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A Window into Practice: Examining Elementary Writing Methods Instruction

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A Window into Practice: Examining Elementary Writing Methods Instruction

Cover Page Footnote

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A Window into Practice: Examining Elementary Writing Methods Instruction

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A paradox in teacher education has been evident for quite some time: We know that effective teaching is complex work requiring a variety of scaffolds (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), but we have yet to create sufficient opportunities for teacher educators (TEs) to learn their profession (Darling-Hammond, 2012). The field offers few concrete resources for future TEs to consider their practice, create meaningful and useful coursework, and prepare to engage effectively with teacher candidates (TCs). TEs tend to learn their craft through their own teacher preparation and graduate apprenticeships (Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006; Zeichner, 2005). It is reasonable to assume that this apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) is as insufficient for TEs as it is for teachers. Yet there are few, if any, opportunities to learn in a more formalized way how to teach methods courses (Grossman & Dean, 2016) or to get inside the mind and process of effective TEs.

Elementary writing methods instructors face the reality that opportunities to learn to teach writing methods are scarce (Brindle, Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2016; Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Grisham & Wolsey, 2011), often because there are relatively few elementary writing methods courses offered. In fact, a recent study of 50 U.S. teacher preparation programs found that although writing may be embedded to a greater or lesser extent in language arts methods courses, only 25% of institutions had a dedicated writing methods course (Myers, Grisham, Scales, et al., 2016). This lack of coursework undoubtedly creates a dearth of opportunities for future TEs to have exposure to – let alone learn how to teach – elementary writing methods, to the detriment of future

P-12 teachers learning to teach writing. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of TEs who care deeply about their work and who work tirelessly to develop syllabi, assignments, assessments, and class sessions intended to help TCs become effective writing instructors for elementary-aged children. Yet, what those TEs do in their courses has received scant research attention.

As a teacher education and research community, we know very little about what happens in methods courses in general, and elementary writing methods courses in particular. In this study, we examined the practices of experienced writing methods instructors. We asked: *What are the instructional practices of experienced teacher educators who teach writing methods courses to elementary teacher candidates?*

Literature Review

The work on practice-based teacher education (PBTE) (Forzani, 2014; Zeichner, 2012) guided our inquiry into the practices of elementary writing methods instructors. PBTE provides a framework for the work of TEs across content areas. The PBTE theorists view methods courses as valuable because they provide a purposeful scaffold for the classroom work of TCs (Core Practices Consortium, 2013). Given that classrooms vary widely and that even excellent mentor teachers are not necessarily trained as coaches, clinical experiences are not sufficient for providing what TCs need to become effective teachers. In methods classes, according to PBTE, skilled TEs make the work of high-quality teaching visible to TCs. In the following sections, we begin with a presentation of the literature on pedagogies of practice in teacher education, followed by a description of unique challenges and affordances of writing methods.

Pedagogies of Practice in Teacher Education

We focused on Grossman and colleagues' three pedagogies of practice—representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice (Grossman, Compton, Igra, Ronfeldt, Shahan, & Williamson, 2009). *Representations* make practices visible to students and often involve watching an expert engage in the practice. For example, a TE might model the minilesson that accompanies a writing workshop or show a video of a teacher using a mentor text to support students' writing. Representations can also involve TCs taking on the role of a student so they can experience the teaching practice and reflect on how students might engage with it. Finally, representations can entail an expert describing classroom practice to a TC with sufficient detail that the TC could mimic the practice.

Grossman and colleagues define *decompositions of practice* as: "breaking down a complex practice into its constituent parts for the purposes of teaching and

learning. Decomposing practice enables students both to 'see' and enact elements of practice more effectively" (2009, p. 2069). Focusing on the discrete components of practice helps TCs see the necessary elements of the practice and understand the value of each element individually and as part of the whole. A decomposition often involves the teacher educator making visible the components of a successful instructional activity (e.g. the elements of a writing conference or the steps involved in assessing a piece of writing).

Finally, *approximations of practice* are intended to move TCs' understanding from thinking about a practice to actually trying it out. Approximations include activities like microteaching or role-plays as well as instructional planning. In teacher education, approximations often involve preparing for or engaging in elements of instruction or data analysis. By design, approximations are considerably less complex than working with children in an actual classroom, allowing the TC to focus specifically on the practice rather than the myriad aspects of teaching. Furthermore, approximations vary in their degree of authenticity, ranging from short rehearsals of isolated skills to more complete and integrated representations of practice (Grossman, Compton, et al., 2009). Ideally, feedback and reflection support TCs' work in an approximation, and TCs are encouraged to fail and try again in a low-stakes environment.

Content versus Methods

In considering these practices within the writing methods classroom, the distinction between engaging in a representation in the role of the student versus engaging in an approximation in the role of the teacher is uniquely interesting. Methods courses, after all, are intended to teach methods, not content, so representations in the role of student may be less powerful than approximations in the role of teacher. However, many TCs experienced a *product*-oriented approach to writing instruction when they were students themselves (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006), which focused on the mechanical and technical aspects of writing. This is in contrast to the process-oriented approach to writing, which is iterative and interactive, focused on developing the writer rather than the writing. While how much explicit instruction and structure is useful for writing instruction remains up for debate, the current general consensus in the writing research community is that some version of process writing is beneficial for developing motivated, skilled, lifelong writers (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012; Graves, Tuyay, & Green, 2004; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006). Perhaps as a result of this shift in pedagogy, there has been a strong movement within the writing community for pK-12 writing teachers, first and foremost, to identify as writers themselves (Andrews, 2008; Margarella, Blankenship, & Schneider, 2013). This translates into writing

methods classrooms where TCs engage with the writing process, keep writer's notebooks, confer and revise, and learn how to write in the ways that writing is currently taught.

This engagement as writers offers a challenge that may be unique within teacher education: rather than the concern about a disconnect between the theory in a methods course and the practice in classrooms (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010), elementary writing TEs run the risk of over-emphasizing writing practice without adequately scaffolding the pedagogy necessary for effective instruction and student support. In other words, with competing demands on limited time, a TC may leave the methods course identifying as a writer, but she may not have the skills to make the practice visible and accessible to all of her students (Ball, 2000). We believe that identifying as a writer is a necessary but insufficient goal of elementary writing methods courses; TCs must enter the field with pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) - knowledge of writing development, of young writers, and of the skills necessary to teach writing effectively - in addition to enthusiasm and a committed writing practice.

Work to design subject-specific articulations of pedagogies of practice for TEs is still in the relatively early stages (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Hill & Grossman, 2013). As Ball and Forzani (2009) highlight, a practice-focused curriculum for learning to teach would include significant attention to actual tasks and activities involved in the work, which necessarily differ across subject areas. We believe that part of this articulation necessarily entails learning from the range and nuance of current practice. In this study, we attempt to move this work forward through an analysis of pedagogies of practice in elementary writing methods instruction.

Methods

To better understand the current practices of elementary writing methods instructors, we engaged in an exploratory study of the teaching practices of seven TEs. We used a multiple case study design, with each participant representing a separate case (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Each case was comprised of survey, interview, and observation data. We explored the pedagogies of practice that TEs used to prepare elementary teachers for writing instruction, distinguishing among and unpacking examples of representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice. All of the participants are also authors of this article. Authors 1 and 2 were the researchers who observed in each classroom. Authors 1, 3, and a research assistant conducted and confirmed the analyses, and authors 1-8 wrote the article together. This allowed for member checking and collaborative engagement in the presentation of the work. Importantly, the collaborative writing provided the participants a window into each other's practice.

Sample

The data presented in this study are part of a larger study of writing methods instruction in one southeastern U.S. state. A survey sent to instructors at the 35 institutions that train teachers yielded responses from seventeen instructors at thirteen institutions. Of the seventeen respondents, ten were chosen for further participation based on the following criteria: 1) The TE taught a course that focused on or included writing methods; 2) The TE reported using active teaching strategies (as opposed to a majority of the time lecturing) in his or her teaching; 3) The TE had been a teacher educator for at least five years; 4) The TE reported feeling "somewhat" or "a lot" of control over the course; 5) The TE reported feeling "somewhat" or "a lot" of satisfaction with the course. Each participant either teaches a stand-alone writing methods course or embeds writing methods intentionally into a language arts course. Of the ten participants chosen, seven were available for observation during the semester of the study. Currently, there are no reliable, validated metrics of effectiveness for TEs, so we relied on this combination of factors to choose a purposeful sample of TEs who were likely to be using Grossman and colleagues (2009) pedagogies of practice and demonstrating reasonably strong instruction. Participant demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant demographics

Participant	Years as a Teacher Educator (including as a graduate student teaching solo)	Description of Training to be a Teacher Educator	Length of Observation (in hours)
Dr. Darrow	8	Visiting lecturer with a mentor	1.5
Dr. Everett	10	Teaching assistantship	1.5
Dr. Church	13	Teaching assistantship; mentoring	2.75
Dr. Avell	7	Teaching assistantship	2.5
Dr. Combs	5	Mentorship by program professor	1.5
Dr. Schoon	10	Teaching assistantship	2.5
Dr. Oakes	13	Teaching assistantship; mentoring	2.5

Data

We began with a 30-item electronic survey designed to gather information about instructor demographics, the writing methods content in the program, the TEs' feelings about the course and impressions of how writing methods is prioritized at their university and in local schools, and information about the instructional strategies utilized by writing methods educators. The follow-up interviews with the seven participants were semi-structured (Schensul, Schensul, & Lecompte, 1999) and included eleven questions to elucidate the TE's practice, course, and philosophy more generally, since the observation would only be one class session.

The observations were conducted during a class period of the instructor's choice, with the request that if it was not solely a writing methods course, the observer would like to see a class session that included writing methods instruction. These observations lasted between 90 and 165 minutes, depending on the length of the class (see Table 1). The researchers used a semi-structured observation protocol, with columns for: 1) timestamps; 2) detailed observations, including as much dialogue as possible; and 3) running questions and comments.

Analysis

Our goal was to present the instructors' practices, particularly as they related to the pedagogies of practice framework. The unit of analysis for this study was the

instructional activity (Lampert & Graziani, 2009). An instructional activity was defined as engagement in a task with a distinct objective.

The observation field notes were divided into excerpts, with each excerpt capturing an instructional activity during the lesson. Across the seven class sessions, we identified 56 instructional activities. A team of researchers coded for evidence of representations, approximations, and decompositions. Codes were compared, and discrepancies were discussed and agreed upon to create a finalized codebook. Interviews were transcribed and coded for evidence of representations, approximations, and decompositions and for descriptions or explanations of the teaching practices observed. Following the observations and analysis, all participants were invited to be co-authors on the paper. A colleague who was not a member of the research team independently coded 20% of the excerpts using the codebook developed by the team, achieving a pooled Cohen's kappa (De Vries, Elliott, Kanouse, & Teleki, 2008) of 0.78, which can be categorized as "good agreement" (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Findings

As we expected based on the sampling process we employed, there were commonalities in the instruction we observed. Class sessions were "practice-based" in that most of the time was spent engaging in the work that elementary teachers and students do in classrooms rather than simply talking about it. In fact, only 5% of the 56 excerpts (each of which encompassed an instructional activity) included no pedagogies of practice (see Table 2). The 5% of instructional activities generally consisted of lecturing without a connection to teaching practice or describing course assignment expectations without engaging in pedagogies of practice in the descriptions. We found that all of the study participants engaged in representations during the observed lesson, and representation was the most prominent pedagogy of practice within the lessons. Decompositions were evident in about half as many instructional activities as representations. All but one instructor provided an opportunity for at least one approximation during the lesson, and approximations were evident in 15% of the instructional activities.

We describe the pedagogies and the intersections of pedagogies below. We begin by describing the practices in isolation, and then we describe combinations of practices.

Table 2
Breakdown of instructional activities by pedagogies of practice

Participant	Number of Instructional Activities	Percent of Instructional Activities including a Representation	Percent of Instructional Activities including a Decomposition	Percent of Instructional Activities including an Approximation	Percent of Instructional Activities including No Clear Practices
Dr. Darrow	5	20	5	5	0
Dr. Everett	7	35	30	5	0
Dr. Church	6	20	15	10	0
Dr. Avell	14	35	20	20	10
Dr. Combs	8	30	15	5	5
Dr. Schoon	5	15	10	15	5
Dr. Oakes	11	55	15	0	0
Overall	56	53	27	15	5

*Note.*Percents do not equal 100 because some instructional activities were coded with multiple pedagogies.

Representations of Practice

In our analysis of the coded instructional activities, we found that representations of practice occurred most frequently. In the elementary writing methods classrooms, representations that occurred in isolation (i.e. not paired with a decomposition or approximation) were likely to involve TCs playing the role of students; representations such as video analysis of writing lessons tended to include decompositions.

TCs in the role of students. Representations of content frequently involved the TE teaching the TCs, who took on the role of students. This practice, as we noted earlier, may be more prevalent in writing instruction than in other elementary content areas, because TEs are working to get TCs to identify as writers in ways that are different than many TCs experienced when they were elementary students.

One of the representations we observed where TCs took the role of students occurred in Dr. Comb's class. The TCs worked in writing groups doing the work of students. They listened to each other's personal narratives, wrote questions, provided a compliment and an area for growth, and then completed the group evaluation. The TCs had the opportunity to try out this structure and process in the role of students.

In Dr. Oakes' class, the TCs listened to an expressive model of a read aloud of a mentor text, Mo Willems' *The Pigeon Needs a Bath.* Dr. Oakes then guided a discussion about how the book is a model of persuasive writing. She asked: "What

are the different things (the author) used to persuade?" The TCs listed the persuasive elements, including appealing to emotions and providing evidence. Dr. Oakes then had the TCs list topics they cared enough about to be able to persuade someone else to do something. Again, the TCs in this case were engaging as students, watching a model of instruction and feeling what it was like to be a student in a class when that instruction is taking place.

Testimonials from instructors. During class, instructors sometimes talked about their own experiences teaching in elementary writing classrooms. Consistent with Grossman, Compton, et al. (2009), since those instances offered a window into practice that was more transparent than simply lecturing about a strategy, they were also coded as representations. For example, Dr. Combs talked about the importance of encouraging students to "play with oral language, whether that's puns, riddles, jokes, poetry. . . spoonerisms, chiasmus" as part of what she did in her own classroom and as part of what is effective in developing children's oral and written language.

Approximations of Practice

Approximations of practice are intended to engage TCs in the work of teachers. We observed a range of approximation practices, including completing unit plan templates and analyzing student work samples. There were five approximations across three instructors that occurred in isolation. In other words, these approximations were not in combination with other pedagogies of practice.

Dr. Church had her TCs explain to a partner the "rule" for a challenging spelling sort as if that partner were a student, ensuring that the teacher in the dyad was "explicitly explaining" the rule in student-friendly language. Having to think through and articulate the rule is work that teachers do in order to help students make sense of complex phenomena.

Dr. Avell had her students go "sentence stalking." As teachers would do, they underlined or highlighted some sentences in a passage she had read that could be models for teaching students a particular writing skill. They worked independently and then shared the sentences and skills with each other.

Intersections of Representations and Approximations

In the instructional activities that included both a representation and an approximation, TCs were able to see a model of what they were expected to do immediately before trying it out. Approximately half of the approximations were accompanied by a representation (see Table 3).

Table 3
Co-occurrence of pedagogies of practice

	Approximation	Decomposition	Representation
Approximation	-	5	5
Decomposition	5	-	17
Representation	5	17	-
Total Co-occuring	10	22	22
Total Coded	12	22	42

For example, Dr. Avell had her TCs analyze a sample of a child's writing in light of a state standard. TCs were approximating the practice of noticing students' strengths and finding what Dr. Avell calls the "intelligence in (the student's) errors" – and a next step for instruction of this particular child. She modeled this practice for the TCs prior to having them try it themselves, thereby providing a representation before the approximation.

In Dr. Schoon's class, the TCs engaged in an approximation of one practice and a representation of another during one instructional activity. Partners were expected to work together to write unit plans for a particular genre of writing. They were approximating the teacher practice of collaborating to construct a unit. At the same time, they were engaging in a workshop structure, where they began the instructional activity setting goals for the workshop time and signing up for conferences with the instructors. The TCs also checked in regarding their goals at the end of the block of time. This instructional activity did not include a decomposition of the workshop structure. Dr. Schoon did not take advantage of the opportunity to make the elements of the workshop clear and to have her students reflect on how that structure would or would not work for groups of children.

Decompositions of Practice

In general, the decompositions we observed involved TEs breaking complex structures like lesson plans into their component parts, making those parts visible to the TCs. Decompositions apart from representations or approximations were rare in our observations. Dr. Avell decomposed a course assignment for her students, describing the aspects of what was expected of them as they planned, taught, and reflected on a writing lesson with their mentor teachers. She described the aspects of the lesson plan that were expected, including the lesson title, the standards, and the objectives. She also described the content, procedure, assessment, and differentiation that was expected in the lesson plan. In this decomposition, students

were not seeing or trying an example of a lesson plan, per se, but they had access to the component parts of a lesson plan.

Intersections of Decompositions with other Pedagogies

In our observations, decompositions of practice consistently co-occurred with representations or approximations of practice. Approximately two fifths of the representations were accompanied by a decomposition. Those decompositions made the component elements of the teaching strategies visible, often affording instructors opportunities to assess their candidates' understanding.

In the observed lessons, four different instructors used decompositions paired with representations. For example, Dr. Everett had her students look at an example of a minilesson, and she prepared them to break it apart into its components. She began by providing an introduction and some scaffolding for a video, describing the ideal conditions for the minilesson and the role of the anchor chart. Dr. Everett then shared the 10-minute video of a teacher and her students engaged in a minilesson about using dialogue to improve writing. Dr. Everett followed up with a series of questions about what the students had just observed: "Did you see all of the parts of a minilesson?. . .What was the takeaway of what the students should be learning?. . .What else did you notice as far as language and behaviors and conditions of this writers workshop?"

Dr. Oakes worked with her students to explore organizational formats for essay writing that went beyond the "hamburger model" that is employed in most writing classrooms. She provided a handout with other formats and talked her TCs through the components of the various formats, using examples that were relevant to the TCs. Dr. Oakes then had her TCs work with partners to brainstorm topics – "words to live by" – for the essays that they were expected to write and turn in.

In the observed lessons, we saw a few decompositions paired with an approximation. Dr. Darrow brought six books for her students to consider as possibilities for mentor texts to use in lessons on aspects of "small moment" narrative writing. In small groups, TCs worked together to use mentor texts to plan, and then Dr. Darrow prompted them to decompose this practice.

> Think about what we just did. What examples shine through the book that you could teach small moments/idea development? What would your prewriting strategy look like? What would a quick write suggestion be? Then be ready to share. Walk yourself through this process as a small group.

The groups planned as teachers would and then they shared out the aspects of their planning—a summary of the story, a takeaway, a prewrite strategy, and a quick write topic—with the class.

Intersections of Representations, Approximations, and Decompositions

In our observations, we saw three examples across three TEs of instructional activities that included a combination of representation, approximation, and decomposition. For example, Dr. Combs had her TCs plan and present minilessons on a variety of skills under the umbrella of sentence variety. She began by identifying and modeling the different components of the planning process (a representation and decomposition) and then the TCs worked in groups to prepare and present (an approximation of practice). With each focus lesson, the presenter(s) described the strategy and then had the other TCs engage in the practice in the role of students.

Similarly, Dr. Everett's TCs worked with mentor texts in groups. Each group was tasked with finding: "What can you teach about craft based on this book?" As teachers, the TCs explored the mentor texts. Dr. Everett modeled for the TCs with a Kevin Henkes book, breaking down the process of how to match a book with a writing skill, including: "What did the author do? What choice did your author make, and what could you invite us to do as a writer?" The TCs then took turns sharing with their peers the aspects of the mentor texts they had explored, including the writing skill, the mentor text, and why the two were a good match. This allowed all of the TCs to approximate the practice of choosing appropriate mentor texts. Paying careful attention to the presentations, Dr. Everett added information, such as sharing that one of the books is a good example of building tension in a story. However, she did not provide feedback or critique of the TCs' choices.

In Dr. Schoon's class, the TCs worked in expert groups to learn about different types of poetry (i.e. haiku, "found" poems, cinquain, formula poems). They found definitions and examples of the type of poetry, and then they planned for how to teach it to a group of students, including how to make it relevant or interesting to the students, what teach point they would use to teach this type of poetry, and creating an example to use with students. Then, they went back to their original group and shared what they had learned and created with TCs who had focused on a different type. They approximated the practice of planning for teaching, but they did not approximate the actual teaching.

Discussion

High-quality methods classrooms make visible the complexities of teaching and allow TCs to view models of practice, decompose practice, and approximate practice in lower-stakes environments than pK-12 classrooms provide (Grossman, et al., 2009). As teacher educators wrestle with how to develop and engage in PBTE across and within content areas, it was clear in this study that there are elementary writing methods instructors who are already very much engaged in practice-based methods instruction.

Promising Pedagogies

In our observations, we found that experienced TEs were not simply focused on creating teachers who identify as writers themselves, but also on developing teachers well-versed in the practices of elementary writing instruction. Each of these instructors used the vast majority of class time to engage TCs in practices. While it is unclear in the literature what an ideal balance of representations, decompositions, and approximations might be across a methods course, let alone in a single class period, it is promising that TEs who were likely to be engaging in PBTE were, in fact, doing so. While there was some variation in how those practices were distributed among the instructors, this finding illustrates that experienced writing methods TEs provide opportunities for their TCs to both observe and to try out literacy practices. What remains an open question is which practices, in particular, are most important for TCs to learn in the elementary writing methods classroom.

Grossman and colleagues have called for further research and conversation on what constitutes defensible decompositions of practice. We observed several "manageable chunks of professional practice that might form the core of preservice practices" (Grossman, Compton, et al., 2009, p. 2093) in writing methods. Since lesson planning is a vital element of what teachers do, having insight into the process of lesson planning through a decomposition of a lesson plan is likely important for TCs. Similarly, the minilesson is an indispensable component of the workshop model of writing instruction, as it is the space where writing skills and strategies are modeled and practiced. We saw TEs actively decomposing minilessons into their component pieces, allowing the TCs opportunities to see and question the important elements of a minilesson.

Approximations in the lessons we observed included and went beyond microteaching and role-play exercises. TEs approximated practices such as choosing mentor texts, providing feedback on writing, planning and implementing chunks of lessons, and explaining complicated concepts. Like Grossman and colleagues (2009), we noticed a range of authenticity in these approximations. We

observed TCs score their students' writing on a rubric and then work to determine a teach point. This process exemplifies a more complete and integrated approximation of practice, closer to what TCs might do in the classroom. We also saw approximations of narrower aspects of practice, such as planning for and explaining a particular type of word sort (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnson, 2016) to a partner. TCs are unlikely to script explanations of different word sorts once they are in the classroom, but this approximation is still valuable. Targeted, less "authentic" approximations "quiet the background noise so that [TCs] can tune in to one facet of practice at a time" (Grossman, Compton, et al., 2009, p. 2083). The TEs we observed used class time to provide space for TCs to try out a variety of practices in a lower-stakes environment than an elementary classroom.

Areas for Growth

As we coded instruction practices, one code that emerged was missed opportunities for TEs to decompose practices they were representing for students. Through the PBTE lens, decompositions are important because they allow TCs to see the components of a practice in order to use them more flexibly. There is no metric in the existing research regarding an ideal proportion of class time spent on decompositions, and decompositions may be part of these instructors' other class sessions. Nevertheless, this may be an area for growth as we consider the work of writing methods instruction.

We observed very minimal in-the-moment feedback as TCs engaged in practices. We know that feedback and questions during approximations matter (Grossman, et al., 2009). Lampert and colleagues (2013), in their investigation of ambitious instruction in elementary mathematics, stressed the importance of the timeliness of feedback that comes from peers, TEs, and students. The instructors' gradual release approach to the TCs learning teaching practices may be even more effective with the addition of a feedback loop incorporating the instructor's expertise on precisely how to apply the practices. It is important that TCs are not just learning about practices, but they are also learning how to enact them in dynamic situations (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009) and with timely and effective feedback.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included a small number of participants and data collection within just one state at one point in time. We were also likely limited by the demographics of the instructors who were part of the study. While we did not collect demographic data on the participants themselves in the survey, our sample

for the observations and interviews was entirely comprised of white women in their 40s.

Implications and Conclusion

It is important that we work to access the knowledge of TEs as the field develops subject-specific pedagogies and practices. The current study, with a focus on understanding the practices and beliefs of writing instructors, aims both to respect seasoned TEs' knowledge and voices and to push TEs to continue to refine their practice.

Dr. Darrow described having felt underprepared to teach writing when she began teaching in elementary schools; she described it as her "own little mission" that her TCs "not replicate bad writing instruction." Therefore, she teaches writing and writing methods extensively and explicitly. Dr. Church, Dr. Oakes, and Dr. Schoon expressed similar passion for the subject matter in addition to a concern that writing instruction is prioritized neither in teacher education nor in elementary schools. And while all of the instructors in our study felt confident in their instruction, each also expressed eagerness to collaborate with other experienced colleagues across institutions in order to improve their own practice.

Adopting a framework, such as PBTE, through which to view the work of teacher education allows for specific strategies for improvement. It also creates a space for generating common understandings of what the subject-specific practices are that are appropriate for writing methods instruction. Like Au's (2002) work with teachers, we imagine engaging TEs who share a common vision of writing teacher education gathering to share their most successful practices, imagine the possibilities, and then align their energy so that future TEs will have a starting point and some concrete resources from which to build syllabi and plan their courses. Bringing together TEs to do this work requires time, space, and trust to develop a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), but the possibilities are exciting. For the authors, the first step in building such a community of practice has been writing this article together and puzzling over how PBTE maps on to our teaching.

Using PBTE as a frame for understanding what writing methods TEs are doing provides a rich, but certainly not comprehensive, look into this complex work. We heed Zeichner's (2012) warning not to allow the interpersonal, context-based, or developmental aspects of a teacher's growth to get lost in the desire to find common ways of improving the quality of teacher education. Additional and larger studies exploring TEs' practices and beliefs about writing methods instruction through a variety of lenses should be conducted to more fully understand how elementary writing methods instructors provide opportunities for TCs to learn this complex work. In terms of PBTE, the field requires in-depth study of each

promising pedagogy, not unlike what is being done in elementary mathematics education research (e.g. Kazemi, Ghousseini, Cunard, & Turrou, 2016). Specifically, researchers must consider what kinds of feedback TCs need as they approximate practice.

The necessity of ambitious writing instruction is no less than a matter of social justice. As Dr. Darrow explained:

> Think about what it means when we don't teach children to write authentically and profusely and critically: What does that do for democratic education? What does it do as far as facilitating voice? To structure an argument? I would like programs to think about writing as more than just a subject but as a way of fostering democracy.

Equitable access to strong models, pedagogies, and practices for TEs is a vital link in the chain that connects children to effective writing instruction.

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