First-Year Composition and the Common Core: Educating Teachers of Writing Across the High School-College Continuum

Justin A. Young
Eastern Washington University, jayoung@ewu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Rhetoric and Composition Commons, and the Secondary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
Young, Justin A. (2014) "First-Year Composition and the Common Core: Educating Teachers of Writing Across the High School-College Continuum," Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol3/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
First-Year Composition and the Common Core: Educating Teachers of Writing Across the High School-College Continuum

Justin Young, Eastern Washington University

An effort is now underway in America’s public schools to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); these assessment standards seek to align K-12 exit standards with college level entrance requirements, thereby producing high school graduates that are, according the architects of the CCSS, “College and Career Ready.” This article will discuss the implications of the CCSS on the teaching of writing instructors at the college level. I will argue that, with the nationwide adoption of the CCSS, the most effective models of the training of writing teachers in higher education will now include collaboration with educators at the K-12 level; I will also offer a model for this kind of collaborative work, based on an effort I am currently leading as the Director of English Composition at my institution. I will begin with a brief overview of the CCSS, and the shifts in the teaching and learning of English Language Arts at the K-12 level they suggest. I will then suggest a model for teaching teachers of first year composition, based on recent collaborative efforts with high school teachers and administrators involved in my institution’s Concurrent Enrollment Program. Specifically, I will discuss how this collaborative model can help us understand the strengths and weaknesses of beginning college writers, from the perspectives of both high school and college teachers, and how this understanding should then inform our instruction of first-year composition teachers. Finally, I will suggest that it is essential that the education of secondary and post-secondary writing teachers be grounded in current theories and practices of the field of composition and rhetoric.

The Common Core State Standards and English Language Arts: Background and Shifts

The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor’s Association jointly initiated the Common Core State Standards, and began work on the standards in 2009 (Common Core Background). A final draft of the CCSS was published in June 2010. According to the official website of the CCSS, sponsored by the CCSSO and the NGA, the CCSS, “define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs” (About the Standards). The CCSS set standards of “College and Career Readiness” only for English Language Arts and Mathematics, although they establish literacy standards for science, technical subjects and social studies in grades 6-12 (ELA Standards). As of the middle of 2013, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards. The CCSS for ELA suggest several significant shifts in standards for language arts in K-12; these shifts that will impact the way that literacy is taught and learned across the K-16 continuum. As the purpose of this article is not to provide an analysis of these shifts, only a brief discussion of these shifts is necessary, in order to establish context for the discussion. According to Student Achievement Partners, a non-profit founded by the chief architect of the CCSS, David Coleman, these shifts can be reduced to three major changes: 1. “Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction;” 2. “Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational;” and 3. “Regular practice with complex text and its academic language” (Common Core Shifts). Of these shifts, the move towards the inclusion of a higher percentage of “informational texts” in the K-12 language arts/English classroom has generated the most controversy. The architects of the CCSS, most visibly David Coleman, argue that students need to spend less time reading and writing narratives (or about narratives), and more time reading and writing what the CCSS terms “informational texts.” As The New York Times notes, in the newspaper’s account of an incident representative of the controversy over this aspect of the CCSS, Coleman himself ignited a storm of criticism when he argued against the use of personal writing in English classes by saying, that, in the business world, no one ever tells an employee, “Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday, but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood” (Lewin). The Times notes that progressive educators reacted strongly to this comment; this upset is part of a generally negative reaction among progressives and some conservatives to the CCSS emphasis on informational texts over literary texts. An understanding of the major shifts brought about by the CCSS for ELA, how these shifts are presented by the backers of the CCSS, and an awareness of the controversies over those shifts, is particularly essential for those teaching writing in K-12. An understanding of these issues is also important to anyone preparing writing teachers at the college level, as these changes will have an impact on what incoming students know, and don’t know, about college writing.

1 See Diane Ravitch’s blog, for the progressive perspective on the ELA shifts.
2 See Sandra Torkel’s post on the website of the Heritage Institute, for a conservative perspective on the ELA shifts.

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Winter/Spring 2014
A Collaborative Model for Teaching Teachers of Writing Across K-16

To improve the effectiveness of K-12 public education by targeting a closer alignment between high school exit standards and college entrance standards, along with an increased emphasis on “college readiness,” in order to effectively teach teachers of writing at the college level, it is increasingly essential to connect the theory of teaching college composition with the current theories and practices surrounding writing instruction at the high school level. Specifically, I believe that, in the process of teaching composition instructors should involve direct collaboration with local K-12 educators; college writing teachers need to learn from the experiences of instructors and observations of secondary school English teachers, and vice versa.

As the Director of Composition at my institution, I recently participated in the College Board’s “Affinity Network,” an “English Language Arts Team Member” representing my university in a collaborative, year-long initiative, which brought together educators in my region across the K-16 continuum. This effort focused on the likely implications and shifts brought about by the implementation of the CCSS, just recently underway in the public schools in our region. The Network provided the opportunity for those in high school and college education to get together with high school teachers and college composition instructors and curriculum developers for the purpose of identifying likely impacts of CCSS implementation and to collaboratively develop a shared response. This initiative suggested that not only did this kind of collaboration amongst educators across the K-16 continuum have the potential to be powerful and effective, it was going to become increasingly necessary in the midst of a national effort to improve the transition between high school and college. The Affinity Network also offered a model for the kind of collaborative professional development that would be needed for teachers of writing at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Concurrent enrollment programs offer a unique opportunity for this kind of collaborative learning about the teaching of writing to occur. At my institution, we currently employ and prepare local high school area teachers to teach our introductory English Composition. In other words, teachers already hired at high local schools can take our “English 101” curriculum, and students receive college credit and high school credit for this course. This collaborative venture provides an opportunity not only to help teach local high school instructors about the expectations and practices that define college level writing, it also provides an opportunity to learn from high school teachers about the practice of teaching high school composition, as well as the weaknesses and strengths of high school writers.

Over the course of an academic year, I have, as the Director of Composition at my institution, led a series of workshops on composition pedagogy, the CCSS, and writing assessment for both our college instructors, as well as the high school instructors. The workshops are part of the college’s Enroll Success Program. I believe that this collaborative program can serve as a model for other college composition programs to establish professional development programs focused on the CCSS, and based on collaboration across the K-16 continuum. This approach to teacher preparation, as well as the content of the workshops themselves, is grounded in foundational and current college composition theory. Specifically, the preparation is grounded in the theoretical work of James Berlin identified with Social Epistemic Rhetoric, a paradigm of rhetoric and writing that continues to inform much of the field of composition and rhetoric. It is also informed by the current scholarship of academic literacies, an approach to the teaching and learning of writing in higher education originally developed by Mary Lee and Brian Street. The sequence of teaching workshops noted below suggest the kind of content that could be covered in this kind of collaborative endeavor:

1. The CCSS for ELA and Student Learning Outcomes for First-Year Composition
2. Defining College Level Writing: The Strengths and Weakness of our Student Writers
3. Minding the Gap: Using Composition Theory to Understand the Differences Between High School and College Writing

I will now provide a brief account of how these workshops can be run, as well as an account of the preliminary conclusions that can be drawn from these experiences.

CCSS Anchor Standards for Writing and Outcomes for First-Year Composition

This workshop brought together high school English teachers and first-year composition instructors to discuss the CCSS “College and Career Ready Anchor Standards for Writing” in comparison with our own program’s composition outcomes for English Composition 101, our university’s first-year composition course. The goals of this workshop were to:

1. Introduce the CCSS to our college level first-year composition instructors and have them apply their understanding of best practices in the assessment of writing to these standards.
2. Introduce and discuss the SLO’s of our institution’s first-year composition course to our high school instructors and have them relate their experience of teaching high school writing to the outcomes.
3. Have instructors at the college and high school level compare writing standards at the secondary and college level, note similarities and differences, and discuss implications for writing instruction and learning at both levels.

The group was comprised of our own college composition instructors, and under ten high school teachers. The group met for over two hours. The participants noted a great deal of overlap between the two sets of standards. (See Table 1, below.) Indeed, an examination of the CCSS standards for the assessment of writing ability at the secondary level suggests that there are several important areas of alignment between CCSS and discipline-approved college level student learning outcomes, such as the WPA Outcomes Statement and the CCR Anchor Standards. Shared terms and terminology vary among the different models, but first-year composition outcomes can clearly be seen, and, in a collaborative workshop setting are quickly noted by both secondary and post-secondary writing teachers.

A similar focus and comparable language exists in our first-year composition outcomes and the CCSS regarding the writing process, argumentation, and information literacy. For example, regarding the writing process, the College and Career Ready (CCR) anchor standards for writing state that students must be able to, “Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach” (Anchor Standards for Writing). Similarly, our program’s composition outcomes state that students must be able to “evaluate arguments and develop a recursive and collaborative writing process that includes prewriting, drafting, revising, organizing, editing, and proofreading.” Both sets of standards include language about developing arguments and finding and using appropriate evidence to support claims.

An analysis and discussion of this example of post-secondary composition student learning outcomes in contrast to CCSS points up a number of compelling dissimilarities between the two sets of standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Comparison of Concepts and Terms in Sample College Composition Outcomes Statement and The College and Career Ready Anchor Standards for Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Concepts/Terms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Terms Not Included in CCR Anchor Standards for Writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Write arguments to support claims”</td>
<td>scholarly, academic, situation, academic discourse, explicit/implicit theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Apply research to support claims”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is illustrated in the above chart, a comparison of a specific set of first-year composition standards and the CCR Anchor Standards for writing suggest that the CCSS do not include terminology and concepts common, and in many cases central, to the teaching and learning of first-year composition. While some cases of omission of terms from the CCSS may simply be a case of differing terminology, in other instances, the absence of terms central to composition theory and practice may suggest a concern for accountability. It is important to consider how the CCSS and expectations for what constitutes a college ready writer held by college writing teachers and administrators. Awareness of and engagement with these contrasts, and the possible gaps between how the CCSS and college instructors describe college ready writers implied by these contrasts, are essential to the successful preparation of writing teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

A collaborative analysis of these standards by high school and college writing teachers suggests that a shared understanding of the terminology of the CCSS in relation to the discourse of first-year composition standards across both levels will be important to the successful training of composition teachers, as well as the success of their students. The CCSS and the CCR standards should be compared and discussed as the products of specific discourse communities. Understanding that the two sets of standards have been composed by different communities using differing—though many times similar, or even overlapping—discourses, can help us note areas of shared concern, even if identical terminology has not been used in both sets of standards. An excellent example of this is reflected in the use of the term “claim” in the CCSS, in contrast to the common usage in the composition field of the term “thesis.” The CCR anchor standards for writing state that students should be able to, “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence...” (Anchor Standards for Writing). The absence of the term “thesis” in the CCSS does not mean that students will not be expected to develop and support thesis statements if they meet the CCSS writing standards; “thesis statements” are represented as a type of claim in the standards. It is important, however, that teachers of writing at both the high school and college level are prepared to communicate this difference in terminology to students. High school teachers need to help students aware that central claims will often be called thesis statements in college; college writing teachers need to be sure to communicate the difference to the student. Similar instances of concepts that are shared across the Core and FYC standards, but that have been articulated using different terminology, should be noted and discussed with writing teachers; these instances should subsequently be noted and discussed with students.

The recognition by workshop participants of the absence of the term “thesis” from the CCSS, and the varying reactions to this absence provides an illustration of the benefits of bringing together instructors across the K-16 continuum. Composition instructors, as a group, were very surprised that the term was absent from the standards; some even expressed a level of dismay over this fact. An experienced high school teacher, who had been involved in state-level efforts to refine early drafts of the standards, however, was able to step in and explain the rationale (based, at least, on his experience) for leaving the term out of the CCSS. This type of information for the college instructors is of obvious importance for the college instructors, and is a common occurrence in these types of workshops. It is one of the goals of these collaborative activities is to bring college and high school composition instructors together.

3 Other versions of this workshop have been held, with different sets of college and high school instructors. In each case, the workshop was held with roughly the same ratio of high school teachers and 3-4 college instructors.

As an introductory exercise in high school education to get together with high school teachers and college instructors and curriculum developers for the purpose of identifying likely impacts of CCSS implementation and to collaboratively develop a shared response. This initiative suggested that not only did this kind of collaboration amongst educators across the K-16 continuum have the potential to be effective and powerful, it was going to become increasingly necessary in the midst of a national effort to improve the transition between high school and college.
college instructors about the absence of the term, made it clear to the high school teachers in attendance that they still needed to use the term “thesis” in their classes, so that students would be familiar with it, when they encountered the term at the college level.

In addition to identifying and discussing terminology that is shared between the CCSS and first-year composition outcomes, the effective teaching of writing teachers should include an effort to identify and discuss any terms common to composition and rhetoric. The term “rhetoric” is often absent in the CCSS writing standards. The term—readily identifiable in any college writing classroom—has been termed “rhetoric in its more recent work in post-process theory and eco-composition.”

8 The concept of rhetoric as radically contingent and ecologically situated.

Her work, therefore, is focused on broadening her students’ perspectives through writing. The opportunity to discover disconnects between the aims of high school teachers and college writing instructors is another benefit of facilitating collaborative opportunities for ELA educators across the K-16 continuum.

More importantly, perhaps, than the absence of the term rhetoric from the CCR anchor standards for writing, is the absence of values and perspectives that rhetoric carries in the field of composition and rhetoric. The notion that every discursive act is one of cultural and political context is central to post-process theory, as can be traced to the classical rhetoric of Isocrates, it is central to formation of itself, and it can also be found in more recent work in post-process theory and eco-composition. This formulation of rhetoric and discourse is reflected in the agreed upon outcomes for first-year writing in the field of composition and rhetoric; the Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition Program Undergraduate Council of Writing Program Administrators requires that students develop an understanding of relationships among knowledge, language, and power. This kind of outcome, as well as any kind of articulation of rhetoric as a socially and ideologically situated practice, is absent from the CCSS. As such, it is essential that this absence, and its implications for the teaching of college level writing to beginning college students be noted and discussed in writing teacher preparation. It may be useful to ask beginning and continuing college composition teachers whether an awareness and basic understanding of the term rhetoric is essential to college readiness. Further, it is worth asking composition teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level at what point students should be introduced to the idea that discourse is socially, culturally and ideologically situated. Should educators wait until students reach college to share this knowledge?

Defining College Ready Writing

The current national implementation of the CCSS, and the promotion of these standards as creating “College and Career Ready” (CCR) opportunities for all and the opportunity to teach writing teachers on information and discussion of how they themselves define “college ready” writing. Such a workshop can, in fact, begin with data collection: secondary and post-secondary teachers can be surveyed on their perceptions of student ability in specific areas of writing competency established by the CCSS. This data collection from educators in a local region can then be used as a starting point for a collaborative workshop focused on college ready writing. “While this data cannot necessarily be used to identify the differences and whether instructors have a particular narrative of the weaknesses of our students, as well as possible disconnects between the perceptions of high school and college level instructors identified reading ability as the greatest weakness of beginning college writers. We cannot draw general conclusions about the weaknesses of beginning college writing teachers from the data; however, these responses do help writing administrators and writing teachers in our specific region begin to develop an understanding of the weaknesses of our students, as well as possible disconnects between the perceptions of high school and college level instructors. In this way, it is important to note that their students enter college lacking the functional and/or critical literacy skills necessary to a successful college writer, while high school instructors are focused on the weaknesses of their students in performing specific college-level writing skills. It could be said that, in this particular case, the college instructors expressed the most concern about their students’ pre-college skills, and the high school teachers focused their concern on specific areas of writing they believed to be most important to successful college-level writing. Regardless of the conclusions that might be drawn from these responses, the feedback, if shared in a collaborative environment can certainly provide the basis for a productive, cooperative discussion amongst high school teachers, college teachers, and writing administrators, about the strengths and weaknesses of the beginning college writers with whom we all work.

Impacts on Writing Curriculum at the High School and College Level

Once, the collaborative dialogue described above, high school and college writing teachers can identify and agree on specific areas of writing where students are commonly falling short of college-readiness, it is essential to continue this collaborative work with the goal of developing curricular responses that address these areas at both the high school and college levels. This collaborative writing where the teacher of college students are currently engaged in the development of a shared understanding of the CCSS are designed to address the college readiness needs of all students across the high school continuum, should next lead to targeted intervention, at both levels, via curriculum development and assessment according to the CCSS and college level learning outcomes.

Winter/Spring 2014

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education
underlie much of the field of composition and rhetoric and the field's agreed-upon standards for assessment (WPA Outcomes)—and that discourse is always ideological. The principles of these two models of writing and writing pedagogy—principles that draw from the other two models, but that it is best able to effectively address student writing. Like the paradigm of writing and pedagogy: study skills, socialization and academic literacies. These authors note that the academic literacies model of ELA curricula that will help to better prepare students who will soon transition into their college classrooms. If such efforts are to truly impact student writing ability and strengthen student literacy skills, however, it is essential that this work be informed by current composition theory and practice, as discussed in the following section.

Using Composition Theory to Address Weakness of Beginning College Writers

Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement, byalkins et al., is a book that aims to enthusiastically promote the effective implementation of CCSS by K-12 educators, suggests that starting district-wide across the curriculum writing initiatives is an excellent way to begin the implementation of CCSS. The authors assert that starting CCSS implementation via writing is particularly advantageous because they claim that in “In the field of writing, there are no real controversies as to the values of pre-service preparation” (25) and professional development provided by composition theorists who have more than 20 years of teaching experience at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Those who teach writing to students who will soon enter college, should, like college level writing teachers, be prepared to teach writing through the development and application of knowledge in the field of composition and rhetoric. Most high school teachers need to realize that they will not know about college writing, in terms of familiarity and practice, even after they entered high school, just having met the standards for “college and career” readiness established by the CCSS. College writing teachers must become familiar with the CCSS and establish expectations for what these first-year college students will know and not know about college composition and rhetoric. These expectations can be based on the fact that college composition and rhetoric are often taught as if they were taught to high school students. This can be misleading because students who have not been introduced to college writing will not have been introduced to the idea that one form that such an intervention can take is the recent effort in my region and state to develop a new Grade 12 ELA course targeted towards students who do not pass the Grade 11 Smarter Balance Assessment (which, in my state, will be the standard assessment of student achievement under the CCSS). In fact, the first step taken by high school teachers at the field level, for example, the post-process movement, genre studies, or multiliteracies. It is clear, however, that the CCSS have been informed by the research in composition and rhetoric conducted and put into practice in institutions of higher education over the last thirty to forty years. Most of the field in this study that would agree that writing must be taught as a process of some kind, and would strongly support the approach to teaching writing promoted by this study (11-14). As a result, it is necessary for high school teachers to understand student experience, home language use and academic discourse. The CCSS for ELA reinforce a model of competency that takes the ability to complete a range of autonomous, universally-transferable tasks as evidence of academic or job preparedness, while failing to acknowledge the cultural situatedness of literacy as well as the cultural and economic contexts that surround the standards themselves. This acknowledgement of cultural situatedness of every discursive act is foundational to the field of writing and pedagogy. Writing teachers at the secondary and post-secondary level must be aware of this, as well as the fact that new college writers will not have been introduced to this idea, even if they have met the anchor standards established by the Common Core.

Further research must be done to determine the specific ways in which we find students, who have graduated and met the CCSS, excelling and struggling in the college writing classroom. Data are obviously not available on students who have been schooled for any length of time under the CCSS. We now, instead, must gather and share information on how our students are currently excelling and struggling as they transition from high school to college. This will help us identify whether and how the CCSS contribute to a higher level of college readiness in writing. We must now gather and share information as we prepare writing teachers on the contrasts that will still remain between the teaching of writing at the high school and college level, even after the CCSS have been fully implemented. The kind of collaborative teacher preparation, described above, offers a model for doing both of these tasks. As the Common Core is put into practice across the diverse states that comprise this country, we need to bring together educators who span the K-12 and higher education continuum, but who share a local community, in order to share the task of teaching those who will teach writing to the kids, young adults, and college students who help make up that community.


About the Author

Justin Young has taught writing at City College of New York, the University of Oklahoma, and Claremont McKenna College. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern Washington University, where he directs the composition program and Writers’ Center. His research focuses on literacy instruction at both the K-12 and college level. Specifically, his work explores the ways that improved reading and writing instruction can better prepare students across the K-16 continuum to communicate effectively in both print and digital environments and to succeed in college.

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Re-thinking Personal Narrative in the Pedagogy of Writing Teacher Preparation Introduction

Mary M. Juzwik, Michigan State University
Anne Whitney, Pennsylvania State University
April Baker Bell, Michigan State University
Amanda Smith, Michigan State University

The role that personal narrative writing should play in the teaching of English in secondary schools is a question that members of our field have returned to again and again. Further, it is a question that onlookers of our work—both critical and supportive—have argued about. At one extreme, David Coleman, the dominant figure behind the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, has notoriously said about personal writing that “as you grow up in this world you realize people really don’t give a shit about what you feel or what you think” (10). Yet multiple voices in the field of English education have drawn out the complex connections between personal and academic writing, making compelling arguments for the importance of the former; both in its own right and as a contributor to developing competence in the latter (see as just a few examples Hillocks, Narrative; Fredrickssen, Wilhelm, and Smith; Kittle; Smagorinsky, Augustine, and O’Donnell-Allen). We find their arguments compelling. We see personal narrative as one of the many ways people make arguments in the world of discourse in school and beyond; further, we have seen how students engaged in personal narrative writing so often find themselves drawn into experimentation with different approaches in a text, deep revision, and a commitment to precise expression that we see as critical to learning writing.

Our own desire to prepare English language arts teachers to teach personal narrative well stems also from our sense of the socially mediated identity work that written and oral narrative texts accomplish in people’s lives. Narrative is one of the primary ways that people understand, experience, and create reality (Bruner). As described by Bakhtin, narrative is dialogic. Any utterance made in speech or in text emerges as a part of an ongoing conversation, begun long before an individual speaks (or writes!) and carrying on long after. In this way, all stories respond to previous stories and anticipate stories that will be told in the future. Our narratives join other narratives in a tangled web of dialogue through which we take up, reject, and reappropriate the words of others while inviting listeners to do the same with our words. Further, they vary in shape and function according to culture (Cazden). In addition to being dialogic and contextually embedded, narratives are also “intersubjective—belonging to the context as well as to the author;” (Daiute 113). In this way, narrative is implicated in self-authoring. Mead suggests that, in part, we author ourselves as a result of our own objective introspection regarding our thoughts and behaviors. In order to accomplish this work, we must become an ‘other’ to ourselves. That process of self-consciousness, Mead contends, remains social in nature as we human beings take up the position of an “other” to interrogate ourselves (215). Viewing narrative in this manner, as socially and dialogically shaped in the context of culture and instrumental to a process of self-authoring, pushes us to re-consider narrative writing in terms of what it might do for students, both in and beyond classrooms. However, understanding personal narrative in these ways is not the same as teaching it well—or of preparing teachers to do so. As Hillocks reminds us in his introduction to a book for teachers on teaching narrative (Narrative), too often we “teach” narrative by reading examples of narratives and then assigning narratives, failing to teach strategies that might result in good narratives. Even more rarely do narrative texts written in school (or any other kinds of texts written in school, for that matter) actually go anywhere beyond the teacher, thus failing to offer students experience in negotiating meanings with readers, working out the versions of self in context that narrative writing can foster. Teaching personal narrative well, in ways that are consistent with our view of personal narrative’s value and the identity work it can support, has proven challenging. In the pages that follow, we describe and reflect on one effort to do so in a teacher education setting, in a class-to-class partnership between teacher candidates and first-year college writers. We introduce the example not as a success story or an exemplar, but rather as a problematic case (Bush) causing us to reconsider a) our sense of the purposes and possibilities of personal narrative writing in secondary schools and b) the uses and pedagogies of personal narrative writing in English teacher education.

A Narrative Writing Partnership

The writing partnership discussed here occurred in and across the English education and first year writing programs at a large public university. Mary taught a writing workshop course for secondary English teacher candidates in the English department, and April taught a first year composition course that was a university requirement for undergraduates (most, but not all, were first year students; we call these students “first-year writers” for simplicity). Through narrative writing, Mary wanted the teacher candidates to a) write narratives, b) critically reflect on and expand their own processes as narrative writers and...