Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes about Writing and Learning To Teach Writing:
Implications for Teacher Educators

By Chris Street

The relationship between attitude and the practice of teaching writing among preservice teachers is an important consideration for a number of reasons. Perhaps most significantly, these students will soon be responsible for teaching writing in schools where superior writing instruction is needed. The need for improving the effectiveness of future writing teachers is underscored by a recent evaluation by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which indicated that only half of the students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in the United States are able to write adequate responses to informative, persuasive, or narrative writing tasks (Chambless & Bass, 1995). The NAEP report also reveals that students generally receive little writing instruction. Furthermore, work by Lucas (1993) indicates that writing process is not as well established in the United States as advocates might have hoped (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Street, 1999, 2002). Therefore, it seems that greater efforts should be "given to the professional development of teachers who will be expected to guide students' writing" (Chambless & Bass, 1995, p. 153).

Certainly in any profession there are "certain sets of attitudes essential to the effective conduct of that profession" (NCTE, 1996, p. 10). Since research

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clearly demonstrates the important relationship between teachers' attitudes about writing and their performance in the classroom (Bratcher & Stroble, 1994; Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Grossman et al., 2000; Kennedy, 1998; Lapp & Flood, 1985; Mayher, 1990; Schmidt & Kennedy, 1990; Shrofel, 1991; Wood & Eicher, 1989), research that explores where writing attitudes originate and how they influence practice are worthy of attention. In this study, I asked the following questions:

1. What attitudes did pre-service teachers hold regarding writing and the teaching of writing when they entered their final semester of pre-service professional education?

2. What were the major influences on these attitudes?

3. What was the relationship between the participants' writing attitudes and the teaching process they actually employed during student teaching?

Writing Attitudes

Teacher candidates bring background knowledge about writing and teaching to their formal professional education (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990). From Lortie (1975) onwards, research has consistently reported the powerful influence that teachers' attitudes about teaching exert on their learning (Agee, 1998; Bratcher & Stroble, 1994; Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Grossman et al., 2000; Kennedy, 1998; Lapp & Flood, 1985; Mayher, 1990; Schmidt & Kennedy, 1990; Shrofel, 1991; Wood & Eicher, 1989). Gaining insights into the writing attitudes of pre-service English/language arts teachers is essential if we are to understand more fully the relationship between the learning experiences of these future teachers and their effectiveness as teachers of writing (Bloom, 1990).

The effectiveness of writing teachers is a concern of the National Writing Project, a group believing that teachers must be comfortable and confident with writing before they can feel a sense of competence with the teaching of writing (Bratcher & Stroble, 1994). The issue of teaching competence becomes important in light of Lapp and Flood's (1985) work, which suggests that as teachers' knowledge of how to teach writing increases, their attitudes of themselves as writers become more positive. Furthermore, this increased knowledge of writing pedagogy positively affects their perceptions of how children learn to write. It would appear then that the more familiar prospective teachers become with writing, the more effectively they will incorporate writing into their classrooms (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Lapp & Flood, 1985; Street, 2002).

The Importance of Self-Confidence for Teachers of Writing

The issue of self-confidence is crucial, since, according to Bandura and Schunk (1981), issues of self-confidence "affect people's choice of activities, how much

effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of difficulties" (p. 587). As Bratcher and Stroble (1994) have stated in their longitudinal study of teachers who completed a National Writing Project Summer Institute, "Where comfort and confidence floundered, competence failed" (p. 83). This research clearly demonstrated that self-confidence in teachers is crucial in order for growth in both writing and teaching to occur. Clifford and Green (1996) have suggested that how pre-service teachers feel about their own effectiveness as teachers becomes a significant factor when looking at how they develop professional identities. In the area of writing instruction, the self-confidence of pre-service teachers is significant because writing often-times is not an activity that encourages confidence in one's own abilities (Mayher, 1990).

The Role of Biography

Student teachers do not arrive at the university as blank slates. Developing an identity as a writer, or as a non-writer, is a long process of socialization, involving school experiences (Lortie, 1975) as well as social and cognitive factors. The attitudes of new teachers are forged during their experiences as students, long before they arrive at the university for formal teacher education (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Shrofel, 1991). For example, students enter college with years of exposure to writing instruction. The quality of this instruction has lasting effects on how they define themselves as writers. This "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) is lengthy, providing student teachers with a deep, though not necessarily accurate, sense of what it means to be a writing teacher. As Porter and Brophy (1998) have written, "Personal experiences, especially teachers' own experiences as students, are represented as important determinants of how teachers think and what they do" (p. 76).

Program Components

Data for this study were derived from a yearlong teacher education program designed to prepare middle school educators to teach in urban schools. All five participants were completing their undergraduate educations at a major research university in Texas. The participants spent one school year at Brook Middle School—an inner city school located in central Texas. Brook Middle School was a place of great diversity. Forty eight percent of the students were Hispanic, 39 percent Anglo, and 12 percent African American. Nearly half (44 percent) of the students were eligible for the free/reduced lunch program. During the fall semester, the participants had worked as interns, primarily observing in middle school classrooms. In the spring semester, student interns returned to their cooperating teachers' rooms as student teachers.

The Participants

Selection of participants was purposive. Purposive sampling is a central aspect of naturalistic research (Erlandson et al., 1993). Participants were female, ranging in age from 22 to 31 years. (Since all members of this university cohort of students were female, no male participants were possible for inclusion in the study.) Three participants were Caucasian, one was Hispanic, and one was Asian (see Table 1 for an overview of the participants' backgrounds and attitudes).

Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

The study took place as five pre-service English/language arts teachers made the transition to student teaching. Five pre-service teachers' lives were explored to identify what attitudes regarding writing these teachers held, as well as examining which experiences pre-service teachers recognized as influencing their writing attitudes and how those attitudes influenced their teaching practice.

The research method in this study was naturalistic inquiry. Three major beliefs form the rationale of the constructivist paradigm: the belief that reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 1998), that multiple realities exist, and that these realities are best studied using holistic methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of qualitative methods was critical, especially since the study design provided in-depth descriptions of specific people, places, and programs. Using such methods, a rich picture emerged, vividly outlining the events these participants found significant regarding their writing attitudes and how they were coming to see themselves as new teachers of writing.

Data were collected through questionnaires (Appendix A) and through interviews of student teachers, their university supervisor, cooperating teachers, and their language arts methods course instructor. Copies of electronic journals and field notes

Table 1
Overview of Participants' Backgrounds and Attitudes

Participants	Attitudes Toward Writing	Self-Confidence Regarding Writing	School Writing Experiences
Tracy	poor	poor	poor
Lisa	improving, but anxious	developing	generally poor until college
Becky	improving, but reluctant	developing	generally poor
Monica	positive	high	poor until college
Veronica	positive	high	generally positive

from observations of the methods course and student teaching classrooms were also collected to allow for ample data triangulation (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Data collection/generation began when students participated in their language arts methods course. Once the methods course ended, the students began their field placements. The use of multiple data sources (observations, interviews, and journals) continued as the study moved to the field.

Data collected throughout the study were analyzed using a variety of qualitative methodologies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Patterns in how the student teachers' attitudes formed and evolved were examined. Data were analyzed using emergent category designation (Erlandson et al., 1993). Two provisional categories were established: attitudinal issues and instructional issues. Finally, cross-case analysis focused on the similarities and/or differences between the individual cases. Analysis of the data allowed the five participants to be grouped into three categories, according to their levels of self-confidence regarding writing: reluctant writer (1), developing writers (2), and confident writers (3). I begin by providing three brief case studies, one from each group; I conclude with an analysis of the cross-case themes, which includes all five cases.

Case Studies

The Reluctant Writer

Tracy as student. Tracy continually described school as a "negative place." She recalled doing "grammar sheets and other boring stuff like that" while a student in junior and senior high school. Tracy recounted numerous negative school experiences and appeared to have trouble recollecting many positive encounters with writing while a student. Tracy recalled with particular clarity a harsh high school composition instructor who criticized her writing, causing her to feel that she was not a "naturally talented writer." Those feelings were still sharp for Tracy years later, causing her to characterize her school experiences as "wholly negative." Tracy, the most reluctant writer in the study, openly wrote in an email message that "I don't see myself as a writer." Tracy believed that some people are natural writers and others are not. She likened this "innate ability" to sports or music, saying that "like sports or music, some people have a knack for knowing what to do. Like me, I can do grammar but I'm not a good writer." Tracy came to her language arts methods course hoping to change her negative attitudes regarding writing:

> I admittedly come into this class with a negative attitude toward writing. I don't look forward to writing everyday and I think I will struggle to think of things to write about. I am hoping this class can help change my attitude toward writing some. It is hard to be a good teacher of writing when you don't like to write yourself.

Tracy was a mystery to her language arts methods professor, who remarked "she was so quiet that I have no sense of her." This timidity carried over to sharing her

writing with others: "I have found that I am timid when it comes to sharing my writing. I don't think that this has anything to do with me being a teacher, I just think that I have never been that confident about my writing."

Though Tracy saw the importance of writing attitudes in her development as a new teacher, she never developed into a self-confident writer, claiming she only felt comfortable doing technical writing because "that is what I am good at. I am not good at creative writing." It appeared questionable whether she was even equipped to teach writing, since she reported in a group interview that "I just never write. I can't understand why people would write. What good does it do?" Moreover, Tracy claimed in a survey given by her methods instructor that she "didn't do any writing just for [her]self." Tracy never escaped from her perception of school as a negative place.

Tracy as teacher. Thirty-two sixth graders sat in cooperative groups of fours and fives, waiting for Tracy to introduce a lesson on creating limericks. After Tracy's five-minute introduction to limericks, the students were allowed "to work." From the back of the class, I peered out at a class full of students engaged in everything but poetry. They quite obviously had no sense of where to go with the activity. I could not blame them. Their student teacher's dry introduction and pedestrian examples were far from enlightening. Tracy either did not want to respond to this problem or failed to notice. She continued walking around the class, answering many variations of one question: "What are we supposed to be doing?" Her uninspired lesson struck me as especially disheartening since she was "trying to excite the students about writing poetry." This was not at all surprising, however, considering that Tracy saw herself as a technical writer rather than a creative one. Tracy taught poetry as one might teach technical writing, thereby showing her inability to cross over from her comfort zone—technical writing—to what she needed to teach—creative writing. This problem would plague Tracy throughout her field experience.

This lesson was indicative of Tracy's approach to teaching writing. Comments such as "let's get this done" rather than "how may I help you" pervaded her instruction. Thus, there seemed to be a relationship between Tracy's attitudes regarding her own writing and how she presented the subject to her students. This greatly troubled her university supervisor, who attempted to assist Tracy by providing suggestions to spice up her teaching; but after repeated attempts with no improvement, the supervisor concluded that Tracy "is probably not in the right profession."

Tracy also had reservations about her ability to teach writing: "I don't feel that prepared to teach writing because I am unsure about how to positively criticize papers that have numerous mistakes in them." As will be explored, Tracy's negative writing attitudes and low levels of self-confidence appeared to influence the manner in which she taught writing.

Quite obviously, Tracy's poor writing attitudes carried over into the classroom

and seemed to have a negative influence on her classroom instruction. Her task master persona while teaching writing hardly reflected the kind of engaged teaching and modeling exemplified by expert middle school writing teachers (Atwell, 1998; Reif, 1992). What implicit messages came through to Tracy's students when she treated writing as a chore to be completed? Certainly not that she was a passionate writer or teacher of composition. Her writing demonstrations only revealed Tracy's lack of interest in teaching writing.

Tracy also reported in an interview that she "doubted writing could be taught," believing instead that "it was a gift one possessed or failed to possess." During her student teaching semester, Tracy's teaching definitely reflected this viewpoint. In repeated observations, her university supervisor remarked that "Tracy always seemed miserable when teaching." Characterizing her own past experiences with writing in school as "boring" seemed a precursor to the language Tracy's students would likely use to describe the way she approached the teaching of writing. Her past experiences with schooling seemed to be influencing the teacher she was becoming (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Shrofel, 1991).

The Developing Writer

Lisa as student. Lisa's self-confidence as a writer while in school was hindered due to the reactions of teachers to her written work. She recalled the mostly negative comments of her teachers and the difficulty she had meeting the demands of her instructors. These severe comments and unmet teacher demands contributed to her unsure feelings of herself as a writer: "My writing was always criticized in school because it did not fit the proper form." She added, "My handwriting was sloppy and I'd have to write in cursive over and over in the third grade until I 'got it right.'" As a student, Lisa also feared books: "Literature was made scary, bleak, and depressing to me." Admittedly, writing had always been a challenge for Lisa. She had always struggled with viewing herself as a writer, stating: "The whole process from deciding on a topic, creating notes, a rough draft, editing the paper, and producing a finished piece was always (and probably always will be) a very painful, frustrating experience for me."

Coming into the language arts methods course, Lisa had the goal to "continue to develop confidence" as a writer, a goal she partly realized. She had only recently acquired much self-confidence with writing, saying "high school English was my negative writing experience. It convinced me that I was a horrible writer." Though Lisa saw the writing process as a challenge, once she began to receive validation as a writer, she developed greatly in terms of her self-confidence. Lisa wrote in a journal entry about the importance of validation and support, declaring "I needed understanding and compassion" as a student. This "understanding and compassion" was largely absent from her school experiences. Though Lisa continued to struggle with her identity as a writer, she did grow in this respect, recording in a journal entry close to the end of her student teaching experience that "in order to be

a confident, successful writing teacher, one must feel confident of their own writing and ideally enjoy writing."

Like Tracy, Lisa recognized the important role that self-confidence played in her development as a new teacher of writing. Though Lisa did not leave the university as a highly confident writer, her feelings of self-confidence had changed dramatically from when she entered the university, four years before. Dr. J.L., the language arts methods instructor, described Lisa as a "strong contributor" in class as well as being "caring and smart." Lisa now felt she could better aid her students, since she now "saw writing more deeply than I ever did before; now, I can better see how my students see writing." Lisa left the university believing, if not that she was a writer herself, that she would be able to "pull it off" once out and teaching in her own classroom.

Lisa as teacher. Though Lisa had a positive student teaching experience, she often appeared harried and overwhelmed by the complexities of teaching classes of up to 36 sixth-grade students, many of whom demanded a great deal of her attention. Lisa acknowledged that writing was valued in her sixth-grade classroom but stated that "Reading Writing Workshop did not work for them. There was not enough structure." Once she began taking over responsibility for teaching writing, for example, she perceived that to implement the workshop approach as discussed in her methods course would not be feasible for her specific teaching situation. Lisa was also frustrated by the lack of maturity in her students' writing; she wanted desperately to have more time with them in order to expand the depth of their emerging ideas. She did, however, have some taste of the kind of impact she wanted to make on the writing of her students. When she experienced one such success, she quickly dashed off an excited email, explaining what had taken place that day:

> Well, what I did was read the piece and write questions throughout their writing and then briefly discuss what I wrote. For example, "What did she look like," "How did it smell," "What did the food taste like at Gardner Bets?" (juvenile detention center), etc. I may be kidding myself, but it really seemed to make an impression on them. I think it got them thinking about the details of what they were writing about. I also think it made it clear that I wasn't asking for just length of the piece, that I wanted substance.

Walking into Lisa's sixth-grade classroom, I was first struck by the posted student work throughout the room; this was obviously a place where literacy was valued. Lisa was introducing memoirs to the students. Reading aloud from *The Boy's Life*, she attempted to communicate the essence of what constituted a memoir to her students. After the lesson Lisa was concerned that not all of her students "got" her lesson. This reflective attitude best characterized Lisa. She focused on students' successes and failures and took it quite personally when they did not live up her expectations. She attacked her responsibilities with the fervor of a student teacher, but was often brought crashing down by the setbacks that are quite natural for a new

teacher. Her mature, reflective stance regarding her strengths and limitations as a teacher was an asset for Lisa. Though she was not the most confident teacher or writer in the study, she did acknowledge how important it was for "a teacher to have a clear understanding of how [he\she] feels about writing." By the end of the student teaching experience, Lisa had gained a mature stance toward teaching and was looking forward to the challenges awaiting her as a new teacher.

The Confident Writer

Monica as student. Monica reported numerous negative school experiences that made it difficult at times to maintain her conception of self as writer. Monica said, "School was a detriment to my writing. It was always about literature, essays, that kind of thing, rather than writing for pleasure." A lack of feedback was the largest area of concern in the one course Monica described as most severely diminishing her sense of self as writer:

> Another English class I had, the teacher did not know me at all. He was a typical teacher. I just showed up for class and sat in the back. It would drive me nuts because he would just put a C or C- on my paper with no feedback. I'd go ask him and he'd say, "well, it's just not that good." He couldn't even remember the paper. He'd say, "wait, wait, what class is this for?" I got a C in English.

Fortunately, these negative school influences were not enough to shake Monica's vision of herself as a writer. Her family support structure proved crucial in maintaining her vision as a writer. Monica's father, for example—a minister holding a doctorate—was described by Monica as "always writing." Furthermore, Monica reported that her mother made sure that the home was a "print rich environment" and "always stressed the importance of reading and writing while I was growing up."

Monica had maintained a journal since the sixth-grade and had aspirations to write for publication, the only participant with firm views in this area. Her abilities and desires as a writer translated into her methods course and her field placement, where her language arts methods professor, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher reported that she was an excellent writer and a "very strong" teacher of writing. This may have been due, in large part, to her self-reported passion for writing. Monica wrote that she hoped "her enthusiasm [would] come through" in her teaching. Like all of the participants in the study, Monica also reported the importance of teachers feeling confident as writers: "As we've been saying, writing confidence is reflected in the way the teacher teaches the subject, and that confidence is formed by the teacher's experience in writing."

Monica as teacher. Monica's second formally observed lesson was a creative marvel. As I entered the classroom full of eighth graders, Monica was bombarded with students clamoring to read their work. Cries of "can I read ours?" and "we are next, we are next" met me at the door. The lesson, an introductory activity designed

to prepare students for their upcoming poetry unit, proved engaging for Monica's often-reluctant students. Why? Monica saw herself as a writer and loved sharing her own work, something she did with a flare for the dramatic during this lesson. As I left the room for the day I felt renewed, remarking in my notebook that "I have just seen a creative, confident teacher, completely engaging her students in the lesson, primarily due to the force of her own personality and pen."

Monica taught in an engaging classroom, one where she and her cooperating teacher both valued writing. An extensive classroom library of current adolescent literature was available for students. Posters emphasizing stages of the writing process, bordered by examples of student writing, were posted on a class bulletin board dedicated to writing. There were quite a range of writing activities in her classroom, but Monica felt that too much time was spent preparing the students for the state competency test (TAAS). This preparation included practice in formulaic writing—especially the use of transitions—and grammar exercises.

Monica was one of the student teachers considered for recognition as Student Teacher of the Year. Though she did not receive the top honor, she definitely earned the respect of all those who worked with her: professors responsible for her professional development courses, university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and myself, the researcher. Comments from her language arts methods course instructor characterized Monica as the "best writer in the cohort, someone who 'sparkles,' who was witty, courageous, sharp, compelling, and talented." One especially impressive aspect of Monica's teaching was her ability to model for the students the writing task at hand using her own writing. In fact, Monica relished the chance to share her work with her students, saying, "I have a passion for writing."

Cross Case Themes

Apprenticeship of Observation

It was interesting to note that how writing was taught to these pre-service teachers had a profound effect on their emerging identities as writers. These pre-service teachers certainly did not enter the university as empty vessels. They had accumulated years of meaningful experiences as students that profoundly shaped who they were as writers. This common occurrence is what Lortie (1975) referred to as the "apprenticeship of observation."

All participants had critical teachers whom they deemed detrimental to their development as writers. These critical teachers all shared a common emphasis on prescriptive correctness over meaning and expression. Tracy, for example, indicated that she felt her past experiences with school had been "boring," a word she used constantly in describing her experiences in middle and high school. When asked to expand on her repeated use of this term, she recalled "worksheets and grammar" exercises that dulled her vision of school. Unable to overcome her negative school experiences—or apprenticeship of observation—Tracy became

disengaged with writing "before attaining mastery over core skills" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 19). She appeared to have given up as a writer, at least in part, due to her long history with negative school writing experiences.

Though Tracy had by far the most negative writing attitudes among the participants, Lisa's self-confidence as a writer while in school was also hindered due to the reactions of teachers to her written work. Lisa's school experiences caused her—even as an adult—to view most writing tasks with trepidation. She too remembered the sting of the red pen. Even the two self-professed writers could not escape memories of negative school experiences associated with writing. For example, Monica remembered an approach to writing based on "grammatical correctness and structure," while Veronica deeply resented one particular teacher due to her focus on grammatical errors, saying that they were conducted according to a "strict grammatical approach."

Writing Communities

The role of teachers. The emerging themes in this study suggest that these teachers needed more support and validation by others. All five of the participants, regardless of their writing abilities or attitudes, reported their appreciation for the support provided for them by their methods instructor in the language arts methods course. The participants used words such as "supportive, encouraging, meaningful, choice, accepting, open, and ability to share" to describe this class. This level of support—both from the teacher and from one another—stands in stark contrast to the lack of help provided by the critical teachers mentioned by all five participants. Tracy recounted that school was an "unsupportive place where I was alone." It was not until her language arts methods course—during her senior year of college—that she began to feel supported as a writer, stating:

> Dr. J.L.'s class is the only class that I can think of that swayed me one way or the other from what I already felt. This class made me think more positively about creative writing. Before I never thought of myself as a very good creative writer, but I have found that I enjoy it and I am not as terrible as I thought.

For Lisa—though she saw the writing process as a challenge—once she began to receive validation as a writer, she developed greatly in terms of her self-confidence. Lisa wrote in a journal entry about the importance of validation and support, declaring "I needed understanding and compassion" as a student. Yet this "under-standing and compassion" was largely absent from her school experiences. It was Lisa's husband, as well as her language arts instructor, who provided the support she needed as a developing writer.

Like Lisa and Tracy, Becky also struggled with a lack of validation as a writer. While at the university, she never really came to see herself as writer, in part because, as she said, "I've never been validated as a creative writer, so maybe that's part of what's holding me back." Becky went on to write that she thought her

language arts methods class was very influential in her development as a new teacher of writing. She too emphasized her supportive methods instructor as influencing her views on writing. Becky greatly valued feedback from teachers, a supportive classroom atmosphere, and teachers with the ability to model effective writing.

The confident writers—Monica and Veronica—also stressed their need for support and validation by others as being important to their development as writing teachers. For Monica, one college class in particular stood out as being a place where she really came to feel supported as a writer: English 325M, an intensive writing course. She felt that this college English class was ideally suited to learning how to write more effectively, party due to the support found in the class, which was "structured like a reading and writing workshop." Monica also recognized the importance of teacher education in her development as a writing teacher, reporting that "Teacher education has a tremendous impact on learning to teach writing because it forms the teacher's attitudes and base knowledge of writing itself." Her language arts methods class was mentioned in one journal entry as being a "particulalarly supportive place where we could take risks and still feel successful."

Veronica mentioned one teacher in particular who helped her develop as a writer: "I feel that my senior year in high school, when I took creative writing, helped mold me into a better writer." As a creative writer and published poet, Veronica greatly appreciated the caring nature of this supportive teacher. Veronica also mentioned her language arts methods course as being a place where she was nurtured as a writer; she appreciated the ability to use what she had learned in the course with her own students, saying, "Dr. J.L. helped me experiment on ways I could teach what I had learned."

The importance of "more capable peers" was deemed significant by the participants in their development as writers (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, 1991; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Those teachers and professors who had established close working and/or professional relationships with their students were shown to be the most effective in recognizing the developmental needs of these five participants as they struggled to grow as writers. This scaffolded approach to teaching writing suggests that effective learning and teaching do indeed occur in the company of more experienced others (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, 1991; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).

Becoming an accomplished writer seems to involve entering new intellectual communities, places where the support of caring teachers is essential. Relying heavily on prescriptive correctness, previous teachers of these student teachers did not view the participants as newcomers who were legitimate peripheral participants in a community of writers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They did not accept that these students would quite understandably make errors as they learned and developed as writers. Strangely, they seemed to expect these newcomers to enter their writing classes with the skills of full participants. Thus, these students were denied "legitimate peripheral access" to the community of writers while apprentices, or

student writers (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 93). What these teachers offered instead was an unfulfilling context for writing, one emphasizing prescriptive correctness over meaning making and support.

As a kind of social practice, learning implies a relation to social communities; it implies becoming a full participant, or a member of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Only two participants—the self-professed writers in the group—managed to see themselves as members of a writing community. These writers came to define themselves by this relationship within this community, referring to themselves as writers and sharing their expertise as writers with their students. The other participants did not enter this community as full participants.

Poor Writing Experiences in School

Tracy's university supervisor reported that she was "extremely concerned about Tracy's lack of enthusiasm for teaching," remarking that Tracy appeared to be "miserable" while teaching. This lack of enthusiasm for teaching may simply have been an extension of how Tracy had always viewed school, as "dull and dreary." The teaching practice that Tracy established during student teaching reflected her views on education in general. Specifically, the knowledge and values she brought with her from her years as a student (Florio-Ruane & Lensmire, 1990; Lortie, 1975, Shrofel, 1991) were not altered by her pre-service education or her field experiences. She entered her professional development sequence with a poor regard for writing; she left student teaching with only slightly improved writing attitudes and with poor teaching abilities. Unlike some of the other participants whose beliefs about their own writing abilities and their feelings about teaching writing evolved over time, Tracy's beliefs seemed ingrained in her sense of self; her identity seemed fixed.

Lisa and Becky—the developing writers—struggled with seeing themselves as writers, no doubt partly due to their negative experiences with writing in school. Certainly, the "teacher as authority" figure was quite evident in the negative school experiences reported by these two participants. Becky and Lisa did not see their previous teachers who had focused on prescriptive correctness and grammatical control as effective. What these two struggling writers seemed to want were teachers who would both support and challenge their work as developing writers. Instead, they received editorial criticism with little support and guidance on how to improve their writing. These overly critical teachers suggest that Kennedy (1998) was correct in stating that "an overemphasis on prescriptions renders writing meaningless to students, encouraging them to comply with forms that have no apparent purpose" (p.13).

The two confident writers—Monica and Veronica—reported numerous negative school experiences as writers but maintained their visions as writers. How did they manage to do this? In the case of Monica and Veronica, perhaps the answer lay in the richness of writing experience that they had outside of school. Monica's

"print-rich home" and parents who valued writing helped her maintain her sense of confidence as a writer amid these negative school experiences. Veronica's earliest memories of writing focused on literacy events involving her family, not school. This familial foundation of support seemed to help the confident writers counter the effects of overly critical teachers.

These data suggest that the way in which composition was taught to these five teachers did little to aid their ability to view writing positively. In fact, in certain cases, negative school experiences had such a lasting effect that even as adults some of the student teachers remained fearful of writing. Though it is tempting to overgeneralize and simplify the experiences of these student teachers, their collective experiences with school-based writing and the disturbing consistency among the participants regarding their negative school memories cannot go unmentioned.

It has been argued that there are far too many casualties of the traditional approach to teaching writing (Mayher, 1990). Even though we might expect these future teachers of writing to serve as models of success from traditional school writing programs, they had been singed by teachers relying heavily on prescriptive methods of teaching writing. These negative experiences were easily recalled by all five of the pre-service teachers and held a firm place in their memories of school writing. This is not to say that classroom teachers have not changed their teaching practices entirely. Over the last few decades, the amount of writing done by students has generally increased, as many teachers in varied disciplines have come to appreciate the important role that writing can play in learning (Emig, 1977; Graves, 1999; McCrimmon, 1970; Odell, 1980, Street, 2002). Additionally, variations in genres attempted by students have increased as teachers become more familiar with varied genres and purposes for having their students writing on a regular basis. Finally, the influences of summer writing institutes and other professional development activities have enabled many teachers to envision writing instruction in new and innovative ways (Bratcher & Stroble, 1994).

Conclusion

The data generated from this study suggests a relationship between the teaching practice of these developing writing teachers and the "beliefs, attitudes, and experiences" of the participants (Shrofel, 1991, p. 176). Certainly the two teachers in this study who saw themselves as writers offered a great deal to students that the other three participants did not. In short, the two confident writers in this study saw themselves belonging to two intellectual communities—writing and teaching. As writers, they saw their roles differently than did the reluctant writer and the developing writers in the study. As teachers, they simply had more to offer their students than did the other participants. They could provide students with a passion for writing that the other participants were unable or unwilling to do.

Implications for Teacher Educators

By better understanding the role of attitudes about and experiences with writing, teacher education programs could aid pre-service teachers in confronting, and possibly changing, the writing attitudes they bring with them to the university. By uncovering and exploring these attitudes in university settings, teacher educators can aid student teachers as they strive to accept new methodologies and conceptions of writing. This may enable teacher education programs to better develop future writing teachers.

I agree with Lave and Wenger (1991) that the development of identity is central to the careers of newcomers in communities of practice. If we want writing teachers to see themselves as members of both writing and teaching communities, teacher educators would do well to consider issues of biography, attitudes, and proficiency with writing in methods courses.

The language arts methods course taken by these participants caused the student teachers to both peer inside themselves as writers and look forward as teachers of writing. All participants were highly engaged in the writing process in the methods course and believed it was a nurturing and sustaining environment in which to develop their own writing skills. Since Lave and Wenger (1991) support the notion that learners learn by doing the task at hand, the participants were in the right setting in which to learn to write.

Not only did the participants have the ability to utilize their instructor's expertise as they developed their confidence as writers, but, as Becky testified, they also had the ability to learn from one another: "I never thought that we could learn so much from each other. It's so valuable to see and hear pieces written by your peers." In fact, all five participants mentioned the methods class as a place where they felt validated as writers. A representative comment by Lisa captures the views of all of the participants: "Dr. J.L.'s class had a big impact on the way I look at writing and teaching writing." It was, for all the participants, a transforming event. Current research (Chambless & Bass, 1995; Franklin, 1992; Lapp & Flood, 1985; Stover, 1986) demonstrates that, indeed, writing attitudes can be changed by effective university courses that stress positive experiences with writing.

The National Council of Teachers of English states that in any profession there are "certain sets of attitudes essential to the effective conduct of that profession" (NCTE, 1996, p. 10). Successful methods courses, such as the one experienced by these five participants, may help teachers adopt the kind of professional attitudes that are so crucial to their continued success as writing teachers.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire

1. Describe yourself as a writer.
2. Describe a positive writing experience you have had (in or out of school).
3. Describe a negative writing experience you have had (in or out of school).
4. What is the easiest part of writing for you? What do you do well?
5. What is the hardest part of writing for you? What do you feel you need to work on?
6. What kind of writing do you do just for you?
7. What makes a piece of writing excellent?
8. As you think about your professional life as an educator, what sort of written contribution do you see yourself making (e.g., writing for parents, colleagues, administrators)?
9. As you think of yourself working with students, helping them develop as writers: What do you see as your strengths? How do you think you will most help writers? What do you anticipate having to work on as a teacher of writing?