



Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 4

2020

Learning to Teach Writing Across Contexts

Kristine Pytash

Kent State University, US, kpytash@kent.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte>



Part of the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation

Pytash, Kristine (2020) "Learning to Teach Writing Across Contexts," *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol8/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



Learning to Teach Writing Across Contexts

Kristine Pytash
Kent State University

Research has documented that preservice teachers learn to teach writing from a variety of sources, including their own experiences as students and writers, their university methods courses, and their experiences in the field (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Morgan & Pytash, 2014; Pardo, 2006; Smagorinsky, Rhym, and Moore, 2013; Smagorinsky, Shelton, & Moore, 2015). Often described in the literature are the tensions that preservice teachers experience when these sources have conflicting messages about how writing should be taught, specifically when there is a disconnect between their learning in field experiences and in university coursework. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Jacob, a preservice teacher, as he learned to teach writing across two middle school contexts. This research examines Jacob's experience during his methods course, which was embedded into an 8th grade classroom with an established writing workshop model. The research then follows Jacob into his student teaching experience at a middle school with a prescribed curriculum aligned to the state standardized achievement test.

Theoretical Perspectives

Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) is a theoretical stance that focuses on “the interaction of human activity and cognition within relevant environmental contexts” (Leko & Brownell, 2011, p. 230). Rooted in Vygotsky's theories (1978) about knowledge acquisition, this perspective takes into account the context where the activity takes place, as well as the beliefs, thoughts, actions, and history of those in the particular context. This is founded on the idea that activity is mediated and in relationships with particular communities (Engestrom, 2001); therefore, activity is “shaped and constrained by cultural factors” (Brayko, 2013, p. 49). Researchers have drawn on activity theory to investigate preservice teachers' learning and implementation of pedagogical practices (Grossman, et al., 1999; Grossman, et al., 2000; Smagorinsky, 2011). Grossman, et al., (2000) explain:

This framework focuses our attention on how beginning teachers develop goals while engaged in activity in particular settings, identify problems they must solve, and choose a set of tools to inform and conduct their teaching (p. 633).

Activity theory provides insight into the conceptual and pedagogical tools that teachers draw on when making decisions about classroom instruction (Grossman, et al., 1999; Smagorinsky, 2011). Conceptual tools are the “principles, frameworks, and ideas about teaching, learning, and English/ language arts acquisition that teachers use as heuristics to guide decisions about teaching and learning” (Grossman, et al., 1999, p. 11), while pedagogical tools are the “classroom practices, strategies, and resources that do not serve as broad conceptions to guide an array of decisions, but instead have more local and immediate utility” (Grossman, et al., 1999, p. 12). As Grossman, et al., (2000) contend:

Activity theory provides a framework for examining how teachers understand and use these tools in their teaching. Rather than suggesting that teachers do or do not use a particular strategy or understand a particular concept, activity theory helps us understand the process through which a person adopts, or appropriates, the pedagogical tools available for use in particular activity settings (p. 634).

Researchers have documented the divide between preservice teachers’ understanding of conceptual tools and their implementation of pedagogical tools when they enter K-12 settings (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Flessner & Lecklider, 2017; Smagorinsky, Shelton, & Moore, 2015). This was first described as the *two-worlds pitfall*, as Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) explained preservice teachers often encounter contradictory ideas about what they’ve learned about teaching in university methods courses and what they’ve learn to apply in their field experiences. Smagorinsky, et. al, (2015) broaden this to the *multiple-worlds pitfall* to document the “myriad of influences” preservice teachers encounter when learning to teach that may cause them to “act in inconsistent ways in their instruction to meet competing, if not always binary, expectations for their practice and their student outcomes” (Smagorinsky, et. al, 2015, p. 153).

The purpose of this study is to examine how Jacob (pseudonyms are used), a preservice teacher, learned about teaching writing and also learned to implement writing instruction during an early field experience and then again during his student teaching placement.

Methodology

This study took place at a large university in the Midwest, with approximately 40,800 students. The Integrated Language Arts program prepares undergraduate candidates for licensure in grades 7-12. The course, *Teaching*

Language and Composition, took place during the spring of the junior year and focused on theories and research-based practices about the teaching of writing. At the time of the study, the course had an embedded field experience at James Middle School (JMS).

At the beginning of the Teaching Language and Composition course, preservice teachers were informed of the research and asked to participate. Jacob agreed and then agreed to continue his participation in the research study after the course and into his senior year student teaching placement. Case studies are used to understand the meanings people make in particular contexts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Identifying Jacob as a case provided an opportunity to document his practices in detail over an extended period of time and across contexts.

This study follows Merriam's (1998) characterization of case studies as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The study was particularistic as it focused specifically on Jacob's learning and teaching of writing. It was descriptive as it was presented in a detailed manner, providing rich and "thick" descriptions of Jacob's experiences at JMS and his student teaching site. The study was also heuristic as it provided an explanation of the Jacob's experiences learning to teach writing across two activity settings, JMS and his student teaching site. This illuminates the salient experiences in Jacob's development as a writing teacher. Jacob identified as a Caucasian male in his early 20's. He considered himself a writer and enjoyed writing creative pieces. He was considered an academically successful student as recognized by his participation in the Honor's College in the University.

Role of the Researcher

I coordinate the Integrated Language Arts program and had Jacob as a student in class prior to him taking the Language and Composition course. While I did not have Jacob in class during the research study, I still call on Fecho's (2003) practitioner research to situate myself and to frame the lens through which the research was guided. Fecho (2003) describes the role of the practitioner researcher as "those of us in education and elsewhere who are reflective upon our won practice and who see to call our praxis – that dialogue between theory and practice – to the surface, the better to be able to understand that transaction" (p. 283). This research provided insights into the Integrated Language Arts program, for which I am responsible.

University Methods Course and Field Experience

The Language and Composition course and the field experience structure were grounded in theories of writing based on sociocultural theories and promoted the writing workshop model. James Middle School (JMS) is located in a suburban

area and during the time of this study JMS enrolled 552 middle school students. The Language and Composition course instructor, Elizabeth, worked closely with the 8th grade teacher, Amy, to design the field experience. Amy had already embedded a writing workshop in her classroom, frequently used mentor and model texts, conferences, and instructional supports, such as scaffolding, to develop her students as writers. The goal of the field experience was to have preservice teachers work directly with Elizabeth and Amy to conceptualize and implement lesson plans focused on writing instruction.

The field experience took place over a four-week period for one day a week for three hours. Preservice teachers were divided into teaching groups (typically 3-4 to a group) and worked as a group to plan and implement instruction for one of the days. The other days, preservice teachers observed other preservice teachers teach. Teaching groups worked closely with Elizabeth to plan lessons. Preservice teachers were required submitted revised plans and the planning process often took multiple cycles until the instructional plans were finalized. Feedback on lesson plans was used by Elizabeth to highlight the conceptual knowledge that she wanted preservice teachers to learn. She often used lesson planning as an opportunity to ask students questions about how they were using mentor texts, how they were scaffolding students' writing, and how they were asking questions to guide students thinking.

Student Teaching Site

Greendale Middle School is located in a large urban area and is part of a large public school district. The school serves students in grades 6-8. Of the approximately 544 students, 63% identify as Black, 26% identify as White, 7% identify as Bi-racial, and 4% identify as Hispanic. In previous years and at the time of the study, the middle school had received failing grades on the state report card with only 35.8% of eighth-grade students passing the state English language arts test.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected during two semesters: the semester Jacob took the Language and Composition and the semester that he had his student teaching experience. Data collected was dependent on the semester.

Field Experience Data. Field notes were taken when Jacob was leading instruction with his teaching group. In addition, immediately after each teaching session, preservice teachers were asked to provide a written reflection in response to prompting questions. Prompts were used to serve as scaffolds for reflection and guides to important course topics. These reflective writing responses were also collected as data. This data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis

(Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The main themes from Jacob's data included: (1) importance of modeling, (2) importance of allowing students choice, and (3) using talk as a scaffold.

Student Teaching Data. During Jacob's student teaching, he taught three writing units. All lesson plans, handouts, and teaching materials were collected as artifacts. In addition, after Jacob taught each writing unit, he participated in a semi-structured interview. The interview began with the question, "describe what you did during your unit." This first question was deliberately left open-ended, so Jacob had the opportunity to reflect on the instructional practices that he implemented in the classroom. Probing questions were asked to clarify and elicit additional information about his teaching. The second interview question, "Why did you make the decisions that you did?" was also open-ended so that Jacob had the opportunity to talk about his rationale for his instructional decision-making. Probing questions were used to draw out additional information about issues and topics that were important to him as a writing teacher. Probing questions also provided insights into how he was interpreting his writing instruction, while also allowed him to clarify his teaching decisions. As a researcher, I wanted the interviews to be conversational to best document Jacob's thinking, learning, and experiences.

This data was also analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Jacob's interviews were coded with the following themes: (1) instruction implemented, (2) rationale for implemented instruction, (3) personal beliefs about writing instruction, and (4) references to his experience at JMS. With the fourth theme, references to JMS, I specifically coded instances that he talked about the three themes coded from his JMS data: (1) importance of modeling, (2) importance of allowing students choice, and (3) using talk as a scaffold.

This data, specifically, the codes detailing instruction and instructional rationales, were triangulated with lesson plans and handouts from Jacob's teaching. For example, during Jacob's first round of teaching writing during student teaching he discussed giving students a handout with the following terms: hook, claim, reasons, evidence, counterclaim, and closing statement. The handout was also analyzed and confirmed not only his instruction, but it also contained his personal notes, such as "read learning target aloud, and give students the handout." Examining the transcripts of Jacob's interviews with artifacts, such as lesson plans and handouts, provided further documentation of the instructional practices he was implementing. This provided insight into the pedagogical and conceptual tools he implemented during this teaching and the interplay between his choices and his statements about teaching writing.

Findings

Junior Year Findings: Course and Field Experience

During the time Jacob was at JMS, the writing instruction focused on flash fiction. During their first lesson, Jacob and his team were responsible for introducing flash fiction. The objective was for students to be able to define flash fiction and identify elements of the genre. In addition, by the end of the lesson, students were to have opportunities for independent writing. The class began with Jacob asking students what they thought the definition of flash fiction might be. This was followed by preservice teachers reading a model piece of flash fiction. After, preservice teachers engaged students in relay writing in which they contributed words to create one cohesive flash fiction piece. This served as an opportunity for a whole class discussion focused on the elements of the genre and the decisions authors make when writing. Following, students received three additional mentor texts used by preservice teachers to guide students through collaborative and independent sessions in which they identified elements found within the mentor texts. Over the next four weeks, this unit continued and Jacob observed his fellow preservice teachers teach students to revise and publish their flash fiction pieces.

During the course of these four weeks, three themes emerged from Jacob's reflective writing in response to the teaching he implemented and observed: (1) the importance of mentor texts and modeling, (2) making sure instruction was relevant and offered student choice, and (3) using talk as an instructional scaffold. For example, after teaching his lesson introducing flash fiction, Jacob wrote:

Students learn to write when it is modeled well for them. They need to have the material be made relevant one way or another to them, and they also need the structural supports when they are given the opportunity to first write. After they have seen it modeled well for them, have tried writing it themselves.

Jacob noted that the teacher served an important role in how mentor texts are used for writing instruction. He explained, "it is important for the teacher to highlight his/her noticings, the good elements. Because students can take the parts that make the writing effective and use them in their own writing in a unique way."

During the second week of the field experience preservice teachers used additional flash fiction mentor texts to teach revision. After observing this lesson, Jacob shared his understanding of how models and mentor texts could be used as a part of the revision process. He explained:

students seemed to understand the importance of proofreading after they were actually able to do it. It allowed them an opportunity to experience it firsthand and wasn't just something that their teachers were telling them was important. After doing some of the proofreading exercises they would catch

their mistakes and it would improve their skills as writers and it would also improve the pieces they were working on.

Throughout all of his reflective writings, Jacob repeatedly wrote about the importance of students having “freedom and choice to write about what they want to write about.” He extended this idea when he reflected:

what has become apparent to me is that students often find themselves enjoying themselves when it comes to writing about a topic that they want to write about or that is relevant to them.

The idea of relevance extended past relevance in choice of writing topic and into particular genres and forms of writing. Jacob wrote:

writing should not be an isolated exercise isolated exercise sheet they won't represent any meaning to them. They need to write authentic genres and choice on the genre they want to write. I've learned that students relish the opportunity to write and really seem to enjoy having the ability to create their own story. There is something really satisfying in crafting a story that is one's own, and the students at JMS seem to exemplify that through how they describe the process. For students it is important to given them the room to create, reflect, and explore through their writing while still providing the supports that they need to help them reach the next level of writing.

At the end of the semester, Jacob shared his “ah-ha” moments related to the teaching of writing. He wrote:

My major "aha" moments have been to let students talk about what they are writing about. Allowing students the room to talk about what they want to write and giving the necessary time, space, and tools to do so is crucial. Students also need to be able to have multiple types of experiences with the text if they are to be successful. Also, another major "aha" moment that I've experienced is how much students have to say. Students have great, wonderful ideas that are deep and profound and with the right direction and medium to share the ideas, they will. They think deeply about life and have moments of refreshing clarity that benefits all who are involved.

Student Teaching Findings

First Writing Instruction Cycle. In his first cycle of teaching writing, Jacob was co-teaching an argumentative writing unit with his cooperating teacher. Jacob explained that at this point in his student teaching, he was serving as a co-teacher and that his teacher was making most of the instructional decisions.

Following the district's pacing guide, Jacob and his cooperating teacher dedicated one-week to introducing students to argumentative writing and for them to write their own argumentative piece. Jacob gave students a handout that served

as a reference guide with specific definitions and examples for the following: hook, claim, reasons, evidence, counterclaim, and closing statement. In addition, Jacob provided students with a list of topics, including are driverless cars safe and beneficial, should corporations be allowed to advertise in schools, and should minors be allowed to get tattoos. Students were instructed to find and read two articles about the topic and located evidence to support their argument. The expectation was that students would write a five-paragraph argumentative essay. Essays were uploaded into Google Classroom so that students could use an editing checklist to complete a peer review of papers.

According to Jacob, this was the 4th argumentative paper students had completed during the year. The focus was on preparing students to take the state testing in the spring. Jacob explained that the goal of this unit was to reinforce the structure of argumentative writing, in addition, this unit focused on teaching students to use “citations in their writing, or at least the author’s last name and paragraph or line number, since that is how it is on their testing.”

Jacob explained that because of state testing all their writing units were either argumentative or informative. Jacob continued:

I would like to do creative writing, especially with the honors classes, not that I wouldn’t want to with our general education classes. I would like them to do other types of writing. But that isn’t in our curriculum, and we are supposed to be doing and covering argumentative writing. Plus, it’s a 40-minute period. It’s tough to work it all in. So, we are like, well, we have to work on these specific types of writing, like argumentative and informative, just because that’s what they are going to be tested over and that’s all we have time for.

Jacob explained that when teaching structure, students were first given a formative assessment. He explained, “we gave them a sample argumentative essay written by another seventh grader and we had them identify the different parts to see if they could identify the structure. And overall the results were pretty good.” From that assessment, Jacob and his cooperating teacher decided to focus their instruction on students’ thesis writing, specifically the three-point thesis statement.

Jacob recognized that this type of direct instruction regarding writing, and the relying on the five-paragraph essay structure, differed from what he experienced during his field experience. He explained:

I know what we are doing is different than what we did at JMS. Like more direct instruction. And at JMS, it was more of a gradual release model. And maybe both ways are effective, but we sorta jumped right to the ‘you do it on your own’ part. if I taught this on my own, or if I have a job next year, I would definitely model the process a lot more. I think it’s something that

should be done at the beginning of the year. Even citations. Just model every single time.

Jacob reflected on how modeling was demonstrated during his experience at JMS, and also reinforced through course readings. He continued:

It (modeling) was definitely done at JMS and we even read about in the Kittle book, *Write Beside Them*. The take away from that was, modelling it for the students. Model yourself as a writer, model your thought process, think aloud for them. And I think that's something that I would like to try. And that I might try, you know, during the next unit on informative writing. During our classes and at JMS, we always talked about when you are planning you need to think about what students are doing. I think about that every single time I plan. Like, what are the students doing? And, I think that they could use some more modeling when it comes to writing.

While Jacob felt modeling could have been effective during this unit, he did share that he made the decision about students having a choice in topic selection. He asked his cooperating teacher if they could let the students chose their own topics, and she agreed. Jacob shared:

What I have noticed with them doing their writing, is that they really enjoy writing. They might mumble and grumble a little bit, but I think they actually like writing. The last argumentative essay they completed was based off the book they were reading, *The Outsiders*. And, they just weren't great results. And so, you know, I started thinking, how do we drive student engagement in terms of writing and how do we make students more involved and take more responsibility for the writing process? And so, I thought choice in topic might do those things.

Jacob also explained that he thought students' ownership in choice might make it more the teaching of structure and citations easier because the content might be more engaging and relevant. He explained:

I put together a list of relevant topics and then they could pick the topic they want to write about. And they have articles they have to find evidence from, and I write directions in the same way the test would give directions. Then I can teach what I have to, but at least the topics are relevant to their lives.

Jacob wrestled with the pressures and accountability of state testing, when he stated: It's the all-around focus, can we show growth in our testing. Especially with a school district like South School District. When you have an F on the state report card and there are consequences and things that can happen. The state can take over. And so, there's a huge emphasis on getting test scores it. But it's also disheartening, when you have to do all of this standardized testing. And everything you do is for standardized testing. When in reality, the students have the ability, they just need the, not the incentive, but they need

to feel that responsibility for their learning, and that ownership for their learning

Jacob continued to discuss how responsibility and ownership were tied to engagement, relevance, and student choice. When asked what this meant for writing instruction, Jacob mentioned the importance of choice in writing. Jacob viewed choice as an opportunity to keep students engaged and “involved” and “if students are more involved, more engaged, and have responsibility, then they can make the leaps and gains that they are expected to. But in an authentic way, not an easy way, but an effective way.” Jacob’s use of the word “authentic” was contrasted with his views that much of the writing instruction was because of the “bureaucracy of education.” And yet, Jacob held onto the belief that “as much student choice, as much student responsibility, and as much personalized response, is what’s going to lead students to improve.”

Second Writing Instruction Cycle. Jacob’s second writing unit focused on informational writing. Since this was considered the mid-point in his student teaching experience, Jacob acknowledged that he was making most of the decisions regarding this instructional unit; however, he was still required to strictly follow the pacing guide and the focus was still on the state testing that would be occurring later in the semester.

During the informational writing unit, Jacob incorporated thinking aloud and modeling into various aspects of the instruction. For example, Jacob explained that he spent two days working with students to interpret the writing prompts. He shared:

I went through and just unpacked the prompts. I asked students questions like, ‘do we know what the question is asking?’ What is the questions purpose? If you look at the topic, what is it.’ Then I had student students rewrite the prompts in their own words.

Jacob relied more on a gradual release model for the informative unit. He explained that he first deconstructed his noticings about an informational text and how it was written, highlighting the important elements. He then asked students to practice with another informational text making the same noticings for homework. The next day in class, Jacob guided students through the structure of informational texts. He explained, “I modeled how to write a hook, several supporting sentences, and a three-point thesis. Then I had students write a class topic sentence.”

In addition to modeling how to structure an informational text, Jacob also modeled how to find evidence to use in an informational text. He explained:

there were four different articles on Burmese Pythons that we had to read. So we did that as a class. And I read one and modeled how we take this and this information. And then I had students to do that in collaborative groups.

So, I modeled it. Then they did it. Then we talked about it. Then we did another and I modeled it. Basically, how to gather information for essays. When explaining the final step, Jacob shared that he decided to make the unit a collaborative writing unit. He had students use Google Docs to write together in pairs. When asked about the instructional approaches he implemented, Jacob explained:

I feel like I've given them a lot of support. I feel like I did a little more modeling with the form and the structure. So, I modeled, this is how we write a hook, this is how we write an introduction, this is how you add details. I don't want to do it for them, but I think about JMS and what we read with Kittle and it is all about modeling the process. I feel like I have to best support the students. And doing it in class this way, I feel like I am able to hit certain things and it's meaningful because it's in context.

Even though Jacob was still “strictly” following the pacing guide, he found opportunities to adapt the instruction to include instructional approaches that he learned at JMS and in his writing course. Jacob used the metaphor “learning to riding a bike” to explain how the instructional scaffolding served as a support. He explained:

Each step of the way, as long as you do it in context, then you can really slowly take away the supports and have them, like take off the training wheels and start riding the bike, then I think they will be ready come April.

Third Writing Instruction Cycle. Jacob described the final writing unit as the “nitty-gritty state test prep.” While Jacob had input on the unit, the instructional coach for the building designed the instruction. Jacob explained, “we really learned on our instructional coach’s unit, since some of the lessons were building-wide initiatives.” He shared that most of the resources were given to the instructional coach at a professional development session that the school district had for instructional coaches.

He explained that most of students’ writing was done in class, during the 40 minute periods. He shared, “they had to write an argumentative essay using some passages. And then the following day we looked at rubrics from the state. We put that into ‘kid friendly’ language. And then they used the rubric and graded their essays.” Jacob believed it was “good for them to see, and for them to identify in their own writing what worked, and to look at the peers’ writing and just go through that process.” This process was repeated once more during the week.

Jacob acknowledged that he didn’t feel like he was “really teaching writing.” He explained:

You know, we are a bit strict just teaching to the test right now. But you know, it's what we have to do. And hopefully, the students learn writing along the way, because they need to be able to write informative essays, argumentative essays, the structure, hook, thesis, topic sentences, the supporting details, all of that.

Jacob recognized that there was a disconnect in what he believed in how writing should be taught and how he was teaching writing, particularly during this unit. He shared, "I have a pacing guide to follow. I don't think, necessarily, your instruction always, a hundred percent reflects your teaching philosophy behind writing."

Implications

This study contributes to the literature suggesting that the context where the teaching occurs significantly influences preservice or novice teachers' instructional decision-making (Grossman, et al., 1999; Grossman, et al., 2000; Pardo, 2006; Smagorinsky, et al., 2013; Smagorinsky, et al., 2015). Researchers have found that school settings, including field placements, student teaching placements, and first-year teaching sites, each have cultures and expectations that teachers must contend with. A CHAT perspective provides an understanding of these phenomena and why a disconnect between settings can occur (Johnson, 2016). For example, while Jacob maintained his conceptual beliefs about teaching writing, the setting significantly influenced the instruction he implemented during student teaching. Examining how Jacob appropriated conceptual and pedagogical tools during his early field experience with his implementation, or lack of, at his student teaching site, deepens the field's understanding of how context influences instructional decisions and how preservice teachers may hold on to certain beliefs even when not consistent with the context. This gives teacher educators and researchers insights into the systems that influence preservice teachers' instructional practices (Borko, 2004, Johnson, 2016).

Jacob's early field experience was intentionally designed by his university professor and the JMS 8th grade teacher to align to certain conceptual and pedagogical practices that were reinforced in the methods course embedded within the field experience site. This alignment between the university methods course and field experience site at JMS was done by Elizabeth and Amy having shared conceptual and pedagogical beliefs, and through time spent working together during various professional development opportunities. In addition, JMS was an activity setting that offered teachers freedom to conceptualize and implement writing instruction in the ways that they thought most appropriate. In her classroom, Amy was allowed to implement writing instruction that was consistent with her beliefs about how to develop student writers. Amy had already established a writing

workshop and emphasized instructional scaffolding, writing with students, and using mentor texts. Elizabeth intentionally partnered with Amy to provide her preservice teachers with a consistent experience so that they were learning about conceptual tools for the teaching of writing in their methods courses and implementing the pedagogical tools that aligned during their teaching. This consistency seemed to provide Jacob with a strong foundation of how to teach writing as a process.

While Amy had flexibility with a lack of district curricular mandates in how she approached writing instruction, Jacob's student teaching instruction was strictly guided by a district pacing guide. The state testing requirements, and the school's past failure, heavily influenced Jacob's implementation of pedagogical tools. This activity setting provided a barrier to implementing instruction that was consistent with his previous learning and personal beliefs about writing instruction.

In addition, in the first unit Jacob had little decision-making as his cooperating teacher planned most of the unit. While he had little control, he did convince his teacher to allow students choice over the topics of their argumentative writing. While this may not seem overly significant, it did seem to indicate that Jacob still believed students needed ownership over their writing. In addition, while modeling was not used as a pedagogical tool during the unit, in his follow up interview Jacob still spoke significantly about the importance of modeling. In his student teaching site, Jacob was able to identify what was difficult about the writing process for his students and recognized that modeling might be an effective tool for supporting them. It was actually the lack of modeling that reinforced his ideas about the support this instructional approach provides student writers. While he might not have learned to more effectively model writing for students or how to best guide students by using mentor texts, these pedagogical tools were reinforced as valuable tools for teaching writing because he recognized their potential in how they could support his students.

In the second writing unit, Jacob was more responsible for planning the unit. During this unit, he still followed the scripted curriculum pacing guide; however, this time he did include modeling and mentor texts. Jacob specifically discussed relying on the gradual release model as he conducted think-alouds about how to read and interpret prompts and also to find and incorporate textual evidence into informational writing. During his reflection on implementing modeling and mentor texts, he implied that he found it to help his students with their writing when he explained, "I feel like I have to best support the students. And doing it in class this way, I feel like I am able to hit certain things and it's meaningful because it's in context."

Furthermore, Jacob created opportunities for students to engage in dialogue to support their writing. Students had opportunities to practice using textual

evidence collaboratively and they also used Google Docs to write collaboratively. During this second unit, there were more instances of Jacob using the pedagogical tools that he learned at JMS.

Jacob's last instructional unit was planned by an instructional coach, which Jacob admitted was more of a "test prep unit" rather than a writing unit. The district curriculum pacing guide and the emphasis on the state test was certainly a "pitfall" that Jacob experienced (Smagorinsky et al., 2013; Stillman & Anderson, 2011). Researchers have found that high stakes testing strongly influences instruction (White, Sturtevant, & Dunlap, 2003); however, even though these factors influenced Jacob's pedagogical approaches, they did not seem to influence the conceptual beliefs he had about how writing should be taught. Jacob held onto the beliefs he had about teaching writing and he recognized that there was a disconnect between what he was teaching and what he stated he believed about writing instruction. This supports research contending that while instruction may be influenced by high stakes testing, preservice teachers' beliefs about instruction may be resilient because of what they learned in their teacher education programs (White et al., 2003).

While this study only represents Jacob's experiences and teaching beliefs, it highlights how a field experience with consistent conceptual and pedagogical practices may provide preservice teachers with the foundational knowledge they need to transfer their understandings of teaching and learning to various settings. Research has demonstrated that preservice teachers' beliefs and instructional practices are informed by a variety of experiences (Grossman, et al., 1999; Pardo, 2006; Smagorinsky, et al., 2013; Smagorinsky, et al., 2015), and much of the research highlights the tensions that exist when preservice teachers experience inconsistent messages about teaching and learning across activity settings, particularly university and school contexts (Johnson, 2016). In this study, Jacob had the opportunity to observe how a veteran teacher implemented the conceptual and pedagogical tools that he had been reading about in his university methods course. In addition, he worked closely with Elizabeth, the university methods course faculty, and Amy, the teacher, to design a lesson that he implemented with his teaching group. This experience seemed to provide knowledge that significantly influenced Jacob's views about writing instruction, even when he moved into a school with a very different approach to the teaching and learning of writing. More research is needed to understand how various structures and models of field experiences and embedded courses influence preservice teachers understanding of conceptual tools and implementation of pedagogical tools for the teaching of writing.

References

- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3–15.
- Brayko, K. (2013). Community-based placements as contexts for disciplinary learning. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 64(1), 47–59.
- Dyson, A., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.
- Fecho, B. (2003). Yeki Bood/Yeki Ne Bood: Writing and publishing as a teacher researcher. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 37(3), 281–294.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Buchmann, M. (1985). Pitfalls of experience in teacher preparation. *Teachers College Record*, 87(1), 53–65.
- Flessner, R. & Lecklider (Eds.). (2017). *The power of clinical preparation in teacher education*. Rowman & Littlefield Education in association with the Association of Teacher Education.
- Grossman, P. L., Smagorinsky, P., & Valencia, S. (1999). *Appropriating conceptual and pedagogical tools for teaching English: A conceptual framework for studying professional development* (Technical Report No.12011). Albany, NY: National Re-
- Grossman, P., Valencia, S., Evans, K., Thompson, C., Martin, S., & Place, N. (2000). Transitions into teaching: Learning to teach writing in teacher education and beyond. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 32(4), 631–662.
- Johnson, L. (2016). Writing 2.0: How English teachers conceptualize writing with digital technologies. *English Education*, 49(1), 28–62.
- Leko, M. & Brownell, M. (2011). Special education preservice teachers' appropriation of pedagogical tools for teaching reading. *Exceptional Children*, 77(2), 229–251.
- Pardo, L. S. (2006). The role of context in learning to teach writing: What teacher educators need to know to support beginning urban teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57, 378–394.
- Smagorinsky, P., Rhym, D., & Moore, C. (2013). Competing centers of gravity: A beginning English teacher's socialization process within conflictual settings. *English Education*, 45, 147–183.
- Smagorinsky, P., Shelton, S. A., & Moore, C. (2015). The role of reflection in developing eupraxis in learning to teach English. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 10(4), 285–308.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Stillman, J. and Anderson, L., (2011). To follow, reject, or flip the script: Managing instructional tension in an era of high-stakes testing. *Language Arts*, 89(1), 22-37.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- White, C.S., Sturtevant, K., & Dunlap, K. (2003). Preservice and beginning teachers' perceptions of the influence of high stakes tests on their literacy-related instructional beliefs and decisions. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 42(2), 39-62.