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Problems or Possibilities? What Do Early Childhood Preservice Teachers Notice About K-1 Writers?

Dawn Roginski, *Kent State University*

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2016) recommended that preservice teachers (PSTs) gain an understanding of how to respond to writers. Ballock et al. (2018) added that experiences where PSTs respond to writers are necessary during teacher preparation. I contend that before a PST can respond to a student writer, they must note “the surplus of possibilities” (Bomer et al., 2019, p. 140) that exist in students’ writing.

Little research has examined responding to “student writing as a practice or how novice teachers become skilled in it” (Ballock et al., 2018, p. 57). Ballock et al. (2018) found the variability in how PSTs respond to student writing troubling. The PSTs in Hall and Grisham-Brown’s (2011) methods course acknowledged that responding to student writers is a weakness despite Teaching Works (2019) insistence that responding to student writers is a literacy core practice for future teachers.

In this study, I applied the term noticing to examine what the early childhood (EC) PSTs in one-literacy methods course recognized as the writing moves made by K-1 writers in writing samples. The PSTs looked at writing samples representative of writing that would be found in a K-1 classroom. To date what EC PSTs notice about the moves made by a K-1 writer is an unexplored theme. The following research question guided the investigation:

- What do early childhood preservice teachers notice about a K-1 writer in seven writing samples?

Review Of The Literature

Writing Instruction – The Neglected “R”

Practicing teachers of writing consistently informed researchers that they lack confidence in their own writing abilities and feel they will “never be able to teach their students to write well” (Street & Stang, 2009, p. 76). PSTs further reported that they find writing to be the curricular area they are least prepared to teach (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; Hall, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2014). PSTs’ lack of confidence to teach writing comes during a time when effective writing is a skill of immense importance for all students (Graham & Perin, 2007).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) adopted by 41 states reflect an emphasis on writing across grade levels and throughout the curriculum (Ballock et al., 2018; Martin & Dismuke, 2015). The CCSSs require students to “devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and long-time frames throughout the year” and to write across curricular areas to assure students are “college and career-ready writers” (CCSS, 2019, pp. 63-64). However, Cutler and Graham (2008) documented that first, second, and third-grade students spent a mere 21 minutes of their school day engaged in writing activities. Previously, the National Commission of Writing (2003) stated that writing “skills cannot be picked up from a few minutes here, and a few minutes there” (p. 20).

Product vs. Process Writing Instruction

John Dewey’s progressive education movement encouraged writing teachers to alter the priorities in writing instruction to reflect “individualism and self-expression” (Hawkins & Razali, 2012, p. 310). In response, writing teachers were encouraged to offer authentic writing activities where student writers composed from personal experience. However, the writing teachers continued to focus on “inauthentic word and sentence level instruction” (p. 311). Writing teachers continued to view writing as an activity that “was assigned and then corrected” (Calkins, 1994, p. 13).

The complex and contradictory contexts that PSTs experience while becoming Language Arts teachers “includes pressure for divergent views of literacy: traditional foci on text and skills [versus]. . . literacy rooted in the every day” (Bomer et al., 2019, p. 197). Teachers who “assign and then correct” (Calkins, 1994, p. 13) a student’s writing assume a traditional approach to teaching writing with a focus on correctness and conventions (Graham et al., 2012). Hallmarks of a traditional writing pedagogy include marking errors with red ink and writing notes about the “clarity and logic of a product” (Graham et al., 2012, p. 4).

Contrasting a product approach to writing instruction is a process approach. Donald Murray (1972) published an article titled *Teach Writing as a Process Not*

Product. Murray's publication began a shift in writing instruction. Writing instruction shifted from a focus on a final written product to the process undertaken by the writer while crafting the product. Applebee (1986) summarized the process approach of writing as "providing a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does (planning, revising, and the like) instead of in terms of what the final product looks like (patterns of organization, spelling, and grammar)" (p. 96).

A core recommendation of the U.S. Department of Education (2012) in *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* encouraged EC teachers to implement the process approach of writing instruction in classrooms (Graham et al., 2012).

Emergent Literacy in Early Childhood Education

An emergent literacy perspective encourages EC PSTs to value what young children understand about writing before they enter formal instruction. EC educators who embrace an emergent literacy perspective assume that emergent writers' beginning understandings about language lead to writing proficiencies and literacy achievement (Mackenzie & Hennings, 2014). The beginning understandings that young children need to acquire about literacy are referred to in this study as early literacy skills. The skills identified are based on emergent writing understandings discussed by Clay (1966) and the early literacy skills indicated by Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003).

The Concept of Emergent Literacy

The concept of emergent literacy addresses the range of abilities understood to be a part of children's development of literacy competence. An emergent literacy perspective suggests that young children learn as they are engaged in language activities foundational to learning to read and write in more formal settings (Saracho & Spodek, 1993). This view of literacy learning represents a shift from a readiness perspective that emphasized proficiency in discrete skills to an appreciation that children develop a set of behaviors and concepts about literacy that precede the development of conventional literacy abilities (Sulzby, 1989). It also parallels Murray's (1972) advocacy to teach writing as a process rather than a product.

Clay (1966) is credited for coining the phrase *emergent literacy* to describe children's exploration with language in informal settings. Emergent writers develop understandings about writing because they are "apprentices of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 61) and learn from observing more capable writers. For instance, Clay (2005) observed preschool children using the print that appeared on signs, cereal packets, and television in their writing explorations. Clay concluded that young children know how print works (from top to bottom and left to right of a page for example) because of exposure to written words in the environment.

Emergent Writing Behaviors.

In *What Did I Write?* (1975) Clay further revealed patterns of writing development she observed in young children's writing. Clay theorized that young writers use four strategies as they perfect independent writing ability. The strategies included:

- A *recurring principle* when young children understand that patterns are a part of written language.
- A *generative principle* when young children create unique messages using a small set of letters or words.
- A *sign principle* when young children link concrete objects to the accompanying written work. And,
- An *inventory principle* when young children apply the repertoire of words they know to a writing product (Clay, 1975).

According to Clay (1975), writing development also follows a predictable pattern beginning with children scribbling and picture drawing. Emergent writers proceed from drawing pictures, to forming letter-like marks, and ultimately producing conventional letters. Sulzby and Teale (1996) observed that conventional letters appear individually, then in words, and finally in sentence sequences. Clay noticed that children navigate the stages of writing through the actions of tracing, copying, and generating. The process-focused approach to teaching writing incorporates emergent literacy understandings. In process writing, an EC teacher recognizes that each student writer is following an individual path on the writing development continuum.

Early Literacy Skills.

Roskos et al. (2003) suggested that identifiable early literacy skills are indicative of what young children need to know "if they are able to enjoy the fruits of literacy, including valuable dispositions that strengthen their literacy interactions" (p. 52). The researchers adopted the term "'early literacy [skills]'" as the most comprehensive yet concise description of the knowledges, skills, and dispositions that proceed learning to read and write in the primary grades" (p. 53). The early skills identified by Roskos et al. (2003) as essential for young children include:

- *Letter knowledge* where young children discover that language is comprised of a series of symbols that represent sounds (also known as the alphabetic principle).
- *Print awareness* where young children recognize basic text structures.
- *Phonological awareness* where young children begin to hear the smaller sounds of language.
- *Narrative ability* where young children can retell a story.

- *Vocabulary* where young children understand and apply a large knowledge of words.

These early literacy skills have gained empirical ground as foundational to literacy development and belong in the early childhood curriculum (Roskos et al., 2003, p. 54).

Teacher Noticing

Breaking down, or “decomposing a skill” into the “special knowledge, skill, and orientations needed for enactment” assists novices in approximating a core practice (Ballock et al., 2018, p. 57). Experts in their field recognize meaningful patterns in their areas of specialty (National Research Council, 2000). The National Research Council offered the example that expert chess players are better at noticing chess moves than novice chess players. In chess, experts’ noticing is based on their knowledge of a finite set of individual moves. However, teaching is more complex than chess and Sherin and Star (2011) reasoned that teachers are faced with a “blooming, buzzing confusion of sensory data” (p. 69). While everyday noticing refers to general observations an individual might make, *teacher noticing* further involves the processes teachers use to manage the ongoing information they recognize during instruction. Sherin and Star explained that teachers employ two processes while noticing. Teachers first attend to events in an instructional setting and then make sense of the events they noticed.

Responding to Writers

PSTs voiced concern about their abilities to respond to writers (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). Morgan and Pytash (2014) reported that PSTs who practiced responding to writers found the activity helpful. Morgan and Pytash concluded that learning to respond to writers is a critical skill for future writing teachers. More recently, Ballock et al. (2018) asserted that “research is needed to further clarify how teachers develop skill in analyzing students’ writing” (p. 66). Ballock et al. further suggested that for PSTs to assist writers in achieving the writing goals of the CCSSs, PSTs must master “reading and responding to student writing” (p. 57). I reason that before it is possible to respond to a writer, the reader must first take notice of the moves the writer has employed in their writing product.

What to Notice? Product or Process?

Ballock et al. (2018) found that what PSTs notice in students’ writing is variable. Some PSTs attended to the writer’s conventions while others attended to the writer’s intentions. PSTs’ foci, according to Ballock and colleagues, depended on their “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 61) during traditional elementary school literacy instruction. Lortie (1975) explained that during their own schooling PSTs had only a partial view of a teacher’s job. Consequently the

PSTs saw only the “front and center’ actions that teachers took. . . [but are not] privy to the teacher’s private intentions and personal reflections on classroom events” (p. 62). Due to their front and center viewpoint, PSTs did not place teachers’ actions in a pedagogically-oriented framework. Lortie concluded that PSTs, schooled by recollections of their own written products marked with red ink, return to such memories when noticing the moves made by student writers. I sought to understand the experiences of 20 PSTs enrolled in one semester-long EC literacy methods course as they rehearsed noticing the moves of K-1 writers in seven writing samples.

Methods

Participants

Twenty PSTs enrolled in one literacy course during the Spring semester of 2020 comprised the participants. Demographic information provided by the participants is revealed in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

*Name	Age	Race	Gender	Class Rank	*Name	Age	Race	Gender	Class Rank
Alli	23	W	F	S	Julie	19	W	F	J
Colleen	20	W	F	J	Molly	20	W	F	J
Jill	22	W	F	S	Devin	21	W	F	J
Megan	21	W	F	S	Abby	20	W	F	J
Allyson	21	W	F	J	Alex	19	W	F	J
Victoria	22	W	F	S	Andrea	20	W	F	So
Katie	25	W	F	S	Laura	20	W	F	J
Katy	20	W	F	J	Bri	20	W	F	J
Hal	22	W	M	S	Rachel	19	W	F	J
Emily	20	B	F	J	Kris	24	W	F	S

Note. * All names are pseudonyms. W=white, B=black, F=female, M=male, S=senior, J=junior, and So=sophomore.

Research Site

The research was conducted in an undergraduate EC methods course at a public university in northeastern Ohio. The 2018-2019 undergraduate enrollment

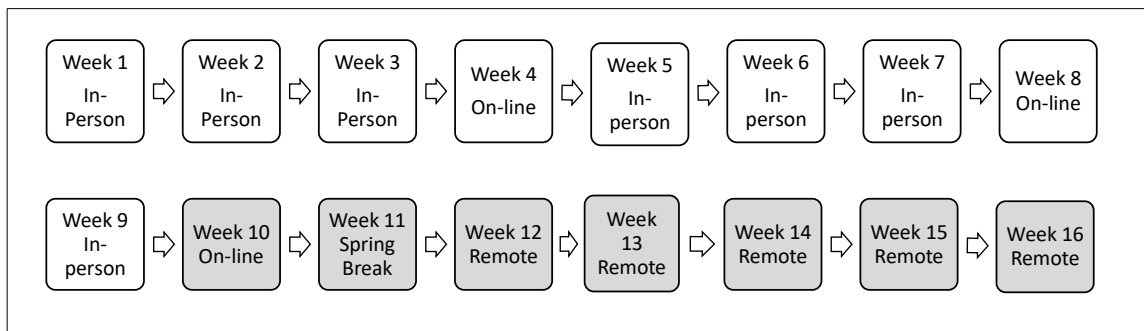
of the university was 23,178. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is one of 18 education majors available in the Education Department.

The Methods Course

The literacy methods course where the study was conducted was described in the class catalog as “an examination of the process of language and literacy development in preschool children. The course focuses on how preschool teachers integrate the knowledge of development with early school and family literacy learning” (University Catalog, 2019). Two goals for the course specifically pertained to preparing EC PSTs to teach writing. To become efficient teachers of writing and fulfill the course goals, the PSTs’ needed to approximate taking notice of the writer before responding to the writer’s written product. Such responding is a core practice for writing teachers (Teaching Works, 2019). The course was the first literacy course required of the EC PSTs.

A historic pandemic impacted the context of the world, nation, state, and university operations during the Spring of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly interrupted the semester. The university and the course were responsive to Ohio Governor Michael DeWine’s COVID-19 orders. To assure the safety of all campus personnel and students, the University announced a modified spring semester. Figure 1 reflects the resultant changed mode of instruction.

Figure 1
Class Environment By Semester Week



Note. Shaded blocks represent remote instruction.


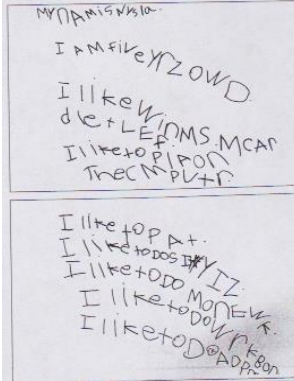
Data Sources

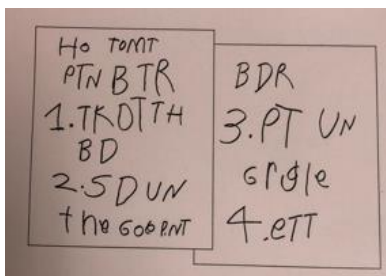
Writing Samples – Lists of Moves Noticed by PSTs

I asked the PSTs at seven points during the semester to “Imagine this writing is from a K-1 writer in your future classroom. Please list what you notice about the writer” (Writing Sample 1, 2020). The seven writing samples that the PSTs were provided are pictured in Table 2.

Table 2

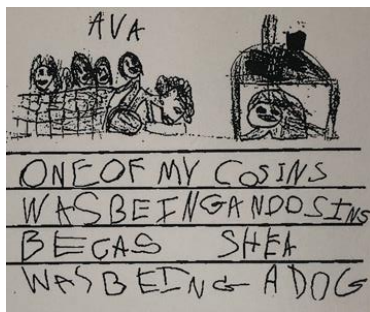
Writing Samples 1 through 7

Writing Sample	Rationale for Inclusion	Considerations for Order of Placement
	<p>The sample demonstrates the writer’s knowledge of print awareness, use of invented spelling, letter knowledge, and understanding of the functions of print.</p>	<p>PSTs have yet to receive any formal instruction in emergent literacy themes or emergent writing assumptions. This sample offers the PSTs ample opportunity to notice the writer. However, the sample also contains writing convention needs that PSTs may be more inclined to notice.</p>
	<p>When sample 2 was pilot tested, the PSTs were most concerned with the writer’s handwriting and print awareness. However, the writer also is demonstrating an understanding of adding details to an idea. Making lists is characteristic of emergent writers as they begin to make letter to sound correspondences. Emergent writers enjoy writing repetitive statements that they have mastered.</p>	<p>At this point in the semester, PSTs have been immersed in process writing experiences for seven weeks but have not been exposed to emergent writing instruction. This sample allows the PSTs the opportunity to apply their learnings of emergent literacy themes. They may also apply their own personal experience of being immersed in the process approach to writing.</p>



The writer is writing for purpose. The writer understands that the reader must follow the steps in order. The invented spellings are approximations for the words. It is a different genre than the PSTs have already considered. The writer is applying what is known about how language works to create a message.

This sample may offer the PSTs the opportunity to notice a writer's intention. They have been immersed in the writing process and have experienced the "insider knowledge" of [the] writing process" that is a prerequisite for teaching writing (Gardner, 2014, p. 129). However, there also are convention errors that PSTs who cling to a Product approach might identify. Additionally, over the past two weeks, PSTs have brought their Case Study Writing sample to the Smart Board. The PST offered their noticing and classmates contributed questions and comments. The PSTs can apply what they have learned about young writers to a writing sample immediately after discussion.

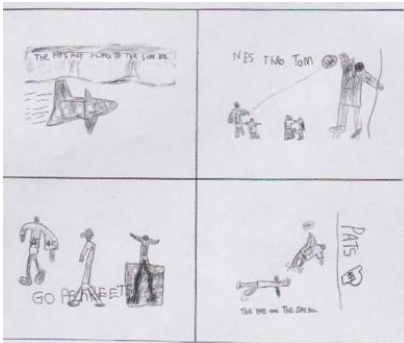


This sample was piloted. The vocabulary in this sample demonstrates the young child's ability to "write like we talk". The child also uses a comparison between a person and a dog which may suggest familiarity with simile and metaphor which is a technique often found in books for young children. Young writers are encouraged to use

This sample illustrates emergent writing assumptions that relate to the class readings, discussions and activities of the week. Additionally, over the past two weeks, PSTs have brought their Case Study Writing sample to the Smart Board. The PST offered their noticing and classmates

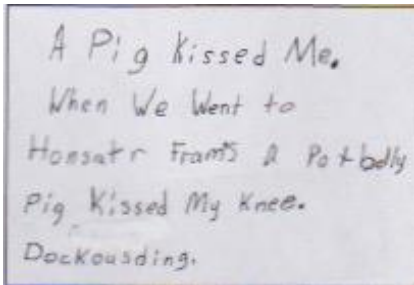
mentor texts when writing independently

contributed questions and comments. The PSTs can apply what they have learned about young writers to a writing sample immediately after discussion.



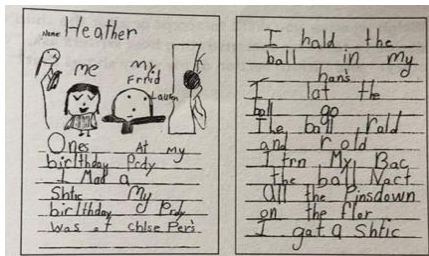
This sample was pilot tested. The PSTs noticed narrative skills and the writer's use of dialogue. The sample also offers the PSTs the opportunity to notice the writer's print knowledge, use of invented spelling, inclusion of many details, and a connection between illustration and story.

This sample may offer the PSTs the opportunity to notice a writer's intention. They have been immersed in the writing process for 13 weeks and have experienced the "insider knowledge" of [the] writing process" that is a prerequisite for teaching writing (Gardner, 2014, p. 129). However, there also are convention errors that PSTs who cling to a Product approach might identify.



This sample illustrates emergent writing assumptions that relate to the class readings, discussions, and activities of the week. This week we practiced using picture books and paired picture books as mentor texts for writing. Reading like a writer was discussed as an entry point into writing for young children.

The PSTs began to notice the author's ability to write their ideas on paper. Less concern was placed on conventions and more PSTs commented on the writer's message and ability to consider the reader.



This sample was pilot tested. The sample demonstrates the writer's knowledge of print awareness, use of invented spelling, letter knowledge, strong narrative skills, and understanding of the functions of print. The writer is sharing what he knows about a topic, acts as an expert, and shows stamina for writing. The author is writing with purpose and needed to decide what to present on each page. The child appears to have selected a topic important to him.

This sample has much to notice. It was placed as the final sample to offer the PSTs an opportunity to demonstrate all that they have learned about K-1 writers during the sixteen-week semester. This sample may offer the PSTs the opportunity to notice a writer's intention. They have been immersed in the writing process for 15 weeks and have experienced the "insider knowledge" of [the] writing process" that is a prerequisite for teaching writing (Gardner, 2014, p. 129). However, there also are convention errors that PSTs who cling to a Product approach might identify.

This sample was collected after the PSTs participated in the semi-structured interview. It is possible that the interview conversation influenced their noticing of the K-1 writer.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The words people use reflect their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). I interviewed the participants to gain insight into the thinking processes of the PSTs. Through interviews with each PST, I came to understand the participants' views regarding their personal noticing of the K-1 writers responsible for the seven writing samples.

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes with each individual PST during week 14 of the semester. The interviews were conducted

remotely due to the pandemic. I asked 18 of the PSTs the 11 interview questions in Table 3. I probed the PSTs' answers and asked exploratory questions when necessary. I discussed with each PST their noticing history in the writing samples as well as their recollections of their personal writing instruction. Two participants, Colleen and Andrea, were unable to participate in their interview due to the pandemic. Colleen fell ill and Andrea faced challenges as an 'essential worker' that resulted in difficulty scheduling her interview during week 14 of the semester.

Table 3
Interview Guide

Questions

What are your recollections of the writing instruction you received as a child?

Did that memory play into your responses to the writing samples? How?

When you began our course, what did you think a K-1 writer could do?

What informed your understanding?

When you first began looking at the writing samples of a K-1 writer, what were you most likely to notice?

How did you decide what was important?

Has your noticing changed over time? If so, how?

What do you think caused that shift?

What course activities or experiences influenced your noticing?

Data Analysis

The data from the PSTs' lists of noticing and the interviews were first analyzed as separate data sets.

Writing Samples – Lists of Moves Noticed by PSTs

I assembled the lists of moves noticed by the PSTs into a master matrix using Microsoft *Excel* software, Version 16.36 (2020). I tallied the noticed items using tables. I highlighted key phrases in the PSTs' lists of noticing as codes. I

copied the highlighted codes) into *Excel* columns. For each data chunk, I placed a numeral “1” in the corresponding column of the matrix. Figure 2 displays the building of the matrix as I added Emily’s lists of noticing in writing samples four, five, and six.

Figure 2
Emily, Samples 4, 5, and 6 First-Cycle Coding

Participant	Sample 4, <i>My Cousin</i>	Capitalization	Incorrect spelling (word or pattern)	Phonological	Sample 5, <i>Patriots in the Super Bowl</i>	Capitalization	Phonological awareness Message is understood	Sample 6, <i>Pig Kiss</i>	Incorrect spelling (word or pattern)	Understands how writing “works”	Uses a craft move from another writer
EMILY	She seems to have an understanding of letter sounds and how they work together. Example “oo” and “ea.”			1	I noticed that this student has an understanding of letter combinations sound relationships like the “ch.”		1	The writer understands that she can write about her thoughts and feelings about getting kissed by a pig.		1	
EMILY	I notice there are some spelling errors, with large words but it is clear the writer is sounding out to make a best effort based on what she knows about sounds.		1	1	I also noticed that the student could use instruction on different uses of upper- and lower-case letters as he scatters them throughout writing.	1		It was as if I could hear her telling the story. She showed disgust by creating one sentence “Disgusting!” It shows the strong attitude.			1
EMILY	I also notice that she writes using capital letters.	1			He was able to convey what he wanted using writing.		1	She was able to spell smaller words correctly but still falters.	1		

Once all the PSTs completed their lists for the seven writing samples, I reduced the number of column headings (First-Cycle Codes) into a smaller group of codes. I sorted the First-Cycle Codes into three Second-Cycle Pattern codes (Miles et al., 2014). The Second-Cycle codes were: conventional writing skills (or product skills), early literacy skills, and process writing skills. I considered any item with a focus on correctness (Graham et al., 2012) to be a conventional writing skill. Such items assure “clarity and logic” (Graham et al., 2012, p. 4) in a writing product and are marked as errors by traditional writing teachers. I defined early literacy skills as the knowledges, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades (Roskos et al., 2003) and the patterns and

behaviors noticed by Clay (1966, 1975) in emerging writers. I applied Applebee’s (1986) summation that process writing is “a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does (planning, revising, and the like) instead of terms of what the final product looks like (patterns of organization, spelling, and grammar)” (p. 96) to identify process writing skills.

Table 4 reflects how I sorted the matrix columns of First-Cycle Codes into the three Second-Cycle Pattern codes.

Table 4
First-Cycle Codes Sorted into Second-Cycle Pattern Codes

Conventional Writing Skills	Early Literacy Skills	Process Writing Skills
Capitalization	Appropriate spelling progression (recognition of stages)	Can tell a story
Compound word construction	Can form a sentence	Demonstrates creativity/imagination
Consistent spelling pattern	Can form a word	Elaboration encouragement
Handwriting-Stays on the line	Letter knowledge	Identifies as an author
Incorrect spelling (word or pattern)	Narrative skill (retells a happening not necessary, including beginning, middle, and end)	Illustration adds to or matches text
Legibility	Phonological connections (sounding out)	Implements a craft move (borrowed from picture book)
Punctuation	Use of word part to spell	Includes details
Sight words spelled correctly	Vocabulary	Kept to topic
Spacing		Message is understood
Specific sound error		Story has a beginning, middle, and end
		Understands readers as ‘audience’
		Understanding of how writing works
		Use of a title

I tallied the columns to determine the frequency that the PSTs applied each code in each of the Writing Samples. Table 5 illustrates the tallying of moves noticed by the PSTs in Writing Sample 4.

Table 5
Grouping of First-Cycle Codes, Writing Sample 4

Conventional Writing Skills									Early Literacy Skills								Process Writing Skills		Total/Sample	
Capitalization	Stays on-line	Incorrect spelling (word or legibility)	Punctuation	Sight words spelled correctly	Sound error	Spacing	Appropriate spelling	Can form a sentence	Can form a word	Can write name	Letter knowledge	Narrative skill	Phonological awareness	Print awareness	Vocabulary	Illustrations corresponds to text	Message understood	Understanding of how writing	82	
13	2	6	2	4	4	1	9	7	3	2	2	3	1	8	3	4	5	2	1	82

I recognized that each writing sample offered a differing number of features to identify. Because of the different possibilities to notice in the seven unique writing samples, I determined the percentage of moves noticed that fell into the three Second-Cycle Pattern Codes (Table 6).

Table 6
Percent of Noticing by Writing Sample

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4	Sample 5	Sample 6	Sample 7
# First-Cycle Codes Noticed	24	19	18	21	24	24	31
Convention Codes	12	12	9	9	9	8	8
Early Literacy Codes	8	5	5	9	9	8	9
Process Codes	5	2	4	4	6	10	15
% Of Conventions	58%	75%	48%	58%	42%	35%	24%
% Of Early Literacy	36%	21%	41%	27%	47%	40%	27%
% Of Process	7%	4%	10%	16%	27%	29%	57%

Semi-Structured Interviews

After transcribing the interviews, I emailed each PST the interview transcript and asked for assurance that the interview was recoded accurately. All PSTs responded that the transcription accurately reflected our conversations. I uploaded the transcriptions into *Dedoose* software, Version 7.0.23 (2016). Within the *Dedoose* software, I employed systematic coding of every line of the interview transcriptions. Systematic coding involved “break[ing] the data into manageable segments and identify[ing] or nam[ing] those segments” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 32). I began the coding process with a provisional “start list” of codes (Miles et al., 2014, p. 81) from the master matrix. I also applied in-vivo codes to “preserve participants meaning of their views and actions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). For example, in Alli’s interview, she said,

Focus on *solutions not problems*. Effective feedback does not merely point out problem areas but instead offers solutions. In my future classroom, it will be one of my goals to offer solutions in not just language and literacy but in my teaching as a whole.

The phrase *solutions not problems* became a code that represented Alli’s experience of noticing writing moves made by the K-1 writer.

Applying Interview Data to the Master Matrix of PSTs' Noticing

The matrix display that was created in *Excel* allowed “at a glance” reflection, verification, conclusion drawing, and other analytic acts” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 41). I reviewed First-Cycle codes that were column headings in the master matrix. I was easily able to sort them into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs (Miles et al., 2014) called Second-Cycle Pattern codes. I printed out the First-Cycle Codes from the master matrix and the in-vivo codes from the interviews on small index cards.

I sorted all the index cards into three Second-Cycle codes of: conventional writing skills (or product skills), early literacy skills, and process writing skills. I organized the code cards and aligned the codes that “tie[d] together bits of data” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). I wrote three narrative paragraphs using all bits of data to summarize how the PSTs noticed the moves made in writing samples by the K-1 writers in this study. The paragraphs (see Table 7) informed the findings of the study.

Table 7
Narrative Paragraphs Incorporating First-Cycle Codes into Second-Cycle Codes

Second-Cycle Pattern Code	Source	First-Cycle Codes	Narrative Description Of Second-Cycle Code
Conventional Writing Skills	Master Matrix First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalization • Compound word construction • Consistent spelling pattern • Following writing rules • Handwriting-stays on the line • Incorrect spelling (word or pattern) • Legibility • Sight words spelled correctly • Spacing • Specific sound 	<p>When PSTs looked at the writing samples their eyes initially went towards the rules of writing they remember learning in their early school years. Some of the PSTs even confused the term “writing” with the concept of “handwriting.” In addition to legibility, the PSTs were concerned that the writer did not follow the writing rules regarding capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and format. The PSTs wanted to point out errors so they could fix the writer’s mistakes. As a result, they pointed out the negatives in the writing samples. These PSTs continued their own EC teachers’ focus on product convention over the writers’ process.</p>
	Interviews First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to focus on • Learn to follow the rules • Sight words • Punctuation • Capitalization • Handwriting Practice 	

Early Literacy Skills	Master Matrix First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can form a sentence • Can form a word • Can write name • Letter knowledge • Narrative skill • Phonological connections; sounding out • Print awareness (directionality) • Use parts of a word to spell • Vocabulary 	<p>Young writers need to develop some precursor skills before becoming expert readers and writers. These skills are not “testable” or “correctable.” There is a reciprocal process in reading and writing and as children learn to love stories, they develop writing skills from their observations of read-aloud. They develop awareness of how language and print works. They are exposed to new words and become better storytellers. Young children gain these understandings over time as the progress through similar stages.</p>
	Interviews First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate spelling progression • Can form a sentence • Can form a word • Can write name • Letter knowledge • Narrative skill • Phonological connections; sounding out • Print awareness (directionality) • Use parts of a word to spell • Vocabulary 	
Process Writing Skills	Master Matrix First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can form a sentence • Can form a word • Can write name • Letter knowledge • Narrative skill • Phonological connections; sounding out • Print awareness (directionality) • Use parts of a word to spell • Vocabulary 	<p>Writing involves the writer understanding that when we write, we are sharing a message with authors. Our marks on paper share our thoughts and ideas with others. In order to get that message on paper, the writer engages in their own writing process. There are many skills more important than following rules. Before ever applying the rules of convention, a young writer must develop an</p>

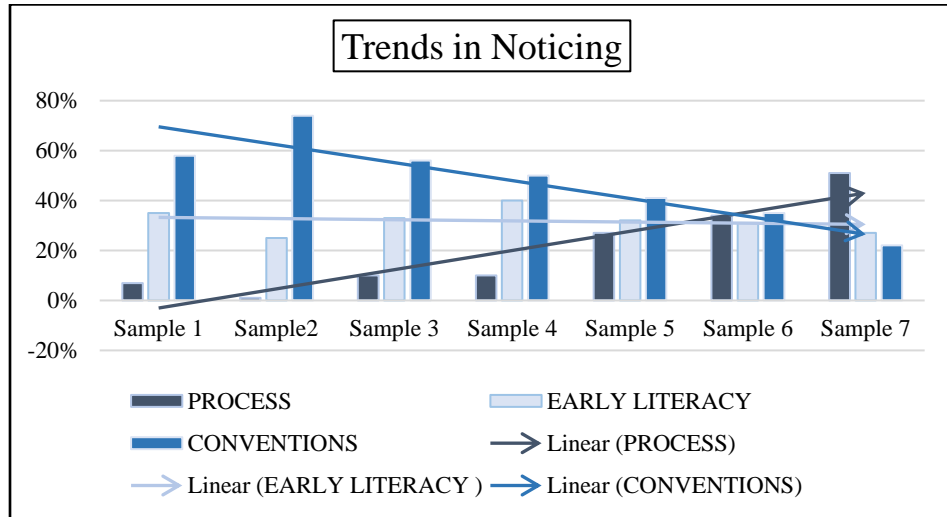
	Interviews First-Cycle Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate spelling progression • Can form a sentence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can form a word • Can write name • Letter knowledge • Narrative skill • Phonological connections; • Print awareness (directionality) • Use parts of a word to spell • Vocabulary 	<p>understanding of topic, themselves as an author, and their reader as an audience. Involving children in a Writing Workshop, is the opposite of the check and correct writing experiences they recalled. However, when focusing on the positives in a writer's work, it is possible to see how much a child has developed in their language and literacy abilities.</p>
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Findings

As the semester progressed the PSTs noticed more about the authors of the writing samples. The PSTs noticed fewer conventional writing moves. The number of conventional errors pointed out in each sample declined as the semester progressed. The number of noticings that indicated an author's attainment of an early literacy skill initially increased but peaked and remained steady from Writing Sample 4 through 7. The number of moves that pertained to a K-1 writer's process writing conceptions gradually increased across the semester until almost tripling in the final writing sample (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Frequency of Second-Cycle Pattern Code Noticed by Writing Sample



Conventional Writing Skills

Although the PSTs noticed less conventional writing abilities of the writer across the semester (Figure 4), the conventional skills the PSTs deemed as worthy to note remained constant (Figure 5). Twenty-six percent (85 of 333) of the conventional moves noticed by the PSTs pertained to the writer's ability to capitalize correctly.

Figure 4

Percent of Conventional Writing Skills Noticed by Writing Sample

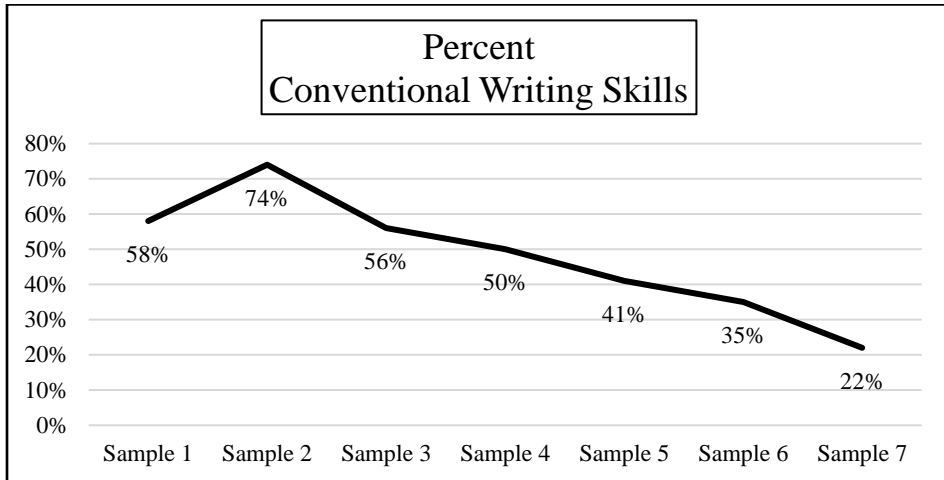
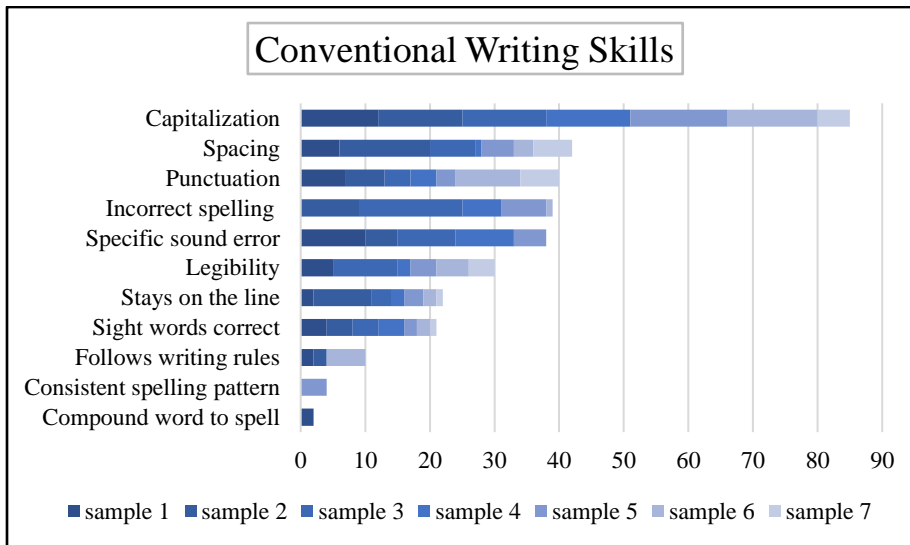


Figure 5

Conventional Writing Skills Noticed by Writing Sample



Early Literacy Skills

As the PSTs became more familiar with the early literacy skills necessary for emerging writers, they gradually began to identify these skills in the writing samples. In Writing Sample four, the PSTs peaked in the number of early literacy skills they noted (Figure 6). The early literacy skill most often noticed by the PSTs (37% or 84 of 227) was the K-1 writer’s phonological ability (Figure 7). The conventional writing skill of spelling and the early literacy skill of phonological awareness appeared to be important to the PSTs. Noticing the combination of these moves suggests that the PSTs’ recognition that sounding out words to spell them correctly is a literacy milestone for young writers to achieve.

Figure 6

Percent of Early Literacy Skills Noticed by Writing Sample

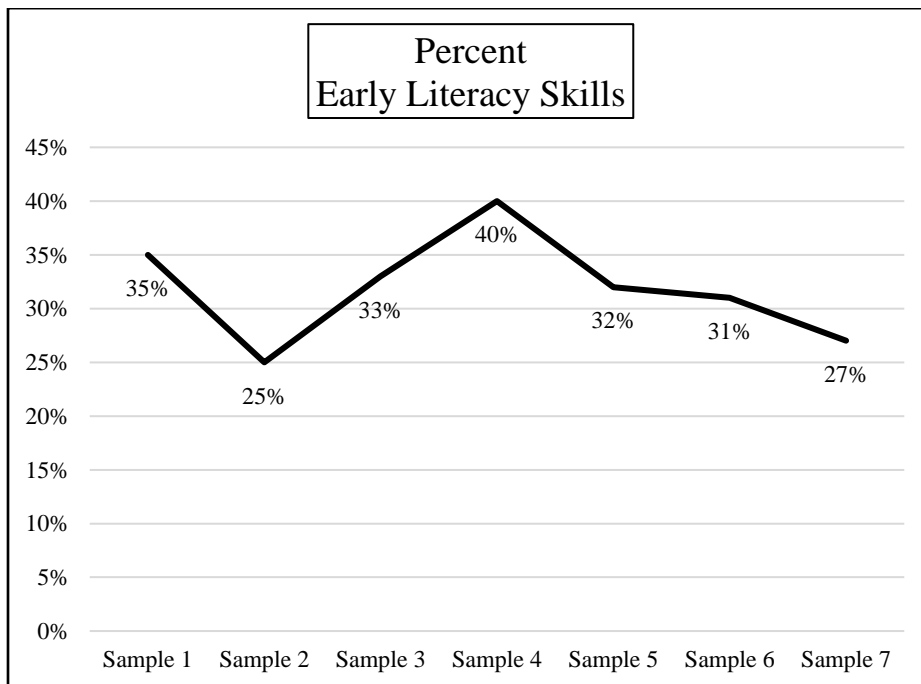
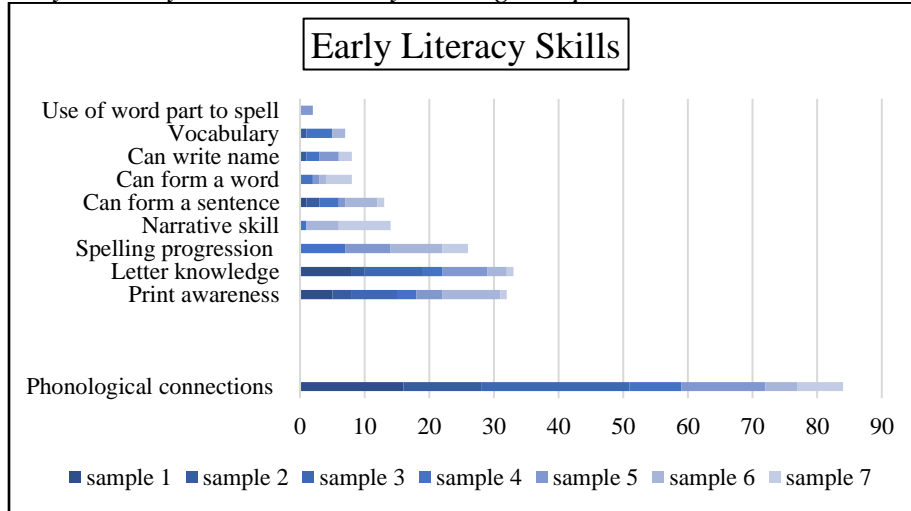


Figure 7
Early Literacy Skills Noticed by Writing Sample



Process Writing Skills

In writing samples one through six, the PSTs were less likely to notice process writing moves of the writer. Yet, the PSTs identification of process writing abilities increased steadily over the semester (Figure 8). The process writing skills most identified were the pairing of text and illustration (19% or 30 of 115) and the writer’s knowledge of how writing works (20% or 31 of 115) (Figure 9).

Figure 8

Percent of Process Writing Skills Noticed by Writing Sample

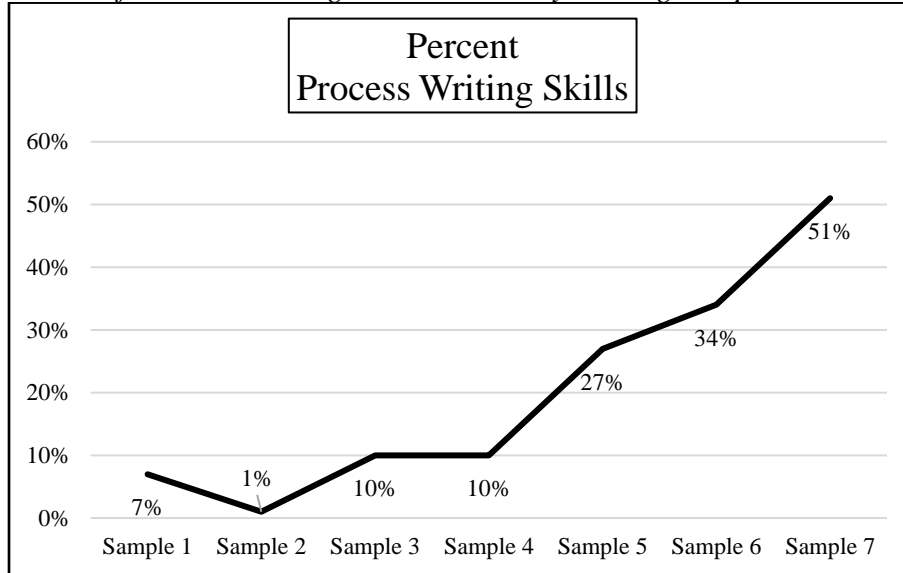
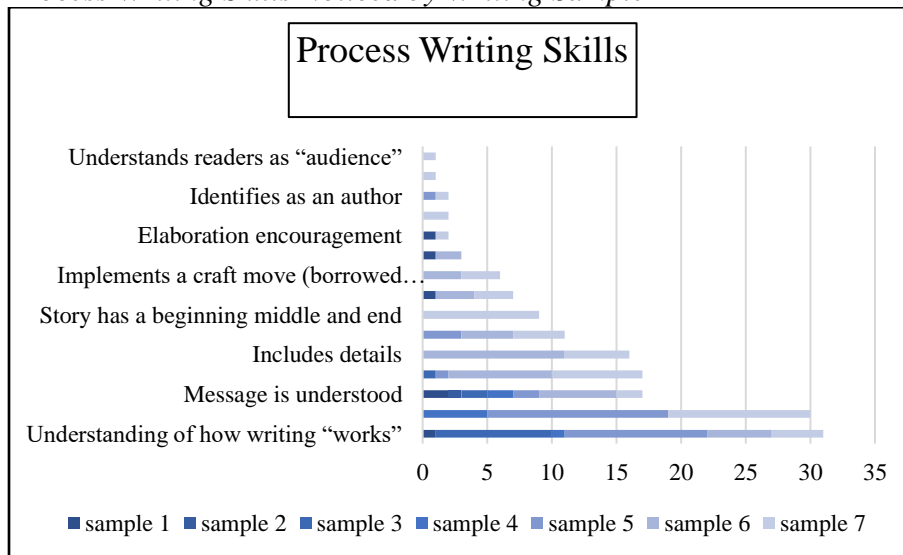


Figure 9

Process Writing Skills Noticed by Writing Sample



Discussion

Expert writing teachers notice meaningful patterns in their students' writing (Lesgold et al., 1988). The PSTs in one literacy methods course initially had trouble noticing the possibilities evident in young writers' writing. Vygotsky's assertion that "we need to concentrate not on the product of development but the very process by which higher forms are established" (1978, p. 64) was ultimately realized by the PSTs in this study. The PSTs originally centered their noticing of K-1 writers on the correctness of their written product. However, over the semester, the PSTs recognized that the process of writing undertaken by the young writers was paramount.

The PSTs accepted that a writer acquires language abilities implicitly and spontaneously (Vygotsky, 1987). Once acknowledging that conventional writing ability would follow as K-1 writers experimented with the writing process, the PSTs recognized creativity, imagination, and other characteristics of the young writer. In her interview, Laura explained,

As the course went on, I found myself trying to find the context of the story because I was thinking about what they actually tried to write. I tried to compare what was on the paper to what the message in their mind might be. I tried to understand how what seemed correct in their mind was reflected in what everyone else sees when looking at their paper. I learned that it is important to understand [the child's] thought process of how what they have written down is in their head (interview).

The PSTs in this study found recognizing writing conventions easy. However, the PSTs needed support from the social context of their literacy methods course to take notice of the K-1 writer's writing process. I conclude that PSTs require conventional, cultural, and genre knowledge about student writers during their preparation to become writing teachers.

Asking PSTs to approximate core practices during teacher preparation effectively assists their shifting understandings from being the writer to becoming the teacher of writing. This transition caused the PSTs to feel uncomfortable. Megan's comments echoed those of her classmates when she recalled,

At first, I only focused on the errors the child was making in their writing and really only on the negative aspects of their writing. But now I know that when looking at writing, teachers can acknowledge the positives instead of the negatives. By the end of the semester, I tried to focus on what the child was capable of writing. It is difficult to change your mindset when all your life you are taught to focus on your grammar and spelling instead of just reading the child's writing without noticing the mistakes (interview).

Teacher educators should not assume that PSTs understand that different ages of writers require different responses from their writing teachers. The PSTs in this literacy course struggled to negotiate their own experience as young writers into an acceptance that emergent writers approximate adult skills through play and drawing. The future teachers came to understand that young children need positive and authentic motivation to further their writing skills. Jill recalled,

As I started to notice all the children could do, I thought about the difference it might have made if my writing teachers encouraged or excited me about writing. If teachers focus on allowing children to enjoy writing at a young age, [the children] can carry that with them throughout their life (interview).

To keep writers motivated, the PSTs made constructive suggestions while noticing the writers rather than viewing the writer's immaturity as a trait requiring correction. Hal explained,

I changed my perspective over the last few writing samples because while at first, I would look for spelling and grammar errors; I started to make sure I was also focused on the emotion and feeling I got when I read the writing samples. I could picture the writer in my head – maybe excitement, surprise, or joy of the child. It made me happy to realize that I was able to focus on the whole writing process and not just mistakes (interview).

Further, the PSTs came to realize that novice writing attempts are valuable evidence of a child's acquired language and literacy abilities. In her interview, Bri explained,

Approximated spelling really had me thinking. I was examining their writing and thinking I can understand where [the writer was] going. They know how to listen for the first and last sounds in a word. That is a successful approach to future spelling. If they had the beginning and ending

sounds, maybe they were ready to listen for the middle vowel sounds (interview).

After gaining experience in recognizing young writers' possibilities, the PSTs dismissed their entrenched understandings regarding readiness. The PSTs let go of their handwriting and spelling standards and recognized that children take individual journeys toward conventional writing. The PSTs came to value the journey each writer takes as their social interactions, opportunities to write, and teacher's encouragement nudges them forward on the continuum of writing development. Focusing on the writer, as opposed to the writer's completed writing project was valuable to the PSTs in this study and is likely to impact their future praxis as teachers of writing. Julie summarized,

As I have practiced noticing the writer over the semester, I have been able to change my perspective. I was no longer looking for the simple mistakes, I focused more on the meaning behind stories and ideas. I was able to see a glimpse of who the children were as young writers. It made me realize that yes, they are going to make mistakes in their writing, they're still learning; but it's important to recognize ideas and thoughts through their writing attempts and acknowledge the early behaviors in a positive and less judgmental way (interview).

Implications

Teacher education programs intent on improving future writing instruction need to involve PSTs in the approximations that lead to mastery of core practices. If teachers are to be better prepared to assist every child in writing effectively, they must accept children where they are, scaffold their existing skills, and celebrate children's attempts to improve their writing abilities. Often, this is at odds with PSTs' recalled writing instruction.

To overcome a PST's "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 61), the PST must rehearse taking notice of the moves writers are making while in the process of writing. After noticing writing moves, writing instruction can be tailored to individual writer's needs. Further, after noticing signs of process writing development, PSTs are better able to respond to the individual writer.

Teacher educators should not make assumptions regarding what PSTs understand about the development of children. In this study, the PSTs were new to the concept of "emergent" literacy and consequently had an unrealistic view of the abilities writers of an early age might demonstrate. After exposure to young writers abilities, through writing samples, PSTs gained insight into the value of each mark

on a page. With scaffolding, the PSTs in this study were able to look at K-1 writer's written products and imagine future writing possibilities for the writer.

This study brings to light important considerations about current writing instruction in U.S. elementary schools. As in prior research, this study found that EC teachers naturally focus on the conventional features of writing such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation despite years of writing research indicating the need for young writers to be actively engaged in learning experiences before meaningful connections leading to understanding can occur (Vygotsky, 1978). One might assume that when EC PSTs come to notice a young writer's desire to communicate, they will respond with motivating feedback. However, PSTs do not immediately see their role as motivators. Instead, the PST's assumption is to point out the young writer's deficiencies.

Thus, this study contributes to our understanding of how EC PSTs might be best prepared to respond to a K-1 writer by noticing the possibilities in K-1 writer's written products. With attention to the evidence of emergent literacy understandings that an individual writer leaves on the page, an attentive writing teacher can customize a rich context for literacy learning where reading, writing, listening, and speaking are tools for literacy growth.

Even though the CCSSs require students to "devote significant time and effort to writing" across curricular areas to assure students are "college and career-ready writers" (CCSS, 2019, pp. 63-64), PSTs of EC writers are unprepared to notice the literacy growth evident in the written products. Just as writing "skills cannot be picked up from a few minutes here, and a few minutes there" (NCW, 2003, p. 20), future EC writing teachers cannot teach writing without intentional preparation to do so. Involving PSTs in writing methods courses that make use of writing samples to approximate the practices of classroom teachers is required as writing is "the quintessential 21st-century skill" (The National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2009, p. 4).

Limitations

While the goal of research is to reduce limitations, I recognize that limitations are unavoidable in any research study. This study was limited by the number of participants registered in one course and the short duration of the course. Additionally, my role as researcher was dependent on my role as the course instructor in the literacy methods course. Consequently, it is possible that the PSTs under investigation aimed to please me, their instructor. While I hope that the participants shared openly, this cannot be known for sure.

Further, the long-term effects of the shifts in PSTs' noticing patterns are not measurable from the data gathered. Whether these same PSTs would continue to

focus on process writing skills when confronted with the CCSSs or a school district curriculum is unclear.

Another limitation of this study is the inability of the PSTs to develop a relationship with the K-1 writers they were asked to take notice of. The directions given to the PSTs instructed that they “Imagine a K-1 writer” (see Appendix A). The ability to imagine a K-1 writer assumed that the PSTs were familiar with K-1 students, their writing capabilities, and their intentions for writing. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) pointed out that learning can occur before children have the development necessary to apply their learning in a social context. As a result, it is conceivable that had the PSTs been offered the opportunity to engage in social conversations with the writers of the writing samples, they may have noticed additional skills of the writer that were not as evident in imagined writing samples.

Areas for Further Study

As with any investigative project, the conclusions drawn from this study require additional research. The long-term effects of a course on PSTs requires examination to recognize if the shift made by these participants impacts the tone of the eventual EC classroom. For example, are PSTs who matriculated from this course more likely to implement a process Writing Workshop in their classroom? Or did the participants in this study experience obstacles in balancing their process approach to writing instruction with product-based curriculum materials mandated by their school district? Following up with the participants of this study, once entrenched in classrooms, would be interesting.

By exploring what teachers notice, researchers might gain additional insight into the eventual practice of responding to writers (Teaching Works, 2019) which is a priority for teachers of writing. Future studies into PSTs’ noticing and responding patterns would supplement the limited research the writing field has on noticing and responding to writers across grade levels.

Conclusion

Responding to a writer is a necessary activity for teachers of writing. Through noticing practice, the PSTs in this investigation were able to discover the need to scaffold young writers’ existing understandings by nudging forward the writer through encouragement instead of correction. As the PSTs recognized what the writers could do, rather than what they could not, the PSTs celebrated the writer regardless of where the writer sat on the continuum of writing development. The PSTs recognized the young students as capable and ready writers. Using writing samples in a literacy methods course is one way for future writing teachers to practice recognizing a writer’s potential. As a writer’s writing proficiencies are “limited [only] by the abilities of [their] teachers to teach [writing] well” (Gallavan

& Bowles, 2007, p. 61), continued emphasis on how to best prepare PSTs to notice the “surplus of possibilities” (Bomer et al., 2019, p. 140) of a writer holds great promise for educating the next generation of writers.

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APPENDIX A

Writing Sample 2

Name _____

Imagine this writing is from a K-1 writer in your future classroom. Please list what you notice about the writer. Then, suggest what you might do next to encourage writing growth of the writer.

Handwritten text sample 1: MY NAME IS NYSIA. I AM FIVE YEARS OLD. I LIKE WHEN MS. MCA RDLE LAUGHS. I LIKE TO PLAY ON THE COMPUTER. I LIKE TO PAINT. I LIKE TO DO MORNING WORK. I LIKE TO DO WORK BOARD. I LIKE TO DO INDEPENDENT.

My name is Nysia. I am five years old. I like when Ms. McArdle laughs. I like to play on the computer. I like to paint. I like to do morning work. I like to do work board. I like to do independent.

Handwritten text sample 2: I like to paint. I like to do work board. I like to do independent.