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# What about Writing?: A National Study of Writing Instruction in Teacher Preparation Programs

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## Abstract

This study explores how writing instruction is taught to pre-service teachers across the US. Despite growing writing demands in K-12 classrooms, our national survey of literacy teacher educators revealed that colleges and universities rarely offer stand-alone writing instruction courses. Instead instructors are responsible for embedding writing instruction into their reading courses. Equally concerning, our data revealed a lack of confidence among many teacher educators regarding teaching writing. This study highlights the need for greater attention to writing in teacher education and adds to the conversation of why these issues continue to plague higher education.

**Keywords:** teacher education, writing instruction

Knowing how literacy teacher educators provide pre-service teachers with learning opportunities that foster development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions critical to writing instruction is vital, especially as the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) have placed renewed emphasis on writing outcomes in K-12 classrooms. However, neither practicing teachers nor teacher candidates typically receive much instruction related to teaching writing (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012; Cutler & Graham, 2008) despite the National Commission on Writing's (2003) call for better preparation. The lack of data regarding the state of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs (TPPs) is one barrier obstructing improvement of writing instruction (e.g., Colby & Stapleton, 2006; Grossman et al., 2000; Moore-Hart & Carpenter, 2008, 2009; Morgan, 2010; Risko et al., 2008). For instance, writing instruction in TPPs is rarely addressed in scholarly resources such as *Handbook on Writing Research* (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006) or in teacher education research journals (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). Thus, a comprehensive nationwide picture of how pre-service teachers learn to teach writing is needed.

The purpose of this paper is to share and discuss findings from a national survey of literacy teacher educators highlighting their perspectives regarding the current status of teacher candidates' writing methods instruction in TPPs. An additional goal of this study is to encourage dialogue regarding TPPs, which have increasingly become the focus of attention for legislators and other policy makers (e.g., Hall, 2015; Nelson, 2012).

## Relevant Literature

Despite knowledge of the complexities of writing processes, the unique challenges of teaching writing in elementary classrooms, and the need to engage pre-service teacher candidates in subject-specific coursework (Darling-Hammond, 2005), writing instruction in TPPs has not received adequate recent attention in policy contexts or literacy research. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) focused attention of literacy educators and researchers on reading, as did the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000). Issues of reading instruction led to concerns in reading teacher education, such as in the International Literacy Association's (formerly International Reading Association) survey of pre-service preparation in reading (Hoffman, Roller, & National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction, 2001). Unfortunately, little emphasis was placed on writing, which is essential for school success (Graham & Harris, 2005) and it is the primary way students demonstrate their knowledge in school (Graham & Harris, 2004). Although ignored by others, the College Board, which is comprised of more than 4,300 colleges, described the need for improved preparation of pre-service teachers in writing instruction (The National Commission on Writing Report, 2003). The initial report and its updates (The National Commission on Writing Report, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006) stress that all pre-service teacher candidates, no matter their discipline, should have courses in how to teach writing and that these courses should be a requirement. More recently, Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) emphasize that the CCSS are explicit in requiring teachers to teach the literacy—including writing—of science, literature, and history, and states that did not adopt the CCSS are making this shift as well. Despite increasing demands for writing expertise in students, writing instruction for teachers is usually embedded into reading methods courses (Morgan, 2010) and few states require a separate writing methods course for certification (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Certificates for post graduate writing instruction have begun to appear at the university level and at the time of this writing a new journal, *Journal of Writing Teacher Education*, sponsored by the University of Western Michigan, has been published online since 2012.

A recent examination of undergraduate literacy course titles in three states (Brenner, 2013) revealed far more course offerings in reading than writing. Sixty-one course titles referred only to reading while 75 course titles included both reading and writing. Only five courses across the three states were dedicated to writing instruction. Another concern raised by this study was that half of these courses had a reading prefix, reflecting an institutional commitment to reading rather than a broader scope of literacy. Not surprisingly, many teachers are not prepared well to teach writing in their teacher education programs (Authors, 2011; Morgan, 2010; Pardo, 2006). In a survey of 174 primary teachers (Cutler & Graham, 2008), only 44% of teachers reported that their preparation to teach writing was adequate, and over one quarter of them (28%) rated their preparation as poor or inadequate. In addition, they found that 72% of the teachers took an eclectic approach to writing instruction, joining elements of process writing and skills instruction. Based on their findings, Cutler and Graham made seven recommendations, one of those being the need to improve professional development for writing instruction in teacher education programs stressing, "It may not be enough to introduce teachers to new writing practices and encourage them to apply them" (p. 916).

Also disconcerting is the lack of opportunities for practicing teachers and pre-service teacher candidates to see themselves as writers (National Commission on Writing Report, 2003). In addition, the 2004 report states, "Teachers need to understand writing as a complex (and enjoyable) form of learning and discovery, both for themselves and for their students" (The National Commission on Writing Report, 2004, p. 24). Furthermore, the National Commission on Writing Report suggests that teachers should model themselves as writers to help rouse enthusiasm in students.

Unfortunately, this lack of attention to teacher preparation, self-efficacy, and motivation to teach writing impacts K-12 student motivation to write. This leaves teachers scrambling to find ways to motivate and provide instructional techniques to use with good, average and struggling writers (Graham & Harris, 2003). A few studies (e.g., Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Bruning & Horn, 2000) focused on motivation and writing, linking teacher attitudes about writing with their students' motivation to write. They found that programs for developing writing motivation rest on the beliefs of the teacher who provides a model for and shapes his or her students' beliefs. Therefore, instructors of writing must examine their own beliefs and conceptions about writing to prevent those attitudes from spilling over into instructional decisions that impact students' opportunity to learn and grow (Author, 2014b; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Zumberg & Krause, 2012).

Some scholars argue that teachers' writing identities shape their literacy instruction (Andrews, 2008; Commeyras, Bisplinhoff & Olson, 2003). These studies found that when teachers wrote often, modeled their writing, and showed enthusiasm for writing; their students grew as writers (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Murray, 1985; Root & Steinburg, 1996). Educators would benefit from more research that examines how pre-service teachers develop their writing identities and what role university faculty play in writing identity construction (Margarella, Blankenship, & Schneider, 2013).

This is especially important because of the adoption of English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) by 43 states, the District of Columbia, 4 territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity has placed renewed emphasis on writing outcomes in K-12 classrooms. The relevance of the ELA Common Core State Standards (CCSS) lies in the fact that academic content standards and their associated assessments appear to shape teacher behavior (Calkins et al., 2012; Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). Standards inform curriculum development, guide instruction and assessment and goals for student achievement. Therefore, the ELA CCSS likely influences teachers' preparation for writing instruction. This means that there is need for a renewed emphasis on literacy teacher preparation for writing (Calkins et al., 2012).

Additionally, changing understandings of the nature and purposes of new literacies, such as digital technology, has refocused educators' attentions on the full complement of the English Language Arts. Teachers must assume that being literate means being digitally literate because the ELA CCSS state that students should be able to "analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and non-print texts in media forms old and new" (CCSS for English Language Arts, 2010, p. 4). With the ELA CCSS emphasis on creating savvy digital composers and the growing availability of digital composing tools and media (Dalton, 2013), this means that teacher education programs must prepare candidates to teach writing integrated with digital literacy tools to meet the ever-evolving needs of students in the 21st century (Authors, 2012; Collier, Foley, Moguel, & Barnard, 2013).

Longstanding international and national organizations traditionally dedicated to reading research and practices, such as the Literacy Research Association (LRA, formerly National Reading Conference/NRC) and the International Literacy Association (ILA, formerly International Reading Association/IRA) altered their names and foci within the last five years, as have other scholarly organizations. Name changes are not enough, however. Knowing how literacy teacher educators provide pre-service teacher candidates with learning opportunities that foster development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions critical to writing instruction is vital. Thus, we created a survey for the following purposes: 1) to gather data about teacher educators who teach language arts/literacy methods courses and their experiences teaching writing; 2) to determine how writing instruction is taught in respondents' teacher preparation programs; 3) to learn how teacher educators identified themselves as writers; and 4) to offer teacher educators an opportunity to agree or expand upon a definition of writing. This survey is an important first step in analyzing how writing is being taught in teacher education programs so that we can improve pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and skills as writers, and thus affecting writing instruction in K-12 classrooms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Over 50 years of research indicates that teacher quality is the single most powerful influence on student achievement (e.g., Barr et al., 1952; Harris & McCaffrey, 2010; Konstantopoulos, 2012; Slavin, 2012). Excellent teacher-preparation programs underscore subject matter expertise and provide opportunities for teacher candidates to apply their learning of theory and pedagogy in real classrooms under the supervision of an experienced mentor (Authors, 2014). An integrated model of literacy includes the language arts—reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language—but also includes literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (ILA, in process; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014).

In the process of designing this research study, we recognized that we first needed a common definition of writing to focus our understanding. Thus, the research team defined writing as:

Writing is a matter of mind, hand, and heart--involving complex cognitive, physical, affective, and social processes. Writing is part of the communications whole. There is no one writing process. Writers use multiple skills and strategies as they move through stages of planning, drafting, revising/editing, and presentation. People write in many written genres/formats for different audiences and purposes in their daily lives.

### Social Cognitive Theory

Most writing inquiry is framed around social cognitive (or socio-cognitive) theory, which, according to Bandura (2002) focuses on individual agency. However, Bandura recognizes the complexity of cultural organizations and the growing influence of globalism and technology. A growing awareness of the influence of culture on individuals led us to a different perspective in our research.

### Sociocultural Theory

The researchers sought to frame this study around sociocultural theory. Wertsch (1991) focused on the work of Vygotsky and proposed three themes: 1) that individual development has its origins in social sources; 2) that human action is mediated by tools and signs; and 3) these should be studied through analysis of the development of change. As later researchers posited: "Sociocultural theory seeks to understand how culturally and historically situated meaning are constructed, reconstructed, and transformed through social mediation" (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 208). Englert and colleagues (2006) note that few writing instruction research programs attend closely to a sociocultural perspective or devote much systematic attention to communities of practice in creating learning environments; their review of the literature included studies that used sociocultural theory as an interpretive lens. Further, they identified three relevant tenets of sociocultural theory: 1) socio-cognitive apprenticeships in writing; 2) procedural facilitators and tools; and 3) participation in communities of practice.

*Socio-cognitive apprenticeships in writing.* Experts, and other agents (e.g., teachers, peers) provide access to strategies and tools in the Vygotskian sense of the more knowledgeable other. Teachers often are instrumental in the explanations and modeling required for a writing apprenticeship and/or community of writers (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Pella, 2011). Interactions with teachers may create spaces where semiotic tools and varied discourses are used to construct texts. For novice teachers, co-participation and guided practice (scaffolding) are seen as essential to the development of expertise. Expert teachers can create such complex spaces in their classrooms, but how does the novice teacher learn the appropriate pedagogy without a similar community?

*Procedural facilitators and tools.* Support for cognitive performance through appropriate scaffolding of students' writing development has positive effects on independent performance (Englert, et. al, 2006). These include mnemonics, devices, procedures, and a host of other pedagogical tools that make the elements of the task more visible and attainable--an example might be the "writing process" (or prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publishing). Such procedural facilitation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) supports the writing of elementary aged students. Englert and colleagues (2006) note: "Instruction that focused on producing well-organized texts using strategies and tools that supported students in planning and drafting their texts significantly impacted writing outcomes" (p. 212).

*Community of practice.* A community of practice is a group of individuals who "emphasize knowledge construction and knowledge dissemination through participation" (Englert et al., 2006, p. 214). The individuals come to share social practices, convention, standards, genres, etc., but first must acquire the language proficiency to engage with others and to receive feedback, both from peers and mentors. The individual's knowledge is elaborated through these interactions so that there is a shared practice. Disciplinary writing groups often share the perspectives and tools of their community of practice. Group inquiry (e.g., cooperative learning, team writing) furthers the shared spaces and understandings. Englert and colleagues (2006) share the positive findings from a series of studies on this topic.

In sum, writing development is teaching and learning in social contexts (Lemke, 2003; Pella, 2011). Writing resulting from such contexts provides a view of the thinking of the community at a particular time and place in history. A related system, activity theory, which grows out of socio-cultural theory, (e.g., Engeström, Miettinen & Punamaki, 1999), posits that people are socio-culturally embedded actors (or agents), rather than system components (or objects) but that their activities are influenced by cultural and technical mediation. Human interactions occur within these complex systems consisting of material and cognitive tools, socially-constructed artifacts of activity, rules, communities, and differentiation of labor (e.g., Barab, Schatze & Scheckler, 2004), thus context is a framework to examine how human beings act to construct and interpret meaning and how that process is mediated. Learning to teach writing in a teacher preparation program, then, may require us to thoughtfully create learning communities in coursework and fieldwork that assist teachers to accomplish the same goals and outcomes in their K-12 classrooms.

### **Purpose**

Based on writing as a social activity with skills developed through partnership with mentors, we designed a survey that explored who is teaching pre-service teachers writing instruction and how they are doing it. A second goal of the survey was to learn how teacher educators identified themselves as writers and to discuss a common definition of writing. Participants were teacher educators across the US who completed an online survey comprised of short answer and extended response questions related to their experience: 1) teaching pre-service teachers writing instruction and 2) their views of themselves as writers. Our research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do literacy educators in pre-service teacher preparation programs learn to teach writing methods?
2. How do literacy educators in pre-service teacher preparation programs describe writing instruction in literacy methods courses?
3. How do literacy educators who teach writing instruction to pre-service teachers identify themselves as writers?
4. How do literacy educators in pre-service teacher preparation programs define writing?

### **Method**

#### **Background and Participants**

The research team was comprised of ten members from a special interest group focused on literacy teacher education research, which meets annually during a literacy research organization's conference. Researchers were literacy teacher educators representing public and private, research focused and teaching focused institutions across the US.

We used a simple descriptive survey design, "...a one-shot survey for the purpose of describing the characteristics of a sample at one point in time" (Mertens, 2010, p. 177). We were strategic in our sampling, using convenience sampling to target an immediately accessible and relevant population (Baumann & Bason, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The survey link was emailed to 132 literacy teacher educators, targeting the past and present members of the larger special interest group, as well as research team members' literacy education colleagues in their teacher preparation programs from public and private institutions across the US. Research-focused and teaching-focused institutions (e.g., a 4/4 teaching load) were represented in the sampling. Potential respondents must have been teaching or overseeing literacy instruction as part of a university TPP at the time the survey was administered or have done so in the past. Researchers send a reminder email to all non-respondents, and then downloaded the data from the survey tool website for analysis after the deadline to respond had passed.

While the response rate could be considered low (Mertens, 2010) with 63 literacy teacher educators responding (48% return), Fowler (2002) and Jackson (2009) agree that this is a typical return rate for an online survey. It is difficult to determine whether respondents and non-respondents would share similar information. Respondents represented 50 public and private universities in 29 states. Specifically, 21% of

respondents were from the Northeast, 38% from the Midwest, 21% percent from the South and 20% from the West. Ninety-four percent of the respondents had achieved a terminal degree and taught in TPPs and 92% of the respondents were female. Eighty-nine percent of respondents taught in accredited university TPPs, most of which were undergraduate programs. Thirty-three percent of the respondents indicated that their TPPs were post-baccalaureate programs and 67% indicated their TPPs were undergraduate preparation programs. Some respondents indicated that their TPPs were both post-baccalaureate and undergraduate. Table 1 indicates length of teaching experience and experience working in TPPs. Of the teacher educators in this study 95% teach or have taught reading methods, 98% are teaching or have taught literacy courses and 53% are teaching or have taught writing (see Table 2).

<insert table 1 about here>

<insert table 2 about here>

### Survey Instrument

Survey research has been used to collect information regarding literacy education for over 50 years (Baumann & Bason, 2011). The structured, simple descriptive survey (Mertens, 2010) was developed by the researchers and guided by existing literature on pre-service writing instruction (Morgan, 2010; Pardo, 2006; Zumberg & Krause, 2012). To increase the validity of the survey, it was shared with three expert reviewers in the fields of literacy and/or teacher identity prior to distribution. Based on reviewers' feedback, the survey was revised to more precisely address the research questions.

Researchers sent the link for the 27-item electronic survey (see Appendix A) via email to literacy teacher educators across the US (N=132), targeting past and present members of the larger special interest group and their literacy teacher education colleagues. The four-part survey was designed to elicit responses to determine: informed consent/demographics, description of teacher preparation coursework and state-level writing requirements, respondents' identities as writers, and respondents' response to a definitions of writing. During data analysis the research team realized that some survey questions could have been more clearly worded while others were redundant. We report responses that address research questions posed in this paper.

### Data Analysis

Survey responses were gathered from the online survey source and posted to a password protected online storage site. Quantitative analysis consisted of calculating frequency distributions for responses to Likert-scale items. Percentages calculated for specific items were based on different totals, given that not all respondents answered all questions.

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the closed-item questions, we analyzed the results of the open-ended questions. Researchers read, coded (Babbie, 1990), and created summaries of their assigned data. Next, we looked at the patterns in the data to create pattern codes (e.g., descriptions of success in teaching writing, writing texts). While considering these codes, each researcher reexamined the originally compiled open-ended responses to revise interpretations of the data using constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). In this process, researchers made comparisons of initial data analysis to create displays of the descriptive data and draw conclusions (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Following this analysis and discussion among researchers, we honed the themes to specifically address our research questions and came to consensus on the major findings: Teacher educators' experiences in teaching writing, teacher educators' writing instruction, and teacher educators' identities as writers. We also attended to the respondents' ideas regarding our definition of writing.

## Findings and Discussion

The research team identified four main findings: 1) how university teacher educators' describe their experience with writing instruction; 2) how university teacher educators describe their writing instruction; 3) how university teacher educators identify as writers. These findings are described next; and 4) how university teacher educators respond to a given definition of writing.

### Teacher Educators' Experiences Teaching Writing

Table 3 illustrates quantitative results of participants' experience teaching writing. Twelve respondents (fewer than 20%) had specialized training for writing, such as affiliation with the National Writing Project; however most (54 responses) of participants' knowledge of writing instruction was derived from self study and research on the topic. Yet in the qualitative open-ended responses, teacher educators displayed a strong love of writing for the most part. Several participants discussed the importance of writing for pre-service teachers' own learning, as well as the need to know how to teach writing to K-12 students. Others talked about their love and passion for writing and the conditions that enable writing for them. For example one respondent shared, "I write best when I am passionate about the topic." Some remarked on their wishes for more time to write for pleasure and bemoaned their lack of time due to the demands of academic writing. An illustrative example of this follows:

The original reason I wanted to be a teacher was that I wanted to be a writer (poetry and fiction) and I figured having the summers off would be good for that. That changed as soon as I started spending a lot of time with children (when I was in middle school), but writing was always a passion. Before my doc program, I journaled and wrote poetry every day. I feel like a lot of that confidence and creative juice got sucked out of me during my doc program and on the tenure track.

<insert table 3 about here>

University teacher educators' experience varied greatly, as did how they teach writing instruction in their classes. This aspect of the survey is explored next.

### Teacher Educators' Writing Instruction

In this section we explore how writing instruction is incorporated into TPPs in the US and how teacher educators teach pre-service teachers writing instruction.

*Writing methods courses.* The quantitative survey data revealed that literacy teacher educators rarely (28%) taught a stand-alone course on writing instruction, while 72% indicated that writing instruction was embedded in reading courses (see Table 4). These findings support the results of other studies (Brenner, 2013; Morgan, 2010) that found similar patterns when examining writing instruction in TPPs.

<insert Table 4 about here>

A major theme that emerged from the qualitative open-ended response data was a lack of time for writing instruction, primarily due to the emphasis on reading instruction. One teacher educator who taught writing instruction embedded in a reading course wrote, "There is not enough time to get much in." Respondents shared that very little time was dedicated to writing instruction when it was embedded with reading methods. The time spent on actual writing instruction in these cases ranged from one class session to 50% of the course. A respondent shared, "It is woefully unaddressed." Interestingly, some respondents mentioned the writing they assigned teacher candidates as part of their writing instruction. For example, one respondent wrote, "Every assignment (in the TPP) requires writing as an essential component," which suggests that this respondent thought that having students work on their own writing skills was analogous to teaching them how to teach writing.



*Descriptions of success in teaching writing.* Sixty out of 63 respondents indicated how successful they feel at teaching writing to teacher candidates (see Table 5). Quantitatively, 59 respondents indicated that they felt “very successful” (25%), “moderately successful” (37%), or “somewhat successful” (37%), while one respondent indicated that they felt “rarely successful” at teaching writing to pre-service teachers.

In the qualitative open-ended response section, 11 provided comments to elaborate on their responses. As stated in the overall description of writing courses, lack of time was a major negative factor in literacy instructors’ ability to teach writing to teacher candidates. Without adequate time to spend on teaching writing methods, respondents felt rushed in their instruction. Comments included “Never enough time,” “It (writing) is woefully under addressed,” and “I know a great deal but there is not time devoted here.” However, another respondent shared 20 hours were allotted to teach writing methods and thought this was enough.

Another theme in the open-ended responses was that writing is a “difficult sell” to pre-service teachers. Indeed, one respondent stated that to teach writing well, candidates must buy into being good writers themselves. Another shared, “With [CCSS] it is becoming difficult since they want academic writing only. The teachers, naturally, are overly concerned with grammar, but my focus is content supported by grammar.” Both of these comments illustrate how writing could be a difficult sell to pre-service teachers.

Further, one teacher educator shared that she was good at teaching her *teacher candidates to write*, but not at teaching her *teacher candidates to teach their K-12 students to write*. Another indicated that she conducted research over the past five years that demonstrates the writing course positively influences the writing knowledge, skill, and dispositions of teacher candidates.

*Writing methods texts.* In the open-ended qualitative portion of the survey, respondents listed texts they used to teach writing methods. Institutions offering a stand-alone writing methods course tended to use the following texts: *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Graves, 1983) and *Writing Essentials* (Routman, 2004). One respondent wrote that she is not happy with the required text but it is a program norm and so she must supplement with chapters from other authors. When writing instruction is embedded in the literacy course, some teacher educators use one text for both reading and writing, such as *Literate Lives* (Flint, 2008) or *Literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Tompkins, Campbell, Green & Smith, 2013), while others have a separate text for writing instruction. The types of texts used in the stand-alone and embedded writing instruction courses emphasizes to us the varied exposure to different aspects of writing instruction, such as writing workshop and conferencing, that pre-service teachers are receiving across the US.

*Writing methods topics, instructional techniques, and tools.* Some respondents mentioned specific topics they teach pre-service teachers about writing instruction, including the writing process, writing across genres, using writing workshop, and using mentor texts to teach children the craft of writing. Writing assessment, portfolio assessment, peer-review, as well as using rubrics to assess writing were also mentioned. Others noted that they use shared, interactive, and guided writing in their methods classes. One respondent wrote, “I write with my students during writer’s workshop and use my own notebook entries during mini lessons.” These findings mirror the results of other studies that address writing instruction and pre-service teacher education which found that teacher educators spent a lot of time modeling (Kaufman, 2009; Stockinger, 2007) and provided extensive opportunities to write (Morgan, 2010; Stockinger, 2007).

We found that writing and technology integration in TPPs varied, and 27 out of 63 (43%) respondents skipped the question. Eleven respondents listed tools but did not indicate how the technology might be useful as part of writing instruction or writing tasks. Sixteen respondents elaborated in some manner to indicate how technology was used. Tools participants mentioned included Prezi, interactive white boards, web-based applications, iPads, websites (including specific online resources), wikis, Google docs, word processing software, computers, and videos.

In many cases, respondents indicated how they integrate technology and writing tasks. These tasks included online publication and feedback through blogs and message boards, using online writing samples to practice scoring and feedback, analyzing and creating projects about new literacies and multiple literacies/multimodal writing, creating virtual books, translating written literacy vignettes into digital stories, using electronic portfolios, exploring methods of using technology to enhance writing instruction, learning about websites to

use as reference tools for conventions and the writers' craft, developing multimodal compositions and/or digital stories, using the CCSS app, creating a "Live Binder" (an online collection of digital language arts artifacts), and implementing lessons including the document cameras with projectors. These findings highlight that those teachers who shared how they are using technology are truly trying to prepare pre-service teachers to teach writing integrated with digital literacy tools (Collier et al., 2013).

*Envisioning possibilities.* Research has suggested that for many pre-service teachers their sense of writing and of teaching writing shifted as a result of their writing methods class (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). It helped them envision possibilities for their teaching of writing which may be different to before they took the class. However, it is not without its challenges. One respondent wrote, "Even if you enjoy writing it is challenging to teach others how to teach writing." Next we explore how university teacher educators identify themselves as writers.

### Teacher Educators' Identities as Writers

A number of respondents indicated their confidence or lack of confidence in writing. Of the 62 quantitative responses, 38 (61%) shared they considered themselves "competent" writers, six (9%) selected "average" and three (4%) considered themselves to be "functional" writers. In the open-ended qualitative portion of the survey, one respondent admitted not liking writing and another shared her realization that she would never be really good at writing. A compelling quote from one participant captures this lack of confidence, "I don't consider myself a writer even though I've published 16 scholarly books and 60+ peer reviewed articles." This indicates that the survey participants interpreted the question as writing for pleasure, which may have excluded academic writing from their thinking when responding.

Numerous respondents made note of what writing does for them, finding it therapeutic, a mode for thinking, and critical to learning. Finally, a few others mentioned future writing wishes: more time for writing after retirement, being able to write in a particular genre, or being able to get writing published in a particular venue, such as *The New Yorker*.

Some respondents discussed how they support their students' writing identities. This included activities for the pre-service teachers to see themselves as writers and also building time to develop a community of writers within their courses. One respondent wrote, "I pride myself on the number of students that leave my class feeling they were transformed into readers and writers." This is critical because a review of the research on writing identity showed that pre-service teachers began to see themselves as writers due to various course experiences (Morgan & Pytash, 2014), which is essential because pre-service teachers with more positive writing identities were better able to engage students in meaningful writing experiences (Street, 2003; Wang & Odell, 2003). Overall, our findings mirror what other researchers have found: Our survey respondents indicated that teachers' writing identities shape their literacy instruction (Andrews, 2008; Commeyras et al., 2003).

### Teacher Educators' Definition of Writing

The research team, comprised of literacy experts in the field of teacher education, created the following definition while drafting this study:

Writing is a matter of mind, hand and heart- involving complex cognitive, physical, affective and social processes. Writing is part of the communications whole. There is no one writing process. Writers use multiple skills and strategies as they move through stages of planning, drafting, revising/editing, and presentation. People write in many written genres/formats for different audiences and purposes in their daily lives.

Quantitative data indicate that over 55% of respondents agreed (3.51 on a 4 point Likert scale) with our definition. Unsurprisingly, respondents were in total agreement (56%) or agreed to a great extent (40%) with the definition of writing we posed. None disagreed, but 5% of respondents only partially agreed and from their qualitative comments their partial agreement stemmed from language in the definition. For example, several participants mentioned that our definition lacked recognizing writing as a process. For instance one

participant wrote, "Writing is a process; it is different for everyone and is not a linear progression." Another participant commented, "I would say that writing is comprised of processes, not stages." Other participants used this opportunity to communicate additional thoughts such as, "I believe that writing is always persuasive" while another added, "With the technology we have available today, writing often entails creating images and sounds to also communicate ideas." By presenting a common definition of writing in this study, future studies may adopt or adapt it to closely examine writing methods instruction in TPPs.

In conclusion, methods courses may help pre-service teacher candidates develop pedagogical understanding about the teaching of writing. If teacher candidates do not learn how to teach writing in their TPPs, they are left to rely on their own experiences as students to guide their writing instruction (Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003; Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen, & Konopaket, 2007). University instructors have an opportunity to confront and challenge the attitudes that pre-service teacher candidates bring to their classes about writing (Street, 2003). However, how teacher educators teach writing instruction, their experience as writers, their identities as writers, and their definition of writing may shape pre-service teacher candidates' experiences within these methods courses.

### **Implications**

The development of policies and practices to improve writing instruction at the university level must be grounded in a clear understanding of how we teach teachers how to teach writing. Without this information it is hard to determine what needs to be done. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of literacy teacher educators. Survey data indicated how these educators struggle when writing methods content is embedded into reading methods courses because there is so much to teach in one three-credit-hour course. Alternatives to sole literacy courses could be the addition of another course, combining reading and writing methods instruction across six credit hours or offering a reading methods course separate from a writing methods course. This survey also revealed how university teacher educators define writing, and how many literacy instructors do not identify as writers. Thus we argue that university teacher educators need support in several ways--more time to teach writing instruction and opportunities for their own professional development as teachers of writing.

The needs of literacy instructors are even more apparent when we look back over the last twenty years and see that K-12 students' writing skills have made little progress on national assessments. For example, in 2011 only 27% of 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders were considered proficient writers, a slight increase since 1996 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996, 2003, 2011). These static numbers have been connected to differences in teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions regarding writing (Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011). In addition, Troia and colleagues (2002) found that teachers themselves felt unprepared to support students as writers.

The data presented in this survey suggests there is a need to provide professional development for university teacher educators in writing instruction in order to increase their knowledge about effective writing practices, to increase their own skills in writing, and to increase their own and their teacher candidates' dispositions about writing. The model of teachers teaching teachers has gained traction through the National Writing Project, and local professional development in teaching writing is available for K-university teachers, teacher candidates, and local teachers. In each Writing Project workshop, the participants actively engage in writing and then step back to think metacognitively about their teaching of writing.

In our survey, a high percentage (80%) of writing teacher educators in TPPs indicated that writing instruction is embedded in reading courses, writing is not offered as stand-alone courses in their TPPs, and that there is little time for teaching writing. Indeed, these are the same concerns of K-12 teachers (e.g., Calkins, et al., 2012). Perhaps these concerns are actually an opportunity for writing teacher educators. Writing is not an isolated task. Writers write about some topic--whether as a response to readings, a commentary on current events, an opinion piece about a local issue, a detailed description of a scientific investigation. All writing is embedded in other curricular areas. Indeed, the ELA CCSS require students to write as a core part of all curricular areas and for a real purpose and with a real audience in mind (e.g., Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Lemke, 2003; Pella, 2011).

Teacher educators must understand the importance of and model real writing not only in their literacy classes, but also in math, science, social studies methods classes. If teacher educators do not hold positive attitudes about writing or the teaching of writing, it becomes their responsibility to enter into professional development to enhance their skills and dispositions. Support for this professional development might come from the TPPs in the university or through literacy and writing associations and conferences. We cannot enter into another decade with teacher educators teaching teachers who are not avid and knowledgeable in writing pedagogy as well as writers themselves.

### Limitations

This study explored literacy teacher educators' perspectives of writing instruction within TPP's across the United States. With all research, limitations must be identified so that readers can put the findings into perspective. This study has several limitations, the first is that we did not consult a psychometrician in the development of the survey nor did we pilot test the survey, which may have helped us with misinterpretations of questions (Mertens, 2010). Although limited demographic information was obtained, these data did not reveal the uniqueness of nonrespondents in terms of race, gender, type of community where they taught (rural, town, city or suburb), their attitudes or how they would have responded to survey items. An additional limitation is socially desirable response bias. In other words, teacher educators may have responded to survey questions based on what they believed the researchers wanted to hear. In this study, foils were not used to control for biased responses (Shapiro, 1994). In addition, the survey relies on self-reported data. This may compromise validity of information provided (Mertens, 2010), however, we found the benefit of hearing from those in the field across multiple states and from varied institutional settings (public/private; research-focused/teaching focused) was an important addition to this body of research literature. Furthermore, despite the wide variety of programs in the study, the findings might have been different with a different sample. As a result, no claim to generalizability can be made.

### Further Research

Our research offers a faculty perspective of what happens when writing instruction is taught in stand alone classes, embedded in other literacy courses or is optional for pre-service teacher candidates. What is clear from the data is that teacher educators feel that some students are leaving teacher preparation programs with little understanding of and experience with teaching writing (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). More research is needed to highlight the voices of teacher educators who successfully teach writing instruction. On a local scale, teacher educators can find out what is happening at their universities with writing. On a large scale, researchers could continue our work and investigate the relationship between how teacher educators teach writing and whether that is related to our definition or teacher educators' personal definitions of writing.

We believe educators should advocate for teaching writing methods as a stand-alone, required course to give credence to the importance of teaching writing. Literacy teacher educators should continue to seek professional development opportunities to hone their teaching of writing methods and to boost their confidence levels while demonstrating that learning to teach is a career-long endeavor. Various models and methods for teaching writing exist in schools, and our pre-service teachers need to be aware of multiple perspectives.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight how literacy teacher educators are approaching preservice writing instruction across the US. The findings indicate that pre-service teacher candidates in TPPs are learning from a variety of writing texts, and their instructors are focusing on various techniques. The data also indicate that literacy teacher educators vary in their confidence teaching writing, in their ability as writers, and how strongly they identify as writers. This national study indicates that there are many factors within higher education that constrain how writing is taught to pre-service teachers. This study contributes to the conversation regarding how teacher educators prepare future teachers to teach writing. We support the argument that methods courses devoted solely to the teaching of writing are needed (National Commission on Writing, 2003). There are many issues still to explore regarding teacher education and writing instruction reminding us to further question: What about writing?

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