What Does Effective Writing Instruction Look Like?

Practices of Exemplary Writing Teacher Educators

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The TERSG Collaboration

- TERSG is the Teacher Educator Research Study Group continuously affiliated with the LRA (Literacy Research Association) since the early 1990s.

- TERSG members are university faculty from universities whose teacher preparation programs are generally recognized as focusing on practice, but who are also educational researchers.

- TERSG members are a collaborative research entity that investigates teacher preparation/education across the U.S. providing a wider and deeper investigation of agreed upon topics.

- TERSG has widely published the findings of these research projects in scholarly refereed articles and books.
The Educational Problem

- Writing pedagogy methods have been historically neglected in teacher preparation programs (Troia, 2007).

- Study of 50 U.S. teacher preparation programs found that only about 25% of them had a writing-intensive methods course in their program (Myers, et al., 2016).

- Inservice and preservice teachers typically receive insufficient instruction in the teaching of writing (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012; Cremin & Oliver, 2016; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, & Morphy, 2014).
Our First Study on Writing

Citation:

- In this study researchers surveyed teacher educators across the country and found that writing intensive coursework was rare as most literacy classes focused on reading.
- There were a number of respondents who did provide information about writing courses.
- Based on these findings researchers posed questions that provided a basis for the second study presented today.
The Present Study

Citation:

Our Constructivist Grounded Theory Research

Investigated the models and methods of 18 teacher educators across different U.S. teacher preparation programs

1. What do effective writing methods courses in teacher education programs entail?

2. How do exemplary writing methods instructors structure learning experiences in writing-intensive teacher education courses?

3. What are the theoretical and practical models of writing instruction employed by exemplary teacher educators?
Research on Effective Writing Instruction

Effective writing instruction includes:

- Authentic, genre-specific writing engagements (Araujo, Szabo, Raine, & Wickstrom, 2015; Colby & Stapleton, 2006; Morgan & Pytash, 2014)
- Time to write daily (Gleason & Isaacson, 2001; Graves, 1982)
- Explicit instruction in the processes of idea generation, drafting, revision, and editing (Graham & Perin, 2007)
- Explicit modeling (Gersten & Baker, 2001; Troia, 2007)
- Use of model/mentor texts (Graham & Perin, 2007)
Research on Effective Writing Instruction

Effective writing instruction includes:

- Engage students in reading like a writer -- examining a writer’s strategies (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Sanders & Schilperoord, 2006)

- Allow for topic choice (Braddock, Llyod-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Graves, 1982) or for students to develop strong topic knowledge through inquiry (Graham & Perin, 2007).

- Employ both formative and summative assessments in the form of feedback to writers through peer-conferencing or collaboration (Graham & Perin, 2007), written feedback (Troia, 2007), and/or teacher-student conferencing (Gersten & Baker, 2001).

- Use portfolio assessments and other longitudinal assessments to determine performance and skills (e.g., Troia, 2007).
Method

- Purposive sample of practicing literacy instructors (N=18) selected from the first study or recommended by TERSG members meeting the criteria of the study.
- Examination of syllabi, focusing on course assignments in writing.
- Interviews of identified exemplary writing instructors.
- Qualitative multiple-case study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).
Data Collection

- Targeted purposive sampling at the elementary level of teacher preparation
  - Undergraduate teaching of writing
  - Writing methods courses or writing intensive methods courses
  - Use of identified exemplary writing instructional process
  - Direct writing instruction with opportunity for field application
- Audio-recorded and transcribed individual interviews, syllabi, and assignment directions
Participants

- Public and private institutions in six states across U.S.
- Participants had achieved doctoral status with focus on literacy
- 7 females; 1 male
Data Analysis

- Data Analysis Team created a data matrix for organization.
- Research team members reviewed the matrix, inserting comments and creating quotes.
- Sorting and re-sorting of data led to two major categories:
  - Developing self as a writer
  - Becoming a teacher of writing
- Member checks and critical peers provided validity and reliability.
Findings from Exemplary Writing Methods
Teacher Educators

- Writing was viewed as a tool of power and a voice for oppressed and marginalized people. Participants believed it was an act of social justice to teach writing well, with writer’s choice and voice supported throughout.

- All participants implemented a writing process approach with explicit instruction and aimed to develop candidates’ content knowledge of writing, experiential knowledge as writers, and pedagogical content knowledge for teaching writing.
Findings from Exemplary Writing Methods
Teacher Educators

- A rhetorical genre stance undergirded the participants’ pedagogies of connected reading and writing processes, including the deconstruction and production of texts.

- Instructional strategies focused on constructivist and experiential methods that emphasized modeling, deconstruction, and reconstruction of text elements and writing devices through interactions with authentic texts.
Findings from Exemplary Writing Methods
Teacher Educators

- The writing teacher educators held complex conceptions of assessment and believed its purpose was to inform instruction. Assessment methods were multifaceted and encompassed individual and group assessment as well as snapshots and longitudinal assessment. Participants had a competence-based, growth mindset toward both candidates' and children’s writing development.

- Participants maintained extensive connections to K-12 classrooms through research engagements, volunteer work, and practicum supervision, which directly affected what they taught and materials used in coursework. Many writing methods courses included field experiences where candidates applied course content.
Additional Findings

Qualitative data revealed a number of elements present in the instruction of exemplary teachers of writing that match with what we know about effective writing instruction. Participants provided instruction to teacher candidates emphasizing the following:

- Developing the self as a writer through assignments that varied in genres with reflections for discussion
- Experiencing the art of writing by teacher candidates so that self-recognition of oneself as a writer was considered important to teach (voice and choice, as well as craft)
- Assignments that asked teacher candidates to consider their own learning about writing pedagogy and how that might be extended to K-12 students
- Building confidence in the self as writer as necessity for teaching writing
Discussion

Qualitative data revealed a number of elements present in the instruction of exemplary teachers of writing that match with what we know about effective writing instruction. Participants provided instruction to teacher candidates emphasizing the following:

- Learning to write for different audiences
- Modeling the writing process
- Authentic writing for authentic purposes
- Assignments that help develop writing instruction for K-12 students (lesson plans, assessment, fieldwork, case studies, portfolios)
- Applying the research on writing to classroom instruction
- On demand writing
Limitations and Future Research

- Contextual differences limit the findings. For example, the differences in field assignments in the programs we examined. Research is needed on the impact of taking learning about writing instruction into the field.

- A need exists to examine candidates who graduated from their programs to further determine the impact of program instruction on the actual practice of novice teachers.

- The study did not include observation; actual interview transcripts reflect differences in interviewer questioning (e.g., depth and probes into questions).
Ideas on Future Research

- Future research might include interviews with candidates about what writing pedagogy they learned from their course assignments.

- Future research should also incorporate observations of writing course instructors to deepen our understanding of how they teach candidates about writing pedagogy in class sessions or online.

- Future research must focus on what writing courses mean for sustained learning. For example, what mediating elements do new teachers find in K-12 schools?
Implications for Teacher Preparation

• Reading is complex and pedagogy has been addressed through research and promising practices.

• Writing instruction, in contrast, has not received equal attention.

• Writing needs to be more prominent in Language Arts classes. We recommend more attention, time, and research focused on writing pedagogy.

• Based on the research presented here, and ongoing investigations, it seems a stand alone writing course might improve the writing instruction provided to K-12 students.
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Thank you!