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Writing Teacher Educators Share their Pandemic Stories:
Innovations, Reflections, Narratives, and Beyond

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We began this journal as an experiment almost a decade ago. At the time, we knew this was a unique opportunity to build and grow a community of teachers and scholars. As writing teacher education emerged as a defined field of discourse and scholarship, we knew there was an audience of teachers and scholars whose voices needed to be heard. Ten years later, this is still a pretty exciting mission in ordinary times.

But these aren’t ordinary times. In March 2020, as the country began sheltering, we, along with educators around the country, suddenly found ourselves in new territory. With very little time, decisions were being made about how we were going to continue our methods and theory classes, field experiences, professional development programs, conferences, and professional organizations.

We both were involved in multiple conversations with colleagues at our institutions and across the country about possible ways to move our work in to new spaces. These were thoughtful, interesting, and - well, let’s admit it – sometimes panicked conversations. How in the world do we maintain the richness and nuance needed in writing teacher education in this new context? We knew that we had an opportunity to preserve this moment in time and create an outlet for these ideas. We put out a quickly-written call with some open-ended prompts:

*We’re all trying to – on-the-fly – ensure that our students and our teaching colleagues. We’re heard anecdotaly from colleagues all around North America about all the things they are doing to educate and support new and current teachers of writing. We’ve heard about lots of innovation, and are humbled by the amazing amount of skill, dedication, and talent that our colleagues possess.

Let’s capture this and learn from it. We intend to use this issue of Teaching/Writing as a tool to codify and amplify those voices, not only to provide an image of the work as it happened in an unprecedented moment, but also to provide a means for those voices to teach and guide future generations of writing teacher educators.

So, here we are: We seek narratives from writing teacher educators on how they have adjusted their classes, programs, and experiences in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We’re looking to publish an expansive issue that includes voices from all types of institutions and all sort of roles, including
English language arts methods instructors describing how they are adapting their classes to remote instruction
Field instructors, student teachers, cooperating teachers, program managers, and others on the ways they are articulating field experiences in writing and language
First-year writing directors and faculty on how they have adjusted their programs, pedagogies, and support and training systems for graduate students, adjuncts, and others
National Writing Project (NWP) site directors and teacher consultants on how they are maintaining contact and support for classroom teachers.
And more! Any others who are involved in the training, education, and support of writing teachers in all settings. If you have something to share, bring it on.

Really, we want to find out what you’ve done, why you did it, and how it went (or is going). Success stories are great, as are those that show challenges and failures.

We knew what we were hoping to do, but we weren’t quite sure what we would get - or if we would even get a response at all. We shouldn’t have been worried. The submissions were tremendous and exciting. The result is this amazing edited collection of voices from throughout writing teacher education, ranging in positions, experience, and institutions that span vast aspects of our field. This collection is a picture of the community of writing teacher educators, and the ways they transformed their classrooms and programs during an unprecedented situation. We respect the contributors who were brave enough to share their stories, struggles, and successes, and we are in awe of their accomplishments.

What an exciting time to learn how to teach, and what an exciting time to teach how to learn!

These are the words of a pre-service teacher. Even after having “lost” her classroom placement in the spring and not knowing what student teaching will look like in the fall, she still sees hope in her chosen profession. What a time, indeed. Authors in this issue bear witness to how frustrating, exhausting, and heartbreaking these past few months have been. Yet, through their stories, we see hope, enthusiasm, and a can-do attitude that turned challenges into opportunities for innovation. We see educators committed to their students and to the guiding concepts of teaching and teacher education. We see classrooms staying true to pedagogical principles while navigating new territory.

We believe in the power of storytelling. This collection of scholarly personal narratives highlights perspectives and insights from all corners of our community. It’s no secret that academic publishing is in a crisis. Even before the financial issues that followed the Pandemic shutdowns, academic presses and journals have been limiting proposal and publications and focusing on projects that are expected to gain large readerships and financial success. Scholars and practitioners in specialized fields like writing teacher education, with small but highly dedicated audiences are finding a tough market for their
work. As an established online journal, we’re able to provide a rigorous, well-known professional academic outlet without the having to consider financial pressures that comes with costs involved in printing and distribution involved in traditional publications. We’re pretty excited about this opportunity. We hope to do more of these as opportunities arise, to the benefit of our community and our students.

To our authors: thank you for the opportunity to read, edit, and publish your stories. In sharing your experiences, you represent countless other writing teacher educators and their communities of learners across the country. And to the readers of this collection: today and in the future – we hope that you see the effort, commitment, passion and compassion, as well as the scholarly and pedagogical expertise, of all our contributors and are as inspired as we are in reading their stories.

Finally, we are also thankful to the Western Michigan University Libraries for their ongoing support for the journal and this project, and all other WMU-based Scholarworks journals. We also recognize the academic leadership and administration of the WMU College of Arts and Sciences and WMU Department of English, who have both been supportive and helpful throughout the years. We thank Lauren Johnson, an English education student at WMU who created our two cover designs.

We finish with an excerpt from Nicole Sieben’s contribution, “Tell Your Story … Share Hope.”

In our willingness to share ourselves through stories, we open up our hearts and our lives to others in ways that can move them to have hope when it is most needed. . . . the stories, I think, matter more right now. They are the humanity that threads us together and moves us along in our uncertainties, anxieties, losses, and pain.

Since we began this project in spring, our country has engaged in even more extraordinary events in ways we couldn’t anticipate. Times are challenging, but we are grateful and hopeful for the future, knowing that teachers and teacher educators are at the forefront of pedagogical innovations and social and cultural change.

We’re going to get through this. And we do, we’re going to do it with stories that make us stronger, smarter, and more aware of our importance as scholars, learners, teachers, and citizens.