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Afterward

A Reflection on Writing Methods: Where Am I Going? Where Have I Been?

Kia Jane Richmond, *Northern Michigan University*

My first experience teaching writing methods was in the summer of 2001 at Northern Michigan University (NMU). I had just completed my Ph.D. in English Studies (Composition and Pedagogy) at Illinois State University and was hired to join the NMU English Education program. My syllabus for the writing methods course (EN 309 - Teaching of Writing) was focused on helping elementary Language Arts and secondary English pre-service teachers understand various teachers' roles in the K-12 writing classroom, create assignments connecting writing to all subject areas, evaluate students' writing and academic progress, and use literature, music, art, and technology to enhance the teaching of writing at all levels. I used a portfolio system of assessment and drew from research based in composition and literacy studies, the National Writing Project, and my experiences teaching middle and high school English Language Arts (ELA) in the early nineties. Textbooks required included Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle: New Understandings about Reading, Writing, and Learning* (1998), *Portfolio Portraits* – edited by Donald Graves and Bonnie Sunstein (1992), and *Writing, Teaching, Learning: A Sourcebook* – edited by Richard Graves (1999).

About ten years later, Jonathan Bush invited me (with M. Kilian McCurrie) to write an article focused on “Our Vision for Teaching/Writing [for] *Teaching/Writing: Journal of Writing Teacher Education*” (*T/W*). In that 2012 essay, we called for scholars in the field to identify methods of writing teacher preparation that connect “writing in the real world with the classroom context” and that offer “practical solutions and models for administrators and policymakers involved in planning, implementing, and assessing writing programs” (p. 11). In the ten years since publishing that inaugural issue of *T/W*, many experts have answered the call, sharing research and practical strategies for improving the teaching of writing in both K-12 and college/university settings, including Reid (2017), Zenkov, Dutro, Cartun, Melnychenko, Haberl, & Williams (2017), Scales et al. (2019), and Graham (2019), the last of which details features of effective writing instruction; shares research on teacher preparation and educational policies; and offers specific recommendations for making improvements in how writing is taught across grade levels in the U.S.

This year, when I taught EN 309 again, I realized that my approach remains centered on helping pre-service teachers understand the writing process and consider the roles of teacher and student in the K-12 writing classroom. Goals for pre-service teachers are based in part on objectives on the Michigan Test of Teacher Certification (MTTC), including understanding writing processes and purposes of revising and editing written texts, understanding the “forms, techniques, and stylistic requirements of writing to impart and explain information, for literary response and analysis, persuasive writing, and/or writing for personal and artistic expression and social interaction” (MTTC *Study Guide* for Field 002: English, 2017), and creating effective lesson plans based on English Language Arts curriculum and K-12 Common Core State Standards. Textbooks I used in 2022 include Jim Burke’s *Writing Reminders: Tools, Tips, and Techniques* (2003), Mary Ehrenworth’s *Looking to Write Students Writing through the Visual Arts* (2003), Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell’s *Writing with Mentors* (2015), and Laura Robb’s *Teaching Middle School Writers: What Every English Teacher Needs to Know* (2010). I occasionally still pull from my experiences as a classroom ELA teacher, but more frequently, I draw from observations completed as a university supervisor working with student teachers in middle and high school ELA classrooms in the Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and eastern Wisconsin. I also rely on knowledge gained through interactions with ELA teachers, English Education professors, and published authors who gather annually at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) fall convention and at yearly workshops and conferences sponsored our NCTE state affiliate (MCTE, the Michigan Council of Teachers of English).

Moreover, we have experienced many changes in instructional practices due to the Covid-19 pandemic that affected schools when, starting in March 2020, “Overnight, students, teachers, and parents went from the familiarity of in-person learning to one hundred percent remote/virtual learning” (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2020). K-12 teachers and university instructors were required to teach writing via video conferencing platforms to students working from home before some districts and colleges opened back up to (limited or hybrid) in-person teaching and learning. Some teachers were also asked to prepare learning packets for students to complete if they did not have access to the internet and/or to run revision workshops for students wearing masks in classrooms where students sat in socially distanced assigned seats – practices that in a few cases continue despite educational administrators (and others) saying that things are *back to normal*.

Also, as a result of NCTE’s commitment to antiracist and antibias practices and policies focused on “counteracting racism and other forms of bigotry in teaching materials, methods, and programs for the teaching and learning of English and the language arts” (NCTE Presidential Team, 2020), I have included in my writing methods more videos,

blogs, articles, and texts that invite students to reflect on antiracist teaching and its place in writing instruction. Students who complete the EN 309 course today, I believe, are well prepared to take on the challenges and joys of writing instruction through employing research-based, culturally diverse practices that support antiracist teaching tenets such as those espoused by our national organization (NCTE) and other experts in social justice in education.

In this issue of *Teaching/Writing*, I found support for some of the changes that I've already made to the writing methods syllabus and discovered inspiration for many more changes I can make in EN 309 going forward. For example, Naitnaphit Limlamai's discussion of pre-service teachers' cultivation of and reflection on their own "writerly identities" reinforces teaching writing in ways that are "humanizing and just." Likewise, Margaret Opatz and Elizabeth Nelson's argument for having pre-service teachers create "critical mentor text sets" sustaining "cultural and linguistic identities" – and Sarah Donovan's discussion of the development of pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in writing as well as experiences in genre study – both undergird antiracist/antibias teaching practices called for by NCTE and other educational organizations. Christina Saidy, Nicole Nava, and Ginette Rossi's discussion of how they modified their methods courses "to include purposeful multimodal assignments and genres" reminds me of the importance of paying attention to technology and its place in writing and writing instruction. And Nicole Sieben's article prompts us to consider teaching writing methods as "an undertaking of social justice work."

Though I'm not scheduled to teach writing methods specifically this fall, I will be revising writing instruction practices in that course the next time I teach it, and indeed in all my classes in the meantime. Based on the excellent recommendations of experts such as the authors in this volume of *T/W*, my goal is to continue reading published, research-based studies on antiracist/antibias practices, to attend workshops and conferences sponsored by NCTE and MCTE, and to collaborate with experts in English Education, including with a new colleague, Kelly (Kel) Sassi, who brings to NMU a set of diverse experiences teaching English Education in North Dakota and directing the Red River Valley Writing Project. As we move into what (we hope) is the post-pandemic world of teacher preparation, my intention is to remain reflective, creative, and informed, and perhaps most importantly, to stay ready to pivot at a moment's notice.

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