Preservice English Teachers' Evolving Conceptions of 21st-Century Writing

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Introduction

English teaching practices and curricula over the past 20 years have responded to shifts in digital technologies, multimodal composition, and new literacies to expand the field's conception of writing and writing pedagogy. Still, several recently revised position statements by the National Council of Teachers of English (2018a, 2018b, 2018c) and texts such as *Because Digital Writing Matters* by the National Writing Project, et al. (2010) point to the continued importance and urgency of integrating 21st-century literacies in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. Current research makes clear that teaching new literacies is not only the job of ELA teachers but also of the English educators who prepare them (Caughlan et al., 2017; Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Hicks, et al., 2013; Pasternak, et al., 2017).

Yet, scholars in English education have expressed concern about the ways and the extent to which ELA teachers integrate 21st-century writing in their instruction. Research identifies gaps between what the field believes about what digital and multimodal writing can offer for writers and writing and the practices that teachers enact in classrooms (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Turner & Hicks, 2012). Some of the challenges researchers have identified include teachers adopting surface approaches to using digital technology in ways that do not substantively evolve students' writing experiences (Applebee & Langer, 2013; Pasternak et al.); teachers sustaining traditional genres and writing approaches at the expense of public and multimodal texts students engage with beyond school (Carrington & Robinson, 2009; Kist & Pytash, 2015); and teachers perceiving digital and

multimodal writing as a threat to traditional school-based writing (DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Turner & Hicks).

Despite assumptions that younger teachers entering the profession may be more likely to bring new literacies into the classroom, research indicates that the new generation of English teachers is still unlikely to transfer 21st-century literacy practices into the teaching of writing (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013). This may be due, in part, to the relatively limited focus on writing pedagogy in secondary English education programs (Caughlan et al.; Smagorinsky, 2010) and limited opportunities for pre-service teachers (PSTs) to develop conceptual frameworks of writing to guide their instruction (Morgan & Pytash, 2014)

In response to these challenges, English educators continue to explore how to align methods courses and field experiences to the field's evolving understanding of digital literacies, new media literacies, and multimodal writing (Caughlan et al.). Because theories related to 21st-century literacy and writing pedagogy are constantly in motion (Mills, 2015), it is important that teachers develop an open, responsive, and flexible stance to writing and teaching writing. Presuming that what PSTs bring with them from their own experiences or what they learn in university-based teacher education will situate them now and into the future does not acknowledge this notion of flux and evolution. Given the challenges of defining 21st-century writing and preparing new teachers for a future yet to be defined, it is critical to prepare PSTs to both understand and implement 21st-century writing in their instruction.

This article describes how four PSTs conceptualized 21st-century writing throughout their student teaching internships and how they reflected on critical teaching moments to shape these conceptions. In their efforts to define 21st-century writing, the PSTs discussed ways that their teaching experiences destabilized, challenged, and contradicted these emerging definitions, ultimately leading to more nuanced and dynamic conceptions of 21st-century writing. The PSTs' experiences suggest that English educators may support new teachers by helping them develop and reflect on their conceptions of 21st-century writing, particularly during classroom-based field experiences, when their beliefs are both tested and implemented in practice.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks of 21st-Century Writing

Digital and multimodal literacies have advanced critical discussions about writing instruction among ELA teachers and English educators leading into and throughout the 21st century. New forms of writing—such as blogs, social media, websites, and video essays—prompt us to reconsider what writing is and what kinds of writing have a place in academic settings (National Council of Teachers of

English, 2018c). Palmeri (2012) and Turner and Hicks, among others, have warned that neither writing practices nor pedagogies will shift simply with the introduction of technological or digital tools. Just by moving classroom writing to online platforms such as Google Docs, for example, teachers aren't substantively changing the way they—or their students—think about the benefits of multiple modes (e.g., video, audio, spatial) or affordances (e.g., hyperlinks, web publishing) made possible by digital technologies.

Scholars claim that meaningful integration of 21st-century writing requires teachers who understand both the technical requirements and the rhetorical possibilities afforded by digital and multimodal literacies (Grabill & Hicks; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, Hicks, et al.). As teachers respond to and include multimodal texts, emergent genres, and new approaches to writing in their teaching, it can be overwhelming for them to keep up. Because institutions and curricula try to keep up but do so unevenly, it is important to activate PSTs' awareness about the evolution of these frameworks and practices. Only when ELA teachers view 21st-century writing through rhetorical (e.g., What audiences is a piece of writing for? How do digital modes change the nature of the piece?) and sociocultural (e.g., What communities exist to develop and/or respond to writing? What kinds of expertise can support new kinds of compositions?) lenses will they adopt critical and flexible ways of teaching writing.

Teacher Knowledge and Beliefs

Scholarship in digital literacies and teacher education points to mindset, as defined by Lankshear & Knobel, as a foundation of teacher development. It is important that teacher educators acknowledge the impact of teachers' prior experiences and beliefs on their classroom practices. Teachers who hearken back to their own experiences as students might remember learning formulas for writing five-paragraph essays or limited opportunities to write in modes beyond words-on-paper, for example. Research about teacher beliefs recognizes that the knowledge and experiences teachers bring with them as writers and learners shape their practices and are replicated in their classroom pedagogies, particularly when they remain unchallenged or unexamined (Burnett, 2009; Morgan & Pytash; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014).

Similarly, recent studies about ELA teachers' perceptions of digital technology in classrooms and their related beliefs about teaching writing have found that even new teachers are likely to compartmentalize writing that belongs in school versus writing in students' (and their own) out-of-school lives (DePalma & Alexander; Hundley & Holbrook). Shifting teachers from technical mindsets that focus on digital tools to mindsets that explore rhetorical, cognitive, and social choices writers make requires explicit attention to the knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs teachers bring to the classroom (Grabill & Hicks).

Thus, English educators are unlikely to draw meaningful conclusions about what PSTs know and understand simply by focusing on teaching practices—what is *visible* in the classroom—without also understanding the underlying values and beliefs—what is *invisible* (Boche, 2014; Burnett). Studying teacher conceptions is a helpful way to understand how teachers develop beliefs about writing and to receive feedback on which beliefs transfer into classroom practices. Ultimately, because new teachers will be the facilitators of writing pedagogy in the 21st century, it is important to discover what experiences will best prepare them to do so.

Student Teaching as a Site of Learning

Student teaching is often the first full-time teaching experience for PSTs and thus a critical point in their development of the beliefs that will inform their teaching practices. It is also a complicated space for PSTs as they step into a new identity, respond and adapt to a new context, and attend to competing demands imposed upon them by the university and the school. Their first teaching experience is a rich context from which to study how PSTs construct and complicate theories of composition and pedagogy while they navigate dual roles of learner and teacher (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Zeichner, 2010).

Many studies in English education have focused on the methods course as a site of PST learning about 21st-century writing (Howard, 2014; Hundley & Holbrook; Katić, 2008; Wake & Whittingham, 2013). However, without the experiential learning that teaching provides, learning theories about 21st-century writing and digital literacies within a university-based class alone are unlikely to have a significant effect on teachers' actual practices (Smagorinsky & Barnes). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) suggest that knowledge "acquired through experience and through considered and deliberative reflection about or inquiry into experience" (p. 262) is crucial to developing teachers who not only gain knowledge in the short term, but who act as responsive knowledge-makers and adapt principles in action over time. Reflection situated within teaching contexts can help teachers process critical moments and deepen their understanding of theory. This study explores, through Cochran-Smith and Lytle's lens of reflection-on-practice, how PSTs develop and enact evolving conceptions of 21st-century writing and teaching.

Methods

Research Questions and Overview

This research study was designed to discover how PSTs' conceptual frameworks of 21st-century writing are informed by clinical teaching experiences. The study explores two questions:

1. How did PSTs conceptualize 21st-century writing during their internships?
2. In what ways did their teaching experiences challenge and/or shift their conceptions?

To answer these questions, I interviewed four preservice English teachers at five points before, during, and after their four-month internships at the culmination of their graduate-level English education program. Having co-taught all four participants in an English methods course that included a limited focus on 21st-century writing pedagogy (a description of the course goals, assignments, and outcomes can be found in Jensen, 2019) one year prior to their internships, I had a relationship with the participants that positioned me as both mentor and researcher. I designed the interviews as reflections that gave participants an opportunity to make sense of their teaching experiences while also developing and revising their notions of 21st-century writing.

Participants

The four PSTs in this study were members of a cohort of graduate students in a master's degree and licensure program in English education at a research university in the eastern United States. The participants represented a range of ages, academic and professional backgrounds, and student teaching placements that allowed me to explore how individual PSTs operated within particular teaching contexts and how a range of PSTs responded to integrating 21st-century writing across diverse secondary classroom settings.

Margot[1] was a 29-year-old white woman returning to the university after completing her undergraduate degree in marketing, a three-year career in public relations, and four years in admissions at a private K–12 school. Margot secured a full-time, paid internship at Franklin High School, a socioeconomically, linguistically, and ethnically diverse suburban public school; she taught five sections of International Baccalaureate (IB) English Literature II, English 12, and English 11. Franklin High School was one of the district's pilot sites for students to receive school-issued laptops, where digitally-mediated learning was a high priority for school administrators and the English department, who focused professional development on digital learning and technologies.

Callie was a white woman, 25 years old when she began the graduate program, two years after finishing a bachelor's degree in communication studies. Callie's internship situated her at Campbell Middle School teaching sixth-grade English. Campbell was a small, affluent, and resource-rich suburban public school. Part of Callie's internship included collaborating with two other teachers to revise their curriculum within the guidelines of the IB Middle Years Program (MYP).

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[1] All names of participants and schools are pseudonyms chosen either by the participant or the researcher.

Campbell also provided school-issued laptops to students and, like Franklin, devoted faculty development efforts and administrative priorities to the integration of technology in classroom learning environments.

Janine, a 48-year-old white woman, had returned to graduate school 14 years after completing her undergraduate degree in English, having taken time off to raise her children. Janine's internship was at Skyview Middle School, a suburban public middle school, which she described as overcrowded and socioeconomically diverse. Janine taught in a mobile pod—four classrooms connected within a trailer––outside of the main school building. Many of the students in her honors and general education English 7 courses, and particularly those in a remedial writing course, were English language learners. Janine's students had limited access to computers at school, as one laptop cart was shared between four teachers' classrooms, so making digital writing and learning part of her everyday teaching was impossible.

Leila was an Iranian-American woman who was 25 years old when she began the program, three years after completing an undergraduate degree in American literature. Leila taught AP Literature and team-taught English 11 at the most urban of all four of the participants' teaching sites, Millcreek High School. As the only high school in the socioeconomically and ethnically diverse city it served, Millcreek's student population included a large percentage of English language learners (31%) and students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch (56%). The city invested heavily in the school system, and in recent years, every student at Millcreek had been issued a Chromebook, although Leila noted that teachers varied in how often they used the laptops for instruction.

Data Collection

I collected data through a series of five stimulated-recall interviews (Calderhead, 1981) with each of the four participants over the course of their internships. Using artifacts from across their teacher education program (e.g., methods course assignments, student teaching units, and lesson plans) as stimuli to ground their responses, I asked participants to articulate their beliefs about 21st-century writing as related to their artifacts and teaching experiences. I also asked them to reflect on how teaching prompted them to explore these conceptions in new ways.

Through a pair of questions revisited in each interview, I asked participants to (1) define the features and experiences of 21st-century writing, and (2) identify the features and experiences they considered most and least important to the ELA writing curriculum. Returning to both questions—and their previous responses—in each interview allowed participants to track and discuss the ways their conceptual frameworks evolved. Participants engaged in practice-based reflection by revisiting their responses from previous interviews, then continuing to clarify their emerging

beliefs by responding to the question, "Looking back at your previous responses to the question about 21st-century writing, is there anything you would change or add at this point?" This process allowed both the participants and me to observe their evolving beliefs over time.

Finally, as a way to understand the role of the interviews as interventions themselves, in the final interviews I asked participants to discuss how the interviews, if at all, helped them develop their evolving teaching beliefs and practices. I also asked them to note particular experiences in their teaching internships that shaped or shifted their thinking about 21st-century writing instruction in secondary ELA classrooms. Participant responses to these two sets of questions—about 21st-century writing and about the roles of our interviews and their internship experiences as interventions—shaped my response to my research questions and the analysis of data collected.

Data Analysis

I coded the interview data using an inductive approach influenced by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) to identify common conceptual themes derived from participant responses. The findings in this article are based on content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of participant responses to the following four interview questions:

- *Q1 (Interviews 1–5):* What features define or characterize writing in the 21st century?
- *Q2 (Interviews 1–5):* Have your core values and priorities about teaching writing shifted in any way during your student teaching experience? How so?
- *Q3 (Interviews 1–5):* Is there anything we talked about in our interview today that has caused you to think differently about teaching writing in the 21st century? Is there anything from a previous interview that may have influenced or shaped how you are thinking about and planning for your own teaching experience?
- *Q4 (Interview 5 only):* What experiences during your teacher preparation program were influential in helping you develop and enact your conception of 21st-century writing?

I derived codes for Q1 from recurring themes in participant responses, categorizing ideas at the sentence level when participants introduced a new idea or example (see Table 1 for codes, definitions, and examples used in analysis). In a secondary analysis of the coded data, I subdivided certain categories in order to capture the difference between participants' explicit (named) acknowledgement of a particular feature versus an indirect (implied) reference to the same feature (see

"digital" and "multimodal" codes in Table 1 for examples). Coding at this level allowed me to analyze for nuances of participants' awareness of the features they described. The identified codes, including parent codes and related subcodes for "digital" and "multimodal" themes, are depicted in Table 1, along with definitions for codes and examples from the data.

Table 1. 21st-Century Writing Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code Labels	Definitions	Examples
Accessible	References the ease or accessibility of composing (e.g., typing vs. handwriting) and/or publishing writing (e.g., on blogs, listservs, Twitter). May include references to lowering or minimizing barriers to entry for writers or writing.	*Composing:* "They liked to write on the computer, which was really helpful, because they seemed to find it tedious to write. [. . .] I didn't know if it was the outlining process or just the ability to be able to type, which is much more comfortable for them, so I guess that's it." (Janine) *Publishing:* "There is more of an opportunity in the 21st century to share your writing if you're just an average person." (Margot)
Digital	**Implied:** Mentions a writing process or product that implies or assumes that a digital technology device or software is required or has been used. This can include digital genres (e.g., text messages, videos) or practices that require digital access (e.g., publishing online, uploading a document). **Named:** Directly mentions "digital" or "technology" where there is an explicit recognition of the presence of digital technology devices, software, and/or processes for writing.	*Implied:* "You know, we're writing in 140 characters on Twitter and people are Snapchatting and using writing for social media a lot." (Callie) *Named:* "[I'm] thinking about how they are always sharing digitally these days, regardless of what they're sharing." (Leila)
Evolving	References to writing changing over time, including how writers, theories, and/or institutions expand their notions of what "counts" as writing.	"As history has progressed, writing has become more diverse in terms of what's considered 'good writing.'" (Margot)
Flexible/ Diverse	References writing in a diverse range of genres, structures, media, modes, etc. (not diversity of content), including diversity in writers' experiences, for example writing for various purposes and/or audiences or practicing writing using various platforms. Includes references to flexibility in writers' choices across a range of options.	"I do think the variety of genres is incredibly important, just because it helps them think differently for each genre. It's always good to give them different ways of thinking, [. . .] and that kind of goes along with the many modes and texts." (Leila)
Frequent	References the frequency with which writers produce writing. May also include references to shorter length of texts and/or writers' attention spans.	"[Writing] is in little bits, I guess, more than long, drawn-out missives, where you sit down and you pen a letter. It's more instantaneous. But people do write all day long, back and forth. Messaging." (Janine)

Immediate	References the immediacy of writing, publishing, sharing, and/or receiving responses to writing. Includes notions of urgency and instantaneousness.	"There's this urgency and this overstimulation in the 21st century of images and words and writing." (Callie)
Multimodal	**Implied:** Mentions a writing process or product that implies or assumes that the composition requires or uses more than one mode (e.g., audio, image, video, text, etc.). **Named:** Directly mentions "multimodal" (including "visual" and/or "audio," for example) where there is an explicit recognition of the presence of multimodal components of writing processes or products.	*Implied:* "Like, video essays, I'm thinking, or composing a video where you're answering a question or something. So thinking of that as writing, not just the actual typing." (Janine) *Named:* "I noticed that one major theme [. . .] is the concept of visual literacy and visuals interacting with text and words." (Margot)
Public	Mentions writing for, publishing to, or presenting to a public audience (e.g., beyond classmates and/or the teacher). Response must go beyond general mention of "audience" to explicitly acknowledge writing for or with awareness of a wider public audience.	"Just knowing that their writing is going to be read on a more public stage [. . .] will hopefully make them realize that their words matter more and will hopefully help them be more active in it." (Leila)
Social/ Interactive	References writers collaborating to draft, revise, compose, provide or receive feedback, and/or considering the reaction they might invoke a from an imagined or real audience.	*Collaboration:* "I have gotten better at giving them more opportunities to write and collaborate and become more comfortable sharing their writing with one another, which I think is a key component." (Leila) *Imagined Audience:* "I personally see interactive as thinking about the audience, thinking about the response. [. . .] We talked about how digital writing is put out there for an audience and for people to react." (Callie)
Student-Directed	References student writers' choices in (1) self-expression in the content of their writing and/or (2) use of prior knowledge about writing processes (including digital tools and platforms) to make choices during the writing process.	*Engaging students' prior knowledge:* "I think that would be really meaningful to them to like make a video, because that's probably something they've done." (Janine) *Students' self-expression:* "Just giving them a lot of ways to express themselves I think is important." (Leila)

Using a third layer of analysis, I examined responses to Q2 and Q4 where I identified patterns and exemplar experiences in participants' descriptions of critical teaching incidents from their internship experiences. Finally, I analyzed Q3 to understand what aspects of our interviews participants identified as influential in developing their conceptions of 21st-century writing. In both, I looked for patterns between participants' evolving conceptions of writing and their own claims about the ways the teaching moments they identified and our interviews caused shifts in their conceptions. In the findings below, I have selected illustrative examples of critical teaching and reflection moments from which to excerpt longer accounts from two case study participants.

Findings

By the end of their internships, the PSTs' evolving definitions of writing in the 21st century aligned with the field's theoretical understandings and were complicated by and responsive to teaching tensions. Ultimately, teaching challenges—alongside opportunities for guided reflection on these experiences—pointed PSTs toward rhetorical, rather than technical, considerations of writing and writing instruction. As PSTs situated their understanding of 21st-century writing within their teaching experiences, they were less likely to talk about the tools of composition and more likely to reflect on their teaching and students' writing experiences. They developed more complex rhetorical and pedagogical understandings, particularly of digital and multimodal aspects of 21st-century writing, and they attributed these shifts in thinking primarily to their teaching experiences as supported by our interviews as spaces for meaningful reflection.

21st-Century Writing as Digital

Discussions of composing in digital spaces and using digital technologies predominated PSTs' descriptions of 21st-century writing throughout their internships, although their attention to digital writing—and the way they talked about it—shifted. Early in the semester, PST descriptions of 21st-century writing centered on digital devices, platforms, technologies, and processes. In the pre-semester interview, direct and implied references to digital writing figured more prominently than any other feature. When giving examples of 21st-century writing, participants primarily referenced their own and students' out-of-school writing habits, including tweeting, posting on Facebook, and texting their friends.

It is notable that, while the PSTs offered many examples of digital writing in their early interviews, they were less likely to explicitly acknowledge or name "digital" as a feature of 21st-century writing. This suggests that while their frameworks for conceptualizing 21st-century writing included the understanding that writing happens in digital spaces, this core element of their framework was not acknowledged directly, at least early in the semester. During Callie's first interview, for example, she stopped to reiterate that when she talked about "writing," she was "referring to typing, so texting, using an iPad, using a laptop." During the mid-semester interview with Margot, I was surprised to notice that, despite so much discussion about her students writing on computers and in digital genres such as discussion board posts and digital peer comments, she had never explicitly named "digital" as a feature of 21st-century writing. When I asked her why as a follow-up to Q1 she said, "I guess I just thought that [. . .] when we're talking about 21st-century writing, the fact that it's digital was a given. It's hard for me to think of writing now that's not digital."

In Callie's and Margot's cases, their initial assumptions that all 21st-century writing is digital seemed to overshadow their awareness about the ways their

approach to writing instruction using digital tools and devices impacted students' writing experiences. While from the beginning, digital writing was integral to how the PSTs talked about 21st-century writing, they were initially more likely to acknowledge the digital tools rather than the ways digital writing changed or challenged their frameworks for what writing is or how students experience writing.

Throughout the semester, however, all of the participants began to express more complicated views about the relationship between digital writing and its place within their conceptions of 21st-century writing. As Figure 1 shows, by the final interview, the participants were collectively more likely to directly name than imply "digital" as a feature of 21st-century writing, suggesting they had developed awareness of digital writing as a feature worth naming rather than as an assumption. This is important because it shows a shift in their recognition of the importance of digital as an explicit—rather than assumed—feature of writing and writing instruction they expect to reflect in their 21st-century ELA classrooms.

Figure 1. Implied vs Named Digital Features by Interview
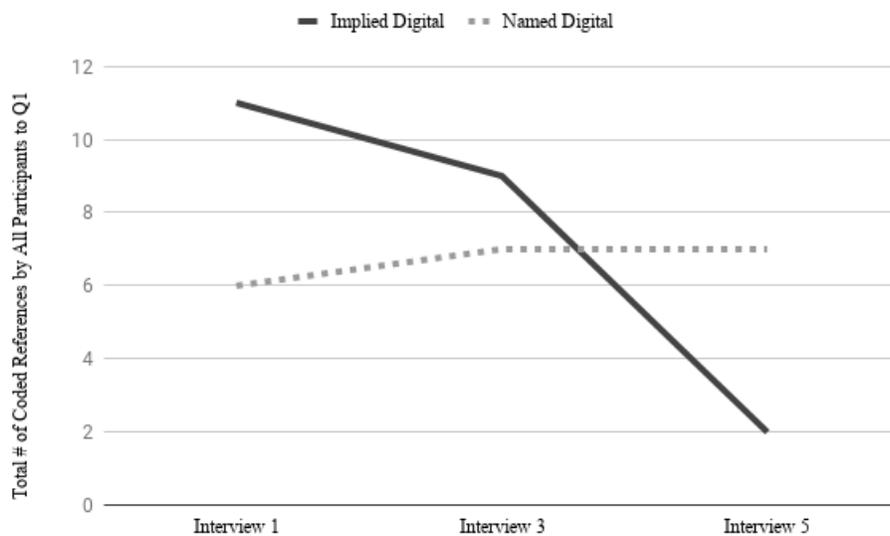
Interestingly, however, as Figure 2 shows, this shift also accompanied an overall decrease in references to 21st-century writing as *digital* relative to 21st-century writing as *multimodal*. In fact, by the end of the semester, all four participants ultimately called into question their earlier assumptions that all 21st-century writing is necessarily digital or that writing in digital spaces always represents what they believed to be most important about 21st-century writing. Becoming more aware of writing as digital seemed to accompany a decrease in their belief that writing in the 21st century must be digital.

Figure 2. Conceptions of 21st Century Writing by Interview
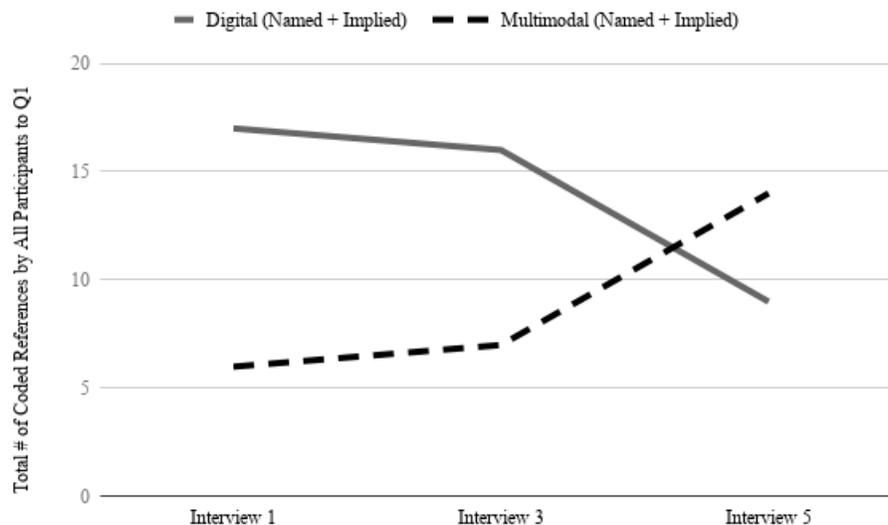
For example, at the final interview, Callie explained how she might revise her working definition of 21st-century writing:

> [My thinking] evolved that 21st-century writing isn't—just because it's on a Word document or because you can put it onto slides, just because it's digital, doesn't mean it's 21st-century writing. Like, what's the difference of me writing out this outline and then typing it out in Google Docs?

Leila had a similar realization: "Originally I thought it was necessary [for 21st-century writers] to do things digitally, like maybe some sort of social media. [. . .] I do want to incorporate that more [in my teaching], but I don't think it's a necessity." By the end of their internships, the participants acknowledged that 21st-century writing need not always take place in digital environments, and they also began to consider the less visible implications of 21st-century writing: how students make decisions about genre or how students interact with and respond to each other's writing.

Critical Teaching Moment: Callie

Callie's critical reflection of a challenge she encountered during a writing unit she taught illustrates how her teaching experiences complicated her initial beliefs about digital technologies and led to nuanced understandings of teaching 21st-century writing. During a unit on narrative writing, Callie integrated opportunities for students to use laptops throughout the writing process. She led

students through digital peer review, digital color-coding activities to identify specific kinds of revisions, and online writer reflections. Despite her attention to digital composing, she was surprised to discover that the majority of her students submitted text-only manuscripts of stories rather than the audiobooks, graphic novels, children's picture books, and Google Slides she had expected when she assigned the open-media writing task. Even after extending the deadline and reviewing the range of media their stories could take, she reported that "50% [of the students] still came in with a printed Google Doc and they were like, 'This is my chapter book.'" Callie found that her digital approach to teaching writing had been successful in the writing process, but not in producing what she would consider 21st-century writing products.

Surprised that her students did not intuitively transition from the text-based drafts they composed on Google Docs into the digital, multimodal genres she hoped they would produce, Callie came to an important discovery about the risk in assuming that students already know how to make decisions about text forms and structures just because they are working on a familiar digital device. When asked in her final interview about how this critical experience would inform her future teaching, she said she wanted to continue giving students "choice and chances to write in new forms," but she realized she needed to help them "explore things digitally that they're not used to." She concluded that helping students discover how to approach new writing tasks was more important than the devices they used.

Recognizing the important role of digital technology in 21st-century writing while also clarifying the affordances and limitations of digital technologies to the teaching of writing was an essential area of growth for Callie. Along with the other PSTs in this study, Callie's end-of-semester reflections highlighted an increasingly rhetorical and pedagogical approach to her conceptual framework of 21st-century writing. This rhetorical and sociocultural approach to teaching writing often still included digital technologies (e.g., online peer review, digital presentations), but participants also identified non-digital writing (e.g., using post-it notes to respond to each other's work, composing graphic novels with hand-drawn images) as effective 21st-century writing instruction.

21st-Century Writing as Multimodal

In addition to seeing 21st-century writing as digital, all of the participants in the study also conceptualized it as multimodal. For example, they all talked about how alphabetic text, image, video, and sound interact in 21st-century writing. They cited examples including digital videos, PowerPoint presentations, Snapchat, memes, and graphic novels. Some participants used terminology such as "visual literacy" and "multimodality" to describe the ways that 21st-century texts integrate multiple modes. Others described multimodal text indirectly; for example, Janine noted that creating a PowerPoint presentation "isn't just about having an

illustration. It is about being able to communicate more at the same time." Even when they did not all start out with the theoretical language to describe multimodal composition, all four PSTs expressed that they valued writing that transcended alphabetic text. These conceptions and values showed up both when they directly defined features of 21st-century writing and also when they referenced writing experiences they designed for their students.

During student teaching, the PSTs had varied comfort levels with and approaches to integrating multimodality in their writing instruction. Leila discussed using "pictures as a lead-in to writing." Using a collaborative digital platform called Nearpod, for example, she posted a question about a character in a literary text and asked students to respond using a gif. She talked about wanting students to find images to precede their daily journal writing as part of a collaborative brainstorming strategy. In her case, Leila incorporated student-selected images as a transition into a discussion about their literary text. Callie, on the other hand, asked students to compose or curate images as part of a final product to accompany a writing exercise: she expected her students to include illustrations along with their narratives, focusing on how images amplify text in the publication phase. Participant discussions about integrating image, sound, or video alongside text often implied a belief that their students were accustomed to multimodal texts: whether it be text messaging with emojis or watching and creating videos on mobile devices or posting memes on social media, the PSTs often talked about how students were already thinking and communicating multimodally. For them, students' prior knowledge was an entry point for their approach to 21st-century writing instruction. They trusted that students' existing expertise and familiarity with composing in and interacting through multimodal texts would motivate students into writing in these ways for class assignments and experiences.

Whereas some of the participants believed that students brought with them the ability to compose multimodal texts, Margot began her internship with a goal to help her students become more conscientious of complex writerly choices when composing visual texts. She explained her thought process as follows:

> Being intentional with words is something that hopefully students learn since they begin to start writing in elementary school, but I think students aren't taught as much about visual literacy. [. . .] Maybe students aren't taught to think about the way that visuals communicate something, and so I think that when a [writing] assessment becomes visual, or at least partly visual, then [the visual aspect] needs to be focused on more.

Margot's belief that students need to become more aware of visual composition choices motivated the unit she designed and taught in which students read a graphic novel, *March* by John Lewis, Andrew Ayden, and Nate Powell, and then composed

personal narratives in graphic novel format. "As we were studying Lewis's novel and the illustrative power in his choices, we talked about the choices that they would make in their own writing as well," Margot explained. She challenged students to consider how body positioning, facial expressions, use of color, movement across panels, and other visual features foreground meaning in their graphical narratives. Margot guided students through the unit as they created pre-writing storyboards, received peer and teacher feedback, and wrote reflectively about their compositional choices.

Critical Teaching Moment: Margot

The other teachers on Margot's teaching team, all but one new to teaching English 11 and all experienced teachers, were eager to adopt Margot's innovative approach to the longstanding text-based personal narrative assignment; they asked her to share her lesson plans and assignment guidelines for the graphic novel assignment. Despite these affirmations, Margot faced a critical incident when she discovered that, as a first-year teacher in the department, her own beliefs about writing did not align with established traditions and values of some senior colleagues. In a department meeting about guidelines for student digital portfolios, Margot asked about including her students' graphic novel narratives. She was told that only text-based assignments would be included. Margot explained her reaction:

> Our students have to create writing portfolios digitally, but the only writing they can put in there is traditional writing, essentially, all essays. So [my students' graphic novels] can't be reflected in the portfolios. But I still think it's writing. If you did a multi-genre project, [my department] wouldn't put that in the portfolio even though [I believe] it has a major writing component. I guess my department only sees writing as completely text.

Ultimately, Margot decided there were no real consequences to herself or the students for having fewer items in their portfolios, so she continued to assign a range of writing assignments throughout the year, including so-called "traditional" essays as well as multimodal and digital compositions that would not find their place in the portfolios.

Field Experiences and Interviews as Interventions

In both Callie's and Margot's cases, experiences prompted by student and colleague responses to the writing tasks they designed challenged the PSTs' beliefs about 21st-century writing and their approaches to implementing new pedagogies in their classrooms. Facing contradictions and tensions is something all student teachers experience; for the participants in this study, however, reflecting on these

moments through the lens of their own conceptions and values gave them space to reconsider, articulate, and recommit to their own beliefs.

When students did not meet Callie's expectations about writing in innovative genres, and when department policies cast doubt on Margot's approach to teaching writing, both participants identified our interviews as a useful space to discuss these challenges and a platform to consider strategies for future scenarios. In their final interviews, the PSTs said these teaching moments, paired with guided reflection, became critical junctures that helped them wrestle with complex conceptions of writing and prompted them to ask questions that would guide further inquiry.

When asked how our interviews influenced her conception of 21st-century writing and how she would approach future writing instruction, Callie said the following:

> [Reflecting on this experience has] helped me to realize that just because [writing is] on the computer doesn't mean that it's digital writing. What I've really taken is opening to all the different genres in the world and making them accessible in a classroom. How do we take one thing that we already know, like a book report, that's been taught for a million years in schools, and how can we use digital technology to change it into something more? Take, for example, a story. What type of digital forms do stories take?

Her reflection demonstrated a new awareness: she grappled with concerns about how and to what extent writing is mediated through digital technology, how genres take on new characteristics as they move from print to digital modes, and how traditional school-based genres like book reports might be reimagined to reflect more meaningful writing. Asking herself the question, "What type of digital forms do stories take?" shows how Callie's reflection provoked her to think beyond the tension itself and into future considerations for writing instruction.

Margot noted that the interviews helped solidify her own values about teaching while guiding her thinking about how to position herself within the constraints imposed not only by her department but also by what she termed "the current education system," two pressure points that she felt keenly aware of and susceptible to as a new teacher. She said the following:

> What these conversations do for me the most is get me to set aside time to just think about my values. [. . .] Sometimes what I think is important gets in the way of what the system thinks is important. These discussions have helped me to refine how I view 21st-century writing, and having a better understanding of that helps me to make sure that I'm incorporating what I think is important for my students' futures now.

The interviews, serving as guided reflection-on-practice, provided the PSTs tools to make sense of tensions and constraints in ways that ultimately led to, in Callie's case, recognition of a more complex and rhetorically-situated understanding of digital writing and, in Margot's case, thoughtful consideration of how to advocate for 21st-century writing practices as a first-year teacher. These kinds of realizations exemplify how English educators can catalyze teaching experiences as productive opportunities for learning and future-oriented guided inquiry.

Implications for Writing Teacher Education

The developing conceptions of these PSTs during their internships suggest that, despite the challenges and pushback they may face in the classroom, the next generation of English teachers can evolve understanding of and pedagogical beliefs and practices related to digital and multimodal writing, especially during clinical teaching experiences. PSTs can develop and enact nuanced approaches to teaching 21st-century writing, furthering Hicks et al.'s call that teachers must go beyond declarative and procedural knowledge of composition. Asking PSTs to begin by conceptualizing writing in the 21st century then supporting them as they grapple with experiential challenges activates their practice-based learning and reflection.

The PSTs' experiences described in this article point to three ways that English educators can foster learning about 21st-century writing throughout teacher education programs. First, English educators need to design learning frameworks that acknowledge that 21st-century writing is in flux. Second, English educators need to honor field experiences as knowledge-making spaces. Finally, English educators need to develop regular opportunities for PSTs in the field to reflect on their practice in ways that help them construct conceptual frameworks that will sustain their long-term professional growth.

Writing Is Always in Flux. The ways Margot, Callie, Janine, and Leila's conceptual frameworks of 21st-century writing evolved over the course of their internships reiterates that theories about literacy and writing can be destabilized by teaching experiences. For teachers, the conditions for teaching 21st-century writing are often contingent upon institutional structures such as limited access to technology for Janine, upon students' readiness to bring their literacies into the classroom for Callie, or upon colleagues' willingness to see new approaches to multimodal composition as valid for Margot. To respond to these complicating conditions, PSTs must develop critical engagement and rhetorical flexibility to explore unfamiliar and evolving territories of 21st-century writing.

Critical engagement, in this sense, suggests the kinds of questions new teachers ask about curricular and institutional possibilities and limits around digital and multimodal writing experiences in ELA classrooms. In Margot's case, this

meant observing the ways her assumptions about what "counted" as writing for students' writing portfolios came into conflict with her department's policies. Developing critical awareness of how traditions, policies, and expectations can frame how new teachers are expected to enact writing pedagogies in their classrooms is an important first step in helping new teachers acknowledge and eventually address these gaps, as Margot began to. Rhetorical flexibility suggests the kinds of options teachers see in the ways their students compose to satisfy certain requirements. For Callie, this meant understanding the choices her students were—and were not—ready to make when it came to adapting their text-based narratives into digital and multimedia forms. While her original conception of the assignment allowed for rhetorical flexibility on the part of her students, she discovered she needed to develop more flexibility in the ways she engaged her students in actively making rhetorical choices (e.g., Who is the audience for this piece? What mode or medium will best help me tell my story? What skills do I have or can I develop to help me compose my story in a form best suited for its purpose?). The kinds of critical awareness both Margot and Callie developed in response to the unexpected challenges they faced in their student teaching experiences prompted them to think more critically about how their pedagogical choices can and should evolve to reflect the changing nature of writing in the 21st century.

Understanding how PSTs view digital and multimodal writing when they enter the field, as well as the classroom challenges and institutional demands that prompt them to modify their conceptions, is key to English educators' efforts to integrate 21st-century writing and pedagogy in PST education. Because writing in the 21st century is in flux and because teachers are called upon to respond to these changing conditions, it is important that teachers enter the field with a flexible definition of these literacies—in theory and in practice.

Field Experiences Are Knowledge-making Spaces. The participants' experiences also suggest that constructing PSTs' initial teaching experiences as knowledge-making spaces is key to their flexibility as teachers and to our ongoing learning about 21st-century writing in practice in the ELA classroom. While introducing theories of digital literacies, multimodal composition, and their rhetorical and sociocultural underpinnings during methods coursework may provide a useful beginning to helping PSTs develop beliefs and knowledge of their own, it is in their teaching experiences that their learning will be tested and enhanced. As the participants' teaching experiences posed challenges and raised questions, their beliefs about writing became more concrete and nuanced. In Callie's case, for example, she shifted from thinking about all 21st-century writing as digital to considering *how* and *to what extent* digital forms of composition and/or delivery substantively change—or don't change—writing experiences, processes, and products. Because she entered her student teaching semester with beliefs that

hadn't yet been practiced or challenged, it was in learning from her students' responses that she was prompted to reconsider her assumptions about 21st-century writing and about her students as 21st-century writers. For each of the PSTs in this study, revisiting their conceptions over multiple interviews allowed them to develop, reconsider, and problematize frameworks—all within the context of real teaching scenarios.

PST learning in teaching sites is useful not only to their own development as teachers, but also to English educators who rely on field-based knowledge to adapt teacher preparation programs and methods courses. As Pasternak et al. indicated in their recent study, English educators reported a wide range of availability and use of technology in their students' teaching settings, but they wanted to know more about how technology was used for writing in practice. Situating field experiences as spaces for continued learning and knowledge-making facilitates integration of university-based and classroom-based pedagogies and practices.

Meaningful Reflection Leads to Professional Growth. Finally, reflection-on-practice activates new teachers' knowledge and connects classroom teaching experiences to meaningful learning. Margot and Callie identified reflection during our interviews as an intervention that helped them make sense of challenges in their teaching and assume courage to honor their values despite those challenges. Callie said the following:

> I'm sure lots of people in student teaching had the same kind of thoughts that I had. But maybe they didn't have a way to go back and measure out those thoughts. We have our reflections from last semester which we could look back at and see they how we've changed our views. I think [the interviews] made me rethink a lot of things.

These participants' experiences developing as reflective practitioners echo Dunn et al.'s (2018) conclusion that "tension points could serve as entry points" for teacher educators to open dialogue with PSTs about challenges they face during field experiences, "thus bridging conversations about beliefs with practice without simplifying or reducing down the real choices teachers face in classrooms" (p. 53). This is especially important in English education as we acknowledge the flux specific to 21st-century writing. PSTs need both formal and informal opportunities to reflect on their experiences as they develop theories of writing instruction.

Conclusion

As students become teachers, we need to prioritize helping them construct flexible and adaptive conceptions of 21st-century writing. Even without a course

dedicated to 21st-century literacies, even with minimal focus on concepts related to digital and multimodal writing, and even without being given the language or a predetermined framework of 21st-century writing, all four participants arrived at more complex and nuanced understandings of these principles through discussion and reflection on their practice. Their understandings about digital and multimodal writing evolved and deepened. Insightful considerations about new academic genres and effective teaching processes emerged as they re-examined their knowledge through practice.

Because 21st-century writing demands new ways to theorize, experience, and teach composition, it becomes an effective lens through which English educators can prompt PSTs to grapple with contradictions around the future of writing instruction: Does providing digital devices for each student substantively change the kinds of writing students produce or the way writing is taught? What expertise do students born and raised in the 21st century bring to digital and multimodal writing practices? How do teachers engage and extend students' expertise in ways that are valued in academic and non-academic spaces? What kinds of considerations do teachers need to take into account when it comes to issues of student access to and prior experience with digital composing technologies? What concerns are there about privacy and protection of publishing student writing? These kinds of questions must accompany university-based exploration of 21st-century literacies in ELA classrooms, and PSTs must be prepared to grapple with concerns like these as they arise in their teaching contexts.

Ultimately, in order for the next generation of English teachers to advance 21st-century writing, they need to be invested and prepared. It is therefore essential to provide ongoing reflective, practice-based opportunities for PSTs to discuss the underlying principles of 21st-century writing while they make sense of new teaching contexts.

While the research study I describe here positioned me, a university-based teacher educator, to prompt PSTs in such reflection through structured interviews, I can imagine a variety of spaces and relationships built in to the existing structures of teacher education where PSTs could practice reflection about the purposes and practices of 21st-century writing in ELA classrooms. As part of student teaching seminars, PST peers—each in their own new teaching situation—might consider the ways that their teaching practices challenge or redefine for them their existing beliefs about writing instruction in the 21st century. Conversations with mentor teachers might also include reflection opportunities that help PSTs track their evolving beliefs against the backdrop of particular institutional expectations or classroom challenges. University supervisors, already positioned to play a role in helping PSTs navigate the demands of a new school and classroom context compared to their university-based learning, could frame their ongoing

conversations with PSTs as opportunities to practice reflection on developing and evolving beliefs.

Reconsidering the purposes and possibilities of the reflection that is already built into the mentoring relationships PSTs have as they transition between university and classroom, it is essential to prioritize meaningful reflection-on-practice that will guide developing teachers of writing into and throughout their teaching careers. After all, the ways our current and future PSTs conceive of and practice writing instruction will shape the future of writing teaching and learning in the 21st century.

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