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Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol12/iss1/2
The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course (TESWMC): An Approach to Improve Teacher Candidates’ Writing Skills and Attitudes

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High-quality academic writing is critical to student success in graduate-level education courses as well as to professional advancement in our field. Yet, many of our students are not prepared for the demands of college writing. According to recent NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessments (2007), 72% of students coming out of high school are not ready for college-level writing. Only 27% of employers surveyed in a report commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2015) felt recent graduates were well prepared in writing. In teacher preparation programs, the focus on writing should be paramount as writing is an essential skill that teachers of all subjects should possess and be able to teach. Yet, literature on writing teacher education has been lacking (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). For the past few years, faculty and leadership in the School of Education and Human Services at Sherwood Lane University (pseudonym) have engaged in multiple conversations about best ways to address students’ weak writing skills. After implementing different writing programs over the years (i.e., summer remedial course, software writing system) that proved to be less than ideal, recent efforts included implementing a unique and effective way to teach writing to college students—The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course (TESWMC).

Dr. Vicky Giouroukakis was asked to become a member of the writing committee that was formed to examine the writing issue because of my background, experience, and interest in writing instruction. As a former high school English teacher and current professor of literacy, she has spent her 25-year career researching and teaching writing. She was tasked with developing curriculum around key writing skills that students need to be successful in college and career. Eventually, she ended up designing the course and teaching it as a push-in to graduate teacher candidates enrolled in a Master’s degree program. The goal of the course was twofold: a) to improve teacher candidates’ skills in writing critically and effectively and b) to positively influence teacher candidates’ attitudes towards
writing. She also wanted to determine the efficacy of the course and whether it should be offered again by examining how it impacted the teacher candidates. Therefore, the mini-course also served as a pilot study and was approved by the institution’s IRB. Vicky’s research assistant, Laurie Bocca, contributed to the literature review and provided an understanding of the existing research in college writing instruction.

**Literature Review**

Future educators and teacher candidates, despite their multifarious fields of study, are required to write throughout a great deal of their college coursework and beyond, but many future educators feel underprepared to teach writing because of the general absence of writing support in higher education classes (Abbott et al., 2022). The implementation of The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course (TESWMC) is meant to address the observed areas of concern for future teachers through the systematic and scaffolded plan presented in the research.

**Writing Demands and Difficulties**

Scholarship indicates that students entering higher education do so with greater writing needs than they have historically, citing increased linguistic outputs via digital media but an inversely related skill level in academic and scholarly production (Bauerlein, 2010). Students in primary and secondary school have displayed a general decline in writing skills, as noted by Cutler and Graham (2008) who found that “The writing of two thirds or more of the students tested in Grades 4, 8, and 12 was below grade-level proficiency,” which necessarily filters up into the higher education landscape. Abbot et al. (2022) further addressed the growing rift between school-aged students’ writing needs and the capabilities of teacher candidates; they proposed that “the difficulty of teaching the skill without quality preparation can lead to low levels of confidence and self-efficacy, which can impact teachers’ writing instruction and potentially student achievement” (p. 2). This reveals a cycle of need defined by school-aged students with lacking proficiency receiving writing instruction from those with low writing confidence, thus augmenting the writing needs addressed by past researchers.

These writing needs are indeed more traditional, but digital literacies – often perceived as less pressing in terms of learner deficits – are covertly suffering under the guise of technological awareness in young people, or “digital natives” (Morgan, et al., 2022, p. 262). Despite the ever-growing wealth of information online, and students’ interactions with it, students in higher education struggle to successfully amalgamate and evaluate digital information, which necessitates direct instruction to remedy those needs because “being able to determine bias and quality, evaluate an abundance of information, as well as communicate in a digital world, are critical for employability and citizenship” (Morgan, et al., 2022, p. 270). While the study
by Morgan et al. focused on business majors, teacher candidates mirror these needs, especially in the selection, evaluation, and eventual employment of educational theory and practice, evidenced by the article critique assignment described in this research.

Addressing Needs

Current and future teachers need direction to reflectively engage with the writing process without the inherent desire to reach some amorphous final answer of writing skill. Rivera-Mueller (2022) asserted that “if preservice or practicing teachers expect teacher education to provide...final answers about teaching, teacher educators can coach them toward additional goals for teacher-learning,” specifically regarding teachers’ attitudes towards writing and its instruction. Teacher candidates inextricably operate within several but linked spheres of institutionality that demand writing instruction and output that do not always align, so it is imperative that teacher candidates (and practicing teachers) have a variety of methods and tools from which to choose to write and teach writing effectively, specifically in terms of flexibly navigating a world of indefinite “answers.” Collier et al. (2015) insisted that “it is incumbent upon teacher education programs to serve as a mediator between the students whom they train and school systems characterized by dysfunctional rigidity,” thus validating the need for the present research study.

Methodology

The mini-course/pilot study, the methodology utilized, and the results/discussion are described in this section.

The Course

The new course the researcher designed and taught was a 7-week scaffolded writing mini-course embedded in an existing 14-week, 3-credit course taught by three other professors. The full-semester course is titled “Strategies, Methods, and Environments for Teaching Students with Disabilities.” The goal of this course is to enable teacher candidates to utilize effective teaching methodologies and create learning environments to promote success for students with disabilities. It is a required course in the dual-degree Master’s program in Childhood [Grades 1-6]/Special Education (SPED)]. There were 27 teacher candidates in the course, all pre-service elementary-school special education teachers. The mini-course took place in the first 7 weeks of the SPED course.

TESWMC was seamlessly incorporated into the first half of the semester and placed only a few additional demands on the teacher candidates which were the instruments for the study (i.e., the diagnostic essay, two surveys, interview, final paper with highlighted changes along with checklist, and reflection) (See Appendix...
A). The work submitted was worth 15% of the final grade. The researcher was respectful of the time constraints of the SPED course as it was assignment-heavy (it also included a field component) and knew that if she put too much pressure on teacher candidates by including multiple requirements that they would not be receptive to the assignment and to her feedback. The point was to weave TESWMC into the SPED course in an inobtrusive way so that teacher candidates could manage the assignment and learn from the experience.

The focus of TESWMC was on scaffolding the scholarly journal article critique, which is a benchmark assignment typically required in most education courses. Many college students have a challenging time analyzing and critiquing texts, developing arguments, and writing for a scholarly audience as opposed to supporting opinions or summarizing which they practice more frequently in high school. For this assignment, teacher candidates select an article of their choice, published within the last three years, from a peer-reviewed journal focusing on a topic related to the course. Example topics include: the role of response to intervention in the detection of learning disabilities; trauma-informed teaching for teacher candidates with special needs; technology to support twice-exceptional children. Teacher candidates write an analysis and critique of the article in a 3-page paper using the American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style.

Several scaffolding elements served as the foundation of the course and were essential in ensuring success. One was the writing process approach that is key in helping teacher candidates develop a strong writing product. Process writing is based on the idea that if writers follow the steps of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, they will produce strong writing. Whereas typically teacher candidates would write the paper and submit it to the professors for a grade, TESWMC required teacher candidates to engage in the steps of the writing process which involved reviewing their work several times before submitting a final draft for publication. The researcher wanted to make the assignment manageable for teacher candidates which would also help her give feedback in smaller doses so as not to overwhelm them. Therefore, she broke down the assignment into three shorter tasks—article selection, one-page summary, one-page critique, and one-page opinion. She taught students lessons on how to write this paper in two online synchronous sessions, in weeks one and three. She provided cycles of feedback—step-by-step personalized written comments on each task and verbal comments during our one-on-one conferencing. She made sure to continuously monitor teacher candidates’ work throughout the writing process. Even though additional conferencing could not be mandated outside of the course, teacher candidates were encouraged to maintain lines of communication via email and by making an appointment to discuss their paper in person or on Zoom.

Feedback focused on global issues with the paper (e.g., “this section should be reorganized” as well as local concerns (e.g., “use a transition here”). In her
opinion, the most helpful advice the researcher could give teacher candidates included specific and targeted comments, such as “Elaborate here in 1-2 sentences; consider your audience who may not be familiar with this education idea” or “Replace this word with a different one since it is repeated multiple times in this paragraph.”

It was important to make the assignment authentic and meaningful with the hope that teacher candidates would take the assignment more seriously and produce a stronger paper. At the beginning of the course, the researcher informed them that they had to write for a real audience and that their final papers would be published on a digital platform. The ultimate goal is not to leave teacher candidates where they are, however, but to move them toward greater flexibility, so that they can write for wider audiences (NCTE, 2016).

Before launching TESWMC, the researcher frontloaded resources by putting them on the SPED course’s Canvas site, the University’s Learning Management System, and set them up in organized modules. These resources were: a) Journal Article Critique Description; b) Scaffolded Critique (Step-by-Step Guide); c) Journal Article Critique Rubric; d) Library Information; e) Sample Critiques; f) APA Materials; and g) ELA Materials. Frontloading is promoting learning before the actual instruction (Priest & Gass, 1994). This helpful information was readily available and easily accessible to teacher candidates throughout the semester.

There may not be a more appropriate approach to investigating problems of practice than through teacher inquiry. Teacher inquiry is the “systematic, intentional study of one’s own professional practice” (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019, p. 6). As one of the instructors of the course and therefore an insider, the researcher had first-hand knowledge of the problem and the context as she began to investigate and find ways to address this issue. In the development of self- and interpersonal reflection, writers who seek and provide feedback synergistically develop their writing skills through the reciprocal sharing of composition insight, as discussed by Fallon and Whitney (2016) in their study that found that the provision of feedback “prompted the teacher-writers to reflexively assess their own capabilities on multiple levels…This was a two-way process wherein the reviewer would see others’ work through his or her own perspectives…while simultaneously reacting to and learning through the performance of those reviews” (p. 67). Collier et al. (2015) echoed this need for reflective practices in teacher inquiry, asserting that in order for future teachers to develop their writing personalities, “they must have opportunities to reflect upon their own conceptions of what effective writing is, have access to multiple materials and resources for writing, and be encouraged to develop their own philosophies,” further underscoring the need for increased opportunities to take measured investigations into their own positions as teacher candidates, writers, and teachers of writing (p. 106).
Materials

The researcher used various tools to explore the impact of TESWMC on teacher candidates’ writing skills and attitudes: a) pre- and post- mini-course surveys; b) written interview; and c) reflection. The study was approved by the institution’s IRB.

Pre-and Post-Mini-Course Surveys

Two surveys were given via a google form using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. One survey was completed before the scaffolded intervention which was meant to assess attitudes towards writing, the writing process, and perceived abilities and skills. Examples include: “I consider myself to be a good writer;” “I enjoy writing;” “I use an outline for my paper;” “I revise as I write my paper.” Post-course, the teacher candidates completed the same survey with the addition of the following question: “How have your writing attitudes and abilities changed as a result of more guided instruction in writing the journal article critique? Please be specific.” This last question was meant to gauge the learning gained by engaging in the process of writing the paper with guided instruction.

Written Interview

Teacher candidates were asked to respond to a written interview, giving them time to think about and respond to a set of predetermined questions. The semi-structured interview has the advantage of asking all participants the same core questions which are open-ended (Brenner, 2006); for example, how they perceive themselves as writers, how they feel about writing, what writing strategies/techniques they use, how often they write, and what kinds of writing they do typically. These questions, similar to the ones on the surveys, centered on writing attitudes and habits, but rather than being assessed on a Likert scale, they were open-ended to reveal individual differences. Ideally, the interview questions would be asked verbally “with the freedom to ask follow-up questions that build on the responses received” (Brenner, 2006, p. 362), but the time constraints of the course did not allow for that format.

Reflections

Feedback was given to teacher candidates throughout the mini-course to guide them in improving their papers. They were expected to submit at least one rough draft and the final paper with highlighted changes to demonstrate what revisions they made and how their work evolved. Accompanying these drafts was a one-paragraph reflection describing the evolution of their paper. The reflection
was meant for students to develop meta awareness and consider what good writing looks like and how to achieve it.

Results and Discussion
Teacher candidates completed a consent form granting permission for me to collect the materials and use them in the study. The course was taught by four instructors, and the researcher was solely responsible for teaching the mini-course focusing on the journal article critique assignment.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed and revealed that teacher candidates’ attitudes towards writing improved. A university statistician assisted with comparing the quantitative data in terms of percentages for each response and of means via ANOVA. The analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between the teacher candidates before the course and after the course. The qualitative data analysis revealed that teacher candidates reported learning new skills, such as time management and organizational skills. They also learned strategies, and in particular chunking. Their attitudes towards writing also improved and teacher candidates reported gaining self-awareness and confidence in writing.

Teacher Candidates Reported Developing New Skills
Teacher candidates reported gaining organizational and time management skills. These skills are not typically taught in a graduate course, but by being shown how to organize a paper in chunks, use helpful resources, incorporate feedback into the writing, and take time to reflect and work on the process, teacher candidates were able to produce a satisfactory paper. Michelle talked about how much she enjoyed the scaffolded instruction:

I genuinely wish other classes created assignments like this where small parts were due at different times. It teaches teacher candidates good time management skills that can become a good habit and allows teacher candidates to actually analyze and read over their work with good timing; compared to having all parts on an assignment due on a certain day and teacher candidates leaving it until last minute and not fully reading it over.

Slowing down the process also meant giving teacher candidates, like Lisa, the opportunity to revise their text to improve it. Carla expressed her satisfaction with the revision aspect of the scaffolded instruction.

After guided instruction, I felt that my attitudes and abilities changed immensely. I started to realize that I need to use higher-level vocabulary. I tend to rush my work and use lower-level vocabulary because it’s easier. This process made it easier to reflect on my writing and made this assignment much easier to complete.
Revision was a constant theme in the data as teacher candidates reported having multiple opportunities to revisit their work and make necessary changes. Structuring the course and providing modules with due dates was beneficial, according to teacher candidates, like Georgia:

“My writing attitudes and abilities have changed as a result of more guided instruction because I was able to create many drafts and work off of the feedback I was given. In situations where it is more independently done, I tend to make one draft and then proofread it and correct myself and call it a day. However, with this process, it kind of forced me to re-read my writing many different times and in smaller sections, which allowed me to catch more mistakes. I also think this process helped organize everything better and do it in a timely fashion. Although I have been very guilty of procrastination in the past, I have gotten better with it. Doing it this way, though, didn't leave a lot of room for procrastination because each section had to be done at certain times.

The need for time and space in writing practice for teacher candidates, illustrated by the present study, mirrors that which Collier et al. (2015) discussed in their research—in which teacher candidates engaged with and evaluated their own writing styles and needs—each finding that teacher candidates needed the academic support of their preparation programs to aid in the growth of their writing identities, and thus, their capabilities as individual writers.

Teacher Candidates Learned Strategies--Chunking

The interview and reflection data revealed that teacher candidates typically write more often for college and tend to use a personalized writing approach that works for them. One student described step-by-step her prewriting method:

Another pre-writing activity or outline that I usually do before writing a paper or an essay is to outline by introduction, body paragraph 1, 2, 3 and conclusion. I then give each body paragraph a topic and go into the text and bullet information that supports this topic or claim. Therefore, when I go to write the paper, I know what information I am going to focus on and have it to base the rest of my writing on.

Another student discussed how topic and content contribute to how easy or challenging writing a paper is:

Some journal article critique assignments do come easily to me, and others don’t. Similarly to my other response, it has to do with the topic and the journal article itself. For example, this assignment came easier to me
because I was interested and motivated in my topic, and the article itself was clear and easy to understand.

In addition to the strategies that teacher candidates brought with them to this mini-course, they reported learning how to chunk information. “Learning by chunking is an active learning strategy characterized by chunking, which is defined as cognitive processing that recodes information into meaningful groups, called chunks, to increase learning efficiency or capacity. Chunks of information are generally composed of familiar or meaningful sets of information that are recalled together” (Fountain & Doyle, 2012, p. 1814). Chunking allows the writer to focus on one part at a time and organize the information in a comprehensible way both cognitively and in writing. Rob expressed his experience with chunking:

Before beginning this assignment, I thought I would have a hard time pulling out key ideas and facts from the article due to them being challenging for me to understand. But because we had the assignment broken down into three parts I was able to focus on each specific section and not have to worry about the whole paper at once. It helped me with my writing as I was able to comprehend each section more.

In addition to chunking, teacher candidates learned how to get started with their writing and became more aware of their expectations. Beth wrote: “The guided instruction I was given enhanced my ability to write the journal critique. There were times where I didn’t know what to write about, but the zoom meeting I attended where we discussed my paper and the checklist also gave hints as to what was expected.”

Teacher Candidates Changed their Attitudes and Gained Self-Awareness and Confidence in Writing

The survey results revealed that teacher candidates’ attitudes towards writing changed. There was a significant difference (p = .002) between the means of the teacher candidates before the course and post course in the writing survey. Post-course, they decreased toward Strongly Agree by an average of .202 points. Therefore, on average, someone who scored 2.0 (Agree) on the pretest now scored 1.8 (closer to Strongly Agree) (Appendix C).

In addition to the survey results, the quantitative data revealed that teacher candidates became self-aware and recognize their strengths and weaknesses as a result of taking the mini-course. Bobby recognized what he needs to do to become a stronger writer:

This experience absolutely helped me to recognize both my strengths and weaknesses in writing. In addition, this has also allowed me to become a
better writer by having an individualized approach to pinpointing what I need to work on to become a better writer.

The most prevalent theme in the data was the confidence that the teacher candidates reported gaining as a result of being in the mini-course. Almost every response touched upon this theme. Karla reported feeling less pressure and developing a more positive attitude towards writing.

After this SMWC I definitely feel more confident in my writing abilities. I learned a lot by having to closely analyze an article. I also think that practicing how to formally analyze a paper and add in my own opinion has been helpful. Having the paper broken up into chunks to do throughout the semester was a good way for me to stay organized while writing the paper and take it one step at a time instead of rushing. The way the mini course was organized was helpful in the writing process and did not cause me any stress, which helped me have a more positive attitude towards the writing.

The personalized feedback that targeted specific global or local issues in the writing proved to be invaluable. Teacher candidates reported feeling like the assignment was manageable based on the organizational structure of the mini-course as well as the specific feedback, as Tom and Alexandra, respectively, note below:

The journal article critique assignment seemed very intimidating and difficult when I first saw the assignment. However, the way that we completed it by breaking it down and receiving feedback for each section made it less overwhelming and manageable. It also made writing seem more enjoyable for me instead of feeling pressure.

The guided instruction really helped me gain confidence in my writing abilities. I also felt that it broke down the work to make it seem not so bad as we went. Personally, I loved receiving feedback and editing my paper as I went, before starting another section, in order to keep myself organized. It also kept me on track and accountable for my work, instead of waiting until the last minute to write.

Research about the value of writing feedback’s role in developing personal writing skills also suggests that both giving and receiving feedback is beneficial to the development of teachers’ writing acuity and style, highlighted again by Fallon and Whitney (2016): “When the teacher provides feedback to student writers, he or she is not just affecting their writing, but the process of providing feedback is also affecting his or her own writing;” therefore, further defining the essentiality of teacher candidate writing support in a structured format (p. 70). The appreciation
of feedback in the present study, then, reflects the extant value found in previous research.

**Implications**

The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course provided scaffolded writing instruction to teacher candidates and guided them in developing and strengthening their analytical and critiquing skills. It also aimed to positively impact their dispositions towards writing. Findings indicate that teacher candidate reported that their skills and attitudes improved as a result of taking this mini-course. The following suggestions are an outgrowth of these themes:

**Need to Scaffold the Writing Process and Provide Strategies**

The goal of process writing is to engage writers in a recursive order of steps that end with a “publishable” final product that is appropriate to the topic, purpose, and audience. By the time they enter college, students have a philosophy and a plan of approaching writing, whether they know it or not. Research has shown that students have their own personalized writing process—for example, some students begin with an outline, whereas others start drafting; some students revise along the way and others revise at the end. Educators must accept and value students’ individualized writing process in order to support their efforts to produce good writing (Giouroukakis et al., 2021). Collier et al. (2015) addressed the highly individualistic nature of writing and becoming a writer, positing that “writing is not only a mechanical process but it is also deeply connected to the internal construction of one’s identity as a writer, and to the social construct of one’s identity as a future educator,” which underscores the overarching need for instruction that supports the individual writer in his or her journey towards self-efficacious composition (p. 92).

Whenever possible, teachers should attend to the process that teacher candidates might follow to produce texts—and not only specify criteria for evaluating finished products, in form or content. Teacher candidates should become comfortable with prewriting techniques, multiple strategies for developing and organizing a message, a variety of strategies for revising and editing, and methods for preparing products for public audiences and for deadlines. In explaining assignments, teachers should provide guidance and options for ways of accomplishing the objectives. (Benjamin & Wagner, 2021)

Scaffolding allows educators to structure and organize assignments in order to facilitate the writing process and meet the needs of all students. Wood et al. (1976) define scaffolding as a process "that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Breaking
down an assignment into smaller tasks that are due at different times and providing resources, strategies, and feedback along the way is a process that provides supports to learners and enables them to achieve a goal that would not be attainable otherwise.

Frontloading information before students even begin to draft their papers is important in setting them up for success.

The part of the term *front* indicates that the facilitation takes place up front or prior to the beginning of the experience or formal activity. The *loading* portion of the word refers to the point that the learning is loaded together or emphasized in combination beforehand. In summary, frontloading means punctuating the key learning points in advance of the adventure experience, rather than reviewing or debriefing any learning after the fact. (Priest & Gass, 1994)

Educators can provide guided information, such as a verbal and written explanation of the assignment, model papers, a rubric and checklist to ensure that expectations have been met, and materials on documentation and ELA conventions. Modeling processes in the introduction of complex tasks is proven effective in directing students’ learning applications; Walsh-Moorman and Pytash (2022) found that, in the introduction of a research task using a modeled process, “When students were asked to demonstrate lateral reading on their own, we noticed that they applied the same steps and often used the same tools shared during direct instruction,” and while this occurs at the research stage rather than the composition stage, it is clear that students innately use those tools which are displayed in the scaffolded steps of a composition-based unit. Frontloading and scaffolding encourage students to employ structured and validated methods for composition without the undue pressure of lacking direction.

**Need to Encourage Revision and Writing for an Authentic Audience**

Research shows that routinely engaging in revision is associated with better writing performance. Students who were required to routinely revise scored highest on the National Association of Educational Progress writing assessment; those who were never asked to revise scored poorly (NAEP, 2007. Researchers note that revision separates expert writers from novices since the former revise, but the latter do not revise much, if at all (McLeod, Hart-Davidson, & Grabill, n.d.). Yet, many students think that revision and editing are the same, but re-vision is to look at something in a different way, with new eyes. It involves making substantial changes that will improve the content, such as moving paragraphs, reorganizing the structure, changing the voice. Editing refers to form-level changes, such as correcting errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, an equally important stage, but one that should not replace revision.
Providing feedback gives students information about how they can accomplish their goal in writing. Effective feedback consists of qualifiers:

1. It is formative — it helps learners get better at a task or increases their understanding.
2. It is timely — it happens at a moment when it's possible to learn and change (e.g., revise).
3. It is descriptive, goal referenced and directed. (McLeod et al., n.d., What Feedback Is and How to Teach It, para. 4)

Of course, not every piece of writing should be the target of revision and further development, but students should be encouraged to engage in this process at least for one benchmark assignment (Schmoker, 2007). The aim should be to craft fewer and better pieces than producing multiple pieces for the sake of claiming that students are writing more and more frequently. Through peer and teacher feedback and conferencing, it is the hope that teacher candidates will be able to produce strong writing. Although the time constraints of this course did not allow for peer-feedback, peer-feedback has the potential of “promoting a diversity of responses, as members providing feedback in a writing group are very likely to come from a wide range of perspectives,” as found in collaborative teacher writing groups (Fallon & Whitney, 2016, p. 62).

Varying the audience and having students write for different purposes are also important in helping them become more versatile writers who take into consideration topic, audience, and purpose. One of the limitations of the study is that teacher candidates did not refer to the element of writing for an authentic audience built into the course nor discussed its impact on their writing. One of the reasons might be that I did not explicitly remind students throughout the course that they would be writing for publication; it was discussed only at the beginning and mentioned at the end when students’ work was actually published in a digital platform. Writing for an authentic audience accomplishes many things: it shows students how the real world works in that they must follow certain rules, it raises their self-confidence, and it forces them to take their work seriously (Schulten, 2018). Teacher candidates may publish their writing in the college’s newsletter or share their work with other teachers, peers, or administrators via social media, a website, Wakelet, or other digital platforms (Giouroukakis & Connolly, 2015).

**Need to Reflect on Writing**

Often, when people think of writing, they think of finished products and not necessarily what strategies they use or what errors they might be making or how they can go about writing better.

Knowledge about writing is only complete when writers understand the ensemble of actions in which they engage as they produce texts. Such understanding has two aspects, at least. First is the development, through
extended practice over years, of a repertory of routines, skills, strategies, and practices, for generating, revising, and editing different kinds of texts. Second is the development of reflective abilities and meta-awareness about writing. (NCTE, 2016, Writing Is a Process, para. 1).

Therefore, it is extremely important to encourage students to reflect on their own writing and gain an understanding of themselves as writers and of how the process works. This includes reading texts and analyzing a researcher’s voice, style, and choices in craft and structure. Reading and writing go hand in hand. Only then will students understand what it means to be a writer and what the writing process entails. Rivera-Mueller (2020) recognized the necessity of teachers’ intrapersonal intellectual navigations in the larger conversation of inquiry because, when teachers “critically examine the range of factors contributing to student learning, as well as the consequences of particular learning goals,” they consequently begin asking themselves the right questions and developing appropriate learning goals.

**Conclusion**

The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course (TESWMC) was designed to both improve teacher candidates’ skills in writing critically and effectively and to positively influence teacher candidates’ attitudes towards writing. The 7-week mini-course was taught by the teacher educator/researcher as a “push-in” into a semester-long graduate Education course. The content, structure, and contextualized aspect of the course have the potential of more effective writing instruction in higher education. TESWMC could be used as a model for other assignments and can be modified for all grade and ability levels. The goal should be to use it to scaffold one benchmark assignment so that students learn how to write and transfer their learning (skills and attitudes) to other writing tasks.

Teaching writing is not an easy task; Benjamin and Wagner call on all educators to “stop pretending that scattershot, half-hearted, and formulaic efforts to teach writing will succeed. In reality, learning to write well is a complex skill that requires focused instruction and frequent practice” (Benjamin and Wagner, 2021, Writing for the Real World, para. 1).

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Appendix A
The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course Pilot Study Outline

Assignment Prompt: Write a critique of a recent (not older than 3 years) peer-reviewed journal article of your choice related to the content of the course.

Instruments

Pre-mini-course

- Writing Habits and Skills Survey via Google Form
- Interview Questions via Google Form
- Diagnostic Essay—Evaluator Notes and Rubric Scores

Intervention

- Zoom Meeting (First Class)
- Resources Uploaded
  - Journal Article Critique Description
  - Scaffolded Critique
  - Library Research Resources
    - Videos on How to Do Research
    - Selecting and Using Keywords
    - Scholarly Searching Basics
    - The CRAAP Test
  - Sample Critiques
  - APA Resources
  - ELA Conventions:
    - Writing Rules
    - Transition Words
    - Transitions Handout
    - General Proofreading Strategies (Links to an external site.)
    - Article Critique Checklist.docx
- Written Paper Feedback
  - Approval of Article
  - Summary Draft Feedback
  - Analysis Draft Feedback
  - Opinion Draft Feedback
  - Communication with Teacher candidates via Email and Announcements
- One-on-One Conferencing via Zoom

Post-mini-course

- Writing Habits and Skills Survey via Google Form
- Final Paper—Evaluator Notes and Rubric Scores
- Drafts and Final Paper with Highlighted Changes
- Reflections on the Process of Producing a Final Paper
Appendix B
The Embedded Scaffolded Writing Mini-Course Modules

Week 1: (Zoom)
- Diagnostic
- Pre-SMWC Survey about attitudes towards writing, your process of writing, and your perceived abilities/skills (Google Form).
- Interview about writing habits and skills (Google Form).
- Review assignment—What makes a good journal article critique?
- Review resources—Description, scaffolding, rubric, samples, APA and ELA materials
- How can you find an appropriate scholarly article to review? (Librarian’s Visit)

Week 2:
- Submit article for approval and feedback.

Week 3: (Zoom)
- How can we analyze and critique an article?

Week 4:
- Write a succinct summary of the article (1 page).
- Submit it for feedback.
- Use sample as a model.

Week 5:
- Write an analysis of the article--Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the article (1 page).
- Submit it for feedback.
- Use sample as a model.

Week 6:
- Write your opinion of the article and how it applies to your instructional practice (1 page).
- Submit it for feedback.
- Use sample as a model.

Week 7: (Zoom or In-Person Conferencing)
- Discuss APA conventions and ELA Conventions (mechanics, grammar, spelling, capitalization).
- One-on-one personalized feedback.

Week 8:
- Write the final draft of the journal article critique.
  1. Submit the journal article critique for evaluation.
  2. Submit the journal article critique checklist.
3. Submit at least one rough draft along with the final draft **with highlighted changes** to show that feedback was incorporated. Write **one reflection paragraph** about the changes you made and why.

4. Complete **Post-SMWC Survey** about learning gained by going through the process of writing this critique with guided instruction (Google Form).

Publication: Papers will be uploaded to a **Website** or **Wakelet** created by the instructor.
### Appendix C

**Survey Results: How Pre- and Post- Course Surveys Were Coded**

Mean Differences between Pre- and Post- Surveys (Student Attitudes)

1. Strongly Agree and Agree, Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided/Neutral and Undecided, Agree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Survey Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Post-Survey Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself to be a good writer</td>
<td>2.11 (.64)</td>
<td>2.00 (.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others consider me a good writer</td>
<td>2.22 (.58)</td>
<td>2.15 (.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy writing</td>
<td>2.62 (.941)</td>
<td>2.31 (.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write creatively for fun</td>
<td>3.22 (1.05)</td>
<td>3.22 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy writing for college</td>
<td>3.04 (.71)</td>
<td>2.70 (.823)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the writing I do is for college</td>
<td>1.56 (.75)</td>
<td>1.52 (.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider writing to be an important life skill</td>
<td>1.52 (.51)</td>
<td>1.37 (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a future teacher, I expect to teach writing</td>
<td>1.41 (.58)</td>
<td>1.41 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do library research to find a journal article</td>
<td>1.89 (80)</td>
<td>1.48 (.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do a google search for my research involving identifying a research journal article</td>
<td>2.44 (.93)</td>
<td>1.96 (.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reread the article to understand it</td>
<td>1.82 (.87)</td>
<td>1.64 (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take note/use graphic organizer to help me</td>
<td>2.26 (1.10)</td>
<td>1.81 (.921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.62 (.64)</td>
<td>1.77 (.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use an outline for my paper</td>
<td>3.31 (1.12)</td>
<td>2.96 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use another type of prewriting activity for my paper</td>
<td>1.56 (.70)</td>
<td>1.41 (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I revise my paper as I write</td>
<td>1.70 (.54)</td>
<td>1.48 (.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use transitional words to help my readers better understand my writing</td>
<td>1.52 (.58)</td>
<td>1.37 (.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I proofread my work before submitting</td>
<td>3.38 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.04 (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the journal critique assignment to be easy</td>
<td>2.85 (.66)</td>
<td>2.37 (.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can summarize a research journal article</td>
<td>2.00 (.48)</td>
<td>1.74 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can analyze the content of a research journal article</td>
<td>2.38 (.80)</td>
<td>1.73 (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can analyze the content of a journal article not based on a research study</td>
<td>2.33 (.53)</td>
<td>1.74 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can organize my paper</td>
<td>1.74 (.59)</td>
<td>1.52 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can develop ideas in a paper</td>
<td>1.81 (.48)</td>
<td>1.48 (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can provide evidence in a paper</td>
<td>1.67 (.48)</td>
<td>1.48 (.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can incorporate</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paraphrasing into my paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can incorporate</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quotes into my paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have control of ELA</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can cite in-text</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>references in APA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can cite references at</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the end of the paper in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can evaluate a</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research journal article</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can evaluate a</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journal article not based</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on a research study</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a significant difference ($p = .002$) between the means of the pre-course group and the post-course group in the writing survey. The post-course group decreased toward (Strongly Agree) by an average of .202 points. Therefore, when things got better for the post-course group, the score was lower. Therefore, on average, someone who scored 2.0 (Agree) on the pretest now scored 1.8 (closer to Strongly Agree).