“What I Needed to Know to Get Published”: Teaching (Frightened) Graduate Students to Write for Publication

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The author uses mentoring theory to create a curricular model that teaches graduate students to produce publishable scholarly writing. The writing process and feedback (WPF) model presents getting published as an appropriate expectation of all graduate students. The model includes structured sequential classroom assignments, student editorial review boards, guest classroom appearances by published writers, and extensive feedback from faculty and peer mentors. Student feedback shows that those who completed courses using this framework have clearly benefited.

**Background**

This approach to academic writing liberated and empowered me. For the first time I felt that it was not only acceptable but also preferable to include some of my own insights gained through experience. My training in the past had led me to quote, document, and keep my writing completely impersonal. This fresh approach, however, gave my writing a new authority and gave me the confidence to trust my own voice. (Student Questionnaire, 1999)

My education graduate students tell me they feel that their greatest challenge in academic life is to acquire the necessary skills to create publishable research. This is partially attributable to the structures of their lives—as adult learners they are pressed for time and must manage a
number of equally important duties. But it is also due to shortcomings in their academic programs. Students say that they have had little guidance in the writing process and have not been trained adequately to write for academe. These findings concur with a study of graduate students from 13 institutions revealing that writing for publication was not part of their training (Engstrom, 1999). As a result, many graduate students have a fear of writing and a greater fear of failure. They enter professional fields without having mastered a skill that is essential to the development of their identities and careers.

This article discusses an innovative curricular writing model that I designed to meet the needs of such students (see the Appendix). The model I describe also may help faculty members who do not normally teach writing to realize that it is something they can do in their classrooms. The model, which I call the writing process and feedback (WPF) model, helps graduate students become confident and strategic scholar-writers. It was developed on the premise that it is possible to improve graduate students’ abilities and self-perceptions as writers and researchers. By the time students complete a course using this model, they not only have learned to draft, revise, and polish their writing, they also have learned to participate in a collaborative peer group that provides valuable constructive feedback. Processes that scaffold student writing to ensure success have been found to affect students’ beliefs and self-image about writing as well as their motivation to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

The goal of this study was to give students a skill that they needed for their personal/professional development and academic success; they were willing participants on these terms. Also, the opportunities I created for students to submit anonymous feedback on the writing-for-publication process worked to overcome barriers created by the faculty-student power differential. Finally, on the last day of each course I provided students with consent forms, which they had the option to sign after receiving their final grades, giving me permission to quote anonymously from their papers. Even though I provided them with writing assistance, along with targeted publishing information, I did not seek co-authorship of their work. The discovery that students can learn to write publishable material, along with the opportunity this study has given me to describe my model and the theory behind it, has been its own reward.
The Writing Process and Feedback (WPF) Model

The writing process and feedback model is premised on relatively rapid generation of text and quick feedback. Many graduate students are afraid to generate text and are even more afraid of receiving feedback on it. This model addresses those fears and pushes students to work beyond them. From the outset of the semester, multiple deadlines pop up in quick succession, and students are rewarded for their efforts with helpful feedback from their peers, from the professor, and from other published writers, all of whom take the students’ work seriously.

The WPF curriculum is my response to the current climate in higher education, which does not sufficiently assist graduate students in producing works of publishable quality through pedagogical models of research-based writing. It is based on my assumption and that of others (Dinham & Scott, 1999; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986) that many graduate students need to learn how to write effectively so that they can compete successfully in the tight academic job market. Articles in The Chronicle of Higher Education (see, for instance, Cassuto, 1998) constantly remind us of how increased competition has changed the face of academe for new arrivals. Prospective academics need to learn to work collaboratively in groups to democratize their working spaces (Valde, 1997), communicate with increasingly informed and diverse audiences (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986), and develop as reflective citizens and lifelong learners (Edwards & Usher, 1998).

Teaching faculty need to facilitate the writing skills and professional development of graduate students who range widely in skills and interests. I agree with Kuh (1999) that when high-level performance is modeled, positive learning can occur. I have struggled to put my beliefs into action by designing an intervention that I adjust for the topic of each course, with the special needs of each group and individual in mind, and incorporating new insights that I continue to gain from student feedback and evaluations.

Expanded Views of Writing and Research

Academic discourse, it has been argued, is gendered—it emphasizes a masculine structure that is “less intuitive” and “intrinsically motivating” (Bruning & Horn, 2000). In contrast, the WPF model teaches students that a variety of types of research and writing are valuable. Although many students have been taught to devalue them, personal and professional experiences can be a rich well from which to draw for scholarly
writing. Insights from well-crafted fiction, biography, and autobiography also are valuable and useful. The WPF model seeks to heal the false boundaries between life and scholarship. It supports new genres of educational research, such as narrative writing, and the blurring of boundaries between academic disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Geertz, 1988; Richardson, 1994). This philosophy resonates deeply with adult learners, who grow in confidence as they use their experiences and selves as important sources for generating text.

The model also draws on a variety of communication skills; it seeks to incorporate aspects of graphics design and production, for example. This particular feature permits students to represent data beyond the kinds of conventional matrices that Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate. Graphics software—for instance, Adobe Photoshop (© 2000, Adobe Systems, Inc.) and Corel Draw (© 1999-2000, Corel Corp.)—simulates the processes of a visual artist and allows students to construct circles and irregular shapes (Newby, Stepich, Lehman, & Russell, 1996). Students whose communication and learning strengths are visual rather than verbal are especially pleased to learn that these skills can contribute meaningfully to their academic writing.

Another strength of the WPF model is that students learn to think critically about their research findings and points-of-view. It teaches students that the research process is interpretive, which means that students develop the capacity to understand how they make sense of ideas, events, and information. The students, who increasingly come to identify themselves as authors, also reflect on how they are invested in a topic and how they can create a sense of the presence of self and others in the text.

Students in the WPF courses took a number of creative risks in all of these directions. For example, they wrote autobiographies in which they staged themselves as “participants” in their studies of “others.” They explored Denzin’s (1994) notion that “The Other who is presented in the text is always a version of the researcher’s self” (p. 503). As they undertook their formal research studies, they searched for their own metaphors of inquiry (Edwards & Usher, 1998; Richardson, 1994), specifically those relating to identity, relationship, and organization. For example, their metaphors for organizational culture included the “glass house” and “dysfunctional family”; metaphors for their fellow classmates included “band buddies” and “phantom mentors”; and metaphors for the creative process included “peeling an onion” and “gardening miracles of growth.” They also created visual metaphors, often for the first time as adults, and represented deeply personal ways of seeing their organizational cultures in universities and schools, patterns in (or problems with)
their data, and their relationship to other participants. Each class accepted the scholarly challenge to learn from the changing field of education, which is far less “bounded” than ever before and which is constantly “loosening and becoming more permeable” (Edwards & Usher, 1998, p. 83).

Students framed and reframed their research problems, collected and analyzed data, questioning what “data” are and can be, and shared their findings as preliminary insights. They submitted manuscript drafts to me for feedback in their early, advanced, and refined stages, with the goal of producing work of publishable quality with the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Clearinghouse. The ERIC Clearinghouse is a U.S. federally funded national information system with 16 subject-specific clearinghouses and a high (60%) acceptance rate. It boasts the “world’s largest and most frequently searched education database” (About AskERIC, 1999).

Launching the WPF Model

The WPF model was launched during the first session of each course in which it was used from 1998 to 2000. The syllabi for the courses featured this statement of intent, which I discussed with each class:

With specialized guidance from the instructor, and with constructive feedback from classmates combined with your own serious effort, you will learn how to prepare and write a research report that is both acceptable for a conference presentation and publishable with an ERIC Clearinghouse. The oral, written, and cooperative components of professional development will be emphasized through the writing process and feedback (WPF) model. Your writing will be submitted in phases and then as a final paper, formatted in the American Psychological Association (APA) 4th edition style. You also will be encouraged to submit your manuscript for review to a research journal and, in a modified form, as a proposal for a conference presentation. The instructor will be available beyond the timeframe of the formal course to assist you in meeting these goals.

Students then introduced themselves and their areas of professional and personal interest. This exchange initiated the important process of identifying topics for their independent studies. I explained that we would explore and revisit topics during each class. Each student would articulate his or her independent area of study and carry it out in alter-
nating cycles of reflection and action until it was ready for publication. We would be rethinking the conventional idea of “independent study” within the context of the WPF model to reinforce the importance of feedback and collaborative decision making. The students would learn that we all draw upon the support of others as we craft our writing; there is no such thing as “independent” scholarly work. Instead, students would produce an interdependent research study within a mentoring context. The use of a co-mentoring structure (which is described later) provided ongoing support for making intellectual gains.

Students were introduced to the idea of an interdependent writing effort by sharing critical aspects of their work for feedback during class sessions. They focused on areas that were unresolved for them, such as how to discuss a politically sensitive issue without jeopardizing the reputation of one’s workplace or colleagues; or how and when to use anonymity that simultaneously provides sufficient context and respects the privacy of participants.

The phases of the WPF model are as follows (see the Appendix):

- paragraph writing
- paragraph sharing
- phase 1 writing
- phase 1 sharing
- subsequent writing phases
- continued sharing
- final writing phase
- writing refinement
- a new writing cycle

**Paragraph Writing and Sharing**

I launched the WPF model with a paragraph-writing exercise. This is a highly challenging assignment, requiring that students imagine the scope of their entire paper early on. The paragraph exercise, in effect, works as an actual snapshot of the intended study only for the few students who already have a clear idea of their research topic; for the rest, it serves as a warmup that motivates them to consider possible directions for their research.
During the second class meeting, students read each other’s paragraphs. Here the tone was set for friendly but rigorous conversational exchanges. Students asked questions of the writers, who were to respond honestly and without pretense. Writers took notes based on the feedback they received and used it as the basis for the first phase of writing. The learning conditions I aimed to establish here modeled cooperative problem-solving strategies. For example, students were to become comfortable with the need for honesty about their research processes (for example, how many surveys were sent out versus how many actually were returned and analyzed). They would learn to talk openly about their research dilemmas and to make suggestions for resolving problems. They also would come to embrace, contrary to traditional learning, the “messiness” of unexpected field site experiences and the value of other sources of inquiry as data worth mining (Van Maanen, 1988).

**Phase 1 Writing and Sharing**

Phase 1 writing is a development of the paragraph exercise. At this point in the project, students mapped out how they planned to fill in the details of the research snapshot they had initially crafted. They explored their intended research topic, the reasons for their study, inquiry question(s), possible methods of data collection, and key sources. The writers provided notations directly on their manuscripts of queries they had about their study and areas they had not yet developed (for instance, methods of data collection and analysis). Writers were encouraged to talk directly to their intended readers (construed, in Phase 1, as our class, and later as the prospective editors, reviewers, and professionals in their particular fields) about their queries. Examples of the notations they made include the following: “I can’t locate any studies that clarify how coaching is a form of mentoring practice. Can you help me?” and “Do you think my subject pool is sufficient for this study, or should I solicit more volunteers?”

During phase 1 writing, the literature search was only preliminary. Writers had the task of locating and meaningfully incorporating key sources for their study. Even more challenging, students needed to identify how their study could offer something of value to an academic/professional audience. The literature search was not complete until students had gone through the initial cycle of writing, consultation with peers and me, and rewriting. This was an intellectually challenging aspect of the writing projects, especially for those students who had never really grasped that their paper potentially could make a significant contribution to a current topic or field.
Subsequent Writing Phases and Continued Sharing

Subsequent writing phases consist of a minimum of three to four separate draft submissions—or more for those who are willing. At this stage, students built on and refined their earlier drafts, addressing areas of concern signaled by themselves, their peers, and me. Throughout these writing phases, the students continued to ask questions of their readers by pointing to areas of their study that they found to be daunting or confusing; the writers also supplied placeholders, in their texts, for areas needing further development. Actual examples of the questions they wrote requesting feedback on complex matters include these: “Can I, the researcher, be considered a participant in my own study? If so, how do I talk about this?” “Do you think I sound too opinionated in my analysis of what my participant shared?” and “Why should the reader trust my version of a conversation that I’ve sketched from memory?”

The students also learned that they could design variations of the same data set in order to ensure that enough subjects responded. Students prepared questionnaires that subjects could mail, e-mail, fax, or respond to verbally. Students came to appreciate the flexibility that researchers must demonstrate in response to the unexpected and to their subjects’ preferences and schedules. They also learned that persistence and ingenuity are necessary throughout the writing process, especially within a short timeframe and a changing research context.

At this point in the project, I devoted classroom time to formal instruction in writing using APA 4th edition style. My students had not received instruction on the use of the APA format in their respective programs, nor had they thought about taking the initiative to learn the format. I soon learned that it was unrealistic to expect students to learn APA conventions on their own because they needed help with the technicalities. To provide students with applications of the APA manual, I provided them samples from my own APA-formatted studies along with material from the Internet on Web-based citations. Our discussion of APA format included practice exercises and follow-up assistance when students encountered areas of ambiguity. Students responded well to this direct instruction, as was clear from the questions about style they asked while preparing each draft. In addition, students’ comments on the questionnaire I administered indicated that they found this technical guidance to be extremely helpful. Typical student responses were as follows: “The examples you provided of the APA format were first-rate and they really helped me”; “I found the APA format to be sensible and demanding in its details”; “APA is much easier than the Chicago format, and I prefer it
by a long shot”; and “I like how the APA model gave me the structure that I needed for the final draft.”

**Final Writing Phase**

For the final writing phase, students included analytic tables (for example, data displays and research instruments) and/or imaginative figures (for example, graphic representations of a critical aspect of their study) that they had developed with input from the class. Students used these emerging works as handouts to be discussed during their research presentations in the last two weeks of the course.

Near the end of the course, the classes shared and discussed the ERIC Clearinghouse information (contact information, description of the ERIC databases, list of multiple Clearinghouses, submission requirements, and review process) for each writer’s intended publication venue. Students also were required to contact an ERIC representative to determine the fit of their topic with one of the Clearinghouses. Many students followed up by making final revisions and sharing them with me after the course ended. The majority indicated that, given our discussions, they felt confident about preparing their paper for submission.

**A New Writing Cycle**

I read students’ final papers as drafts to be revised further for submission for publication. I treated the papers and the entire writing/research process as a *pilot study*, which has been defined as a preliminary account containing a sample of the population to be investigated later in a larger study, such as a dissertation (Brown & Dowling, 1998). Students understood that the *personal mastery model* (Senge, 1990) had undergirded my approach to the writing/ extending/ revising process; this model “goes beyond competence and skills, though it is grounded in competence and skills. It goes beyond spiritual unfolding or opening, although it requires spiritual growth. It means approaching one’s life as a creative work” (p. 141). I viewed the final papers, then, as an opportunity to make comments in support of the students’ further research and ongoing inquiry.

**In-Class Student Editorial Review Boards**

Another part of the feedback process was in-class student editorial review boards. This simulated activity exposed students to the professional review process and showed them how it can be used effectively as
a catalyst for growth. The student writers functioned as editorial teams that provided constructive feedback to their peers. The students used a manuscript review form that I had created based on actual review forms from the editorial boards of journals to guide their giving of feedback. The authors took seriously the feedback they received on the review forms and on their papers.

The editorial boards made themselves available to the authors for further clarification of feedback and evaluated the revised manuscripts. This process of giving feedback was personalized, with authors and editorial boards sitting together and discussing the paper in question. Students learned that rewriting can be an invigorating process—rather than an isolating or humiliating one—and that getting and giving constructive feedback is an essential communal activity among scholars. I emphasized that editors often require modifications of even the most outstanding papers.

Class Presentations by Successful Student Writers

Presentations by successful student writers, who were either already published as a result of the WPF model or who had written outstanding papers that were under review by a publisher, contributed powerfully to the writing sessions. The student groups considered this kind of visit to be a “real treat.” They eagerly prepared by reading the guest speakers’ manuscripts and making comments on them. Students engaged the speakers as a way of seeking clarification on their own emergent writing issues; they also made helpful comments for improving the speakers’ papers. Both the speakers and the students made noticeable gains with this kind of symbiosis. One student captured the spirit of the speaker event:

Please don’t misunderstand me, but I got much more value from the student speakers you brought in, and their writing, than from the published readings. Although you are a role model as a writer, you’re too far along for me to relate to. I identified strongly with the successful student writers, some of whom are from my own program. I loved reading their manuscripts and could relate to what they wrote and how they see things. This was a unique college experience for me! (Student Questionnaire, 1998)

Students also held conversations with published faculty members. These faculty, whose work students had read beforehand, were invited to participate in a seminar, with a designated student as the lead facilita-
tor. By this point in the course, students had learned that writing and revising is an ongoing process, that the technical requirements of scholarly writing are rigorous and important, that eliciting feedback and criticism from a variety of sources helped them to clarify their thoughts and improve their work, and that creating collaborative networks of scholars generated a source of support and expertise. Most important, they had learned that they could write and that the topics they had investigated were of interest to others and, hence, potentially publishable.

The Study

Goals and Participants

The goal of this study was for graduate students to produce and disseminate a quality piece of scholarly writing for review for publication and conference presentation. In order to facilitate this goal, I redesigned my education graduate courses so that they would assist and motivate students to develop research-based skills in their areas of academic interest. Accordingly, the courses incorporated the WPF model strategies of multiple, structured writing phases; student editorial review boards; mentoring from seasoned student writers; input and feedback from published writers; and a co-mentoring classroom structure.

I used the WPF model in seven education graduate courses at two different research/teaching land-grant universities in the southern U.S. A total of 102 students took courses with me in leadership and administration, student affairs, socialization of adult learners, organizational culture, curriculum development and teacher education, and mentor training of professionals. The classes each consisted of between 13 and 15 master’s and doctoral students from diverse ethnic groups, including Caucasian American, African American, Latino/a, Native American, Asian, and bicultural.

Student Feedback as Data Sources

In order to elicit students’ understanding of and response to the WPF model, I systematically obtained data from them through multiple sources: questionnaires, course and peer evaluations, and spontaneous, unsolicited responses (e-mail and in-person student feedback). The results of these data sources indicated that students can be positively influenced in their roles as peer collaborators, professionals, researchers, and writers through supportive writing structures. Specifically,
student feedback showed that training in the various areas of the WPF model—the structured writing process, incremental timeliness of the writing phases, technical formatting based on the APA model, creative and metaphoric use of language and graphic symbols, peer conversations with professionals about writing and research queries during class sessions, and reading of student works that had been prepared for publication—contributed to their development as professionals. Above all, the students shared that the experience of writing as a group process had facilitated their knowledge, self-confidence, creativity, and, consequently, their academic success.

The feedback I received also indicated that the model helped students to combat writing anxiety. They became less self-doubting and more confident about their writing. Some students claimed to have embraced a view of themselves as developing writer-researchers who can engage in complex academic tasks. This claim is consistent with the actual writing development that occurred—for each student and with varying degrees of success—within 8 to 12 weeks.

Students described the WPF model in various ways. Each of their perspectives captures a particular aspect of the model with regard to its purposes, strategies, and outcomes. The questionnaire that I administered asked, “In your own words, describe the writing process and feedback model that we used in class. I am interested in how you interpreted and experienced it.” One female student, over 40 years old, wrote: “We focused on parts of the research paper, submitting it in phases for feedback. This process was very effective for clarifying my thoughts and organization of ideas. The instructor’s method worked because she concentrated on the process of writing, which allowed my paper to evolve in a way that was not forced.” A 24-year-old male student wrote: “The writing and research process in this class was one of constant mentor/mentee exchange of ideas, concepts, hunches, etc.” A 55-year-old female wrote this about her own powerful transformation in association with the WPF model:

The writing model we used in class makes me think of an onion. First, one peels off the dry scales (gets used to the class, peer group work, and assignments). Then, one finds the moist “meaty” sections (writes about each aspect of the research process, gets feedback from many peers, and then improves the product). By the time one reaches the center, s/he has a sense of accomplishment that is about an awakening of the self and its potential to live in the world of publishing.
A 41-year-old male described the WPF model as a paradigm shift fueled by creative risk taking:

> The writing model could have gone in the direction of being a traditional write/rewrite mechanical process. However, from the outset the latitude of subjectivity and of “pushing the limits” on our own development moved the total process from the traditional paradigm to the progressive. Interestingly, the value placed on my own thinking and processing of ideas that the structural guide allowed, let me, for the first time, to acknowledge my personal voice and use subjectivity in my work.

This comment about the value of the personal in academic work and professional development was particularly powerful.

Students described multiple benefits of the WPF model, each one detailing a layer of its “onion”: a technique for improving thinking and organizational processes, a form that gives structure to content, a step-by-step process that unfolds organically, a paradigm for “personal voice” and “subjectivity,” a structural guide, and an awakening to one’s own potential for growth. The WPF model encompasses these apparent contradictions in both process and form.

**Preliminary Results**

This article discusses a new approach to research writing based on a set of hypotheses rather than on an empirical scientific study. Thus, I have not focused on examining the final publishing outcomes for the students in this discussion. However, I have been tracking the outcome of my students’ submissions in terms of their being accepted/rejected/recommended for revisions by ERIC Clearinghouses, professional journals, book publishers, and academic newsletters. Many of my students have submitted their manuscripts to ERIC. The most ambitious among them also report having submitted their manuscript, in revised form, to a professional journal, conference, book editor, or newsletter.

At this point, all students in the study from the two-year period that included fall, spring, and summer terms ($n = 80$) have submitted their manuscripts for review. A few ($n = 10$) have had their work published in journals or as book chapters. Those whose manuscripts were rejected upon first submission have expressed two types of reactions: (a) that they are “now at least in the publishing game” and (b) that while the reviews have proven helpful for making revisions, they have ranged from being somewhat favorable to outright critical.

The two updates from students that follow capture the multifaceted
pursuits many of them are currently engaged in as they disseminate their work:

As the result of your encouragement, I submitted my paper “Mastering the Maze Through Mentoring: Career Advancement of Female Superintendents” to *Equity and Excellence in Education* in June 1999. One month later they replied, “We regret that we are unable to publish your article at this time. We found that your paper is a good preliminary study, but the sample is too small. We encourage you to broaden your investigation by attending conferences for superintendents and the like. We welcome you to submit any future work for possible publication.” I also submitted the paper in proposal form to MSERA, and it was accepted for presentation for November 1999. I am currently revising the paper for submission to ERIC for review. At your invitation, I also wrote a modified version of my paper called “Mentoring and Servant Leadership” for the *Community of Learners News*. I now have the confidence to look for other venues for my writing, regardless of the outcome of each review process. (Joan, electronic mail, 1999)

This May 1999 I sent my paper to ERIC and to the *Oxford Review of Education*. My topic fits their specifications and addresses one of the major issues they have been recently debating. The writing model you used in our class on mentoring was what I needed to know to try to get published. Thank you for everything you did to help me to learn the APA 4th edition format. (Betty, electronic mail, 1999)

Continuing to write for purposes beyond coursework is an appropriate expectation of all graduate students. Submission to a professional venue, regardless of the outcome, is arguably not only a source of valuable experience but also the most important outcome of the course because it shows that the WPF model provides positive reinforcement for writing. Because the students in these courses have set getting published as a goal, their success rate should increase over time. I plan to develop an empirical study based on the hypotheses in this article to show that the students’ publication rate in each of the categories of dissemination can be read as single, independent items. However, I will suggest that the numbers can be read as clusters revealing a pattern of how each individual is tackling the publishing effort. For example, Joan’s update above shows that she first submitted her paper to a journal, where it was rejected, then to a conference, which accepted it, then to a newsletter, which accepted it, and then to ERIC, where it is now under review.

In the courses using the WPF model, before earning an “A” a stu-
dent’s research paper needed to be of publishable quality with an ERIC Clearinghouse, which I determined through an analysis of ERIC documents for their shared elements of strategic writing (for instance, a clear and purposeful abstract containing a statement of the study’s significance and its main finding). Out of my participant population of 102 students, only 4 received a “B” and, thus, “underachieved” according to my evaluation criterion—everyone else received an “A.” To my surprise, the grades that my WPF students received were consistently much higher than those for my “regular” students. The WPF participants are gradually reaping the benefits of having produced a work that permits them entry into a public conversation with different audiences.

**Enlarging the Discussion**

Lincoln (1998) argues that teacher-researchers need to “enlarge the discussion” of what we do in our classrooms in order to contextualize the abstract reports found in the educational literature. More idealistically, Van Maanen (1988) writes that “the ubiquitous, disembodied voice of the culture” has been dismantled by writers who claim personal authority, and “in its place is a person” who establishes a relationship with readers (p. 74). I believe that the teaching of scholarly writing has yet to become a focus in higher education institutions. Discussion of the crucial roles faculty can play with regard to the teaching of writing—creating opportunities for graduate students to produce research-based writing, helping them find venues for publication, and providing mentoring responses to their work—represents an emergent area of research. A major goal of college educators should be to ground concepts of student writing development in their courses. One solution is to use a mentoring intervention that contributes both to the learning of students and to the literature.

If the theory-practice gap in higher education with regard to research and teaching can be addressed through graduate programs, then an overarching question becomes this: “What is important in the professional worlds we inhabit, and what new directions might curriculum development facilitate to prepare students better?” Graduate students like mine in educational leadership and administration programs must demonstrate the capacity to investigate educational phenomena, assess on-site programs, and communicate their findings clearly and succinctly. Like many professionals today, these students experience pressure to conduct research and writing tasks in their roles as grant and analysis researchers, curriculum developers, teachers, and administrators.
Like Bolton (1994), Denzin (1994), and Richardson (1994), I consider academic writing to be an act of interpretation that incorporates narrative elements in addition to data. These teacher-researchers describe writing as a form of inquiry that promotes personal/professional development by exploring ourselves and our topics. Richardson (1994) claims that by situating ourselves openly in our writing, we become “more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged” (p. 516). Why is the WPF model an innovative approach to graduate student teaching? Because it engages students who do not perceive of themselves as scholarly writers and who have had little formal training to master the necessary skills within one semester. The model uses innovations in graduate education courses—revolving around multiple opportunities for feedback—to help students learn about the culture of academic writing. Finally, the model includes a component that teaches students where to find venues that might publish their work and how to approach them. Students emerge from this “training” with a great deal of technical knowledge about writing and rewriting, eliciting and incorporating feedback from peers, seeking help from a variety of mentors, and finding the right scholarly niche for their work. They have had an excellent introduction to what Engstrom (1999) calls the “norms, expectations, attitudes, and practices of the scholarly community” (p. 265).

Mentoring Maps That Guided This Study

Co-mentoring theory (Bona, Rinehart, & Volbrecht, 1995; Mullen & Lick, 1999) suggests that the best way to teach a new skill is to create a collaborative whose members bring diverse skills and levels of knowledge to the group. My student groups studied theories that are relevant to the development of its members, examined different models of writing, produced and reviewed writing, and discussed what they were learning. Accomplishing these tasks required recasting the formal curriculum in terms of the WPF model, which includes co-mentoring as one of its components. For the majority of my students who had not yet developed a relationship with a primary mentor, the co-mentoring structure proved especially viable and significant. Regardless, the multiple mentoring experience is one that the literature has shown to be rewarding, particularly for women (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 2000; Mullen, Whatley, & Kealy, 2000). Scott (1992) reports that “Successful people often comment they have had up to ten or more mentors, each contributing to different areas of need” (p. 170).

Members of a co-mentoring collaborative are grouped to work together
on writing skills across differences in ethnicity, gender, age, politics, personality, experience, and skill. This idea of learning across difference is naturally conducive to this study, given that heterogeneity was a defining characteristic of the seven classes that participated. Each class was organized noncompetitively as a co-mentoring team that provided feedback to peers during every session on research plans, methods, and writing. Peer-based research relations served as a guiding concept in these classrooms.

Co-mentoring, or reciprocal mentoring, works differently from traditional mentoring. Traditional mentoring involves the administration of professional guidance through the pairing of an experienced adult with a young adult or protégé for a defined period of time (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Phillips-Jones, 1982). In contrast, co-mentoring is characterized by a nonhierarchical arrangement in which everyone shares the roles of mentor (giving feedback and making suggestions based on experience and intuition) and protégé (asking for assistance and input in order to arrive at an insight, strategy, or solution) (Bona et al., 1995; Mullen & Lick, 1999). This reciprocal approach to human development served as an ideal philosophical stance in my courses by allowing students to share research opportunities as equal partners. The students and I worked toward reconstructing our institutional boundaries and our traditional roles as “learner” and “expert.” Co-mentorship provided the basis for a two-way communication structure without the trappings of hierarchy, power, and privilege that inhibit feelings of self-worth (Senge, 1990) and productive change (Fullan, 1999) within higher education.

The co-mentoring process recognizes the importance of trust, building emotional as well as professional bonds, and personal reflection and growth (Bona et al., 1995; Mullen, 2000; Tauer, 1998). This process has worked very well for this study; previous students who have submitted impressive works for publication serve as role models for my current students. These student-authors, together with the students who are struggling to publish for the first time, continue to develop professionally after they leave the course. They contact me to obtain advice on publishing, to update me on their progress, and to talk about the editorial review process and publishing outlets. Their continued development supports claims that mentor/student collaboration leads to higher order thinking, to an increase in academic performance, and to the formation of strong attachments (Gallimore, Tharp, & John-Steiner, 1992; Mullen et al., 1997; Tauer, 1998).

The co-mentoring model has strong potential to support minority stu-
students who need to overcome significant challenges to their educational progress. White majority institutions, like the one that is the setting for this study, have generally failed to provide mentoring to minorities (especially females) both as doctoral students and as scholars (Mullen et al., 2000; Scott, 1992; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). The co-mentoring model is also powerful, although in a different way, for academically competent students who are “at-risk” of never realizing that they can become published writers. Most graduate students can excel in a learning climate that provides them with the chance for rapid intellectual and interpersonal growth.

Students need to be actively engaged in their courses as both learners and teachers (Mintz, 1998). My students report that they have experienced university courses that build on a process, not of student empowerment, but of proving a hypothesis that has already been established for them. Although graduate programs often include advanced courses that cover components of a research study (for instance, data analysis and display), students need to be guided by a complex and holistic curriculum with a progression of research activities presented in manageable pieces (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Nikolova Eddins & Williams, 1997). University programs that encourage active learning for students result in increased knowledge and improved reading and writing skills, among other significant gains (Terwel, 1999).

Conclusions

Questions that have arisen through this study about higher education compel me to ask, Do we as members of the academic community underestimate the ability of our graduate students to learn how to write for publication or, possibly, our own ability to engage them in this challenging process? Do we value writing-for-publication as empowerment for the student members of our communities of scholars? Or could it be that we somehow expect graduate students to learn about the academic culture, including its values and practices, by trial and error?

New learning conditions are needed in higher education that will help prepare students for the demands of tomorrow’s professions and institutions. Faculty members can help prepare students as leaders by using their courses to teach writing skills and related academic material, such as publishing formats and expectations. We also can help students by sponsoring such opportunities as academic mentoring roundtables at conferences, whereby doctoral students receive feedback from scholars on work they intend to submit for publication. Although many higher
education programs offer one or more courses on the dissertation as a research process, this is insufficient training for most students. The challenge of academic writing for publication involves additional rigorous learning; guidance needs to be provided to adult learners at much earlier developmental stages.

Many more courses and programs in higher education need to incorporate a research/writing curriculum that promotes opportunities for discussion, application, and publication for the purpose of furthering the development of our students. Both colleges of education and professional associations need to support this goal. A problem that colleges have yet to resolve is the shortage of faculty to teach qualitative writing and research skills (Stallings, 1995) and to offer focused attention to students during and beyond formal coursework. This kind of transformative project is about the need to create a more accountable and empowering relationship among students, instructors, and institutions. We invite other educators whose writing and research programs have made a difference to share their insights with the rest of us.

Footnotes

1Three domains of the literature are relevant to this study of the importance of student writing and research skills. One major domain is college student writing (specifically composition/experiential and technical writing) (Anson, 1999; Bolling, 1994; Bolton, 1994; Carpenter, 1996; Lincoln, 1998; Prior, 1991; Richardson, 1994; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986; Smith, 1997; Straub & Lunsford, 1995; Valde, 1997). A second area is the socialization and liberation of adult learners (through such vehicles as dissertation cohort groups and publishing activities) (Cassuto, 1998; Cole & Hunt, 1994; Dinham & Scott, 1999; Henson, 1999; Witte & James, 1998). A third area is the mentoring of college students in a culture of effective leadership and collaboration (through such outlets as faculty-student and peer mentoring) (Bona et al., 1995; Bova & Phillips, 1984; Kochan & Sabo, 1995; Mullen et al., 2000; Mullen & Lick, 1999; Nikolova Eddins & Williams, 1997).

2The educational field of scholarly writing can be categorized into four models. The first model is ideologically driven from cultural studies, ethnic models, feminist theory, and narrative/fiction/life history (Denzin, 1994). The second model involves information gathering about the role of graduate schools in socializing doctoral students to become published scholars. For example, Dinham and Scott’s (1999) survey measures the success of those with doctorates by considering two factors: whether
the subjects had been socialized in graduate school to disseminate their works and the degree of success in their current lives. Engstrom’s (1999) case study also investigates the socializing influences during graduate school of those with doctorates, but through the lenses of prolific scholars. The third writing model is grounded in the practice of teacher-researchers who share pedagogical strategies that have worked well with their students (Bolton, 1994; Mintz, 1998; Richardson, 1994; Valde, 1997). A fourth model appears to be missing in the literature, one that combines theory with practice through an experientially developed, holistic curriculum. This is the contribution that the WPF model seeks to make, by asking, How can the formal curriculum be used to prepare graduate students to become published writers who recognize their own potential to develop?

References


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Appendix

Summary of the Writing Process and Feedback (WPF) Model

This research-based writing assignment for graduate students may need to be adjusted to accommodate different disciplines, curriculum areas, timeframes, teaching styles, improvements, preferences, academic abilities, and learner input.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps for Graduate Students</th>
<th>Writing, Research, and Publishing Specifics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph Writing</strong></td>
<td>Outline your intended research topic in about three sentences. Provide the reasons/rationale for this study. Write one research question based on your professional interests and any secondary questions. List the methods you plan to use (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus groups). These are your data sources. Include a timeframe for the development of your study (e.g., instrument[s], the collection of data, and the analysis). Provide key sources from the literature and elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph Sharing</strong></td>
<td>Bring copies of your paragraph to class. Read each other’s paragraphs. Help the other writers to develop their ideas and plans and reach out to get constructive feedback from others. Offer resources to classmates (e.g., access to a specific research population or site).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 Writing</strong></td>
<td>Develop the paragraph exercise by elaborating on each of the items in your paragraph exercise. Write personal queries about unanswered questions regarding the research process directly on the text. Emphasise your thoughts, concerns, and plans for the project by, for example, using bold or colored font. Questions go directly in the text or margins. Also, clarify the areas of your study that still require development (e.g., collection and analysis of the data). Submit your draft instruments (tables or figures) and get feedback prior to use. Find creative and prompt ways to gather data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Steps for Graduate Students | Writing, Research, and Publishing Specifics
---|---
*Phase 1 Sharing* | Circulate your text to the class. If there are sensitive issues in your study, discuss them with the instructor beforehand. Present your research and talk openly about the areas of the project that are working well and the areas that concern you. Ask for specific feedback and offer constructive input to others. Encourage others to discuss issues that you share in common, such as questions about confidentiality and how to protect the identity of participants and/or institutions. Discover what areas of the research process the class shares and discuss these by working through all major ideas and decisions together.

*Subsequent Writing Phases* | Submit three to four (or more) drafts of your writing. Continue to use the strategies for writing development and honest reporting outlined for the Paragraph Writing phase. Express any confusion that you may be experiencing.

*Continued Sharing* | At this point you ideally should have shared aspects of your work on a regular basis. The idea is to share the “messy” realities of your study, not to protect them or to make the research process seem perfect or flawless—it’s not. Search for the deeper value of the research process by turning its limitations and obstacles into material for writing (and, hence, strengths).

*Final Writing Phase* | Learn the publishing style that is required for your purposes. Examine manuscripts that are in the correct form. Include your table(s) and/or figure(s). Present the results of your work. One way of doing this is to use your table/figure as a handout to describe the results and implications of your study. This way you will be certain to have feedback from the group in these critical areas.
### Writing Refinements

Learn where you will submit your study for review before the course is over. You can begin with electronic venues that publish student papers (in the U.S., this would be the ERIC Clearinghouse), and then further improve the work before submitting it to a journal. Find out about the relevant journals in your area and their acceptance rates before you submit. Your text may need additional revision before it can be sent out for review for publication. It may even require a larger subject pool and more extensive analyses of the data as well as profound or original insights. Ask yourself, “What am I contributing of value to the academic/professional field that my paper addresses?” Be patient with any such additional layering and envisioning. This process can make the critical difference in whether or not your work is accepted. Seek answers to your questions about publishing from knowledgeable faculty and students, scholarly guides (e.g., Henson, 1999), writing workshops, and the Internet. Be persistent!

### A New Writing Cycle

Initiate a new writing/research cycle with a study that extends your previous one, or that is different altogether. Strive for cohesive studies that reflect your values and philosophy of education.