadable text[s].” A cultural anthropologist, for instance, suggested I read Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg’s *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009); my prior notions about field notes from having read Shirley Brice Heath (1983) and Clifford Geertz (2005) as part of my English Ph.D. suddenly gave way to a much more nuanced understanding, one I have since used with class visits and in several first-year writing assignments. My notions of document design expanded tenfold when an environmental-science colleague showed me the break-out boxes, tables, and images fluidly interspersed throughout articles in such journals as *The Ecological Society of America*. Conversations with a biologist enabled me to teach first-year writers how to create posters as an alternative to text-based verbal presentations and presentation software programs. More surprising for me was when I learned from a musicologist that the Suzuki method of music pedagogy is not entirely about monotonous drills and rote memorization, but is also rooted in strategies I hold central to effective first-year writing pedagogy: encouragement, practice, revision, and collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps of equal significance has been what I have learned from scholars outside of writing studies about our own field’s erstwhile unreadable texts. A religious-studies scholar in our first-year writing program, for instance, once remarked, “I came to teach [first-year] writing and I read an article about process pedagogy, and then one about post-process pedagogy, and I had no idea what any of it meant.” Such a response may seem obvious: Why *should* a religious-studies scholar be able to make sense of Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch (2002), Lad Tobin (2001), or John Trimbur (2011) any more than I might be able to understand Jonathan Z. Smith (1978) or Bruce Lincoln (1999)? Surely, this scholar’s teaching and writing ultimately benefited from his foray into the contact zone, despite the difficulties he encountered. However, I have come to believe that unless these (for him) unreadable composition texts are situated alongside texts from his discipline, he will have little-to-no opportunity to position writing within religious studies. For him, writing would then unfortunately remain that which is borrowed or visited rather than nested within his own discipline.

Experiences like these—about which I propose to say a few more words—have enriched my first-year writing pedagogy, my writing, and my approach to first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support. These encounters have convinced me that first-year writing teachers bear a responsibility to approach writing and writing pedagogy through a more inclusive, multidisciplinary lens. Such an epistemological shift has, for me, been facilitated by relying on the geological concept of “deep time,” described in the second epigraph above.<sup>2</sup> A deep-time approach to writing foregrounds the ways in which disciplines—like mountains—shift, erode, meld, and separate across dimensions of time and place: “always the same, never the same.” Placed alongside Pratt’s notions of contact zones, deep time illustrates the longer, deeper, more recursive and complicated histories and relationships that define contact zones around writing.

The concept of deep time emerges most prominently from eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher James Hutton (1788), but McPhee coined the term “deep time” in *Basin and Range* (1981), deploying it as a way of naming the incomprehensibility and recursivity of geological time.<sup>3</sup> Geologist Henry Gee (2000) and others emphasize deep time as a substantive epistemological tool. Gee, for instance, laments the human impulse to fit geological history into “human terms” (2), a tidy trajectory where fish move to land and then apes gradually morph into hominids. Instead, Gee calls for “a truly

comparative biology of humanity, such that we can understand what being human really means” (225). “What we need,” Gee argues, “is an antidote to the historical approach to the history of life; a kind of ‘anti-history’” (4). In calling for this ‘anti-history,’ Gee demonstrates deep time’s epistemological disruption. Its undercurrent of phylogenetic relationships and cladograms, “branching diagrams [that] represent orders of cousinhood between organisms—patterns of relationship” (Gee 6), shows that human and geological history cannot fit into a linear, compartmentalized trajectory. As such, the way we understand the nature of being human must always be connected to a recursive, limitless past with human relationships moving along various “orders of cousinhood.”

So too, I suggest, with writing.

I argue in this article that infusing deep-time, multidisciplinary dimensions into first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support—unveiling and creating contact zones within a deep-time framework, where first-year writing faculty can meet, clash, and grapple with the pedagogies, writing, theories, and practices of many disciplines—will enrich the ways faculty and students think, write, and talk about first-year writing. Such a move helps disrupt for faculty and students what Rebecca Nowacek (2009) terms “double binds”: “[T]hose uncomfortable and perhaps inevitable situations in which individuals experience contradictions within or between activity systems (e.g., between the motives and tools within a single activity system or between the motives of two different activity systems) but cannot articulate any meta-awareness of those contradictions” (507). I believe that such a move is vital across nearly all contexts of first-year writing, not only where first-year writing has overtly multidisciplinary features (as in my program), but also where first-year writing exists more firmly in English departments.

This kind of dialectical cross-disciplinary approach has not thoroughly enough influenced first-year writing faculty preparation, despite the otherwise rich multidisciplinary terrain of writing studies—including the multidisciplinary origins of the field, CAC, WAC, and WID programs, and the now-expanding institutional locations for FYW. Instead, the strategies most often used with first-year writing teaching mentoring and support tend to remain discordantly anchored to a comparatively narrow version of writing pedagogy. Although this enables us to share, sustain, revisit, and extend the expertise compositionists have about effective writing pedagogy, it also limits our efforts by igniting some of the same problematic challenges of translation and power dynamics that Pratt describes in relation to other contact zones.

To be clear: I am not dismissing or demoting composition scholarship from being the cornerstone for first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support. Nor am I advocating for multidisciplinary faculty or curricula. Nor am I debating whether writing programs should or should not be housed in English departments. Instead, I hope to encourage more deliberate multidisciplinary dimensions to first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support as a way of enhancing first-year writing pedagogy and forging stronger writing faculty and stronger first-year writing experiences.

My argument builds on and extends the work of a handful of others, such as Janice Lauer (1970), who advocates importing heuristics into composition pedagogy, and Nancy R. Comley (1986), who asserts that good writing instruction should not only be a matter of learning rhetoric. Katherine Gottschalk (2002) makes similar moves through her work in Cornell University’s John S. Knight Institute: “[F]aculty and TAs in the disciplines know a great deal about writing, that indeed they may have insights into writing in their own fields that others do not” (138). More recently, Emily Golson and Toni Glover (2009) strive to cultivate in *Negotiating a Meta-Pedagogy* a multidisciplinary ethos by asking scholars from such disciplines as music and business to describe how their fields shape their first-year writing pedagogies.

However, despite this work, by and large, most first-year writing faculty too often remain relatively separate from these kinds of multidisciplinary efforts. Catherine G. Latterell (1996) notes the homogeneity of most Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training programs: “What is immediately noticeable about the descriptions of GTA education programs ... is their rough similarity given a wide range of programmatic options” (141). Sidney I. Dobrin (2005), in his introduction to *Don’t Call it That*, suggests that “neither [first-year writing] ‘practicum’ titles nor the approach to these courses has shifted very much in the past ninety years, despite remarkable changes within composition studies” (6). Those who have questioned approaches to the practicum—even many of the contributors to Dobrin’s collection—have done so mostly by debating the balance between theory and methods rather than by unpacking the degree to which most of the theories and methods, howsoever they are balanced, emerge from a somewhat narrowly-conceived disciplinary lens.

This pervasive homogeneity with first-year writing faculty preparation, mentoring, and support can further be seen through the language most often used in these contexts. Many of the terms commonly deployed in preparing and advancing first-year writing teachers—terms like process pedagogy, expressivist pedagogy, post-process pedagogy—may operate on the surface as extra-disciplinary, but are in fact phenomenologically, epistemologically, and semantically anchored in composition and rhetoric. Using such a disciplinary language delimits what could otherwise be fuller conversations about first-year writing with scholars trained in disciplines other than English or rhetoric and composition. In my experience, terms such as these isolate faculty from English and composition and rhetoric, positioning them as insider-experts and limiting their ability to speak effectively about writing with students and faculty from a range of disciplines. Virginia Anderson and Susan Romano (2006) argue that this lack of preparation in how to be more effective “ambassadors” contributes to many composition and rhetoric graduate students sharing “the common experience of dislocation and forced self-reinvention” (6) upon entering the professoriate. Learning more about the writing, pedagogy, and theories of other disciplines would help composition and rhetoric scholars speak more productively with faculty and students in other disciplines and therefore share more effectively the expertise

compositionists do have with writing and writing pedagogy.

Where faculty in English or composition and rhetoric suffer “dislocation” and lose the opportunity to be “ambassadors,” terms like post-process pedagogy, as seen in the opening anecdote, befuddle and alienate writing from faculty in disciplines outside of composition, rhetoric, and English. Not surprisingly, these scholars, many of whom may be new to the teaching of first-year writing and composition, look to writing-studies scholars as experts *at the expense and exclusion* of also thinking about how they are already writers and writing teachers. In my experience, they express confusion and dissatisfaction with composition scholarship when it is provided because it seems inaccessible, even with extensive contextualizing, writing, and conversation.

Sometimes this homogeneity reaffirms problematic dichotomies between content and writing. Faculty from disciplines outside of writing studies often approach their work as first-year writing teachers as though they have a firm grasp on the content and, in order to become effective writing teachers, only need a quick dose of classroom tips.<sup>4</sup> As a writing program administrator, I repeatedly hear from multidisciplinary first-year writing faculty (who have already taught in their disciplines) concerns over a purported inability to teach, especially to teach writing: “I’m not prepared to teach writing.” ... “In my field we never talked about teaching.” ... “There’s nothing from my background about leading class discussions. I was never taught how to think about student-centered learning.” I am increasingly convinced that these concerns are not so much confessions of insecurities or realistic appraisals of preparedness as instead reflective of an ingrained and errant set of perceptions about who owns writing instruction in the academy and which disciplines do or do not value and practice effective pedagogy. Such concerns reinforce the difficulties such scholars as David R. Russell (1997) and Michael Carter (2007) have discussed regarding the ways in which writing is too often perceived as “generalizable to all disciplines and therefore distinct from disciplinary knowledge” (Carter 385).

While the dangers of such ownership negatively impact current and prospective first-year writing faculty by limiting their reach as scholars, teachers, and administrators, David Smit (2004) suggests that this ongoing insularity also has a deleterious impact on student writing: “[Composition studies] continues to foster writing in generic ‘writing’ courses with no common curriculum or content; it assumes that teaching the ‘personal essay’ or the ‘research report’ or ‘literary analysis’ is tantamount to teaching writing generally, that to teach any genre in classroom conditions is equivalent to teaching all genres in all contexts” (10). Working against such presumed universalism, I have over the years sought a more expansive and inclusive multidisciplinary language and approach—a deep-time pedagogy for first-year writing faculty mentoring and support: How can I more effectively share the expertise in writing pedagogy from rhetoric, composition, and writing studies alongside a visible inclusion of the scholarship, practices, and pedagogies that other disciplines can bring to first-year writing? What stands to be gained from weaving a more multidisciplinary approach into first-year writing faculty mentoring and support? What might be at stake?

The ensuing sections detail the strategies that have surfaced for me as I have pursued these questions by thinking within a deep-time framework. I share these strategies as a way of spurring more conversations about how compositionists might inflect first-year writing faculty mentoring and support with more multidisciplinaryity. Again, I am not suggesting that anybody can teach first-year writing; nor am I replacing the invaluable scholarship on first-year writing developed in the last half century by compositionists; nor am I advocating for all first-year courses to have multidisciplinary curricula. Instead, I hope to showcase a language and an approach to first-year writing faculty mentoring and support—a deep-time writing pedagogy—that more effectively dovetails the many other multidisciplinary registers of writing studies and generates more awareness about the limitations of insularity within the context of first-year writing faculty preparation, mentoring, and support.

Expanding Epistemology

[I]t seems nothing separates humans and animals so obviously as language. ... As a consequence, we tend to play down the richness and subtlety of visual, auditory and olfactory communication found among organisms right down to bacteria. (216)

Henry Gee, *Deep Time*, 2000.

Perhaps the most subtle, but arguably crucial, aspect of expanding the disciplinary dimensions of first-year writing faculty mentoring and support through deep-time pedagogy involves an epistemological shift towards first-year writing and first-year writing pedagogy in disciplines outside of composition. Instead of complaining or abiding by complaints about what faculty from disciplines outside of writing studies purportedly lack in knowledge about writing and writing pedagogy, and assuming out of hand that compositionists are superior first-year writing teachers, a deep-time epistemology would uncover and seek the strengths and perspectives many disciplines can bring into first-year writing. Such a move, to a certain degree, facilitates a “breakdown of sovereignty” (Dimock, 2006) that enfranchises all disciplines into the teaching of first-year writing rather than locating it solely in the provenance of composition and rhetoric or English.

Geologically, for Gee, deep time challenges the human tendency to define our own sovereignty around constructed matters of difference, such as language. Gee argues that our human desire for sovereignty causes us to “play down the richness and subtlety of visual, auditory and olfactory communication found among organisms right down to bacteria” (216). Such shortsightedness, Gee argues, has made humans feel unnecessarily “alone” (225) and can be offset through deep time’s

epistemological disruption and emphasis on “patterns of relationship” (6) and “orders of cousinhood” (6).

Connecting this epistemology to first-year writing would ask that knowledge construction in first-year writing faculty mentoring and support be similarly connected to a recursive, dynamic past and ongoing, shifting relationships with other disciplines. Another scholar, Wai-Chee Dimock, has drawn on deep time to push against what she identifies as a longstanding insularity and self-defined sovereignty she sees in American literature:

For too long, American literature has been seen as a world apart, sufficient unto itself, not burdened by the chronology and geography outside the nation, and not making any intellectual demands on that score. An Americanist hardly needs any knowledge of English literature, let alone Persian literature, Hindu literature, Chinese literature...I have in mind a form of indebtedness: ... Rather than being a discrete entity, [American literature] is better seen as a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures... I would like to propose a new term—“deep time”—to capture this phenomenon. (3)

Dimock’s invocation of deep time, therefore, promotes a more relational approach to disciplines, one that I have found to be a useful model for first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support.

One can see a similar spirit in composition studies undergirding Malea Powell’s 2011 CCCC call for papers, where she emphasizes “relations,” “webbed relationality,” and the contestation of “originary stories.” This relationality also informs the approach Anderson and Romano suggest for working against the insularity governing graduate education in composition and rhetoric: “[A] rhetorical education [that] rethink[s] graduate education as a matter of relationships: disciplinary/intra-interdisciplinary relationships; human relationships—hierarchical, labor, gender; and institution-to-discipline relationships.” (7). I aim to extend this focus on relationships deliberately to how we prepare first-year writing teachers and how we construct professional development opportunities, thereby generating increased inclusivity and a broadening of boundaries.

Fostering Relationships

Even though it is impossible to know for certain whether one species is the ancestor of another, we do know that any two organisms found on Earth must be cousins in some degree. (155)

Henry Gee, *Deep Time*, 2000.

Deep-time pedagogy positions patterns of relation and cousinhood across time not only in terms of writing, but also in terms of human relationships. Maintaining disciplinary plurality within such a framework asks that first-year writing faculty and administrators actively create occasions for scholars from a variety of disciplines, administrators, and members of the larger community around an institution to share space and conversation in the context of first-year writing. Though some might argue that teaching as collaboration is already an established ideal, I would counter that there is still more work to be done, particularly in first-year writing. A more rigorous and expansive collaboration would invite first-year writing faculty to consider in a sustained manner the ways in which our teaching is shaped by colleagues and mentors, students, friends, family, and acquaintances, as well as past, present, future, real and imagined experiences across disciplines and in and outside of the academy.

As a way of encouraging such insights, our teaching seminar for new first-year writing faculty mirrors a first-year writing class as it offers one of the most foundational moments for establishing collaboration and relationships. We ask for active reflection from participants about how and where and why they have written, and what they can bring to writing pedagogy from these experiences. Thus, while the initial template for this classroom may have originated from within a composition framework, it gets rewritten across our time together, enriched by layers of multidisciplinaryity. Establishing this culture of collaboration and relationships continues beyond that seminar in the form of hallway conversations, social events, symposia, speakers, symposia, classroom visits, and sustained collaborative reflection through assessment and review. While our program’s multidisciplinaryity offers a natural contact zone, such efforts could also be achieved in other contexts.

Deep time, in fact, unsettles disciplinary identity in such a way that even first-year writing faculty who are primarily in English Studies would be invited to examine their own networks of kinship. Birgit Neumann and Frederik Tygstrup (2009) apply Edward Said’s concept of “travelling theory” to describe a growing interdisciplinarity in English: “English Studies is certainly among those disciplines which have been strongly affected by the dynamic exchange of concepts, most of which have been imported from other disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy or psychology, and so forth.” The 2011-12 MLA *Job Information List* suggests interdisciplinarity in English Studies is growing: According to “Table 3,” the MLA identifies twenty subspecialties within English Studies.<sup>5</sup> The category “Interdisciplinary” first appears in 2004-05; it remained steady at around 10% of all MLA job advertisements for several years, but has jumped most recently to 14.9%. In 2000-01, 16.6% of ads were labeled “Other fields of specialization;” in 2011-12 that figure has risen to 25.7%. Thus, even first-year writing faculty situated in English department embody inter- and multidisciplinaryity, with scholars connected to the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Deep time would invite conversations between faculty that draw on these multidisciplinary domains.

More specifically, one could provide a list of events happening throughout campus across disciplines and ask first-year writing faculty to attend and reflect on a symposium or other event in another department. In a future iteration of our first-year writing seminar in teaching writing, I might ask participants to schedule conversations with faculty members in various

disciplines who teach writing-intensive courses to discuss how they approach writing in their courses and how first-year writing might (or might not) intersect with that work.

Moments for fostering relationships across multidisciplinary registers also include developing opportunities to draw on undergraduate expertise after first-year writing. We have invited seniors from a variety of majors to first-year writing faculty focus groups to discuss the writing they’ve done throughout their undergraduate experience (on and off campus), and what they remember from their first-year writing class. Our institution, like others, also hires undergraduates from across disciplines as peer tutors in the writing center, and undergraduates serve a vital role in our journal of first-year writing and in our annual conference showcase of first-year writing.

Reaching out to scholars across disciplines to expand conversation about first-year writing should in similar ways be more pervasive in order to create more rewarding relationships. I was delighted to see that one of the featured speakers at the 2010 Council of Writing Program Administrators conference was Michael Delli Carpini, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, and scholar of political science and public policy, who spoke about how and why he values writing and writing instruction, and how he sees writing operating across the curriculum.<sup>6</sup> One recent similar occasion at our institution involved faculty members from history and biology joining our first-year writing faculty retreat for a conversation about student writing in upper-division writing intensive courses. We have also created opportunities for senior faculty around our institution to teach first-year writing on an occasional basis. These Faculty Associates are selected because they have already demonstrated an interest in teaching writing within their disciplines, and we ask them to agree to teach first-year writing approximately every other semester for three years.

Inviting faculty from a variety of disciplines into first-year writing, and motivating first-year writing faculty to move around campus extends as well to the larger community. Bronwyn T. Williams (2010) argues in “Seeking New Worlds” for “more research about the writing taking place off campus” and a “systematic and conscious reconsideration of the practices and, just as important, of the nature and perceptions of our field” (130). Similarly, I ask that first-year writing faculty think together in a forum about how their teaching of writing is shaped and inspired by experiences with writing and people off campus. I have asked people at area nonprofits to visit my first-year writing class and talk about their writing. One might also encourage first-year writing faculty to ask members of the larger community about their writing, perhaps through oral history, ethnography, or journalistic interviewing. Any of these gestures would help foster a more multidisciplinary perspective for first-year writing.

**Reading “Erstwhile Unreadable Text[s]”**

An abstract, intellectual understanding of deep time comes easily enough ... Getting it into the gut is quite another matter. Deep time is so alien that we can really only comprehend it as a metaphor. (3)

Stephen Jay Gould, *Times Arrow, Times Cycle*, 1987.

Working toward a more expansive, deep-time multidisciplinary in first-year writing faculty mentoring and support prompts a reconsideration of the kinds of readings offered to teachers of first-year writing for training and/or professional development. Closely reading texts from other disciplines is crucial for first-year writing faculty to move past general abstractions about writing in other disciplines and instead “get it into the gut.” This would mean that preparation workshops, conversations, or seminars on teaching writing not necessarily be limited to discussing the *Norton Book of Composition Studies* (2009) or *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (2003) or *Teaching Composition* (2007) (though each deserves presence), but also include selections from the aforementioned anthologies along with portions of Golson and Glover’s *Negotiating a Meta-Pedagogy*, or William Grassie’s “Powerful Pedagogy in the Science-and-Religion Classroom” (2003) or Laura Henry-Stone’s “Cultivating Sustainability Pedagogy through Participatory Action Research in Interior Alaska” (2010) or Derek Malone-France’s “Composition Pedagogy and the Philosophy Curriculum” (2008). Another fruitful reading might include a selection from the inaugural issue of *CCC Online*, “The Turn to Performance,” which brings together performance studies and writing studies (Fishman, 2010).

Our preparation seminar for new first-year writing teachers includes an activity titled “Disciplining Writing,” where we ask participants to share a brief piece of published writing from a discipline about which they are familiar that exemplifies what they deem to be effective writing, poses important questions pertaining to their upcoming first-year writing course, or raises some other compelling ideas about writing in that particular discipline.<sup>7</sup> The intent is to generate conversation about academic writing in various disciplines, and about how our program’s goals and practices for academic writing emerge across our different disciplines. Such an activity could easily be adapted in the context of an English department: first-year writing faculty could ask a faculty member in another department for such a text, peruse a leading journal in a particular field, or examine a rhetoric tailored to a particular discipline, such as Harold Becker’s *Writing for Social Scientists* (1986) or Ann Penrose and Stephen Katz’ *Writing in the Sciences* (1998). One could even start a journal club (modeled on those in which physicians often participate), where each meeting features a leading journal from a different discipline. Thus, instead of positioning disciplines outside of English and writing studies as periphrastic, these activities help position many disciplines at the center of writing pedagogy, and help surface multiplicity, difference, and variety between and within disciplines.

Again, I am not suggesting a disregard of composition scholarship in the preparation, mentoring, and support of first-year writing faculty. But, rather, that as we showcase for newer first-year writing teachers the expertise of composition theory, we also avoid positioning it as the only model of writing theory and pedagogy.

**Translating between Disciplines**

If by some fiat I had to restrict all this writing to one sentence, this is the one I would choose: The summit of Mt. Everest is marine limestone. (124)

John McPhee, *Annals of the Former World*, 1998.

Moving toward a more multidisciplinary, deep-time platform for first-year writing faculty mentoring and support also invites a reconsideration of the language used in these contexts. McPhee worked time and again to translate the concept of deep time for various readers. With first-year writing faculty, instead of using a pedagogical language steeped in assumptions about shared understanding of humanities or composition discourse, I try to define discipline-specific terms and encourage parallel terminology across disciplines so writing is positioned more expansively and so scholars from a range of disciplines can approach first-year writing pedagogy from a position of familiarity rather than distance.

Fostering multidisciplinary awareness and sensitivity has prompted an activity in our program we call “Translating Scholarship,” where first-year writing faculty briefly share for a multidisciplinary audience the questions that motivate their scholarly writing, their habits of mind, their disciplinary epistemologies. Recently, these conversations gave rise to a wiki on our in-house website (titled “The Tower of Babel”) that highlighted discipline-based terminology. Phrases like “the ghetto-ization of composition,” “lyrical sociology,” or “synthetic review” then became more widely usable as they were defined, so all participants felt like they were together creating a language, all simultaneously outsiders and insiders to the teaching of writing.

Effectively translating the language associated with first-year faculty mentoring and support means recognizing that course documents are material artifacts that may (and should) be read by people beyond students in a particular class or colleagues in a particular department. I encourage first-year writing teachers to think about teaching documents—syllabi, assignments, reading lists, student writing, course descriptions, teacher response—as having a powerful, longstanding impact, beyond particular semesters, individual practitioners, and even institutional boundaries. This reach is particularly vital in that it enables first-year writing faculty the opportunity to share assignments and course design on a more sustained basis with one another, with faculty in disciplines across the institution, and with members of the more extended communities. We post assignments to a shared or public site whenever possible, be it with the student essays featured in our journal of first-year writing, or on an internal blog to which each faculty member contributes for a week, or in our showcase of innovative teaching materials by members of our program who win our annual award for excellence in teaching writing. In our program, we have also instituted a feedback process on our course descriptions for first-year writing: faculty draft a description and get feedback on it through a committee of peers. This process attends to the many multidisciplinary readers who may be reading the course description.<sup>8</sup>

**Conclusion: What’s at Stake?**

The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end. (80)

James Hutton, “Theory of the Earth,” 1788.

My hope in making visible the advantages of and strategies for inviting more earnestly a greater number of disciplines into first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support through deep-time pedagogy is that others involved with first-year writing will deliberately pursue the many multidisciplinary possibilities rather than leaving such discoveries to occasional or situated chance. While there have already been some efforts at infusing first-year writing faculty preparation, mentoring, and support with multidisciplinary, they have been for the most part somewhat isolated and/or directed primarily toward curricular design rather than in what are arguably the most crucial places: epistemology and pedagogy.

Surely there are costs. Fostering deep-time pedagogy, cultivating relationships, seeking out collaboration, translating, and embracing the materiality of first-year writing requires a disposition toward loosening control and relinquishing some expertise. In effect, a deep-time approach toward first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support embodies what David Seitz (2004) terms the “pedagogy of humility”: “Humility in my role as a teacher of critical writing is ... a willingness to lie with and learn from the unpredictable” (xi). This unpredictability amidst shifting ground can leave us vulnerable to competing approaches to and values regarding the teaching of writing.

However, one can see much value through instances of multidisciplinary in the larger field of composition studies, as in J. Blake Scott’s “Civic Engagement as Risk Management and Public Relations: What the Pharmaceutical Industry can Teach Us about Service Learning” (2009) or through Charles Bazerman’s work with education (2006). Other examples include Neal Lerner’s *The Idea of a Writing Lab* (2009), which shows intersections between science education and writing, and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s intention to borrow the “Patient Page” concept from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and adapt it for *College Composition and Communication* in order to facilitate better conversation between scholars of writing studies and others.<sup>9</sup>

Such efforts as these underscore the gains that can be attained through multidisciplinary cooperation and conversation, and highlight what seems a general receptivity to multidisciplinary approaches that remains discordant to the mentoring and

support in which many first-year writing faculty participate. What I hope to have achieved in this article is to push against the monolingualism, the *lingua franca* of composition, that still dominates so much first-year writing faculty teaching mentoring and support, and instead create more space for translanguaging, for a pidgin dialect—a deep-time pedagogy—that could facilitate a culture of first-year writing that permeates disciplinary boundaries across, within, and beyond the academy.

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Endnotes

1 Stephanie Stein Crease (2006), for example, describes the Suzuki method as including both individual and group practice (29), low-stakes opportunities to share and present one’s work with others (29), “incremental ... development” (30), daily practice (30), and “continual positive reinforcement and feedback” (30).

2 The term was first introduced to me by my colleague and co-presenter, Rebecca Walsh, at the 2007 CCCC.

3 McPhee in *Basin and Range* offers deep time as a way of mitigating the incomprehensibility of geological time: “Numbers do not seem to work well with regard to deep time. Any number above a couple of thousand years—fifty thousand, fifty million—will with nearly equal effect awe the imagination to the point of paralysis” (20).

4 Russell articulates succinctly the dangers involved with such “a conceptual split between ‘content’ and ‘expression,’ learning and writing” (5): “If writing was an elementary, mechanical skill, then it had no direct relation to the goals of instruction and could be relegated to the margins of a course, a curriculum, an institution” (5).

5 This grouping of twenty includes disciplines that are sometimes separated into a discrete unit, such as composition and rhetoric, creative writing, and technical and business writing.

6 Delli Carpini’s talk, in fact, generated a disciplinary version of the “code switching” discussed the day before by another plenary speaker on the program, Keith Gilyard.

7 I also discuss this activity, as well as the “Translating Scholarship” activity mentioned below, in another article: “Translation and Transfer: Interdisciplinary Writing and Communication” (2013).

8 This material approach, buttressed by a notion of translation, is also illustrated by an initiative currently underway by the American Sociological Association: “TRAILS—the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology Web site—will be an archive for peer-reviewed classroom innovations, including syllabuses, class activities, individual assignments, bibliographies and Web sites—all focused on teaching. (Jaschik 2010)

9 The JAMA Patient Page is a one-page feature in each issue that focuses on a particular medical condition or disease, including a definition of the condition, diagnosis, and treatment options. The patient page has perforated edges and a “Copy for your Patients” box in order to facilitate increased communication between patients, the general public, and medical providers. cf. Janet M. Torpy, Alison E. Burke, and Richard M. Glass’s “Depression” in the 19 May 2010 issue of JAMA.

**About the Author**  
*Denise Comer* is an Assistant Professor of the Practice of Writing Studies and Director of First-Year Writing in the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University, where she works with a multidisciplinary first-year writing faculty. She teaches theme-based first-year writing seminars on topics such as illness narratives, civic engagement, and travel writing. Her scholarship, which has been published in such journals as *Pedagogy*, *Writing Program Administrators Journal*, and *Composition Forum*, explores writing pedagogy, writing program administration, and the intersections between technology and the teaching of writing. She has two books forthcoming from Fountainhead Press in 2014: *Writing in Transit: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (ed.) and *It’s Just a Dissertation: The Irreverent Guide to Transforming Your Dissertation from Daunting to Doable to Done* (co-written with Barbara Gina Garrett).

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## Writing for the Audience that Fires the Imagination: Implications for Teaching Writing

Denise K. Ives, *University of Massachusetts-Amherst*  
 Cara Crandall, *University of Massachusetts-Amherst*



From Shakespeare to Melville to Morrison, writers have embodied the audiences that fired their imaginations through the language of their texts. Authors leave cues for readers in their texts about what kind of audience they imagine them to be. In Act III, Scene II of *Julius Caesar*, Marc Antony, speaking at Caesar’s funeral, utters the following: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones; so let it be with Caesar.” Through the words of his character, Shakespeare, embodies his audience, communicating to them the role he expects them to take up—that of friend and countryman in order to understand Marc Antony’s modes of persuasion with his audience and to reflect on the consequences of political upheaval during a succession crisis, which was a public concern in England at the time of the play’s writing.

When English teachers teach students to read authors such as Shakespeare, they encourage them to read closely and actively in order to recognize, interpret, and respond to those cues in texts to understand the author’s intent and purpose. However, too often when those same writing teachers read their own students’ writing, the onus for understanding and responding to a reader’s expectations rests squarely on the student writer, who must create a text that considers the possible ways *any* reader might respond to that text in order to engage and please a reader. This upending of the active role of a reader is the result of writing pedagogy and writing process theory that positions the relationship between author and audience as integral in the development of student writers but places the success or failure of a text on a reader’s reception of that text. The challenge for writers then is to develop a text based on that audience’s expectations not only for what a text will say but also for how it will say it.

In positioning student writers to meet these demands, writing teachers often instruct students to imagine an audience or construct assignments that purport to offer them real-world audiences. In asking students to attend to what is described as an authentic audience, teachers frequently set the terms for how writing can be done and constrain writers in the kinds of texts and ideas they can produce. However, no matter who the articulated audience of a text might be, we argue that student writers believe that when they are writing in a classroom the audience that matters, the true audience they are writing for, is the teacher. If students are expected to fictionalize in their minds an audience, when their actual audience is their writing teacher, writing teachers must correspondingly imagine themselves to be the audience that the writer has fictionalized. As readers, we do not expect Shakespeare to consider our expectations; rather we position ourselves as active readers of his works by looking for clues in the text for how to read and engage with his text. These clues—ranging from semantics and word choice to cultural touchstones—are used by readers to stretch their own understandings of a text and become the audience Shakespeare, or any writer, has imagined them to be.

Student writers employ these same rhetorical moves that they have learned as readers, as they take up the conventions and language that best suits their text and authorial purpose. As readers themselves, student writers assume *their* audience will take up the roles they have imagined for them, including recognition of the linguistic and cultural clues needed to understand and engage with their text, so that their audience will take on the role imagined for them. To often, though, student writers are not presented with opportunities in classrooms to write for the kinds of audiences that they have experience being themselves and when they make those opportunities on their own they are not always able to find receptive audiences in their writing teachers.

### Background

According to Aristotle, the father of modern rhetoric, when a speaker or writer composes a text he or she must take into account three elements: the subject or message, the audience, and the speaker/writer. These three elements make up what is known today as the rhetorical triangle. In considering the subject, the speaker/writer evaluates what he or she knows already and needs to know, investigates perspectives, and determines useful evidence for supporting claims. Considering the audience means speculating about the reader’s expectations, knowledge, and dispositions with regard to the subject the writer explores. The speaker/writer element of the triangle represents the author’s voice or persona. Writers use who they are, what they know and feel, and what they’ve seen and done to find their attitudes toward a subject and their understanding of a reader. Decisions about formal and informal language, the use of narrative or quotations, the tone of familiarity or objectivity, come as a result of writers considering their speaking voices on the page. Aristotle saw the three rhetorical elements coming from lived experience; speakers knew how to communicate because they spoke and listened in the world. Though not discussed explicitly by Aristotle,

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two other important elements make up the rhetorical situation—the context in which writing or speaking occurs and the writer/speaker’s purpose, or aim.

Clearly, considering the audience has long been considered an important element of the composing process. Many scholars of composition theory have worked to understand and explain the relationship between writers and their audiences and the strategies writers use to accommodate actual and/or imagined readers’ expectations, knowledge, and dispositions toward their subject matter. In doing so, some theorists have emphasized the actual, physical qualities of real, or addressed, audiences; that is, the particular teacher for whom a student writes an assigned essay or editor for whom a scholar writes an article. These scholars encourage writing teachers to provide opportunities for students to engage in “real-world” writing, to support their students in analyzing and accommodating their intended audiences, and to teach the structures and conventions of disciplinary genres (Mitchell and Taylor, 1979/2003). At the same time, though, these theorists acknowledge that for student writers the real, physical audience they write for most frequently is their teacher. In such cases, writing teachers are urged to instruct student writers to imagine an audience that is as close to an audience that exists in reality as possible (Pfister & Petrik, 1980/2003).

Other composition theorists have contended that assigning such importance to an addressed, or actual, audience overemphasizes the audience’s “observable physical or occupational characteristics” (Long, 1980/2003, 223) when in fact most writers, whether writing for an actual audience or not, must construct their audiences in their imaginations. In his well-known essay about audience, Ong (1975/2003) argued that whether or not an author was writing for an addressed audience, “the writer’s audience is always a fiction”:

What do we mean by saying the audience is a fiction? Two things at least. First, that the writer must construct in is imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role...Second, we mean that the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself (12).

Ong called that constructed, or fictionalized, audience “the audience that fires the writer’s imagination” and explained that fictionalizing an audience is how writers “give body to the audience for whom [they] write” (58). What’s more, Ong suggested that, rather than analyzing or imagining actual audiences, writers fictionalize in their imaginations audiences they have learned to know from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imaginations audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers.

By way of example, Ong describes how a student, assigned to write an essay on how he spent his summer vacation, finds an audience by “making like Samuel Clemens” That is, the student who has read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and “knows what this book felt like, how the voice in it addressed its readers, and how the narrator hinted to his readers that they were related to him and he to them” (59) picks up that voice, and with it, its audience. Ong and Long argued that the central task for writers then was not to analyze an audience and adapt to its needs, but instead to “use semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help to define the role the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2003, 83).

The audience embodied, or invoked, by the text shares a set of evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, and conditions of knowledge. “It is only through the text, through language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader... [that is], they invoke it...by using all the resources of language available to them [they] establish a broad, and ideally coherent, range of cues for the reader” (90). For instance, Ong describes how Hemingway’s use of definite articles in *A Farewell to Arms* subtly cues readers that their role is to be that of a “companion in arms...a confidant” (62). Other roles identified by Ong include entertainment seekers, reflective sharers of experience, inhabitants of lost and remembered worlds of childhood, and the like.

Ong labeled this process of fictionalizing an audience in the imagination and embodying and cueing that audience to their roles through the language of their texts a “game of literacy,” adding that “readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of those projections” What’s more, “a reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom corresponds with his role in the rest of actual life” (60). That is, as was stated above, just as the writer fictionalizes his or her audience, the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. Ong does admit, however, that, for a variety of reasons, a reader may or may not be willing or able to fictionalize such an audience or take up expected roles.

For this reason Ede and Lunsford, advocate a conception of audience that captures the integrated, interdependent nature of reading and writing highlighting the important role the writer plays as reader of his or her own text as well as emphasizing that the writing process is not complete until someone other than the writer reads the text also. It is through this process they claim that “writers create readers and readers create writers” (93). Ede and Lunsford (1984/2003), explain the role of audience in terms of a complex series of obligations, resources, needs and constraints embodied in the writer’s concept of audience” (p.88) and submit that any complete conception of the audience must take into account the fluid, dynamic nature of rhetorical situations. “It is the writer who, as writer and reader of his or her own text, one guided by a sense of purpose and by the particularities of a specific rhetorical situation, establishes the range of potential roles the audience may play” (89). These roles might include self, friend, colleague, critic, mass audience, past audience, and future audience. In fact, they assert that Ong fails to take into consideration the constraints placed on the writer, in certain situations, by the audience. In other words, he fails “to acknowledge [that] readers’ own experiences, expectations do play a central role in their reading of a text, and that the writer who does not consider the needs and interests of his audience risks losing that audience” (88). Ede and Lunsford suggest that the best way to understand the writers’ audience is through analysis of particular rhetorical situations.

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Writing in 2003, Ede and Lunsford state that, although writing teachers were becoming more critical of theories like Miller and Taylor’s that emphasize analysis and accommodation of an addressed audience, little scholarship in composition had embraced the perspective described by Ong and Long. In this article, though, we take up Ong and Long’s paradigm of fictionalizing imagined audiences in combination with Ede and Lunsford’s focus on analysis of the rhetorical situation, in order to examine the audiences invoked in the texts of two middle school writers. Specifically, we analyze each girl’s text in order to answer the following questions: What kinds of audiences fired the imaginations of these student writers? What language did these student writers use to embody their audiences in their texts? What roles did the girls signal for readers of their texts? How were the girls’ imagined audiences like those of authors they had read? What might be implications for writing instruction, when these students’ texts are viewed in terms of writing for an audience that fires the imagination?

Methods

Here in, we feature the writing of two girls—Kristina, an African American sixth grader and Charlotte, a European American eighth grader. The texts described and analyzed in this article were generated during two different ethnographic studies both conducted in middle school English language arts classrooms separately by the authors. Study One, conducted by Author One, Denise, aimed to document the literacy practices of African American students in an urban middle school English language arts (ELA) classroom. Study Two, conducted by Author Two, Cara, in her own suburban English language arts classroom, sought to examine the narrating practices of middle school writers. Both studies employed ethnographic methods including participant observation and field note writing, interview, and artifact collection. Below we describe the contexts and participants of each study.

*Study One.* The site of Study One was Ms. Wagner’s ELA classroom at Hoyt Middle School (HMS)<sup>1</sup>, HMS is one of four middle schools in a school district located in a midsized Midwestern city. The student body at Hoyt Middle is composed almost entirely of African American students from poor and working-class homes. At the time the study was conducted, Hoyt was in its fifth consecutive year of failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Not surprisingly, concern about preparing students to take and pass the state assessments, called LEAP tests, was an ever-present and highly visible pressure in the lives of Hoyt administrators and teachers including Ms. Wagner, the focal teacher in this study. Ms. Wagner is a middle-class, European American woman, who at the time of the study had taught at Hoyt her entire 12-year teaching career. Ms. Wagner described herself as an avid reader and reported that she “tried to always use best practices” in her teaching and worked hard to stay abreast of and align her instruction with current federal, state, and district curricular expectations for sixth grade language arts. Kristina’s text, a play titled “Ghetto Family,” was written by Kristina on her own outside of the classroom. It was not a school assignment, but was brought to the classroom by Kristina who asked her English teacher, Ms. Wagner, if she would type it up for her. Denise was introduced to Kristina’s play by Ms. Wagner. Ms. Wagner said she thought to show Kristina’s piece to her because it was written in African American Language (AAL), which she knew from previous conversations was a research interest of Denise’s. Kristina brought “Ghetto Family” to class on the first day of a novel study unit featuring *Hatchet*, an adventure story written by Gary Paulsen. During the novel study unit planned by Ms. Wagner, students would read the novel in whole and small group configurations, learn about story elements and literary devices, answer discussion question and complete literature circle role sheets, and compose several texts of their own including an informative essay on survival and a descriptive essay analyzing a fictional character. Through these assignments, Ms. Wagner planned to address the following state Grade Level Content Expectations in writing: set a purpose, consider audience, exhibit individual style to enhance the written message, use writing style conventions, and be enthusiastic about writing.

*Study Two.* The site of Study Two was Cara’s own ELA classroom at Garden Grove Middle School, one of two middle schools in a small suburban town located in the Northeastern United States. This school, with a student population of 434, is comprised largely of young people who are European American and come from middle, upper-middle class and wealthy homes. The school provides not only the core content classes during the school day but also offers classes through an extensive music program. Most students participate in one or more athletic leagues outside of school. While school personnel were sensitive to the school’s status as a Level 2 school, teachers at Garden Grove were given wide latitude in determining curriculum and assessments. While the state-mandated test, MCAS, informed the work of the classroom, teachers, like Cara made final decisions about what to teach and how to teach. Cara is a middle class European American woman who was new to the school during the time of Study Two. Although Cara had been teaching for nearly twenty years at the time, this was her first year at Garden Grove. At the time of the study, students had worked with her for approximately six weeks. Charlotte’s text, “Emerald Eyes,” was written outside of the classroom for a required assignment in her eighth grade English class. Students were asked to write a 5-page, double-spaced short story as part of a curriculum unit on the short story. The assignment fell midway in the unit so students had spent time reading the works of published authors such as Jamaica Kinkaid, Langston Hughes, Shirley Jackson, and John Cheever, and discussing narrative and literary techniques specific to the genre. These lessons and activities focused on the uses and development of conflict and characterization, the importance of details for making writing vivid for a reader, and

1 All names are pseudonyms

audience as the final arbiter for an author in making a story successful. This assignment also preceded their final term project, an analytic essay constructing arguments about character motivation and choice. Cara, Charlotte’s ELA teacher, viewed the short story assignment as a way to move students from their position as consumers of a text to the producers of such texts in order to develop an insider’s perspective on how stories are constructed. Class discussions, free writes, and partner writing activities were utilized for students to practice with the idea of how one can transform writing for the self into a piece that can resonate with another person.

In what follows we summarize the two focal texts and analyze the cues, or rhetorical strategies, employed by both writers to invoke and embody imagined audiences. We illustrate how, through particular authorial choices, both girls signaled their audiences to play certain roles. We also demonstrate how both writers drew on their own experiences of being certain kinds of audiences as they “made like” authors they had read in order to construct their audiences. Finally, we present and discuss the opportunities each student had to write for, and share that writing with, audiences that fired their imaginations.

Findings

*Kristina’s Play.* Kristina’s play consisted of several sheets of three-hole punched, lined notebook paper filled from edge to edge on both sides with the balloon-like print characteristic of many middle school girls. In the top margin of the first page was a cast of characters including the narrator, Tamika, MJ, Grandma Cookie, TaNesha, Ra Tonya, Shonda, Tonya, La’Tonya, Re’Lonya, and Doctor. The play began with the narrator speaking to the audience. “Yo, yo, yo. What’s [the] dealio? Well this play is about a ghetto rich family. They is ghetto about everythang. Then MJ gets shot.” In essence the play is about a family, a ghetto family to be precise—that is made up of parents, Tamika and MJ, Tamika’s mother, Grandma Cookie, 5 teenaged girls, and a two year old. In the play the characters chided, squabbled, teased, and tried to get each other into trouble. They also did homework, attended school (where Ta’Nesha got into a fight over a boyfriend), and held down jobs.

Throughout the first part of the play, the reader comes to understand that something is bothering MJ, but when Tamika tries to find out what’s wrong by asking him if he got somebody pregnant, he hits her and accuses her of not helping out. She reminds him that she cooks, cleans, and takes care of the children during the day and then goes to work at night. The following day Cookie and Tamika discuss what happened, and Cookie says he doesn’t have the right to put his hands on her. Tamika says she knows but what can she do, she loves him. Before Tamika and MJ have a chance to address the situation, the narrator informs the audience MJ has been shot by his work partner. MJ is taken to the hospital where he dies from his wounds. The narrator declares an Unhappy Ending, but teases readers with the promise of an upcoming “Ghetto Family, Part II.”

*Charlotte’s Short Story.* As per the assignment requirements, Charlotte handed in her completed short story typed using Times New Roman font. The length of her story surpassed both the assignment expectations and the length of nearly every other story submitted by her peers. Charlotte’s story includes a two-voiced narrative, which allows her to tell the main story of a kingdom ruled by a cruel tyrant through the voice of his daughter, Evelyn, and the commoner she is secretly in love with, Rowan. These characters describe their resistance to the king, their plot to prevent Evelyn’s arranged marriage to a man like her father, and to admit heir own burgeoning love for one another. Minor characters include the king; Frederick, the evil suitor; Galen, a palace worker Evelyn sees as a surrogate father but who will betray her; Matilda, the “castle seamstress,” who is a surrogate mother; and the members of Rowan’s family, who suffer in poverty due to the king’s reign. Other characters include various guards at the castle and villagers in the kingdom.

Charlotte’s story begins with Evelyn’s wedding, but rather than continue the scene, Charlotte halts that scene as she uses several pages to explain Evelyn’s family situation, life as a princess, and the social and political conditions of the kingdom. Rowan, who has been her best friend since childhood despite the forbidden nature of their relationship, is introduced. When Evelyn and Rowan sneak out of the castle in order to bring food to the starving inhabitants of the village (including his family) they are caught by palace guards. Rowan is imprisoned while Evelyn is told she will marry Frederick. At the same time, her father presents her with the choice to have Rowan killed or allow him to live but as a slave. While she makes the choice, she also hatches a plan to rescue him. He is released from prison, and rouses for revolution sympathetic villagers and later guards who begin to see their ruler’s treachery. While Evelyn prepares for her wedding day, Rowan and his allies prepare for revolt and rescue. As the story moves to its conclusion, Charlotte brings her readers back to the initial scene. Evelyn is rescued as her father, Frederick, and even Galen die in the midst of the battle that breaks out in the castle hall. Evelyn and Rowan are free as are the subjects of the kingdom. For the two main characters, they are also freed to love one another.

Embodying an audience through the language of the text

Both Kristina and Charlotte embodied their audiences, those they fictionalized in their imaginations, through the language of the texts. The language employed by each girl reveals how the two writers created their readers, that is, communicated to them the knowledge, interests, attitudes, and values they expected audiences to take up. The audience Kristina’s text embodies is one that has knowledge of or curiosity about black language, characters, and themes and can appreciate a humorous glimpse into the life of a “ghetto rich” family. Charlotte writes for an audience who enjoys a traditional fairy tale complete with an evil king, star-crossed lovers, and a happy ending with a contemporary flare—a postmodern, boundary-crossing princess of power.

*Ghetto rich.* Kristina chose to write about her subject, the daily life of a ghetto family, in the format of a play. Her play included many of the standard conventions readers would expect including a cast of characters, stage directions, and a narrator. The narrator opens the play by announcing, “This play is about a ghetto rich family. They is ghetto about everythang.” Kristina’s choice to describe the family as “ghetto rich” implies at least two things about the audience for whom she writes: 1) that her audience is willing and able to understand ghetto as a positive attribute and 2) that her audience will recognize and appreciate her clever word play.

The word ghetto as a noun frequently signifies a poor, culturally or racially homogeneous urban area and for many carries a negative connotation. “For many African Americans, though, ghetto means home: a place representing authentic blackness and a feeling, passion, or emotion derived from rising above the struggle and suffering of being black in America” (Smitherman, 2000). Here Kristina uses ghetto as an adjective. While “ghetto” as an adjective can be used derogatorily, the African American community, particularly the hip hop scene, has taken the word for themselves and begun using it in a more positive sense that transcends its derogatory origins. The audience Kristina invokes with the use of the phrase “ghetto rich” is one that understands ghetto to be a mark of pride. In addition, Kristina writes for an audience who recognizes and appreciates the artful way in which she pairs ghetto (typically signifying poor) with the word rich (meaning wealthy but also abundant) to establish that being ghetto, in this case, is both a source of pride, and hence a positive attribute, as well as something the family is to a large degree.

Though Kristina’s narrator does not explicitly explain to the audience what ghetto rich means Kristina, through the dialogue of her characters, lets her audience hear what ghetto rich sounds like. In the first few lines of the play in an interchange between Tamika, RaTonya, the oldest daughter, and RaLonya, the youngest child, we hear how a ghetto rich family talks:

Tamika: Where yo daddy at?

RaTonya: He at work don’t remember?

Tamika: Who is you gettin’ smart wit’? Cause I will beat you like you stole somethin’.

ReLonya: na, na, na, na, na, na you gon get in trouble.

Tonya: Shhhhhhh... You gon get cha self in trouble.

TaNesha: Can ya’ll stop arguin and help me wit my homework.

Tamika: Naw ask ya gma.

From these lines, we can see that a “ghetto rich” family’s speech is characterized by phonological, syntactic, and lexical features of African American Language (AAL). For instance, we see phonological representations of black speech with spellings like wit’ for with and yo for your; grammatical patterns of AAL, like the absence of “is” and “are” in sentences such as, “Where yo daddy at?” and “You gon get in trouble;” and lexical choices like use of the expression, “I will beat you like you stole somethin’.”

Once again, though some readers may have a negative reaction to both the form and content of this family’s particular way of speaking, the audience Kristina imagines is one that can understand the language of her characters as ghetto rich in the sense of “representing authentic blackness” and perhaps also as reminding them of the language of “home.”

The exchange above also illustrates the conflictual nature of the relationships featured in the play. Tamika and RaTonya exchange sharp words; RaLonya teases RaTonya; Tonya scolds RaLonya; and TaNesha begs them all to “stop arguing.” In fact conflict-ridden relationships seem to be a cornerstone of the text. There is conflict between the members of the family—between the mother and grandmother and the daughters, between the siblings, and between the parents, Tamika and MJ. There is also conflict between family members and the outside world: Tanesha gets in a fight at school, MJ is shot and killed by his work partner, and Tamika smacks the doctor treating MJ after he asks her out on a date as her husband lay dying. In every case conflicts involve either the threat of violence or actual violence. In the following exchange we see the conflict between the parents as Tamika attempts to find out what is bothering MJ after he returns from work for the second evening in a row in a bad mood and heads immediately to bed. Tamika follows MJ to the bedroom. MJ greets her, “Hey bay” and Tamika says, “Why is you always goin’ to bed? You got somebody pregnant?” MJ responds to Tamika’s question by telling her he is tired of her being nosy and smacking her.

Though the play centers around the multiple conflicts in this family’s life and the content—domestic violence, infidelity, murder—suggests a serious tone might be in order, Kristina utilizes the narrator to communicate to readers that, despite the serious content of the text, the tone the author adopts is a playful, humorous one. The clearest example of this occurs at the end of the play when the narrator informs the audience that MJ has been shot and doesn’t have long to live. The narrator punctuates the announcement with, “I feel sorry. Sike (sic).” Kristina even inserts a stage direction (laughs) for the narrator to follow. Again at the conclusion of the play the narrator cavalierly announces that, “The husband died, of course,” and adds, “so as you can say this is a unhappy ending.” Despite the grave circumstances and the narrator’s declaration of an “unhappy ending,” he or she doesn’t really feel sorry about MJ’s violent and untimely demise. One could infer that the narrator believes that MJ got what was coming to him for hitting Tamika, or perhaps Kristina is invoking an audience that has learned to respond to adversity with humor, strength, and optimism—an audience that understands life is hard and that those living it must carry on in spite of the hardships. In fact, the narrator promises the audience as much with the declaration that, “Part two is comin’ at cha.” In other words, life goes on.

*Postmodern princess.* Charlotte invites her audience to a make-believe land where anything is possible through her adaption of the fairy tale genre with a modern twist: her story is set in a castle, the kingdom is ruled by an unjust ruler, and the

main character is a princess named Evelyn. Fairy tales offer readers an imagined realm, which Charlotte modifies by creating a feminist princess who sees herself as a savior of a people and a kingdom as much as she embraces the traditional romance and happy ending of such stories. Charlotte envisions her audience as familiar with both genres—the traditional fairy tale genre as well as appreciative of her contemporary take on it—largely because they are what resonate with her own literary tastes as a reader, and are commonly read by her white, middle class, middle school peers. Charlotte writes for an audience that she understands to be very much like herself, and their familiarity with both genres presupposes a willingness on the part of an audience to take up both conventions within one story.

This fusion of conventions of the fairy tale genre with those of contemporary young adult fiction is further demonstrated in Charlotte’s adoption of the arched language of the fairy tale, which she blends with the colloquialism of the contemporary teen-ager. When the lovers prepare to revolt against Evelyn’s arranged marriage, Rowan exclaims, “It was time to take down a wedding,” and Evelyn later tells us, “I screamed, and I mean screamed.” Using the phrase “take down” lets readers know what will happen next in the plot, but does so with a term that has a humorous and aggressive tone at the same time and assumes an audience will understand that the next scene will be at Evelyn’s wedding, but will also move readers back into a more traditional fairy tale convention where the princess will be rescued by her love. In a similar way, Charlotte embeds the phrase “I mean” to add emphasis and make clear the stakes for Evelyn, while assuming her audience will understand this rhetorical move.

Unlike princesses in traditional fairy tales, Charlotte’s princess, Evelyn, is a young woman of power, power granted to her both as a princess and the power she takes for herself throughout the story. Evelyn steps outside of the boundaries of the social expectations for a princess in many ways. She maintains a friendship with Rowan, which crosses the boundaries of station and class and is similar to the foster parent relationships she has with servants in the castle. Throughout the story, Evelyn understands that these forbidden relationships have provided her with love, guidance, and a moral code by which to live her life. These relationships and the models they provide her to live as a good person coupled with Evelyn’s rejection of the power granted her by birth offers audiences a main character who will resonate with anyone who has negotiated the individuation stage of adolescent development. Charlotte assumes her audience will understand how rich an emotional life exists outside of one’s own family and will appreciate Evelyn’s rejection of her own father.

In similar ways, Charlotte further positions readers in relation to the genre in her use of violence, but here violence used to further legitimate ends: the overthrow of injustice both personal and social. This idea that the story is ultimately about power and resistance suggests that Charlotte wants her readers to believe in her story and see her character’s actions as just and well-motivated because she is playing on ideas of social justice and fighting for what is right. Evelyn’s resistance for justice continues with her rescue of Rowan from the cell in which he has been imprisoned, putting herself and him in further danger. Rescue occurs not only when she takes him from the cell, but also when she declares her love for him before he is able to articulate his own feelings for her. Evelyn perhaps assumes her privilege as princess will protect her if the guards come upon them; however, in making her feelings clear to Rowan, she makes her emotional vulnerability not a weakness but a strength for both of them.

Finally, Charlotte writes for an audience that enjoys an action-packed story laced with suspense and dramatic tension. Charlotte begins her story *in medias res*: the narrative begins in the middle of a dramatic scene, which readers will later find out is in fact the last scene of the story. The drama has already come to its high point and a reader cannot help but wonder how Evelyn has gotten herself into this predicament and how it might be resolved. But first, Evelyn and her author understand that before the drama can move forward, before we can find resolution, we must fully understand how Evelyn arrived at this moment. The final line of the first scene invites readers deeper into the story through the use of a flashback: “Then, I think back to the day when my life began to unravel.” With this pause on a moment of dramatic tension, Charlotte understands that an audience will read a story when there is something at stake, so her flashback is constructed to cue readers both that the story will move back in time but also that dramatic events, “my life began to unravel,” will continue. In the final section of the story, Charlotte repositions readers out of the flashback and back into the story’s beginning: “Here we are. Back to where it ended. In those few short moments I recapped everything that went down. I have brought you in a full circle.” In bringing readers full circle, she ends not with the overthrow of the evil king, but with the moment of reunion for the lovers, played both for laughs with sexual innuendo as well as perhaps the true intention of her story, that Evelyn believes “everything will be ok” because Rowan has pledged his love to her. Readers are asked to leave Evelyn not in the midst of political or social upheaval to which she has been concerned in much of her story but back in the arms of love.

#### **Cueing audiences to play a role**

Through the language of their texts the girls not only embody audiences they have fictionalized in their imaginations, they also cue, or signal, those audiences to the role or roles they are expected to play. That is, through their texts, both authors communicate to their audiences how the author, subject, and audience are related and how readers should receive and respond to their texts. Kristina invites readers to take up the roles of connoisseur of “authentic” black language and life, cultural insider or interested boundary crosser, and consumer of dark comedy. Charlotte asks her readers to root for a postmodern princess of power, swoon when star-crossed lovers fall into one another’s arms, and cheer when an evil king gets what is coming to him.

*Dark comedy.* The purpose of Kristina’s play is to entertain her audience. She expects her audience to have knowledge of and/or be interested in the daily happenings of a ghetto rich family. She also imagines an audience willing to find humor in

looking on as characters say and do outrageous, larger than life things. In the case of Kristina’s play, it is the narrator, speaking directly to the audience, who most clearly communicates to readers their roles. Kristina’s narrator speaks to the audience six times over the course of the play. Each time the narrator cues the audience/reader to how they should receive the text/events that follow.

The narrator launches the play by saying to the audience, “Yo, yo, yo. What’s [the] dealio?” In other words, “Hey everybody. How’s it going?” To conclude the play, the narrator signs off with a casual, but intimate, “Peace out home skillet biscuit,” meaning goodbye, close friend. This colloquial, informal language gives readers the message that the narrator and the audience are on friendly and familiar terms. In addition, the narrator’s use of the lexicon of black youth culture, especially hip hop culture, such as yo, dealio, peace out, and home skillet biscuit suggests the audience should take up the role of youthful, cultural insider. In fact, Kristina’s narrator signals, by using “urban slang,” that he or she, like the family that is the subject of the play, is at least a little ghetto as well.

However, Kristina’s narrator, unlike her ghetto rich family, uses a combination of urban slang, African American Language syntax and phonology, and Standardized American English (SAE). For example, the following excerpt represents standardized English usage:

Narrator: MJ got shot by his partner at work. He doesn’t have long to live. I feel sorry. Sike (laughs).

Though the narrator’s hybrid language use might simply be a result of differences between dialogue and exposition, it could also be intended to present the narrator as a code-switcher and cultural border-crosser—a person who could act as a guide for an audience who need not be cultural insiders—young and black or ghetto rich—to enjoy this play, but only interested in, open to, and entertained by such things.

With phrases such as “‘Just watch and listen,” “I wonda what is gon happen,” “Now this is interesting,” and “It was so much drama they had to give it to the mama’s,” the narrator communicates to readers that the events the narrator and audience are watching unfold together are at once dramatic, interesting, and entertaining. The narrator’s statements guide the audience in terms of what events are important and cue readers to how they should experience those events and feel about characters. The narrator’s interactional style creates an intimate, playful, provocative relationship with the audience cueing them to respond to the play as the narrator does with interest and black humor.

*Happily ever after.* Rather than start her story with the typical fairy tale beginning that lets readers know they have settled into “once upon a time,” Charlotte cues her readers to her story’s setting through the mention of a dagger, a balcony, and a dress made of “layers of emerald and pearl silk.” These cues are used in the middle of a wedding scene tinged with danger because, in the story’s opening line, Evelyn tells readers, “The terror that seized me was so great that I was struggling to stand.” Charlotte waits until page three to tell readers that Evelyn is a princess when she also introduces the forbidden relationship between Evelyn and Rowan. As he sneaks into her room late at night, Evelyn warns him, “You know how improper he [her father] thinks our friendship is, not to mention you are an apprentice and I am a princess.”

In this same scene, Charlotte sets up Evelyn’s as yet undisclosed love for Rowan while she also introduces the real reason for his visit, “As I sat in my bed, happy and content, the people, my people, starved to death on their straw mats, if they even had that... That is why mine and Rowan’s job is so important. We deliver food to the people.” If this princess has found the man she desires, she subsumes her feelings with a more valuable and rewarding option: to save her people.

In structuring her narrative, Charlotte uses a two-voiced narration that allows readers to know the inner thoughts of these two well before they have admitted their feelings to each other. When Rowan describes Evelyn’s “smile is my light. Never mind the sun; she is the only light I need,” readers understand that the question isn’t if the lovers will declare their love but how and when during the story.

Charlotte’s struggles as a writer to make the two voices sound like distinct people, and one aspect of their commonality lies in both how proper their language sounds as well as their occasional lapses into more contemporary phrases. Evelyn’s tone can shift from the arched, “‘Father, what is it you’d like to speak about?’” to a description voiced by any teen arriving home past a curfew: “By the time we got back, the whole castle was up.” For Charlotte’s readers, the important cues are not about characterization but rather the resolution of the love relationship, so the lapses into more contemporary speech jibes with Charlotte’s retelling of the traditional fairy tale love story.

When Charlotte brings her readers to the ending of her story, because this is a fairy tale, readers can anticipate a happy ending. But first she returns to the story’s first scene. This time, violence breaks out at the wedding, leading to the deaths of her father and the man he’d intended her to marry. Quickly, the scene moves from “chaos” to that happy ending for the two lovers, but it is an ending that combines sexual innuendo with romantic love: “I hastily move to get off. ‘You don’t have to get off,’ he says cockily. I swat at his head and laugh. ‘You could have gotten hurt,’ I chide. I am dizzy with relief.

‘I’m fine. You know I always will be, as long as I have you.’ He seals those words with a kiss and I know that everything will be ok.” Once again, the words are contemporary in tone but echo one of the most important conventions of a fairy tale: the assurance of a happily ever after.

### Writing for the audience that fires the imagination

Kristina and Charlotte both had a great deal of experience being the audiences of other writers. In addition to the texts the girls were assigned to read in school, they both read, viewed, and composed texts they self-selected for their own pleasure. Not surprisingly, many of the texts the girls self-selected were popular culture texts that reflected their personal interests, values, preferences, experiences, and social identities. Both girls drew on their personal experiences as readers and viewers of such texts to fictionalize in their imaginations their own audiences. That is, they made like Samuel Clemens (or Carl Weber or Suzanne Collins) as they composed “Ghetto Family” and “Emerald Eyes.”

Kristina frequently read and wrote texts of her own choosing on her own time. The texts Kristina read, wrote, and viewed reflected an affinity for African American characters, language, and themes that mirrored her African American, working-class, adolescent, and female identity. In fact, the majority of the texts Kristina both read and wrote in class, especially on her own, featured Black characters and/or African American Language (AAL). For instance, during the twice-daily independent silent reading time, Author One often observed Kristina reading books about African Americans. Once, over the course of several class periods, she read a biography about Marian Anderson, the first Black singer to perform at the White House and the Metropolitan Opera. On another occasion she read *Player Haters*, a book by black author Carl Weber (2004) about the “bickering, beautiful Duncan family,” three African American, adult siblings. In addition to reading books about African Americans, Kristina also frequently produced texts featuring Black characters and language. For the final writing assignment of the novel unit, when Kristina was asked to write an essay about a fictional character she admired, she wrote about Major Payne, a Marine Corps Special Forces killing machine, played in the 1995 movie by black actor Damon Wayans, who is forced to find new work as the commander of a junior ROTC military academy. Kristina wrote in her essay that she and Major Payne were a lot alike because they were both bossy and liked yelling at people.

The texts Kristina most often selected to read featured black language, characters, and themes. The characters are black, cross-aged or adults; families are large and extended; relationships are contentious; dialogue is fast-paced, sardonic, and irreverent. The tone is humorous. Love relationships are central, but occur usually between adults and are characterized by conflicts like abuse, infidelity, and unplanned pregnancy. Kristina’s play shares many features with both the books by Carl Weber and the movie featuring Major Payne. Indeed we might say she is making like Carl Weber as she writes “Ghetto Family.” It features a family of black characters who negotiate life’s conflicts with a certain style. They bicker, boss, get into trouble, and are unapologetic about who they are. Kristina’s play, like these two exemplars, adopts a playful, almost slapstick attitude in the face of serious conflicts. For the Duncans, it is the death of a parent and negotiating love relationships. For Kristina’s characters, it’s weathering domestic abuse and death by gun violence. Despite the seriousness of the issues, though, all the texts seem to be designed to entertain their audiences with humor, fast-paced dialogue, and conflict.

Charlotte also had a lot of experience being the audience of other writers. The texts Charlotte reads feature youthful characters and strong female characters who are engaged in violent struggles of good versus evil. They also feature romantic relationships between star-crossed lovers and fractured families that allow for emancipated characters. Main characters are white, though class boundaries are often crossed. The endings are generally happy and the tone serious. She shared in personal discussions with Author Two her love of reading and even showed Author Two a photograph of herself reading one of the Harry Potter series books at age two. She described herself as a voracious reader who enjoyed complex texts and read them with ease. Her interest in reading led her to such texts as the popular series books of Harry Potter, *Twilight*, and *The Hunger Games*. She preferred to read stories that had fantastical elements, though not necessarily the fantasy genre, and strong female characters who were active participants in the fictional situations in which they were involved but who also were negotiating love and heterosexual gender relationships.

In all sorts of ways, Charlotte creates a fictional world, not unlike the fictional world she has inhabited as a reader, that allows a girl not only options for agency, but the drive to act and in acting the ability to create the kind of world she imagines. Her main character is the sort of hero popular fiction offers to young adult readers today, and Charlotte is an avid reader of such books. Like Bella of the *Twilight* series, Hermoine in the Harry Potter saga, and Katniss in *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Charlotte can, in the machinations of Evelyn, live outside of her boundaries, rescue others, and declare her feelings of love – all in public ways Charlotte might not access for herself. Her story fuses imagination with action to provide her audience with a happy ending and perhaps offers her audience the belief that such things are possible in real life as well. Charlotte has written what she knows, both in the literary symbols she chooses and the narrative structure she creates, but also she writes about what would matter most for an early adolescent girl: the ability to fulfill her desire for love and power in equal measures.

### Seeking (and hiding from) an audience

Though Kristina’s text was not assigned by or composed specifically for her teacher as part of the novel unit, it did find its way into the English language arts classroom. Kristina brought the play to her teacher and asked her to type it up for her. This act implied that Kristina was in search of an audience beyond herself. It’s hard to imagine why she brought her play to her teacher if not to create a situation in which her teacher would read her text. Ultimately, Kristina ended up with more audiences than she bargained for. Ms. Wagner shared the text with Denise who took an interest in it because the text employed African

American Language. After reading the play, Denise approached Kristina to talk to her about it and to ask permission to take the play and make a copy. When she returned the original to Kristina, it became evident that Kristina desired multiple copies. Denise returned several days later with enough copies that the play could actually be performed. She also approached Ms. Wagner about allowing Kristina and others to perform the play in class. However, Ms. Wagner said she did not “feel like there [was] time.” Ms. Wagner explained that there was “just too much [external] pressure” to devote time to anything that did not address the Grade Level Content Expectations or directly prepare students for the state LEAP test. Still, Kristina was eager to do the play and Denise wanted to find a way for her to have that opportunity so she suggested to Ms. Wagner that perhaps the play could be performed during the lunch hour. Though Ms. Wagner did not think the activity could fit into regular class time, she did agree to let Kristina choose a group of actors who could practice and perform the play during the lunch break. Kristina was given time in class to select her actors and pass out scripts, and Ms. Wagner wrote out hall passes so those actors could return to the classroom during lunch to enact “Ghetto Family.” Charlotte, on the other hand, did compose her short story at the behest of her English teacher. She knew that as an assignment it would be read and evaluated by her English teacher and that she could expect to receive written feedback from her teacher on her text. Charlotte also knew that after her teacher returned her writing, she would have the opportunity to share her short story with her classmates either reading aloud to them herself or having her teacher read the story aloud. Charlotte, though, declined to share or have her stored shared with her class. In addition, the only process of review and revision for this writing assignment was with the teacher; peer conferencing was not included largely because all of the students had some initial trepidation around themselves as creative writers. For Charlotte, who also refused to show her story to any friends or her parents, the only real-world audiences she was willing to consider were herself and her teacher. Imagined audiences could have included any of those people she refused to let see her writing, but perhaps wished she could show them: peers, family, and the best friend in her English class that she had romantic feelings for.

Conclusion

Both Charlotte and Kristina drew on a variety of personal resources as they composed their texts. They made authorial choices about content, style, and form based on their purposes, preferences, priorities, interests, and identities—all of which linked to their own experiences being readers of others’ texts. Charlotte, who was presently smitten with a young man in her class, wrote into being a world in which she and he (perhaps) fell in love and overcame all obstacles to be together. Kristina, who craved reading and viewing material about Black life, created through her text her own irreverent, funny, fast-talking, extended “ghetto family.”

In order to fashion their texts both girls relied on their experiences being readers of certain kinds of texts in order to “give body to their audiences.” That is, they “fictionalized in their imaginations an audience...an audience learned from earlier writers” (Ong, 1975/2003, pp. 59-60). They wrote like the authors they had read with the understanding that readers would know what kind of audience they were invoking because they too had read such texts. Charlotte’s text, which referenced through theme, genre, and character, texts like *Titanic*, *Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* invoked an audience that would accept her invitation to embrace a powerful female heroine, to tolerate some violence as long as it was in the name of justice, and to appreciate true love as the binding narrative thread. Kristina’s play, through content, characterization, and dialogue, reflected texts like *Player Hatesr*, *Baby Momma Drama*, and *Major Payne*, and consequently invoked audiences familiar with or interested in Black life, especially ghetto life, sensitive to nuanced and complicated familial relationships, accustomed to direct treatment of sensitive topics, and appreciative of dark comedy.

As all writers do, these two student writers signaled the range of potential roles they hoped their intended, actual, eventual audiences—whether self, teacher, peers, or researcher—would take up “through the text, through language” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2003, p.90). Through choices about language, Charlotte and Kristina left cues for readers about the kind of audience they wanted them to be including the “attitudes, interests, reactions and conditions of knowledge” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2003, p.90) they would need to have. In employing the genre of fairly tale, Charlotte invited her readers to accept and expect a certain kind of arched speech while at the same time defying the readers’ expectations by mixing archaic language with smatterings of modern colloquialisms. Kristina, too, by choosing the format of play relied heavily on language to cue readers to be a certain kind of audience. Dialogue was employed by Kristina to develop a family of characters that were “ghetto rich,” which in part meant they used language in a particular way. Dialogue then was an apt device for creating such characters.

Charlotte and Kristina both tapped into unique reservoirs of personal knowledge and experience, including their experiences as readers of others’ texts, in order to craft their texts. As they did so “they made like Samuel Clemens” (Ong, 1975/2003, p. 59)—or Suzanne Collins or Carl Weber—by fictionalizing in their imagination audiences like those of the writers they had read previously. They invoked those audiences, and the corresponding attitudes, interests, and reactions, through cues encoded in the language of their texts. For both girls the texts wrote into being something they each identified with and desired. For Charlotte, though, the text was written for school. She was assigned to write a short story. She knew her story would be read by her teacher, and she opted not to have it read by anyone else (at least for now). Kristina, though, composed her text of her own of her on volition. She did, though, bring her text into her language arts classroom, perhaps so that her teacher might be her audience. In the end, Kristina found many audiences for her text including her peers, the authors of this article, and the multiple audiences with whom the authors of this article have shared, and will share, her text.

This examination of Kristina and Charlotte’s efforts to write for their real and imagined audiences through Ong’s

paradigm of writers “fictionalizing audiences in their imagination audiences learned from other writers,” raises a number of question teachers of writing might consider. In what ways are their students writing, either inside or outside of the classroom, for audiences that fire their imaginations? Are there opportunities in the writing classroom for students to self-select not only topics but also genres, formats, purposes, and imagined audiences? Is there room for students’ texts to be the texts that are read and studied in order to learn how authors embody audiences and cue readers? What roles are writing teachers playing in relation to their students’ texts? Do they play multiple roles, such as friend or learner, taking their cues from the students’ texts, or do writing teachers too frequently simply slip unconsciously into the role of critic or more knowledgeable other? In what ways are writing teachers drawing on their students’ experiences being audiences themselves? Are writing teachers including in their classrooms popular culture texts such as movies, video games, graphic novel, and the like? Are they making their classrooms safe for students to write texts that reflect their unique social identities, values, interests and preferences, and lived experiences? Are writing teachers capitalizing on opportunities, especially unexpected opportunities, to recognize, value, and build upon what their students know about writing because they are speakers, listeners, readers, and writers in the world? Finally, are writing teachers, as the most common audience for student writers, able to interpret the cues student writers embed in their texts and willing to take up the roles students are inviting them to play in relation to those texts even when the imagined audience their students are writing for does not at all correspond to the roles the teacher plays in everyday life?

While it’s true that all writers make demands of their readers, in the sense that they invite them into other life worlds, and cue them through their texts to take up certain kinds of roles, such as “companion at arms,” it’s also true that “readers may accept or reject the roles.” Readers might reject writers’ invitations to become the audiences they have fictionalized in their imaginations for a number of reasons. For instance, as English teachers know, students may not be willing or able to take up Shakespeare’s invitation to be “friends, Romans, countrymen” because they cannot recognize the cues the author has left in the text for them instructing them how to do so. In other instances they are not willing to search for those cues, or take up those roles, because they seem too far removed from their own life experiences and perceptions of themselves. Teachers, as actual readers of, or possible audiences for, students’ texts also have the option of accepting or declining student writers’ invitations to be the kinds of audiences that “fire their imaginations.” As writing teachers, it is essential to consider how our classrooms shape students’ opportunities to write for and be read by the audiences that fire their imaginations.

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About the Authors

*Denise Ives* is an assistant professor of Language, Literacy, and Culture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research interests include child and youth literacies, English Language Arts pedagogy, and African American Language.

*Cara Crandall* is a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the School of Education’s Language, Literacy, and Culture concentration. She currently works as an ELA teacher at the middle school level, but has been a teacher focused on the teaching of writing at various grade levels for more than 20 years. Her research areas include writing and composition; narrative theory; and the literacy practices of adolescents.

# A Late Adopter’s Chance to take an ESL Program Multimodal

Erin Laverick, *University of Findlay*



As a doctoral student, I was required to take a course entitled *Computer Mediated Writing Theory*. In this class, we explored the research and theory behind computers and composition and how technology (re)defines the role of writing teachers in a higher educational setting. Unfamiliar with the technology and the pedagogy behind multimodal compositions, I felt alone, frustrated, and overwhelmed. I was so focused on learning how to use the technology that I failed to learn the main objective of the course –the pedagogy behind multimodal compositions.

A few years later, I was assigned to teach several sections of first-year writing with large populations of English language learners (ELLs) at The University of Findlay (UF) –a private, comprehensive university in Northwest Ohio. The director of UF’s writing program announced instructors were “encouraged” to include one multimodal assignment into their courses. The projects would be included in the students’ portfolios, which are assessed by the English department faculty at the end of each semester. In her article, “Taking a Traditional Composition Program ‘Multimodal,’” Christine Tulley, director of the UF writing program, writes about her experiences introducing multimodal assignments into the first-year writing curriculum, “As Director of Writing, I ideally envisioned a writing program where first-year composition courses could have the same standard writing requirements but instructor choice how to implement them, and instructor choice included use of at least one multimodal assignment.” UF’s new writing curriculum offered students a means to break away from traditional print-based texts and instead compose for a variety of audiences and purposes through a variety of channels, which according to Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe offer students multiple ways for creating and conveying meaning (1). Through my studies in the *Computer Mediated Writing Theory* course and in conversations with Tulley, I knew it was important to offer students multiple ways to communicate with an audience. I also knew it was time for me to apply what I learned in graduate school and design multimodal projects for my students to complete in the first-year writing course. Little did I know, this move would serve me well when I began directing the Intensive English Language program (IELP) on UF’s campus. Therefore, in this article, I share some statistical data and personal observations from implementing a multimodal composition in a first-year writing course made up of primarily ELLs and how I used this experience to implement multimodal compositions into UF’s IELP curriculum.

## Going Multimodal

One multimodal composition assignment that worked particularly well in the first-year writing courses called for students to transpose written argumentative research papers into posters (appendix 1 and 2), which they presented to UF faculty, staff, and friends. This class was composed of only eleven students –one domestic student and ten international students. Ten out of eleven students completed a survey (appendix 3) at the end of the semester. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether or not they found value in the assignment. Based on their comments and the statistical data, it is clear that presenting their posters aided students in revising their written texts (Laverick).

Presenting the poster aided in revisions	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	8	2	0	0

In addition to these statistics, several students explained how presenting their posters helped them revise their written work. For example, a student wrote in regard to the revision process, “People [at the presentation] asked several questions that I didn’t think about. For my revision, I will study more about my topic and do more research to answer their [audience members’] questions.” Another student wrote, “[the poster] made my focus clearer for my argumentative essay. Improving structure and development within the paper itself might still be needed.” A third student wrote, “I plan to take off one part [of the paper]. All the people [audience] think it’s unnecessary.” Overall, the act of presenting the posters helped students begin thinking about possible revision strategies and attack revisions in a sound direction.

Indeed, the poster assignment employed multiple literacies, as students were required to visually, orally and in writing present their arguments – a strategy Dunn advocates for in her book as a means for students to improve their writing skills (3). Also, Denecker reports successful findings using multimodal compositions as digital heuristics for students to revise their written work. Specifically, the poster presentation targeted students’ diverse learning preferences and in turn helped them better focus, organize, and develop their written arguments. The poster presentations afforded students a new revision strategy, as they gained valuable feedback and revision suggestions from presenting their work to a diverse audience.

## Benefits for ELLs

Overall, the assignment offered ELLs additional tools for communicating with an audience, rather than depending solely on the written word. A student from Saudi Arabia commented he enjoyed presenting his work and “explaining for an audience and talk[ing] to them because it makes me explain my idea clearly.” Likewise Dong Shin and Tony Cimasko argue, “... Multimodal approaches to composition provide writers who are having difficulty in using language, including those writers for whom English is a second language (ESL), with powerful tools for sharing knowledge and self-expression” (377). Takayoshi and Selfe argue digital texts cross “geo-political, linguistic, and cultural borders” (2). As the semester advanced, I was beginning to understand how multimodal compositions help ELLs better communicate and revise their written work, allowing them to cross-linguistic borders and best communicate with diverse audiences through multiple channels. And I was beginning to think that like the first-year writing program, UF’s IELP would benefit from implementing multimodal assignments into its curriculum. While there is limited research about using multimodal compositions with ELLs, let alone using them in an entire curriculum, I thought it might be worth a try. What follows is an account of how I designed a new curriculum to include multimodal compositions. Since there are no models for instructors or administrators to follow when designing a curriculum to include multimodal compositions for ELLs, my hope is for colleagues to borrow, tweak, and modify the process presented in this article.

I began by reading sources that present pedagogically sound rationale for using specific multimodal assignments with ELLs. For example, Stein calls for using images such as photographs to help ELLs make meaning and improve their language skills (335). Skinner and Hagood focus on using digital narratives as a means for ELLs to develop their social identities and engage in new literacy practices (12). Benson also argues digital storytelling “...is also an engaging project for the ESL class utilizing numerous academic language skills, such as the expression of voice through story creation, process writing, researching, and citing sources with the use of technology” (8). In addition, Nelson finds that students take on greater ownership when designing digital texts. “Knowledge of semiotic affordances and implications of what a written text encodes linguistically and visually, and of the ability to design complimentary relations of meaning among these modes, represents a potent communication combination indeed” (63). Thus multimodal compositions offer ELLs multiple channels to communicate, which is even more helpful when preparing an ELL for his/her academic studies. For example, if a student struggles with writing, s/he may find it beneficial to include pictures or audio clips to effectively communicate his/her points. Based on the existing research and my experience teaching first-year writing, I knew it was time for the IELP to go multimodal.

## Support for Faculty

With these curricular revisions, came the need to train faculty so they could use the technology and recognize the pedagogy behind multimodal assignments. With limited time, I decided to implement several informal in-services into our faculty meetings. Also, to ensure faculty had the necessary resources, I purchased materials for department use at the end of several fiscal years. For example, we now have a department laptop, projector, 15 flip cameras, and 30 clickers. Faculty need not seek out resources; they are all at their fingertips. If they require technology training, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) on campus can assist as well. Angela Crow writes, “If we’re setting up environments that are smart for learning, we shouldn’t place people [faculty] in the position of having to request special materials; we should ask them to select from options, resources that will facilitate their experiences without making these into abilities or disabilities” (116). Purchasing these materials, along with the CTE training, has ensured IELP faculty can focus on teaching the rhetorical and linguistic skills behind the multimodal compositions, rather than worrying about where to find the technology and how to use it.

For our first faculty meeting in August 2009, I asked the instructors read Cynthia Selfe’s article “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing.” In this article, Selfe provides readers with a clear and concise argument for the use of multimodal assignments in composition courses in which she focuses on auralities. She writes:

My goal in this article, then, is not to suggest that teachers focus on *either* writing *or* aurality, but rather that they respect and encourage students to deploy *multiple* modalities in skillful ways –written, aural, visual –and that they model a respect for and understanding of the various roles each modality can play in human expression, the formation of individual and group identity, and meaning making. (625-26)

Selfe’s eloquent prose spoke to the IELP instructors and provided them with an excellent foundation for recognizing the importance of including multimodal assignments in their teaching. Given that our target population is ELLs, we need to ensure students are thoroughly prepared for their undergraduate and graduate coursework, and so offering students additional tools to communicate with –as Shin and Cimasko recognize –was becoming a necessary addition to the program. My objective at the first faculty meeting was for instructors to begin thinking about how they could use multimodalities in their own teaching, not just in the writing classroom but other skill areas (grammar, listening, reading, and communication) too and Selfe’s article helped me accomplish this goal.

I also invited the faculty to attend the first-year writing poster presentations. Most ESL composition teachers favor modeling as an instructional strategy in which students analyze sample essays to help them better organize and develop their own writing (Freeman and Freeman 38). Therefore, I decided modeling good teaching practices would be an effective means to introduce the faculty to multimodal compositions. I hoped if I eased them in, the instructors would feel comfortable trying such assignments in their own teaching. And fortunately, at the end of the fall semester, some instructors began to pilot multimodal assignments in their classes. They shared their ideas, asked for advice, and reflected on their experiences with me. Instructors

were more confident and seemed excited about the outcomes of the multimodal assignments.

With the curriculum revisions still in progress, spring 2010 offered instructors further time to experiment with multimodal compositions and meet with me to discuss the successes and downfalls of the assignments. My goal was to implement the instructors’ assignments and activities into a new uniform curriculum. For example, one instructor asked students tell fairy tales from their native countries using Movie Maker. Another instructor had students create podcasts, using Audacity to help them practice and improve their pronunciation skills. And finally, a third instructor had students read professional journal articles and transpose written summaries into poster presentations. Students presented the articles, using the posters as visual aids. By the end of the academic year, four out of the six full-time instructors were implementing multimodal assignments into their courses, not only into their writing classes, but also into other language courses such as pronunciation, reading, and communication skills. In addition, the faculty began visiting the CTE more often to learn how to implement new technologies into their classrooms. Slowly, our program’s curriculum began to evolve.

Revising the Curriculum

- When we first embarked on this venture, the IELP course objectives were poorly written and not assessable. Below are several objectives for a beginning-level composition course:
- 1). Review construction of simple, compound, and complex sentences
  - 2). Distinguish between fragments and complete sentences by identifying basic sentence parts
  - 3). Review parts of speech as needed for effective revision of compositions
  - 4). Use all tenses in the construction of all types of sentences
  - 5). Review basic paragraph construction
    - a. Topic sentence
    - b. Supporting sentences
    - c. concluding sentences
  - 6). Introduce an awareness of topic, audience, and purpose

Clearly, there were several problems with these objectives. First, they were not assessable and instead served as directions for instructors to follow in their teaching. Second, because the objectives were so vague, new faculty members and adjuncts would simply teach from a textbook, often of their choice, and as a result did not implement any multimodal compositions to help advance students’ proficiency of the language.

Finally, there was no consistency in what was being taught. When the program was at its largest (250 students), we offered several sections of each level. Instructors covered different assignments from different textbooks, leaving holes in what was taught within the levels. For example, a student once told me she wrote a narrative essay in three different levels of composition. Thus rather than building on what the students’ learned in previous levels, materials and assignments were recycled and others were not assigned. Because we didn’t have an assessment plan, students were not held accountable and simply advanced to the next level without a clearly defined set of outcomes.

In regard to the curriculum revisions, the faculty fell into two camps. One who wanted complete academic freedom to teach whatever they wanted and another who wanted guidance with clear directions of what language skills should be taught and how the skills should be assessed. As an administrator, I fell in the middle of these camps. I wanted key assignments and activities that assessed specific language skills, including multimodal assignments, reserved for each level of instruction. However, I also wanted instructors to have the freedom to teach the assignments in a manner that best suited them and their students. Therefore, I tailored the IELP’s curriculum after the way Tulley revised UF’s first-year writing program’s curriculum. Through this approach, faculty maintained academic freedom but they also had greater expectations placed on them. According to Hafernik et al., “Although abiding by the course description and specific guidelines, individual faculty make almost daily curricular decisions regarding such factors as the pace of the course, the amount and type of homework, and number and type of in-class activities, the kinds and frequency of fieldtrips, the type of grading procedures, and so on” (105-06). To maintain the instructors’ academic freedom, I designed a curriculum that offered new faculty members, especially adjunct instructors, guidance in their teaching but still allowed them the flexibility of designing daily lessons, assignment sheets, and rubrics.

Perhaps the biggest change was I selected a textbook series used department-wide that encompassed all four modes of language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). The series offered continuity, not only between levels, but also between the courses within the levels. I used the textbook series to design “shell” lessons (appendix 4 and 5), a form adapted from a UF TESOL professor, which provides instructors with further guidance in putting together their daily lessons. For example, if beginning-level students are writing personal narratives, they also learn the simple past and past perfect tenses in the grammar class. And in communication class, they orally present their narratives. Thus all three classes focus on narratives composed in the past tense. This approach created a seamless transition for course-to-course instruction and reinforced the language skills taught in individual courses.

In addition, several of the lessons include multimodal assignments. For example, in the beginning level grammar class (appendix 4) the final assessment for simple past and past perfect calls for students to create a PowerPoint or video in which they narrate a story. The purpose of the assignment is twofold. First, it allows the instructor to assess students’ abilities to use

the simple past and past perfect correctly through the act of writing and/or speaking. And second, it is a means for the instructor to introduce basic visual literacy skills, as the pictures and images students put in the slide shows must connect to or enhance the written and/or spoken text presented on the slides. This according to Selfe enhances a student’s purpose for communicating (660).

In addition, in the advanced-level listening class (appendix 5), students watch a video about the US suffrage movement to practice their academic listening and note taking skills. After watching the video, the students discuss the content and compare it to women’s traditional roles in their native countries. For a culminating project, students design a video in which they research and present a movement or traditional women’s roles in their native countries. Students are required to conduct outside research on their topic and use APA documentation correctly within the video. While this assignment could be completed as a traditional research paper, the multimodal component allows students to better share their cultures and beliefs with their peers more effectively by including images and sound. Assignments such as this help students not only improve their language skills, they also hone their rhetorical skills and better engage with an audience –and as Benson argues both are necessary skills for ELLs to improve their academic English skills (8).

Reflections

The IELP is still in the process of implementing its new curriculum, and I continue to encourage instructors to meet with me and discuss their questions, suggestions, triumphs, and frustrations. Some still struggle to use the technology and recognize the pedagogical implications and value of multimodal assignments. As a late adopter, who struggled with such assignments in graduate school, I can empathize with them, as I was in the same position. I listen and offer them professional development opportunities or ideas for their lesson plans. In addition, I continue to design faculty in-services so the instructors can further recognize the rhetorical theory behind the multimodal assignments. As an administrator, I try to pay attention to what takes place in the classroom and create a comprehensive curriculum with a multimodal component. It is also my responsibility to ensure the faculty feels confident integrating classroom technology. It has been a long journey, but I believe our program is better off. Our students are now provided with multiple tools for communicating with diverse audiences, which will best prepare them for their undergraduate and graduate studies at UF.

Author Note: Additional materials that support this project, including student handout, rubrics, and responses are available at: [https://ufonline.findlay.edu/webapps/cmsmain/webui/\\_xy-1238577\\_1?action=itach](https://ufonline.findlay.edu/webapps/cmsmain/webui/_xy-1238577_1?action=itach)

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About the Author

Erin Laverick currently serves as Director of The Intensive English Language Program at The University of Findlay. Her main research interests focus on effective writing instruction for English language learners.

Where Writing Happens: Elevating Student Writing Through Digital Storytelling



Jane M. Saunders, Texas State University-San Marcos

“Do you call people who write digital stories ‘authors’?” – Claire

And so begins a conversation about creating digital stories in Clara Vera’s high school class. Her students are participating in a process that Clara deems invaluable for her students’ literacy development: writing, critiquing, and employing technology as a tool of expression. What began as an interesting proposition, “Why don’t we try to make movies with students so that they can tell their stories, name their experiences?” evolved into an inquiry of students grappling with how to portray themselves in multiple mediated environments and through the written and reflected word. Calkins (1994) describes the benefit of writing in that it “allows us to hold our life in our hands and make something of it” (4), to essentially examine lived experiences and share these with others. What surfaces from this project are the tensions that exist in making such work public, and the challenges students experience in developing stories of self after spending a decade learning to write to stilted prompts for standardized tests.

This paper documents the progress of my work with a teacher and her secondary journalism students producing digital stories in the spring of 2011, in partnership with the National Writing Project. The work was both challenging and exciting – challenging because of the multiple drafts and media involved in the process; exciting because for the first time all year, Clara witnessed students fully engaged in writing as a process (Atwell 1998; Tompkins 2011) rather than a chore. What follows are the steps that Clara and I followed while working with students, excerpts from students’ writing, and their reflections on the process. Also included is what we learned about students by writing side-by-side with them, first on paper and then mediated through digital spaces. We discovered that where writing happens is *not* just the English classroom, as many secondary teachers might assume. And, if we want to increase students’ efficacy in writing, it could be useful to look for alternate spaces for writing to occur so that students can better examine their lived experiences, find their voices, and strengthen their writing.

The Roots of Digital Storytelling

An increasing body of research is surfacing about the power of digital storytelling as a pedagogical and learning tool for developing student writers (Dreon, Kerper, and Landis 2011; Hull and Katz 2006; Kajder 2004; Ohler, December 2005/January 2006; Robin 2008; Vasudevan, Schultz, and Bateman 2010). Defining digital storytelling is a complex endeavor; typically digital stories include two distinct processes. First, authors write (or type up) a story they want to convey and that they suspect could be matched well with images, music, video, or audio. Authors go through a writing and revising process to hone the story into a short and tightly knit piece and record themselves reading it. Using movie making software like FinalCut Pro, Moviemaker, or imovie, authors drop in the recording and then enhance this by adding images, music, etc. to deepen the viewers’ experience and understanding of the story. With increasingly available movie-making programs arriving in students’ schools and homes, digital storytelling projects are effective on two levels: expanding students’ understandings and use of the writing process (describe in greater detail later in this piece); and, helping students explore their lives in a medium that is conversely both familiar and strange.

Researchers (Dreon, et al. 2011; Kajder 2004; Ohler, December 2005/January 2006) have written extensively about the process of making movies with students, largely drawn from the work of Joe Lambert (2009) and the Center for Digital Storytelling (2011). Bull and Kajder (2004) and Robin (2008) delineate the Seven Elements [more recently called the “Seven Steps,” by Lambert (2009, xiii)] that include:

Step	Description
1. Point (of view)	The story the author is attempting to relate through the movie-making process.
2. Dramatic Question	This creates tension and sustains the viewer’s attention.
3. Emotional Content	This universalizes the experience and helps the viewer connect with the digital story.
4. The Gift of Your Voice	Our voices convey who we are.
5. The Power of the Soundtrack	Music and sound effects undergird and strengthen the story.
6. Economy	The use of a short enough written text and related multimedia keep the audience interested without dragging on too long.
7. Pacing	Both pauses and movement help pace the movie and make it easier to understand.

These steps are invaluable in providing a roadmap for the writing process in a digital environment, and offering guidance for students while developing, audio-taping, and piecing together their digital stories.

A second line of research considers the necessity of connecting digital story production with standards and academic skills (Dreon, et al. 2011) in order to strengthen students’ literacy practices. Ohler (December 2005/January 2006) affirms, “digital stories provide powerful media literacy learning opportunities because students are involved in the creation and analysis of the media in which they are immersed” and tap “dormant skills” that might otherwise not surface in a non-digital classroom (47). In terms of combining visual images and written text, Bull and Kajder (2004) and Burmark’s (2004) work suggest that students’ comprehension is augmented by the blending of the two, which show promise in strengthening the skills of students who struggle in the literacy classroom.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for using digital storytelling is its potential to foster power and develop “agentive senses of self” (Hull and Katz 2006) among teachers and students. Hull and Katz spent multiple years working with youth and young adults in a community technology center, where participants wrote together, participated in writing process workshops to refine their work, and then created digital shorts from these pieces. They document “turning points” (Bruner 1994, 42) during the digital storytelling process and detail “how the opportunity to be successful as a learner and doer can foster a view of self as agent, able to influence present circumstances and future possibilities” (71). This development of students as agents in their own learning was particularly important to Clara, who found some of her language learners reticent to tell their stories both during in-class writings or through blog posts documenting the school community and their place within it. Having read Lambert (2009) and thinking about how students negotiate multiple identities, she pointed out a passage from his book as justification for the digital storytelling project:

The only real way to know about someone is through story, and not one consistent story, but a number of little stories that can adjust to countless different contexts. As we improvise our ways through our multiple identities, any tool that extends our ability to communicate information about ourselves to others becomes invaluable (15).

Yancey (2004) acknowledges, “Literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change. Even inside of school, never before have writing and composing generated such diversity in definition. What do our references to writing mean? Do they mean print only?” (298). By giving students the opportunity to express their stories in digital formats, we are in many ways meeting students in their preferred environment and possibly making the production of writing more engaging and interesting. It seems possible that the marriage of technology and storytelling could help develop students’ ability to read and write more effectively, by hiding the work inside the production of a movie-making endeavor. And as we consider what literacy – reading, writing, listening, speaking, researching – will look like as technology becomes more widespread in public schools, it is important to consider how these tools can be harnessed for both learning and as a source of fun.

### A Push to Focus on Adolescent Literacy

In recent years, calls for the improvement of adolescent literacy in American public schools have reached critical mass, and for good reason. It is estimated that as many as 70 percent of secondary students struggle with literacy in some way (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006, 8); these problems range from a difficulty with fluency to an absence of comprehension strategies when engaged with increasingly difficult texts. As a result, while National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores have improved modestly for students in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade over the past several years, students tested at the 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade years are exhibiting little or no progress (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy 2010). Given that students today must learn both to understand and critique text in order to further their aspirations post-high school, it is necessary that adolescents “use and practice literacy to navigate and manipulate both popular culture, academic culture, and the world of work” (Moje 2002, 212). In tandem with this obligation is the responsibility to meet the demands of increasing standardization, including performing well on high stakes tests and engaging with the Common Core State Standards. It is no surprise that a recent Carnegie report on adolescent literacy acknowledges that “our schools are systematically failing to provide many students with the guidance, instruction, and practice” (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy 2010) to develop proficiency in a host of interrelated literate practices (defined as “the way in which students are taught to read, comprehend, and write,” across the school day (viii).

As a result, educators face a moral imperative to cultivate the literacy skills that will help students realize their full potential both in and out of schools, and through print and digital environments. As our definitions of literacy expand to include divergent and rapidly changing media, teachers are also tasked with striking a balance between helping students develop the technological prowess necessary to read and write in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms, while keeping reading and writing events relevant and valuable to students’ lives. It is the blending of these competing forces – the development of written work that allows students to examine their lived experiences (Freire 2005) and the nourishment of the “functional tools” (Selber 2004), those necessary to succeed in increasingly complex technological environments, that are at the heart of this research project. Details about the study as well as its results follow.

### Methodology

This project represents a partnership between the National Writing Project (NWP), a professor, and a Central Texas English/journalism teacher. After receiving a mini-grant from the NWP Urban Sites Network to assist in purchasing computer equipment like cameras, digital recorders, headphones, and memory sticks, I (a university professor of reading/literacy

education) approached several NWP-affiliated English teachers to gauge their interest in creating digital stories with middle and high school students to augment the traditional approaches of developing student writing their schools were using. Our goal was to infuse creativity and innovation into what was in many of the schools a “bland and scripted” writing process curriculum (C. Vera, personal communication, March 20, 2010). The focus of this article is English and journalism teacher Clara Vera and her students at Central High School, a culturally and linguistically diverse school within a large urban school district. Over a third (34%) of the student population at Central High School comes from economically disadvantaged homes. A bit more than half of the student population is non-white; 8% are African American and 44% are Latino according to the most recent state agency report. These demographics roughly reflect the students involved in the digital storytelling project. Of the fifteen in her Journalism I course, two were African American, four were Latino, and nine were White. Two were international students with complete fluency in English; one was formerly in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses prior to coming to Central High School.

Central High School is one of the oldest schools in the district and has a long history of drawing from some of the wealthiest homes in the area. More recently, with the alteration of attendance zones Central now serves larger numbers of middle and lower income families, occasionally creating conflict among students. Those at Central High School typically perform well on state-mandated tests; reporting data from the 2009-2010 school year show that 94% of students (in combined grade levels) passed the reading and language arts portions of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) end of year exams (Texas Education Agency 2010). What goes unacknowledged by state reporting are the burgeoning numbers of Spanish-dominant language learners at Central High School and the school’s increasing concern with how to serve such students.

In early conversations with Clara about how she might shape this project, we discussed the importance of drawing out the voices of all of her students, not just those who were often favored at Central High School – namely those from wealthier, White homes. Clara saw the language learners of the school “rendered voiceless in the world at large” (Bomer 1999, 2) at Central by the pedagogical decisions of school and district personnel in their attempts to increase scores on high-stakes tests. Originally, I posed the idea of making digital stories to several other English teachers on campus to participate in the project; we were dismissed by several over concerns of time commitment and a feeling of pressure to “cover” the curriculum. The resultant work reflects a case study approach that documents the process of digital storytelling, student reflections, drafts of scripts and other elements of the writing process, and the students’ final film shorts.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The case study described here is part of a larger study involving three teachers in two separate school districts, and spanning the 2010-2011 school year. Using purposeful sampling (Merriam 1998), the teachers – each of whom are affiliated with the National Writing Project – were selected in part based on their stated commitment to equity and culturally appropriate teaching practices (Villegas and Lucas, 2002) and their receptiveness to notions of progressive teaching and critical theory (hooks 1994; Morell 2008). While each of the participating teachers employed digital stories for a variety of purposes (to inform, to explain, to reflect), the work at Central High School seemed to stand out in terms of offering the most benefit to students on both an academic and personal level.

This paper draws from three separate pools of data to develop the portraits that follow. Data from Clara includes: (a) planning conversations before, during, and after the project; (b) handouts and activities that structured the process; (c) personal correspondence, such as email and text messages; and (d) samples of Clara’s own writing that occurred throughout the project’s span. Data from students includes: (a) brainstorming and written work developed from seed ideas (Buckner 2005); (b) reflections produced before, during, and after their development of digital stories; (c) informal conversations with students during the writing and movie-making process; (d) written transcripts of students’ digital stories; and (e) the digital versions of the stories produced by the class. A third set of data includes notes from an observation journal I kept throughout the project and samples of my own work while participating in class writing activities. The latter were invaluable in serving as a reminder of Clara’s pedagogical decisions and the activities and efforts employed to develop student writing.

Interview transcripts with Clara and field notes about the process helped surface questions and wonderings that we looped back to after the completion of the project. Because Clara and I have known one another for many years – since she was a high school student and I was a classroom teacher – we have developed a short-hand in our conversations and are similarly allied in promoting a pedagogy of social justice and liberation (Freire 2005). These notions were a regular part of our discussions throughout the digital storytelling process and helped shape the themes represented in this article. The collection of lesson plan ideas and student artifacts were on-going throughout the 2010-2011 school year, and subsequently analyzed inductively using guidelines delineated by Huberman and Miles (1983). Triangulation of multiple data sources (such as observation notes, lesson plans, student reflections and drafts, and interviews) was built into data collection and analysis for the purposes of achieving trustworthiness.

Through an examination of the writing process, the ensuing negotiations with technological tools, and the digital stories themselves, this portrait offers a roadmap for educators interested in working on similar projects with students or other teachers. Additionally, this seeks to document the efficacy of digital storytelling as an effective tool for developing students’ capacity to express their lived experiences while concurrently cultivating the writing and multimedia skills students need to flourish in media-rich technological worlds.

Findings

In the section that follows, I include detailed descriptions of the digital storytelling process as Clara and her students completed their projects and their ensuing fears, frustrations, and successes. I begin with how students engaged with both the viewing/reading of digital stories available online and relate this to the writing process employed by most writing teachers. I then include details of the challenges the students and Clara confronted while using technology as a classroom tool. Finally, I discuss the possibility and potential for using digital storytelling as a means of developing student voices and agency inside schools.

Engaging With the Process

*“The thing most difficult about this project is finding something to write mostly, then getting started and putting it together.” –Jose*

As is noted earlier, the writing focus for most students in secondary schools in our state is that which is tested on end-of-year, high stakes exams. The tests have varied over the years; an earlier push toward persuasive writing evolved into narrative and synthesis essays. The common element across the grade levels is the appearance prompts that guide student writing. This limiting of student writing to “what is testable” (Bomer 2006, 366) seems to have produced an unintended consequence: a diminishing capacity for students to create writing sans the prompt. Clara and I noticed early on that students floundered when confronted with choices – given the option of writing about whatever they wanted served to stymie many student writers. We used writing process methods familiar to students, asking them to brainstorm ideas that they developed over time, write, revise, edit, with the intention of publishing that work mediated by digital tools – the movies. Clara’s student Kristen acknowledged how difficult it was to get started in an early reflection noting, “I think that the most difficult thing is finding a story. I really want it to be the perfect story that explains everything in a short time.”

To ameliorate this, Clara asked students to view several digital stories from the Center for Digital Storytelling web site to get ideas for their own writing (<http://www.storycenter.org/stories/index.php?cat=5>). She instructed students to document things they liked and didn’t like while watching each story, and consider what additional enhancements – music, images, embedded video – contributed to the story’s message or theme. The class constructed a rubric to gauge the effectiveness of stories they viewed, which later served as a guide as they developed their own work. Students agreed that some of the movies were too long, had problems with narration, and in the case of one that Sophie viewed, “didn’t have a purpose.” They acknowledged that personal stories were effective, but as Marisol pointed out “You don’t want to get to a point where [the story] is so personal you can’t tell it, but you don’t want it to be dull.” After engaging with digital “texts,” and offering several opportunities for students to writer freely, Clara introduced the Topic Graph to assist those still struggling to nail down a subject.

Topic Graph

Fill out the Topic Graph to the best of your ability. In each block, use short phrases or trigger words that come to mind when you think of the particular event. Under mood and color, just put the first word that comes to mind.

Topic	Personal Subject	Image	Mood	Color	Lesson Learned
A person who changed your life					
Earliest childhood memory					
The member of your family that causes you the most pain					
A special place					
Something you saved					
A dream you had					

When you are finished completing the chart, choose one of the events to write about in detail. Write 1-2 pages on a separate sheet of paper. Be prepared to read your favorite paragraph to your partner.

Because of the broadness of the ideas on the graph (example: “something you saved”), students interpreted the topics in a variety of ways. Claire wrote briefly about saving a cat; Chantelle a love note; others wrote about jewelry now lost. While most seemed bolstered by these earlier activities and got right to work, Jose – one of two Latino students in Clara’s class, who was a language learner upon his entry to the district years before – spent time listening to music, trying not to draw attention to himself. After a few visits to the class, Clara asked me to encourage him to work. Jose and I discussed possible subjects like music, interests he had outside of school, or selected one of the ideas he generated on his Topic Graph, like his first dog or winning president of his class in elementary school. These topics did not sustain his interest, and when Jose wrote, it often took

him “ten minutes to get one sentence down” (C. Vera, interview, June 9, 2011). When he told me, “I don’t like school – this is boring” I suggested that he write about his experiences in school or what he would change about how schools were set up to better accommodate students. This caught his attention, and Jose haltingly began to write.

Engaging also included participating in the writing process (Romano 2000), and in reading, reviewing, revising, and talking about their work. We were all participants in the process, writing together, sharing ideas, and serving as readers. This became a useful tool for Marisol; unlike Jose, she had many ideas and wrote three separate pieces as possible material for her digital short. While conferencing with Kristen and Melinda, she read her pieces aloud to them. The girls responded, “Read them again!” which pleased and embarrassed Marisol. Clara elaborates

She read it and they helped her pick which one and why they thought this piece was more accessible, [why they] liked the topic. They asked her “Which one would you feel more comfortable with?” It created a lot of accountable talk and part of that was I think – you and me being in there, modeling so that students knew what it looked like. I heard them tell each other, “I liked that, why don’t you try this?” (C. Vera, personal communication, May 31, 2011).

After students winnowed their pieces down to roughly 500-700 words, which would aid in keeping movies a manageable length, we had them map out their work in “storyboard” format using a template created by the Center for Digital Storytelling (Lambert, 2007). This process helps movie-makers organize the sensory elements of the movie, and to consider what viewers will see and hear while watching it. An additional benefit to this stage of the process is it helped students “consider how effects, transitions, and sound would be sequenced” (Kajder 2004, 66) and how these contribute to the larger effect of the story. Students exhibited a noticeable persistence throughout the engaging process, and enacted several of the steps of the writing process including brainstorming, drafting, and revising. Having written the stories, mapped them out, and begun the process of gathering photos and images, we were ready to face the largest obstacle in our path: harnessing the technology.

Grappling

*“If I were to do this project again, it would come out a lot better because now I have the experience...when I first started I had no clue.” –Claire*

When I first approached Clara and the other participating teachers about producing digital stories, they were excited about the possibility but held concerns about technology. In her mid-twenties, Clara was well versed in multimedia like most teachers of her generation. She worked on the newspaper in high school and college and had extensive exposure to complex computer applications like PageMaker and the Adobe Suite programs. Clara made a digital story as a requirement for one of her English/ language arts methods courses while learning to teach; she made a second movie to use as a model for her students before beginning this project, using imovie on a MacBook computer. In spite of this proficiency, there was still hesitation and concern. The only computer lab in the school that had movie-making software loaded was a PC lab, and the Adobe Premiere program was new to both of us. Clara prefaced our time together with students in the lab with, “We’re all going to be learning this together. Yes, Author and I have made movies before, but this platform is not what we’ve used. We’re going to have some problems, and it’s going to be fine” (Author, observation, March 31, 2011). Clara’s acknowledgement that challenges lay ahead invited students to work in dialogue in a “problem-posing” environment (Freire 2005, 81) where they could all learn and rely on one another. By positioning students as problem-solvers and making space for those with more skill to serve in a teaching capacity, Clara helped cultivate an equitable space inside the computer lab – one where we all participated as learners and teachers.

Not surprisingly, students with greater technological proficiency stepped up to help those struggling while putting movies together. Like most movie-making programs, ours supplied multiple tracks, where we could drop in the voice-over narration, and add photos, music, and effects on separate tracks. After struggling to record the narrations of the lab computers, Clara brought in another teacher to trouble-shoot. We ended up recording narration tracks for student movies on a MacBook using its Garage Band program, saving this as a music file, and jumping it over to the PC computers to drag onto the narration track. While assisting students with the process, I saw several help each other use a backdoor entry around the school district’s web site blocking software, so that they could access Facebook and grab photographs and other images that they wanted to include in their movies. Although this practice exhibited an infraction of the school rules, none of the students dawdled. Rather, accessing images from Facebook in this case appeared to be just another source – like a jump drive, ipod, or burned CD that students brought to class to transport their information readily (Author, observation, April 12, 2011).

There were hiccups in the process, particularly as we neared the end of the school year and students became pressed to complete movies prior to final exams week. Some of the problems were the result of students’ growing understanding of how to employ the tools they were using to create the digital stories. While most had successfully navigated the process of writing and editing their pieces and gathering supporting materials to enhance the movies themselves, their functional literacy (Selber, 2004) in using the movie-making software was limited. Thus, these limitations produced a logjam in terms of completing and rendering the movies. A few students lost parts of their movies, including background music and photos. After attempting to drop in a short video of her sister singing near the end of her movie, Kristen faced calamity, “the digital story started deleting everything, including both sets of audio” (K. Small, reflection, May 30). After a call to her dad to post additional photos to Facebook, she patiently rebuilt her story. This diligence and persistence were noticeable throughout the group; we regularly heard students remind each other “save your work” and “make sure you have that backed up.”

For a few of the digital stories, we did not discover until after they were rendered that the background music tracks were too loud, drowning out the narrator’s voice. Sophie wrote “the software was frustrating to work, and took a while to the hang of things” (M. Wiatrek, reflection, May 30, 2011). In the case of Marisol’s completed movie, about two minutes into the story the screen goes dark, but you can still hear her narration. We are still uncertain what happened, whether she accidentally deleted photographs or did not stretch them out to match the length of her voice-over recording.

In spite of these difficulties and the imperfections of the completed digital stories, students were pleased with their work. A movie day was held, where students watched digital stories back to back, complimenting and critiquing each other’s work. In lieu of a final exam, Clara asked students to write a reflection that answered the following questions: What did you enjoy and not enjoy about this project? What would you change about your story? What would you change about the process? In the end, were you happy with your work? Kristen’s thought, “It’s been kind of cool learning about a new program and figuring out how to put all these pieces together to make a movie and all of the elements needed for it” (K. Small, reflection, May 30, 2011) encapsulates most of the responses we read from student essays. Melinda acknowledged, “The story just starts to move itself and you end up with something better than you could have ever imagined” (M. Parson, reflection, May 30, 2011). Several of the students noted that they did not enjoy listening to their own voices. Ana worried “I sound different, and strange” (A. Vargas, reflection, May 30, 2011), while Jose “did not enjoy having to listen [sic] to my voice, mostly because it did not sound anything like me.” Jose’s concerns were equally compounded by worries over how his classmates would view his work, acknowledging “The thing I hated was having [sic] to know that the hole [sic] class was going to see it, and even more when they *did* see it (J. Lopez, reflection, May 30, 2011).

We were pleased by students’ reflections about the project. Sophie’s response, “I felt proud of all the work I had put into the process” (S. Wiatrek, reflection, May 30, 2011) mirrored our pride in the students’ diligence and patience with the process. Surprisingly, another common strand encapsulated by Allison also surfaced in student essays. She came closest to realizing one of the original goals of the project included in the grant proposal I wrote that helped fund our work: “The most important thing...was showing how the world looks from my eyes” (A. Stanton, reflection, May 30, 2011).

### Naming

*[In response to the question, “Why do you think stories about ourselves are important to share?”] “So people get to know us better...to know what is really going on with us.” – Courtney*

One of the more powerful aspects of participating in a digital storytelling project is the collaborative nature of the endeavor (Lambert 2009, 47). In our case, collaboration was a necessary part of our work, both in developing and strengthening the written stories and in overcoming obstacles that surfaced in the computer lab, putting the movies together. It was through these shared experiences that a true bond seemed to surface among students, who entrusted each other not only with their stories but also with their vulnerabilities – whether this had to do with their capacity as writers or their proficiency in producing an eye-catching, poignant movie short that resonated with viewers. Students wrote a whole host of short pieces prior to determining which they would focus on for their digital story. What follows are descriptions of stories that afforded students the opportunity to “name their world” (Freire 2005) and for once write about a subject of their choice – and not one constructed as an evaluative tool or prompt for a standardized tests. Clara viewed the creation of digital stories as an opportunity for students to go beyond the written word and look at larger truths in their lives and the world around them. She saw the movies as an opportunity for students to deeply immerse themselves in their writing – something they had less time to do in other classes or on end of the year exams – and felt the movies “amplified the meaning” of students’ pieces by means of music, photographs, video, and voiceover (C. Vera, personal communication, June 7, 2011). What follows are some of the lessons students took away from the process, and in some cases, the deeply personal insights they gained from this collaborative endeavor.

**Kristen and Sophie – Learning about Life.** Like many of the students in Clara’s class, Kristen and Sophie focused on family members for their digital stories. Kristen’s story “Sunshine” starts with a photograph of her younger sister Addie rolling sideways on a rug looking up at the camera. Although there is more than a decade between the two, the narration tells us that Addie has served as a teacher for Kristen in many ways. One example occurred after the death of their family dog. While Kristen and the others were grieving in a ceremony in the backyard Addie, “my little silver lining, came up to all of us, kissed us on the cheek, and told us that it will be okay because Hudson [the dog] is playing with Jesus now.” Images of Addie at home, school, church, and in nature splash across the screen while music from local artists plays in the background. One of the strongest connections that Kristen shares with her little sister is a love of music.

It wasn’t until I watched her [Addie] sing that I understood what music does to people. The best part about listening to her sing is that she does it with such joy. Her face lights up when she hears a song she knows and she sings at the top of her lungs. [Music] changes you and gives you the words when you can’t say anything, and it brings people together. At two years old, Addie was able to comprehend this even before I understood. Rather than finding her younger sibling a burden, Kristen views her as a guiding light and force in her family’s life.

While putting together her digital story, Kristen struggled with how to merge a video clip of her sister singing – which she hoped to use at the end of her movie while the credits were rolling – with the rest of her pictures and narration. At one point, she was forced to dump all of her information – narration, photographs, and the video – and start a new movie file. We never really understood what happened, but this is

emblematic of the challenges that emerge when blending writing with multimedia. Kristen’s final movie did not include Addie’s song, although we had all seen it during production. This caused her some consternation, but did not diminish the effect of Kristen’s story.

Sophie’s movie “Water Races up to My Toes” tricks the viewer initially. As the voiceover describes a time at the beach with her grandfather, the viewer sees images of trees and sunflowers flowing in and out of the screen in an artful manner. There are close-up and fading effects generated from the movie-making software. What follows are images of toys, nature, and ocean scenes; we don’t actually see a picture of the “main character” or images of the beach until we’re a minute into the digital story. Mirroring the composition of images, the narrated story unfolds slowly as well.

Sophie’s grandfather came of age in Communist Poland, later immigrating and working as an engineer in the United States. Like Kristen’s portrait of her sister, Sophie discusses the many lessons she received from time spent together with her grandfather.

He taught me where to find every country on the map and the names of every tree in our favorite park...how to drive a car, and how to be proud of where I am and what I believe in.

Perhaps most poignantly, as the images move to beachscapes, tidal pools, and craggy rocks, there is also mention of her grandfather’s large hands picking up small shells. Among them are hermit crabs and as these are discussed, a hermit crab appears on the screen. It is never overtly mentioned but the hermit crab seems to serve as a metaphor for Sophie’s own flowering from a shy and reticent girl, to how she sees herself today. “I’m not shy anymore. I’ve grown into a young woman with tumultuous troubles, like any other,” the narration continues. The movie ends with a portrait of Sophie panning first on her legs, her midriff, an arm crossing her chest, and then a close-up of her staring into the camera. Finally, we see the smiling portrait of the author; like the hermit crab moving out of its shell in the safety of the water, she exudes a tentative confidence while facing the audience. Background music that ends in a whistle takes us out, while the image of Sophie dissolves into a large oak tree in the background of her portrait.

**Marisol – Visiting Stones.** After narrowing down her choices, Marisol decided to draw from a piece of writing entitled “Flowers for a Stranger” for her digital story. The voiceover begins, “We go every year to visit them. They lie beneath, basking in dirt while they are confined in they’re [sic] eternal beds. The granite stones sit above them.” Quiet piano music plays in the background. Images of cemetery statuary, flowers, and teddy bears placed at gravesites draw the viewer in. As the story progresses, we understand that Marisol feels disconnected from the mourning experience her family engages in and is trying to make sense of these yearly visits. Her narration is calm and somber; images of people crying and hugging appear on the screen. Heaviness builds as she acknowledges, “People cry and I watch. Even the silence hurts. How can I feel something for someone I don’t know?” An image of the Piata appears on the screen as Marisol reveals, “I’ve never shed a tear, and I hate myself for that.” The story ends with a reflection on questions Marisol has posed to her younger sisters about the cemetery visits. She asks them, “What do you feel?” and tells the listener that while hesitant in their responses, her sisters feel similarly, and this offers comfort. “It gives me a sense of belonging. I still feel apart, but at least there’s something to hold onto.” Marisol ends her piece with a metaphor, “I too, am a stone.”

Because *Flowers for a Stranger* touches on a topic that many people are uncomfortable with – death and remembrance – it evoked quite a response from her classmates during their movie viewing day. Many found the digital story dark and were surprised by its effect on them. Students were equally surprised that this work had come from Marisol – largely because she is quiet and unassuming in class and does not discuss herself openly with others. While Marisol’s story focused on family traditions and experiences, it was less a rumination on the lessons learned from others than Sophie and Kristen’s work. In many ways, Marisol’s seemed to involve placing a mirror up to her culture – to her family and their repeated treks to honor the dead – and then examining it and making public this quiet ritual with the predominantly White student population of the class. In spite of a few problems with images not appearing in the final thirty seconds of the story – when you can hear narration, but see nothing but a black screen – the viewers found Marisol’s work “compelling and deep.”

**Jose – Creating the Perfect School.** As is noted earlier, Jose had difficulty finding a topic for his digital story. In addition to the Topic Graph activity, Clara led the class in writing about “tiny moments” in our lives that turn out to have significant resonance as we reflect back on them. She had the class and me write down a list of words, skipping lines between them. Included were: proud, tough, rewind, bird, hair, romance, and awkward. We were then asked to select several of the trigger words to use as a starting point for writing; students (and I) could later develop these into the narratives for our digital stories. Jose responded to only three of the words: proud (“winning school president”); tough (“becomeing [sic] school president in elementary”); and rewind (“Wishing I could [sic] rewind back to middle school moments – the last day of school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade”). Jose wrote a short piece about going to Six Flags (an amusement park in Texas) “with 3 of my homeboys and 2 homegirls. It was gust [sic] us 6 haveing [sic] fun with no parents or other known people.” None of these initial pieces captured his attention enough to elaborate on further. After his complaint to me that school was boring, I asked Jose put this in writing. I asked him, “What would you do differently if you were in charge? How might we change schools to make them less boring?”

It is possible that Jose’s negative experiences in school were tied to his struggles with literacy; looking at his written work, one finds myriad small grammatical mistakes that collectively suggest (later shown to be true) that Jose was a language learner. Having advanced to high school without the requisite skills to find success in grade-level courses, Jose was placed in a low-level English class that focused on test preparation – preparation for something that he characterizes in his digital story as “a test that

I think has no meaning.” Jose’s movie highlights his lived experience as a struggling student. With a background of classical music and images of children and test booklets clipped from the Internet, his narration explains,

All we do in that class is work that comes in a paper with a label that looks like the one on the TAKS test. The only things we do besides that are test and quizzes. To me this tells me that school is a boring thing and that the only things we’re doing is working hard all year to take a test at the end. A test that I think has no meaning.

Jose continues by fleshing out recommendations for a better learning environment for students like him.

My school wooed [sic] be a learn-as-you-can school where you can take a brake [sic] at anytime and come learn when you’re ready as long as you learn what’s necessary...my school wooed [sic] have small classes so it makes it easier to learn in class. There wooed [sic] also be lots of help and assistance by teachers.

He goes on to recommend the incorporation of cutting-edge technology to assist those struggling to learn, including a computer for each student. Unlike most of the students in Clara’s class, who were able to conceive of and develop their movies in discrete parts, Jose was somewhat overwhelmed by the process. His writing seemed hampered by the absence of a prompt, and he acknowledged in his end of the year reflective essay “I was not happy with my story because it was a story that I did not really feel had something to do with me.” He also admitted he would have spent “more time thinking about what to write about” and linking that to pictures and images he had from home to enhance his movie.

Clara and the other students in the class felt differently, talking him up during the movie-viewing day. Students responded to his movie with, “Jose, that’s awesome!” Most of the students – who were in either grade-level of PreAP (Advanced Placement) classes and had not experienced English classes where the entire focus was on test preparation – had a shift in their understanding of Jose, and acknowledged as much. I asked Clara how students viewed Jose prior to his creation of the digital short, and she said that most saw him as shy and non-participatory. When she paired students with him earlier in the year, “They were like, ‘Awww, I’m going to get paired with Jose?’ They were a little apprehensive” (C. Vera, interview, June 9, 2011). In the end, Jose was his worst critic disparaging his voice, the images he clipped from the Internet, and his choice of topic – which he viewed as less personal than other students’ digital stories. Interestingly enough, Jose’s story was actually quite personal, as it documented his daily experience as a student grappling to perform in a school setting that was largely populated by highly successful students. Surfacing this reality seemed to both Clara and me every bit as personal and compelling as the other stories we viewed during our work on this project.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data presented here illustrate the complexity of working with technology as a classroom tool, and also offer promise for developing students as writers and critics of their own (and others’) work – two important skills for success in the literacy classroom and beyond. Much like the participants in Hull and Katz’s (2006) research, students in this study were able to use digital storytelling as a means for vivifying their lived experiences in a world that often silences their interests and stories while favoring prescribed, prompt-based writing. What is most intriguing to me about the digital storytelling process that seems absent from written research is its power to reinforce the writing process without seeming repetitive or heavy-handed to students. Writing requires a persistence and tenacity that adolescents do not always want to employ, particularly in the revision and editing portions of the process. This study suggests that pairing the writing process with technology – as Robin (2008) acknowledges, not for its own sake but rather as a tool to assist learning in other areas – increases students’ capacity for staying interested in the process. Clara’s students produced multiple drafts, engaged in peer mentoring, held discussions about images and sound that would undergird the larger message of their stories, and then went through each of these steps *a second time* as they put together their digital shorts. Even in the face of calamity, as when Kristen lost most of her data and had to begin her movie production anew in the last week of school, students were determined to see their stories through to fruition and participate in the movie-viewing day at school.

The transformation from written, 1-dimensional words on the page to 2-dimensional narration and images on the screen offered a secondary benefit, particularly to Jose who struggled to articulate himself clearly on the written page; the movie essentially erased his grammatical mistakes. I do not wish to minimize Jose’s struggles, but rather use these as an example of why digital storytelling holds promise for assisting struggling learners. Our initial efforts to get Jose to write were met with minimal progress and fear. He had been told repeatedly he was not a good writer, and was wary of sharing work with teachers or other students. Yet the digital storytelling process intrigued him so that he wanted to participate, and made him willing to write enough to show us his work regardless of errors. His first draft was a paragraph; the second was two. Jose stretched this finally into a one-page, single-spaced, typed story appropriately constructed for the voice-over for his movie. This was the longest written piece Clara had received from Jose all year, and the most telling in terms of a diagnostic tool. If she were to pass this writing sample along to another teacher, s/he would have an excellent starting point for assisting Jose in ironing out his writing problems and developing his many strengths.

What this study suggests is that students grow in their understanding of writing by completing multimedia projects, in spite of the noticeable absence of technology use in many classrooms. My work as a teacher and researcher in schools has taught me that English teachers often forgo opportunities like digital storytelling out of fear over time constraints or worries about their personal capacity to engage with technology. The data here suggest that the time commitment is beneficial to students in particular if it includes a collective agreement about: the purpose of the assignment (to tell a multi-dimensional

story); the expected quality of the product (ascertained by students in advance, while learning to critique the work of others); the time commitment (extensive, especially if students are given ample time to write while in class); and the co-construction of knowledge (that students will rely on each other in addition to the teacher to guide them through the process). Perhaps the most intriguing aspect about this data is where the writing happened – not in an English classroom, but rather an introductory journalism class. Freed up from the constraints of an inhibiting curriculum and concerns about time or test preparation, Clara was able to promote writing for its most fundamental purpose: a means of expression and examination of experience.

While this study considers the work of one teacher in one classroom, it is emblematic of the kind of literacy instruction and learning that are imperative for students to gain access to in schools if they are to flourish in our increasingly inter-connected, technological world. In tandem with this kind of teaching, we would benefit from more research that examines such practices as a tool for growth in reading and writing. If we were to welcome in the diverse and interesting voices of students and teachers attempting to harness these new technologies, our field would grow exponentially. Like Clara, teachers (and researchers) exhibit fear in opening that portal; the reality for our students is they have already crossed over the threshold while we are lagging behind them. In her poem, “No ideas but in things” published in *The New Yorker*, Jessica Greenbaum (2011) writes

... We name life  
in relation to whatever we step out from when we  
open the door, and whatever comes back in on its own.

As we move forward in the field of literacy instruction and learning, we might well put aside these fears and consider new ways to teach and study the technologically savvy students of today, lest we find ourselves left behind.

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#### About the Author

Jane M. Saunders is an Assistant Professor in Literacy in the College of Education at Texas State University-San Marcos. Her academic background includes a B.A. in Letters (Classics, Liberal Arts, and Languages) from The University of Oklahoma, a M. A. in Interdisciplinary Studies (English, history, women’s studies) at the University of North Texas, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies at The University of Texas at Austin.



## Writing and Learning Online: Graduate Students’ Perceptions of Their Development as Writers and Teachers of Writing

Kelly N. Tracy, Roya Q. Scales, Nancy Luke, *Western Carolina University*

In the last decade, online learning has moved from the fringes into the mainstream as a viable approach to higher education. The number of college courses and full-degree programs offered online continues to grow rapidly. One survey found over 60% of institutions in the United States offer fully online degrees and around 32% of students take at least one course online (Allen and Seaman 4). Recently, faculty in the elementary and middle grades program made the decision to move our Master of Arts degree (M.A.Ed.) to a completely online format, joining our already fully online post-baccalaureate program, which is designed for students who are seeking initial licensure in middle grades but already hold a bachelor’s degree in a field other than education. As we began this transition, we wondered about the influence on our students’ learning in our graduate-level literacy courses. Specifically, we wanted to focus on our online graduate course in elementary and middle grades writing pedagogy because of the increased attention to writing that the Common Core State Standards bring for K-12 teachers (Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman 10) coupled with research indicating that teachers are underprepared to teach writing (e.g., Graham and Wosley 348; Street and Stang “Improving the Teaching” 37).

As in our face-to-face classes, this course required students to write extensively based on the premise that teachers of writing should be writers themselves (Atwell 18; Augsburg 548-552; Graves 36; “About NWP”; Routman 35-50; Watts 155); however, because the predominant method of communication, collaboration, and shared understanding in this online course was also in written format, the amount of writing students completed extended well beyond our typical expectations. Given the writing pedagogy content and the online context of the course, we wondered what changes in beliefs and perceptions would occur for the graduate students participating in the course. The purpose of this paper is to share what we learned about the changes in self-perception and how these teachers developed as writers and teachers of writing after completing our course. While it is not within the scope of this paper to explain how to design an online course, several useful sources are dedicated to this topic including current articles (Andrew and Arnold 110-111; Singleton-Jackson and Colella online) and more in-depth books on the subject (Ko and Rossen; Warnock).

#### Relevant Literature

Teachers’ beliefs in their ability to teach writing are shaped, in part, by their perception of themselves as writers, and both positive and negative experiences affect this perception (Daisey 161). Those who are anxious about their own writing abilities struggle with teaching writing, and lacking confidence means a higher likelihood of giving up when faced with student writing challenges (Bratcher and Stroble 83; Pajares and Johnson 326; Street and Stang “Teacher Education Courses” 83). Teachers’ personal beliefs about their own writing shortfalls can lead to reluctance about teaching certain concepts. For example, Hall and Grisham-Grown found that pre-service teachers who struggled with conventions were hesitant to teach about them (156). Additionally, if teachers think that writing is a talent rather than a learned skill, it influences the value they place on writing instruction (Norman and Spencer 34). Conversely, when teachers have ample opportunities to be successful writers and receive formal preparation on writing instruction, they feel more positive and confident about teaching writing (Chambless and Bass, 159).

How people perceive their own competence is closely related to the concept of self-efficacy, or a person’s belief that he/she is capable of achieving a specific goal (Bandura 3). As one researcher explains, “[Self-efficacy beliefs] influence the choices people make and the course of action they pursue. Most people engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not” (Pajares). Self-efficacy affects motivation, achievement, and attitude (Ashton and Webb; Brown; Graham and Weiner, 75; Guskey) and plays a role in how teachers teach writing. For example, teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to adapt instruction for struggling writers than those who lack confidence in their ability to change student behaviors (Troia, Lin, Cohen, and Monroe 177). Similarly, self-efficacy helps teachers overcome challenges that they face as writing teachers, such as reaching reluctant writers (Tracy and Headley 182).

When teachers have opportunities to learn to teach writing among “supportive and committed colleagues,” their perceptions of themselves as writers can evolve, and they can gain confidence in their ability to write and to teach writing (Street and Stang “Teacher Education Courses” 91). These sorts of communities can be accomplished within graduate courses (Street and Stang, “Improving the Teaching” 43), including those that are taught in part or completely online through sharing of personal experiences on blogs and discussion boards, frequent feedback loops between students as well as instructors, and

opportunities for supportive critique and peer review. As a result of these course activities, the online learning community can support an increase in confidence among its members. When increased confidence translates into better teaching, student writing achievement is positively impacted (Kaminski, Hunt-Barron, Hawkins, and Williams 27-28; Singer and Scollay 10).

Jang found in her study of teacher candidates that learning theory and practice in the field “online helped pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of the theories and stimulated each of them in their thinking...[and provided] an avenue to ask questions and obtain instant peers’ feedback” (862-863). Of particular interest for online courses that focus on the teaching of writing are the elements that require students to rely on written discourse to communicate ideas and negotiate understandings with peers and instructors. Considerable research has been done with online learning and English Language Learners (ELL), including the use of discussions to encourage language development and the construction of knowledge of theory and practice related to the use of language in writing and speaking. With regard to teaching writing online, Green and Tanner used multiple intelligence theory in an online course as a basis for pre-service teachers to develop an “appropriate metaphor for the ideal writing teacher” (317). This approach helped prospective writing teachers to think about the process of teaching writing including the nature of feedback for students as well as their preferences for responses to their own writing. Ferguson, Littleton, and Whitlock assert that online courses have the potential to help students develop “new literacy practices” via open and participatory discourse “that makes use of the affordances of the asynchronous setting and privileges participation, collaboration, distributed expertise, collective intelligence, experimentation and innovation” (118-119). Many of these practices indirectly and directly relate to core principles of the National Writing Project and to approaches to teaching teachers across multiple subject areas including literacy and specifically, writing.

Research in online learning has explored the benefits of this approach for teacher educators over and above the usual factors of convenience and access to include supporting positive learning outcomes for students because (and not in spite of) this method of delivery. Online educators have explored gender and the value of anonymity in online learning for female students (Sullivan 138); investigated the role of social presence in online discussion boards as a means to encourage safe collaboration and interaction (Kehrwald 98); and assessed the positive impact of online discussion on students’ overall performance in an online course (Chang et al 260). Online courses in teacher preparation have grown in the past two decades and are currently part of many teacher education programs in multiple areas such as literacy. Teacher educators have found good online course design that includes active interaction among students and instructors can lead to positive experiences and deep learning for pre- and in-service teachers, including those learning to teach writing. As a researcher of online writing states “written messages that course participants have composed ... endow participants’ textual contributions with an interactivity and continuity... there are some interesting consequences for the kinds of thinking, writing, and discursive interaction that take place” (Lapadat). Informed by this statement, a need arises for focused study of these “interesting consequences” as they relate to helping teachers develop as writers as well as teachers of writing.

Methodology

To investigate how teachers’ perceptions of themselves as writers and as teachers of writing changed after completing an online graduate course on writing pedagogy, we employed a collective case study design, allowing us “...to get a richer and more complex picture of the phenomenon under study” (Mertens 265). Such a qualitative design enabled us to understand the complexity (Barone 24-25) of teachers’ writing beliefs and instruction. Indeed, Barone asserts, “...case study research is important to our understanding of literacy” (24).

Setting

The first two authors co-taught the *Intensive Study of Writing* Master’s level course through a mid-sized public regional institution of higher education in the rural mountains in the southeastern United States. This online course occurred over a 4.5 week time period during the first summer session and was taught using an asynchronous format. The course design was based on a National Writing Project’s core principle: Understanding how to teach writing comes from a mix of theory and research, analyzing practice, and the experience of writing (National Writing Project). Students completed daily readings from the course text and journal articles, wrote reflections on the teaching of writing, engaged in online discussions, and participated in multiple writing tasks in which their own students might engage, including the choice of an I-Search or Social Action paper. Instructors focused much of the course on helping students learn to integrate writing into their teaching of the content areas and expected students to write daily utilizing the techniques about which they were learning. Additionally, students reflected on and discussed with the instructors and their peers how they could incorporate these or similar writing strategies into their classrooms. This work was intended to increase students’ confidence in their own writing, as well as their ability to teach writing.

Participants

A total of nineteen students (all were female) from both the Master’s and post-baccalaureate programs enrolled in the course. Our study consisted of eight participants: Five Master’s students who were already certified elementary teachers with classroom experience and three post-baccalaureate students whose undergraduate degrees were in a field other than education and who were seeking initial certification in middle grades education. Of those seeking initial certification, two had classroom experience in a role other than the primary teacher (see table 1). Thus, ours was a convenience sample because the participants

were readily available (Mertens 325).

Table 1 Participant Information (All names are pseudonyms)

Name	Grade level(s) taught	Number of years taught	Program/Degree
Zoe	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	2	M.A.Ed., Elementary Ed
Susan	Teaching Assistant for 5 years (4 years in computer lab & 1 in 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade)	Teaching Assistant for 5 years	Post-Baccalaureate Initial Certification, Middle Grades
Sara	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade teacher in another state, 4 <sup>th</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup> tutoring, 1 <sup>st</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , & 5 <sup>th</sup> Title 1	1 (3 <sup>rd</sup> grade)	M.A.Ed., Elementary Ed
Maddie	4 <sup>th</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> grade: 1 year 5 <sup>th</sup> grade: 3 years	M.A.Ed., Elementary Ed
Joy	2 <sup>nd</sup>	6	M.A.Ed., Elementary Ed
Angie	K	Interim - 1 year	M.A.Ed., Elementary Ed
Donna	Not teaching. After-school site coordinator: 1 year		Post-Baccalaureate Initial Certification, Middle Grades
Ella	NA	0	Post-Baccalaureate Initial Certification, Middle Grades

Data Sources

At the start of the semester, the instructors established a series of tasks designed to get students comfortable navigating the various tools used in the online course, including a reflective writing “practice task.” Students also completed an initial blog reflection in the first week of class and then wrote a final reflective blog entry on the last day of class. These three writing tasks, which were designed with our research questions and course content in mind, were the primary data sources for our research. Additionally, participants received a follow-up questionnaire via email one year after participating in the course. For the complete directions for these three tasks as well as follow-up questions, please refer to Appendices A – D. All students, regardless of participation in the study, completed the tasks. Only after the course was completed did we engage in data analysis with the participants’ responses.

Data Analysis

The first two authors met several months after the course was completed and agreed to independently read each participant’s practice assignment paper, initial blog, and final reflections in that order. During the meeting we organized the data (Creswell 232) and composed a follow-up email to participants regarding whether changes were sustained through the school year.

We analyzed the data by hand, due to the small database (Creswell 234). We first conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis, where we read the data several times (Creswell 237-239) independently noting themes present in the data. We focused on the meaning rather than coding line-by-line. Thus, our unit of analysis consisted of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that captured the meaning. One week later the first two authors met to discuss the themes based on the text segments selected and completely agreed on the themes present, which decided our categories (Creswell 238-247). Some were collapsed into broader categories, due to redundancy (Creswell 243-247). Quotes from the participants’ practice assignment paper, initial blog, and final reflection were used to support the creation of the categories. We analyzed each case before looking across cases for themes (Creswell 243-245). Next, we enlisted the third author to conduct a peer debriefing and invited participants to engage in member checking to provide verification or credibility of the data analysis and interpretations (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione 29-30; Mertens 257).

To aid with transferability, we used multiple cases and thick descriptions in this study (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione 29 -30; Mertens 259). The eight participants from this research study do not necessarily reflect the teaching population as a whole, but the findings may be generalizable to other students with similar backgrounds and experiences who are enrolled in a Master’s level writing course.

For dependability in our research, we created an audit trail or research protocol where we documented each step of the research project (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione; Mertens 259-260). The researchers established confirmability during the dependability audit to ensure “...that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher’s [or researchers’] imagination” (Mertens 260). Thus, while examining the audit trail and peer examination, the data were tracked back to the original sources (participants).

## Findings

We discovered four major themes, or categories, in the data. The themes were as follows: (1) Past experiences shape perceptions of writing; (2) Perceptions shape writing instruction; (3) Perceptions are malleable; and, (4) Course design impacts students’ perceptions. We describe each of the four themes below and then discuss the implications of our findings.

*Past Experiences Shape Perceptions of Writing.* To better understand how our participants’ perceptions about writing developed, we asked them to describe their experiences as K-12 students. After a cross-case analysis of the data (Cresswell 243-245), we found a mix of positive and negative experiences that seemed to influence our participants’ feelings about themselves as writers, as well as about writing itself.

Overall, the participants had vague memories of their own writing experiences as K-12 students. However, most of the participants recalled specific projects and/or awards that stood out positively. For example, Angie described a balloon story she won an award for in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade research report on lemurs. Sara described her 5<sup>th</sup> grade book report. For some, like Joy, who won awards for her poetry, creative writing and personal narratives throughout elementary, middle, and high school, feelings about writing were overwhelmingly positive. Joy described her papers as always earning “the highest marks” and she shared how she enjoys writing “very much” and “takes pride” in her writing.

All participants also described negative experiences with writing. Some were general, such as a feeling that no one explicitly taught them how to write or that grammar instruction seemed irrelevant to their actual writing. Other participants described specific examples of negative writing experiences. Angie described missing recess in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in order to finish her writing, “I remember feeling that struggle of being put on the spot to find the ending to my story and really stressing over how to make it the best it could be. Due to that stress, I’m not sure I enjoyed the writing process. . . I’m not sure that’s a great lesson for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader to learn.” Susan remembered copying lines as punishment and described writing as “painful and pointless.”

While most participants had a mix of positive and negative memories of writing, Maddie could remember no positive experiences prior to college. She stated, “Since I have always felt somewhat discouraged when it came to writing, the subject was never fun for me.” Like Maddie, Donna and Ella struggled with writing and lost confidence in their abilities to write. Donna shared, “I know from personal experience that when you are not confident in your ability as a writer, writing is tedious and unfulfilling work.” Ella saw writing as a chore and lacked confidence in her writing.

*Perceptions Shape Writing Instruction.* Our analysis shows support for previous research findings that experiences shape teachers beliefs about writing and that these beliefs affect instruction (Hall and Grisham-Brown 156; Bratcher and Stroble 83). Maddie explained, “I do not remember liking writing too well because I never felt like I was very creative or could put sentences together well.” She went on to say, “Due to my personal experiences, teaching writing is not one of my favorites.” Participants also described conflicting influences on their feelings about writing. Zoe, who identified herself as a person who loves to write, shared, “I am excited about teaching writing and I integrate writing in all subject areas. . .” but she went on to say, “Because I had some discouraging times regarding the structure of writing tasks in elementary school, I struggle to know exactly how to help all students organize their writing without putting them in a particular – and, for many, discouraging – box.” Zoe shared that her current confidence in her writing ability came from later teachers and professors who valued her writing. Others expressed similar sentiments, supporting the notion that external factors, most often a person’s teachers, seem to influence students’ beliefs about themselves as writers more than their actual ability or effort. This influence can come in the form of feedback or behaviors that teachers exhibit, such as the time they devote to writing in class or their demonstrated attitudes toward writing (Mathers, Benson, and Newton 294).

Sometimes the external influence on teacher beliefs was indirect, like in the case of Angie, who described a lack of enthusiasm for writing until she completed an internship in a classroom where the teacher emphasized writing. She shared, “However, it wasn’t the teacher that inspired me; it was the children. . . 4<sup>th</sup> graders were writing truly good, funny, riveting, focused stories – something I felt like I had never even done in my life. . . I opened myself up to love writing again.” Angie went on to share how she used many of the same techniques she observed in her internship with her own students and how proud she felt of what those students accomplished.

*Perceptions are Malleable.* Angie’s change in attitude during the final year of her undergraduate studies also gives evidence that students’ perceptions of writing are flexible. In another example, Ella says, “. . . as I grew older, writing became more of a chore and I lost confidence in my ability. I compared myself to other writers and didn’t feel that I produced the same quality work.” Zoe used strong language to describe early writing experience such as *forced*, *hating*, *resented*, *anxiety*, *discouraging*, and *struggle*, but then shared how later teachers built her confidence back up.

The ability to change was also evident in the analysis of our pre/post data. Participants demonstrated shifts in their perceptions of themselves as both writers and teachers of writing. Sara, Maddie, Angie, and Donna felt more confident in their writing abilities and felt comfortable writing. Sara and Maddie referenced the various writing genres and projects from the course as helping boost their confidence and comfort levels with writing. Angie attributed her growth in confidence in her ability to write to the frequency of writing required for the course. Over the 4.5 week semester Angie explained that her understandings of communicating through writing and thinking through writing improved. Angie gained renewed passion for

writing and shared, “. . . I genuinely love writing more and I have found a reason to write for myself through this course.” Donna summed up her change in perception of herself as a writer through the following explanation: “At the beginning of this class I considered myself a writer, but it hasn’t been until now that I feel like I could seriously write for publication. What changed? I gained confidence in who I am as a writer. I realized that with a little work and time it is possible to create something that is worth reading. I can create something not just for a cathartic effect, but to inform myself and others. I can literally take others on a journey with me, through my writing. If this process can do this for me, I know my students can gain the same confidence in their writing.” Donna’s explanation indicates that she more strongly believes in her students’ capabilities as well as her own, and she understands that she can influence her students’ confidence; thus, Donna’s self-perception seems to have influenced her confidence and self-efficacy for teaching writing.

Ella, who originally described herself as approaching the course with “trepidation,” still considers herself an average writer. However, it is apparent that Ella has started seeing the connection between herself as a writer and her students’ writing. She reflected, “My attitude will affect my future students, so I need to make some attitude adjustments. . . I have learned that I can teach writing. I have also learned the importance of my own writing. I wouldn’t look for my name on a bestseller list any time soon, but I will continue to produce and improve my own writing to model for my students”

Susan, Zoe, and Joy, who had strong writing identities prior to the course, did not perceive change as writers but described feeling affirmed and learning about new methods of instruction that they could try in their own classrooms.

*Course Design Impacts Students’ Perceptions.* To understand the effectiveness of the course, we asked participants at the end of the term to reflect on the perceived effect the course had on their writing instruction. They discussed how their ideas changed and how those changes would directly influence how they teach writing. The data demonstrate that the teachers’ personal experiences with writing during the course affected how they thought about the teaching of writing. Many of them mentioned the importance of modeling their own writing for their students as they actually teach (rather than assign) writing. For example, when reflecting on her writing instruction, Maddie came to the realization that she needed to be a positive writing role model for her students in order to be a better teacher of writing. “One of the most important pieces to being a good writing teacher that used to hold me back from engaging my students is enjoying writing myself and modeling for my students. This class has helped me understand the importance of writing and the joy that can come of it and it is crucial that I show this to my students.”

Participants discussed how course assignments influenced their views of writing and motivation to write. Zoe stated that her “. . . thoughts about and understanding of teaching writing have developed more fully as a result of the assignments in this course. I still feel that writers must actively participate in writing - daily and to communicate with other people and in conjunction with other people. Writing should be a social experience as well as a personal experience.” The course helped Donna become more energized about writing and the teaching of writing. “I am truly excited about teaching writing. I can’t wait to try the writing workshop and encourage students to explore topics they enjoy. Before this class I was a little uneasy about letting students choose whatever topic they want. Now, I feel more confident in guiding them to find an appropriate and exciting topic. I know this approach will help my students have more fun with their assignments and even get caught up in their writing just like I did!”

This idea of choice in writing, which was modeled during the course through assignments, came up repeatedly in participants’ reflections. Participants clearly enjoyed having the opportunity to select writing topics and felt that they should allow their own students choice in the future even if they were previously skeptical about it. Joy reflected on the I-Search writing project, which was a required task for this course. While doing so, Joy addressed students’ interests and capabilities. More specifically, she discussed how tapping into those interests could be powerful for her students as developing writers. “The research was not some time-consuming tedious event to be endured but a fun, exciting quest of knowledge. If I view writing like this, why have I stifled my students? Oh sure I can go with the standard I did not know any better but deep down I did. If I find something boring then my students will find it boring as well. I need to get over the, ‘My students are only in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade’ mindset and allow for my students to explore with their writing. I realize that I have held them back for fear of them failing but now I know that it is ok if they fail. I just need to be there to pick them up, brush them off and guide them to success.” Joy’s statement is yet another example of how teachers’ views of themselves influence their belief in their ability to help students succeed.

Although only two of our eight participants responded to the follow-up questionnaire we distributed one year after the course ended, those responses indicated that the shifts in participants’ thinking were sustained into the school year. For example, Ella shared that she was still feeling more confident as a writer and this confidence helped her “attempt new challenges.” Zoe explained, “I was willing to try new things – like carousel writing, partner writing, and a more formal writer’s workshop time – because I felt that I had the understanding to do so.”

While none of the participants explicitly mentioned the online format, the amount of writing that they engaged in was likely a factor in their growth as writers. Maddie described it this way, “I have had the opportunity to reflect on my reading, respond to my classmates, receive feedback on my writing, and have been able to express my honest thoughts about writing.” Our data do not indicate that this online format was more or less effective than a face-to-face course, but simply that the format appeared effective based on students’ feedback and reflection on their own growth as writers and teachers of writing.

Discussion and Implications

Overall, the findings of our study support previous research indicating that teachers’ perceptions of themselves as writers influence their confidence and sense of self-efficacy for teaching writing, thus shaping their writing instruction (Bratcher and Stroble 83; Hall and Grisham-Brown 156; Tracy and Headley 182), and that external factors influence these perceptions (Mathers, Benson, and Newton 294), both positive and negative (Daisey 161). Additionally, the malleability of the teachers’ perceptions based on various experiences, including participating in an online graduate course, demonstrate the complexity of how teachers learn to teach writing (McQuitty 381).

Students in the course engaged in opportunities to make connections between theory, practice, and personal experiences with regard to the study and teaching of writing. As shown in the results, participants grew both as teachers of writing and as writers themselves. What is interesting in light of these findings is the role that learning online may have played in the success of these students since all interactions, assignments, and shared understandings were made in written form. Writing as a way of making meaning, forming connections to the content and to each other, and producing work for assessment was essential as it was the only form of communication in this asynchronous online course. The online blogs and discussions were a shared space for meaning making and for professional development as writers and teachers; they were also a rich source of data for analysis of emergent themes. Because these were spaces in which students collaboratively engaged in what Ferguson, Littleton, and Whitlock (118) call “exploratory dialogue,” it seems noteworthy that the online discussions were an essential part of supporting the students’ development both as writing teachers and as writers. Explicitly investigating this through focused interviews and perhaps comparisons between face-to-face and online contexts may be the next steps in understanding how online courses in writing pedagogy may best meet the needs of developing teachers.

Although more research is needed, our findings about the shifting perceptions of our participants as they embraced the online course concepts and experiences have implications for at least three audiences: (1)K-12 teachers of writing, (2)Higher education writing methods course developers, and (3)Administrators.

First, teachers of writing need to consider the message they send to their students about the purposes of writing and the value(s) of writing based on their own attitudes and methods of teaching. Do we want teachers to convey that writing is “punishment,” associate with pain, or a “pointless” task (Susan)? Do we aim to teach students to “...crank out a dry, structured answer to a prompt on the [state mandated] tests” (Angie)? Or do we “allow students to become apprentice writers so they can learn first-hand what writing should look like, sound like, and feel like” (Donna)?

Our second audience is higher education writing methods course developers. The findings from this small-scale study indicate that course content paired with engaging writing tasks designed to explore a variety of formats and genres can influence university students’ perceptions of writing and their plans for teaching writing in their own classrooms. This influence is thought-provoking for designing writing methods courses for teaching at the pre-service teacher (undergraduate) level as well as in-service teachers through professional development opportunities and/or graduate level courses. While this particular study was conducted solely online, we believe the implications reach out to hybrid course designs that offer face-to-face and online sessions, as well as traditional face-to-face courses.

Our third audience is the school administration. Principals, curriculum specialists, and other advocates for effective teaching for students’ learning in the area of writing should seek out and provide professional development opportunities for their K-12 teachers. It is critical for teachers to understand their own perceptions of writing, how their methods influence their students’ learning, and gain real experiences with alternatives to methods that may not be producing a truly literate society. School administrators can be the instructional leaders in their schools and school districts, guiding the thinking and practice of writing as a necessary part of developing engaged, democratic citizens as well as literate ones.

We recognize that our study cannot be generalized beyond our limited sample and acknowledge that the Hawthorne Effect or “reactivity” (Maxwell 108-109), where participants could share information they think the teacher/researcher wants to know (Mertens) may influence our data. However, the study does offer a starting point for considering how online courses on writing can benefit teachers as well as students. Given the increasing numbers of online courses and degrees, the need for more professional development in writing, and even political decisions such as whether to eliminate pay raises for teachers with advanced degrees, understanding how courses such as ours affect instruction is important.

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Appendix A: Directions for the practice assignment

- Please **briefly** describe the following in a short paper (1 - 3 pages) and upload it here.
- Describe your experiences with the writing process and student choice of writing in your K-12 experience.
  - Describe your honest feelings about writing and the teaching of writing.
  - Describe how you see yourself teaching writing to your students.
  - State what you hope to gain from this class.

Appendix B: Directions for the first blog reflection

You will use this blog to engage in the writing process throughout the semester. Click on “create blog” to create your blog.

Please respond to this prompt:

- What does it mean to be a writer?
- How do you view yourself as a writer? What connection, if any, does this have to do with teaching writing?
- What kind(s) of writing are your students expected to do?
- What do you really believe your students are capable of as writers?
- What would hold you back from engaging students in the writing process or student choice during writing (i.e., what are the constraints of your context)?
- How can you overcome these constraints?

Appendix C: Directions for the final blog reflection

Consider your learning about writing and the teaching of writing over the course of this semester. Has your thinking changed? Please address the following questions in a thorough and thoughtful way. Be sure to use examples to illustrate your ideas and to provide clarity.

1. What does it mean to be a writer?
2. How do you view yourself as a writer? What connection, if any, does this have to do with teaching writing?
3. What kind(s) of writing are your students expected to do?
4. What do you really believe your students are capable of as writers?
5. What would hold you back from engaging students in the writing process or student choice during writing (i.e., what are the constraints of your context)?
6. How can you overcome these constraints?

Appendix D: Follow up email questions

1. How did the course impact your writing instruction during the current school year (if applicable)?
2. Did you seek out further resources on writing instruction after taking the course?
3. What are you currently doing as a writer?

About the Authors

**Kelly N. Tracy** is an assistant professor of literacy education at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC. Her research focuses on elementary and middle grades writing pedagogy and writing professional development.

**Roya Q. Scales** is an assistant professor of literacy education and the program coordinator of elementary and middle grades education at Western Carolina University. Her research interests include adaptive teaching, teacher visioning, and literacy teacher education.

**Nancy Luke** is an assistant professor of elementary education and digital literacy at Western Carolina University. She conducts research related to online learning and in the thoughtful use of technology to support K12 instruction.

Writers Who Care: Advocacy Blogging as Teachers - Professors - Parents



Leah A. Zuidema, *Dordt College*  
Sarah Hochstetler, *Illinois State University*  
Mark Letcher, *Purdue University Calumet*  
Kristen Hawley Turner, *Fordham University*

We’re writing teachers; we teach writing teachers. And we’re parents of young writers. We can’t help but notice how writing education matters:

We have seen when a child abandons writing because she isn’t given the freedom to create beyond the formulas given to her.

We have seen the pride in a teenager’s face when his audience laughs at his anecdotes and *gets* his message.

We have heard from countless college and graduate students who remember the teacher who had incredible impact on their relationship to the written word.

From implicit curricula to planned pedagogies, writing lessons make a difference--for better, or for worse. We’re convinced that student writers--all of them, not just our sons and daughters--deserve the best possible writing education. We care how writing gets taught. Our personal experiences, our research, and the knowledge we’ve gained as parents, as teachers, and as teacher educators all compel us to believe that the best way for students to learn is through authentic writing.

Because we believe so strongly that writers develop through authentic writing instruction - and because we see policies that drive practices away from these goals - we have decided to speak up and to speak out. The blog *Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care* ([writerswhocare.wordpress.com](http://writerswhocare.wordpress.com)) was born from our frustration with current mandates that limit teachers and students to reductive writing. We know what good writing instruction looks like, and we want to share that knowledge with an audience beyond academia. In doing so, we hope to redefine what it means to be an academic writer and to encourage others to contribute their knowledgeable voices to a very public dialogue.

- The development of *Writers Who Care* brought challenges that we document here with the following purposes:
- For those interested in leading or participating in other advocacy blogging efforts, the window that we offer into our rhetorical decisions may serve as a roadmap to the kinds of choices and decision points that you, too, may potentially need to navigate. We hope that by sharing our rationale, our work may help you effectively connect with your desired audiences for the purposes you have in mind.
  - For those who wish to join our collective efforts by submitting blog entries for possible publication on *Writers Who Care*, the behind-the-scenes background that we share may provide more nuanced insight about the rhetorical considerations that can help you to shape an effective entry. We hope to equip you to write submissions that fit well with the genre, audiences, and purposes for our blog, as we would very much like to be joined by many others in effectively reaching friends, neighbors, teachers, board members, administrators, and politicians who need to be informed and motivated to advocate for authentic writing instruction.
  - For those who are writing teachers, writing researchers, and/or writing teacher educators, our reflections about our composing choices are meant to lay bare some of the writing work that blog writing entails. We seek to emphasize that blogging is indeed a significant form of writing that merits our attention, and to illustrate the complexity and potential power of blogging--as a genre, as a recursive rhetorical process, and as an authentic means of creating and reaching audiences for advocacy writing.

Any genre, any form of writing begins with purpose. So we, too, begin with ours.

Authentic Student Writing: It Matters

Student writing is *authentic* when it is composed for real audiences and real purposes. For example, asking twelfth graders to write and send letters to audiences they choose and for the purpose of trying to bring about changes that matter to them is more authentic than asking all twelfth graders to write about property tax hikes by sending letters “to the editor” with the teacher as the only reader. The purpose of the second writing activity, like the first, is to practice the conventions of a specific genre and rhetorical appeals to a precise agent. However, the second activity is merely a practice exercise, whereas a high school senior in the first example knows there is real potential for action from a respondent: a twelfth grader who writes to her principal to argue for more senior rights (*e.g.*, additional opportunities for student leadership; options to leave campus for lunch) knows

that the principal may react favorably and grant extended senior privileges--or may respond with a rejection.

Authentic writing enables an influential student learning experience because it connects the writer and audience in ways that have significance for the writer. Students see the impact of their writing beyond that of a letter grade, and they have an opportunity to *live* the effects of their composing. If the assignment were limited to an empty exercise of writing to the teacher as a substitute or “pretend” audience, as in the second example, an essential component of the writing experience would be lost. Similarly, if students’ writing were shared with their intended audiences but their topics were constrained to issues important only to the teacher, the students would have limited investment in writing decisions, and the relevance and impact of their writing experience would also be minimized. This is why authentic writing matters: it’s real, making the writing decisions more complex, the urgency more pressing, the learning more relevant and powerful.

Authentic writing need not be limited to letters or other genres used to effect change; it can also include creative genres such as poetry and fiction--if these are written for purposes that are more than merely “schoolish” (Whitney 57) and shared with the audiences they are intended for, which may be the teacher alone, or classmates, or others beyond the walls of the classroom. Digital writing, in particular, provides many opportunities for students to write for authentic audiences (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, and Hicks 4). Whether the audience is worldwide or locally based, the point is that authentic writing in the classroom gives student-writers opportunities to navigate and reflect upon composing decisions in real-world genres and situations as they write for audiences and purposes that extend beyond practicing (or simply repeating) rote steps.

### Why Advocacy about Authentic Student Writing is Needed

The absence of authentic writing in P-16 classrooms negatively impacts many aspects of the writing experience. Without authentic writing, classrooms can become isolated because written assignments limit interaction with potential audiences; teachers can grow weary of serving as the primary (and oftentimes artificial) audience for all genres of writing; students can come to see the process of composition as unrelated to the writing they do on their own, thus damaging the natural curiosity and excitement that comes from engaging with real audiences for real purposes. Perhaps most dangerously, students miss the chance to see writing as the powerful experience it can be, ripe with the potential to affect themselves and others, and instead see it as rigid and uninspiring, or as only a tool for testing.

In recent years we’ve witnessed a surge in threats against educators and education. Teachers and other educators are too often left out at crucial points in the shaping of standards, assessments, and policy decisions that directly affect classroom practice (as Kylene Beers illustrates so eloquently in her troubling essay “The Sound of Silence”). The problem is compounded by some in the news media who make sweeping statements that are unsupported and uninformed--yet shouted through the public megaphones of print, television, and the web, with the effect of eroding public confidence in teachers’ expertise and judgment and further undermining educators’ authority to lead in making decisions that impact student learning. Too often we read and hear baseless attacks like Evan Thomas’s characterization of teacher education in his claim that “teaching can be taught, to some degree, but not the way many graduate schools of education do it, with a lot of insipid or marginally relevant theorizing and pedagogy” (par. 3).

However, we have also seen the rise of teachers, parents, and others pushing back against initiatives, mandates, and proposals that are not in the best interest of schools and, more importantly, students. For example, in January 2013 teachers at Garfield High School in Seattle voted unanimously to boycott the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) test, and in spring a group of mothers in Texas successfully pressured the state to reduce testing in elementary grades (Dornfeld; Molnar). Weeks later protesters were “detained and ticketed” in Chicago for marching in opposition to the city’s sweeping school closures (Lutton). Still others have taken to their keyboards or picked up their pens to share insights on topics ranging from questioning the practice of linking student test scores to teacher salary and promotion, to celebrating the successes of singular teachers and echoing their frustrations (Azuz; Strauss). And all of this work was done by educators and citizens choosing to take action.

In the inaugural post for *Writers Who Care*, Peter Smagorinsky calls educators to action, asking us to “make [our] voices heard in the broader cacophony of the public debate about education” (“Carpe Diem in the Public Sphere, Part I”). In his follow-up post, he highlights his own regular contributions to public dialogue in literacy education through the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well those by fellow English educator Michael Moore, who writes a monthly piece for the *Savanna Daily News* (“Carpe Diem in the Public Sphere, Part II”). Smagorinsky further points to blogs and online newspapers (e.g., *The Patch*) as locations for discussion about advocacy and writing. In another post for *Writers Who Care*, Anne Elrod Whitney introduces her group of teacher-writers, local teachers who compose blogs for community consumption, letters to the superintendent and school board, articles for journals, “rants and diatribes, poems and promises” (“And Yet We Write”). Her final line encompasses what she and her group hope to promote: the idea that “to be a teacher-writer is to raise your voice and let your writing be as powerful as it can be.”

We agree, and we have established *Writers Who Care* as a space where multiple voices can be heard. Students need advocacy from all corners of the educational sphere, and these moments of advocacy can overlap and be further supported through a united position on the value of authentic writing. The authors of *Writers Who Care* have seen the ways that inauthentic writing assignments shape how our students and children come to understand writing, often resulting in the loss of opportunities for personal and intellectual growth as well as a decreased engagement in writing.

Our concern is not a new one--that much is clear in Paul Thomas’s review of a 1936 *English Journal* article calling

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for teachers to redefine and make curricular space for “creative” writing in which the student-writer chooses the subject, form, and length (LaBrant 293). In today’s educational and political climate, however, the need for advocacy for authentic writing is pressing and grows with increasing urgency, and we believe that it will take our collective voices to foster significant change. We therefore invite the perspectives of teachers, professors, and parents, and we hope for broad contributions to the blog.

Teachers need to be freed from political agendas that propose to “reform” the teaching of writing in ways that are not aligned with what educators know to be best practice. Parents need agency in decision-making that impacts the way their children learn to read and write, and they need resources for supporting developing writers at home. Professionals in writing teacher education need the power to create curricula and further develop their licensure programs in ways that aren’t burdened by corporatized measures of success. To advocate for authentic writing we must advocate for and as teachers, professors, and parents who speak for writers at all levels of development. Which brings us to our story about a blog that aims to facilitate this goal of collective advocacy.

### Blogging for Advocacy

Our blog was born from an ever-growing sense of urgency that we needed to react to the political landscape affecting education while also being proactive to positively influence writing instruction in as many classrooms as possible. The four of us are members of the Conference on English Education’s (CEE) Commission on Writing Teacher Education (CWTE), and during NCTE’s annual convention in November 2012, our commission met to discuss growing anxiety over recent state and institutional mandates, national reform movements, external pressures on English teacher education, and their potential impact on writers, writing, and writing teacher education. Colleagues related stories that included concerns such as the omission of important genres of writing in the Common Core State Standards, collective worry over the marginalization of writing in Pearson’s teacher performance assessment (edTPA), and fears that corporate groups and other non-educators have the power to change how writing is taught, assessed, and even defined.

As we concluded the meeting, several Commission members indicated a desire to participate in a more political dialogue on these shared concerns and to offer voice to these conversations from the perspectives of writing teachers and writing teacher educators, as well as from parents, community members, and other invested parties. Members of the commission regrouped in July 2013 at the CEE summer conference to outline a potential plan to agitate for change. The result was a collective blog, launched in September 2013 and appropriately named for the multiple roles embodied by people in the room--*Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care*. Its subtitle speaks to the larger purpose of the writing: “A blog advocating for authentic writing instruction.”

Although we considered a number of different avenues for advocacy, it was a series of linked rhetorical considerations that led us to begin a collective blog. Foremost in our minds were the audiences we wanted to reach and the purposes we wanted to achieve--which related directly to our understanding of the problems we were trying to address and our assumptions about how we might effect change. As we reflected on themes that had emerged in our Commission conversations over the years, we realized that we wanted to take action in ways that could help us to make inroads in our local schools--as well as in classrooms around the country, even those where our connections might be limited to a shared desire that students everywhere learn to value writing, to understand its power, and to do it well. We wanted to advocate in ways that could garner the attention of our neighbors, of our friends, and of writing teachers everywhere. We wanted to educate our readers and ourselves about what exists, what is good, and what is possible (Berlin 78), and we wanted to do so with a nimbleness that would allow us to respond quickly to new situations, events, and ideas.

Our own roles and situations mattered, too. As parents, we wanted to offer encouragement and support to those who teach our children and to build positive, trusting relationships with them--without settling for inauthentic writing instruction. As teacher educators, we wanted to be allies with the teachers in our neighborhood schools, fostering individual connections--while also raising our voices collectively. We recognized that the more of us that could be involved and give voice to our advocacy, the better, and we sought to find a way to have ongoing contact and involvement. We realized that we needed to amplify our voices in an already public conversation about education--but we also understood that adding publications to traditional academic venues would preach to the academic choir rather than reaching the broader public audience we had in mind. We were mindful that our experience and expertise as writing teacher educators is not often sought in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We considered committing to blogging independently (with each of us maintaining a separate blog), but we also faced a pragmatic concern: who among us could take on a sustained writing commitment when so many other important tasks also demanded our time? And how would we link our voices? When Leah raised the possibility of blogging collaboratively, an energetic series of “What if...?” explorations from our commission helped us to decide that it was time to begin advocating together for authentic writing instruction through a collective blog.

Under Mark’s leadership, we developed a purpose statement for the blog:

*We are teacher educators, classroom teachers, students, parents, and community members, and we have created this blog to speak to these five audiences. Collaboratively, we hope to:*

- *Spotlight and celebrate the powerful writing work that teachers and students currently do, and illustrate how that work could potentially be affected by certain educational and/or political policies.*

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- *Circulate information about teaching practices and policies, so that our audiences can advocate strongly for students and teachers.*
- *Address how research affects writing in schools and communities, based on our experience in the field of writing instruction.*
- *Strengthen the connections and community among universities, K-12 schools, teachers, parents, and students.*

*By working together, as well as with others who advocate for the teaching profession, our audiences can learn about writing, the teaching of writing, and the power of engaging young writers in craft and story. We will offer our informed advocacy and arguments so that others can advocate and speak loudly as well.*

Determining this purpose and scope was an important starting point, but as a lead team, the four of us soon realized that we had much additional work before us in order to bring the blog to life, to maintain a fresh and well-spoken advocacy presence, and to foster ongoing conversation with an ever-growing audience. Though only a few short months have passed since we decided in July to begin this blog, we’ve encountered a multitude of significant composing choices. We highlight a few of them here to further illustrate the decision points we are encountering along the way in our journey in advocacy blogging.

**Designing, Curating, Editing, Authoring, Publishing: Blogging with Care**

As with our decision to blog, our decisions about *how* to blog were also guided by considerations about the rhetorical space that we wanted to open for writers and readers. From the beginning of our discussions about collective blogging, Commission members were especially eager to effectively bring together the diverse voices of professors, teachers, and parents while also reaching out to an equally diverse audience. We recognized the line too often drawn between university faculty and K-12 teachers, and we were mindful of the reality that parent voices are often left out entirely from conversations about education. We wanted to create a space where these different, yet connected voices could be heard in tandem, advocating for students. We needed a composing space that was inviting to teacher-writers and even to parents, and yet we also hoped that our university colleagues would see writing for the blog as a valuable dimension of their professional writing -- rather than a distraction from it. Furthermore, we wanted to ensure that the voices of individual authors would be good representations of the Commission’s collective views, and we sought to design our blog (and the behind-the-screens processes) in ways that would support authors in putting forward their best writing on topics of professional and personal importance to them.

Given these complexities, the Commission elected to establish the blog as a co-edited forum and to appoint the four of us as editors responsible for implementing the vision: developing the design, curating entries, reviewing submissions, dialoguing with authors, editing manuscripts, and publishing entries.

*Designing and Launching*

After a weekend of brainstorming at the CEE Conference in Ft. Collins, we had the draft of a purpose statement, many topical ideas for writing, and a team of four individuals committed to bringing the work of the larger group to fruition. Launching the blog proved daunting. What design should we adopt? Who would author the first post? Where would we go from there? How often would we post? How would we vet the submissions? These questions hit us immediately, and for our own sense of clarity but also for the sake of the authors we would work with, we wanted to identify from the start a clear sense of genre, audience, purpose, and situation--the “rhetorical GAPS” that writers consider (Bush and Zuidema 119).

As Mark took on the work of finalizing the group’s purpose statement, Kristen began development on what we call “the back end.” Through discussions with other colleagues and educational bloggers, she decided to host the blog via Wordpress, a free tool that will allow for growth in purpose as the blog evolves. In collaboration with the other lead team members, she created a shell that included pages for content (About, Authors, Research Briefs & Talking Points, Resources) and prepared to make the blog “live” and open for public reading.

Concerned with aesthetics, Kristen considered the visual appeal to readers. She wanted a clean homepage that included an appropriate image. She also knew that neither she, nor anyone else on the lead team, had the expertise or time to create an original design. Therefore, she searched Wordpress templates for a free shell (as we do not have funding to support this endeavor) that would highlight individual posts without being visually overwhelming. She drafted many versions of the blog interface before identifying a neutral template that matched form with our desired function. The clean, clutter-free design (see Figure 1) met the aforementioned goals while also allowing for authors to include unique images that could enhance the visual draw of an entry for those encountering blog posts in image-rich environments such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Flipboard.

With the design in place, the group was ready to launch the blog. Sarah prepared a post to introduce the blog and its purpose (Hochstetler, “From Idea to Action: Welcome to the Blog”), and with the click of the mouse, *Writers Who Care* opened to world viewing. The four of us shared with our networks, breathed a quick sigh of relief, and immediately began the process of preparing the next post.

*Curating and Editing*

The first call for submissions to *Writers Who Care* went to the group that imagined it. We invited Peter Smagorinsky, a leader in the field of writing instruction and a regularly published op-ed author, to write the inaugural posts as a call to action.

We also asked members of the Commission on Writing Teacher Education to write, and for those that accepted the call, we assigned publication dates. Having decided that posts would be editorially reviewed, the four lead team members agreed to share responsibilities. Sarah would communicate with authors and set publishing dates; Leah and Mark would assume lead editing responsibilities during the first two months of operation; Kristen would handle the publishing; everyone would comment on author drafts.

We initially imagined a weekly process that included author submissions, editorial comments, and lead editor response to the author, who would revise the submission for publication the following week. We quickly learned that our expectations were not realistic and that our process needed improvement. Our motto among ourselves became “no guilt.” We were all committed to the work of the blog; we all trusted each other to get the work done; we all knew that this work came in addition to our regular roles as teacher educators. “No guilt” freed us to work systematically but flexibly, and our first decision under our new motto was to do away with specific publication dates. We still hoped to publish regularly, but we no longer expected ourselves to publish weekly or burdened our authors with impractical revision deadlines.

Shortly into the blog’s life, with submissions rolling in from CWTE members who had committed to writing, we received notifications from interested authors via our “Author” page, and we realized that we needed an avenue for communicating with these authors--many of whom were from beyond our CWTE circle--to help them develop their ideas into blog posts that aligned with the Commission’s goals. Though these processes are still under development, we have developed the following guidelines, which also give a window into how we work together:

*Manuscripts may be solicited or unsolicited. Solicited manuscripts evolve from a discussion among Commission members, who agree on a list of current, relevant, and important topics. Editors request submissions from professors, teachers, other educators, or parents who can speak to these topics. When an author agrees to a topic, editors assign a submission date, a tentative publication date, and a lead editor. Submissions are reviewed by a minimum of three editors, with the lead editor making final recommendations to the author. When the author re-submits a revised draft suitable for publication, the lead editor completes final edits to the text and then informs the publishing editor that it is ready to post. The publishing editor attends to final formatting and posting. All editors announce the post via their social networks.*

*Unsolicited manuscripts are handled in a similar fashion with a few caveats. In this process potential authors submit topic ideas through the submission form on the blog. An author coach then contacts the individual and helps to focus the topic and offers the writer tips for crafting an effective Writers Who Care post. When the author has finalized the submission, the author coach reads the draft and either (1) provides suggestions for revision to the author or (2) submits it to the editorial queue. Once the submission enters the editorial queue, editors follow the process outlined for solicited manuscripts.*

As our guidelines suggest, we as an editorial team agreed that in our editing roles, we commit to serving as editorial coaches who respond to authors, guide them as they revise their writing to meet the GAPS of the blog, and then finalize contributions for publication. As teachers of writing who want to encourage many voices to publish their stories, we feel strongly that mentoring writers is important. Unlike traditional academic journals that accept or reject ideas, we hope to develop ideas into published pieces that represent a variety of voices.

As we’ve refined our editorial process, we have also revised how we assign the lead editing duties. When we began the blog in September, we assigned target publishing dates for all potential authors and then worked through rotations where Leah, Mark, and then Sarah each took a month’s worth of lead editor duties in connection with the authors whose work was “due” to be published that month. After a three-month trial of this arrangement and our move away from a weekly publishing deadline, we realized that we needed a new process. We wanted to ensure that we could publish unsolicited entries in a timely way without having to worry about holding slots open on a publication calendar. We now place submissions into our editing queue in the order in which they are received, and Leah, Mark, or Sarah takes a turn working as lead author with three contributing authors before passing the lead editor role on to the next editor. Continuing in her role as the publishing editor, Kristen shares with the other editors in the responsibility of commenting on submitted drafts, but also attends to publishing details, including final formatting issues and the inclusion of images into the post.

*Authoring and Publishing*

Our first published posts provide models for writers from the perspectives of teacher (Montgomery, “Narrative Writing: The Orphan Child of the Common Core), professor (Dunn, “Engagement as Enzyme for Learning: Are Students Excited about Writing?”) and parent (Turner, “It Deserves an Exclamation Point!”). We also encourage authors to submit “Research Briefs” or “Talking Points” that distill academic research into usable, printable guides for parents and teachers as they advocate for authentic writing instruction in their local schools.

Through trial and error, we have developed a system that streamlines the editorial and publishing process (and makes the lives of the authors, editors, and our publishing editor much easier). Though not required, we prefer drafts to be submitted via Google Docs, and editors collaboratively respond to submissions using the comment tool in Docs. We ask that authors link to relevant content and that those links be embedded in the text. To meet the visual needs of readers and to better publicize

our blog, we also ask authors to submit an image to include in the post. Finally, authors are asked to include a two-sentence biography--which may further highlight their work as writers through description and embedded links.

Authors retain copyright to their work, and, in fact, the Commission encourages authors to consider their posts as single entries into extended conversations on their topics. We hope that authors will revise and expand their work and resubmit it to other publications that contribute to public discourse about writing in schools. Authors are required to secure necessary permissions to post student work, images of students, or school and teacher names; submission of the manuscript indicates the author has secured these permissions.



Authors may expect that the lead editor assigned to their submission will guide them in shaping the piece rhetorically, will help to ensure that all necessary content has been included, and will verify that links are working and active. We’ve found it delightful to work with authors whether they wear one or more of the hats of teacher, professor, or parent, and it is our hope that this article will further widen the net of contributing authors for *Writers Who Care*.

Advocacy Blogging as Professional Development

The act of creating a blog has produced welcome and surprising ripples in our professional lives, ripples that extend both outward to our professional community of English educators, and inward to our own beliefs and practices related to the teaching of writing.

Building and Strengthening Community through Blogging

Each of us as editors finds support within our circle of English Education colleagues; this blog began because of the collaborative ties that we and our Commission co-members have formed over the years. Creating and maintaining the blog, though, has offered us as editors opportunities to work with many other professionals in our field. We have reached out to colleagues who we mostly know through their work, and others who are personal friends; we felt that each of these individuals had perspectives and experiences that would lend themselves ideally to the scope and purpose of the blog. They are also individuals whose viewpoints, whether we realized it at the time or not, fit well with our own: these authors generously offered complementary perspectives as well as new ways to stretch and grow our thinking. Our writers are teachers and parents as well, individuals who care deeply about the workload and public perception of teachers, and who wish to lend their informed voices to the conversation. In this way, we have strengthened connections that already existed for us. But this project has also introduced us to other colleagues in English Education and in even wider circles of public and private school teachers and administrators.

In short, the blog has acted as a connective net, spreading our professional circles wider with each successive post. We believe that open access is the heart of connected learning (Ito *et al.*) and that peer review need not be limited to a pre-publishing process. In this spirit, *Writers Who Care* authors are encouraged to self-promote their and others’ posts and to engage in conversations such as #engchat and #literacies. Our readers are urged to share our writings freely (rather than being encumbered by the need to seek permissions and navigate copyright concerns). Peer review is facilitated by the blog design, which invites public comments on posts, and by our ethic of encouraging authors and readers to engage in ongoing conversation within the blog space as well as in other public forums such as Twitter.

These connections are important not only for the blog’s success, but also for our professional development as teachers

and scholars. Each new post leads to additional stories, resources and organizations that can support not only the work of the blog, but also the field of English Education as a whole. Our commission has been striving for years for ways to effectively disseminate key works on writing pedagogy and writing teacher education; more traditional options such as annotated bibliographies have been discussed previously, but the task always proved too big and time-consuming for one or even several commission members to undertake. In the blog, we now have opened the doors to an evolving and immediately-available collection of works, accessible not only to commission members, but to anyone who visits the blog. The open access element of this project may be one of the most attractive elements to all of us. The research-based posts included at our site offer valuable support and information for any teachers, parents and administrators who may not have ready access (or time) to read through research studies in order to find support for their practices and policies. In this way, *Writers Who Care* is serving one of our original purposes: circulating information at the point of need, so that others may use it effectively.

Reaching out in this way, and working with post authors from outside our circles, has also given us the opportunity to connect emerging scholars and energetic teachers with experienced teacher-researchers and scholars. As an editorial board, we offer feedback on all submissions, and the rotating lead editors work more closely with authors to tailor their posts specifically for our blog’s intended audiences. We hope to involve even more “new voices” in *Writers Who Care*, and a next step the editorial board is currently implementing is the addition of a graduate student member. As with so many other Web 2.0 tools, the blog has increased personal and professional connections and broadened our professional community.

Refining Our Practices

As writing teacher educators, we as editors also find that our work for *Writers Who Care* is influencing the way we think about the preparation of our own teacher candidates and graduate students. The blog can certainly offer more resources for us to pass along to our students, but even more importantly, our students can now see that there is a supportive community for them when they become teachers, and that their own voices have value and weight in the field.

We are encouraging our students to submit posts to the blog, and we agree that our responsibilities as teacher educators now include leading our students through exploration of the rhetorical complexities and opportunities of blog authorship. Students who post can acquire valuable experience and reach a wide readership. Publishing through a collective, edited blog affords a rare opportunity for students to experience a full cycle of peer review--from the inception of an idea to authoring, from working with an editor and revising to experiencing readers’ responses. The immediacy of blog posting is something that *Writers Who Care* authors have commented on before; the ability to reach an audience in a matter of days or weeks, as opposed to the months-long pipeline associated with print academic journals, is an attractive change of pace.

Although posts may be short and the path to publication is relatively succinct, blog entries aren’t simple to write. Writing for a blog with a wide audience requires a great deal of sensitivity and audience awareness, and authors face composing problems and questions as nuanced as those in any other authentic writing situation. One of our reasons for encouraging student submissions is to broaden our students’ definitions of *writing* and to further develop and expand their understanding of the complex rhetorical decisions faced by writers.

However, as in any other case of authentic writing instruction, our goals extend far beyond providing students with practice in needed writing skills or with fodder for their theorizing. We hope that in writing for a blog audience, the preservice and inservice teachers in our classrooms see exciting potential and opportunities--as well as responsibilities--for participating in public conversations on education and other significant issues. Our students need to see that academic publishing can, and should, now include outlets such as blogs and open-access journals. As academics, our scholarly conversations are read carefully by a relatively small audience, with some exceptions. But the posts on *Writers Who Care* have already reached thousands of individuals across the globe, in only a few short months. While we do not advocate the dismissal of our established academic forums, we feel there is ample room in the field for more immediate and direct publishing venues, of which blogging is one example. If our own students choose to pursue these avenues, their ideas and research can reach a wide audience, and with an advocacy angle, provide much-needed support and information for teachers and parents.

Merging Professional Expertise, Public Citizenship and Personal Passion: Advocacy Blogging as Academic Contribution

As indicated in the previous sections, this blog was born from a sense of urgency and collaboration. In the few months it has been in existence, it has become a labor of love for the four of us on the editorial team, but a labor nonetheless. We share that reality here not as a complaint, but to help those interested in a deeper knowledge of this type of writing work: it is important to understand how collective, edited blogging requires much more than simply pasting in an author’s submission and pressing the “publish” button. It demands editors’ ongoing time commitment to collaborative work and to behind-the-screens processes. We had not anticipated, back during our July brainstorming, the time and thinking required to bring such a project to fruition, and more importantly, to maintain and nurture it. The multiple, sometimes competing commitments that we have outlined in this article posed challenges to the editors as we sought from our first meetings to achieve a balance between the expectations of the academic community and the possibilities of connected writing.

In effect, we have been learning how to edit an academic journal for a new era. Our work has included soliciting manuscripts, reading unsolicited submissions, guiding authors through revisions, preparing manuscripts for final publication, and conferring regularly with each other about our posting schedules, editing responsibilities, and other logistical tasks. Though

the work is additive to our everyday teaching, scholarly, and administrative duties, we do it gladly. The blog is an evolving project that affords us room for our creativities and passions, one that feels truly authentic and that can reach a wide audience almost immediately.

By taking on the responsibilities we have described, we hope that we are also helping to expand current notions about what it means to be an academic. As our colleagues in the digital humanities have argued, some contemporary “models of research, pedagogy, and public engagement... unsettle our understanding of units of scholarship” (Galaraza, Heppler, and Seefeldt, par. 1). Tenure and promotion processes place high value on publications for other academics. However, as experts in literacy education, we must rethink our contributions to the field. If we want to effect change in teaching and learning, we must become part of the conversation that surrounds policy makers. In a digital age, this conversation can be shifted through the fast-paced world of Web 2.0-- where individual readers share compelling writing via social networks, and where the collective voices of teachers, professors, and parents make a difference.

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**About the Authors**

*Leah A. Zuidema* serves at Dordt College as Associate Provost and Dean for Curriculum and Instruction. She hopes her work as a literacy sponsor will make a significant difference in the writing lives of her daughters, her students and faculty colleagues, and in classrooms near and far. She can be reached at Leah.Zuidema@dordt.edu.

*Sarah Hochstetler* is an Assistant Professor of English Education at Illinois State University, where she teaches writing methods as well as other undergraduate and graduate pedagogy-based courses. Her research interests include writing teacher identity development, and preservice teacher assessment and its impact on the teaching of writing. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys mentoring former students as they navigate their early years as practicing secondary teachers. She can be reached at shochst@ilstu.edu.

*Mark Letcher* is an Assistant Professor of English Education at Purdue University Calumet, where he oversees the English Teaching program, and teaches courses in ELA methods, composition, young adult literature, and reading across the curriculum. With Kristen Turner, he co-chairs the Conference on English Education’s Commission on Writing Teacher Education, the organization behind Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care. He also co-chairs the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Special Interest Group on English Education-Composition connections. He can be reached at markeletcher@gmail.com.

*Kristen Hawley Turner* is an associate professor of English education and contemporary literacies at Fordham University in New York City. Her research focuses on the intersections between technology and literacy, and she works with teachers across content areas to implement effective literacy instruction and to incorporate technology in meaningful ways. She is a Teacher Consultant for the National Writing Project and the director of the Fordham Digital Literacies Collaborative. She can be reached at krturner@fordham.edu.

## Of Thresholds and Springboards: Teaching Them, Teaching Each Other

E.A. Williams, *University of St. Francis*

Frank Farmer, *University of Kansas*

*Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.*

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

The past two decades in composition studies have seen an increase in scholarship devoted to the course typically referred to as the composition practicum, especially to the relationship of the faculty who teach the course to the new teachers who are enrolled in it. The questions raised in this area of scholarship include: Should there be “several faculty contributing their own approaches to teaching the practicum” in a single program, as Belanger and Gruber (2005) suggest (138)? How important is it that whoever teaches the practicum be what Marshall (2004) defines as a professional in composition studies pedagogy (1-17; see also, Stenberg 8-11)? How can a practicum help a new teacher of writing use composition theory in creating a curriculum that, as Stancliff and Daly Goggins (2007) write, “models the learner-centered practices that so many of us want new teachers to take into their own undergraduate classrooms” (12)? Do administrative or faculty attitudes encourage resistance to this course, and if so, how? Is there an institutional tendency, as Stenberg (2005) claims, to think of new instructors as “‘empty vessels’ who are in some way deficient,” despite bringing their own “complicated pedagogical history to the classroom” (64-5)? These are but a few of the questions that scholars have investigated recently.

One issue that has received more limited treatment is the relationship between the faculty who teach practicum courses and the advanced masters and doctoral students who may assist them. This isn’t an uncommon arrangement, despite the relative lack of attention to it in the literature. As the scholarship reveals, the particular duties of the practicum assistant differ widely from institution to institution. In some programs, a few advanced teaching assistants work with small groups of instructors who are new to teaching or who are new to the program but have some basic experience with teaching; these teaching groups may or may not be used in addition to a practicum course. In another model for practicum assistantships, an advanced Teaching Assistant or graduate student assists the faculty member with the (often overwhelming) duties of teaching the practicum, and the faculty member mentors the assistant in teaching and administering a graduate-level course on composition pedagogy. Of particular interest in this body of scholarship is the question of mentorship. Long, Holberg, and Taylor (2002), for example, contrast an “apprenticeship” model of mentorship in which assistants are on the disempowered end of a unidirectional power structure—less mentees than “gofers”—with a “collegial” model in which assistants are endowed with administrative duties and have the power to shape the programs they administer. Certainly, the mentoring relationship between the practicum faculty and assistants warrants further investigation, since its consequences exceed the two individuals involved and extend to the group of new teachers to whom they are immediately responsible and to the program in which they teach.

Before we discuss our mutual experience in this course, however, we wish to make clear from the outset that our course was considerably more than “just a practicum.” Its official title was, in fact, “The Study and Teaching of Writing,” and in our graduate catalogue, the course was described as “a survey of major concepts and issues in the study of writing, especially as applied to teaching composition. Practices in writing pedagogy are also discussed, and students’ teaching of composition is observed and explored” (University). Yes, our course was undeniably a practicum, but it was much more than that. And yes, we are quite aware of and sensitive to the representational issues raised by Dobrin (2005) in *Don’t Call It That: The Composition Practicum*—the title of which says much about how the practicum is still widely discredited as a “how to,” “nuts and bolts” introduction to writing instruction. This was not the course we taught. But for purposes of convenience, we will refer to our course using the familiar, shorthand term, *practicum*, and trust our readers to keep in mind that our course was also “an introduction to composition theory ... to pedagogical theory, to histories of composition studies ... and to larger disciplinary questions about writing,” to borrow from Dobrin’s inventory of *what else* the composition practicum typically entails (2). Having made this qualification, then, we offer a little more context about our circumstances.

In the fall of 2010, we found ourselves co-teaching our version of the traditional practicum. Frank is an associate professor, and at the time, Erin was a doctoral candidate. In our program, the assistant—under the title “Faculty Intern” that semester, which was changed in subsequent semesters to “Teaching Mentor”—fits into the second assistantship paradigm (mentioned above) as an advanced graduate student who gains professional experience with teaching a composition practicum by assisting the faculty member assigned to teach it. Our practicum, as we have just noted and further explain below, is a course in both the study and teaching of composition, and it entails administrative and mentoring responsibilities, which Frank and

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Erin shared that semester. As part of our duties, we conducted teaching observations of all new Graduate Teaching Assistants (as they are titled in our department), reviewed one set of their graded student papers, and advised them on the assignments they developed for one unit. An individual conference with each teaching assistant followed each of these administrative tasks. We also consulted with teaching assistants about student problems and successes, lesson planning, and other everyday pedagogical issues. In this respect, Erin was very much a junior colleague to Frank in the practicum, but because she was, in reality, still apprenticed—that is, because she was not Frank’s peer—she did not share his teaching or grading responsibilities.

The positive results, and the need for more discussion about such assistantships, inspired us to attempt to convey some of what we learned as a result of our collaboration. Here, we will relate the difficulties we faced and the satisfactions we experienced as we negotiated (and re-negotiated) our relationship over the course of that semester. Our approach is one that might best be described as a reflective dialogue, a written conversation structured around two major themes, locations and tensions, that we found formative to some of the events, problems, and insights we experienced that semester. Our hope is that this retrospective will be useful to other practicum faculty and assistants as they negotiate similar circumstances.

### Locations

*Erin*

One of the first conversations that Frank and I had about this position after I agreed to serve as the Faculty Intern was about our respective locations in the contexts of our mentoring relationship and our shared responsibilities. Having a mutual understanding of our respective and shared locations was key to maneuvering effectively in these contexts. The most immediate and perhaps delicate of these contexts was our mentoring relationship, but thankfully it was also the context with the longest history since Frank had been my professor, my masters exam director, and a member of my dissertation committee. In offering me the opportunity to collaborate with him in teaching the practicum, Frank was graciously offering me a new opportunity to learn from him as an instructor and administrator. Frank anticipated some of the problems of location that could emerge in these teaching and administrative contexts if we didn’t discuss them early on. In other words, he worked from his location as my mentor in a previously existing context to make it possible for me to learn as much as possible in a new context as his mentee. His foresight in initiating this conversation helped me to understand my own location as his mentee and junior colleague.

In that early conversation, we had to come to a mutual understanding of the implications of my location between him, as a tenured faculty member, and the new teachers that we were mentoring. We had to strike a balance between my appearing to be just another graduate student—someone to whom these new teachers might take their casual complaints about the course and its tenured instructor—and my appearing to be purely an administrator who cared only about monitoring their teaching. Because the Faculty Intern had no instructional responsibilities in the class, I used my presence as an auditor in the class, which met twice weekly, as an opportunity to demonstrate that Frank and I were a team when it came to the course and its administrative responsibilities. We didn’t always have the same responses to the everyday pedagogical issues that the new teachers wanted to discuss in class, but Frank helped to situate me as part of the instructional team and as a colleague by asking me directly for my input and then affirming my authority by explaining to the new teachers how my suggestions could be suitable alternatives to his own. In looking back, I realize that I couldn’t have struck that balance by myself; my location as a point between the new teachers and the tenured faculty had to be continuously and clearly validated by Frank as the semester progressed.

At the same time that I was learning about how to locate myself as both a mentee and a junior colleague, I was also acting as a mentor to the new instructors whom Frank and I oversaw in the practicum. While it may seem to be a contradiction—a mentee who is also a mentor—it was in fact a beneficial arrangement. Without having a mentor to help me understand and structure the contexts in which I interacted with these new teaching assistants in our program, it would have taken quite a bit of imagination on my part to determine what the nature of my interactions with new teachers of composition should entail. Frank helped me to understand myself as someone who was close enough to the experiences of the new teachers—as a graduate student and former teaching assistant myself—to be empathetic while also distanced enough—by time, experience, and administrative and mentorship duties—to offer guidance and support with authority.

*Frank*

When I was first presented with a list of experienced teaching assistants who might be suitable to assist in the teaching of the practicum, and when I saw Erin’s name on that list, I knew immediately who would be my choice. As Erin mentioned, we already knew each other from earlier courses, and I was well acquainted with her intelligence, her good humor and her professionalism. More than this, I was also aware that Erin possessed an impressive knowledge of digital technology that, frankly, I did not have. This knowledge, as I anticipated, would prove beneficial to the success of our practicum, especially since I had redesigned the 101 common syllabus to include an emphasis on applications of new media to visual rhetoric. And while, early on, I may have flattered myself, believing that I could address any and all technical problems that arose with this course, it soon became apparent that this clearly was not the case. In retrospect, I remain convinced that our practicum would not have been as successful as it was without the many contributions that Erin made—not only technical contributions, but pedagogical and scholarly ones as well.

In her opening comment, Erin alludes to finding herself in the middle of a paradox, aware of performing the dual roles of mentee (to me) and mentor (to our new teaching assistants). Of course, it is not possible to understand Erin’s rather vexed

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location (and mine, too) without some basic familiarity with academic hierarchies. Erin occupied a muddled middle because, at the time we taught this course, she was both a graduate student and an instructor of graduate students—an unusual situation, to say the least, and certainly one that was negotiated in subtle ways over the course of that term. But, I often wondered, were our new teachers aware of this departure from the usual order of things?

I suppose what we’re talking about here is the question of legitimacy—or perhaps more accurately, the classroom authority that derives from legitimacy. In many ways, what Erin and I struggled with paralleled a similar challenge that our teaching assistants faced. New teachers, many of them with no teaching experience whatsoever, often have considerable anxiety about their classroom authority, and many soon learn that such authority varies according to gender, race, age, experience, and of course, their location within the academic hierarchy. Based on what I have observed, especially over the last decade or so, some first-year students have now begun to question their 101 teachers’ authority based on whether or not their teachers are fully credentialed professors. While it would be easy to dismiss this complaint as the sort of casual grousing that inevitably occurs among students, I think it instructive to note that college ranking agencies consider this a factor as well, and include the percentage of sections taught by teaching assistants and part-time lecturers as one of their evaluative criterion. As it turns out, some of our first-year students and ranking agencies share at least one guiding assumption—namely, that good teaching directly corresponds to academic rank, credentials, and location within the hierarchy. I think this is a highly questionable assumption.

But I wondered: Did our new teachers, then, look upon Erin in the same way that possibly some of their students looked upon them? Did they question her instructional authority, say, because they knew that she too was a graduate student, someone in the process of finishing her doctorate? Erin might be able to answer these questions better than I, but among our new teachers I noticed nothing but respect, appreciation, and positive regard for Erin. Certainly, this had much to do with Erin’s comportment, her abiding professionalism and goodwill. But I think that this may have had something to do with the fact that neither of us made her authority an issue that had to be explicitly addressed. We simply proceeded on the assumption that she and I both possessed authority for the class we were teaching, and that was that.

#### Erin

Frank wonders whether I encountered any resistance from the practicum students because I was relatively more proximate to them, both professionally and personally (most of our program’s new teaching assistants are in their mid-to-late twenties, as was I when I served as the Faculty Intern). I couldn’t guess as to the motivations behind any resistance I encountered, which was negligible, but it’s quite possible. When I did encounter resistance from the new and experienced teachers whom I mentored, it usually had to do with whether that person and I had differences of opinion about how best to handle a classroom or pedagogical situation. In general, my philosophy regarding my administrative and mentoring duties was that diplomacy was the best way to respond to resistance. For example, when faced with resistance to suggestions about how to restructure a tricky class activity or clarify an over-written assignment, my first task was to understand what the instructor’s original intent for the assignment was by restating my understanding of it to the instructor. Then I discussed with the teacher a range of possible approaches that could make the activity or assignment more effective while still honoring the instructor’s original intentions and, if needed, helping the instructor to bring those intentions in line with the objectives of the unit and the course. My experience as the recipient of this sort of mentoring told me that this was the best way to help instructors who are new to teaching or new to our program learn how to adapt what they know about writing, the classroom, and their own students to teaching the first-semester composition course in our program.

The resistance I encountered occurred during the private conferences I held with the new teachers in my office about their teaching observations, sets of graded papers, and assignment drafts. I can’t recall any time at which I met with overt resistance in the classroom. There, Frank was physically present to remind the new teachers of the fact that he authorized my location in the hierarchy. In my office, however, it was probably easier for instructors to see me as one of them and to forget the tension between us since I was not, in fact, one of them. It took some time and reflection for me to realize that when I encountered resistance, it was usually more about my administrative and pedagogical *authority* rather than (or as much as) my *ability* to offer good advice. I also realized that I couldn’t take resistance personally. The new teachers couldn’t be expected to know about the months of training and years of study that preceded my internship. Frank and I presumed that we didn’t need to have a class discussion about my professional background, and rightly so. The new teachers weren’t in a position to judge for themselves whether my training was sufficient to help them. It made sense, then, that the practicum students’ frustrations could lead them to question my authority, just as they might any other instructor or mentor with whom they might be frustrated. I considered that my responding defensively or allowing these questions to undermine my confidence would only exacerbate tense situations and threaten to undo all the work that Frank and I had done to establish my authority and create an atmosphere in which the new teachers could feel comfortable expressing their concerns and frustrations related to the practicum.

The contrast between the classroom and the office also taught me that that the physical location in which mentoring happens affects the ways that new teachers react to their mentors and administrators. The closer proximity, personally and physically, of being in my office was more often than not an opportunity for the new teachers to be heard as individuals, to get personalized guidance, and to have their particular concerns addressed. Even though the closer proximity also meant an increased risk of sorts, it was an invaluable part of the mentoring experience, which always entails risk. I have wondered since then if my experiences are common for more experienced faculty and administrators. I wonder if I was (or am still) looking at

my experiences from the point of view of a graduate student or that of a junior administrator, and if I managed in the end to find a balance rather than a schizophrenia<sup>1</sup> between the two roles.

#### Frank

I was struck by your use of the term *schizophrenia*, Erin, to describe your sense of being pulled in two opposing directions at once, or rather, of having to perform two contrasting roles simultaneously. Your word choice reminded me of a distinction I have noticed several times over the years. How or where I came by this nugget, I don’t recall, but I am aware that one way schizophrenia has been redefined is to claim that it is not a break with reality, but rather, *a break with sincerity*. It would be hard to gainsay the fact that we both had plenty of reality to deal with as we taught this practicum! Truth be told, neither of us could afford to have a break with (or take a break from!) the reality—or realities—we faced in this course, especially the reality of helping new instructors overcome their doubts, fears, traumas, and daily crises so that they might become more effective teachers of writing. I am, as you know, describing the unofficial curriculum we wrote as we taught the class, the one that didn’t appear on the syllabus and, for the most part, couldn’t have been known ahead of time.

But the question of sincerity remains an interesting one to think about, especially in the way it is naively assumed that people are either sincere or they’re not, and that’s the end of the story. Minimal attention is given to the possibility that the roles we are required to fulfill come with readymade, pre-established forms of sincerity, and thus, when asked to perform conflicting roles—namely, of teacher *and* student, mentor *and* mentee, peer *and* advisor, “graduate student” *and* “junior administrator”—we just might find ourselves up against competing versions of what it means to be sincere, or, in other words, what it means to be earnest, forthright, consistent, and appropriately trustworthy in our dealings with others. The maddening thing here is not so much a break with sincerity, but rather, the challenge in finding a flexible way to be sincere when called upon to be so many things to so many people.

From a comfortable distance, then, I admired your ability to balance your various roles, duties, and audiences. And as I write these words, I am aware that much of what you describe above would simply never happen to me, at least not at this moment in my academic career. My qualifications are never questioned these days, though I admit my judgments sometimes are (he said, laughing to himself). And yet, I too found myself in a predicament similar to yours, that is, of having to perform multiple roles—roles that sometimes worked against one another and, for that reason, left me confused, a little less surefooted than I like to think I am.

The difference between our experiences, I think, might be this: The source of your role conflicts could be linked to the many persons and groups you were answerable to, and therefore asked to perform for—department and writing program administrators, our new teachers, other graduate students, and, of course, yours truly. The source of my distress, on the other hand, could be linked to the multiple roles that I had to perform for one person, yourself. As you know, in various moments I was your teacher, your student, your mentor, your mentee, supervisor, helping hand, friend, nemesis, colleague, dissertation committee member, and sometimes confidant. And as if this were not enough, you may now add to this list, co-author.

I am sure that I did not manage all of these roles successfully. In fact, I am quite certain that there were times I took on a certain role, say that of mentor, when it might have been better had I enacted a very different role, say that of friend. Recalling those missteps, I am heartened by this knowledge—that most of our best moments were the surprises, the random confusions we faced, the impossible double-binds we overcame, and, to draw upon your metaphor once again, the “schizophrenia” we experienced separately and together. Or, as Mrs. Malaprop might say, the “nice derangement” we discovered in teaching this course.

#### Tensions

##### Frank

I suppose one of the ways to make any discussion of tensions more agreeable (and thus less tense!) is to modify that plural noun with its now predictable, almost obligatory adjective, *creative*, as if to suggest all tensions are generative of insight and inspiration. Maybe we’ll get around to those creative tensions later, but I would like to start this section off with an inventory of the not so creative tensions that accompanied our course. Some of these may be endemic to the practicum, regardless of where it is taught; some may be specific to our institutional context; some may have emerged only in our particular course, possibly as a consequence of things we did, as well as things beyond our control.

First, one venerable hurdle we faced, and one that long preceded us, is that the practicum is compulsory. We could do nothing to escape the fact that our practicum is one of two courses required of all teaching assistants, the other being English 800, a course that, at the time, was entitled “Introduction to Graduate Study in English.” As with most universally required courses, neither of these are always beloved by grad students, even though the usefulness of the practicum is, for many, more immediately obvious. In any case, some of our students did not especially like the fact that they were required to take this course, usually because, as has often been said to me, there were other courses that far better reflected their individual scholarly interests. Fair enough. I actually have some sympathy for this position. And maybe there’s a kind of curious justice built into this

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to make clear that they in no way intend to use this term in a derogatory fashion. In using this expression, Erin alludes to Mountford’s (2002) observation that a graduate student or faculty member can identify “as a teacher, activist, and scholar [and] maintains skepticism about upper administration,” while “a WPA must embrace a different model of work or suffer schizophrenia” (44). In this article, we draw on the notion of schizophrenia as a condition in which one “finds him or herself in a communicational matrix, in which messages contradict each other” (Gibney 50).

arrangement. If our new teachers have to teach captive first-year students, and therefore confront their own students’ resistances, maybe it’s right we have to do the same. At the very least, there’s an illuminating symmetry to this order of things.

That said, there was also a predictable trajectory that happened over the duration of this course. Because our new teachers were *brand new teachers*, most of them having no prior classroom experience, we were the people who somehow got them through that first class, that first week, month, unit, and semester. We provided them with a common syllabus, resources, encouragement and support, stage directions, tricks of the trade, and in the process, I believe, a lot more confidence than what they possessed the week before classes began. But as I said, this was a trajectory. By the end of the semester, many had long departed from the common syllabus, others were writing their own assignments, and still others were busy experimenting with our course design. I can’t honestly say I was always happy with these developments, but on the other hand, many of our teachers were exercising their autonomy as teachers, testing new classroom ideas and activities, taking pedagogical chances. It’s hard to be too upset about that. After all, the goal of this course is eventually to make ourselves unnecessary. It’s just that some may have concluded we were unnecessary long before we concurred with their judgment!

A second tension ensues from the various attitudes about the practicum that some of our students brought to the course. I am speaking here of what I think are attitudes that roughly align with their scholarly interests and specialties. Obviously, rhetoric and composition students, along with language students, tend to be more favorably disposed to this course than students who hail from other specialties within English. And this is even more understandable, given the fact that our practicum doubles as an introduction to the field of composition studies. Beyond this group, though, it is not unusual to encounter some resistance to the course from students who have no knowledge of, or particular scholarly interest in, composition studies.

Part of the usual resistance to this course happens because we ask students to surrender— or, at the very least, to question—many of their received ideas about writing instruction. Such commonplaces are familiar enough to anyone who has ever taught a practicum: the idea that the overriding concern of any writing course ought to be good grammar; the idea that literary texts, because they are considered exemplary, are the only texts that should be used to teach writing; and of course, the idea that writing cannot really be taught at all—or to put the matter bluntly, one either knows how to write or one doesn’t. A very romantic sentiment that, but also a very debilitating one, too, especially for those first year students who, unfortunately, might believe the same thing. While these ideas have long been discredited in our literature, they have not been discredited in the minds of some of our new teachers, and the work devoted to challenging these shibboleths will, on occasion, provoke resistance.

Finally, then, there were the tensions that resulted from our choice to design a first-year writing course that incorporated new media and new technologies. To be sure, instructional technology on our campus has made incredible advances over the last several years, but at the time we taught this course, there remained stark differences from one classroom to the next. Some of our instructors taught in “state of the art” classrooms; others, however, did not, and found themselves pushing a media cart from one location to the next. In addition, we had to devote more instructional time than we originally planned to the task of acquainting teachers with available online resources, the array of digital tools that could help their students successfully complete the writing assignments given to them. There were, of course, a predictable number of technical problems, but on balance, this aspect of the course, I happily admit, went far better than I ever imagined. But this was mostly due to your knowledge, your skills, and your forbearance—not only your patience with our new teachers, but with your co-instructor!

*Erin*

I’m sure that anyone who’s reading this exchange of ours, Frank, will be incredulous about the fact that we still get along well enough to be co-authors, but in fact, we do. Hopefully, this article will help others to have the same enthused, supportive relationship that we’ve enjoyed even after similarly high-stress collaboration and mentoring situations!

From my perspective, the tensions that you, our new teachers, and I experienced in the practicum were very much the product of differences in institutional and disciplinary positions and their concomitant power differentials. More plainly, given how much everyone involved invests—professionally and personally—in any practicum, it’s a miracle whenever a practicum concludes without acrimony. Of course, tensions do not have to be acrimonious; as you mentioned earlier, they can be *creative*, both in the sense of being *productive* and in terms of forcing people in otherwise difficult situations to *be* creative in finding solutions.

Here, I want to highlight some of what I think helped us both to be creative and productive in coping with the tensions of mentoring, teaching, and administrating the practicum. But first, I want to remark upon a notable *absence* of a tension that particularly stands out to me as I look back at that semester. You explained that you selected me from a list of potential candidates because of my background and experience, particularly with new and digital media, and because you and I had a history of working well together on various projects. Lucky us to have had previous mentoring and training experience, and lucky me to have had the right skills and interests at the right time! But surely this is rare. It’s incredible to me that no one in our program demanded an interviewing process. After you offered me the job, I wondered if I should feel guilty about having been selected, but no one seemed to object. Even now, I wonder if there were any unspoken hard feelings about it from my graduate-student colleagues with comparable experience. Since then, an interviewing process has been implemented to fill the position (and granted, the position description has changed since then to be a solely administrative mentoring position with no pedagogical duties). But I wonder which is better, since interviewing for the assistantship would have essentially been interviewing to be a mentee, which seems an odd way to arrange that relationship. Perhaps that’s why no one raised concerns

then.

The selection of someone to fill the position of faculty intern wasn’t even the first of the institutional tensions that we had to address. Justifying funds for the assistant position, as our readers might imagine, has been difficult. Since the position was first created several years ago, making the case for *two* instructors—one of whom is a member of the graduate faculty—to teach twenty students has not always been easy. Thankfully, we have an usually supportive and empathetic department, and the difficulty of explaining the benefits of a practicum assistant to those outside our field has never been as tense as it could be in other departments or institutions. On the whole, our department and our College recognize the value of supporting graduate-level faculty who devote so much of their time and energy to training all of the university’s newest teachers of writing.

Nonetheless, having a graduate student to assist with planning, teaching, and fulfilling the administrative duties of the course is an investment that we are thankful our administrators find worthwhile, since, among other benefits, it gives the assistant the sort of experience that is an asset for the professionalization of a new academic like me. It was a great opportunity for me to be mentored in teaching at the graduate level as well as with administration and mentoring.

*Frank*

It occurs to me that this might be a good time to interject a bit of history about our program—and by history I mean both ancient history (relatively speaking, of course), and recent history, especially changes that occurred within the last decade or so.

Since arriving here several years ago, I have always been proud of the fact that one of the founding figures of modern composition studies, Albert R. Kitzhaber, taught at the University of Kansas during the mid-1950s to early 1960s. In fact, and rather amazingly, Kitzhaber described in detail our TA training program in an article published in *CCC* in 1955. In revisiting that article, I was struck by how much had changed since then, but also by how much had remained the same. (Yes, I know how perilously close I am here to uttering a cliché.) We still place great emphasis on the rhetorical tradition, even though Kitzhaber’s course was more classically oriented in that respect; we still seek to balance practical concerns with theoretical ones, though it should be said that these two emphases have shifted over time, and continue to shift depending on who teaches the course; we still find ourselves teaching teachers whose primary interest is not composition, though in Kitzhaber’s time, his students were overwhelmingly devoted to literary studies, while in our time, such students tend to avidly pursue creative writing; we still want “to put our young teachers in the way of good ideas that would stimulate them to think seriously about the teaching of composition,” even though what counts as “good ideas” has understandably evolved over time (196). And finally, like Kitzhaber, we realize that this course is freighted with two characteristics that make it especially hard for those assigned to teach it—a disproportionate workload and the idealism that those who teach this course often bring to it.

I can speak to these last commonalities out of personal experience. Kitzhaber mentions that at the time of his writing, our program had two courses whose primary purpose was to train new teachers, a first and second semester course, each of which provided the new teacher with one hour of academic credit. Taken together, the two courses required of new teachers provided fewer credit hours (2) than one regular course taken in any given semester (3). And considering what Kitzhaber tells us about required readings, writing assignments, discussions, etc., it seems unlikely that his new teachers worked any less in his course that they did in their other courses.

When I first started teaching at KU, English 801, the practicum, was strictly that—a practicum and nothing more. New teachers worked from a common syllabus, met for two hours each week to discuss their successes and failures, questions, ideas, activities, challenges, and occasional traumas. There may have been an occasional assigned reading, but never more than one a week, and always one based on a pedagogical theme. Very little, if any, graded work was required, since the course was “pass-fail.” New teachers received two hours of academic credit for the fall practicum, and one hour in the follow-up version that occurred in the spring semester. The instructor was required to file classroom observation reports for each new teacher and was also asked to evaluate a set of every teacher’s graded papers. In order to introduce new teachers to composition theory and scholarship, a different course (English 780) was required in the spring semester. Among first year teachers, there was some occasional resentment at having to take the 780 course, since most did not see its relevance to their particular scholarly interests—nor, in some instances, to their teaching practices.

As I mentioned, the two qualities of this course that always seem to be in abundance are its work requirements and its idealism—and oftentimes the latter has a direct bearing on the former. I can speak to this firsthand, too. After a few years of familiarizing myself with the arrangement just described, I proposed a different approach. So that we might keep theory and praxis together, I argued that 801 should do double-duty as both a practicum and an introduction to the field of composition studies. The new 801 would become a three hour course, and even though students would still be required to take a one hour follow-up practicum the following spring, they would no longer be required to take English 780, since the purpose of that course would now be fulfilled by the new 801.

As you know, that argument prevailed, and the course we taught was essentially the one I proposed. Looking back, I now wish I had not been so persuasive. My idealism, I confess, got the better of me. At the time, I was concerned that to require a “stand-alone” practicum was to be complicit in the routine de-intellectualizing of pedagogy that, I observed, seems to occur most everywhere, and that I did not wish to aid and abet. While I still hold this view (in theory anyway), I have reluctantly concluded that my proposed change was a mistake because it created a model (or should I say, a *monster*?) that,

practically speaking, was cumbersome and frustrating for everyone concerned. It is difficult to explain to others—colleagues, administrators, friends, generally anyone who has not taught the course—just how much sheer labor is involved in guaranteeing that the course does what it says it does. And without the help of an assistant, or administrative intern, or teaching mentor—whatever the honorific *du jour*—the course is nearly unmanageable. In fact, I do not think it possible that any instructor could *effectively* manage this course alone. It should come as no surprise, then, that our writing faculty are currently revisiting this course to find other ways of easing the burden of teaching it.

Erin

As I recall, you insisted that I be familiar with Kitzhaber’s work for my master’s exam! I’m thankful for your foresight in that regard because it gave me a sense of how important our practicum is. I, as a newly hired teaching assistant with no teaching experience whatsoever, appreciated having the practicum elements of the course combined with an introduction to composition theory. When our program recently surveyed experienced teaching assistants, we found overwhelming support for the practicum-theory structure of the course for many reasons: it provides a rationale for teaching composition according to our program’s values and goals; it gives them pedagogical training that will inform their teaching for the rest of their teaching careers, even if they plan to teach in areas other than composition studies; and it helps them on the job market because successful completion of the course provides clear evidence of thorough training in composition studies and pedagogy and prepares them to speak about their teaching philosophies and experiences clearly and competently. But it is a demanding course for instructors and students alike, and both really do benefit from having the intermediary assistant there to help manage the tensions that come with the course. For me, this was a productive tension, because it provided me with the opportunity to learn from you and the new teachers whom I mentored.

And these new teachers had plenty of tensions that they needed help dealing with, too. Some of them had a great deal of difficulty balancing time and priorities, and since you were one charged with final grade evaluation, we decided that it would be your responsibility to discuss these concerns in the practicum with (the relatively few) students for whom this was a serious problem. The new teachers regularly came to both you and me for advice about frustrating or confusing situations, such as how to deal with a problem student, or a disastrous class meeting, or a challenge to their authority, or attendance problems, or a too-friendly student. While these were no doubt unpleasant situations at the time, I look back on them as creative tensions, too, because it was through dealing with these situations individually during our practicum meetings that the new teachers built up a cache of ideas about how to negotiate such trying situations. They came to know themselves as teachers by working through this adversity, with our assistance and guidance. I received the same assistance and guidance from you, as I learned about and assisted with this course. And you and I both continued to test and refine our own pedagogical philosophies and notions about how to teach a course like English 801.

Conclusion

Looking back over our conversation, we are struck by a number of themes that emerged in this discussion. First, there seems to be a pattern of tiered, repeated alignments in the situations our teachers faced with their students, and what we faced with our new teachers. Among other things, we observed that just as our new teachers had to deal with captive first-year students, we had to do with our teachers who were required to take our course. Along these same lines, we wondered if the casual questioning of authority that some first-year students have learned to direct toward their instructors (e.g., “She’s only a TA, after all!”) might also be at play in our new teachers’ interactions with Erin (e.g., “She’s only one of us, after all!”). We could not help but wonder if there might be some pedagogical value to be discovered in these symmetries. Is it possible (or even advisable) to suggest to new teachers that the resistances they may feel about the practicum originate in the same sources as the resistances their students feel toward them? Knowing this as co-instructors, we have come to realize that we need to be mindful of how we model our responses to student resistance, since, clearly, we teach too when we model. And though our new teachers may not have realized this that first week of classes, it is impossible to teach for any length of time without encountering *some* resistance from *some* students. As most teachers know, this is a pedagogical fact of life, regardless of the course.

Another insight that emerged from our dialogue is that in arrangements like our own, it helps if both faculty member and assistant have some knowledge of the history of the course, and of the writing program, at their home institution. Among other things, we think this knowledge could help instructors avoid what might be called the two great Groundhog’s Day temptations—the inclination to regard one’s practicum course as either utterly original or utterly scripted. It is, of course, neither of these things. We were fortunate enough to have some of our program’s early history chronicled in the published literature, but any instructor new to this course would be well-advised to learn as much as he or she can about the history of the course—its traditions, its changes, its inherited practices, its controversies, etc., at their respective institutions. Taking time to learn such histories will enable those assigned to teach the course to understand its continuities in ways they might not have noticed otherwise. To have this knowledge is to have a deeper understanding of why the practicum is sometimes a site of struggle and controversy, but also a site of enormously important and productive learning. Certainly, we had our fair share of bad moments, random confusions, little emergencies, delightful surprises, assorted victories, and much needed laughter between ourselves and with our new teachers. But, in retrospect, we understood that even these particulars of our experience were part of something larger than ourselves, something that preceded us and something that endured, and will continue to endure, long after our one

semester together. We think that that *something* needs to be known, as best it can, by those who teach this course.

Finally, we would like to close with a reflexive confession of sorts. At various junctures in the composing of this dialogue, we sometimes found ourselves stymied by how to refer to those enrolled in our course. Indeed, they were our students, but to call them that (or *only* that) seemed to discredit what we both felt was their more important role as teachers. To address this problem, we decided to call them “new teachers,” and to use that term throughout our text, even though we knew it was incomplete: Our “new teachers” were obviously our “new students” as well. As we noted above, the same doubling accompanied the twin roles that Erin performed, too. As an advanced doctoral candidate, our new teachers realized that, like them, Erin likewise was a graduate student. But they knew her as a co-instructor in their practicum as well. For those enrolled in our practicum, then, Erin was teacher *and* student, and sometimes both at once. And even Frank, who enjoys the luxury of not being *officially* identified as a student, knows all too well that he learned much from these new teachers, and even more from Erin. His only regret now is that he may not have told others how much he learned from them.

But rather than be too vexed by this duality of role, we now wonder if maybe we could have made good use of what up to this point, we had only considered a problem. Maybe we missed an opportunity to address what Freire (2006) calls “the teacher-student contradiction” with our class; maybe we could have thematized this very contradiction as a feature of our pedagogy. Certainly, in our experience, the “teacher-student contradiction” was everywhere to be found, a seemingly inescapable feature of this course—and of our specific arrangement. In fact, we would argue that the practicum, wherever it is taught, constitutes an especially promising site for an exploration of Freire’s basic idea. And from our present vantage, we now entertain the possibility that by *not* addressing the teacher-student contradiction in class, we may have unintentionally fostered its continuance. We recall that many of our new teachers did an admirable job of compartmentalizing their dual roles as teachers and students—so much so, in fact, that for some, these roles became too rigidly interpreted, distinct, reified. In retrospect, then, we believe there may have been some missed opportunities to broach with our class the positive value of understanding that they could be, simultaneously, *both* teachers *and* students. But that is a value that has to be cultivated, educed, not merely assumed.

It is perhaps unavoidable to reflect upon things we would change at the same time that we recall what we celebrated, hoped for, and think we accomplished. While Erin wished for more time in the classroom to teach composition theory and pedagogy to the new instructors, she realizes that she grew as a teacher and colleague by working with instructors individually throughout the semester. And while Frank regrets that he did not look for more opportunities to reverse the institutional roles assigned to Erin and himself, he wonders how they each might have likewise exchanged roles with their new teachers. On several occasions, for example, he and Erin learned a great deal about their new teachers’ intellectual strengths and interests. Looking back, Frank wonders if he and Erin might have helped new teachers incorporate their particular strengths and expertise into our common syllabus—or, at the very least, find some structured opportunity for new teachers to share their knowledge with each other and with us. This means, of course, a receptivity on the part of Erin and Frank to learn from—and learn more about—what new teachers already know and, importantly, to illuminate the pedagogical value of that knowledge.

Still, despite what we might have done better, our conversation is about what we learned from teaching this course together and, moreover, what we learned from writing about that experience. We hope our readers learned something, as well, in this modest retelling of Erin and Frank’s most excellent adventure.

Frank: Anything else, Erin?

Erin: No, Frank, except to say that I wish our readers an experience as rewarding as ours!

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About the Authors

*E.A. Williams* is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages at the University of Saint Francis (IN). In addition to her work as Director of Writing, she teaches courses in developmental, first-year, and advanced writing. Her research interests include conceptual metaphor theory, writing and science, and writing program assessment.

*Frank Farmer* is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Kansas, where he teaches courses in writing and rhetorical theory. He serves as the Director of First- and Second-Year English, and his most recent book *After the Public Turn: Composition, Counterpublics, and the Citizen Bricoleur* (Utah State UP) was published in the spring of 2013.

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