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## "I Think Writing is..." A Multi-State Study of Teacher Candidates' Changing Beliefs about Writing

Jenn Raskauskas

West Chester University, jraskauskas@wcupa.edu

Sonia M. Kline

Illinois State University, skline@ilstu.edu

Amanda Wall

Georgia Southern University, awall@georgiasouthern.edu

Grace Y. Kang

Illinois State University, gykang@ilstu.edu

Chinwe H. Ikpeze

St. John Fisher University, cikpeze@sjf.edu

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### **Authors**

Jenn Raskauskas, Sonia M. Kline, Amanda Wall, Grace Y. Kang, Chinwe H. Ikpeze, Joy Myers, Roya Q. Scales, Linda D. Smetana, and Kelly Tracy

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Jenn Raskauskas, *West Chester University*

Sonia M. Kline, *Illinois State University*

Amanda Wall, *Georgia Southern University*

Grace Y. Kang, *Illinois State University*

Chinwe H. Ikpeze, *St. John Fisher University*

Joy Myers, *James Madison University*

Roya Q. Scales, *Western Carolina University*

Linda D. Smetana, *California State University - East Bay*

Kelly Tracy, *Western Carolina University*

Scholars understand writing as a multidimensional and contested concept (Bomer et al., 2019; Ivanič, 2004; McCarthey et al., 2014). Those who study writing illuminate its complexity and provide a plethora of evidence to support the importance of recognizing this complexity in pedagogical practices (Bazerman et al., 2017; Graham, 2019). In particular, scholarship framed by sociocultural theory highlights the ways that writing is culturally, historically, and politically situated and intimately tied to issues of identity, agency, and power (Englert et al., 2006). Research also demonstrates the imperative to recognize the complexity of writing, especially for students from culturally, racially, and linguistically non-dominant groups (Athanasēs et al., 2013; Dyson, 2013; Muhammad, 2015; Woodard & Schutz, 2020).

Given that broad understandings of writing are vital for educational equity, we, teacher educators/researchers, recognize the necessity for illuminating broad understandings of writing in our courses. However, we also acknowledge the challenge of disrupting the limited conceptions of writing embedded in our educational institutions, particularly as most teacher candidates’ (TCs) experiences of school-based writing occurred during a period when skills-based writing was prevalent in schools (McCarthey, 2008). These issues are further complicated in teacher education programs when writing is often neglected or treated as an add-on

to reading-focused methods courses (Araujo et al., 2015; Myers et al., 2016; Norman & Spencer, 2005).

The TCs in this research study *did* participate in a writing-focused course at one of six institutions across the USA. While these courses were not identical, all six courses contained common elements, as described below in the Methods section. We designed this study to understand more about our TCs' beliefs about writing; since each of them will be a writing teacher, they need to reflect on their beliefs about writing as part of their preparation to teach. We wanted to learn from them. This study aimed to investigate TCs' changing beliefs about writing and to consider the implications for teacher preparation. Specifically, the following question guided this study:

In what ways (if any) do teacher candidates' beliefs about writing change after a semester in a literacy course for educators?

First, we consider constraints on writing in schools and ways to broaden conceptions of writing in our educational institutions.

### ***Background and Literature Review***

#### **Constraints on Writing in Schools**

Writing in K-12 schools is typically constrained in several ways. There is evidence that reading is privileged over writing, and widely varying amounts of time are allocated for writing instruction (Brandt, 2001; Fisher, 2009; Puranik et al., 2014). In the almost 30 years since their systematic report on writing instruction (Applebee et al., 1986), Applebee and Langer (2009) documented increased time spent on writing in schools. However, they also found that many students reported not engaging in writing of substantial length or complexity. In addition, while the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) has prompted greater attention to writing, these standards continue to reinforce limited conceptions of writing without attention to context and culture (Woodard & Kline, 2016). More recently, Graham (2019) reviewed research on how writing is taught and found wide variance; across grade levels and content areas, teachers take different approaches, allot different amounts of time, and emphasize different purposes and genres. Overall, Graham wrote, "writing instruction in most classrooms is not sufficient" (2019, p. 43).

Beginning in the era of No Child Left Behind (2002), writing instruction has become more standardized, structured, and skills-driven, particularly for children of color and low-income students (Au, 2009, 2016; Dyson, 2020). The widespread purchase of writing programs reinforces narrow understandings of

writing and writers (Kang, 2016; Kline & Kang, 2022). These programs typically provide teachers with a full scope and sequence of lesson plans but take much agency away from teachers and students. Scripted programs make assumptions about students' lived experiences and provide little opportunity for student voice (Dutro, 2009; Yoon, 2013). In addition, such programs continue to perpetuate White Middle-Class norms and White Mainstream English in our schools.

Similarly, standardized tests and curriculum standards also promote a constricted view of writing as a timed response to prompts to persuade, explain, or convey experience (Freedman et al., 2016). Standardization limits the opportunities of all students to expand their linguistic repertoires; it is particularly harmful to students who are racially, linguistically, or culturally different from White Middle-Class norms (Baker-Bell, 2020). Consequently, there is an urgent need for writing instruction in schools to be grounded in broad understandings about writing that sustain racial, linguistic, and cultural pluralism.

### **Broadening Conceptions of Writing in Schools**

Furthermore, writing instruction is limited in terms of the theories that undergird practice in schools (Kline & Kang, 2022). Specifically, understandings of writing grounded in cognitive psychology are privileged and those framed by sociocultural theories are often neglected in the teaching and learning of writing in our educational institutions. Cognitive theory focuses attention on the processes occurring inside an individual's mind and how individuals coordinate writing as a complex problem-solving activity, including planning, translating, reviewing, and managing the task environment (Hayes, 2012). While attention to these processes is important in learning to write, focusing on a cognitive perspective alone is problematic. Most notably, leading to a failure to attend to the social aspects of writing, such as the ways that writing is intimately connected to issues of agency, identity, and power (Lewis et al., 2007; Vaughn, 2020). Sociocultural theories highlight the need to consider social context and the ways that learning is mediated by culturally produced tools and signs (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Drawing on these ideas, a much broader understanding of writing has been gained in the last half-century. These understandings, however, are often not evident in schools. Below we highlight how scholarship grounded in sociocultural theories challenges narrow concepts of writing, typically found in K-12 schools, and supports a more expansive view of learning to write.

In contrast to classrooms that promote writing as an individual act and reduce the audience to one (the teacher), sociocultural scholarship demonstrates that writing is a social construct, mediated by social tools and signs, and tied to social identities (Bakhtin, 1986; Engeström, 1999; Ivanič, 1998). Furthermore, writing is inextricably linked to human motivation and affect (Hayes, 2000;

Magnifico, 2010). Learning to write, then, requires extensive access to print and extensive access to social worlds that make visible the myriad of processes and purposes of writing (Brandt, 1990; LeFevre, 1987). For children, play and social talk are essential components of the composing process (Dyson, 2003). Play offers children opportunities to use compositional skills, communicate with partners in real and imagined ways, and try different social roles (Yoon, 2013). When teaching from a sociocultural perspective, teachers give children space to experiment with writing through a permeable curriculum where students are positioned as individual decision-makers and social actors (Dyson, 2003). Moreover, critical scholarship calls for humanizing pedagogy that centers learners' lived experiences, challenges oppressive systems, and engages learners in transformative action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970).

Sociocultural scholarship also challenges school-based conceptions of genre. In schools, genres are presented typically as a series of discrete text types (e.g., narrative, informative, persuasive). Most significant about particular text types are the ways that they are structured (e.g., chronological sequence, cause/effect, problem/solution) and the features that they contain (e.g., headings, bullet points, captions) (Woodard & Kline, 2016). Also evident in schools is a hierarchical approach to text types whereby argumentation is emphasized (CCSS; NGA & CCSSO, 2010). In contrast, sociocultural scholarship considers genre in terms of whether a text accomplishes its intended social function (Bazerman, 2004). Genres are recognized as complex and fluid (Prior, 2009), and the privileging of argumentation is regarded as problematic, particularly for students from non-dominant communities (DeStigter, 2015; Olson et al., 2015). Instead, real writing focused on students' complex traditions, unanticipated genres, and unexpected social goals are valued (Dyson, 2003; 2020).

In addition, sociocultural scholarship challenges how the relationship between technology and writing is typically presented in schools. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS; NGA & CCSSO, 2010) provide narrow views of technology for writing focused on traditional forms of production and publication. Technology is often used to correct grammar and spelling or enhance the processes or presentation of traditional writing. In contrast, understandings from sociocultural theory illuminate how technology might transform practices through factors such as play, performance, and networking, positioning students as knowledge producers whose inquiries move beyond classroom walls (Gee, 2004; Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010). Sociocultural scholarship also highlights the multimodal nature of writing (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2010), which has further implications for how writing is taught and assessed in educational institutions (Shipka, 2009).

Similarly, much scholarship challenges narrow conceptions of grammar and language. In schools, grammar is often taught in isolation from writing, for

example, using skills-based worksheets, despite decades of research demonstrating the ineffectiveness of such approaches (Braddock et al., 1963; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 2011). Sociosemiotic scholarship shows how grammar is intimately connected to context in the ways writers make grammatical choices based on the purposes of writing (Halliday, 2014; Thompson, 2014). However, even when grammar is taught in connection to meaning-making in schools, only White Mainstream English (WME) is encouraged, taught, and accepted. We have purposefully chosen to use the term White Mainstream English to offer an analysis of linguistic racism and to deconstruct the linguistic and racial hierarchies that exist in language (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Baker-Bell, 2020). Grammar and language are nuanced and contextualized, and language is deeply connected to one's cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. As we consider grammar and language in schools, it is paramount that WME is critiqued and that multiple grammars and languages are recognized, valued, and encouraged. Students must be encouraged to codemesh in all contexts and draw on their cultural and linguistic resources and repertoires when composing (Baker-Bell, 2020; Lee & Handsfield, 2018).

From a sociocultural perspective, what might be considered good writing is never fixed; instead, it is always intimately tied to the broader social, political, historical, and cultural contexts (Gee, 2014; Muhammad, 2018; Street, 1995). Similarly, cultural practices are never neutral; they are full of values and beliefs that are appropriate and meaningful to the identity of a particular context (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Each school and classroom has its own culture that is established by the teachers, students, and broader cultural context (Bakhtin, 1986). Sociocultural understandings, then, make evident the problematic nature of scripted and rigid curriculum that limits child and teacher agency (Kang, 2016; Marsh, 2016; Yoon, 2013); and highlight the importance and complexity of teachers deeply listening and responding to children's thoughtful inquiries and engaging in humanizing pedagogy that centers learners and sustains racial, linguistic and cultural pluralism (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017; Payley, 2007; Yoon & Templeton, 2019).

Given the constraints on writing instruction in schools and the importance of broad views of writing for educational equity, we consider teacher education programs valuable spaces for expanding educators' understanding of writing. This article examines the shifting beliefs of TCs, in multiple institutions across the United States, after completing a writing-focused literacy course. We also highlight implications, including potential disruptive practices in writing in teacher education.

## *Methods*

### **Setting and Participants**

This qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009) was a component of a larger project conducted by members of a teacher education research study group of a national literacy organization. The researchers are teacher educators with a shared goal of researching writing in teacher education to strengthen writing pedagogy within our programs and for our TCs and their future students. This study came from a new collaboration among the research team members; as we will describe below, we have used the findings to continue our research collaboration and inform our approach to further iterations of the respective courses. The research team meets regularly, sometimes as often as weekly, to improve our pedagogy through collaborative research; team members discuss common readings; share, develop, and discuss similar types of assignments; and research different aspects of writing in teacher education. We describe the research context with information not tied to a specific course or institution to protect participants.

Data were collected from TCs from institutions in six states (Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). TCs were invited to participate in the research based on their enrollment in a semester-long literacy course at their respective institutions. First, we provide details about the institutions and programs involved, and then the specific courses. Across the six institutions in six states where data were collected, there were large, medium, and small institutions based on overall student enrollment and institutions classified variously as public research universities, public regional universities, or independent colleges. Additionally, these institutions represented rural, suburban, and urban settings. TCs who participated in the study were enrolled in Bachelors and Masters degree programs for Early Childhood, Elementary, or Middle Grades Education.

TCs were enrolled in a literacy course at the time of their participation in the study. These courses included language arts methods courses, writing methods courses, and general literacy pedagogy courses. The courses were TCs' first experiences in courses focused on writing pedagogy. The instructors of these courses were members of the research team. All instructors drew on sociocultural perspectives of literacy in our courses and shared a common vision to engage TCs as writers and future writing teachers. We enacted these perspectives through such facets as readings, assignments, and structures within courses (e.g., literature circles, peer writing groups, collaborative structures), and through navigating constraints of scripted curricula and affording students agency in their writing. There was diversity across courses in terms of specific assignments, but there were some common elements. Key ideas across all courses included: teachers as writers, writing workshop, teacher modeling, mentor texts, and reading-writing



connections. Assessment methods implemented in the courses were also models for TCs for their own future teaching; these methods included assignment-specific rubrics, general rubrics, the 6 + 1 Traits Writing Rubric (Education Northwest, n. d.), feedback for learning, peer conferences and feedback, self-evaluation, and structured reflections. TCs in different courses commonly learned about and also questioned the role of grammar and dominant Western perspectives in writing and writing pedagogy. TCs considered their identities as writers through course experiences; they also engaged in writing in multiple genres and for multiple purposes, in keeping with sociocultural perspectives in their respective courses.

Different assignments common across many courses called on TCs variously to reflect on their identities as writers, analyze student writing, and plan mini-lessons on writing-related topics. Other experiences in multiple courses included: multi-genre projects, text sets, writing-related lesson plans and thematic units, and literature circles. Example assignments from two of these courses are representative of the various ways that instructors drew on sociocultural perspectives to engage TCs as writers and future teachers of writing. In one course, TCs wrote a reflective paper in which they considered influences on themselves as readers and writers—specific books, people, and experiences that made an impact on them. Drawing on these influences, TCs reflected on how they wanted to integrate literacy in their own teaching, making connections to their roles as teachers, the kinds of reading and writing they wanted to inspire in their own students, and how literacy related to their overall identities as teachers. This project became multimodal as TCs created digital visuals to accompany their written papers. In another course, TCs developed a portfolio over the course of the semester with several artifacts relating to storytelling, mentor texts used with students, and reflections. The portfolio included multimodal components such as video, music, and visuals. These two assignments represent ways that instructors applied sociocultural principles as stated above. Through these and other assignments, TCs engaged their social identities as writers and teachers of writing; they challenged genre; they drew on technology to transform practices; and they grappled with ideas about language, grammar, and what constitutes “good writing”.

Although these perspectives and ideas were common to all courses, there were differences based on course delivery model (online, hybrid, or face-to-face), course type (i.e., writing focus or general literacy focus), course level (i.e., undergraduate or graduate), and program type (early childhood, elementary, middle). TCs in many courses also had a field practicum during which they interacted with students, with specific requirements for different courses: some courses included the development of literacy lessons taught to students, while others included reflections or other assignments drawing on TCs’ observations and experiences in classrooms.

Across the courses, 113 TCs consented to participate and had complete data. Four participants identified as African American women, one as an Asian American woman, one as a Latina woman, 99 as White women, one as a Pacific Islander man, and four as White men.

### **Data Sources**

The TCs gave narrative responses to open-ended questions at the beginning and at the end of the semester to help us learn about their beliefs and experiences. For this inquiry, we revised a protocol that had been used by some members of the research team as a pedagogical tool and that was based on the ideas of contemporary writing scholars (Brandt, 2001). The instructors introduced the research by explaining that the purpose of the research was to explore TCs' beliefs about writing and teaching writing; the IRB documents also stated the purpose of the research, "to explore teacher candidates' experiences with and beliefs about writing and writing instruction, and to examine any shifts in thinking after a semester in a literacy course." TCs wrote narrative responses electronically: TCs in face-to-face courses wrote during regular class time; instructors provided time in class (approximately 15-30 minutes) for TCs to write. TCs in hybrid and online courses completed their responses asynchronously.

Data sources for this study were narrative responses to two open-ended questions from a larger document. We used TCs' responses from the beginning and the end of the semester: "What do you think are the purposes of writing?" and "What do you consider to be good writing?" We used these questions as windows into TCs' beliefs about writing. TCs responded to the questions at the beginning of the semester (within the first 2-3 weeks of the course) and again at the end of the semester (within the final 2-3 weeks of the course), following similar procedures within each course at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester.

### **Data Analysis**

Our goal in data analysis was to understand changes (if any) in TCs' beliefs about writing. We were not interested in making claims about particular courses; accordingly, we did not conduct a comparison of TCs from different institutions. Instead, we focused on patterns across the data set to raise our collaborative awareness of these trends. In order to do this, we employed both thematic and discourse analysis.

We began with thematic analysis (Krippendorff, 1980; Merriam, 2009). The first four authors read the TCs' responses for each question and considered the content of these responses. First, we conducted open coding, reading the first few responses from each course together and generating descriptive codes (Miles et al.,

2020). Together we created a codebook for each question, including the name of the code, and examples of the code from the dataset. Then, we each coded a portion of the data independently using the codebook. During our research meetings, we brought to the group responses that did not clearly correspond to a code and we resolved discrepancies together. We updated the codebook, dividing and collapsing codes as necessary until we had codes that could be applied consistently across the data. In the end, we had 17 codes for the responses to the question, “what do you think are the purposes of writing?” and 18 codes for the responses to the question, “what do you consider to be good writing?” Table 1 is an excerpt from the codebook we created for the TC’s responses to the question, “What do you think are the purposes of writing?”

**Table 1**

*Excerpt from the Purposes of Writing Codebook*

Code	Examples
COMMUNICATE	<p>“...To send a <b>message</b> or just to relay something to someone.”</p> <p>“Convey thoughts or <b>ideas</b>...”</p>
FEELINGS	<p>“To express thoughts, <b>feelings, emotions</b>...”</p> <p>“...<b>finding your voice</b> on paper.”</p>
ENTERTAIN	<p>“I think the purposes of writing are...<b>entertain</b>.”</p> <p>“I think it is to <b>tell a story</b>...”</p>

The 17 codes in the Purposes of Writing codebook were: multiple purposes; entertain; persuade; inform; learn; communicate; enjoyment; feelings; opinions; remember; personal experiences; better writer; social action; therapy; reflect; assess; other. The 18 codes in the Good Writing codebook were: clear; flow; meaningful; intro, body, and conclusion; correct conventions; emotion; organized; reader; passion; personal; emotion; elaborate; evidence; critical thinking; grades; process; communicates a message; and other. Multiple codes were applied to most responses. For example, the response “There are many purposes of writing which can include persuading and informing” was coded as “multiple purposes;” “persuade;” and “inform”.

After coding the data from the TC’s beginning of the semester and the end of the semester answers, we then compared beginning codes and end codes. We

charted codes that were added or deleted and identified moves from one set of codes to another. Table 2 provides a coding example for TCs' responses to the question about good writing.

**Table 2**

*A Coding Example for one Teacher Candidate's Responses to the Good Writing Question*

<b>Coding Examples: What do you consider to be good writing?</b>				
<b>Beginning Response</b>	<b>End Response</b>	<b>Beginning Codes</b>	<b>End Codes</b>	<b>Nature of Change</b>
I consider good writing to be clear and concise. When the audience reads the piece, he/ she should know the exact message the writer is trying to convey.	Good writing makes readers fascinated with the text. When I was younger, I always said that good books were like "movies in my head". Now I know this term is called imagery, and this is part of a good story as well. Many good writing pieces have "turning points". Something that has happened which makes readers want to find the resolution.	clarity; communicates a message; reader	reader; description; engagement	Addition & Deletion (maintain idea of audience/reader; trade clear and concise for imagery and implied engagement)

We also engaged in discourse analysis (Gee, 2005). In the process of multiple readings of the data set, we noticed patterns related to changes in ways TCs responded at the beginning of the semester compared to the end of the semester, which our thematic analysis did not capture.

We were able to describe TCs' responses but wanted to gain a more theoretical sense of patterns in the data (Maxwell, 2005). Author 1 (Jenn) led the discourse analysis and worked with the rest of the coding team to discuss and reconcile codes. First, we re-read responses, wrote analytical memos, and identified words and phrases that appeared with frequency throughout the data set. We then developed descriptors of how these words were used within the responses and categories to describe the changes that occurred between the beginning and end of semester. For example, we explored the presence (or absence) of personal pronouns (e.g., I, we, you, your), changes in verbs used (e.g., express, share), and the use of school-based language related to teaching (e.g., mentor text, mini-lesson). Engaging in both thematic analysis and discourse analysis provided us with a more nuanced understanding of the changes in TCs' beliefs.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study center on the data sources. Beliefs about writing are complex. Beliefs shift across time and context and are often beyond our conscious thinking. In consequence, when studying beliefs about writing multiple data sources are ideal. In this study, however, we focus only on TCs' narrative responses to two questions. We recognize that we captured a limited snapshot and that TCs' understandings of writing are far more nuanced than this picture. We are also aware that broader data sources would likely reveal other patterns and perhaps different changes in TCs' beliefs. In this study, however, we benefited from hearing from TCs from varied institutional settings, in terms of size, geographical location, population density, public/private, teaching/research-focused. We also heard from TCs from varied education programs, including Masters and Bachelors programs for Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Grades Education. In addition, we believe that this data set was useful because it revealed what was most salient to TCs when asked to respond to two simple yet telling questions about writing.

As we plan for future studies, we have included additional sources of data to complement the data source here. For example, in another project, we have collected student work samples. Other data sources, such as interviews or focus groups, would further complement and extend findings reported below. The TCs in this study were enrolled in one of six literacy courses at one of six institutions. There were common themes, types of assignments, and course topics in each of the six literacy courses-- but there were also differences according to factors like the type of literacy course, program, course delivery model, and degree program. However, we see these differences across the courses as an asset of the study in that the variety across courses contributes to the generalizability of the findings.

## ***Findings***

Our research question prompted us to center our attention on the ways that TCs changed their beliefs about writing after a semester in a literacy course for educators. We found that the majority of TCs' responses indicated that their beliefs about writing changed. Of the 113 TCs who responded to the questions at both the beginning and end of the semester, changes were evident in 85 of their responses to the question "What do you think are the purposes of writing?" and in 107 of their responses to the question "What do you consider to be good writing?". We report our findings as they relate to patterns across TCs' responses to these questions. Overall, while changes were evident in the majority of TCs' responses, these changes tended to be minor. We found that the direction of the changes was inconsistent. For example, some TCs' responses shifted toward a more social view of writing while others shifted toward a more personal view. Our analysis also

revealed beliefs that were prevalent at both the beginning and end of the course. In particular, we found the mention of “inform,” “persuade,” and “entertain,” as stated purposes of writing across the data set. Below we detail findings across three major themes: writing as social practice, writing as personal practice, and writing as school practice.

### **Writing as Social Practice**

We found that some TCs’ beliefs changed towards a more social view of writing. This social view was particularly evident related to the concept of audience and in TCs’ adoption of writerly identities. To a lesser extent, changes related to writing for social action were seen in the data.

#### ***Audience***

For 26 TCs this was seen by the addition of writing to communicate as one of the stated purposes in their end of semester responses. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC answered, “I think the purpose of writing varies, but overall I think it is the way that we express ourselves...” At the end of the semester, this TC stated “I think that the purpose of writing is to share messages and stories. It is to convey meaning. Honestly, writing is really like any other type of art but it is written and shared among people.” This TC, similar to others, changed from thinking about writing as something someone engages in for personal reasons to thinking about writing as something someone does to communicate with an audience.

We also found that 19 TCs’ conception of audience widened from the beginning to the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, the implied audience for these TCs was oneself. For example, one TC shared, “I think the purposes of writing are to get thoughts down on paper, to express yourself, and to occupy yourself.” At the end of the semester, this TC stated, the purposes of writing were “To get your feelings across, to share thoughts, or to inform.” While this TC’s stated purposes for writing were directed at an audience of themselves at the beginning of the semester, by the end of the semester, their beliefs shifted to include an audience that includes others. Another TC stated, “the purpose of writing is being able to express one’s thoughts and feelings toward a topic.” At the end of the semester, this TC wrote, “The purpose of writing is to tell your reader a story. It is important to get the story across to your reader without them walking away with questions.” By the end of the semester, many of the TCs’ answers indicated that they were considering an audience beyond themselves.

Specific mention of a reader was more common in the TCs’ end of semester responses. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC answered, “I think the purpose of writing is to share information whether it be about a story, facts,

arguments, or whatever else it may be.” At the end of the semester, that same TC answered, “I think the purpose is to get your point across to the reader.” Another TC started the semester thinking, “The purpose of writing, in my opinion, is to share ideas and stories.” And ended the semester by answering, “I think the purpose of writing is to share your ideas or experiences with a reader in a way that engages them.”

A social view of writing, in particular related to the concept of audience, was also evident in TCs’ responses to the question, “What do you consider to be good writing?” We noticed a change from TCs thinking about writing in terms of an isolated product to thinking about good writing as writing that is written with the audience in mind. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC answered, “Good writing flows cohesively and has a purpose that is steady throughout the piece.” At the end of the semester, this same TC wrote, “Good writing utilizes the 6 traits in a well-composed way. It is written for a specific audience that understands the information being written.” A second example is from a TC who stated at the beginning of the semester, “Good writing is having fully developed ideas with an introduction that introduces your ideas and a conclusion that wraps everything up.” At the end of the semester, this TC answered, “Good writing is where the author is able to paint a clear picture for the reader no matter the subject.” These examples demonstrate that at the end of the semester, some TCs began to consider the audience in ways they hadn’t at the beginning of the semester.

### ***Writerly Identities***

Changes from the beginning and end of the semester in the TCs’ views of themselves as writers were evident in their responses due to their use of personal pronouns. At the end of the semester, 16 TCs used personal pronouns (e.g., we, your, our) in their responses to the question “what do you consider to be good writing?” and 20 TCs used personal pronouns in their responses to the question “what do you think are the purposes of writing?” Personal pronouns were not present in these TC’s responses to either question at the beginning of the semester. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC stated, “To spread the word of different beliefs and opinions and also entertainment.” At the end of the semester, the same TC answered, “To express yourself and your opinions. Also to inform people and educate them.” At the beginning of the semester, another TC answered, “To express one’s ideas physically” and at the end of the semester, the same TC answered, “The purposes of writing are to convey our own ideas and style in a piece that can be read and interpreted by others in order to share our thoughts and opinions.” The introduction of personal pronouns suggests that these TCs are espousing writerly identities by the end of the semester.

### ***Social Action***

Across our data, there was only one mention of writing for social action in TCs' beginning of semester responses. At the end of the semester, three TCs expanded their responses to include social action as a purpose for writing. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC stated:

I think writing has a lot of purposes. It can reinforce concepts students have learned about and ask them to embellish those ideas. It can serve as a creative outlet. It can be very therapeutic. It can help organize thoughts. It is a wonderful way to communicate and to relate to one another.

At the end of the semester, the same TC answered:

People write for all different reasons, and I think that is what I like about it the most. People can write to share ideas and information, to create, to refresh or recharge, to inspire, to call others to action, to speak out against injustice... There are so many great reasons for people to write and so many different ways to write.

Another TC began the semester claiming, "the purpose of writing is to allow an individual to express themselves on paper while also providing readers with multiple different perspectives about different ideas" and ended the semester asserting, "the purpose of writing is that it gives people the opportunity to write about the things that they value and the things that matter to them. Writing helps individuals to establish a voice in society." The rarity of responses related to social action and justice is striking; while these changes are few in number, they are important to note.

Collectively, the examples provided above, and other similar responses in our data set, indicate that many TCs appeared to expand their beliefs to include a more social view of writing; however, few TCs changed towards articulating more complex views of writing as social practice.

### **Writing as Personal Practice**

While some TCs' responses changed towards a more social view of writing, for others, writing became more personal. We found the direction of change was inconsistent.



### ***Self as Audience***

Ten TCs' responses indicated that their conceptions of audience shifted in their end of semester answers to include (sometimes exclusively) themselves. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC stated the purposes of writing are "to tell a story or inform" and at the end of the semester, the same TC identified the purposes of writing as "to put thoughts down, reflect on situations, and communicate." While telling a story, informing, and communicating all imply an audience other than the writer, putting thoughts down and reflecting on situations imply that the writer is the intended audience. A second TC began the semester believing the purposes of writing are to "inform, entertain" and at the end of semester, this TC expanded their answer to include the writer as the target audience for some of the stated purposes, "To inform, engage, persuade, give opinion, self-reflect, self-regulate, self-care. Anything you really want it to be."

### ***Self-Expression***

Across our data set, 14 TCs mentioned writing for the purposes of self-expression at the end of the semester, whereas they had not mentioned writing for self-expression in their beginning of the semester answers. For example, one TC's beginning of the semester's response identified the purposes of writing as "to learn, remember, and express new things" and wrote "to express who we are, what we've been through, and what we know" at the end of the semester. Another TC began the semester claiming, "I think there are many purposes of writing, but for the most part I believe the purpose is to be able to document and share information and to communicate. The information can be factual or fiction, but writing is a way to document and share it." At the end of the semester the same TC responded, "To think creatively and express yourself." A third TC began the semester stating, "There are many purposes of writing. I think the answer to this question is unique to everybody." At the end of the semester, this same TC answered, "to express thoughts, feelings, emotions, opinions, suggestions, etc."

### ***"From the Heart"***

For 12 TCs, personally meaningful topics were included as criteria for good writing at the end of the semester, while they had not mentioned this idea in the beginning of the semester. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC explained that good writing is "the presence of critical thinking and exploring all aspects of the topic." At the end of the semester, the same TC defined good writing as "writing that is descriptive and shows how meaningful the topic is to that writer." A second TC stated, "I think good writing is something that is interesting and understandable by the general public" at the beginning of the semester, and at the end of the semester, answered, "I consider good writing to be anything that comes

from the heart and means something to the writer, and hopefully to the audience.” A third TC stated at the beginning of the semester:

I would consider good writing to be thoughtful and objective. Something that doesn't get off-topic and sticks to the point. It is nice being able to read the first sentence of an article and know exactly what the writing is going to be about. I also think it's important to be detailed and include words that everyone may not know.

At the end of the semester, this TC answered, “I consider good writing to be something from the heart. Something that shows emotion and connects to the audience. Something that creates imagery.”

The phrase “from the heart” reflects how these TCs interpret good writing. This finding connects to the larger finding of writing as a personal practice since these TCs equate good writing with meaningful writing. The emotional resonance and relevance of writing matter to these TCs.

### **Writing as School Practice**

Many of the TCs’ beliefs about the purposes of writing and what counts as good writing included language associated with school. For example, one TC mentioned that good writing is considered “receiving good grades on writing assignments” and another shared “the biggest main purpose of writing as it relates to me is for assignments.” Across the data set, numerous examples related to writing as school practice.

### ***Becoming Teachers***

Ten TCs positioned themselves as the teacher or included language related to the role of the teacher in their end of semester answers to the question “what do you think are the purposes of writing?” whereas at the beginning of the semester, none of the TCs’ responses to the question positioned themselves as the teacher. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC identified: “the purpose of writing is to express an idea, feeling, or thought. It is used as a form of communication.” The purposes of writing that this TC stated at the beginning of the semester were broad. At the end of the semester, the same TC positioned themselves as a teacher of writing when they stated:

I think that the purposes of writing are to explore your thoughts, and be able to reiterate information that you’ve learned. It also serves a purpose to educate yourself about a topic and to assess your knowledge and your teaching.

A second TC began the semester with the response, “The purpose of writing is to be able to express thoughts in a concise manner.” Again, this TC’s response at the beginning was broad. At the end of the semester, however, the same TC indicated that they were stepping into the role as a teacher in their end of semester response:

The purpose of writing is to communicate thoughts down onto paper so that they can be read by another person when that person is not physically there. Writing can also serve as a way to remember certain things happening. Writing is a way to share information and teach.

In their beginning of the semester answers, four TCs pointed out what they considered good writing differed from what they believed to be the teacher’s perspective of good writing. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC wrote:

Good writing comes from the heart, it varies from person to person. Everyone has a different idea of what “good writing” is. I think that if you write and feel good about it, then you did good writing. However, from a teacher’ standpoint good writing qualifies as being able to read and understand a student’s writing.

In response to the same question at the end of the semester, this TC wrote: “Writing with a purpose and with a voice.” While this TC’s end of the semester answer was shorter than their beginning of the semester answer, no distinction was made between this TC’s definition of good writing and a teacher’s definition of good writing; this may suggest that their views and what they perceived to be the teacher’s view had become one and the same.

### ***Writing to Persuade, Inform, Entertain***

When identifying the purposes of writing, we found that TCs often used language aligned with text types typically privileged in school standards and curricula. Specifically, the terms “entertain,” “inform,” and “persuade” (and derivatives of these words) were commonly used. In TCs’ responses to the question “What do you think are the purposes of writing?” 49 TCs mentioned to inform, persuade, and/or entertain in at least one of their answers (in the beginning and/or end of the semester). 24 TCs mentioned at least one, and sometimes all three terms, as purposes in their beginning of the semester answers and also in their end of semester answers. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC responded, “There are three main purposes of writing: entertainment, informative,

persuasive” and at the end of the semester, the same TC answered: “to persuade, entertain, inform.”

Seventeen TCs mentioned at least one of these purposes in the beginning, but did not include any of these purposes in the end. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC answered, “Writing has a ton of different purposes; to inform, persuade, entertain, express feelings, etc. Writing is a very important component to our lives.” At the end of the semester, this TC’s response changed, “To get your feelings across, to connect with others, to inspire, to communicate, etc.”

Eight TCs did not include any of these purposes in their beginning responses but added at least one in their end of semester answer. For example, one TC changed their response from “To express emotions, thoughts, passions, and sentiments. I think the purpose of writing is giving a person another means of communicating with others” in the beginning of the semester to, “the purpose of writing varies. It could be to entertain, inform, describe, persuade, etc. I ultimately think the purpose of writing is to communicate and collaborate with others” at the end of the semester.

Also of note, 13 TCs who wrote about these purposes in their beginning and end of the semester responses expanded their end of semester response to include one or more additional purposes for writing. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC responded, “I believe there are several purposes of writing, which are to inform, persuade, and entertain” and in the end of the semester, that same TC expanded their answer and pointed out, “There are many different purposes of writing. Some texts entertain, persuade, inform. However, all types of writing have a purpose.”

The widespread use of these three specific terms appear to echo the simplistic ways that text types are often presented in school writing standards and curricula. However, the fact that some TCs moved away from including these terms in their end of semester responses, and other TCs added purposes in their end of semester responses, indicates that these TCs were changing and/or expanding the ways they were thinking about writing.

### ***Grammar***

We also found that TCs changed the ways that they talked about grammar in their end of semester responses. In particular, we noted a shift from thinking about grammar as a part of the writing product towards considering grammar as part of the writing process. For example, at the beginning of the semester, one TC explained that good writing “is easy to follow, lacks grammatical errors, and is captivating.” At the end of the semester, they answered “I consider good writing to be when someone writes something that is meaningful, has been revised, and

clearly edited.” A second TC began the semester believing, “good writing is creative, uses correct grammar, and is effective” and ended the semester answering, “good writing is anything that you compose that consists of your own creativity. Good writing can be edited and revised to be the best it can be.” A third TC commented in the beginning of the semester, “I think good writing has to flow and have correct spelling and punctuation. It has to make sense and be meaningful to the topic of purpose the writing may be about”, and at the end of the semester, this TC stated:

I consider good writing to have a voice in the writing. It is important to identify the writer’s voice and what the purpose of the writing piece is. Another aspect is going through the writing process and working on the writing piece, so revising work is another sign of good writing.

Related to the shift in TCs’ thinking about grammatical correctness, we noted that many TCs appeared to drop the inclusion of grammar and elevate the importance of content in their end of semester response. For example, in the beginning of the semester, one TC answered, “Good writing has a strong voice, is concise, and has little-to-none grammatical errors.” At the end of the semester, the same TC replied, “Good writing is when an author is able to clearly describe what they are trying to say with an intention and focus in their writing with imaginative vocabulary.” A second TC responded, “I would consider knowing proper grammar and punctuation as being someone who is good at writing” at the beginning of the semester and, “Writing that conveys the points or feelings you intend to” at the end of the semester. Although the changes were subtle, taken together, these changes in the TCs’ responses appear to suggest a change in their beliefs away from a focus on grammar and correctness and towards a focus on process and content. Other more complex understandings of grammar, however, were not evident.

### ***Discussion and Implications for Teacher Education***

Our findings indicated that almost all TCs changed their beliefs about good writing and the purposes of writing, although most changes were minor. TCs enter college classrooms influenced by a wide range of understandings about and experiences with writing that were shaped by their histories as K-12 students and inform their current beliefs about writing (Kline et al., 2021). If writing practices grounded in sociocultural and critical ideas about writing were not included in TCs’ prior experiences, the fact that even minor changes in their beliefs were evident after just one semester in a course informed by these ideas is a positive start. We noted a few instances of major changes in beliefs about writing. When comparing

their end of semester responses with their beginning of semester responses, we found more examples related to social understandings of writing in the end of semester responses. For example, at the end, TCs were thinking more about communication and audience. They were also thinking more about process and meaning making. In addition, TCs were more likely to position themselves as writers and/or as teachers rather than as students. These are positive changes. However, of concern is what was limited or missing in TCs' responses. Certain key sociocultural and critical understandings were almost entirely absent from our data. Most significantly, TCs seldom connected writing to issues of power, culture, and context. Of course, it is possible that more of these shifts did occur, but they were not captured in our data. Regardless, it is clear that these issues were not in the forefront of TCs' thoughts. This leads us to consider what we might change in teacher education, and in our own courses, to *center* these key sociocultural and critical issues, so that they are at the *center* of TCs' thinking about writing.

Given that narrow views of writing are so deeply embedded in our educational institutions (and we are part of these institutions), we recognize the challenge of disrupting TCs' beliefs about writing, particularly when TCs take few courses addressing writing and often none focused on it (Myers et al., 2016). In our courses, however, we recognize the responsibility of challenging narrow views of writing and providing experiences to help TCs broaden their understanding of writing toward humanizing writing pedagogy. In particular, we acknowledge our responsibility to thoroughly unpack the ways in which writing is intimately connected to context, culture, and power. In order to cultivate future teachers' understandings of what writing is, we must enact practices in our courses that engender these major disruptions. As teacher educators and literacy researchers, it is our role to teach in critical ways and to prepare our TCs to do so in their future classrooms. For this reason, below we provide three potential implications for disruptive practices in writing in teacher education that will lead to humanizing pedagogy that centers and sustains racial, linguistic and cultural pluralism.

### **Disrupt Beliefs about Grammar and Language**

Through our investigation, we found that some TCs changed their beliefs about grammar. In particular, they shifted from a focus on grammatical correctness towards a focus on content. However, as discussed in the findings, we did not find major changes related to understandings of grammar and language. Instead of TCs considering grammar as less important, we want TCs to develop nuanced understandings of grammar and language. Part of this involves supporting TCs to recognize the contextual nature of correctness. However, this is not enough. We need to do more to disrupt beliefs that are deeply embedded in our institutions. TCs must recognize that notions of correct grammar and language are intimately

connected to issues of power and White privilege. We want them to understand that accepting only White Mainstream English (WME) is a racist practice, as this promotes the needs, self-interests, and racial privileges of Whites at the expense of linguistically marginalized communities of color (Baker-Bell, 2020). As teacher educators, we must critically examine our literacy courses to unearth ways that we perpetuate the normalization of WME, and we must center racially and linguistically diverse writers and writing practices in our courses. In addition, we must involve TCs in critical inquiry concerning notions of “grammatical correctness,” and engage them in conversations about power and privilege as they relate to grammar and language. When we support TCs to recognize and value multiple grammars and languages, we are engaging in anti-racist practices towards humanizing writing pedagogy.

### **Disrupt Beliefs about the Forms of Writing**

Our investigation also revealed the prevalence of TCs’ use of language related to traditional school text types (e.g., persuade, inform, entertain), both at the beginning and end of the semester. This is another area where we recognize our courses did not elicit major disruptions. One component of this is connected to the forms of writing. Writing instruction in K-12 classrooms is littered with practices and materials (e.g., scripted curricula, essays, assessments) that promote writing only in a narrow range of forms (Woodard & Kline, 2016; Kang, 2016). In particular, essays are dominant and oftentimes students are encouraged to follow formulaic structures (e.g., the five-paragraph essay), which are only found in examples of school writing (DeStigter, 2015). As teacher educators, we need to consider the ways that we reinforce attention to writing only in a limited number of forms. In sum, this work involves critically examining our own practices. For example, we might ask: What forms of writing are privileged in our main assignments and learning activities? What are the dominant forms in the standards and curriculum materials that we share with TCs? What forms of writing do TCs observe in their clinical experiences? We need to ensure that we are providing guidance to support TCs to critique the forms of writing typically evident in schools. We also need to support TCs to look beyond classroom walls to investigate writing in a wide array of spaces (e.g., social media platforms, protest sites, community settings) and forms (e.g., comics, spoken word, speeches, tweets, memes, podcasts), as well as to recognize the multimodal and genre hybridity inherent in this writing (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2010; Prior, 2009). In addition, TCs must recognize that writers make decisions about the form of writing based on their purpose for writing and intended audience (Bazerman, 2004).

## **Disrupt Beliefs about the Purposes of Writing**

We also believe that as teacher educators we need to do more disruptive work related to the purposes of writing. In particular, we need to consider what we can do to move TCs beyond thinking of writing as primarily a school activity. Writing for advocacy and agency must not only be encouraged, but also embodied in our classrooms (Kang & Kline, 2020; Vaughn, 2018, 2020). Schools should be sites where students critically deconstruct texts, dismantle dominant perspectives, and write for empowerment and change (Yoon, 2020). In the same way, we need to create these humanizing and critical spaces in our college classrooms. Additionally, in recognition that the purposes of writing are tied to intended audiences, we need to encourage TCs to envision writing tasks in which the audience extends beyond the teacher. Although we cannot bypass larger systems, mandates, and pressures on teachers, we need to guide TCs to see curricula not as a script, but as a resource teachers can flexibly use as they draw from students' interests, inquiries, and backgrounds and center students' purposes for writing (Kang, 2016; Yoon, 2013). Students from marginalized backgrounds and non-dominant communities do not have a choice to care about issues of equity and diversity, it is a part of who they are. Humanizing writing pedagogy must decenter Whiteness and create opportunities for TCs to consider writing classrooms to be spaces of dialogue where students' linguistic repertoires, cultural backgrounds, and histories are not only included, but invited, honored, and celebrated (Kang & Kline, 2020; Kang & Osorio, 2020).

## ***Conclusion***

Undergirding our study is the notion that all of our TCs will be teachers of writing in some capacity, so it is necessary for them to explore and understand their own beliefs about writing as they prepare to teach writing. Our implications highlight the necessity within teacher education writing courses to disrupt and transform some of the outdated and problematic beliefs about writing that remain prevalent in today's schools, and that some TCs carry with them into our courses. As teacher educators, we have a responsibility to identify and address these concerns, including how we, ourselves, may unintentionally perpetuate these beliefs, and actively work against some of these structures. We see it as integral that teacher educators *center* discussions of power, culture, and context, and their intimate connection to the purposes of writing and what is considered good writing, and not consider them add-ons. While we do not expect TCs to change the system on the basis of one or a few writing-focused courses, we can impact their thought processes around negotiating these critical issues in their future teaching. As future



teachers, it is essential that TCs recognize and value the plethora of voices, purposes, and audiences for writing in the world within the classroom and beyond.

To build on this work, future research might explore understanding TCs' continuum of growth through longitudinal studies, as well as including other data sources to capture a fuller and more nuanced understanding of TCs' beliefs. In addition, we think it is important to investigate the kinds of course experiences that are most influential in disrupting TCs' beliefs about writing and supporting them to bring broad understandings of writing to their future students.

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