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### Critical Literacy as a Tool for Social Change: Negotiating Tensions in a Pre-Service Teacher Education Writing Course

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**Abstract:** In this *Voices from the Field* article, we (two teacher-educators/-researchers) describe our negotiation of teaching practices in an online writing course for pre-service teachers. Our overarching purpose is to disrupt dominant discourses of writing and to illuminate critical perspectives. Specifically, we highlight intentional shifts to our initiating texts to better align with tenets of critical literacy. We experienced various tensions that led us to redesign the course. In closing, we pose lingering questions that critical teacher educators may ask while engaging in the iterative process of learning and growing through practice.

**Keywords:** critical literacy, online teaching, teacher education, teacher research, writing instruction



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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In our dual roles as teacher educators and researchers, we recognize the importance of disrupting narrow approaches to writing instruction and illuminating critical perspectives (Bomer, Land, Rubin, & Van Dike, 2019). We also recognize the complexity of this task. With this understanding, in our writing course for pre-service teachers (PSTs) we work to engage in the ongoing, contextual, and dynamic process of intentionally shifting toward a more critical perspective. In this *Voices from the Field* article, we explore our negotiation of a writing course for PSTs, focusing on our intentional teaching practices and moves. In particular, we center our investigation on the initiating texts used. These *initiating texts* (Prior, 1998, 2004) included assignment and assessment guidelines, readings, and digital tools, as well as discussions, feedback, and other learning activities surrounding various composition assignments. As Prior highlights, through these initiating texts teachers become coauthors in their students' work. Consequently, the nature of these texts and the perspectives of literacy and learning embedded within them play an important role in shaping the subsequent texts created by students. We recognize that initiating texts do not fully control the students' work that follows from them; rather, students interpret and negotiate these texts as they seek to meet the requirement of an assignment. We also recognize that other factors (e.g., personal and cultural histories, and social and political contexts) influence students' work. However, we find value in focusing on our *initiating texts* because we are in a position to

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change and improve them in order to align with the tenets of critical literacy.

## Background

We frame our narrative in scholarship concerned with critical literacies and approaches to the teaching of writing.

### What are Critical Literacies?

Critical literacies consider the ways that literacies are historically, culturally, and politically situated, which in turn interact with readers and writers' social worlds, impacting how they negotiate various identities, positions, and privileges (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street, 2000). We draw on the understanding that teaching is a political act and that education will never be a neutral enterprise (Freire, 1993). Both teaching and learning are co-constructed from the daily experiences, cultural backgrounds, and funds of knowledge of the teacher and students (Moll et al., 1992). Freire (1993) further argued that “language represents one of the most important aspects in the process of democratization of societies” (p. 135). He argued that teaching literacy is a social and political commitment to challenge oppressive structures of dominant society for a more equitable, humanizing, and democratic world. Furthermore, the dominant narrative and mainstream cultures have values and rules that are often unspoken and that espouse privilege that emerges from aspects of identity, agency, and possible futures. Given these features of critical literacies, literacy teacher educators must combat traditional practices of public schooling and conceptualize literacy as both *reading the word and*

<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this

article we use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

*reading the world* in which literacy is not only an area of study, but also a reflection of interpretations, values, and beliefs (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

### What are approaches for writing instruction?

Contemporary writing scholars (Kang, 2016; McCarthey & Ro, 2011) have outlined various approaches for writing instruction, including: (a) teacher-directed and more product-based with an emphasis on formats and structures, (b) process-oriented approaches releasing power from the teacher to the students regarding topic choice and writerly moves with a focus on the writing process. Proponents of writing workshop embed characteristics of process-oriented writing (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983, 1994) in which writers are writing for real audiences about personally meaningful topics. Although there are various interpretations and instantiations of writing workshop, the main components include: (a) extended period of time to write on self-generated topics, (b) instruction through mini-lessons based on the needs of the classroom, (c) teacher and students collaborating on various phases of the writing process (e.g, pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing), and (d) opportunities for teacher and students to share and confer about writing throughout the various writing stages (Boscolo, 2008; Pollington et al., 2001). National Writing Project (NWP) also shares the process-oriented writing workshop value in which teachers of writing must take on the various writerly roles and experience the joys and struggles of participating in the writing process (Brooks, 2007).

With that said, some may argue that process-oriented approaches come from positions of power and privilege that value some texts, genres, and styles over those of students from diverse cultural and

linguistic backgrounds. In other words, the assumption of the process-oriented approach emphasized in writing workshops is that logical sequencing and steps within the process lead to understanding. However, embedded in enactments of writing pedagogy are ideologies about language, teaching, and learning (Delpit, 1995; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Bomer (2017) challenges writing teachers to disrupt traditional writing workshops and move from culturally tolerant to culturally sustaining pedagogies in explicit ways regarding whole class texts, topic choice, language, forms of assessment, and genres. Critical writing workshops (Flint & Laman, 2012; Heffernan, 2004; Winn & Johnson, 2011) offer writing classrooms space for dialogue where students' linguistic repertoires, cultural backgrounds,

and histories can be used as starting points. They create classroom communities that have dynamic cultures based on social interactions, negotiations, and imaginations. In the next section, we describe the context of our courses, our PSTs, and teacher initiating texts.

### Context

#### Authors' Positionality

We understand the importance of our positionalities as teacher educators and researchers sharing our students' writing and reflecting on our own teaching practices. We are two middle class, female researchers and teacher educators. One is Asian-American and one is White. We are both past participants of the NWP summer institute, as well as former elementary classroom teachers who have taught in diverse environments. We have taught and collaborated on this PST education writing course for six semesters and continue to revise and rethink our course.

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We align with critical teacher educators (Haddix, 2015; Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2015; Vasquez, 2013) who employ critical literacy frameworks within their methods courses. As critical teacher educators, we consider it our role to steer PSTs to recognize neoliberal policies, inequities within the larger system, and opportunities to *teach against the grain* (Darder, 2002). Similar to other teacher educators and researchers, we seek to use systematic inquiry into our own teaching and our students' learning, to challenge traditional approaches to schooling (Cochran-Smith, 2004). In particular, for this article, we were interested in our instructional moves and teacher initiating texts for a digital composition PSTs created as part of their Teacher as Writer portfolios.

### Course Context

Both authors, Grace and Sonia, teach separate sections of this course focused on PSTs as writers themselves, as well as on the teaching of writing. This course has traditionally been 100% online to allow PSTs flexibility in their schedules, because most of them are in clinical classrooms for two full days. This course was previously designed to align with the principles of the NWP, in particular, the notion that teachers of writing should write (Wood & Lieberman, 2000). However, as we taught this course, we began experiencing an increasing tension between honoring our PSTs' voice and choice in their writing and simultaneously addressing sociopolitical purposes for writing and critical perspectives and topics.

The majority of our students are White, English monolingual females, which is representative of the student population in our elementary education program at a public university in the Midwest. The PSTs are elementary education majors and most of them are pursuing a reading endorsement that certifies them as public school reading teachers.

We will describe a shared experience in Grace's class throughout the article. This shared experience was an opportunity for PSTs to familiarize themselves with

an urban neighborhood in Chicago and work with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. PSTs visited a school that has 95% low income students, 56% ELLs, 15 different languages, dual language program. The teacher initiating texts used within the course included: teachers' assignment guidelines, learning activities, and mentor texts. We also considered texts that the PSTs created in response to these teacher initiating texts, such as writers' notebooks (blogs), writing portfolio compositions, and reflections. Before the shared experience, PSTs responded to pre-reflection questions about urban spaces (see Appendix A). Because the PSTs were limited to a day trip with the students, they used Flipgrid, a social learning platform with a provision for holding a video-based online discussion, to meet and converse with their students and develop relationships before the urban field trip. The PSTs also administered reading surveys (see Appendix B) and created their poetry lessons.

### Reflecting on Initiating Texts and Recognizing Tensions

When we examined the teacher initiating texts used in the course, we recognized that these texts frequently did not align with the critical approach we were advocating for. Specifically, we identified tensions related to teacher-directed, text form, technology tools, and literacy as a neutral practice.

### Teacher-Directed vs. Writer's Choice

In our initial assignment guidelines for the digital composition, we both allowed our PSTs choice over the topic of their assignment, and encouraged them to draw on their writers' notebooks (blogs) and personal interests for topic selection. In inviting them to build on their personal knowledge, we were aligning our instruction with a process approach to writing instruction that encourages student ownership and agency and that recognizes the importance of students drawing upon their personal experiences (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Graves,

1994). However, although we wanted to demonstrate that we value writers' choice and voice, we both experienced some tension when we observed our PSTs' writing topics. They typically chose to write about topics such as pets, hobbies, and interests; and rarely took on critical perspectives or wrote about sociopolitical issues. For example, topics included, *How to make chocolate chip cookies*, *Hogwarts*, and *How to watch Netflix* (see Appendix C).

Some PSTs did choose to create digital compositions around educational issues, such as Common Core Standards and standardized testing; however, the deep interrogation of complex and critical issues that we wanted to see rarely occurred (see Appendix D). Our initial reaction was to feel disappointed with our PSTs' work, but a closer examination of our initiating texts prompted us to reconsider our own roles in their work. Even though we engaged in the reading and discussion of critical texts and issues with our PSTs, we did not make explicit connections to these texts and issues in our digital composition assignment guidelines. Neither did we model what a critical digital composition might look like or the processes in which one might engage while creating such a composition. Within this context, it is unsurprising that we saw little evidence of critical issues or approaches within their work.

### Text Form vs. Text Function

Our examination of our assignment guidelines and other initiating texts also revealed that the way we structured the assignment tended to privilege text form over text function. That is, PSTs were prompted through assignment guidelines to create an informative or persuasive digital composition. By sequencing this assignment shortly after the class reviewed Common Core State Standards for writing that focus on three text types - opinion/argument,

informative/explanatory, and narrative - it is possible that we were perpetuating the common classroom practice of focusing on the structure of writing rather than the purpose of writing. This focus on text types is deeply embedded in classrooms but is highly problematic because it neglects the social dimension of composing and the ways in which genre are tools for accomplishing social practices (Bazerman & Prior, 2005). Given this understanding of the way in which we presented the assignment, we realized the need to socially situate the assignment, as well as to highlight the ways in which a text's function or purpose might shape its form.

### Technology Tools vs. Technology Social Practices

Similarly, we identified tensions in the ways in which our initiating texts prompted PSTs to use technological tools, and in the ways in which our own vision of how these tools might be used for social practice shaped our assumptions. Our assignment guidelines and assessment criteria encouraged PSTs to gain technical skills (e.g., know how to add text, images, video, and voice-over); however, they did not highlight how these digital tools might be used in nuanced and dynamic ways to convey multimodal meaning for particular social purposes. In effect, we were focusing our assignment on the "technical stuff" (the programs and technical tools), rather than the "ethos stuff" (the new conceptions of participation, production, and publication that these technical tools might afford) (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 7). In doing so, we were perpetuating rather than contesting another common classroom practice of uncritically applying technological tools.

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## Literacy as Neutral vs. Literacy as Critical

Our examination of our initiating texts also revealed that we were not highlighting literacy as a critical phenomenon, and were not facilitating connections among critical components of the course and our digital literacy assignment. For example, we were assigning texts and facilitating discussions that illuminated critical literacy; however, when it came to our digital composition assignment, we were not foregrounding the importance of critical literacy. Instead, we were falling into the common classroom practice of treating composing as an autonomous set of skills and practices separate from a social and cultural context. We each had a checklist approach to the assignment that led students to complete particular tasks or include particular components in their digital composition without interrogating why they were doing what they were doing. The concept of context was not addressed in various writing assignments.

We addressed these tensions in different ways given the structure and contexts of our own courses; however, we addressed many common issues. In particular, we considered how we might better contextualize various assignments within social practice and how we might make intentional changes to our initiating texts to better connect our assignments to tenets of critical literacy. In the following section, Grace describes the course redesign, the tensions that she faced in her teacher initiating texts, and provides example lessons used to combat these tensions. We have only focused on Grace's course redesign because of limited space.

### Revising Through Shared Experience

As Grace reflected on her initiating texts (e.g., mentor texts, assignment guidelines, scoring guides), she faced tensions of following along with the traditional genres of writing (e.g., narrative, informative, persuasive) and the limited critical dialogue that was available through the various assignments. As a self-

labeled critical educator, she was confronted with filling her students' containers or receptacles, as Freire's (1983) banking model suggests. After recognizing these tensions, Grace contextualized and grounded aspects of critical literacy within a shared experience. Riley and Crawford-Garrett (2015) illuminate the notion of *rereading* in which PSTs must unlearn certain schooling practices by rereading their past experiences in order to change their future trajectories as teachers. In a similar vein, Grace's PSTs learned about critical perspectives and reread their past schooling experiences. Then the PSTs participated in an urban field trip that provided a shared experience of what critical perspectives could look like. Grace redesigned the course to center on a shared experience, focus on contextualizing various assignments, and ground their perspectives on the foundations of critical literacies.

### Contextualizing Initiating Texts within Social Practice

Throughout the course Grace revised the initiating texts used to prepare PSTs for the urban field trip so that these texts focused on tenets of critical literacies. Grace collaborated with the National Center for Urban Redesign to plan the urban field trip in Chicago. The new initiating texts included:

- Two *YouTube* videos, created by a local non-profit organization, about the local community and school. These videos were posted to VideoAnt (<https://ant.umn.edu/>), a video annotation tool that allows users to combine web-based video with text-based annotation. Through these videos, PSTs had opportunities to engage in critical dialogue with Grace and one another. In the discussion, one PST commented, "I have lived less than an hour away from Chicago my whole life but have not explored Chicago as much as I would like to. I have been to multiple museums and stores but not just exploring the culture." Another PST

responded, “I am kind of embarrassed that I have grown up visiting the city my whole life and I have never heard of this museum. I would like to visit to learn more about this event in history. The architecture is breathtaking and I think it is special that we have a sculpture that you can't find anywhere other than Cambodia.”

- Two interviews conducted by Grace, one with the classroom teacher and one with the director of a local non-profit that focused on storytelling. These videos were also posted to VideoAnt. These interviews presented PSTs with potential differing views and perspectives from their own schooling experiences. They also presented an assets-based perspective of the local school and community organization. Again, PSTs had opportunities for critical dialogue and collaboration around these interviews. PSTs made comments such as, “I also had this initial assumption growing up that I wanted to go home after college and teach in the suburbs where I grew up. However, junior year of college was a turning point for me after I was able to complete my clinical [experience] at a diverse, low income school.”
- A Curriculum Analysis Chart (see Appendix E). After reading about and discussing various theories and approaches to writing instruction, PSTs used the chart to facilitate critical analysis of several writing curricula.
- Poetry mentor texts, written by racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse poets. PSTs analyzed these to prepare for creating their own poetry lesson plans, which they designed for their student(s) in the school on the urban field trip.

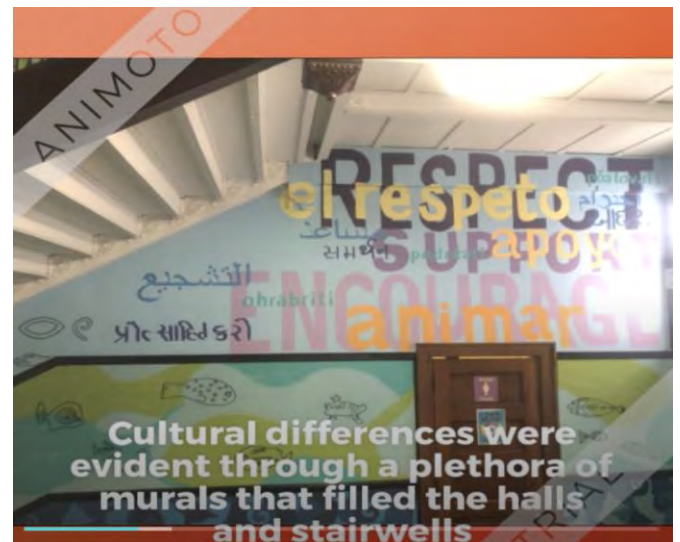
**Figure 1**

*A still image that reveals a PST's response to the changing worlds exhibit.*



**Figure 2**

*A still image that captures a PST's response to the school's decorated hallways and stairwells*



- Grace's reflective digital storytelling video of her experience visiting the urban neighborhood and school. This video was shared using Animoto (<https://animoto.com>) (a drag and drop video maker) and was discussed as a mentor text for the digital composition assignment.

During the urban field trip, PSTs taught a poetry lesson, which they designed for their student(s). A hallway in the school, *The Changing Worlds* exhibit, showcased narratives, pictures, and maps of past students and families. PSTs attended this exhibit and took notes on the various showcased students and families. Then PSTs had lunch at a local ethnic restaurant where they debriefed on engaging with their student(s), teaching their poetry lessons, and going through the exhibit. Lastly, they went to a Cambodian Museum that was located in the same Chicago community. The PSTs were exposed to historical information about the Cambodian genocide, geographical background of the neighborhood, and narratives of Cambodian survivors. Throughout the day, PSTs took pictures and videos of their urban field trip experience to document their learning and growth as educators and their understanding of teaching in this particular context.

Afterwards, PSTs responded to questions paired with their pictures, images, and videos and created a digital storytelling project (after seeing Grace's model and playing with digital tools throughout the semester). Through the revised digital composition, PSTs reflected on the urban field trip experience, their past schooling experiences, and any generalizations and stereotypes. Lastly, this digital composition was also a form of writing where PSTs investigated the tools and affordances available as they created multimodal texts. They documented their journey on the urban field trip and created a multimodal presentation of their experience—layering it with sound, narration, images, videos, and text. In order for the identity of the PSTs, school, and community to remain anonymous, Grace has included still shots of the digital storytelling videos.

One PST wrote,

Overall, I really liked this trip and I learned a lot about the Cambodian culture as well as the diversity within the Chicago school district. I

thought it was a great opportunity to be exposed to diversity that I have not gotten to witness growing up, and I would love to take another trip back here and even go to other Chicago public schools.

Another PST shared,

I learned a lot at the Cambodian Museum. I was not sure what to expect going in, but I am so glad that we went. I have never heard of any of the information that we learned about there. It left me wondering why we do not learn about this in our history classes.

Through these various experiences in a localized particular context, the PSTs had a shared experience that was contextualized and grounded in aspects of critical literacy. They also gained a diverse and deep perspective of a specific school and urban neighborhood.

**Figure 3**

*Two still images from a PST's video regarding the importance of storytelling*





### Final Thoughts

Teaching critical literacies goes beyond implementing best practices and using step-by-step approaches and strategies to achieve the intended goal. Through this inquiry we emphasize that teacher education programs cannot be “one-size-fits-all” factories where the culture of standardization pays little attention to the backgrounds, histories, and experiences of PSTs, children, and communities involved (Haddix, 2015). Instead, teacher education requires complex and disruptive work. This work cannot occur without careful examination of our own practice — and the ways in which teacher educators may unknowingly perpetuate ideologies that they seek to counter.

In particular, through our ongoing journey, we are reminded of the importance of creating a safe space in which tensions can be revealed, examined, and negotiated. Not only do we need to become comfortable with the uncomfortable, we must also find ways for our future educators to do the same, and for them to give this gift to their future students. This endeavor is a challenge, particularly given that the

majority of our PSTs have been educated in an era of standardization.

We recognize the process of making intentional shifts in our instruction as contextual, dynamic, and ongoing. As critical teacher educators of writing, we are continually working toward embodying the critical content and writing workshop components that we advocate our PSTs to take on. We choose to end with lingering questions that critical teacher educators (ourselves included) may ask while engaging in the iterative process of learning and growing through practice:

1. How might teacher educators continually investigate their own biases, positionalities, and privileges within the complex backdrop of broader society?
2. How might teacher educators negotiate the tensions with revising teacher initiating texts and re-enacting instructional practices?
3. How might teacher educators cultivate a safe space where relationships are developing in order to feel comfortable delving into uncomfortable conversations?

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**Appendix A**  
**Pre and Post Reflective Questions**

**Pre-reflective questions**

What feelings come up for you when you think about urban? What do you visualize?

Would you consider teaching in an urban space? Why or why not?

What do you know or have heard about Chicago Public Schools?

What do you know about working with diverse student populations?

**Post-reflective questions**

What did you learn about your student(s) from meeting them in person?

What did you learn about the community or school during your time in Chicago?

Did your opinion change on whether you would consider teaching in Chicago? Why or why not?

Did you confront any stereotypes or combat your own initial assumptions you may have had throughout the day?

What else would you have liked to see or experience?

Has your thinking changed as a result of this new experience? If so, how has it changed?

## Appendix B Reading Surveys

1. Do you enjoy reading books?  Yes  No

2. Do you enjoy writing stories? Yes  No

3. What kinds of books do you like to read?

Mystery Fantasy Family Humor Sports  Adventure

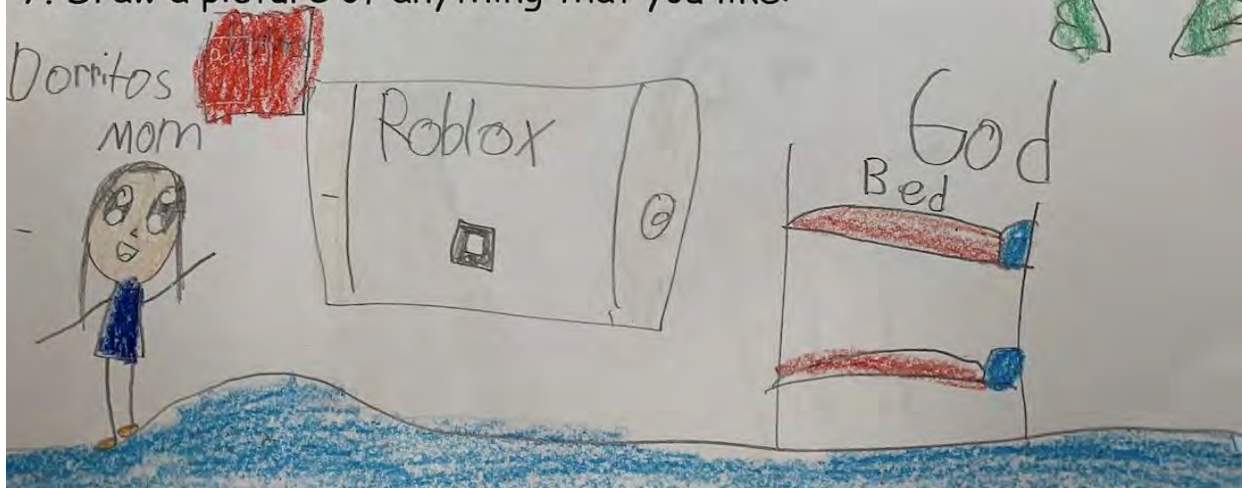
Biography Science Non-fiction How To Books

4. What is your favorite book?  
Elephant and piggie

5. What are your favorite TV shows or movies?  
BFG

6. Do you like it when your teacher reads to you?  Yes  No

7. Draw a picture of anything that you like:



The drawing depicts a girl with long hair and a blue dress standing on a blue textured ground. Above her is a red rectangular object labeled 'Doritos mom'. In the center is a large white rectangular box with a square handle and a circular button, labeled 'Roblox'. To the right is a bed with two red pillows and blue headboard/footboard, labeled 'God Bed'. In the top right corner, there are two green trees labeled 'Wings'.

## Appendix C

### Excerpt of PST's writing (before the course redesign)

#### How to make the perfect chocolate chip cookies

It's that time of year again, the nonstop stress of group projects, papers, and the constant cycle of reading textbooks. It seems like everything is due at the same time, but there is too little of it. As you are sitting in your room working on that paper that is due the next day, what is the best way to take a break? Make the perfect chocolate chip cookies in less than 20 minutes! It is said that eating chocolate can make you happy, and put you in a positive mood. In my personal opinion, nothing is better than the contentment that eating fresh baked cookies while doing homework brings! Let's get started.

First things first, make sure that we have all the ingredients to make the cookies. Next, we need a 13 x 9 pan and non-stick spray so our cookies can bake in the oven. You may have to run to grocery store to get a few ingredients in order to successfully make your cookies. Next, you need the other ingredients, 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened 3/4 cup granulated sugar, 3/4 cup packed brown sugar, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, and 2 large eggs. Most of these ingredients are fairly inexpensive, which is awesome for any college student on a budget.

After we get home from the grocery store, we need to set the oven to 375 degrees to get the perfect cookies. First, grab 1 cup of butter (which is about 2 sticks) and put it in a larger bowl. Place the butter in the microwave for about 20 seconds to soften it. We will then beat the butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Then in a separate bowl, we will combine flour, baking soda, and salt. With the other larger bowl, we will gradually beat in the flour mixture. Don't forget to stir in your most important ingredient - the chocolate chips! Lastly, we will scoop the mixture onto the pan.

## Appendix D

### Excerpt of PST's writing (before the course redesign)

Standardized Testing: Is it the best form of assessment?

As we prepare to become teachers, we are inevitably put in a spot where we are expected to fulfill the ideas of the No Child Left Behind Act. When it comes to teaching, standardized tests are being used to measure student learning, achievement gaps, and the quality of both the school and the teacher. Not only this, but they are also used to determine graduation, disabilities, and can often lead to many misdiagnosis. Unfortunately, as time goes on it seems that standardized tests are continually getting misused and only some are starting to notice. When I think back to regularly taking standardized tests in elementary school, I remember that I was typically in the mindset of “I will do my best today, even though I know it doesn’t matter” or “This is a waste of my time and I just want to get done so I’ll finish quickly”. As beginning teachers, I think that we need to be reminded that standardized testing isn’t the only thing that matters. There are more important things to focus on such as the effects it has on our students, and the time that it takes to prepare for standardized tests.

To a certain point, everyone pays attention in class. Students takes notes, read the chapters, and take extra time to study at home; yet, when a test is sat in front of them it’s like they have never seen the information before. Although many do not think it’s real, this is something that is called test anxiety. Test anxiety is often in the form of physical symptoms like nausea, headache, or a rapid heartbeat. However, it can be shown in other ways such as emotional or cognitive symptoms. It often starts because of things like the fear of failure, lack of preparation, or previous poor test history. If you’re one like me that suffers from test anxiety, then it makes sense to say that tests are not reliable.

## Appendix E

### PST's example of Curriculum Analysis Chart

Critically analyze 2 of the writing curricula provided. Keep in mind this is just one writing unit on a genre, but try to look deeply into the curriculum and see the strengths and challenges within it. In the description, consider what theory (e.g., cognitive, sociocultural, or new literacies) is the curriculum building off of. Also, consider if this curriculum is using a process or product approach and why? Think about what we have been learning about writing workshop, providing time for students to write, going through the various writing stages, and various forms of assessment.

Curriculum	Grade Level	Description: Overall what are your thoughts on the curriculum?	Strengths	Weaknesses
Calkins-Personal Narrative	6	I like how this curriculum focused on improving students as writers and not just their writing. There was less focus on mechanics and grammar. But students were learning how to use strategies that other skilled writers have used in their writing. The lessons gave students ample opportunities to write.	The sessions flowed from one to another.  The standards were listed and assessment was discussed in depth. I really like how it explained what students should be expected to know or do by the end of the lessons. The focus was on progression and less on an end product.	The curriculum was a bit too scripted for my liking.  Less creativity for the teacher.  Also doesn't take into consideration the diversity of students.  It wasn't organized well.
Wonders	1	This curriculum included Reading and Language Arts. The curriculum focused on word work, vocabulary, close readings, and writing. The curriculum gives teachers a good baseline but it leaves enough out to encourage teachers to create their own lesson plans.	Includes scaffolding for ELL students.  Suggests what to say and how to demonstrate concepts to students without going into too many specifics.  Suggests going digital.	Can be too broad for teachers.  There are a lot of writing conventions to be taught for each day. Doesn't go in depth enough.  Might be focusing more on an end product.