

## Reflections and Insights on the Teaching of Writing

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### Abstract

During the Spring Semester of 2013, three teachers joined together to co-teach an undergraduate writing process and content course for future teacher educators. The goal of this writing course was to teach undergraduate pre-service teachers how to teach writing in the PreK-8 classroom. The major question for the study was, “What happens when three RCWP Teacher Consultants co-teach an undergraduate writing methods class? What does it take to successfully co-teach a class?” The data consisted of their individual teacher journals, the recordings of the post-class discussions, and lesson plans and class notes for the next week based on the previous week’s collaborative discussion. Holistic content analysis was followed to generate the major themes in texts. Results include: The writing project, through the use of the writing workshop model and teachers teaching teachers, is an explicit example of this “net- like organization” in the Rhizome model which is the ultimate form of sharing power through the circulation of experience and knowledge. The giving of feedback relates to the sharing of power between the students and the instructor. Also important is that as teachers of future teachers, it is difficult to pass on some information that can only be learned in the classroom while teaching. This tacit knowledge is hidden within the experiences found in the everyday process and application of the workshop model. It can only be experienced and then reflected upon, and it is our fear that not every teacher of writing will do the necessary reflecting.

*Key words:* Writing, Undergraduate teaching, National Writing Project, Co-teaching and Reflection

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During the Spring Semester of 2013, three teachers joined together to co-teach an undergraduate writing process and content course for future teacher educators. The goal of this writing course was to teach undergraduate pre-service teachers how to teach writing in the PreK-8 classroom. This is a required course in the teacher education sequence, and the only one that focused on the teaching of writing for grades PreK-8. Rachel was the teacher of record for the course, a professor, and director of the River City Writing Project (RCWP). Tom was the teaching assistant (TA) and a full-time doctoral student with experience in teaching middle school English. Bianca was a co-teacher and full-time master’s student with ten years elementary teaching experience. All three co-teachers were RCWP Teacher Consultants and shared a common belief:

that writing is essential for learning in all content areas. Karen was a full-time doctoral student who came into the project later to help research, analyze data, and to give a third-party perspective about our research. Rosario, a doctoral student, provided us with another pair of eyes and assisted us in the final stages of the study.

The study took place at a large research university located in southwest Texas. The course, Writing Process and Development, was composed of 56 undergraduate pre-service teachers. Though the class had originally been designed for only twenty students, over time, the enrollment more than doubled, which brought new challenges for the instructors.

Our major research questions was, what happens when three RCWP Teacher Consultants co-teach an undergraduate writing methods class? What

does it take to successfully co-teach a class? We also asked:

1. What does teaching a writing project methods course look like from a Writing Project perspective?
2. What is the value of exchanging ideas for teaching, reflecting on the teaching experiences, and exchanging meaningful dialogue?
3. How can the writing workshop format help to prepare future teachers of writing?

## Literature Review

### *Co-teaching*

Co-teaching can be defined as an activity where two or more instructors collaborate to create and present lessons to teach to all or groups of students in the classroom (Robinson & Schaible, 1995, p.57; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2008, p. 569). According to Friend & Cook (2002, p.425), co-teaching exists in five different styles. One is collaborative consultation, where one of the teachers takes on the role of the content expert; supportive co-teaching, where there is a lead teacher supported by others who circulate among students to facilitate with instruction; parallel co-teaching, where teachers split students into groups amongst themselves; complementary co-teaching, where one teacher acts to model or reinforce teaching taking place by a lead teacher; and team teaching, with teachers sharing responsibilities of planning and instruction. In this particular study, the instructors implemented the team teaching approach to co-teaching.

There have been few studies on co-teaching that have been conducted with teachers at the university level. However, there have been studies conducted with teachers in the K-12 classroom, which help to reveal some benefits and challenges associated with co-teaching (Nevin, Thousand & Villa, 2009, p.571-572). Among the studies that do exist, these help describe the struggles in collaboration, student issues, and text

selection. These appeared as common issues that these co-teachers faced, along with the positive benefits of expanding the range of pedagogical approaches in traditional teacher-led classrooms.

In one study conducted in a Midwestern university, sixteen education courses were co-taught as part of the teacher preparation program (Bacharach, Heck & Kahlberg, 2008). Teachers were prepared for the co-teaching experience by attending four-hour workshops, and then spent a semester together teaching a teacher preparation course.

Students in these courses were surveyed at the end of the semester and asked questions related to how the co-teaching experience affected their learning. The students commented on the benefit of the different points of views offered by having two teachers in the classroom and the accessibility to teachers due to the lower student-to-teacher ratio. However, some of the concerns addressed by students were confusion on which teacher to turn to for questions, having to meet expectations of two instructors in regards to grades, unequal division of teaching time from each individual instructors, and organizational issues at the start of the project. Nevertheless, 89% of students stated that they would prefer to be taught in a co-teach environment in the future, and 74% stated that they felt they learned more than in a course provided by a single instructor.

The co-teachers reported that they personally learned a great deal from the experience, through the sharing of pedagogical methods and reflection of their own teaching. A key point they stressed was the importance of planning with their co-teachers, which required additional time from all parties.

### *Identity*

Identity is a concept that can be used to describe the way a person is seen, by him or herself or by society. According to Gee (2000), identity can exist in four modes (p.101). These are nature-

identity, which describes a person's physical traits and other aspects that have been shaped by forces outside of the individual's control; the institution-identity, which describes an official identity within a larger society; the discourse-identity, which is socially constructed and shaped by interactions between the person and others in a community; and the affinity-identity, which relates to one's involvement in particular interest- or activity-based groups. In the case of our co-teachers, since they each ascribe to the writing workshop model of writing instruction, they could be described as having this affinity-identity in common with one another. They would share a similar language, belief system, and other ways of knowing and communicating that would set them apart from others outside of this affinity group.

Identity theory describes the teacher-to-teacher or teacher-to-student interactions within the classroom. However, identity theory does not clearly explain each individual person's actions within that group. How the individuals view their role and their position within the learning and teaching community will affect the way that the group will ultimately function.

### *Positioning*

An individual's position in a classroom, and the power associated with that position, is directly related to how one views oneself (Davies & Harré, 1999, p.54). A student may see the distinction between oneself and the teacher, and participates in the actions and behaviors associated with that role. The individual is now a part of a distinct social group, within the context of a larger learning and teaching community.

According to Harré (2005, p.57), "positioning theory" describes how these rights and duties are distributed, changed, and challenged over the course of an individual's life. For example, a student who shares the floor with the instructor of record in a classroom can be temporarily thrown into a position that allows her

to take on additional power and responsibility within that classroom. This student's identity is now one of leader, similar to that of the classroom instructor. The instructors in this study shared the powers and responsibilities of the classroom among themselves and the students. This follows with the National Writing Project's (NWP) philosophy of the strength of teachers teaching teachers.

### **The National Writing Project**

The NWP was created in 1974 in an effort to provide training to teachers that could improve writing instruction. Its founders, James Gray, and colleagues at the University of California, Berkley, expanded the reach of NWP to nearly 200 sites in the United States (NWP). NWP has grown in scope as well, from providing professional development to middle and high school teachers, to including K-12 and higher-education teachers across content areas. According to Gray, these exemplar teachers were provided the opportunity to collaborate and improve their writing instruction through demonstrations of their best pedagogical practices (Gray, 2014 as qtd. in NWP).

According to "About NWP" (National Writing Project), the national program model for NWP sites share the following principles:

Teachers at every level—from kindergarten through college—are the agents of reform; universities and schools are ideal partners for investing in that reform through professional development.

Writing can and should be taught, not just assigned, at every grade level. Professional development programs should provide opportunities for teachers to work together to understand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.

Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.

There is no single right approach to teaching writing; however, some practices prove to be more effective than others. A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.

Teachers who are well informed and effective in their practice can be successful teachers of other teachers as well as partners in educational research, development, and implementation. Collectively, teacher-leaders are our greatest resource for educational reform. (NWP Core Principles section)

The above principles are a model for utilizing our most effective teachers as vehicles for improving writing instruction through strong pedagogical practices. Summer institutes allow these teacher-leaders to share their knowledge and experience within their local educational communities. These summer institutes also provide teachers opportunities to collaborate and work alongside like-minded individuals who share a dedication towards improving writing and writing instruction.

### ***The Writing Workshop Model***

The writing workshop model's foundation is based on theories from the works of Lucy Calkins, Susan Sowers, Donald Murray, and Donald Graves (Troia, 2009, p.77-78; Atwell, 1998, p.115-117). In his book, Troia (2009) summarizes the key components of the writing workshop model:

- (1) Mini-lessons on workshops procedures, writing skills (e.g., spelling patterns, punctuation rules), composition strategies (e.g., timelines for planning biographies, editing checklists), and craft elements (e.g., writing quality traits, effective leads for exposition)
- (2) Sustained time (about 20-30 minutes) for personally meaningful writing nearly every day to help students become comfortable with the writing process (i.e., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) and with varied writing tasks with different purposes.
- (3) Teacher and student led conferences about writing plans and written products to help students appropriate habits of mind associated with good writers and make the most of their writing.
- (4) Frequent opportunities for sharing with others, sometimes through formal publishing activities, to enhance the authenticity of writing instruction that emphasizes the writing process (78).

The writing workshop model is student centered, as the student directs and controls his or her own learning through authentic writing experiences. As such, students are active members of a community of writers, allowing teachers to focus instruction on student needs (Atwell, 1998, p.151).

### **METHODOLOGY**

*"It fills me with joy and a feeling of gratefulness. It means that a class of 55 students has become a gift and not a burden."* (Rachel, Feb 12).

#### *The Course*

This course drew students throughout the teaching certification program at the university. Students were required to complete course readings along with writing assignments and other course projects. Students were also asked to create and present mini-lessons and their final written project.



The course followed the Writing Project model. In both the Writing Project Summer Institute and this course, we began each class with daily journal writing. The teacher as a writer is a core component of the model. Like in the Summer Institute (SI), the instructors modeled writing and provided guest speakers and lecturers. The essence of the Writing Project is honoring teacher knowledge: teachers teaching teachers. Teachers and students work in partnership to build on their knowledge base. As teachers, we are continuously educating ourselves in an effort to improve our practices.

After each course session, the co-teachers met to share lunch and discuss and reflect about the day. Then, the co-teachers would return home and write reflections during the week prior to the next class meeting. The data consisted of their individual teacher journals, the recordings of the post-class discussions, and lesson plans and class notes for the next week based on the previous week's collaborative discussion. In this way, we were able to triangulate data sources.

### *Analysis*

Each of the three co-teachers read through all of their teacher journals, coding the data. In addition, the audiotapes, lesson plans, and class notes were analyzed. Karen joined the project to read through the teachers' journals, identifying codes. We followed holistic content analysis (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p.88) to generate the major themes in texts (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998, p.88). By continually reading over the paragraphs, themes were collapsed. These major themes were collaborative reflection, creating a community of writers/learners, and teachers teaching pre-service teachers.

We met weekly, after each class, and discussed issues from the writing class that centered around our teaching instruction, student behaviors, and our own concerns about co-teaching. After our collaborative discussion,

during the week that followed, we would continue our own reflective process through individually written journals. Our written reflections emerged from both our personal thoughts and from our collaborative discussions.

Meeting once a week helped us reflect on the questions and issues that arose during teaching this undergraduate writing course. Early on in the semester, during one of our collaborative reflections, questions came to light that we felt could be addressed as co-teachers of this writing class. The following journal exemplifies this process.

*Bianca 2/5*

Questions:

How did RCWP prepare me to help co-teach an undergraduate class?

Can the format we used in summer be applied successfully in this class?

Can co-teaching enhance what I learned at the summer institute?

How can the SI format and the class format help to prepare future teachers?

What benefits will the SI provide the students?

Can three RCWP Teacher Consultants successfully and professionally co-teach a class?

### **Theme One--Collaborative Reflection**

Examples are shared of the study's results paired with the relevant examples of that result. The last question from the above excerpt was one we came back to throughout the semester. Could we successfully and professionally co-teach this class? One of Rachel's early entries indicated her positive attitude about this question.

*Rachel 2/12*

During our debriefing, I discussed how thrilled I was to have both Tom and Bianca teach with me. Tom said that he remembered me saying that my times with his class were my best days, and now that he sits in a cubicle all day, it is the

high point of his week, too. But what a remarkable situation we find ourselves in, to be able to have three experienced teachers get to teach together and plan together and reflect together. It's the kind of opportunity that rarely happens.

But what does it mean to me to be able to teach with Bianca and Tom? It fills me with joy and a feeling of gratefulness. It means that a class of 55 students has become a gift and not a burden. The opportunity to think critically about my practice, my teaching, and my grading is immeasurable. It means that we have the opportunity to research our practice and to reflect on it through multiple eyes and multiple lenses.

*Commentary:*

We all agreed that, although beneficial, co-teaching could also be difficult to negotiate. As a co-teacher, you have to be willing to give up control. We feared the loss of autonomy that we had become so accustomed to having in our own classrooms. However, we all had differing perspectives of what this collaboration would look like. From Rachel's perspective, having colleagues to collaborate with was a great gift. From Tom's perspective, though, he struggled with his role as a co-teacher in this setting, as indicated by the following journal entry he made.

*Tom 2/5*

Co-teaching is an interesting beast. It can be difficult to find your voice. The common worry concerning me is talking too much (I tend to be overbearing), as well as the need to make sure all of the instructors are sending out consistent messages that are aligned with each of the other instructor's message. It can be overwhelming at times. I think the thing that counts the most is the intention. You cannot over estimate good intentions. These good intentions carry over. It makes your actions deliberate, I think.

Deliberate in the sense that they are thoughtful and carried out with others in mind. This is interesting because there are so many facets to teaching that it is quite impossible to impart all of them to students in a single semester. There is a lot of tacit knowledge involved in learning to teach. You can only learn some things through time and your own application. Making a list of these things wouldn't work, because the pre-service teacher wouldn't realize or understand the benefit of the list.

*Commentary:*

Tom's perspective is based on the negotiation of power. He realized that in this instance it was not his classroom, therefore the expectations of his personal co-teaching experience were not the same as they were in the past, when he was in charge of his own classroom. He had a very real sense that he was a guest in the class and was looking for appropriate times and forms of interjection. However, coming from the same background, using the same model, the River City Writing Project model, it became easier for us to calibrate our co-teaching experience. It became easier because we came from a shared background. Over the course of a few weeks, Rachel reflected how this shared background united our teaching experience, as indicated in the following reflections.

*Rachel 3/16*

One piece of this research that has made such a difference that both Tom and I noticed is that we have identified and we so clearly know what we are trying to do in this class. We are trying to build our students' identities as writers and their identities as teachers of writing. When Dr. Harris asked at Susan's dissertation defense if we are teaching our undergraduates to teach in the writing workshop model and the writing project model, Tom and I looked at each other and knew that it was exactly what we were doing.

*Rachel 2/28*

Tom commented during our debriefing back in my office that he wondered if the students knew that they were living the same writing workshop that we were learning about and reading about. This gets back to our research question—What does teaching a writing project methods course look like from a writing project perspective?

*Rachel 3/26*

I know I've said this many times, but I find it so beneficial to be able to have a deep reflection about class with other experienced writing project teachers. We speak the same language and we push each other's thinking to really analyze what happened in class and how to build on it and scaffold the next class. This is the kind of reflection that most teachers including university professors don't have time to do as they finish one class and then move on the next one.

Commentary:

In the above entries, Rachel reflected on one of our research questions: What does teaching a Writing Project methods course look like from a writing project perspective? Through her own reflective process she answered that it is explicitly reflective and collaborative. All of us would argue that this differs from the typical teaching experience. Our identities as writing instructors were repeatedly changed and transformed through daily reflection and collaboration. This is an explicit part of the writing project methodology and is perhaps the most important part because it fosters growth as an instructor.

### **Building a Community of Writers**

So much has been written about how important it is to create a community of writers, but what does that really mean? It means to create a safe

classroom where everyone feels free to share, no one is rejected, and everyone is valued. We held these beliefs, but found that it was harder to live than we imagined. Although we had an idea of what we wanted our classroom to look like, we struggled with the transparency needed to accomplish this.

*Bianca 2/26*

I still have professors who mostly lecture, show and provide power-point lessons, and give tests. I had one professor who primarily taught like that but it was not until I did a project about a critical race theorist in her class that I actually learned something and retained it.

When students have opportunities to reflect on their own and with others, they are not competing with anyone else; they are only trying to improve on their learning. It is their learning experience. What do they want to take away from it? What is this class about?

Commentary:

We knew that we did not want a lecture class. We highly valued class participation and collaboration. This collaboration creates a community of writers who learn to value each other and work as a team. The idea of collaboration rather than competition leads us to an alternative vision of how a class might function.

*Tom 2/19*

I think the writing workshop model is the beginning of creating an environment where people can begin to care, because it almost forces interaction with your fellow humans. That really is how to inculcate caring. Creating connections. Allowing them to happen. Consciously promoting them.

Commentary:

This vulnerability that comes with caring began with our first writing assignment. We asked

students to interview each other about their names and personal history. These introductions were then shared with the group.

*Rachel 2/28*

We finished our introductions finally; it took such a long time to introduce everyone. The other important thing about this was that everyone shared in front of the class and experienced what it was like to share their writing.

Commentary:

A part of creating a community of writers is to create a safe environment, and to understand some of the underlying constraints, including class climate. In trying to help the class learn about conducting a writer's workshop, we tried to address issues as they arose.

### **Collaborative Reflection**

We wanted to create an environment where students felt safe to share their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. Authentic stories need to be preserved. Our human history needs to be documented in these personal stories, since these storytellers will not be around forever to share them.

The class visited the River City Holocaust Memorial and heard Holocaust survivor Anna Rado's oral history, describing her experiences.

*Bianca 3/19*

It made me realize a very important reason for writing. Someday Anna will be gone and the only way her story will survive is if someone writes it down, whether it is her or someone else. This is what our teachers need to know, so that they can pass it on to their own students--writing keeps the memories, the thoughts and ideas, the dreams and aspirations alive. Just like the ancient pictographs, there is a record of a

civilization that we would not know anything about had they not left their writings behind in the form of pictures. In Anna's case, it is important to not let others forget what happened and that it happened to real people; people that eventually made River City their home and someone whom we met personally.

Commentary:

One thing that the directors at the holocaust museum try to do is to link past injustices to current issues of bullying and social justice. The docents at the holocaust museum pose the question, "Now that you know, what will you do?" The class sessions after the holocaust museum visit led to several dialectic journal topics related to bullying.

*Bianca 4/9*

As I read over the dialectic journals this week, especially the ones about bullying, it was as if the topic had struck a chord in so many. I am sure that at some time or another, most of us have been in a situation ourselves where we were either bullied or were the bullies. This topic was one that opened up the writers and that may be part of the key to getting students to write: giving them topics that relate to them in very strong ways.

Sure we tell them, write about a happy moment or a sad moment, or something equally inane but then they read about something that touches just about every one of us and they are driven to write. This is what teachers of writers must do, give their students a strong emotional tie to what they are writing and I believe that is what this class of writers is getting. They are beginning to see that the writing is theirs and the more connected they are to what they are writing; the more the writing begins to flow.



Commentary:

This led to the students feeling free to express themselves without fear of their classmates' reactions. When the students wrote about topics that they felt a connection with, the writing took care of itself. By finding the subject they were driven to write, they pushed themselves to explore the topic in more depth.

*Bianca 4/16*

At the beginning of this semester you could feel the discomfort, you could feel the resistance, and you could hear the lament of "I don't know what to write," which translated to me, "I do not have confidence in my writing."

However, when you are free to write what you want, how you want, without concerns for the conventions and the grammar and the spelling, your writing is free to take off. That is what I am beginning to see for some of the writers. Writing has become theirs, they own it, and they are now writing for themselves as audience. That is so freeing, so liberating, and it allows for more creativity--creativity that is just theirs, their own words, and their own ideas. They do not have to write for anyone but themselves and they can write about anything that speaks to them. Even when we gave them topics to write about, they were still able to choose another topic or something else that was on their minds. We never restricted them but we encouraged them to challenge themselves.

And it wasn't just us as teachers, but each of the other students. With the idea of "bless, address, and press," all of the writers were open to each other's comments. They asked for help and for ideas and they each tried to ask something that would stretch the other writers. It was exciting to see. They started off small and timid and then began to become more willing to share and expand. A lot of them resisted the idea of revision, which is what writing is all about, always making it better. But even in this, class

revision did not have a structure to it, it was just various ideas of ways you could add depth to your story.

And so I was amazed to see how some of the students had changed their writing project to something new and how good it already was. It was as if this small group of students found a writing voice and found that the freedom to write about anything; without fear of being torn apart, without being dictated about what to write and how to write it, was liberating and exciting.

Commentary:

As instructors invested in the writing workshop model, we feel these words would be a fantastic summation of our goals: "group(s) of students found a writing voice and found that the freedom to write about anything; without fear of being torn apart, without being dictated about what to write and how to write it, was liberating and exciting." This is what we strive for with every writing experience in and out of the classroom.

### **Teachers Teaching Pre-service Teachers**

Another major theme that emerged from our journals and discussions related to how teachers teach teachers. We grappled with how to impress upon the students the importance and effort required to become excellent writing teachers. This has to be an organic process, with the formation of our writing teacher identities and our funds of knowledge integrating with the students' funds of knowledge to create a nurturing writing and learning community. This process is organic due to the distinctive context of each teaching situation, which varies due to differing participants and their unique experiences.

*Bianca 2/12*

So where do I begin to find my own voice? I have studied education and have been a teacher for 10 years and working with this class should be a natural extension of my experience. I

believe there is a natural teacher voice in me who did take 10 years to find. I remember my first years teaching, I was stiff, uncomfortable, and floundering. Then I became animated, as if I had finally found my niche.

*Tom 2/19*

I am a little frustrated by the notion that these students don't seem to appreciate how difficult teaching can be. I think some, if not many of them are seriously underestimating the level of skill needed to be an excellent instructor. Is this my problem? Or is it the simple reality that they won't understand the nature of the difficulty until they have to do it for real? Maybe I'm just getting old and because I am doing a lot of reflecting and research lately, I have begun to see how difficult the task of teaching writing really is.

Commentary:

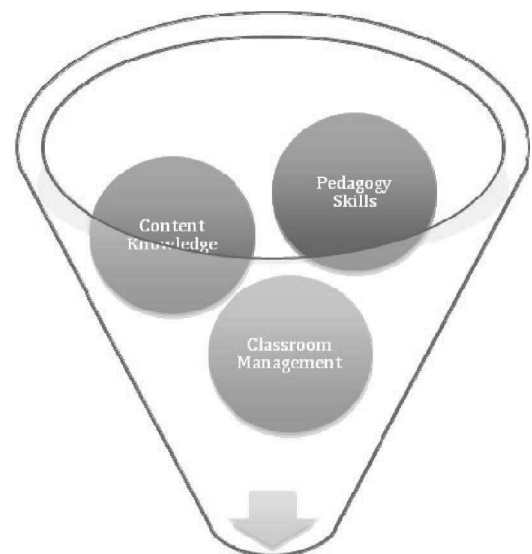
The difficulty in teaching is directly related to the number of skills that need to be mastered, including aspects related to content, pedagogy and classroom management. As our pre-service teachers become acquainted with effective strategies and techniques to teach writing, we were reminded that a teacher's identity is shaped by more than just content knowledge and it was obvious they lacked an understanding of these important relationships. We believe teachers need to actively attempt to master these skills and find their balance in application.

*Tom 4/2*

This week we discussed teaching things that are not usually made explicit until you spend some time in the classroom, or making explicit what is never made explicit in undergrad school. This tacit knowledge is a difficult beast to be honest. In many ways, it's the nuts and bolts of teaching, or tricks of the trade. I think we can attempt to do it, but in the end I'm not sure that the pre-

service teachers will have a frame of reference for understanding the tacit knowledge. I think it may be something that they realize once they are in the classroom and they find themselves in a certain situation, then they may get the, "Oh, now I know what they were talking about." I still feel this is valuable because they will then have a tool to rely on, instead of floundering around, searching for a possible answer, they will have something to work with.

This aligns with the 'teacher of writing identity' that we have been discussing. So much goes into this identity. It entails meeting an understanding of your content, pedagogy, and classroom management. It probably looks something like the figure below, although any type of graphical representation is always going to fall short of reality. Tacit knowledge in each of these areas is required if you are going to progress towards being a successful teacher of writing (or any subject for that matter). An understanding of your content is paramount, but it has to be mixed with an understanding of pedagogy. What is the best way to convey this information to *everyone* in the class? There is no secret for this; it just comes with hard work and experience.



**Teaching Identity**

Commentary:

As teachers of teachers we find it difficult to pass on some information that we know can only be learned in the classroom while teaching. This tacit knowledge is hidden within the experiences found in the everyday process and the application of the workshop model. It can only be experienced and then reflected upon, and it is our fear that not every writing teacher will do the necessary reflecting.

On the other hand, we can explicitly teach some things, for instance the power of stories. By passing on the art of writing, we make it personal and help to archive our students' unique stories.

*Bianca 3/19*

Even as a beginning teacher I wasn't really sure why to pass on the art of writing to others. Sure I found it useful for me but how could I make it useful for someone else? I did not understand that it is one way to leave behind our stories for future generations to look back and understand how we lived during this time. It is also a way to leave behind a piece of ourselves, a reminder, and a way to reach out to those we have left behind.

Commentary

Many times as teachers we try to model good practice, but do our students (future teachers) understand that or does it go over their heads? Our discussions often circled back to this question.

*Rachel 2/28*

Do the students realize that we're modeling what they are reading? How can we make this connection more explicit without being overt? What does real team-teaching look like--not the kind that often goes on in schools--two minute discussions and everyone teaches alone. We're looking at our work through a socio-cultural lens.

The fact that all three of us are writing project TC's indicates shared perspectives and shared beliefs about the value of writing workshop. For me, everything else is secondary. Every tip we have about teaching writing comes second. First—you need to be a writer if you are a teacher of writers. Second—you have to live writing workshop. You have to provide time to write and work on your writing. For most of the students, the writing takes off but even for the student who wrote about how hungry she was, writing occurred. And maybe next week—she'll have a more developed topic.

Commentary:

There were several instances of modeling that we used in our approach to being teachers who teach teachers. Many of these models illustrated the struggle of becoming writers.

*Rachel 2/12*

When Tom shares the chicken dance approach to teaching writing, we have another strategy to share with the class. When Bianca shares her uncertainties with us, it gives all 3 of us the opportunity to reflect on the "not good enough" feeling that all good teachers feel at times. For me, working together is a heightened experience that makes everything clearer and more meaningful.

*Rachel 3/16*

We used every minute of time in class today. We began with me talking about Susan's dissertation defense and about how we've developed the class to be like the River City Writing Project. I also showed them Adam's 4 books that covered the two years of school to show his growth. Then Bianca led us through the kernel writing activity of Bernabei (2009, p.28). She put together a beautiful PowerPoint with floating items and color and pictures. It was a beautiful

demonstration and the class applauded her afterward.

*Rachel 4/23*

The last of the mini-lessons were presented, and they were so well done. It's almost as if the group learning from the coaching we are doing has brought the whole group up to another level. We started the class with a letter from Anna Rado thanking the class for their thank-you letters. What was particularly amazing was that Anna's sister after being touched that she was mentioned in the thank-you letters has decided to begin speaking now. That drew a collective wow from our class.

Tom presented a lesson on teaching expository writing that the class was very interested in. They agreed with Tom that expository writing is really important and were surprised that it isn't explicitly taught. Tom explained that since it is not tested, it is not taught.

Commentary:

This day in particular was an example of teachers teaching pre-service teachers at multiple levels. Power was circulated throughout the class as all three instructors and multiple students provided mini-lessons. Additionally a sense of community was generated through Anna Rado's letter of appreciation, which helped generate connections to the outside world.

*Tom 3/19*

I think reading gets a bad rap; because of all the crap students are forced to read in school. Some of those books are just awful. I found great success with letting students pick topics to study and read on their own. I think the model of the writing workshop should also be used for the reading workshop. Choice, choice, choice, choice is the key. Eventually, through constant reading and the fostering of connections, students will begin to learn about the world. The

connections become more and more exponential as things begin to tie together. I always go back to Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Model (1987, p.21) for organizing knowledge, but I feel it really does fit the process superbly.

Commentary:

The fostering of connections is an important part of both writing and reading. Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome model (1987, p.21) explains these connections. The rhizome is an organizational model for the acquisition of knowledge, which assumes "Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (p.7). In contrast to the traditional model of knowledge acquisition, typically represented by a growing tree that branches out, the rhizome model is antithetical to hierarchies in that connections, termed multiplicities, can be fostered in any direction. There is no universal pivot point from which expansion occurs. Everything has the potential to connect to everything else. In the classroom this is demonstrated by the varying backgrounds, skills and knowledge students bring with them. The students will connect to lessons in varied ways, and these multiple forms of connections should not only be allowed, but also encouraged. Lastly, the rhizome is a model that represents constant "becoming" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.10).

It is important to note the idea of constantly becoming is philosophically in line with the writing workshop model and can be idealized by the phrase "everything is a process." This is directly connected to Foucault's "net like organization" of power (Foucault, 1980, p.98). Every student's funds of knowledge are equally important and connected to every other student's funds of knowledge and each voice must be honored. Writing is the ideal vehicle to honor each student's individual voice and their relationship to the world.



*Bianca 3/25*

If the students from this class start to realize the importance of writing they will have more reason to teach it and the confidence to teach it. If nothing else, writing could just be a way for young students to get in touch with themselves, to express themselves, to discover who they are. From the student writing I have read so far, it seems that they are using writing to work through their own thoughts, especially about their feelings about writing and sharing. As they continue to write this way, they continue to contemplate what we are doing in this class and continue to re-think the experience of writing.

*Bianca 3/26*

We have been journal writing and dialectic journal writing since the beginning of class and I wonder if the students in this class understand the idea of what we are doing. Do they understand that the results of their journaling are what they will want of their own students? What are their own expectations of these writing activities and what will be their own expectations of their own students writing?

I wonder if our students really understand this and I also wonder if they understand that no matter what subjects they teach, reading and writing will always be a part of it. In my elementary science and math subjects, for instance, we kept journals that were used to not only show what was learned but to reflect on what had been learned. We also read expository text in both these subjects and as it was a different kind of reading I had to be able to understand that format to show my students how to read and use expository text. I could not dislike reading because I had to be able to use it in all subjects and in all types of books. I could not dislike writing because I had to be able to use it in all subjects and in all types of situations.

## Commentary:

The idea of constantly becoming, making connections, both teacher to student and student to the world, through writing and reading is the point of the writing workshop. As teachers, it is our job to model the behaviors associated with becoming, through reflection, in the forms of writing, whether journaling, or responding to the world in expository text, or merely discussing our individual readings across the content areas. This again, relates to the idea of fostering connections. Both Foucault's model of power relations and Deleuze and Guatarri's Rhizome model are simple attempts to represent this process. In many ways, the Writing Workshop is as well.

*Rachel 3/26*

Our discussion among the three of us after class felt profound to me. We discussed what it takes to present a good mini-lesson and to be a good teacher. After the first mini-lesson group and before the second group, I went over some of things they needed to include in a mini-lesson. I included telling us the grade level the lesson was focused on, the TEKS, but most importantly I talked about how you have to actually teach something, not just say the definition and expect the students to write it. I also asked them to include at least 4 high quality picture books.

Tom said that when I shared the points to consider after the first mini-lesson, that he had noticed the same things. As I went over the list he said that he was checking off the same points on his sheet. This led to a really detailed discussion among the three of us about what seemed to be missing in the mini-lessons. The students needed to frame the mini-lessons into the bigger picture. We at first thought that after all the mini-lessons had been shared we should lead the class in a discussion about a) What's the highlights of the mini-lessons this week and b) What's the bigger picture.

Commentary:

The giving of feedback relates to the sharing of power between the students and the instructor. The student has momentary control and then the instructor provides feedback in order to bring the whole class in to a think tank and common conversation, from which all participants can learn and grow..

*Rachel 4/2*

We got to the mini-lessons and once again, the three of us wondered what was happening. After the first mini-lesson, Bianca, Tom and I shared our main points about mini-lessons that we had identified last week, but we didn't share how important this small mini-lesson was to fitting into the larger writing workshop. Once again, the mini-lessons to me felt simplistic and didn't really fit into the larger picture. Real writing wasn't happening.

Commentary:

The real reasons you do mini-lessons is to improve writing. It can't be in isolation. Everything has to relate to the writing. This has to be an explicit connection outlined by the instructor during the process. Relating the details of the lesson to the bigger picture is one of the most important insights we gathered from our reflections of students teaching the mini-lessons. It was an aha moment that enabled us to explicitly discuss the connections that needed to be made. In retrospect it seems obvious, but making the assumption that students will make those connections independently is a common mistake made by instructors at all levels.

*Bianca 4/9*

So while we are beginning to see some real growth in their writing, I can only hope that they realize that this is what they should be doing with their own students. I want for them and for their own students to put writing back to where

it should be, something that is interesting and student oriented, not something that is a drudge. I also want them to use books, articles, videos, movies, guest speakers, as inspiration for writing. Because when we get to write about those thoughts that are emotional to us, we begin to develop and grow as writers.

As I looked over the writing this past week I was just amazed. Some of the writers had decided to make a change from what they had originally started to something new and you could just see that their new choice had a natural flow. It was as if these writers had found their writing voices. From the beginning of the semester to now, it's as if they were really starting to realize that we are all writers within. I think that what is happening is that they are realizing writing is an art and not something that is a step-by-step process.

*Rachel 4/9*

We began the class with the second part of my demonstration on revision activities. We asked the students to use post-its to identify areas where they could add a snapshot and a thought shot and then to write them. I also asked them to look for a moment where they could explode the moment and shrink the story. We also asked them to find their theme and to identify it and the important points down to the smallest important point.

Each week, Tom, Bianca and I have shared our insights into their mini-lessons and our teaching and discipline tips. This week we began to see real growth in the mini-lessons. I was most impressed with Brian and his group. They brought the mini-lesson back to the students' own writing. Brian had a number of really good lessons to extend the topic. While Tom thought it might be too much, I was still impressed that he had thought it through and had strong lessons to share.

### Commentary

After Rachel modeled bringing mini-lessons back into their own writing and the work we had done previously, we began to see better connections between the lesson and their writing.

#### *Bianca's Final Journal*

The last few weeks' activities were so exciting and as a result, we had better attendance. This excitement must be maintained all semester but I am not sure how that could be done. So many activities were done throughout the semester that I couldn't imagine missing any day knowing that every class was filled with good information and teaching ideas. Sometimes I felt as if students viewed what we were doing as negative. They resisted what we were trying to accomplish. I read papers from some that expressed this feeling, yet towards the end, several said they had come to change their mind about the experience.

Then I am also concerned about those who never changed their mind about the class and I wish there was some way to relay to them that as prospective teachers, they need to have a more open mind and an attitude of continual learning. As we discussed, sometimes you just have to get out there in the real world to make sense of what our class was all about.

### Commentary:

Just as in writing, teaching requires an openness and willingness to grow. This takes reflection and effort and is not something that happens without work being put into the process. To become a better writer, you have to write and then at some point reflect on your writing. Similarly, to become a better teacher, you have to enter the profession, walk into your own classroom, and teach and continuously reflect on your teaching. As instructors we all feel that reflection is a common quality of all good instructors and is something we

attempted to impart to our students during this class.

### Closing Thoughts

We more deeply understand that the writing workshop model can be layered throughout the educational process beginning with K-12 and ending with teachers teaching teachers. The model should look the same whether it is a teacher teaching a middle school student, or an instructor teaching a teacher in an undergraduate/graduate environment, or in a professional development session where teachers are teaching and sharing with their peers. This is unique to the workshop process and differentiates it from other pedagogical models. Insights into the elements of the writing workshop that stand out are:

1. The purpose of mini-lessons is to improve writing. Mini-lessons can't be taught in isolation because everything has to relate to the writing.
2. The classroom environment is an important aspect of the writing workshop model. The environment needs to be arranged in a manner that encourages collaborative work. It has to be conducive to student interaction and ultimately their writing.
3. The writing workshop model can be layered throughout the educational experience, beginning with K-12 and ending with teachers teaching teachers.
4. Just as in writing, teaching requires an openness and willingness to grow. Reflection is a common quality of all good instructors.
5. We feel that the writing project, through the use of the writing workshop model and teachers teaching teachers, is an explicit example of this "net-like organization" (Foucault, 1980, p.98) in the Rhizome model which is the ultimate form of sharing power through the circulation of experience and knowledge. The giving of feedback relates to the sharing of power between the students and the instructor.

6. As teachers of future teachers we find it difficult to pass on some information that we know can only be learned in the classroom while teaching. This tacit knowledge is hidden within the experiences found in the everyday process and application of the workshop model. It can only be experienced and then reflected upon, and it is our fear that not every teacher of writing will do the necessary reflecting.
7. The fostering of connections is an important part of both writing and reading. The idea of constantly becoming, making connections, both teacher to student and student to the world, through writing and reading is the point of the writing workshop.

This is just one study and we realize that that the results are not generalizable to a larger population. However, the study was greatly beneficial to the participants and helped us to understand the teaching and learning process in a more profound way than would otherwise have been possible. We hope that other instructors will participate in this kind of self-study and that the findings will be published and available to the research community. The application of the Rhizome model (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.21) to the teaching of writing holds great promise. We look forward to more exploration of this relationship in future studies.

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