Opportunities for Equity in Writing Instruction: A Framework for Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

Writing instruction in schools tends to be limited in time and focused on preparing students to perform well on tests. Teachers do not feel prepared to teach writing and too often lack the confidence to stray from the packaged curriculum. This is even more of a concern in low performing schools where less skilled and less prepared teachers are not supported in professional development in writing. This article, borne from work with an Association of Teacher Educators Inquiry Initiative collaboration, proposes a framework for teacher education in writing instruction based upon research in identity, integration, and innovation. This framework can be used to plan and present content in the university methods classroom.

Keywords: teacher education, writing, improving equity

In 1976 Donald Graves wrote of his views of the state of writing instruction in schools. He saw writing in classrooms as a dependent act where students relied fully on their teachers for writing topics, audiences, and feedback. He compared this dependency to the welfare system. He argued that writing had become controlled by outside evaluation and teachers were forced to provide highly structured writing instruction that met the demands of a test. Students, in turn, were writing solely for their teacher and became reliant on their teacher's structure and guidance to produce a written product (Graves, 1976). Graves argued that writing in classrooms had become dependent on a limited system and students relied heavily on that system without breaking out of its grip.

Sadly, today's writing classrooms, especially those found in struggling or low performing schools, have not changed significantly (Goldstein, 2017; Johnston, 2019; Picou, 2022). Writing instruction in high needs schools is guided by what will be tested and a push to perform on tests that often determine funding and status (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Higgins, et al., 2013; NCTE,

2022; Popham, 2001). Writing is taught in formulaic approaches with the teacher as sole audience (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Collins, 1998). In low performing schools writing is taught by teachers who do not feel prepared to teach writing and who rely heavily on assessment driven writing activities in the literacy classroom (Goldstein, 2017; Harris, et al., 2013).

More than forty years later Donald Graves may as well be describing a struggling elementary school in Anytown, USA, today. Writing remains an area of literacy that is only covered deeply when tested and is then limited to teaching what will be tested (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Higgins, et al., 2013; NCTE, 2022; Popham, 2001). Writing is also often limited to a small portion of instructional time in the day or week (Graham, 2019; Picou, 2022). Teachers report feeling underprepared by their pre-service education to teach writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Harris, et al., 2013; Hodges, et al., 2019).

The quality of the teacher delivering instruction is a key factor in the teaching of writing, or lack thereof, in struggling schools. High poverty and/or low performing schools routinely have the least prepared, least skilled teachers teaching the students in the highest need of skilled instruction (Chiong & Oliveira, 2022; Garcia, et al., 2019). Not only are these teachers less skilled or less prepared, but they are also not supported with mentoring and professional development opportunities (Garcia, et al., 2019). Often professional development is driven by selected curricular materials and by state testing demands and rarely addresses writing as part of the daily literacy classroom or as an integrated component in other core subjects (Green & Allen, 2015). Low performing, high needs schools need well prepared teachers of writing to allow for richer writing instruction and to avoid Graves' welfare comparison.

This article, borne of work associated with the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) Inquiry Initiative and on-going opportunity gap research in literacy, offers a suggested

framework for preparing pre-service teachers to be both writers and teachers of writing. By focusing preparation for teaching writing on the three I's; Identity, Integration, and Innovation, preservice teachers can enter classrooms ready to stretch beyond the limited writing instruction aimed at teaching to a test, a test that is likely not equitable and privileges one language and one culture above others (Inuoe, 2020). New teachers entering the classroom can be confident to teach writing, to integrate writing across the curriculum, and to encourage students to be creative and explore a variety of forms of writing as self-expression, valuing all cultures and ways of being.

An Opportunity Gap: Writing Instruction in Struggling Schools

Self-report data from a national sample of teachers in 2008 suggested that writing instruction in classrooms could be occurring for less than ten minutes per day (Cutler & Graham, 2008). This is far from the thirty to sixty minutes daily recommended (Graham, et al., 2012). Schools have still not made writing instruction a priority, Chiong and Oliveira found in 2022 that only 4% of secondary education teachers surveyed spent thirty minutes per day on writing instruction (Chiong & Oliveira, 2022). This has serious and lasting implications for students (Picou, 2022). Students need practice with writing and explicit instruction in writing to become confident and comfortable (Picou, 2022; Wright, et al., 2021). When students achieve comfort and confidence, they are more likely to become strong writers (Picou, 2022; Wright, et al., 2021).

A lack of instructional time is further problematic when it comes to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. Black, Hispanic, low-income students and those for whom English is not their primary language perform at significantly lower rates on literacy tests that include writing components (Picou, 2022). Our lowest performing students need more time with writing

instruction and practice, and they tend to get less than students in affluent schools (Matthewson, 2022). In many urban and high-poverty schools the curriculum is narrow, and teachers are often forced to teach from a script-based program and only in areas that are heavily tested (Milner, 2018).

High stakes standardized assessments of writing lead to a limited view of the definition of writing and often results in a formulaic approach to writing, eliminating opportunities for students to make intentional decisions about product, process, and audience (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Scott, 2008; Warren, 2022). In addition, these assessments focus on specific modes of writing associated with state standards, thus valuing narrative, persuasive, and informational writing above all other modes (Chiong & Oliveira, 2022; Newkirk, 2014; Warren, 2022;). Writing instruction focused on limited modes and performance on standardized tests does not prepare a culturally diverse population of students for the demands of college and career writing tasks. It does not develop diverse communities of writers who write for their own independent purposes after they complete traditional schooling (Behizadeh, 2014; Warren, 2022).

To further complicate high stakes assessments of writing, these instruments tend to have racial and linguistic biases (Perryman-Clark, 2016). If instruction aligns with a test that has inherent bias, instruction only perpetuates further gaps and lessens equity for all students to receive quality instruction. Instruction must go beyond the test, encourage critical thinking skills, and value all cultures and ways of being to challenge current narratives in texts, media, and the world at large.

A white paper published by the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) sums it up in this way:

Writing is an important form of self-expression and communication as well as a tool for thinking, reflecting, and learning. Its use as a process, a practice, and a product is essential in the classroom and beyond. However, in school settings, writing is often perceived and enacted as a gatekeeping device, which contributes to achievement gaps and other inequities. This happens when writing instruction and assessments focus on the *writing*—the products that are ultimately assessed and evaluated—rather than on the *writers* themselves. (2022, par.2)

Preparing Today's Writing Teachers

Today's teachers report a lack of confidence in teaching student writers, and this leads to reliance on prepackaged and prescriptive programs geared toward preparing students solely for the type of writing that will be tested (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Johnston, 2019; Stillman, 2011). This lack of confidence is linked to a lack of preparation in teacher education courses. Universities rarely offer writing instruction specific courses. They tend to include writing instruction embedded within reading courses (Myers, et al., 2016). Reading and writing are reciprocal processes and teaching writing within the context of a reading course is beneficial but preservice teacher candidates also need specific training in writing instruction, assessment, and strategies (Bomer, et al., 2019; Roser, et al., 2014). Student success in writing is linked to teacher preparation and confidence (Hawkins, et al. 2019; Hillocks, 2006; Johnston, 2019). Confident writing teachers create opportunities in their classrooms for writing practice and create an environment where students can explore and grow as writers.

Teacher candidates report feeling unprepared by the lack of a specific writing course. This is further complicated when they do not receive professional development geared toward delivering quality writing instruction once they enter the classroom (Calkins, et al., 2012; Carter

& Townsend, 2022). A lack of professional development hinders teachers' instructional growth. It adds to a teacher's tendency to stick to formulaic or prescriptive assignments provided by packaged curriculum materials. Teachers not supported by continued professional development are less likely to innovate and encourage creativity and self-expression in the writing classroom.

In summary, high needs schools do not always receive high quality writing instruction. Most preservice teachers are not prepared to teach writing confidently. Teachers new to the profession tend to find their first teaching positions in high needs schools. In 2022, Chiong and Oliveira found that many teachers in high needs schools do not feel they have the same access to professional development as schools with fewer needs yet they have a much larger challenge with 90% of Black, Hispanic, and low income students achieving below grade level in writing (Chiong & Oliveira, 2022). This results in a gap and presents an opportunity to improve writing teacher preparation for all pre-service teacher candidates thus improving instruction in writing in all schools equitably.

The Three I's Framework

A framework is a research informed model or structure. It provides scaffolding and support. In essence it is a guiding structure with interlocking pieces that overlap and work together (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005; Regionel, 2020).

The framework presented in this article is one that can be used to scaffold and support preservice teacher preparation in writing instruction. This framework provides a guiding structure for planning course content with interlocking and overlapping pieces. This framework is designed first and foremost to focus on closing an opportunity gap and assisting preservice teachers in developing and delivering equitable instruction to all students.

The Three I's Framework proposed is based upon research in three areas of writing and writing instruction: writing identity, integration, and innovation.

Identity

Many teachers do not describe themselves as writers. In fact, they consider themselves to be poor writers and do not identify as a "writer" (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). Teachers who do not identify as writers may avoid the teaching of writing as often as possible in their classrooms (Whitney, 2016). This can be exacerbated by poor preparation in teacher education programs (Myers, et al., 2016; Daniels & Beck, 2019). Ivanic (1994) refers to the autobiographical self in the creation of a teacher writing identity. Teachers have a personal history of successes and failures in writing that they bring with them into the classroom. Negative experiences in writing can bring with them shame and this can bring with it avoidance of personal writing and the teaching of writing (Whitney, 2018).

A lack of identity as "writer" is problematic for teachers. It influences the quality of instruction in classrooms (Morgan, 2016; Premont, 2022). Teacher enthusiasm for writing is contagious and teachers excited about writing create students excited about writing (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Daniels & Beck, 2019). When teachers identify as writers, they model writing and share the writing process with students creating rich classroom experiences in writing (Cremin & Oliver, 2017). The converse is then true. Teachers who don't identify as writers do not model process or enthusiasm and there is an absence of rich classroom experiences.

Teachers may have a writing identity that they share with students in their classroom. However, what they choose to teach in their writing classroom often represents their own personal socialization and ways of thinking (Picower, 2021). Because of this, teachers can either reproduce racism or challenge it. Teachers must be aware of their own culture as part of their

identity and balance this with an awareness of and honoring of their students' culture when delivering writing instruction. Schools can be a place where student identity and culture is stripped away (Milner, 2017). As teachers develop a writing identity they must be challenged to look at all aspects of this identity. They must realize that what they don't teach in writing speaks loudly and may serve to strip students of aspects of their growing writing identities (Milner, 2017). When topics or writing activities are avoided by a teacher, students miss an opportunity for learning critical thinking and questioning skills and this has the potential to perpetuate the status quo (Davis, 2021; Milner, 2017). Writing is a tool for equitable and inclusive literacy instruction (Inoue, 2020). The writing classroom led by a teacher with an equitable and inclusive component to their own identity can be a place where students develop critical thinking skills that are key to challenging narratives in texts, media, and the world around them.

Identity can be developed. One of the first steps is to accept that writing is naturally a struggle, and it requires practice and effort (Whitney, 2018). Teachers can build their identity as a writer by finding a writing community that provides feedback and encouragement to build confidence (Oliveira, 2016). An inclusive and supportive pre-service teacher education classroom has the potential to provide this community and to build efficacy. When pre-service teachers experience a writing community that allows for vulnerability, they grow to appreciate what is needed for their own students in their own classroom (Premont, 2022). They develop a sense of agency and feel more confident sharing challenges they face in writing with their student in authentic ways (Daniels & Beck, 2019; Premont, 2022).

Once teachers develop a writing identity, they are better prepared to do the same for their students and to support writing instruction in a rich manner in their classrooms. Developing this identity needs to be a part of pre-service teacher education to set future teachers up for successful

writing instruction in their classroom. It is a key foundation for the work (Morgan, 2016). If teachers enjoy writing they will create conditions in their classroom to allow their students to enjoy writing as well (Daniels & Beck, 2019). If teachers challenge themselves to examine their identities and writing curriculum with an equity lens the writing classroom can be a safe space for all (Inoue, 2020).

Integration

Historically, reading and writing have been taught as separate subjects (Sawchuck, 2023). This has been true despite research indicating reading and writing are connected skills and support each other in a reciprocal manner (Graham, 2019). Balancing reading and writing instruction and connecting them instructionally creates generally positive effects on both (Graham, 2019; Sawchuck, 2023).

Writing matters in the earliest of grades as students are learning to read and continues to be important as students develop mature reading skills (Sawchuck, 2023). Students need continuous and embedded writing instruction in the literacy classroom. Writing about reading, for instance, aids deeper comprehension about text (Laminack & Wadsworth, 2015).

Writing also helps students learn content and to make sense of content across the curriculum. Writing to learn in content areas improves student learning overall (Graham, 2019; Graham, 2022). Writing about content helps transfer learning to long term memory and helps students process content at a deeper level (Sawchuck, 2023). Writing about content often involves evaluation and synthesis skills that go beyond factual recall, helping students strengthen not only their writing but their comprehension and transfer of understanding across the curriculum (Sawchuck, 2023).

In terms of bridging opportunity gaps in schools, integrating writing throughout the day and across the curriculum can create an engaged classroom community of writers. An engaged community of writers can create empowerment in individual students. Empowered students consider a variety of perspectives, collaborate with others in problem solving, and think independently with reference to relevant information (Broom, 2015). Writing in all content areas can be a tool for learning as well as a tool for empowering students to find and use their voice in the classroom and in their larger context (Childs, 2020).

Innovation

Writing instruction should be structured (Sawchuck, 2023). In order to be successful writers in school and beyond students need instruction in the writing process and writing strategies. Additionally, they need support with fluency in transcription and sentence building and modeling of quality writing (Sedita, 2022). Research also supports that students need to write frequently and for varied purposes and that they need to be engaged in a writing community (Graham, et.al, 2012; Sedita, 2022).

A common misunderstanding of structured writing instruction with a focus on skills necessary for competent writing is that this approach does not allow for student choice and voice. To the contrary, students should have relevant writing assignments that serve a real purpose and have a real audience outside of the teacher or a test (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007; Hidi & Boscolo, 2006; Sedita, 2022). Proficient writers engage in the art and craft of writing as they practice skills toward competency (Sedita, 2022). Writing about thoughts and feelings can help students learn to express their voice in a way that allows them awareness of an authentic function of the written word (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007; Premont, 2022). Sharing this writing within a literate community can assist students in building a positive attitude toward writing, motivating them to

use writing as a tool for communicating (Boscolo & Gelati, 2007; Fletcher, 2017). Ralph

Fletcher (2017) refers to unstructured writing as "Greenbelt Writing." It allows students to stray

from the structured path of packaged and scripted writing assignments and to be creative while

they explore the craft of writing.

Innovation in writing assignments has an opportunity to increase equity across school

contexts. When the teaching of writing attends to context, identity, and power students can be

empowered to express themselves in meaningful ways (Kinloch, et al., 2017). Teachers have the

power to create an environment in which students can experience value in the linguistic and

cultural resources they bring into the classroom (Guerra, 2008). Creating these types of writing

environments can move students across gaps that sometimes separate them from others (Chiong

& Oliveira, 2022; Guerra, 2008). Students can believe that they are writers and that what they

have to say matters (Kinloch, et al., 2017).

A Framework for Pre-Service Teacher Writing Instruction Preparation

Based upon research in the teaching of writing, the Three I's Framework is designed to

support planning and delivery of equitable and inclusive content in writing methods courses and

in work with pre-service teachers in writing instruction preparation. It incorporates the three key

concepts of identity, integration, and innovation in an overlapping and interlocking manner.

Using the framework focuses all content and instruction on the three key concepts while

allowing for personalization to one's specific educational context. An overview of the

framework is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of the Three I's Framework

Identity	Integration	Innovation
Supporting teacher candidates in growing their identity as a writer	Preparing teacher candidates to write across the curriculum and across contents	Supporting teacher candidates to balance structured writing activities with unstructured writing opportunities in the classroom
Supporting teacher candidates in building writing identities in their students	Preparing teacher candidates to view reading and writing as reciprocal processes	Encouraging and supporting teacher candidates to incorporate writing creatively to support and reinforce concepts in all content areas and to empower students in all contexts
Preparing teacher candidates to build a community of writers in their classrooms	Preparing teacher candidates to employ explicit instruction in writing based upon research supported best practices in all content areas	

A framework is a structure or model that provides support. The framework presented in this article and summarized in Table 1 was constructed from research on three key areas of writing instruction: Identity, Integration, and Innovation. These three areas overlap and provide a basis for developing content for preservice teacher preparation in writing instruction. One potential use of this framework is for content and curriculum development for preservice methods courses and new teacher professional development. Instruction and ongoing support for both preservice and in-service teachers can be planned using these three areas as a foundation. Each activity and learning outcome can be measured by one or more of these areas. These activities and outcomes can be challenged by considering how they address identity, integration, and/or innovation in the classroom. By utilizing the framework for planning and challenging,

instruction and on-going support can be targeted and thoughtful with a focus on equitable and inclusive education for all students.

The Three I's framework can also be used in preservice teacher education to challenge new professionals to consider their own socialization and biases. Teachers often choose to teach what represents them and their way of being and knowing (Picower, 2021). Teacher education must challenge this in developing tomorrow's teachers if classrooms are to be equitable and inclusive for all students. By considering one's own writing identity, and the identities of their students, this challenge can begin. By considering what content is selected for integration preservice teachers can begin to look at curriculum with a critical eye. By considering ways to innovate in writing instruction preservice teachers can look for ways to value students for who they are and move them forward in an inclusive manner (Laskowski, 2023).

A framework can present an overarching argument or reasons for investigating a topic (Ravitch & Riggan, 2022). The Three I's Framework has a potential use as a guide for future research in preservice teacher writing instruction and in increasing equity in writing instruction across all school and community contexts. The framework allows for new ideas and understandings about these topics to evolve and grow (Ravitch & Riggan, 2022).

Finally, this framework has the potential to serve as an analysis method for qualitative data collected on developing content for methods courses, supporting preservice teachers as teachers of writing, and exploring more about the roles of identity, integration, and innovation in preparing teachers to close an opportunity gap in schools.

Research Implications

The Three I's Framework is evolving and in its current state was guided by existing research. It poses a compelling argument for further study. Further research in the

comprehensive nature of the framework itself is warranted. Considering the need for equitable and inclusive teaching in all schools, the framework should be tested for any missing elements. Do identity, integration and innovation cover all aspects of both writing instruction and the need for questioning and challenging the status quo? It is essential that the framework serve as a culturally responsive model that values critical thinking. It is critical that teachers use students' identities and their cultural assets to move them forward and increase equity in classrooms (Laskowski, 2023).

Research around the framework's use as a tool for content development for education methods courses is also warranted. This content development must consider writing as a tool for equitable and inclusive instruction without privileging one culture or way of being over another (Inoue, 2020). This aspect of writing instruction should be explicit in all three areas of the framework.

Finally, research on the effectiveness of utilizing the framework to improve preparation of teachers for teaching writing in low performing schools is needed. Does the framework indeed hold the key to improving teacher education in writing instruction? Does using the framework to build instructional content in teacher education lead to increased equity in all classrooms?

Conclusion

Schools deemed struggling or low performing are often confined to writing instruction that is prescriptive and structured, geared toward what is tested. These schools often have new teachers who report feeling unprepared to teach writing. Students in these schools are not given opportunities for innovation in writing that has the potential to empower them and to help them build skills like communication, collaboration, and empathy. In high performing schools writing is often less structured, teachers are better prepared and supported as writers and teachers of

writing, and students have room to explore, find, and express their voices through written

communication. This inequity creates an opportunity gap that can be addressed in part by

improved preservice teacher preparation in writing instruction.

A framework can provide support for improving content and curriculum development in

pre-service education. The framework presented in this article provides structure that attends to

three key areas of overlapping importance. By supporting preservice teacher identity new

teachers can grow in confidence as they begin their teaching career. Supporting integration can

provide an opportunity for student content growth and improve writing while allowing for

students to express their voices in authentic ways. Supporting innovation helps preservice

teachers use best practices in writing instruction in creative ways that allow students to become

empowered and to view writing as a tool for expression and communication of the true self.

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