Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 27

Issue 1 *Past, Present, Future: Where Have We
Been and Where Are We Going?*

Article 12

2011

From Consuming to Producing: The Potential of Preservice Teacher Scholarship in English Teacher Preparation

Sarah Hochstetler
Illinois State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm>

Recommended Citation

Hochstetler, Sarah (2011) "From Consuming to Producing: The Potential of Preservice Teacher Scholarship in English Teacher Preparation," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1835>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Sarah Hochstetler

From Consuming to Producing: The Potential of Preservice Teacher Scholarship in English Teacher Preparation

Fifteen years ago a mentor suggested I research and write about the work I did as an undergraduate tutor in my university's writing center. That encouragement led to conference presentations and published essays that shaped my growing professional identity and foregrounded my later participation in the professional conversations in English education. The outcomes of my engagement in scholarship as an undergraduate included a better understanding of the field of education, a clearer vision of the kind of writing tutor and future teacher I wanted to be, and confidence in beginning my career. Now I give that same advice—to move beyond consuming scholarship to producing it—to my undergraduate English teacher candidates as a way to foster the transition from student to teacher, and the outcomes are promising.

As we look toward the future of English teacher preparation, I want to suggest that one way teacher education programs can better prepare preservice teachers is to ask them to participate in research and writing for publication. In this essay I use a constructivist framework to argue that participation in educational discourse communities helps teacher candidates form their professional selves. More specifically, as Edens and Gallini (2000) explain, "... student learning evolves from their development of a sense of ownership/authority in a knowledge domain through active construction of their own knowledge within a community that shares a common culture of thought" (p. 64). I offer two extended examples to demonstrate this benefit to preservice teacher scholarship: one, my own undergraduate experiences engaging in scholarship, and the other, an interpretation of my current English education students' experiences with scholarship production.

Students Producing Scholarship

When considering the student's position in the production of scholarship the role is usually reserved for graduate students. Though most undergraduate instructors would agree that their students have refreshing ideas, only some instructors take the initiative to work with undergraduates toward participating in the professional discussions in their areas of study. Offers to collaborate on a research project (beyond the role of research assistant) or co-write an essay are typically reserved for graduate students who are often deemed more appropriate partners for such work. Perhaps this is due to the incorrect assumption that only graduate students are interested in research and writing for publication because they're on career paths that likely require

it, or that only graduate students are capable of the self-discipline necessary for producing scholarly work outside of that required for a course. Or perhaps this is because academe is often set up to reward faculty who prioritize commitment to graduate students. In some institutions of higher education, mentoring graduate students has more prestige.

Further complicating the inclusion of undergraduates in scholarly production is the commonplace belief that faculty alone should maintain research agendas because they are the ones who get

credit for it. When my undergraduate mentor and I wrote about the benefits of student/faculty collaboration she confirmed this, as well as the misconceptions about undergraduates: "In a black and white world, faculty publish, [undergraduates] don't. Faculty have the drive to read and

write; [undergraduates] work only when there's a grade involved. Faculty present at conferences; [undergraduates] go to public lectures when assigned. But I don't live in a black and white world" (Stephenson & Hochstetler, 2000). Her investment in my intellectual work disrupted my assumptions that only experts conduct and write about research. Recent growth in outlets for undergraduate scholarship confirms a disruption and shows that the academy is open to contributions from this population.

The idea that English teachers should engage in producing scholarship is not a new one; outlets for classroom case studies and teacher narratives have been available for decades through NCTE's annual convention and publications like *English Journal*, amongst others. However, in the last thirty years an interest in undergraduate scholarship has increased allowing preservice teachers to participate in the larger discussions going on in their respective fields (Council on Undergraduate Research). There has also been an expansion in publications that feature undergraduate scholarship. For example, the journal *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* includes the work of preservice teachers, and the conferences I attend offer more sessions with preser-

Though most undergraduate instructors would agree that their students have refreshing ideas, only some instructors take the initiative to work with undergraduates toward participating in the professional discussions in their areas of study.

vice teachers than they did a decade ago. Given the increase in opportunities for undergraduates to engage in and share their scholarship, it seems more than appropriate to encourage English education students to participate.

The Value of Undergraduate Participation

The act of engaging in the production of scholarship can help preservice teachers make meaning from coursework in more concrete ways, much like participating in a teaching demonstration or grading a set of authentic student papers is far more powerful an experience than simply discussing best practices in instruction or assessment. Kinkead's edited collection *Undergraduate Research in English Studies* (2010) focuses on the myriad ways students can be prompted to take part in scholarship beyond their coursework. One effect of the production of scholarship, they suggest, is students become more fully and organically involved in their areas of study. Grobman (2009) supports this idea when she states that undergraduate students who participate in research gain authorship and authority in specific areas. Preservice teachers who participate in this kind of intellectual

Assignments that lead teacher candidates beyond consuming scholarship and toward producing it are an opportunity to demonstrate to students that they have interesting and important perspectives to offer to the larger education community.

work feel better prepared for the classroom because they have a clearer understanding of what teaching entails.

Assignments that lead teacher candidates beyond consuming scholarship and toward producing it are an opportunity to demonstrate to students that they have interesting and important perspectives to offer to the larger education community. This, in

turn, can help them feel more connected to the field. This sense of connectedness is a necessary component of a successful orientation into full time teaching (Alsup, 2005; Britzman, 1994). Given the high attrition rate for novice teachers, some of which is due to weak teacher identity, it is advantageous for teacher preparation programs to promote identity formation (Alsup, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001; 2002; McCann, 2005). As Alsup (2005) explains in her study on preservice teacher identity, "... teacher educators can make the introductory phase of the new teacher easier through assignments that encourage the expression of various genres of teacher identity discourse leading into the development of a holistic teacher identity" (p. 26-27). Asking students to engage in the production of scholarship is one way we can do this.

Example One

I argue for preservice teachers to take part in scholarly work because I have seen the positive outcomes of this participation as a student and as a teacher of English methods.

The university writing center where I worked as an undergraduate had a culture of inquiry. Interested tutors were regularly invited to participate in the scholarly work of the writing center as well as explore their own areas of curiosity. The first opportunity for me to participate in the larger discussions on tutoring writing outside of our writing center was through a call to present at a national writing tutors conference a few states away. The director of the writing center suggested I go and speak to the innovative work we were doing in our program. When I returned from that presentation I had a new enthusiasm for and understanding of "our field." I shared my ideas about tutoring and teaching writing with her and she said simply, "you should write about that." With her mentorship through the writing process, I published one single authored and two coauthored pieces with her.

My participation in the conference and the publication of my writing showed me that the work I was doing as a tutor made me part of a larger group and what I had to say was of value. This realization led me to continue exploring my interests in tutoring and the connection of that work to my future as a high school English teacher. As a specific example, I looked for ways to use the kinesthetic modes of tutoring writing popular in our writing center as teaching tools for my future classroom. Though the contexts were different, as tutoring and teaching writing are separate tasks, I saw the potential to use what I had learned about writing through tutoring to help scaffold my thinking about teaching in a secondary setting. Though I may have made some of these connections regardless, the experience of researching and writing about the use of kinesthetic modes of learning in relation to the writing process pushed my thinking about what kind of tutor and teacher I wanted to be, further forming my sense of teacher-self.

The opportunities I had to engage in and publish scholarship about tutoring and teaching as an undergraduate preservice teacher are a model for my current pedagogy in my methods courses. As an undergraduate I learned through my research and writing that the production of scholarship isn't limited to those with advanced degrees. The director of the writing center and other supportive faculty at the university not only told me my ideas were of consequence, but also devoted the time to assist me in developing them. These actions helped me to understand that I, an undergraduate preservice teacher, could and should contribute to professional conversations. I also came to understand the value of collaboration between student and teacher, which also informed my emergent teacher identity and remains an instructional tool I value.

Example Two

When I teach methods courses I make formal and informal research and publication opportunities available to my students. Formally, I require that they identify an area of inquiry to research throughout the semester and report their findings to the class. The goals of this project include inviting students to engage in the writing process using techniques for teaching writing discussed in class, and enter into

the professional conversations in the field by sharing their writing locally. Informally, I invite students to join me in submitting panel proposals for conferences and I encourage students who wrote strong inquiry projects to submit their manuscripts to various outlets. The outcomes of these formal and informal opportunities are positive. Students consistently comment in course evaluations that they felt like “real teachers” for the first time because they were asked to do the work of practicing teachers. In addition, the scholarship they engaged in through the inquiry projects helped them see the many nuanced layers to teaching English that they otherwise couldn’t see through required readings or class-led discussion. For example, to inform their writing students read deeply and widely beyond course texts, some interviewed practicing teachers and still others conducted informal surveys of classmates, secondary students and other relevant populations. These acts, which they otherwise would not have performed, helped form a foundation for future teacher research and contributed to their individual professional development. To be more specific, as students read within a specific area of interest to inform their projects they were better able to situate themselves in the larger professional conversations, thus clarifying for themselves their belief systems as future teachers. In addition, conducting the research necessary for the inquiry project exposed students to the discourse communities of practicing teachers, allowing them to feel more comfortable within it when they began their student teaching later in the year.

Though only a few students take me up on my informal offers of mentoring toward sharing their scholarship with audiences outside of the classroom, those who have found the experience rewarding. One student recently submitted her inquiry project from my class to a major journal in our field. Her writing was already strong, but we exchanged a few emails at the end of the semester with the goal of refining her argument for the appropriate audience. She said in those electronic dialogs that if her essay wasn’t accepted, she was still glad to have had the experience of preparing the manuscript for submission because “teachers of writing should write” and “we have a responsibility to share our insights with each other.” Last semester, at my prompting, a group of students proposed presentations for a national conference, the focus of which was on the unique classroom perspective of preservice teachers. Two of those students’ proposals were accepted and they were thrilled to think that seasoned professionals would want to learn from them, and they eagerly began preparing their presentations. These examples provide continued evidence that when preservice teachers learn they have voices, they feel empowered in ways that influence their professional identity development.

Full Circle

I recently reread one essay the director of the writing center and I wrote together and was surprised to find an interesting parallel between the comments I made as an undergraduate and my students’ comments about writing for publication. I said then of my writing process outside of the classroom, “I had heard this crazy rumor that writing was in a constant

state of revision, but had never really witnessed it until this project. How could I believe it anyway, when all of my class essays were graded and tucked away every semester?” (Stephenson & Hochstetler, 2000). When I push students toward publishing their written work from my class after final grades are posted, they

seem stumped on how to move their thinking and writing forward. When the product isn’t connected to assessment for school, my students find revision difficult.

I tell my students that I, too, struggled with writing when it was disconnected from a grade. Sometimes I show them the article I collaboratively wrote where I talk about this process and they get a good chuckle out my “student” voice. Yet this example of students struggling with their writing only reinforces my desire to nudge them toward publishing their scholarship; this experience can then become a lesson to share with their future students about the writing process and, perhaps, a lesson for how to encourage secondary students to publish their own writing.

Asking our preservice teachers to engage in producing scholarship creates opportunities for students to learn more about their majors and better prepares them for the classroom in ways traditional teacher training does not.

Call to Action

In the last twenty years there has been a shift in the way academe views the scholarship of undergraduates. This change is beneficial to our preservice teachers in that opportunities to pursue inquiry and publish are becoming more readily available. Asking our preservice teachers to engage in producing scholarship creates opportunities for students to learn more about their majors and better prepares them for the classroom in ways traditional teacher training does not. Students can learn more about their future work through the refined lens of preservice teacher research and build a stronger teacher identity and sense of connectedness to the profession through sharing that work with others. As our field moves forward in its thinking about best practices in English teacher preparation I call on those who work with preservice teachers to consider the positive effects of undergraduate research and publication, and encourage students to both consume and produce scholarship.

References

- Alsop, J. (2005). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.
- Britzman, D. P. (1994). Is there a problem in knowing thyself? Toward a post-structuralist view of teacher identity. In *Teachers thinking, teachers knowing: Reflections on literacy and language education*, edited by T. Shanahan, 53-75. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Council on Undergraduate Research. About CUR. Accessed on June 6, 2011 from <http://www.cur.org/about.html>
- Edens, K. & Gallini, J. (2000). Developing a discourse community of preservice teachers in a technology-mediated context. *The Teacher Educator* 35(4): 64-82.

- Grobman, L. (2009). The student scholar: (Re)negotiating authorship and authority. *College Composition and Communication* 61(1) 175-196.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *The American Educational Research Journal*. 38 (3) 499-534.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2002). The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription. *NAASP Bulletin*. 86 16-31.
- McCann, T., Johannessen L.R. & Ricca, B.P. (2005). *Supporting beginning English teachers: Research and implications for teacher induction*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Stephenson, D. & Hochstetler, S. (2000). The colorful world of student/teacher collaboration. *Grand Valley Review*, 21, 55-60.

Sarah Hochstetler, a former middle and high school English teacher, is an assistant professor of English at Illinois State University where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in methods, pedagogy, and writing instruction. Her publications in *Action in Teacher Education* and *The Clearing House* focus on her research interests in English teacher education, identity development and attrition.

Treat yourself

Treat yourself to **free Web seminars** from NCTE. Start your school year off right with fresh ideas and perspectives on literacy practices and professional development support systems used by the most successful and innovative schools in the country.

Visit us at www.ncte.org/seminars to see a calendar of events and reserve your seat today!

NCTE National Council of
Teachers of English

www.ncte.org • 877-369-6283