Changing EPP Curriculum

An Ethnographic Study of Preservice English Teachers and Writing Feedback Methodology

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Introduction

Teaching writing requires explicit pedagogical training. Often preservice English teachers are not only unprepared to teach writing, but they are also unprepared to provide effective writing feedback ("edTPA Field Test Summary Report," n.d.). Effective writing feedback prepares young writers to make sound and thorough writing choices. Effective writing feedback positively impacts learning (Hattie, 1999). Effective writing feedback encourages students to craft writing that others are willing and eager to read (Zinsser, 2006). Writing untangles thoughts, shares a world view, and reveals a human experience. How do writers learn to do this? Teachers. How do teachers learn to do this? Education Preparation Programs (EPPs).

Review of Literature

Providing new writers with constructive feedback builds better writers. For example, Beason (1993) and Ferris (1995) reported that providing

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feedback on student writing is a constructive learning tool. In addition, Beach and Friedrich (2006) reported that when a teacher explains problems inside writing and provides specific next step suggestions, such feedback produces learning. Despite evidence suggesting the importance of teacher evaluative feedback, EPPs do not provide clear and extensive writing pedagogy for either education majors or, surprisingly, English education majors. For example, during document analysis, this researcher sampled six similar Midwestern public and private college, large and small, English education degree plans. This analysis revealed that out of all six sample college degree plans, only one writing pedagogy course emerged. In addition, all analyzed course programs required English courses such as poetry writing, fiction writing, and composition writing. Yet, these courses emphasized producing writing not teaching writing (See Table 1).

Conceptual Framework

Humans use language to share ideas. Halliday (1993) wrote, that language is the result of human knowledge. Humans use language to describe, to define, and to share their understanding of the world. Thus, analyzing language, discourse analysis, illuminates human understanding ("Discourse Analysis", n.d.). Hatch (2006) described a second important view. This view stated that deconstructing text reveals assumptions and realities. Therefore, discourse analysis is one theory that underpins this research. A second theory, pedagogical, states that teacher candidates only develop into professional teachers by participating in real-life professional activities such as planning, instructing, evaluating, and providing feedback (Farnham-Diggory, 1994). Thus, analyzing preservice teachers' written and oral reflections after they participated in professional activities such as providing feedback on eighth grade

Table 1
Required College Course Credit Comparisons

College	*Total required credits*	*General pedagogy credits*	*Courses that teach writing*	*Courses that produce writing*
College 1	143	9	0	9
College 2	128	13	3	12
College 3	137	9	0	6
College 4	124	12	0	12
College 5	114	12	0	12
College 6	104	12	0	14

Note. Numbers represent the required credits for a BS in an English Education Degree

writers' papers, revealed knowledge. Examining this knowledge could prepare and drive education preparation programs curricular revision and/or adoption. Finally, by threading discourse theory and pedagogical theory together, a full research foundation develops.

Instruction

EPPs instruct preservice teachers. Farnham-Diggory (1994) explained that instruction is divided into three different paradigms. One paradigm is the apprenticeship model. A novice, like a preservice teacher, enters an apprenticeship model during field experience or student teaching. The novice and the professional occupy different spaces during these events. A preservice teacher can only enter a professional space through apprenticeship. Farnham-Diggory (1994) report that this participation is vital for two reasons. One, knowledge related to pedagogy is often implied and two, knowledge building is often context dependent. Consequently, it is imperative that a preservice teacher experience real-life planning, instructing, and assessing in order to move from novice to professional.

A second discussion related to knowledge building concerns human memory. Stored memory constitutes knowledge. This knowledge or memory separates into three categories: declarative, procedural, and conceptual (Sousa, 2017). Declarative knowledge identifies and/or defines items or ideas. Procedural knowledge relates to skill. Conceptual knowledge understands a relationship between declarative and procedural (Sousa, 2017). The relationship between knowing how, why, when, and under what circumstances to use the idea or skill. Farnham-Diggory (1994) and Sousa (2017) argued that procedural and conceptual knowledge is developed through experience during an apprenticeship. However, such implicit and context depended apprenticeships are not developing; consequently, teacher candidates struggle with evaluating PK12 student writing because they lack real-life experience. For example, Colby and Stapleton (2006) reported that in order to teach writing, a preservice teacher needs to participate in the writing process. In addition, teacher candidates need to write but they also need to learn how to teach others to write. This experience may not be afforded to preservice teachers. Using data that analyzed course offerings in six major Mid-Western Universities, this researcher concluded that meaningful writing pedagogy is not occurring—the impact: low standardized teacher preparation test scores.

Teacher Candidate edTPA Scores

Preservice teachers' low edTPA scores indicate a gap in EPP practices. Researchers Anderson (2007), Scriven (1967), and Taras (2005)

reported that assessment data provides not only a judgement on student performance but also on curriculum, course, and program effectiveness. The edTPA is a preservice teacher evaluation. It predicts a preservice teacher's ability to impact PK12 student learning. (The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). As reported in the edTPA field test summary report, "The edTPA is an authentic, subject-specific, performance-based support and assessment system developed by the profession for the profession to assess teacher candidates' readiness to teach" (p. 29). More than 18,000 teacher candidates were evaluated on the edTPA last year (Sawchuk, 2015). Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) reported that 36 states and 659 teacher preparation programs participate in the edTPA. The assessment scores teacher candidates using fifteen rubrics. Two of the fifteen rubrics, rubrics 12 and 13, evaluate a candidate's ability to provide PK12 student feedback. Nationally, EPPs report low assessment scores on these two rubrics. Darling-Hammond (2012) comments on these low scores. She reported that, nationally, teacher candidates struggle examining student work and offering meaningful feedback.

Researchers also reported that low preservice candidate abilities impact PK12 student achievement. (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Molina, 2012). For example, not only are teacher candidates challenged by writing but so are PK12 students. These researchers suggested that student test scores on national writing tests may correlate with poor EPP writing pedagogy programs. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2011, p. 1) reported in the National Report Card 2011 executive summary:

> • Only twenty-four percent of students at both grades eighth and twelfth performed at the Proficient level in writing.
>
> • Only fifty-four percent of eighth-graders and fifty-two percent of twelfth-graders performed at the Basic level in writing in 2011.
>
> • The Basic level denotes partial mastery of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.
>
> • Three percent of eighth- and twelfth-graders in 2011 performed at the Advanced level. This level represents superior performance.

Professional English Teachers

Not only are teacher candidates struggling with providing effective feedback, but so are professional English teachers. The teachers who are charged with apprenticing teacher candidates do not know how to provide meaningful writing feedback. Because professional English teachers have limited writing experience and writing instruction, they

are uncertain about providing meaningful evaluative feedback (Colby and Stapleton, 2006). Therefore, English teachers focus on grammar mistakes instead of focusing on clarifying ideas or expanding thinking (Williams, 2014).

Furthermore, many English teachers equate grammar instruction as writing instruction. Writing instruction may focus on structured formulas and conventions but not on developing ideas and sharing or expanding thoughts (Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, & Fry, 2003). Emphasizing formulaic writing boils writing into an equation and restricts critical thinking and reflection (Gallagher, 2011). Formulaic writing pedagogy is a problem because it builds writing fear.

Fear

Humans naturally fear that which they do not understand. Fear impedes learning. English and Stengel (2010) wrote,

> The educator's responsibility is to encourage students to stay in the discomfort and doubt associated with new learning, to avoid a premature commitment to fear and the avoidance behaviors that mark fear as fear, until interest emerges and learning becomes possible. (p. 523)

EPPs do not provide enough feedback pedagogy; thus, preservice teachers fear teaching writing activities as well as evaluating writing. Nauman, Stirling, and Borthwick (2011) reported that because practicing teachers do not understand what constitutes good writing, they are reluctant to assign and evaluate it. The implication is that if a teacher is uncertain about writing, the student will be uncertain also. This uncertain relationship between student writer and teacher evaluator breaks down trust and creates a learning barrier. Because, instead of encouraging young writers, the teacher focuses on grammar errors that creates writing fear. Leigh (2014) commented that this practice "wounds" young writers. Leigh wrote,

> I do not believe all teachers intentionally trivialize students' writing pursuits or are always aware of the power of their words. These kinds of judgements [line editing or margin notes] on our writing and our effort to write can profoundly wound our writing spirit. (p. xi)

Experience begets confidence. Pedagogy theory reports that teacher candidates become professionals through experience (Farnham-Diggory, 1994). It is human nature to fear that which we do not understand. Furthermore, this research reported that when faced with live student papers, preservice teachers reported being "intimidated" and struggled with how to "grade" the eigth grade student papers because the teacher candidates' lived experience was limited to writing theory only.

Materials and Methods

EPP's are not providing adequate evaluation pedagogy. This is a disturbing trend. Gallagher (2011) wrote:

> In a time when the ability to write has become not only a predictor of academic success but also a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy, writing seems to have gotten lost in many of our schools. Writing- a necessity, a prerequisite to living a literate life- is not being given the time and attention it deserves. (p. 5)

It is imperative that education programs develop writing methods courses and thread writing feedback techniques through all methods courses. Yet, few of these courses exist; researchers such as Grisham and Wolsey (2011) suggested why. They reported that teacher preparation programs stress reading instruction and have forgotten writing instruction. Furthermore, an education myth asserts that: if you can write, you can teach writing. Williams (2014) stated, "There is the assumption that anyone who could write the essays required to earn a bachelor's degree in English was qualified to teach writing" (p. 35). Because of these two myths, a knowledge gap developed.

This study found that participants knew what they should do regarding writing pedagogy and providing feedback, but when it came time to put theory to practice, a gap was exposed. To study this gap, two questions evolved:

- What does participant language reveal about their knowledge related to writing theory and to writing practice?
- What does this change reveal about their pedagogical understanding?

Setting and Participants

This case study described teacher candidates' reflections inside a bounded system. Researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1992; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012; Yin, 2009) defined a bounded system as a case limited by physical margins. This study was constrained by topic: evaluation pedagogy; by participant: preservice secondary English teachers, and by number of participants: six. In addition, the study's setting, a small Midwestern university with 3,000 students, enrolls only 12 English majors. Only three of those students are English Education majors.

The researcher teaches a secondary English methods course. This course is offered once a year. It is a meta-course which means undergraduates and post baccalaureate students are dually enrolled. In order to provide teacher candidates an opportunity to practice providing writing

feedback, a local eighth grade middle school English teacher volunteered her students' essays as practice essays.

All participants were females between the ages of 22 and 30. The participants included undergraduate and post baccalaureate secondary English education students. All six students took the Secondary English Methods course during the fall semester. All participants were either one or two semesters away from student teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

Spanning two years, the researcher collected data: assignment reflections, journal entries, and classroom discussion observations. First, participants provided feedback on eighth grade student essays. Next, participants reflected on this experience in journal entries. Finally, during class discussion, teacher candidates shared their evaluative feedback experience. Observations notes were made in a field journal during this discussion.

Results

Attempting to align analysis with the study's theoretical framework, and to triangulate the data, the researcher analyzed participants' reflections multiple times and through multiple lenses (See Figure 1). First, the reflections were open coded using two questions related to the theoretical framework.

What words do participants use to describe their knowing?

What words do participants use to describe feedback experience?

Second, coded words or phrases were listed, categorized, and chunked. During this stage, a memo-to-self was drafted. The question asked in this memo was:

What is going on with the participants?

Next, the identified words or phrases from stage two were added to a domain analysis worksheet (Spradley, 1979). This technique developed new questions that the researcher asked while reading the participants' reflections a second and a third time. To illustrate, words such as *guide*, *implant*, and *influence* were pulled from the open coding and entered into the worksheet. These words helped develop questions asked during class discussion. For example, the instructor asked,

These words represent what kind of writing theory beliefs?"

The answer exposed new terms and/or candidate thinking. The final analysis stage involved Sentiment Analysis. Sentiment Analysis analyzes words for

their emotional connotation. The tool, Sentiword.net, helped determine the positive, neutral, or negative connotation of participants' language. At each analysis phase, words and ideas were sorted, resorted, and examined.

Interpretations and Discussion

During qualitative analysis, the researcher continuously asked:

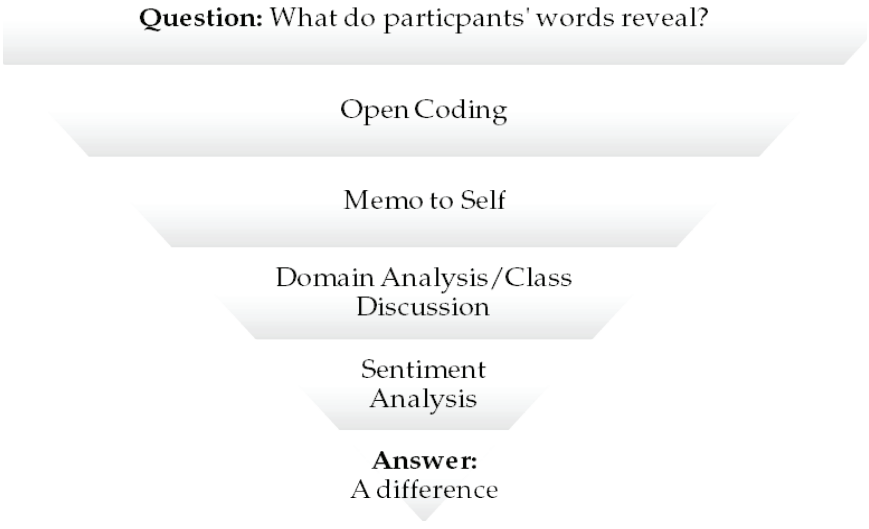
What do the participants' words reveal?

Surprisingly, their words revealed differences. The qualitative impressions include a difference between (a) the words participants used to describe writing theory, and (b) the words they used to describe writing feedback experience. For example, participants used words like *encourage*, *develop*, and *grow* while describing writing theory; however, while describing writing experiences, they used words such as *frustrated* and *tempted*. These language variances appeared in language density, language type, and language content.

Language Density

Linguists debate whether or not language influences thought or

Figure 1
Data analysis procedure. This figure demonstrates the analysis steps taken to answer the research questions.



whether thought influences language (Lakoff, 1990). Nonetheless, linguists report that human thought comes from naming ideas or experiences. In short, humans do not think deeply of ideas or experiences they have not named (Nunberg, 1996). Thus, the language used to describe a vague idea or limited experience will be named superficially because superficial language employs fewer sentences, simple vocabulary, general nouns, and nonspecific adjectives (Lakoff, 1990; Nunberg, 1996). Yet, if a speaker or writer has deep experience with an idea or an experience, the language used to discuss and describe the idea or the experience is dense. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) reported that dense language includes specialized or multi-syllabic words and compound and or compound complex sentences, specific nouns, adjectives, and active verbs. In this study, participants described writing feedback theory densely and writing feedback experience superficially.

The first difference seen in participant writing relates to paragraph structure. When participants explained feedback theory compared to feedback experience they used the same number of paragraphs: nine. However, participants used 1,385 words and ten peer-reviewed citations in the paragraphs that described writing theory. Compared than to the paragraphs used to describe lived writing experience. Participants only used 829 words and no citations. Overall, the teacher candidates used 59% more words to describe feedback theory compared to describing the lived experience.

The second difference noted in participant writing relates to metaphor usage. Crawford (2009) reported that construct metaphors are used in language more frequently when a topic is emotive. Thus, participant writing displayed frustration and fear regarding their lived experience when compared to the writing describing theory. This researcher noted that participants used more linguistic construct metaphors while describing the lived experience. Such metaphors were linked to negative emotions. Crawford (2009) wrote "negative affect is associated with withdrawal" (p. 134). The following metaphoric phrases suggest withdrawal from the whole. For example, while describing their lived experience they used the following construct metaphors: *stood out*, *went back*, *pointing out*, and *moved away*.

Language Type

Language is human communication; it is human thought. Linguists explained that language reveals human conceptual understanding (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Humans share this understanding metaphorically, and the more metaphors used, the more emotive the language becomes

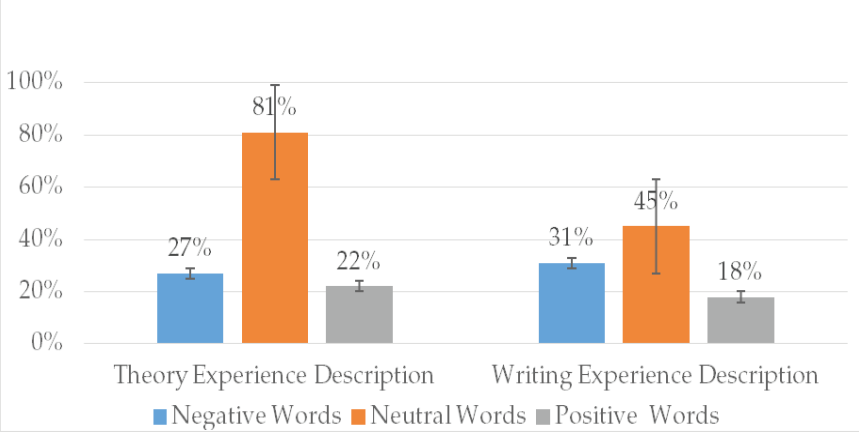
(Crawford, 2009). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) reported that most metaphorical concepts develop through experience. In the participants' case, the metaphors they used were negative thus suggesting they viewed the evaluative feedback experience negatively. Not only did the participants use negative construct metaphors, but they also used words with negative connotations. In comparison, they used far more neutral words to describe writing theory. Researchers report that humans use neutral non-emotive words to describe their thinking logically and clearly. This study suggested that participants' thoughts were logical and clear regarding feedback theory (See Figure 2).

A third observed difference relates to sentence type. Sentence variety enlivens writing (Williams, 2014). Participants' writing may be more emotional when describing experience, but it was more robust when describing theory. For example, using a forty word sample, theory and experience descriptions were compared. Participants varied sentences types while describing feedback theory compared to describing experience Participants used ten percent more complex sentences while describing writing theory compared to writing experience description (See Figure 3).

Language Content

This study not only analyzed how participants described feedback theory and experience but also how participants described their role as future English teachers. One participant said,

Figure 2
Participants' connotative language. This figure describes the difference between positive and negative words used to describe theory and to describe experience.



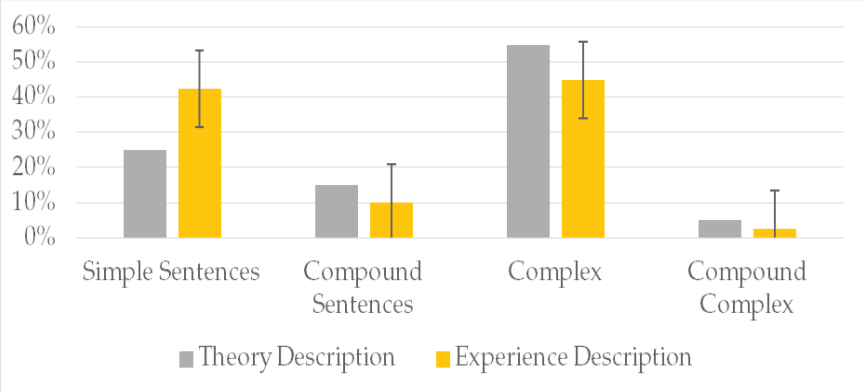
> I think that being an English teacher means teaching students about the many components of the English language. I hope to teach my students how to understand and apply grammar concepts, how to write an essay, how to write a creative story, how to research for an analytical paper, and how to develop an understanding of the English language. English is a complex subject with many parts and pieces. (classroom reflection, 2014)

While analyzing these responses, more often than not, participants referenced the course text regarding feedback theory compared to referencing their lived feedback experience. While describing an English teacher's role, not a single participant referenced providing feedback as an English teacher's function. Even though teacher candidates spent time evaluating eighth grade papers, reading feedback theory in the course text, and participating in class reflections regarding feedback. Interestingly, researchers reported that English teachers view feedback as tedious and time consuming (Lee, 2011). Therefore, as professional teachers mentor teacher candidates, they transmit this writing belief.

This study suggests that feedback theory challenged participant lived experience. When mental models were challenged regarding feedback theory, teacher candidates were troubled; theory and reality did not align. One participant wrote,

> I think the most shocking aspect I learned about assessment is that a teacher should not edit on the paper…I think that not editing on a student's paper will be a difficult aspect to adapt within my own teaching. (classroom reflection, 2014)

Figure 3
Participants' varied sentences. This figure describes the different sentence types related to theory descriptions and experience descriptions.



Through explicit class instruction, readings, and discussions, teacher candidates were exposed to writing feedback theory. Of this explicit instruction, teacher candidates said they learned to not focus only on grammar errors. However, of the six participants, five focused on grammar errors when challenged to put theory to practice on student papers. Not a single participant included comments regarding word choice, clear thinking, or expanding ideas. In a reflection, one participant wrote,

> I tried not to grade for grammar beyond the rubric, but in the end, I could not stop myself from pointing out the big errors. One student needed to work on punctuating dialogue, while another student needed to pick a verb tense and stick with it throughout the story. I tried to give feedback that would help them revise their rough drafts, as they moved into the next phase of writing on this project without being ego-crushing. (classroom reflection, 2014)

Another participant wrote that without a rubric, she would not be able to provide unbiased feedback. She wrote,

> I will admit, the process (of providing feedback) slightly intimidating, but the ability to look at specific expectations defined in the rubric helped confirm my evaluative decisions. Without a rubric, the assessment would have varied from student to student which is unfair to the students because the quality of their feedback would have suffered. (classroom reflection, 2014)

Another participant wrote,

> Most notably teachers must resist the temptation to line edit student papers. It takes up too much of the teacher's time and only serves to overwhelm the student with negative feedback. (classroom reflection, 2014)

Implications

The first implication relates to curriculum. These results reveal an EPP curriculum gap. EPPs do not provide sufficient writing pedagogy; therefore, preservice teachers rely on line-editing and formulaic writing tools to teach and to evaluate writing. This practice causes fear; humans avoid fearful situations (English & Stengel, 2010). This research's conclusion are align with Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald (2013) deductions. They wrote that student writers withdraw or avoid writing if classroom instruction is too punitive or too perspective. This research, as well as Dianovsky and Wink (2012), concluded that if teachers and students avoid writing, writing fear develops. The consequence: all participants lose the opportunity to acquire new content understanding and to foster an appreciations of their writing and of their thinking abilities.

A second research implication relates to knowledge. If language represents human understanding as Halliday (1993) and Lakoff (1990) suggested, then analyzing preservice teacher language reveals preservice teacher knowledge. Also, this research supports Sousa's (2017) discussions related to knowledge. If preservice teachers' knowledge situates only in the declarative phase as Sousa (2017) explained, then preservice teachers may only understand how to define writing feedback but not how to produce it or shift it depending on the situation. This research implies that EPPs do not provide enough experience for teacher candidates' declarative knowledge to mature into procedural and/or conceptual knowing. Thus, when charged with providing meaningful writing feedback, teacher candidates became frustrated and relied on formulaic and/or prescriptive writing instruction and evaluation.

Language reveals internal thought (Halliday, 1993). Preservice teachers' words exposed a negative understanding of writing feedback. However, were participants' words negative because the experience of providing feedback was negative? Or, were participants' words negative because they were being asked to do something that they were not prepared to do? This research, as well as researchers (Beaton, 2017; Colby & Stapleton, 2006; Williams, 2014), suggested two possible source for negative understanding. First, professional teachers view writing feedback as tedious and as time consuming. These professionals perpetuate this negative viewpoint during field experience and student teaching sessions. Professionals may not intend to communicate such feelings, but "grading papers" is seen as a chore and not as a way to help students clarify learning or to share thinking. For example, one participant wrote,

> When I am a teacher, I am going to make all my students write book reports. I hated writing those things. Because I had to do it, I'm going to make my students do it too. (personal communications)

A second source for negative understanding situates inside the education preparation program. Simply, EPPs do not provide enough lived experience for preservice teachers to feel positive and/or to feel equipped to provide effective feedback. For example, a second participant wrote,

> I wondered why we weren't learning how to evaluate student writing in our undergraduate methods courses. I found myself simply correcting students' grammar mistakes all the time, but not considering anything else about their writing. Due to this lack of expertise and training, I felt unprepared to teach or to grade writing. (personal communications)

Furthermore, it is documented that many EPPs do not provide teacher candidates with enough real-life experience (See Figure 1). These

experiences must include best practice writing production strategies and writing evaluation theories (Graham et al., 2013). In addition, writing instruction and planning must be threaded through all methods courses in the same manner reading is blended into all contents. For years a common literacy mantra was, "We are all teachers of reading" (Beaton, 2017). Maybe, but we are also all teachers of writing.

Finally, EPPs must provide feedback instruction. Researchers such as Williams (2014) and Graham et al. (2013) suggested limiting feedback to key writing areas. In response to this research as well as the results from this study, this researcher developed a feedback graphic organizer. This organizer mentored preservice teachers through the feedback evaluation process (see appendix). It assisted preservice teachers in deciding what to say and how much to say on student papers. As a result, preliminary edTPA data may suggest that this feedback chart was one variable that produced increased edTPA scores. To illustrate, this university's 2016-17 edTPA rubric scores related to providing student feedback increased from a 2.0 to 3.5 on a five point scale after piloting the feedback graphic organizer.

Limitations

Ethnographic studies are flawed; they can be subjective. Even when all data redundancy techniques are employed, it takes time, and the results are not generalizable. Sample size is also a failing. To compare, survey studies may engage hundreds of survey participants. This research study employed six. However, Gilgun (2010) used the example of a black swan to illustrate the importance of a small study. She wrote that it only takes one black swan to disprove the truth that all swans are white.

Conclusion

Feeling unprepared to provide writing feedback creates fear. Fear impedes learning (English and Stengel, 2010). Because education preparation programs lack proper writing pedagogy courses, teacher candidates fear providing evaluative feedback. This fear is evidence in the language they use to describe their lived experience. This fear not only impacts their learning but the learning of their future PK12 students. To reduce this fear, EPP programs could include a graphic organizer like the one listed in this appendix. Graphic organizers blend visual and verbal learning (Sousa, 2017). This blending builds comprehension and helps teacher candidates develop positive evaluative processes.

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