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## Influences of Intensive Professional Development in Writing Instruction on Teachers' Dispositions and Self-Efficacy: It's a Matter of Practice

Sherry Dismuke, *Boise State University*

After 20 years of nation-wide literacy reforms only one third of America's students perform at or above grade level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment. Policies such as NCLB (2002) that focused on reading achievement have done little to raise scores on this national assessment of students writing progress (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999, 2011). With 90% of American jobs now requiring higher level literacy skills (Darling-Hammond, Barron, Pearson, & Schoenfeld, 2008), most states have adopted new standards that are designed to ratchet up rigor in order to put American students on a trajectory to meet the demands of a college educated work force. The level of writing called for in the Common Core State Standards (2010) is so ambitious that it calls into question whether teachers are confident and able to lead students toward meeting these new demands.

These writing standards, coupled with uncharted, high-stakes assessments in writing can make the most experienced teacher feel like an apprentice again. Current research suggests there is a gap between what the CCSS standards expect students to do and what teachers have been prepared to teach (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2010). "Not only is writing challenging for the inexperienced author, but it creates anxiety, avoidance, and frustration for those who teach it" (Troia & Graham, 2003, p. 75). Studies of preservice teacher preparation reveals that most inservice teachers were not required to take a writing methods course for certification, but instead were exposed to limited writing pedagogy condensed into literacy courses that are centered on comprehensive and content area reading (Brenner, 2013; Morgan, 2010, National Commission on Writing, 2003). While some states may require prospective teachers to demonstrate limited knowledge of writing processes on tests of literacy content knowledge, "in terms of coursework and competency

requirements, the disparity between those for reading and those for writing is striking” (The National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006, p. 60). Many teachers are aware that they lack the knowledge, skills, and strategies they need to facilitate children’s emerging competencies as writers (Troia & Maddox, 2004). However, with schools scrambling to increase reading scores, few resources have been allocated to alleviate teachers’ concerns about their own lack of competency in the area of writing instruction. This has left many to cite inservice teacher professional development as the solution (Calkins et al., 2010).

While workshops abound that promise districts a quick fix, these writing professional development workshops are usually designed to train teachers in a particular program or methodology in only one to two days. Unlike more intensive models such as the National Writing Project (2006) or dedicated university writing courses that target teacher dispositions, short workshops are largely ineffective in changing teachers’ attitudes or practices (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, & Richardson, 2009). To effectively close the gap left by inadequate teacher preparation (Norman and Spencer, 2005), inservice teachers will need increased access, opportunity, and support to engage in more intensive professional development. University writing method courses could provide a platform to engage teachers over time in developing current knowledge, skills, and positive dispositions surrounding the complexities of teaching writing that could be available year round.

While the success of professional development models such as the NWP summer institute are plentiful (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006), the field of studies are narrow that focus on sustained models of writing professional development on inservice teachers’ beliefs and practice (Troia, Lin, Cohen & Monroe, 2011) and those that focus on the impact of a graduate university writing courses are slim. That could be because these courses are not as common as one might imagine. A current survey of university literacy course offerings in three states revealed that only 5 courses were dedicated to writing instruction (Brenner, 2013). Furthermore, a stand-alone writing methods course is not always required for a master’s degree in education, reading, or for a reading/literacy endorsement. According to a recent survey of 63 university literacy professors representing 50 universities across the United States, 80% indicated that writing instruction was still being embedded in literacy courses (Meyers, et al. under review, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to employ multiple measures to examine the influences of intensive professional development, delivered through a university course devoted exclusively to elementary writing methods, on teachers’ dispositions about writing and writing instruction and their self-efficacy to teach

it. Participants in this study were not required to take a writing methods course as part of their master's degree or endorsement programs. This absence of a course requirement in this northwestern state provided a context for a comparison in dispositions and practices between teachers who took a dedicated writing course and those who did not.

This study extends on previous works that have documented the positive influences of university course work on preservice teachers' writing dispositions and practice (Norman & Spencer, 2005; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000), by examining the possible impact of a writing course on inservice teachers attitudes and instruction once they are embedded in their own daily literacy practices.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are elementary teachers' dispositions regarding their competencies as writing teachers and about themselves as writers?
2. How do these dispositions differ between elementary teachers who have taken a university course dedicated to writing and those who have not?
3. What links may exist between teachers' dispositions about writing, their observed instructional practice, and learning activities in the writing methods course?

### **Literature Review**

The perspectives for this study are situated in understandings of the literature on self-efficacy, teacher dispositions, and subject matter and pedagogical knowledge. Perceptions of how these three areas may intersect to impact teacher practices are explored.

#### *Self-efficacy and Writing*

Many teachers are aware they lack mastery of subject matter knowledge and skill in the area of writing instruction (Troia & Maddox, 2004). According to Bandura (1986), awareness of these deficits, coupled with a lack of confidence in their own ability to perform as writers, negatively impacts teachers' self-efficacy to teach writing (Pajares, 2003). These negative influences on teachers self concepts as writers are important because self-efficacy was thought by Bandura (1977) to play an influential role in the choices we make, the effort and perseverance we are willing to put forth, and the level of success one can obtain. It is a sense of competency and meaning (Brophy, 1999) that motivates both teachers and their students to take on the difficult work of writing.

Teachers' past experiences and perceptions about writing can influence writing instruction. However, purposeful course design has been shown to reshape teachers' perceptions and sense of competencies (Tracy, Scales, & Luke, 2014). Effective professional development in writing begins with unearthing teachers' existing writing beliefs, experiences, and practices for examination (Zumberg & Krause, 2012) in order to intentionally bridge the divide that exists between teachers' personal attitudes and classroom practice (Carpenter et al., 1989; Little, 2002).

### *Teachers' Dispositions about Writing*

Bruning and Horn's (2000) study on motivation linked teachers' attitudes about writing with student motivation: "The beginning point for building student writing motivation is teacher beliefs about writing" (p. 30). They found if teachers held a view of writing that was socially isolating and narrowly focused, it was unlikely they would be able to create an environment that was socially motivating for their students. "The hallmark of high-quality professional development is that there is a component in which teachers engage in writing in ways that parallel their student's engagement" (Troia et al., 2010, p. 183).

In order to develop confidence in their abilities to teach writing, teachers must first develop confidence in their ability to produce writing (Grossman et al., 2000; Keifer et al., 1996). To build new and active understandings about all aspects of the writing processes, it is recommended that teachers should experience these processes by writing themselves (McDonald, Buchanan, & Sterling, 2004; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Troia et al., 2010). Teachers need writing experiences that serve a wide range of purposes and expose them to a wide range of effective tools for teaching, modeling, and motivating students (Pressley et al., 2007). Since writing is co-constructed through social interaction within a community of peers (Bruffee, 1986; Nystrand, 1998). Teachers need opportunities to write and share within a safe community of other writers. They need opportunities to develop self-regulation of their own writing processes. Self-regulation is as important to writing as meta-cognition is to reading (Zimmerman & Risenberg, 1997). When teachers are guided successfully through quality writing experiences they will be motivated to create similar learning conditions for their own students (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

### *Subject Matter and Pedagogical Knowledge*

Teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to teach writing well is fueled by the complexities of the subject matter (Troia & Graham, 2003; Troia & Maddox,

2004). Developing the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to integrate the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of the writing processes effectively is so complex, it is often an obstacle to those who teach it (Bahktin, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Hayes, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The key to overcoming these obstacles and developing confident teachers who are capable of improving student achievement, is to engage teachers in experiences that develop deep content knowledge of the subjects they teach, as well as the pedagogy specific to the content (Carpenter, et al., 1989; Hill, 2007; Shulman, 1987; Sykes, 1999).

expected The National Staff Development Council (2011) advocates that teachers participate in professional development that engages adult learners in applying the processes they are to use, by experiencing firsthand the pedagogical approaches they will be using with their own students. Teachers need to see strategies and skills modeled, decompose them (Grossman, 2011), and then have opportunities to apply and approximate these new practices in everyday practice (Grossman, 2005; Hawley & Valli, 1999). The enactment of these strategies improves teachers' self-assurance, practice, and student performance (Correnti, 2007; Liberman, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009; Troia, et al., 2010). In addition, teachers need time with their peers to reconstruct their practice through action research, reflection, and discussion of their own lessons and student work (Garet et al., 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009).

### **Partnering Knowledge and New Dispositions for Confident Practice**

Professional development experiences that partner the acquisition of subject matter knowledge with opportunities for teachers to examine their dispositions and instruction with each other can provide teachers with a newfound sense of competency and motivate them to engage in meaningful alterations to their practice (Lieberman, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009; Troia, et al., 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Teachers need to sustain the work of developing as writing teachers over time, with other teachers (Lieberman, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2009). Learning to teach writing is as complex as learning to write. Even teachers with extensive training in writing instruction push writing instruction aside, reporting, "It is HARD to teach" (Fry & Griffin, 2010). There is no script or formulaic program for teachers of the writing process to follow. "Learning how to explain, model, and scaffold, writing strategies takes a great

deal of time and effort” (Pressley et al., 2007). When teachers take on this work together they can support and encourage each other as they approximate goals, reflect, and align their current practices with new standards and effective practices in writing instruction.

## **Methodology**

### *Study Design*

In order to investigate the complexities of teacher dispositions and practice (Lampert, 2001; Jackson, 1990), this study utilized a mixed-method, triangulation design (Creswell & Plano, 2007) to examine the influences of intensive professional development in writing on inservice teachers’ dispositions and skills. Mixed-methods allowed for a combination of data sources to both corroborate and elaborate findings by using the strengths of each source to offset the weaknesses in the others (Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Turner, 2003). Additionally, these data sources provided multiple lenses by which to examine links between what the teacher believes or does to the influence of professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

### *Participants*

Twelve K-6 teachers, in five different school districts within the same northwestern state, volunteered to participate in this study. All participants had their master’s degree, a state literacy endorsement, or equivalent post graduate units. Six of the teachers participated in a university, graduate level writing methods course. All teachers who took the 16-week, three-unit course did so from the same university professor in the five years preceding the study and experienced over 50 hours of sustained professional development. The other six teachers had not taken this course, and reported having 12 hours or less of professional development in writing across their teaching careers. Their districts had labeled all of the teachers in this study as highly qualified.

To minimize the effects of selection bias every attempt was made to match participants for crucial characteristics (Shadish, Cook, & Cambell, 2002), such as grade level, years of experience, education and school contexts. However, there were inconsistencies in contexts. Teachers who participated in the course had fewer years of experience, higher incidence of students living in poverty, and higher percentages of English language learners. Additionally, more of the course teachers worked in smaller rural districts that provided fewer resources and lower pay.

These contexts may have provided course-teachers with additional challenges to the implementation of writing instruction. The complexities in instruction increase when you consider that the writing performance of low-income, minority students is well below that of their middle class counterparts (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). This is due in part to a scarcity of writing instruction in low-income schools (Troia, et al., 2011). Teachers in these settings may have had to overcome ridged controls over reading instruction curriculum and scheduling. Tables 1 & 2 compare participant characteristics of course and non-course teachers. (See Tables 1 & 2.)

### *Context of the Professional Development Course*

This semester-long writing course focused exclusively on writing instruction and was consistent with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards. It was taught by an experienced teacher educator and researcher in the field of writing with over ten years of experience teaching undergraduate and graduate level literacy courses.

The course situated participants as writers and teachers through active participation in book clubs, collaborative learning activities, and construction of student profiles. Teachers engaged in writing across genres in order to explore and reflect on the connections between process and product and personal and social purposes for writing. Through immersion in their own writing processes they were provided an opportunity to reconstruct their own self-images as writers. They experienced a process approach to writing, genre instruction, cognitive writing processes, differentiated instruction, and multiple modes of assessment. Teachers in the class were then asked to weave together new understandings and dispositions into lesson designs that they implemented in their elementary classrooms. They returned to the classroom community to share, reflect upon, and problematize their new practices.

### *Data Sources*

Data sources included semi-structured interview transcripts, observational field notes, the Writing Observational Framework (Henk, Marinak, Moore, & Mallette, 2004), (WOF) and course documents.

First, teachers participated in a 40-minute, response-guided interview during which they were asked questions designed to elicit teachers' dispositions regarding their self-identity as writers and confidence in their abilities to teach writing well. Next, teachers participated in four classroom observations across the 2011-2012 school year. Observers recorded the number of effective writing



instruction practices listed on the WOF (Henk et al., 2004) check list. This instrument contains 60 effective writing practices grouped into ten constructs. For this investigation, elements for the WOF that were aligned with teacher and or student self-efficacy related to teaching and providing opportunities for student self-regulation and social-interactions were examined. Field notes were examined for teacher practices aligned with these constructs as well. To investigate links between teachers' practice and the methods course, four observations were conducted in the PD methods course across the spring 2012 semester using the same data sources. Additionally, course documents from previous years were surveyed.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then transformed, consolidated, and compared to establish their points of convergence and disagreements (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell & Plano, 2007; Greene, 2007).

The WOF data were analyzed with independent sample t-tests on SPSS. Chi Square analysis was performed on relevant interview data to provide qualitative and quantitative linkages (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Observational notes were coded using a deductive coding scheme developed a priori (Troia, et al., 2011). Analytic inductive coding was applied to the interview data. Frequency counts; data displays, and individual narrative summaries were created (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for all qualitative data. Throughout coding, similar responses were grouped and regrouped through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and descriptive and analytic memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994) provided further analysis. Data analysis included member checks, peer debriefings, as well as inter-rater reliability of 90% agreement on 27% of the observational data and 85% intercoder agreement on 25% of the interview data. In both cases consensus conversations between researchers continued until 100% agreement was reached.

### **Findings**

Three main findings emerged regarding teachers' perceptions and dispositions about themselves as teachers of writing and as writers. First, teachers shared the perception that their teacher preparation influenced their self-efficacy to teach writing. Next, teachers' perceptions about their identity as writers differed significantly between those who took the university course (course teachers) and those teachers who did not (non-course teachers). Last, there were

significant differences in teachers classroom practices related to the development of self-efficacy, identity, and self-regulation in their own students.

### *Effects of Teacher Preparation on Teachers' Self-Efficacy*

Analysis of the interview data found all participants who experienced the writing professional development felt confident about teaching writing. Dena, a first grade course teacher, gained confidence to teach writing from doing her own writing in the course; she explained:

First, I had to realize I can do this, whether it was writing the memoir or the poem, or things which were out of my particular comfort zone, that I can do it. Which means then I can tell my students they can do it too.

In contrast, those who had not been afforded a writing methods course felt unprepared to teach writing. They had strong opinions about their lack of preparation: Melissa, who teaches fourth grade, said, "Coming out of my bachelor's program.... I don't feel like I was prepared to teach writing, I don't." She went on to say:

There wasn't really a methods course that really focused on writing. There was a literacy strand, but I just felt like it was so much geared towards primary and so much geared towards phonics and the reading component. So I don't feel like I was prepared at all to do writing in the classroom, especially upper grade writing.

Teresa exclaimed, "There wasn't any writing course. I think a writing course should be mandatory. I can think of many other classes I could have done without. It is not fair to my kids, if I don't know I can't tell them." Teresa was not alone. None of the teachers in the study were required to take a dedicated writing methods course. Linda revealed, "It took eleven years into my career before I even received any information on how to teach writing. So I mean that's really sad." Results of the interview data for self-efficacy are shared in Table 3. (See Table 3)

In the university writing course teachers developed confidence, not just in their own writing, but also in their ability to teach writing through an application and inquiry assignment. Teachers constructed lessons based on their new knowledge and practiced teaching them in their own classrooms. They came back to class to share with one another. Amy commented on how this assignment impacted her ability to plan,

Well, as I was taking the writing course, I started to try that style of writing and lesson in my classroom. I liked it so much, that I did an independent study to do a yearlong writing curriculum. I was so excited

about that. I really, really wanted to put something together, adding in what I felt I had learned from that course.

Teachers' developed positive dispositions about writing and writing instruction in the course. This seemed to influence their motivation to teach writing. Olivia explained, "I think because I like writing now, the kids get more excited, because I get excited about it. I try to find ways to encourage creative writing and ways to acknowledge when they are writing on their own." Olivia's comments suggest that taking the time to foster the development of teachers' self-efficacy may lead to increased motivation for writing instruction.

While it is recognized that teachers who voluntarily sought out a course in writing may differ in motivation, interest, and skill from teachers who did not seek out a writing course in their post graduate experience. It is true, that when these teachers were asked to reflect on their own practice, teachers without the course expressed regret and a clear desire for more professional development.

#### *Effects of Teacher Preparation on Teachers' Identities as Writers*

As in other studies of preservice teachers (Norman & Spencer, 2005), participation in the course had a marked impact on inservice teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers as well. Teachers' perceptions and understandings about themselves as writers differed significantly between course teachers and non-course teachers. Course teachers more often thought of themselves as writers and had positive feelings and confidence in their ability to write than non-course teachers. The findings presented in Table 4 document the differences between course teachers' and non-course teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers. (See Table 4)

Course teachers overall had positive self-identities as writers. This self-perception differed significantly from the non-course teachers, while no teacher who took the course explicitly expressed negative feelings about their ability or confidence to write, four of the six non-course teachers did. Amber reflects on her writing ability, "Oh misery (ha ha). I'm a reluctant writer." She goes on to connect her dispositions to what she experienced as a learner, "I come from the generation of where we actually diagramed sentences and well, I hated it, but I think it was beneficial in the long run."

Teacher's views of their writing ability and their experiences learning to write impacted their instructional decisions (Pajares, 2003). Amber held on to and reproduced the way she was taught, even in the face of her negative views of herself as a writer. She was observed on more than one occasion to skip writing instruction in favor of isolated Daily Oral Language Practice. This can be

contrasted with Kayla, who took the course, she remembers how she was taught, “I never did well in writing, so it was always a frustration in school because I’d get my paper back and it’d always be marked in red pen.” In the writing course Kayla was able to explore her negative experiences and developed a positive view of herself as a writer. She did not reproduce the instruction she experienced, replacing the “red pen” with differentiated oral feedback during writing conferences.

Course teachers were provided an opportunity to expose and explore their dispositions about themselves as writers and the way they were taught writing. They were able to rebuild or reconnect with their self-concept through multiple, scaffolded, opportunities to write across genres. Graham echoes what the other course teachers said when he explained how the course helped him reconnect with himself as a writer,

I really love to write, so the class just kind of rekindled my love of writing and I think it was really good, because she [The instructor, Emma] provided those opportunities to just write for enjoyment or to write different types of writing like memoir and I’ve had kids write memoirs and we’ve studied memoirs ever since that class. So I definitely think that for me it was just kind of rekindling the love of writing and I’ve been able to use some of those pieces that I did in that class and show them as examples for my class.

Teachers in the course experienced a nurturing, safe environment designed to support writing growth. Sharon experienced the importance of establishing a community of writers. She said, “What was nice with this class it was more intimate because you were able to share with her [Emma] and share with the people who you felt comfortable with, because you knew the people in the class.”

Course teachers experienced the power of social interaction in the course as a tool for themselves as learners, writers, and teachers. The course teachers were all observed to provide their own students the same powerful pedagogy in their classrooms. Furthermore, all of the course teachers reported that the class added to their self-image and confidence as a writer and as a teacher of writing. Graham said, “You know to be honest it had been a long time since I had done just writing.”

In contrast, teachers who had not been exposed to class had very different conceptions of themselves as writers. Linda shared,

I struggled with it. I think partly because in grade school we learned how to handwrite, but didn’t learn how to put sentences together into paragraphs to create a story. None of that was ever taught to me. So of

course when you go to high school and college anytime you have to write a paper that was an extreme struggle. I mean, I got better at it because I had to, but it made me very angry as an adult knowing that in grade school, junior high, and high school there was no formal writing taught. So that was a huge weakness for me.

Many of the teachers reported experiencing similar ineffective or insufficient models of writing instruction in their own schooling and clinical experiences that in some cases were coupled with negative verbal or written feedback on their own writing. These prior experiences learning to write contributed to these teachers writing and instructional self-efficacy (Pajares, 2003) and highlight the need for attention to writing dispositions in professional development course design.

### *Observed Differences in Classroom Practice*

Findings from teacher observations revealed clear difference in writing practices. Unlike their counterparts, course teachers were observed by researchers to be engaging their students in activities that fostered the development of self-efficacy and self-regulation in their young writers in ways that were similar to what was taught in the course. They created safe communities of practice where students engaged in social interactions around their writing. Learning opportunities for students were designed to develop self-confidence, self-regulation, and identify as a writer.

### *Self-regulation as writers*

Course teachers provided more opportunities for students to be independent with their writing and writing processes than non-course teachers. Data analysis of the coded observations found course teachers gave their students more opportunities to make decisions about their own writing and processes and created environments that scaffolded student independence. Students were responsible for their own topics, provided space and time to move recursively through the writing processes, and relied on their peers for feedback and suggestions. Analysis of the WOF data triangulated with observation field notes to find significant differences in practice for self-regulation across the writing processes. Table 5 reveals the differences in observed practices for self-regulation from the observation field notes. (See Table 5)

### *Writing as a social act*

To help students see themselves as writers they need opportunities to engage both socially and emotionally with a community of writers (Moffett, 1981).

Course teachers were observed to engage their students in, and teach strategies for, meaningful social interaction around the writing processes four out of four visits in: (1) whole class sharing routines; (2) small group sharing; (3) partner sharing; and (4) solicitations for students to share their understandings or problems while engaged in the writing processes. Unfortunately, students whose teachers did not have the course engaged their students in only two of the four social activities. Findings on the WOF corroborated findings from observation notes that revealed significant differences in practices related to social interaction. Table 6 compares the social practices for writing between course teachers and non-course teachers from the observation field notes. (see Table 6)

Analysis of classroom observation field notes and the WOF found that teachers who took the writing course overcame prior experiences and provided more opportunities for their own students to engage in writing practices that were aimed at developing positive dispositions and self-efficacy as writers. This finding is in agreement with Bruning and Horn (2000) who connected teachers' beliefs about writing to their instructional decisions. These findings demonstrate that teachers who took the course made instructional decisions that were more often aligned with effective practices in writing instruction than teachers who did not. Findings from the WOF check sheet of effective writing practices related to self-regulation and social interactions are presented in Table 7 (see Table 7)

## **Discussion**

Participation in the course had a marked impact on teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers. If learning is shaped by the beliefs, values, and experiences that exist within the larger community context (Bahktin, 1981; Norman & Spencer, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978), then it follows that teachers' beliefs and attitudes about writing should be influenced by their preparation to be teachers of writing and in turn, to prepare their students to become confident and competent writers.

All had preconceived notions of themselves as writers and had embedded memories of the more traditional methodologies with which they were taught. But after the course there were marked differences in teachers' attitudes about themselves as writers and in their ability to overcome the way they were taught writing. Non-course teachers more often held on to and reproduced (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) old methods of teaching writing, even in the face of their own negative experiences and beliefs.

This was not true for course teachers, who were able to overcome their apprenticeships of practice and develop not only positive views of themselves as writers, but new practices as well. Unlike teachers without the course, none of the course teachers expressed negative feelings about their ability or confidence to write. This difference in perceptions suggests that professional development that intentionally plans opportunities for teachers to uncover their dispositions about writing can be influential in surfacing and overcoming negative dispositions toward writing. Running parallel to these differences in teachers' self-identity and confidence were their attitudes regarding their formal preparation to teach writing.

Teachers' perceptions of their preparation to be teachers of writing played a critical role in their ability to overcome negative dispositions and a lack of understandings about what writing is. The teachers in this study were not required to take a writing methods course for their teacher certification. This deficit left teachers without the course to rely only on limited professional development provided by their districts and the expertise of colleagues in their schools. Unfortunately, for these six teachers, coaches or colleagues with writing expertise were not readily available. While all of the course teachers felt confident in their ability to teach writing, non-course teachers were vocal about their lack of preparation from their universities and districts. Despite exposure to writing methods in their reading-focused literacy courses and years of experience in the classroom, these teachers did not feel they had learned to teach writing and they called for the addition of a dedicated writing methods course for certification.

### **Implications**

There is a call to prepare all American students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century rigors of workplace and college writing (Calkins, et al., 2010). If students are to meet these expectations then American teachers must be prepared and confident in their ability to teach writing. Universities could fill the existing gap between what teachers are prepared to teach and what students are being asked to do by requiring dedicated writing methods courses for both preservice certification and graduate work in literacy (National Commission on Writing, 2003).

Preparing teachers to teach writing well will require professional development models that can override a teachers' apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) and the negative effects of the *red pen*. This cannot occur in a one-day professional development workshop that provides teachers with little more than a folder full of activities.

Changing dispositions about writing requires meaningful learning with others in a trusted community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, Elmore

(2008) reminds us that collaborative professional development requires a desire to “be developed.” Addressing teacher dispositions surrounding writing professional development includes addressing their attitudes and concerns about another round of required professional development. Teachers have long been subjected to their share of mandated changes and professional development workshops that seek to “reform” their practice. In order for meaningful learning to take place teachers must not only believe that a change in their writing practice is warranted, but also that they are capable to carry out that change (Elmore, 2008). Perhaps increased accountability for p-12 student writing performance will provide schools and teachers with student data that will offer authentic reasons for teachers to engage in professional development that is directly related to their daily practice.

In the long run, if we want to prepare our teachers to become confident, competent, teachers of writing, it has to begin with building positive dispositions and effective practice in preservice preparation. This proactive strategy could provide teachers with a layer of knowledge for inservice development to build on and may lead more teachers to self-select or engage in post-graduate writing development. Findings from this study, while small in numbers, document the importance of uncovering and developing teachers’ self-efficacy as writers and teachers of writing. Further research is needed that investigates the links between teacher’s dispositions, improved teacher practice, and student outcomes.



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## Tables

**Table 1**

*Non- Course Teachers: Less than 12 hours of writing Professional Development*

	Grade Level	Years exp	Post Graduate Education	PD in Writing	School NCLB Status	Students in Poverty Limited English
Amber	1	27	MA	2-days + WS (not current)	District 1 Alert	Title 1 36% LEP 0.5
Teresa	1	19	MA (In Progress)	1 day	District 1 No SIP	Title 1 54% LEP 2.8%
Linda	2	20	Reading Endorsement.	2 days	District 1 No SIP	NE 21% LEP 1.9%
Tessa	3	25	MA	0-1day	District 1 No SIP	NE 7% LEP 0%
Melissa	4	10	MA	0-1day	District 1 No SIP	NE 7% LEP 0%
Alyssa	5	5	MA	0-1day	District 2 Improvement	Title 1 61% LEP 4%
	Primary Grades		Title 1- Schools with over 35% Free and Reduced Lunch			
	Upper Elementary		LEP-Limited English Proficiency			

**Table 2***Course Teachers: Intensive Professional Development in Writing: Over 50 hours*

Personal	Grade Level	Years exp	Post Graduate Education	Additional PD to the 50 hours	School NCLB Status	Students in Poverty	Limited English
Amy	1	4	MA	0-1 days	District 3 No SIP	Title 1 LEP	41% 2%
Dena	1	14	MA	0-1 days	District 1 No SIP	NE LEP	33.3 2.4
Olivia	2	6	MA	25 hrs	District 5 No SIP	Title 1 LEP	73% 13%
Sharon	4	10	MA	2 days	District 4 No SIP	Title 1 LEP	74% 24%
Graham	4	6	MA	2 days	District 2 Improvement	NE LEP	34% 4%
Kayla	5	5	MA	0-1 days	District 1 Improvement	Title 1 LEP	80% 20%
	Primary Grades		Title 1- Schools with over 35% Free and Reduced Lunch				
	Upper Elementary		LEP-Limited English Proficiency				



**Table 3**  
*Interview Data, Results for Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy	Course Teachers	Non-Course Teachers	df	$\chi^2$ value	sig
Expressed a lack of writing content knowledge	0	4	1	6.00	.02
Expressed a lack of confidence to Teach writing	0	4	1	6.00	.02
Desire for more writing course work or PD	1	6	1	8.57	.003

\*All p values are significant, p-value, less than .05

**Table 4**  
*Interview Data, Results for Self as Writers*

Self As Writer	Course Teachers	Non-Course Teachers	df	$\chi^2$ value	sig
Identified Self as Writer	5	1	1	5.33	.02
Expressed negative feelings about their ability or confidence to write	0	4	1	6.00	.02

\*All p values are significant, p-value, less than .05

**Table 5**

*Observation Field Note Frequency Counts for Self-Regulation: Average number of times observed across 4 classroom observations*

Self-Regulation	Possible	Course Teachers	Non-Course Teachers
<u>Self-regulation</u>	4	4	0
<u>Autonomy</u>	4	4	2
<u>Peer Conferencing</u>	4	3	0

**Table 6**

*Observation Frequency Count Findings for Writing as a Social Act*

Writing as a Social Act	Possible	Course Teachers	Non-Course Teachers
<u>Sharing Tactics</u> <i>Average number across observations</i>	4	4	2
<u>Used Peer Collaboration</u> <i># of Participants using PC strategies</i>	6	6	2
<u>Taught Peer Collaboration</u> <i># of Participants teaching peer collaboration strategies</i>	6	3	1
<u>Used Peer Conferencing</u> <i># of participants using peer conferencing</i>	6	5	1

**Table 7**  
*Comparison of Percentage of total observed effective practices on WOF*

Variable	Course Teachers			Non-Course Teachers			t-values	p-values
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
<b>Self Regulation</b>								
Drafting	6	95	7.4	6	65	20	3.53	.011
Conferencing	6	98	3.9	5	73	7.4	7.04	.000
Editing/Publishing	6	90	17	4	48	30	2.92	.019
Writing Practices	6	93	8.1	6	65	22	2.97	.014
Skills/Strategies	6	97	7.8	6	50	27	4.04	.002
<b>Writing as a Social Act</b>								
Climate	6	96	5.6	6	68	13	4.93	.002
Conferencing	6	98	3.9	5	73	7.4	7.04	.000
Editing/Publishing	6	90	17	4	48	30	2.92	.019

All t values are significant, p-value, less than .05