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Developing Preservice Writing Teachers' Professional Judgment: Design Conjectures for Supporting Equitable and Rigorous Writing Instruction

Cover Page Footnote

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Developing Pre-Service Teachers’ Professional Judgment: Design Conjectures for Supporting Equitable and Rigorous Writing Instruction

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How can secondary preservice teachers be supported to develop as intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instructors? This question is important, because secondary students from all backgrounds—but particularly those from traditionally underserved groups—continue to struggle with writing performance, both on standardized writing assessments and once they enter the working world (National Assessment Governing Board, 2011; National Commission on Writing, 2003; 2004). Students will also need stronger preparation as writers, because the Common Core State Standards arguably require more and more intellectually rigorous writing, and digital composition skills are becoming ever more necessary in daily life and in the workplace (Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman, 2012; National Writing Project & DeVoss, Eidman-Aadal & Hick, 2010; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011).

To meet the high demands of the future, writing research agrees that student writers will need opportunities to use digital and non-digital writing to frame and inquire into authentic problems and to communicate for a variety of purposes and audience (e.g., NWP & Nagin, 2006; Hillocks, 2002; Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). In a number of domains, providing opportunities for *all* students to frame and interpret authentic problems, to make arguments based on evidence, and to communicate their ideas has been called *ambitious instruction*, because it is both intellectually rigorous and equitable (Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Cohen, 2011). Ambitious instruction earns its name because it is difficult to enact: Intellectually rigorous and equitable instruction depends upon the teacher’s ability to work in partnership with students to unveil and build upon students’ thinking (Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Cohen, 2011). Thus, intellectually rigorous and equitable instruction is deeply relational, interactive work, which requires teachers to deploy substantial professional judgment about content, students, and pedagogical approaches.

This article is ultimately interested in how preservice teachers can be supported, in teacher education, to develop the professional judgment they will need to teach writing in ways that are intellectually rigorous and equitable, or ambitious. I will first specify what ambitious secondary writing instruction looks like, highlighting why it requires substantial professional judgment. I then describe modal writing instruction in the United States, discussing a few of the reasons that intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instruction is relatively rare in secondary classrooms in the United States. One reason is that teachers commonly report a lack of adequate preparation for teaching writing. Thus, this article focuses on how teacher education can better support preservice writing teachers so that they can develop the professional judgment they will need to teach writing ambitiously. I provide a theoretical framework for how preservice teachers might be supported to develop professional judgment by combining sociocultural ideas about concept development with content-neutral ideas about practice-based teacher education. Using this theoretical framework, I review research on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing.

Based on this review, I make design conjectures for how teacher educators might support preservice teachers in learning to teach writing rigorously and equitably. Design conjectures are conjectures about “how theoretical propositions might be reified within designed environments to support learning” (Sandoval, 2004, p. 215). They are based on existing literature on learning in specific domains and are offered at a level of specificity that allows them to be empirically refined or rejected. The body of work available on how teachers learn to teach writing is small, so these conjectures are necessarily provisional. Nonetheless, they build upon prior work on how teachers learn to teach writing, practice-based approaches to teacher education, as well as sociocultural theories of concept development, to start a conversation about supporting writing teachers’ development of professional judgment.

As will be explained in the final sections of this article, I conjecture that preservice writing teachers should participate in pedagogies of investigation and enactment that support their participation in: (1) a community of writers that encourages reflection on writing processes; (2) collaborative assessments of student work; and (3) student-teacher writing conferences. I report on the first cycle of a design study using these conjectures elsewhere (Kane, 2015a; 2015b). To ground this discussion on supporting preservice teachers’ development as intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instructors, I begin with a discussion of what intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instruction is.

Intellectually Rigorous and Equitable (Ambitious) Writing Instruction

Generally speaking, intellectually rigorous, equitable instruction, which is often called *ambitious*, gives students opportunities to “frame problems fruitfully, to make disciplined arguments, and to interpret material and defend results convincingly” (Cohen, 2011, p. 47). In short, in ambitious instruction, students are given opportunities to participate in strategic decision-making in a particular domain. Such instruction always takes place in partnership with students, since ambitious

instructors must, “treat students as sense-makers” and “attend to students as individuals and learners” (Lampert et al., 2013).

But what does this mean in the context of writing instruction? For many, ambitious instruction’s emphasis on strategies and authentic sensemaking will call to mind ideas associated with process writing instruction. Advocates of process writing instruction generally see writing “not as a set of prescriptions to follow but as a strategy for organizing one’s thoughts and communicating those thoughts to others” (Kennedy, 1998, p. 8). While definitions of process writing instruction often vary in their particulars, proponents generally agree that writing is an iterative process, and that, to learn to write well, writers need extended opportunities to write for authentic purposes and audiences (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Process writing instruction, then, can be understood as an ambitious form of writing instruction, because of its focus on students as problem-solvers, analysts, and interpreters of their own and others’ writing. To paraphrase Cohen (2011), process writing instruction can help students to frame problems fruitfully, make disciplined arguments, interpret material, and defend their stances.

Early instantiations of process writing instruction, however, have been critiqued for perpetuating inequity. At the outset of the field’s move toward process writing instruction, teachers were encouraged to avoid “detailed instruction in specific aspects of writing,” in favor of encouraging teachers to create environments, such as the Writers Workshop, in which students could write (Smagorinsky and Whiting, 1995, p. 61). As the title of Elbow’s (1998) influential book on the subject suggests, early instantiations of process writing instruction were often about *Writing without Teachers* (see also, Graves, 1981; Calkins, 1991). However, critics have argued that, by relegating teachers to the back of the room, some students were denied access to implicit linguistic and literary forms which the culture of power values (Ball, A., 2006; Delpit, 1995; De La Paz & Graham, 2002). More bluntly, critics argued that, if teachers step to the back of the room and simply let students write, only those who are already familiar with middle-class, White expectations for language use would flourish (Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983). Research on writing instruction in culturally diverse classrooms has noted that students will need access to explicit strategy instruction *in the context of meaningful opportunities to write extended pieces* (Ball, 2006). To teach in ways that are intellectually rigorous *and* equitable, then, teachers must don a more “assertive role in pointing student learning in a particular direction” (Smagorinsky and Whiting, 1995, p. 73) than the pure facilitator for which early instantiations of process writing instruction called.

As work on process writing instruction and writer’s workshop continues to mature, it has begun to focus more squarely on what it means to provide “explicit strategy instruction” in the context of meaningful opportunities for students to write. One popular solution has been the “mini-lesson,” which is a short, focused lesson on particular strategies that students might use to improve their writing (Atwell, 1998). For example, during a mini-lesson, a teacher might model one or more strategies for prewriting, showing students the kinds of guiding questions and thinking strategies they might use to generate ideas for their own work (Gallagher, 2011). A teacher might also use a mini-lesson to support students’ reading of mentor texts. A mentor

text is an exemplar text, often but not necessarily by a published author, which students learn to read with an eye toward writers' craft techniques that students might build upon or borrow as they write their own pieces (Ray, 1999). For example, students might notice a journalist's use of transition words like *therefore* or *however*; Sandra Cisneros's use of simile; or Ernest Hemingway's use of participial phrases (Noden, 1998; Ray, 1999). Students then analyze, interpret, and discuss how the author's use of particular craft techniques influences meaning. Armed with these insights into linguistic and literary forms, students return to their own, ongoing, authentic writing to try the techniques and strategies that were modeled or that they investigated through mentor texts.

Central to intellectually rigorous and equitable approaches to writing instruction, then, is that students have access to a variety of linguistic and literary forms, together with justifications for their use, but these forms are not required or prescribed. They are presented as a few of many possibilities students might use to as they engage in the writing process. For instance, a student may decide that he is struggling to convey the anxiety he felt before riding a roller coaster over the summer. He may decide to emulate Hemingway's use of participial phrases to show that anxiety, or he may confer with a peer or with his teacher about other possible solutions. Through these conferences, the student may decide to convey his anxiety through simile, much as he had seen Sandra Cisneros do.

Indeed, conferring is another central aspect of equitable and intellectually rigorous writing instruction. In her review of effective practices for writing instruction in culturally diverse classrooms, Ball (2006) notes that writing conferences are particularly effective, because they allow students to have maximal interaction with teachers around their own writing. Thus, writing conferences are another way to support students' access to a variety of linguistic and literary forms in the context of students' authentic and extended opportunities to write. Writing conferences carry the added benefit of placing students' intellectual and affective thinking at the center of classroom interaction. As is characteristic of intellectually rigorous and equitable instruction, writing conferences have the potential to focus on and build upon students' thinking.

Thus, process approaches to writing instruction—as long as they include multiple opportunities for students to access a variety of linguistic and literary forms, concepts, and strategies that are useful in writing—are an example of intellectually rich and equitable writing instruction. Because process writing approaches ask students to write for their own purposes and audiences and to make choices between and among a variety of writing strategies and craft techniques, students have the opportunity to frame problems they see in their writing, to select among a variety of techniques to solve problems in their writing, and to interpret the models and mentor texts they have seen in order to devise solutions.

What, though, should the ambitious writing teacher do when confronted with a student who begins a writing conference with declarations like, "I'm done," or "I'm not a writer," or—reluctantly—"I'll put commas in there if you want. Where do they go?" Here lies the crux of difficulties with ambitious writing instruction: Ambitious instruction is, first and foremost, a partnership with students. It is "conducted in

thoughtful conversation” with students, and it depends upon students’ affective and intellectual thinking to proceed (Cohen, 2011). Yet students do not always articulate their thinking about writerly decision-making in neat, easy-to-use packages. As Ladson-Billings (2006) describes culturally relevant pedagogies, so it is with intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instruction: Preservice teachers’ common refrain, “Yes, but how do we do it?” cannot be simply answered, because the answers depend not on deploying a list of specific teaching activities, but on teachers’ decision-making in light of their understanding of social contexts, students, curricula, and instruction. To participate in dialogic writing instruction, then, teachers need professional judgment.

In this case, the hypothetical writing instructor must make a decision about how to respond to a student’s assertion that she is “done.” Is she done? What does it mean to be done with a piece of writing? Who gets to decide? Does this student need more experience evaluating her own work and that of others so that she can make better judgments about whether a piece is done? Is this student simply exhausted by a 12-year stream of red marks all over her papers, and now—as a senior—she is done writing in both a literal and metaphorical sense? To respond in the moment to this declaration, an ambitious writing instructor needs to have deep knowledge of her students, of writing and what it means to be a writer, and of teaching and what it means to be an ambitious instructor (Cohen, 2011). And then this teacher has to decide. To do so, she will draw upon her professional judgment. As writing teacher educators, it is our job to support preservice teachers so that they have ample professional judgment on which to draw.

Modal Writing Instruction in the United States: Not Typically Ambitious

Unfortunately, modal writing instruction in the United States is not typically ambitious. In 2006, Applebee and Langer followed up on a survey of writing instructional practices that they conducted thirty years earlier. They found that writing instruction was—on the whole—largely unchanged. Most writing instruction in the United States is characterized, as it was thirty years ago, by very few, very short print assignments, lectures on writing formats like the five paragraph essay, and decontextualized grammar instruction. Indeed, even digital technologies seem not to have changed the landscape of writing instruction substantially. In 2006, computers were most often used to conduct research for traditional research papers, or for their word processing software.

However, an exclusive focus on grammatical conventions or the use of particular formats like the five-paragraph essay is not the foundation of intellectually rigorous or equitable approaches to writing instruction. Grammar worksheets in which students repeatedly identify past participles, for example, do not engage students in affective or intellectual thinking that is devoted to authentic problem solving. Studies have repeatedly found that such instruction may even have a harmful effect on student writing, since it takes time away from opportunities for students to write authentic, extended pieces (Hillocks, 1986; Graham & Perrin, 2007).

Five-paragraph essays have been maligned on similar grounds: Writing a five-paragraph essay does not ask students to participate in authentic sensemaking

about the world. Instead, Hillocks (2002) called the five-paragraph essay a formulaic, on-demand pursuit of “unfocused, rambling and more or less thoughtless” writing (p. 77). Even proponents of this form, which some estimate to be at least 500 years old (Johnson, Smagorinsky & Cook, 2003), note that the five-paragraph essay is a “helpful but contrived” exercise (Nunally, 1991). Other evidence suggests that writing is most often assigned, rather than taught (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Thus, it seems that typical writing instruction is usually a better example of what ambitious writing instruction is *not*, rather than what it *is*.

Why Is Ambitious Writing Instruction Relatively Rare?

The rarity of ambitious writing instruction can be explained by history, policy, and—of greatest concern for this article—a lack of teacher preparation in writing. From a historical perspective, the whims of the muse were said to govern text generation. Thus, it was assumed that writing could not be taught: Individuals were either visited by a muse, or they were not. People are writers, or they are not. This view is still prevalent today, even among those who hope to teach writing (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Thus, writing instruction was considered to be effective when it focused on what it was possible to learn: namely, the conventions of punctuation, grammar, and language usage, as well as common formats for writing (Kennedy, 1998). This focus on conventions and formats for writing, often called Current Traditional Rhetoric, dominated U. S. classrooms through the nineteenth century and into the 1960s.

Indeed, a focus on format and conventions is still influential in terms of how teachers actually teach writing (Applebee & Langer, 2006). However, more modern research has cited not the muse, but federal and state educational policies and assessments for the prevalence of decontextualized grammar instruction and instruction in reproducing specific formats, like the five-paragraph essay (Hillocks, 2002; McCarthey and Sun, 2011; Whitney, Blau, Bright, Cabe, Dewar, et al., 2008).

Both of these arguments have merit and may deserve further attention among educational stakeholders, but of greatest concern for this article is that the prevalence of ambitious writing instruction has been hindered by teachers’ lack of preparation. Undoubtedly, individual teacher educators, as well as the many sites of the National Writing Project, are working to ameliorate this problem, but available survey data suggest that the majority of secondary teachers (71%) have received little to no preparation or instruction on how to teach writing (Kihara, Graham & Hawken, 2009). Older work on teacher preparation for writing instruction suggests that a focus on writing instruction often gets pushed aside in favor of a focus on content-area methods or reading instruction (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). More recently, the National Commission on Writing (2003) dubbed writing the “neglected ‘R,” since writing instruction is often overlooked in favor of attention to reading and “rithmetic”.

Teachers’ reported lack of preparation for writing instruction is particularly troubling, given that research highlights that ambitious instruction requires significant training. As is true in other content-focused domains (Cohen, 2011), ambitious approaches, such as process-oriented instruction in writing, show a greater

influence on students' writing performance when they are paired with strong professional development (Ball, A., 2006; Graham and Perrin, 2007; Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006; Whitney et al., 2008). It is not surprising that ambitious writing instruction requires substantial professional preparation and training, since ambitious writing instruction also requires substantial professional judgment. The question then becomes: How can teacher educators support preservice writing teachers' development of professional judgment?

Theoretical Framework: Supporting Professional Judgment through Practice-based Teacher Education

In the following sections, I describe current work on practice-based teacher education, sometimes called “core practices,” which is beginning to crack a long-standing code on supporting preservice teachers' development of professional judgment. I also note that many past attempts to teach the “practices” or “techniques” of teaching have been critiqued for presenting instruction as though it were technical work (Zeichner, 2012). Since technical work stands in absolute opposition to ambitious instruction, my theoretical framework suggests a way to make sure that a focus on teaching practices, this time around, will not devolve into an emphasis, in teacher education, on technical work: Using Vygotsky's work on concept development, “core” teaching practices can be understood as defining concepts of ambitious instruction. Pedagogies of investigation and enactment, which the Core Practices Consortium champions, align well with a sociocultural perspective on concept development, and therefore stand to support preservice teachers' development of ambitious teaching practices. The reader will note that my conceptual framework describes research on teaching in general, rather than research that is specific to ambitious writing instruction. Indeed, the contribution of this paper is ultimately to suggest how the field's content-neutral ideas on practice-based teacher education can be made specific to writing teacher education, based on research on how teachers learn to teach writing.

The Core Practices Consortium and preservice teachers' professional judgment. Members of the Core Practices Consortium have most visibly supported the notion that preservice teacher education should be characterized by a focus on the “core” practices of ambitious instruction (e.g., Core Practices Consortium, 2013; 2014; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Windschitl, Thompson & Braaten, 2011; McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013; Lampert et al., 2013). They argue that, by focusing on particular, “core” teaching practices in teacher education, preservice teachers can be supported to develop the professional judgment that characterizes ambitious instruction:

By highlighting specific, routine aspects of teaching that demand the exercise of professional judgment and the creation of meaningful intellectual and social community for teachers, teacher educators, and students, core practices may offer teacher educators powerful tools for preparing teachers for the constant, in-the-moment decision-making that the profession requires. (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013, p. 378)

Research on which teaching practices might be considered “core” to ambitious instruction is ongoing. According to Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald (2009), a preliminary list of characteristics for core practices stipulates that core practices must:

- Occur with high frequency in teaching
- Be able to be enacted by novices across curricula or instructional approaches
- Be approachable for novices
- Allow novices to learn more about students and teaching
- Preserve the integrity and complexity of teaching
- Be research-based and capable of supporting students’ learning

In light of principles like these, researchers at the University of Michigan’s TeachingWorks (2015) have been developing a set of “high-leverage” teaching practices that cross disciplines and could form the backbone of ambitious teacher education programs (TeachingWorks, 2015; Zeichner, 2012). Their list includes practices such as eliciting student thinking, running a class discussion, assessing student work, and communicating with parents.

Critiques of past practice-based approaches. Of course, any attempt to identify a streamlined list of “core” teaching practices is fraught with controversy. Some have argued that focusing too centrally on “core” teaching practices may overlook the real center of teaching: Students, whose joys and tragedies are the real center of teaching (Dutro & Cartun, 2016). Others point out that past instantiations of practice-based teacher education have supported preservice teachers in becoming technicians, rather than professionals who draw from a deep reservoir of thoughtful judgment about their students, their content, and their teaching (Zeichner, 2012). The Commonwealth Teacher Training study of the 1920s, process-product research of the 1960s and 1970s, and Lemov’s (2010) current work in *Teach Like a Champion* all fall into this category. As a whole, these bodies of work fail to consider adequately that teachers do not simply enact teaching techniques, they enact practices from a rich intellectual perspective on their disciplines, their students, and on pedagogy itself (Zeichner, 2012; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

For example, we might imagine a new teacher whose technically-focused teacher education program praised peer revision as a necessary teaching practice for a well-run Writers’ Workshop. While peer revision is widely seen as integral to Writers’ Workshop (e.g., Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001), peer revision—like so many ambitious instructional practices—will not inherently support students in framing, analyzing, or interpreting the rhetorical problems presented by their writing. Whitney and her colleagues (2008) provide an example: In their research, two teachers used peer revision. However, in one classroom, students engaged in little substantive discussion, circling punctuation and capitalization errors in their partner’s work. In the other, students had supportive discussions in which they helped each other to analyze and rethink the purpose of their writing, its audience, and how they could reorganize their writing in order to create something more rhetorically powerful and informative.

The first teacher’s classroom is an example of a technical use of peer revision. While this teacher understood that peer revision exists as a potential

teaching activity, she did not understand its function. Ambitious versions of peer revision require more than surface-level punctuation checks. The teacher-as-technician did not understand that peer revision requires that students have, among other things, a vision of what rhetorically powerful writing in a given genre looks like, and models of how to support their peers with useful, constructive feedback. Presumably, students in the second teachers' classroom had been introduced to these ideas. Ambitious writing instructors know that placing desks side-by-side will not be sufficient in order to support students in having intellectually rigorous discussions about their writing. Instead, ambitious writing teachers would have spent intensive time eliciting, for example, her students' visions of strong memoir or their understanding of how to convey constructive criticism to peers. Based on this information, ambitious instructors make decisions about how and when to introduce and sustain peer revision sessions in their classrooms. Teachers who use peer revision conferences ambitiously do so by making professional judgments in response to the affective and intellectual thinking of their students.

Yet Zeichner's (2012) work suggests that the first teacher, who led her students on a witch-hunt for misplaced modifiers, is not alone in her endeavors. Instead, historical efforts to establish practice-based approaches to teacher education have been "plagued by a narrow technical focus," which has not supported preservice teachers to understand when these practices might be useful or to what end, nor have they adequately attended to the historical and cultural contexts in which teaching practices are always embedded (Zeichner, 2012, p. 380). Presenting teaching as technical work is particularly damaging where efforts to teach equitably are concerned, since teaching in all contexts—but especially in those serving students from traditionally underserved backgrounds—must be done in constant, responsive partnership with students' ever-changing affective and academic thinking (Cohen, 2011; Zeichner, 2012; Dutro & Cartun, 2016).

Ensuring that practice-based approaches support professional judgment: Instructional activities and concept development. Fortunately, developments in practice-based teacher education, as well as sociocultural understandings of concept development, can support the field in ensuring that focusing on a subset of teaching practices does not devolve into technical work. By beginning with a sociocultural understanding of concepts, we can provide justifications from learning theory about how a focus on particular practices of ambitious instruction can consistently steer preservice teachers toward professional judgment, rather than toward technical work. In particular, core teaching practices can be understood not as action separated from theories and principles, as is the predominant way of understanding *practice* in Western thought (Lampert, 2010), but as concepts of ambitious instruction.

Let me unpack this idea. In Western culture, theory and practice are often glossed as two separate entities (Lampert, 2010; Smagorinsky et al., 2003). Theory—or formal, generalizable abstraction—is typically considered more valuable: People are expected to apply theory to practice (Lave, 1996). However, people are often not particularly good at understanding which theoretical principles apply to a given situation: It is often the case that a single theoretical principle does not

straightforwardly apply to practice, and the world does not necessarily lend itself to interpretation in light of a coherent set of theoretical principles (Kennedy, 1987).

Vygotsky (1986) had a different idea about the relationship between theory and practice. Instead of seeing these as opposites, Vygotsky posited that formal, generalizable abstractions (theory) and activity-in-the-world (practice) are actually two indivisible aspects of a concept. That is, concepts develop when people make sense of their activity-in-the-world in light of formalized abstractions, and people make sense of formalized abstractions in light of their activity-in-the-world. Thus, a concept “derives its grounding, coherence, and meaning” through activity-in-the-world (Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson, 2003, p. 1408). So, for instance, the ambitious writing teacher, described earlier, likely understood the abstraction that peer revision involves constructive feedback. This abstraction informed her enactment of peer revision, and—crucially—her enactment of peer revision also informed her understanding of the abstractions “constructive feedback” and “peer revision.”

Thus, from Vygotsky’s viewpoint, abstractions and activity-in-the-world are always mutually constitutive: One does not make sense without the other. Although it is tempting to align the idea of core practices with traditional, Western conceptualizations of *practice* as action, Vygotsky’s (1986) work helps us see that core practices are actually *not* instantiations of action, devoid of theoretical ideas. Instead, core practices are concepts of ambitious instruction. They include both formalized, theoretical ideas, and activity-in-the-world. As McDonald and her colleagues (2013) have argued, core teaching practices will not come alive until they are “embedded into an instantiation of teaching-in-action” (p. 382). This argument is eerily similar to Vygotsky’s (1986) work on concept development, since he argued that generalizable abstractions are “dead verbalisms” until they are paired with their necessary peer and counterpart, activity-in-the-world.

Members of the Core Practices Consortium have called “instantiations of teaching-in-action” *instructional activities* (Lampert et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2013). An instructional activity is a recognizable unit of instructional work that “contains” core practices, principles, and content knowledge (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013). To explain this, I return to the peer revision example. One foundational principle of ambitious writing instruction is that students must have opportunities to reconsider and revise their rhetorical decision-making in the context of their own authentic writing (e.g., Hayes & Flower, 1980). However, as we saw, in the technician-teacher’s classroom, peer revision was divorced from this precept, and it became a hunt for surface-level errors (Whitney et al., 2008). Thus, in her room, peer revision was not an example of ambitious writing instruction, but the deployment of technical work. Only when sophisticated ideas about ambitious writing instruction were paired with the instructional activity, peer revision, was the teacher able to use peer editing as part of an intellectually rigorous and equitable approach to writing instruction. Teachers must not only learn about the technical features of peer editing, such as the idea that students will work in pairs and look at each other’s writing; they must also understand that one purpose of peer revision is to

support students in building skills in collaboratively analyzing and interpreting the rhetorical power of their own and their peers' written work.

Thus, teachers' enactment of core teaching practices and instructional activities are only ambitious if they are also conceptual in the Vygotskian sense: The action cannot be separated from theoretical principles of ambitious instruction. One of the goals of this review, then, is to highlight instructional activities and core practices from that research on how teachers learn to teach writing highlights as useful for supporting writing teachers' learning.

Pedagogies of investigation and enactment: Supporting concept development about ambitious instruction. The Core Practices Consortium and Vygotsky (1986) also share similar conceptualizations about how concepts/core practices of ambitious teaching develop. According to the Core Practices Consortium, core practices develop through a cyclical and iterative process of investigating and enacting core practices. In pedagogies of investigation, preservice teachers are introduced to a teaching practice in the context of particular instructional activities, have access to a number of models of that practice, and then decompose and analyze the practice (Grossman, Compton, Igra, Ronfeldt, Shahan et al., 2009). In pedagogies of enactment, preservice teachers have opportunities to enact the practice and instructional activity in an environment of reduced complexity. Preservice teachers then continue the cycle by analyzing and investigating their own work and that of their peers in pedagogies of investigation. They then enact the practice once again (Grossman & McDonald, 2008).

Interestingly, sociocultural understandings of concept development underline the value of this cyclical approach to supporting preservice teachers' learning about concepts/core practices of ambitious instruction (Vygotsky, 1986; Smagorinsky, Cook & Johnson, 2003). Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson (2003) note that concept development is a cyclical and repetitive process that occurs over time and across contexts: "without continual reinforcement over time and settings, a concept does not have an opportunity to develop beyond its rudimentary stages" (p. 1424). Thus, to develop concepts, preservice teachers need opportunities to recontextualize the formal abstractions they are learning across varying examples of activity-in-the-world, and they need varying examples of activity-in-the-world in order to make more robust sense of formal abstractions. Concepts develop through a dialectic relationship between formal abstractions and activity-in-the-world.

In a similar way, the Core Practices Consortium conceptualizes pedagogies of investigation as a set of pedagogies intended to support preservice teachers' understandings of formal abstractions related to students, content, and ambitious instruction. Pedagogies of enactment, on the other hand, involve opportunities to enact these formalisms through activity-in-the-world. In this way, pedagogies of investigation and enactment form a dialectic through which ambitious concepts of instruction (i.e., core practices) can develop (Grossman et al., 2009; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013). Also of interest is that teacher educators do not need to begin with pedagogies of investigation—teacher educators can begin with pedagogies of enactment, if it suits the learning goals of the course (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013). Since Vygotsky (1986) saw formal

abstractions and activity-in-the-world as two indivisible sides of a coin of concept development, he would agree: Pedagogies designed to support thoughtful activity-in-the-world are as likely to inform pedagogies designed to support formal abstraction as the reverse, since activity-in-the-world and formal abstractions are ultimately indivisible. What is important is that, as teacher educators, we must recognize that we have not taught concepts of ambitious writing instruction in ways that allow for and develop professional judgment until preservice teachers have had opportunities to make sense of activity-in-the-world in terms of formal abstractions and vice versa.

To provide a more specific example, preservice teachers will need opportunities to understand peer revision in terms of principles of ambitious writing instruction, such as the idea that students learn to write through collaborative and individual attempts to frame and interpret rhetorical strategies with respect to authentic purposes and audiences. Preservice teachers will also need chances to understand this complex principle of ambitious writing instruction through their experiences with peer revision. The idea is that preservice teachers' enactment of peer revision will reinforce an understanding of principles related to ambitious writing instruction and that preservice teachers' understanding of principles related to ambitious writing instruction will reinforce their enactment of peer editing. However, this mutual reinforcement this will only happen if formalized abstractions about ambitious writing instruction are available and packaged with an instructional activity that is specific to particular content domains.

Thus, in the following section, I describe the instructional activities that research on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing frequently highlights as valuable for learning to become an ambitious writing instructor. Based on my synthesis, I offer design conjectures for methods courses intended to support preservice writing teachers in learning to teach writing ambitiously. In short, I ask: What core practices and instructional activities does the literature on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing suggest that writing teacher educators emphasize?

Brief Overview: Three Design Conjectures for Ambitious Writing Teacher Education

Research on how secondary writing teachers learn to teach writing is relatively scarce. This conceptual review of the literature began as a search of the ERIC database of educational research, using terms like “secondary writing teacher education,” “writing instruction,” and “learning to teach writing.” I also mined reference lists from each article I found until new research no longer revealed itself. Because I review the literature in light of ideas from practice-based teacher education and sociocultural ideas about concept development, I consulted many more articles than appear here, and I do not claim that this is an exhaustive review. Instead, it is a conceptual review, intended to support writing teacher educators in building upon valuable, but content-neutral, work in practice-based teacher education. To make sense of research on how secondary writing teachers learn to teach writing, I looked for evidence in the research about whether and how ideas from content-neutral practice-based teacher education aligned with research on how writing teachers learn to teach writing. For example, Whitney and her colleagues' (2008) study of different

teachers' implementation of process writing instruction and Johnson, Smagorinsky and Cook's (2007) study of a preservice teacher's use of the five-paragraph essay were valuable here. I also read the literature with an eye toward identifying potentially useful instructional activities and core practices for ambitious writing teacher education.

My review yielded three design conjectures: Writing teacher educators can support preservice teachers' development as ambitious writing instructors by engaging them in cycles of investigation and enactment in the following instructional activities:

1. participation in a community of writers that encourages reflection on writing processes;
2. participation in collaborative assessments of student work; and
3. participation in writing conferences.

As will be discussed, not all of the instructional activities in the literature on learning to teach writing happen in interactive work with students. Nonetheless, they are all instructional activities in which students'—and teachers'—thinking about writing is a central focus.

Design Conjecture 1: Preservice Teachers Should Participate in a Community of Writers that Encourages Reflection on Writing Processes.

Perhaps the most vocal advocate for writing teachers' participation in a community of writers is the National Writing Project (NWP), which makes this claim for teachers of digital and non-digital writing alike: “writers are the best teachers of writers simply because they are involved in the practice of writing” (Lieberman and Wood, 2003; NWP and DeVoss, Eidman-Aidahl, and Hicks, 2010; NWP and Nagin, 2006). Lieberman and Wood's (2003) two-year case study of two NWP sites concluded that asking writing teachers to write, to give feedback to peers, and to receive feedback themselves was a defining characteristic of the NWP, and one that allowed teachers to see, experience, and reflect upon the writing process: “Actual engagement in writing allows [teachers] to reflect on the *processes* of writing so they will more deeply understand these processes and be better prepared to teach them” (p. 15, emphasis in original).

Indeed, both personal accounts and more systematic case studies suggest that teachers' experience in the NWP as writers might be part of what makes the NWP “life-changing” (Davis, 2004; Kaplan, 2008; Whitney, 2008). In her case study, Whitney (2008) noted that teachers who claimed that the NWP was “transformative” accepted the NWP's invitation to write and to share their work. Those who did not produce their own written work for the summer institute—and therefore participated only facilely in a community of writers—did not find their time in the NWP to be especially meaningful, and their work did not suggest improvements in their understanding of writing instruction.

Despite the hopeful tenor of findings about the need for teachers of writing to write themselves, however, it should be noted that much of the support for this idea comes out of the NWP itself (Davis, 2004; Kaplan, 2008; NWP and DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, and Hicks, 2010; NWP and Nagin, 2006). Because the NWP is

publicly invested in the idea that writing teachers should write, we should not necessarily expect a critique of this premise from those quarters. Indeed, Wilson's (1994) case study suggests that teachers struggle to maintain a commitment to what they learned in NWP summer institutes once they return to their home schools, which may or may not be supportive of the writing instructional practices the NWP advocates.

Unfortunately, very little research has investigated questions about how teachers' participation in communities of writers influences their instruction or their students' writing. I located only one study that sought to identify links between teachers' participation in a community of writers and their students' achievement in writing. Whyte and her colleagues (2007) split their 35 participating English Language Arts teachers into four groups, divided by whether teachers had attended one of the NWP's summer institutes and whether or not they themselves had an active writing life. One's writing life was measured based on participation in a writerly culture: how often a teacher reported having attended a poetry reading, or how often a teacher wrote online, for instance. The authors then compared students' pre-and post-scores on a writing assessment, aggregated by teacher.

The findings provide partial support for the idea that writing teachers should write and participate in peer review groups themselves. NWP teachers with active writing lives taught students whose writing scores showed statistically significant improvement. An active writing life alone, however, was not enough to engender stronger writing scores. Interestingly, participation in the NWP, without an active writing life, also did not produce statistically significant improvement in P-12 students' writing scores (Whyte et al., 2007). According to Whyte and her colleagues (2007), then, the interaction effect between participation in the NWP and having an active writing life suggests that "the writing by teachers central to the NWP may combine with the two other core elements of the NWP's programs...(demonstrations of practices for teaching writing and professional reading and study) to improve student achievement in writing" (Whyte et al., 2007).

Whitney's (2008) case study of teachers' "transformation" in the NWP further supports the idea that, in order to learn how to teach writing ambitiously, teachers need to learn about writing instruction through demonstrations of practices and professional reading and to participate in a community of writers. Her analysis found that only those teachers who spent their time in the NWP actively participating in the practices of a community of writers, such as writing and receiving feedback on their writing, experienced shifts in their identities as writing instructors. This is consistent with sociocultural theories of learning, which suggest that learning is a change in participation in practice (e.g., Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Relationship to concept development. Findings about the importance of writing teachers writing themselves while they learn principals and abstractions about ambitious writing instruction jive with Vygotsky's framework on concept development. From a Vygotskian perspective, teachers need activity-in-the-world to ground and make meaning of formalized abstractions they might hear about writing and writing instruction. Participating in a community of writers may constitute important activity-in-the-world for those learning to teach writing. Formalized

abstractions about ambitious writing instruction, on the other hand, may arise through other aspects of work in the NWP, such as demonstrations of practices for teaching writing and professional reading and study. For example, the “writing process” is a formless abstraction until it is grounded and refined through activity-in-the-world. Teachers may come to develop concepts about the writing process by participating in the writing process and then discussing their own writing processes with others, thus allowing an interaction between activity-in-the-world and formalized concepts about that activity.

Research specific to teachers’ learning has also found that teachers should be engaged as learners in the areas in which they ask students to learn, but at a level suitable to them (Wilson & Berne, 1999; Desimone, 2009). In other subject areas, researchers argue that experiences which engage teachers as learners, such as solving math problems at the edge of their own understanding and conducting scientific experiments, are particularly effective in helping teachers to incorporate student thinking into their instructional decision-making (Borko, 2004; Cohen, 2011). In short, when teachers investigate their own thinking in a content area, they are more likely to be able to investigate the thinking of their students. Indeed, writing one’s self seems particularly important given the diffidence about writing and the lack of preparation for writing instruction many teachers of both digital and non-digital writing report (Dalton, 2012; Kiuahara et al., 2009; Norman & Spencer, 2005).

The idea that preservice teachers should participate in a community of writers seems theoretically defensible, then, since such participation may support teachers’ identity and concept development as writers, as well as their understanding of students’ thinking about writing. As a field, we need to continue to refine these suppositions through empirical analysis, since the research base on writing teachers’ participation in a community of writers is still in development. Nonetheless, based on evidence that is currently available, I conjecture that participating in a community of writers—particularly one in which preservice teachers discuss their own writing processes—is beneficial for concept development about ambitious writing instruction, since it may support teachers’ understanding of the writing process, their identity development as writers, and their understanding of students’ thinking about writing.

Design Conjecture 2: Preservice Teachers Should Participate in Collaborative Assessments of Student Writing.

The collaborative assessment of student work appeared consistently in research on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing. Analyses of how secondary teachers learn to teach writing suggest that teachers’ facilitated, collaborative assessment of student work supported teachers in creating shared meanings about writing assessment, which—in turn—led to a host of desirable outcomes: The studies revealed improvements in students’ writing performance (Anness, Bartlett & Allen, 2007), observed changes in target writing instruction practices (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2008; Allen, Ort & Schmidt, 2009; Strahan & Hedt, 2009), improved confidence in teaching writing (Limbrick & Knight, 2005; Reid, 2007), knowledge of what development in writing looks like (Limbrick & Knight,

2005), and a new understanding that writing assessment should play a role in designing future writing instruction (Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca & Boscardin, 2008; Allen, Ort & Schmidt, 2009; Reid, 2007).

Relationship to concept development. Although these articles do not set out to analyze how teachers' collaborative assessments of student work contributed to their concept development around writing instruction, they agree that these collaborative discussions helped teacher groups create shared meanings—and perhaps concepts—about policy documents. They often described dialectic discussions in which teachers compared formal abstractions about writing, such as particular assessment scores, with examples of activity-in-the-world, such as students' written work. Thus, the collaborative assessment of student writing has the potential to support preservice teachers in making sense of examples of actual students' thinking in light of ideas about writing and writing instruction, and vice versa. As Vygotsky (1986) would argue, when collaborative assessments of student work involve dialectic negotiation about students' writing, they have the potential to support preservice teachers' development of more robust concepts about ambitious writing instruction.

The collaborative assessment of student work may also be an important way for preservice teachers to begin participating in a core practice of ambitious instruction, which research in teacher education has identified as important across content areas: eliciting student thinking (TeachingWorks, 2015; Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011). Making students' thinking visible is particularly vital for ambitious writing instructors, because teachers need to make complex decisions about their own and their students' roles in writing instruction. Advocates for educational equity often call for greater guidance from writing teachers, arguing that teachers must take on a more actively supportive role for students from historically underserved populations and students with disabilities (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Delpit, 1995), but others fear that overly explicit instruction may rob students of opportunities to become active participants in their own learning (Atwell, 1998). In classrooms, this debate is finally settled by the professional judgment of particular teachers, judgments made in light of teachers' understandings of what particular students on particular days are thinking, both academically and affectively. Thus, making writers' thinking visible is vital to intellectually rigorous and equitable approaches to writing instruction. Collaboratively assessing student writing may provide opportunities for preservice writing teachers to try out the essential work of eliciting student thinking at a reduced level of complexity, since student compositions do not require immediate response in the way that live students do (Grossman et al., 2009).

Thus, because the collaborative assessment of student writing allows preservice teachers to begin the essential work of eliciting student thinking, and because it allows preservice writing teachers to participate in dialectic conversations in which abstractions about writing and writing instruction can be compared with activity-in-the-world, I suggest that the collaborative assessment of student writing may be an important component of efforts to support preservice teachers as they learn to teach writing rigorously and equitably. Yet some may object that this instructional activity does not include actual activity-in-the-world, since student writing is not live,

interactive activity, but only a representation of it. Indeed, cycles of investigation and enactment are intended to allow novices to try out the relational and improvisational work of teaching (McDonald, Kazemi & Kavanaugh, 2013). This is a valid critique: The field of writing teacher education needs more research on how instructional activities that take place in the context of interactive work with students stands to support preservice writing teachers' learning about ambitious writing instruction. With this in mind, I offer my final design conjecture:

Design Conjecture 3: Preservice Teachers Should Participate in Writing Conferences.

In my review of the literature, only one study, by Aguirre-Muñoz and colleagues (2008), provided information about interactional practices teachers were asked to learn, as well as how their classroom practice changed, but it detailed a set of practices associated with systematic functional linguistics, which is not widely familiar either to writing instructors or advocates of ambitious instruction. Nonetheless, research on how teachers learn to teach writing is still suggestive about instructional activities in which novices might participate: The two “instructional activities” most touted by research on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing are concerned with eliciting students’ and teachers’ thinking about writing. Research values teachers’ participation in communities of writers, because such participation has the potential to lay bare teachers’ thinking about their own writing. Teachers may then use their discoveries about their own thinking as writers to make sense of their students’ thinking. Similarly, the collaborative assessment of student work is an opportunity for teachers to make sense of students’ thinking based on evidence in students’ written work.

Indeed, research on how K-12 students learn to write routinely highlights that students need to have access to the writerly thinking of others, often through teacher modeling of writing strategies, writing conferences, or an analysis of mentor texts, which allows students and teachers to collaboratively uncover a writer’s strategies (Graham & Perin, 2007; Ray, 1999; Hayes & Flower, 1980). Thus, much of intellectually rigorous and equitable writing instruction involves making thinking visible—students’ own thinking, the thinking of peer writers, and the thinking of more expert writers.

Because making thinking visible emerges as central to both research on how teachers learn to teach writing and to research on ambitious instruction across content areas, I suggest that preservice teachers should begin their learning about ambitious writing instruction by participating in instructional activities that require them to make students’ thinking visible—and respond to it. Those familiar with process writing instruction know that practitioner-oriented work has touted the writing conference as a long-standing—but interactionally intimidating—component of Writer’s Workshop (e.g., Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Wilson, 1994). In ambitious enactments of writing conferences, teachers are expected draw out students’ thinking about their writing processes and rhetorical decision-making, decide how they will respond to students’ thinking, and guide students toward more sophisticated forms of composition (Anderson, 2000). They are also supposed to do this in under five

minutes, which makes writing conferences interactionally and intellectually difficult work for beginning and veteran teachers alike.

Yet writing conferences are also an enticing instructional activity for preservice teachers to investigate and enact, since Ball's (2006) review of research on teaching writing in diverse classrooms suggests that students from non-dominant backgrounds benefit strongly from instructional activities like the writing conference, since they allow students to have maximal interaction with teachers around their written work. Writing conferences also encapsulate the heart of ambitious instruction: They ask teachers to elicit and build on students' thinking through the force of a student-teacher partnership in which both are called upon to do substantial relational and intellectual work (Anderson, 2000; Cohen, 2011).

Other instructional activities, such as mini-lessons involving teacher modeling or mentor texts (Gallagher, 2011; Ray, 1999), also present opportunities for preservice teachers to make student thinking visible, but they include the added challenge of making several students' thinking visible in one discussion, synthesizing that thinking while managing behavioral and time management concerns, and responding to students' thinking in ways that push the collective thinking of a class forward. While such work is central to ambitious writing instruction and its value cannot be overstated, it is perhaps one developmental step beyond conducting writing conferences. Preservice teachers are learners as well, and they may have very little previous experience eliciting and responding to student thinking at all. Thus, writing conferences may be a useful starting point for preservice writing teachers, since they ask preservice teachers to make visible and respond to the thinking of only one student at a time. This reduces the complexity of teaching while highlighting the heart of ambitious instruction: Interactional work conducted in relationship to students and their developing thinking (Cohen, 2011; Lampert & Graziani, 2009).

Discussion and Implications

This paper argues that intellectually rigorous and equitable (i.e., ambitious) writing instruction supports students' access to and experimentation with a number of literary and linguistic forms, which assists them as they inquire into, frame, and interpret problems through their own authentic writing. Grammar worksheets and lectures on format are widely considered to be limiting, overly explicit, and inadequate for supporting students' ability to use writing as an advantageous tool of inquiry in digital and non-digital contexts. In an effort to ensure that more authentic writing had space in classrooms, early advocates of process writing instruction suggested that teachers should step to the back of the classroom and so that students could write for their own authentic audiences and purposes. From the standpoint of equity, however, critics have argued that simply providing students with time to write is not enough, since novice writers, particularly those who hail from non-dominant backgrounds, those whose first language is not English, or those with disabilities, need access to a variety of linguistic and literary forms in order to learn to write well. The field is still grappling with an understanding of how to provide students with access to a variety of linguistic and literary forms without presenting writing in ways that are overly explicit and therefore intellectually deadening.

In this milieu, ambitious writing instructors must learn to teach writing by deploying their professional judgment. The Core Practices Consortium has provided useful guideposts for teacher educators to use as we seek to develop preservice teachers' professional judgment. However, historically, a focus on teaching "practices" (or activities) has not yielded strong professional judgment—instead, it has treated teaching as technical work. To ensure that current practice-based approaches to teacher education emphasize the development of professional judgment, rather than decontextualized, technical teaching techniques, I suggest that "core" practices can be understood as concepts of ambitious instruction. As such, core practices must remain moored to their intellectual, ambitious underpinnings in order to support preservice teachers in learning to teach ambitiously.

With this in mind, I reviewed the literature on how secondary teachers learn to teach writing in order to understand how precepts related to preservice teachers' development of professional judgment could be made specific to ambitious writing instruction. The literature highlights that preservice teachers should participate in a community of writers and in collaborative assessments of student writing. Interestingly, both of these instructional activities point to a core practice of ambitious instruction: the idea that students' and teachers' thinking needs to be made visible so that writing instruction can be both intellectually rigorous and equitable. With this in mind, I suggest another instructional activity that may be supportive of preservice teachers' development of professional judgment: Opportunities to investigate and enact writing conferences. I report elsewhere on preservice teachers' concept development about ambitious writing instruction in a methods course designed according to these conjectures (Kane, 2015a; 2015b).

As a field, we need more research on how preservice writing teachers' participation in particular instructional practices supports their development as ambitious instructors of writing. My current conjectures are based on a still-developing body of work on secondary writing teachers' learning. Nonetheless, the synthesis I provide here, and the conjectures I derived from that synthesis, might serve as a useful springboard for those interested in supporting more equitable and rigorous forms of writing instruction. In particular, this work provides suggestions for instructional activities that we, as teacher educators, can use to design pedagogies of investigation and enactment for preservice teachers. Perhaps more importantly, it helps situate current practice-based approaches to teacher education in sociocultural understandings of concept development, which can help to ensure that we are supporting preservice teachers to develop professional judgment, rather than a set of technical skills.

Supporting preservice writing teachers' professional judgment for writing instruction is especially important given students' struggles with writing, the increased rigor of writing that the Common Core State Standards expect, the rise of digital literacies, and increasing pressure to teach writing in ways that align with the expectations of state and district tests. To meet these demands, secondary students will need more and better writing instruction. Preservice writing teachers need opportunities to make professional judgments about writing instruction in settings of reduced complexity, and in the presence of those with more experience than their

own. These conjectures provide guidance for teacher educators who hope to play that very role. I look forward to future research, which will undoubtedly refine and improve upon the conjectures I present here.

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