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Learning to "Teacher Think": Using English Education as a Model for Writing Teacher Preparation in the Composition Practicum

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Learning to “Teacher Think”: Using English Education
as a Model for Writing Teacher Preparation
in the Composition Practicum

Angela Lankford

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Learning to “Teacher Think”: Using English Education as a Model for Writing Teacher Preparation in the Composition Practicum

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This study explores the impact of “teacher thinking” exercises in the Composition Practicum as a means of instilling a clearer sense of professional development in graduate instructors. Teacher thinking is a teacher training method that asks the novice instructor to see from the perspective of learners within their writing classrooms. Scholarship on writing teacher preparation programs suggests that English educators regularly employ teacher thinking exercises in the training of secondary school teachers.

Teacher thinking has allowed many English education majors to conceptualize and obtain teaching identities by helping them to envision the intricate layers of teaching earlier in their careers. But can teacher thinking exercises have the same effect on graduate instructors in the Composition Practicum? Using the two main writing teacher preparation courses at Brigham Young University (BYU) for graduate instructors and English education majors, English 610 and English 423, I analyze the evidence of teacher thinking in each program and address the possible implications these findings could hold for the Composition Practicum course.

Through my comparison of these courses, I determine if conversations between English educators and the Composition Practicum could be beneficial in helping graduate instructors to grow professionally as teachers as they learn to think like teachers in the Composition Practicum. I examine, analyze, and compare syllabi, surveys, and interview response from graduate instructors, English education majors, and the teachers of both courses to identify the types of teaching thinking students are exposed to in each course.

Structuring my discussion around the teacher thinking theories of teacher educators, Forrest Parkay and Beverly Stanford, George Hillocks, and Alicia Crowe and Amanda Berry, I identify three types of knowledge that graduate instructors and English education majors gained or lacked in each program. These three types of knowledge are knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory. Through this discussion, I explore what it means to think like a composition teacher and how learning to “teacher think” may help graduate instructors, nationally, to understand what it means to “simply be a composition teacher.

Keywords: Composition Practicum, English Education, Graduate Instructors, Writing Teacher Pedagogy, Writing Teacher Preparation, Writing Teacher Preparation Program, Teacher Thinking, Teacher Knowledge, First-Year Writing

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INTRODUCTION

After sixteen years as a student, the graduate instructor stands in front of the First-Year Writing Classroom (FYW) to play the role of “composition teacher.” Throughout this first semester of teaching, the graduate instructor is full of a list of endless questions and concerns: *What am I supposed to say? How am I supposed to act? What will my students think of me?* These insecurities stem from one central anxiety: ethos or the perceived lack thereof on the part of the graduate student. In order to construct an ethos, some graduate instructors turn to what they know best—how to be a student. As Robert Leamson so eloquently states, “every teacher, even the beginner, has a philosophy of teaching. We all enter the classroom, even the first time, with certain beliefs about how teaching should be done” (Leamson 3). For graduate instructors, this knowledge comes from being a student, analyzing the actions of their teachers, and deciding what they’d “never do” if they were EVER to become teachers. But what happens when these preconceived notions about how teaching should be done do not seem to work in the FYW classroom? Where does the graduate instructor learn to think like a composition teacher?

Enter the Composition Practicum—a course that provides the most lengthy conversation and training on what it means to be a composition teacher. Unlike the traditional week or month-long training seminars that many college and university writing programs use to train future teachers, the Composition Practicum lays the foundations of professional development that extends beyond a student’s time in the graduate program. The Composition Practicum is where graduate instructors begin to build a sense of professional development (Miller 82) as they research and write about the common concerns and issues with teaching first-year writers.

However, as the Composition Practicum defines professionalism in terms of scholarship, it also misses an opportunity to help graduate instructors develop professionally through the actions they perform in the FYW classroom (Leverenz and Goodburn 9). In fact, Sidney Dobrin and Jessica Restaino both agree that nationally, Composition Practicum courses create conflicted spaces (Restaino 116) between graduate instructors' perceptions of theory and practice in the classroom and also between the objectives and goals that both teachers and students have for the ultimate aims of the course (Dobrin 1-2). Typically, the Composition Practicum does not solely teach practical skills to novice teachers (as many graduate instructors may wish it would), but it must also give students an introduction to the current concerns, research endeavors, and theoretical perspectives for the field of composition studies as a whole.

There have been many suggestions for bridging this divide between course and student goals in the Composition Practicum. Stephen Wilhoit details some of these approaches in "Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay." He includes approaches such as providing more writing instruction for graduate coursework, practicing reflection, writing articles for publication, and providing mentorship/assistantship opportunities. Despite these efforts, many writing teacher preparation programs are still having trouble helping some students learn to teach or to know what it means to be a teacher.

However, one approach that has not been heavily explored is using teacher thinking exercises in the Composition Practicum similar to activities English educators use to train secondary teachers. Teacher educators Alicia R. Crowe and Amanda Berry define teacher thinking this way: "Coming to think like a teacher requires an important shift in perspective away from one's personal concerns as a teacher toward an appreciation of the learner's perspective. . . . Such a shift in thinking can be facilitated by putting prospective teachers in the

role of the learner” (37). Similarly, Forrest Parkay and Beverly Stanford suggest that there are three important types of knowledge that teachers should acquire to help them understand the situational context of the classroom. These types of knowledge include gaining knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory (Parkay and Stanford 32-34). Thus, helping graduate instructors to acquire this teaching knowledge and begin to think like teachers may help them to envision the intricate layers of teaching earlier in their careers and to acknowledge those layers as they grow and progress as teachers.

As a second-year graduate instructor at Brigham Young University (BYU) who has taken the Composition Practicum, I believe having more opportunities to learn how to “teacher think” and to test out teacher thinking may have helped me to envision my role as a teacher sooner. Of course, we must acknowledge that all teachers learn what it means to be a teacher in their own subjective ways. Personal experience and teaching experience play a large role in creating a teaching identity and a sense of professional development. However, this idea of building more concrete patterns of teacher thinking in the Composition Practicum may be a viable option for building greater confidence in graduate instructors.

This idea of incorporating teacher thinking into the Composition Practicum was recently explored by Janet Auten in the spring 2012 edition of *Composition Studies*. Auten published a course redesign of American University’s Composition Practicum that advocates for using teacher thinking to help graduate instructors identify as teachers and grow professionally in the field. Auten quotes Shelley Reid’s vision of the Composition Practicum when she states, “Like Reid, I have come to see the pedagogy course ‘as practice in a way of encountering the world rather than mastery of skills or facts, as preparation for a lifetime of thinking like a teacher’” (qtd. in Auten 96). In many ways, this statement calls for a developmental approach to teaching

the Composition Practicum and getting graduate instructors to more clearly envision teacher training as a type of life-long learning. This life-long learning comes through helping graduate instructors think about teaching in a larger paradigm than just the classroom itself.

Considering the potential value of teacher thinking for the Composition Practicum, I believe that college and university writing programs should turn to the resources of English educators to construct teacher thinking activities. In this paper, I will explore how graduate instructors at my institution might benefit from learning teacher thinking in a similar fashion to how English education majors learn how to “teacher think” at BYU. I will do this by looking at the two writing teacher training courses at the University, English 610 and English 423. The structure of the 423 course suggests that its aims are complementary to the mission of the University Writing Program and the needs of novice graduate instructors. The emphasis of the 423 course itself seems to be centered on the developmental nature of teacher training and teacher thinking exercises. This focus suggests that this method of training may be effective in helping graduate instructors to gain a sense of teacher identity, professional growth and development by looking more closely at the mindset and actions of teaching.

An analysis of the teacher thinking that the English 423 and English 610 courses offer their students raises several questions worthy of discussion: What is the evidence of teacher thinking in each course? And what can we learn from this evidence about the benefits of teacher thinking in a teacher preparation course? Using these questions as a guide, I will display the need for teacher thinking in the graduate teacher preparation program using interview responses collected from graduate instructors in my graduate program, BYU English education majors, and the teachers of English 423 and English 610. Redesigning the Composition Practicum following the model of English Education’s teacher thinking exercises may help graduate instructors

acquire knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory. This increased focus on teacher thinking and teacher knowledge may allow the Composition Practicum to provide a clearer sense of professional development and a future in the field to graduate instructors.

HISTORY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION AND FYW COLLABORATIONS

Only recently have English educators and Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) begun to re-acknowledge the benefits of collaborative efforts between English education and FYW programs. Collaboration between these two groups was initially established in the early 1960s with the formation of Carl Klaus's Institutes for the Teaching of Writing (Tremmel 5). However, there were several bureaucratic factors, miscommunications, and departmental divides that halted the progression of these collaborative efforts several decades ago and in some ways continue to do so today. The underlying component of this separation is displayed in an Arizona State University WPA-L listserv discussion in November 2012 started by Rachel Zeleny, a University of Delaware PhD candidate.

While preparing for her upcoming NCTE presentation that highlighted her collaboration with an English educator, Zeleny faced resistance to the idea of "incorporate[ing] the types of pedagogical training you receive as a high school teacher (i.e. lesson planning, assignment design, etc.) into the college classroom for new graduate instructors." She then opened up a discussion on the listserv, asking other educators if they had experienced similar resistance or knew anything about the divide between high school and college English. Responses to Zeleny's question begin to uncover the ideological divide between the training methods that English educators and FYW programs employ to train future writing teachers.

Some college teachers on the listserv expressed their disdain for the “minute-to-minute” lesson planning techniques and the state/governmental intrusions in high school classrooms. Others feared that the “inane notions” that many high school teachers had about teaching and lesson planning would creep into college and university classrooms if collaborations were to take place. However, Steve Fox made a profound statement that seemed to unearth the foundation of the divide between high school and college English teachers on the listserv. He says, “Notice how college faculty in other disciplines don’t see themselves as in the field of ‘Education.’ . . . When we do admit to being in Education, it has to be ‘Higher’ education :) When we talk about teaching, it has to be the scholarship of teaching.” Fox’s statement suggests that English educators and FYW programs may have conflicting notions on the purpose of “teaching” and the value of the profession. Thus, differing ideologies on the purpose of “teaching” could make collaborations between these two groups appear impractical until either side concedes to the other’s definition of what the scholarship of teaching actually entails.

Robert Tremmel, however, notes that despite these long-standing ideological divides, English educators and Writing Program Administrators have had significant points of contact in the past (1). In the 1960s, Carl Klaus’s National Defense Education Act Institutes in the Teaching of Writing were the first formal collaboration between English educators and FYW programs after the passage of the GI bill (Tremmel 5). The GI bill allowed non-traditional students deficient in basic skills of reading and writing to enter the university. At this time, graduate instructors were given little to no training in teaching writing, so it became apparent that improved methods of graduate instructor training were needed to teach these non-traditional students (Pytlik 11). Since we learn basic writing skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in secondary schools, conversations between English educators and FYW teachers turned toward

the benefits that these collaborations could hold for graduate instructors and secondary school teachers.

As a result of Klaus's Institutes, several articles were published in the 1960s and 70s about collaborations between English Education and FYW programs (Richard Larson 1969; Donald Nemanich; Joseph J. Comprone; Maxine Hairston; 1974; Richard Gebhardt; 1977) (Tremmel 5-6). The purpose of these early collaborations is best summed up by Richard Gebhardt: "Those who teach writing in public school or college should understand important conceptual underpinnings of composition and the teaching of writing" (Gebhardt 134). Gebhardt's statement suggested that the most important reason for collaboration was a common goal amongst writing instructors—we all want to teach people to write within the situational context of an academic setting. Having this as our goal, several foundational principles of writing and teaching would be sure to overlap, no matter what grade level you teach.

In the 1980s, the State of Iowa Writing Project upheld the fervor of Klaus's institutes, and collaborative efforts took the form of writing teacher education courses that taught both secondary and FYW TAs in the same classroom (Tremmel 11). These collaborations truly helped educators to learn from each other and gain new teaching techniques from other grade levels. But despite the strides in collaboration seen in the 1960s and 1970s, in the 1980s the history of formal collaborations between these two programs seemed to drop off. Robert Tremmel notes, "writing teacher education in first-year composition and English education has since developed along separate—though similar—tracks" (Tremmel 6). However, a renewed push for collaboration came in 1999 when the CCCC created a special interest group (SIG) that sought to legitimize writing teacher education (learning how to be a writing teacher from elementary, secondary, and higher ed teachers) as a subset or discipline within composition studies. The SIG

has produced some of the foremost authorities in the field of writing teacher education for both English educators and FYW programs. These authorities include Stephen Wilhoit, Thomas C. Thompson, Robert Tremmel, Janet Alsup, Elizabeth Brockman, Jonathan Bush, and Mark Letcher.

Alsup and Bush state, “What ties the SIG members together, then, are not departmental, programmatic, or other institutional issues, but common academic and professional concerns, questions, and interests” (“Commonalities” 673), suggesting that as writing teachers we can draw from a number of different sources to perform effectively as writing teachers. Thus, the SIG seems to suggest that training new teachers using only conversations within one program or group itself may not hold all of the answers for the common concerns of those who train novice writing teachers in both English education and FYW programs.

Stephen Wilhoit lists several concerns that writing teacher educators hold for their students such as fostering a sense of professional development and interest in in-service learning, the role of reflection in our students’ education and development, and balancing classroom learning with field experience (Wilhoit 19). These are issues that *all* writing teacher educators, no matter the grade level, are concerned with for their students’ development. Thus, we can all learn how to alleviate these concerns together.

As we can see, there is a respectable scholarly tradition that explores collaborations between English education and FYW programs. However, this collaboration still seems to be largely unrecognized in recent literature on teacher preparation as a valid option in the training of graduate instructors. As FYW programs turn their attention to the Composition Practicum course and to “ongoing debates over which instructional procedures to employ [within the course] . . .”

(Wilhoit 17), we have neglected to see the value that the resources of English education could hold in this debate, especially in how we can help graduate instructors learn to think like teachers.

If we look closely at the intellectual and conceptual processes that English educators employ to help future secondary school teachers learn to think like a teacher, we begin to see that these training methods are not only applicable to the daily concerns of the college writing teacher but that they may also create a clearer sense of professional development for the novice graduate instructor. At BYU, teacher thinking could help graduate instructors to gain the types of teaching knowledge that Parkay and Stanford outline—knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory.

TEACHER THINKING IN ENGLISH 610, *COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY*

Before illustrating the evidence of teacher thinking in English 610, here is some context about the course. Graduate instructors at BYU take English 610, *Composition Pedagogy*, during their first semester in the two-year graduate program at BYU. English 610 is an introductory course to the major concerns and issues of composition studies. With no PhD program at the University, 610 is the sole course for teaching the principles of composition teaching to graduate instructors teaching the FYW course. This course is taken at the same time as first-semester graduate instructors teach their first FYW course at the University. The purpose of the course is to *explore principles and theories that will help you become an effective writing teacher committed to theoretically sophisticated, reflective, and professional teaching*. Keeping this context in mind, we will begin to uncover the ways that teacher thinking and teacher knowledge is conceptualized in the course.

Graduate Instructors and Knowledge of Self

In English 610, graduate instructors must complete fifteen main assignments designed to help them understand the concerns of the field, learn practical applications of theory, and employ reflective practices. If we look at the course assignments, we can begin to uncover the ways that teacher thinking is conceptualized in 610. We can also see the types of teaching knowledge that graduate instructors may acquire in the course. English 610's fifteen assignments are described below:

- Students write ten informal responses that connect theoretical insights to their own teaching experiences. These ten responses are broken into three categories:
 - Five critical responses to theoretical readings
 - Two teaching philosophies
 - Three lesson plans based on theoretical readings
- With a partner, students write and present one Carnegie Corporation *Writing Next Lesson Plan*. One Writing Next lesson plan is presented by one partnership per-week for seven weeks of the thirteen-week semester.
- Students write an annotated bibliography and a Seminar Paper addressing an issue or controversy in Rhetoric and Composition: Students give a presentation on the issues and controversy paper
- Final Exam: Presentation—"What will I do differently next semester in Writing 150 (BYU's FYW course)?"

All of these assignments, in some way, relate to the categories of teacher knowledge that Parkay and Stanford outline—knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory and research. But a common theme emerges among these assignments: reflective practice

plays a large role in the course through critical responses to theoretical readings, the final exam presentation, and two teaching philosophies. English 610's attention to reflection shows that the course largely conceptualizes of teacher thinking in terms of helping graduate instructors to acquire self-knowledge.

As Vienne McClean states in the article, "Becoming a Teacher: The Person in the Process," "Images of self-as-person and self-as-teacher are critical to the process of becoming a teacher because they constitute the personal context within which new information will be interpreted, and are the stuff of which a teaching persona is created" (58). This statement suggests that a teacher identity is not only constructed by our images and perceptions of what a teacher should be; a vital component for constructing a teaching identity comes in understanding yourself as a person outside of the classroom as well. Graduate instructors grow into a teaching identity as they become aware of the connection between self-as-person and self-as-teacher and use this awareness to better help their students.

Parkay and Stanford illustrate the impact that self-knowledge has on influencing teachers' interactions with students when they claim, "Effective teachers are aware of themselves and sensitive to the needs of their students. . . . If teachers are knowledgeable about their [own] needs (and, most important, able to take care of those needs), they are better able to help their students" (32). This aspect of learning to think like a teacher suggests that the graduate instructor must be self-reflective and deliberate with the actions that they perform as teachers in order to understand and interpret their students' needs. But once the graduate instructor understands his or her self, does knowledge of students come instantly? The reflexive stance seems to help graduate instructors confront their preconceived beliefs about the role a teacher plays in the classroom, but how do graduate instructors come to understand student needs?

Graduate Instructors and Knowledge of Students

According to Robert Leamnson, once teachers have acknowledged their teaching philosophy, they must understand how students learn and be able to define what learning is to them as a teacher (Leamnson 7). Just as we come to acknowledge our own biases and conceptions of teaching, we must also come to the classroom understanding that our students also have conceptions of what learning and teaching are that influence their perceptions of us as teachers. Thus, we must gain knowledge of how our students learn.

Alan J. Singer paraphrases Dewey's philosophy of student learning, suggesting that students learn not only from the specific subject they are studying in a particular class but also from their full range of experience in school (8). Thus, effective teachers are able to connect the subject matter of the course to the existing experiences of their students (Singer 8). Dewey's theory of teaching seems to imply that understanding our students' experiences with the subject and stage of life they are in is equally as imperative to performing the role of teacher as having knowledge of the subject itself to teach. Of course, we should not be quick to over-generalize our students—all students are individuals and have individualized ways of learning. Thus, we cannot assume that all students learn how to write in the same way. But Dewey's principle can act as a starting point for understanding the situations of many first-year writing students. Once we get to know our students, we can then know how to adapt our teaching to meet their individual needs within the framework of their general life experiences and experiences with writing.

Since understanding our students is a vital part of teaching, I wanted to see how graduate instructors felt about dealing with student issues and concerns in the classroom. I looked at this student/teacher relationship through analyzing interview responses of three graduate instructors who took English 610 in fall 2012. I also looked at data from an April 2013 survey of forty-six

first and second year graduate instructors conducted by University Writing Coordinator, Dr. Brian Jackson. These student responses display the first major need for more concrete patterns of teacher thinking in English 610—knowledge of students.

When I asked my three interview participants what issues, challenges, and concerns they still had after one semester of teaching, the need for teacher thinking in terms of knowledge of students became apparent. I modeled my questions to the graduate instructors after Reid, Estrem and Belchier's questions in their study "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants." Using pseudonyms to protect their identities, here are the responses of first-year graduate instructors, Hannah, Tori, and Marcia in April 2013:

Marcia: Things I'm still uncertain about are how to write a good lesson plan. I've been struggling with this. I try so hard and spend so much time on so many lesson plans and then no matter how hard I think about certain activities . . . I'll do it in class and it fails. . . . Another thing I'm uncertain about is how to engage students who don't naturally love the class or want to be there. I don't know how to reach them and help them discover their own interests in the class and have their own reasons to be there.

Tori: My biggest issue is that a lot of what my students go through I didn't have to go through because I'm an English geek and writing things just float into my brain and it is just easy for me, so I had a hard time articulating to them exactly what I want them to do and how I want them to do on a mechanical level.

Hannah: What's challenging to me is that I still am uncertain about who I am as a teacher . . . I think a lot of it is time management and thinking, ok, I just need to get through this class period or I just need to make something as my lesson plan to make the next 50 minutes. As opposed to this is my particular goal and how I'm going to accomplish it . . . So, I think that if I was better at the idea that I want every class period to be practical and useful, I think that will really help with that. . . . But just being able to do a good job as a teacher and do a good job in graduate school is also really hard.

These responses display that these graduate instructors are in tune with the actions they are performing in the classroom. In these statements, they not only reflect on their challenges as teachers, but are also beginning to think about ways to combat them. Their ability to teacher think through reflective practices and self-knowledge comes to light in these statements. They are perceptive of what they are doing as teachers and realize that some of their actions may not have the best impact on their students' learning.

However, from these responses, we also see that these graduate instructors do not yet understand how to attend to their students' needs. And even though there is some attention to student learning in 610 (lesson plans, reflections, and to an extent the seminar paper) these assignments do not overtly address student learning. These responses also show that students are still uncertain how to make lesson plans that relate or work for their FYW students because they still do not have a solid grasp on the ways FYW students learn. Marcia's response about failed lesson plans also relates to Christina McDonald's observation of the important ingredients needed to be an effective teacher in her article, "Imagining Our Teaching Selves." McDonald states,

Students play an active part in determining who we are (and need to be) as teachers. . . .
In my work with other teachers of writing . . . I've discovered that those who have not examined the complex combination of ingredients that make up their teaching personas are often frustrated—unable to find the key to explaining why a class goes wrong or why students don't respond in desired ways, no matter what adjustments they try to make (173).

McDonald's statement offers us a provocative insight: students play a role in the identity we construct as teachers. Looking at identity construction in this way challenges pre-conceived teaching philosophies we construct before we enter the classroom for the first time and we meet and interact with our students.

McDonald's statement is put into perspective when we look at the responses of forty-six first- and second-year graduate instructors in Dr. Jackson's survey. This survey provides a larger sample to illustrate the absence of student knowledge in the teacher thinking exercises used in the graduate teacher training program. Table 1 and Table 2 indicate the concerns, anxieties, and challenges that graduate instructors have based on fifteen teaching activities. Out of the fifteen tasks, students were asked to select the top three activities that were challenging to them as teachers. Tables 1 and 2 detail the top five concerns that first and second-year instructors have about teaching in this program.

Table 1. First-Year Instructors' Teaching Concerns and Anxieties.

First-Year Students: Which of the following teaching activities do you feel the MOST concern or anxiety about? (Select your top three)











Number	Answer	Bar	Responses	%
5	Pacing of lessons		7	30
7	Communicating Effectively		6	26
8	Engaging Every Student		6	26
11	Teaching Principles of Grammar, Style, Punctuation		6	26
15	Handling Paper Load		8	35
			Total Respondents	23

Table 2. Second-Year Instructors' Teaching Concerns and Anxieties.

Second-Year Students: Which of the following teaching activities do you feel the MOST concern or anxiety about? (Select your top three)

Number	Answer	Bar	Responses	%
8	Engaging Every Student		13	57
10	Responding to Student Writing		8	35
11	Teaching Principles of grammar, Style, and Punctuation		8	35
12	Grading Student Writing		5	22
15	Handling the paper load		10	43
			Total Respondents	23

Generally, first-year graduate instructors in this program lack confidence in teaching basic principles of reading, grammar, punctuation, pacing and time management with lesson plans, as well as handling the paper load. They also lack confidence in their interactions with their students—communicating effectively and engaging every student. However, what was most interesting was when we look at the responses of the second-year graduate instructors in table two. Second-year instructors' highest area of concern relates to engaging every student. The responses of these second-year instructors suggest, even after almost two years of teaching, graduate instructors in this program still yearn for the ability to get inside the heads of their students and to cater their instruction to their students' perspectives and needs.

The need for knowledge of students is directly called into question when we look at one of the most provocative findings from Dr. Jackson's study. He asks graduate instructors: How

could University Writing more effectively help you develop your skills as a teacher? In response, a second year student suggested that

“I think a little more practical *instruction about how students actually learn*—not just knowing good principles of writing, but knowing how to teach them so students will remember and apply them to what you’ve taught.”

Similarly, one first-year student suggested,

“I think it would be really helpful to have more basic pedagogy instruction. We learn about how to teach rhetoric and principles of rhetoric, *but we don’t really learn about how to simply be teachers.*”

Thus, while graduate instructors get excellent instruction in rhetorical theories and principles of rhetoric that underlie the foundations of the writing program, some instructors still desire to learn more about how students learn. These responses display Melissa Whiting’s prominent statement about teacher preparation programs when she states, “It is the relationship between teachers and students, and not simply the methods of instruction, that are the critical, and sometimes the overlooked elements in the education of writing teachers” (128). Helping graduate students acquire student knowledge applies not only to graduate instructors at BYU, but also to many other teacher training programs across the country. From these student responses we find that English 610/the University Writing Program should consider incorporating more activities to help graduate instructors understand how students learn and how knowledge of students influences the ways that we teach.

Graduate Instructors and Knowledge of Educational Theory

In my interviews with the graduate instructors, it became clear that 610 must help graduate instructors to better acquire knowledge of educational theory to create their theoretical identities as teachers. In fact, when I spoke with Dr. Brett McNelly, 610 teacher, he stated that “probably the most oft-cited concerns or complaints that 610 students register is that they don’t want all the theory; there is too much theory.” This comment takes us back to the description of the course—*English 610 is committed to help[ing] you become an effective writing teacher committed to theoretically sophisticated, reflective, and professional teaching.*

Since the ultimate goal of the course is to create theoretically sophisticated teachers, Dr. McNelly’s statement shows it is imperative that graduate instructors understand theory so that they can develop professionally in this sense. However, this definition does not suggest how a teacher comes to be theoretically sophisticated in his or her practice. It also does not mention the way that experiences in the classroom with FYW students helps one to determine a theoretical stance, making theory and practice almost feel detached in some respects from one’s actions as a teacher.

Berry and Crowe identify four actionable principles that teacher preparation programs can employ to help students think like teachers: (1) help graduate instructors see from the viewpoint of the learner; (2) give them opportunities to see teacher thinking from experienced others; (4) give them scaffolding to conceptualize teacher thinking (37). We must acknowledge that these principles are not the only way to enact teacher thinking, but these principles act as a way to help graduate instructors at BYU understand theory based on their expressed issues and concerns. We must acknowledge that these principles are not the only way to enact teacher

thinking, but these principles act as a way to help graduate instructors at BYU to understand theory based on their expressed issues and concerns.

Berry and Crowe's third and fourth principles of learning to think like a teacher are an effective way to look at the needs of graduate instructors, struggling to understand theory in any teacher preparation program. Since I feel that scaffolding will enable graduate instructors to test out teacher thinking more effectively, I will first talk about why graduate instructors at BYU need scaffolding to understand theory. After this discussion, I will talk about how having regular opportunities to test out teacher thinking could help graduate instructors to possibly understand how to use theory actively in their teaching.

Graduate instructors Marcia, Tori, and Hannah's responses on their overall experience with the 610 course offer interesting insights as to why graduate instructors need scaffolding to understand theory:

Marcia: Everything I read, I remembered thinking, "oh, this is really cool," but then I'd go to make my next lesson plan and I just barely would understand how to make a lesson plan instead of doing really high level, ok what is my teaching philosophy and how does that influence my objectives for my students.

Tori: I think when 610 first started and I was teaching for the first time that it was a little overwhelming because I was getting all of these scholarly essays on how teaching should be done and why it should be done that way. And a lot of it I wasn't ready to handle, I was just trying to survive each class period each day, and looking back on it now that I have a semester and a half under my belt, I realize that there was a lot of cool data in there and I can read those articles and apply them in my class room, but I feel like at the time it was like trying to drink out of a fire hose.

Hannah: I feel like the initial 610 experience was steeped in very theoretical texts, and even broader philosophical ideas. But I was so terrified not just by teaching, but also by the workload of 610, that with

the guidance of some of the second years, I put 610 as the lowest on the list of priorities; but I wouldn't say it was not valuable.

When we look at the responses of graduate instructors at BYU about their reception of theory in 610, we find similar circumstances to what Janet Auten discovered while redesigning the Composition Practicum at American University. Auten quotes Belanger and Gruber to display her students' initial encounters with theory: "When faced with significant, challenging reading and writing assignments grounded in an unfamiliar field of study" Auten states that "many of my students seemed to stay polite outsiders, visitors to the rhetoric/composition kingdom, just looking to pick up some new skills" (Auten 96).

The ways that Marcia and Tori talk about theory suggests that they may have felt like outsiders as first semester students studying teaching theories they did not yet understand. However, they also recognize the value of theory. They need scaffolding to help them navigate these new theories in the form of goals and clearer applications of theory in practice. We can see a desire on the part of graduate instructors at BYU to understand how to think about and actively use theory in their classrooms when they talk about ways that theory could be applied in the course:

Tori: It would be cool if the course could find more concrete ways to tie theoretical principles into classroom practices in Writing 150. . . . Make assignments concretely useful in the classroom, so have an assignment, that is, write a lesson plan on this topic using this theoretical model, and even if I don't use it, I'll have a portfolio of lesson plans to glean from later on. This would make the course have more of a solid goal.

Marcia: The only comment I had on the evaluations for 610 was that every class period spending time on activities or reflection to connect our reading or make a specific goal or something would be helpful.

Hannah: I thought that having something during class or attached to class time, you could actually glean something from and use in the next 3 weeks in your classroom was helpful, but sometimes came too late in the semester once I'd already struggled to complete that lesson.

The needs of these graduate instructors can be summarized in Robert Parker's explanation of how novice teachers find personal usefulness for theory in their teaching. Parker states, "the only way theory will make any real sense to teachers is if it is grounded in practice, confirmed by experience" (qtd. in Smit 173). Similarly, Auten redesigned the theoretical portions of her course to help novice teachers learn to think like teachers through attempting to help them strengthen the relationship between theoretical insights and personal experiences. She outlines her course in this way: "I redesigned Lit 730 to lead students more explicitly toward thinking like teachers by helping them make connections between personal and academic experience, engaging them explicitly in theorizing, and making our classroom a kind of laboratory in which we interact and reflect on our interactions" (96).

If graduate instructors have more opportunities to teacher think and actively engage with theory, they may be able to begin to see how they can use theory more effectively in their classroom practice. Graduate instructors need clearer guidance on how to think about theory in productive ways. Thus, they need scaffolding—a temporary structure that will give them support or confidence in how to use theory as part of their teaching that they can then break away from once they feel more comfortable to stand on their own.

One prominent component of creating scaffolding for graduate instructors is giving students opportunities to test out teacher thinking in a safe environment. The ability to test out teacher thinking by learning a principle and then applying it in classroom practice may be a good way for graduate instructors to understand theory. However, the need for more opportunities to

test out teacher thinking in the program is illustrated in Dr. Jackson’s last survey question: “How could University Writing more effectively help you develop your skills as a teacher?” Here are several response from first and second year students in Dr. Jackson’s survey:

First-Year Students “Need to Test Teacher Thinking”:

- It would have been helpful to spend more time in 610 developing lesson plans, sharing plans, thinking up activities, etc. Practical things—I found the theory really interesting, but I don't feel like it's made me a better teacher.
- Perhaps allowing for more practice in training (writing and executing lesson plans/leading class discussions/etc.)?

Second-Year Students “Need to Test Teacher thinking”:

- I would prefer more practical training, involving me actually teaching and receiving feedback, rather than talking about principles of teaching. The teaching situation could be simulated I would love it if a chunk of each day of fall orientation was devoted to small groups teaching each other.
- The training in the fall could have more practical application to teaching. Grade norming and going over lesson plans was really helpful while the lectures from visiting professionals were not quite as helpful. So, having more activities that students will use or need in the classroom would be helpful.

After reviewing how teacher thinking is used in 610 and the training program as a whole we see that graduate instructors have activities that facilitate self-knowledge, but they are still struggling to acquire knowledge of their students and knowledge of educational theory. They could potentially acquire these skills through scaffolding and alternate ways to test out teacher thinking. Understanding how all these types of knowledge work together to create a teaching identity may help new graduate instructors to be more confident in their classrooms.

As George Hillocks states, “The categories of [teaching] knowledge do not exist as independent entities from which teachers select in the design of their micro- and macro-curricula. Rather they interact strongly, influencing teaching processes and probably outcomes” (124). Perhaps these gaps in teacher thinking and teacher knowledge could possibly be filled in the 610 course through turning to resources of English education’s methods of teacher thinking.

TEACHER THINKING IN ENGLISH 423, *TEACHING WRITING*

English 423, *Teaching Writing*, is a course taken by English education majors at BYU during their junior or senior year in the program. This course is taken before students go out into the secondary schools to do student teaching or internships. The purpose of the course is to help *students discuss the concerns central to teaching writing as well as to implement current best practices in classroom instruction*. While the learning objectives of the 423 course focus on the daily needs of the students such as creating lesson plans, assignments, and designing units, as well as practicing instructional methods to teach in the secondary writing course, these skills also serve to inform and create the 423 students theoretical positions as teachers. The implication seems to be that theory becomes a part of who you are as you enact your role as a teacher. As the 423 syllabus states, “Teaching choices reflect theories and best practices.” Many English education majors across the country do not have a separate course for teaching writing. But like other programs across the country, 423 adheres to English education’s idea of using inquiry to help novice teachers conceptualize what it means to be a teacher.

In the article, “The State of English Education,” Janet Alsup describes English education as a field of academic inquiry focused on the preparation of English Language arts teachers (279). As one of the central aims of English education, inquiry connotes a sense of action and active participation on the part of the learner as novice teachers explore, question, and practice

what it means to be an English teacher. Having inquiry as a central focus of the field qualifies English education programs as an excellent source for the Composition Practicum to emulate because it is searching for a method to help graduate instructors explore and actively engage in the process of teacher identity creation.

While English education's approach to inquiry sounds like a great way to help graduate instructors better conceive of their roles as teachers, Mary Kennedy, in the study, *Learning to Teach Writing: Does Teacher Education Make a Difference*, suggests that English education programs, just like the Composition Practicum, have been chastised for not preparing their students well enough for the classroom. We also cannot dismiss the powerful effect that experience plays in helping novice teachers in both fields to understand their experiences in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs provide students the grounding but cannot ever fully anticipate the subjective and individualized experiences that teachers will face once they leave the university. Both programs can only offer guidelines and tactics that can be adapted to help graduate instructors handle their classroom experiences more effectively.

However, the correlation between the immediate needs of the graduate instructors and the course work and responses of the English education majors cannot be ignored. They are a possible indicator that English 423 methods of teacher thinking could possibly help graduate instructors to better conceptualize what it means to "simply be teachers" by helping them acquire knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of educational theory.

English 423 and Knowledge of Self

If we break down the eight major assignments in English 423, we see the ways that teacher thinking is conceptualized in the course:

- Participation: Students respond and reflect upon readings—both theoretical and practical. Using writing as a method of learning, students must respond to and reflect upon six readings on the class Wiki
- Collage Write: Students practice a specific teaching strategy
- Photo Essay: Photo Essay: Students examine a digital genre and walk through the steps of considering and creating one. The purpose is to practice a process that students can use and teach to secondary students as an approach to learning a new genre.
- TBD (To Be Determined) Portfolio: Dr. Dean uses this portfolio to model how to create a writing unit and accompanying lessons. Together, Dr. Dean and students decide on the assignment and its grading criteria as a class.
- AQ (Answering a Question) Portfolio: This assignment should help students answer a question about teaching writing and also acts as a model for teaching inquiry/research to their future secondary students.
- Writers Notebook and Anthology Piece: Writer's Notebook and Anthology Piece: The Writer's notebook contains informal writing in the class. Students write a reflection about the experience in their notebooks.
- Writing Unit: Students create a writing unit for a secondary English course to apply the principles of effective teaching.
- Final Exam: Measures different aspects of teaching composition. Students show comprehension of terms and issues related to teaching writing and must discuss them professionally by responding to teaching scenarios.

The assignments in this course illustrate a focus on self-knowledge through reflective practices, student knowledge as they write lesson plans keeping students in mind, and subject matter knowledge/knowledge of theory. The final exam even seems to blend all three types of teaching knowledge as students must respond to teaching scenarios.

Self-knowledge is applied in this course through reflective practices as students write responses to readings and write a reflection about the informal class writing assignments they record in their writer's notebook. In fact, self-knowledge appears to be a major part of the English education major's curriculum as a whole and becomes a major component in the professionalization of English education majors. While attending a BYU NCTE discussion panel of four student teachers and interns from local public schools, I discovered that student teachers and interns are required to write and submit reflections on their teaching to the University on a weekly basis.

In fact, at this meeting, one of the audience members even asked the panel participants how they have employed productive and effective reflective practices in their teaching. She asked this question because she realized that her own reflective practices were counterproductive and at times personally demeaning. This question not only illustrated the vital role that self-knowledge plays in the program but also displayed a self-awareness of ineffective reflective practices and how both negative and positive perceptions of self can potentially influence outcomes in the classroom. This displays the principle of self-knowledge at its finest; it is having the ability to recognize an issue with self-as-person and self-as-teacher and actively seeking advice to mediate this imbalance to perform more effectively in the classroom.

The English 423 course seems to adhere to this model of using reflection as an important aspect of creating a teacher identity. However, the course not only uses writing responses to help students gain self-knowledge; it also uses opportunities to test out teacher thinking to help students acquire self-knowledge. The Answering a Question portfolio allows students to think of a question that they have about teaching and then use the process of inquiry to gain knowledge and self-awareness about the issue. The first half of the course itself introduces students to various principles and processes for teaching writing and the second half of the course is titled “your turn,” allowing students a chance to practice and create units, assignments, and grading, applying what they learned in the first half of the course and selecting methods that work for their personal teaching style.

English 423 and Student Knowledge

After talking with two 423 students about their overall experience with the course and the resources that aided them most as new teachers, Parkay and Stanford’s assertion that knowledge of students is vital to effective classroom performance comes to light. English 423 students learn about student knowledge through in-class activities and assignments. These assignments are designed to help English education majors see from the viewpoint of their potential students. Using pseudonyms to protect their identities, here is what English education majors Alice and Claudia said about their experiences with gaining student knowledge in the 423 course:

Overall experience with the course:

Alice: The course gave me a chance to not only come up with ideas for teaching and assigning writing to students, but to also test how successful these ideas would actually be in the classroom.

Claudia: [Based on suggestions and instruction in 423] I will give my students writing prompts early in the process, provide multiple model texts, and encourage students to compose with my grading rubric in front

of them. I want my students to have choice in their assignments, but I know they need to understand my goals and expectations before they dare take risks.

Resources and activities that were most helpful:

Alice: I think that my favorite assignment was when we came up with a writing assignment that we could give students . . . and then we had other classmates complete our assignments. It was really nice to see the ideas we were learning about in action, and it was such a help to learn from my peers what things I needed to improve/be more clear about.

Claudia: Writing a unit plan was a painful but good exercise. I loved having my peers do my assignment. . . . The lessons at the beginning of the semester about audience and purpose and how good writers focus on those two things when they write also shaped my teaching philosophy.

Experiences like these students had seem to help future teachers not only anticipate the potential responses of their students before they enact lesson plans in the classroom, but it also helps them to revise those assignments using that feedback to make them better for their eventual students. This also allows them to understand how to communicate more clearly with potential learners, essentially putting these new teachers into the shoes of the learner before they experiment on an actual classroom.

Another way that English 423 helps its future teachers to gain knowledge of students in the course is through the ways that they are personally evaluated and graded. On the course syllabus, Dr. Deborah Dean, English 423 instructor, states, “I use a variety of grading methods so that you will get a sense of the strengths and challenges associated with each of them. I hope your experience combined with our discussions and readings will help you develop your own philosophy about grading writing.” This experience not only introduces novice teachers to different rubrics and methods of grading, but it also helps them see from the viewpoint of their

eventual learners. Through being graded in ways that they may eventually use in their own classrooms, students come to understand the limitations and potential complications of each method. This method of evaluation also helps students to begin to construct a theoretical perspective on grading by actively deciding based on their own experiences with that grading procedure what types of grading are most fair and economical for their students.

Similarly, in an *English Education* article, “Becoming a ‘Teacher-Student,’” secondary teacher Ginger Brent describes her experience at a teacher training conference where she had to learn a new skill that opened her eyes to how the various populations of students in her classroom perceive of her instruction and how they learn—she gained empathy for her students. Brent believes that “surveying a learning situation from multiple and overlapping perspectives increases the chances of seeing accurately a student’s relationship to knowledge and instruction, and thus of devising a road map that starts where the student really is and leads where he or she really needs to land” (299). English 423 seems to adhere to this same philosophy, helping students see from multiple perspectives as they read, analyze, and evaluate the experiences of other teachers and as they learn to be teachers while taking part in the same assignments they would give to their students. English 423 students get to take part in this type of teacher thinking before even entering the classroom.

English 423 and Knowledge of Educational Theory

Dr. Deborah Dean’s approach to theory in the English 423 class is best summed up in one phrase: “Theory is not separate from practice, but theory is reflected in practice.” After receiving several end of semester student evaluations that said, “she spent so much time on theory,” Dr. Dean decided to develop a system to help her English education students see how theory and practice are woven together to create a writing teacher’s theoretical perspective. In essence, Dr.

Dean set out to create a method to allow her students to begin to think theoretically about their teaching but not feel overwhelmed by the presence of theory in the course. The 423 course approaches theory through a “developmental lens,” building upon personal experience and course readings, giving students several theoretical perspectives to choose from and expand upon to create a theoretical stance of their own.

In the first week of school, Dr. Dean creates a theoretical lens to help students begin to envision the relationship of theory and practice throughout the semester:

Dean: So we start the year by reading Berlin, Fulkerson, and other kinds of writers who help us to understand theoretical perspectives. Then I move into very practical. We read articles from *English Journal* about teachers who are applying things in classrooms that represent these theoretical perspectives, so we have the very beginning theory and then I can touch back to it. Ok, so this teacher represents which of these ideological perspectives? So we can talk about that theory all the way through and then at the end we read Elbow “Embracing Contraries,” which is a very theoretical perspective.

After being introduced to a “survey” of theoretical perspectives, students then see these perspectives at work in the practice of more experienced teachers as they read *English Journal* articles and are introduced to various concepts of teaching writing (writing process, inquiry, revision, etc.). This approach to theory illustrates Berry and Crowe’s second principle of learning to teacher think: “[new teachers] need opportunities to see teacher thinking from experienced others” (37). However, at the same time that students learn from the teachers of *English Journal* and the model Dr. Dean sets, Dr. Dean is guiding the discussion as she asks English education majors to think about what specific theoretical perspective that teacher is using in their practice

based on the types of theoretical perspectives introduced earlier in the course. In all other class readings and activities she challenges the students to see what sort of theoretical perspective is emerging through what these authors say and do in the classroom.

Students then have the opportunity to apply a theoretical perspective in a research paper on an aspect of teaching that they will have to use in their future classroom. For instance, Claudia spoke of doing a research paper about grading rubrics using inquiry to construct an argument. Thus, Claudia had several questions, challenges, and concerns about the multiple theories for creating a grading rubric and then had to come to a conclusion on which method she felt was most effective for the type of classroom environment she wanted to create as a future teacher. English 423 seems to give its students goals and objectives for their reading and coursework—they are actively looking for what theoretical perspective is at play based on their “library” of theoretical positions. And with Dr. Dean’s guidance and class discussion, students have the scaffolding to begin to see the importance of theory and how it influences practice and decision making in the classroom. In essence, this course is just the start of theoretical thinking. Students must then be in command of their own learning and theorizing when they leave the 423 classroom. English 423 helps students to begin thinking theoretically as teachers, one step at a time, building upon their initial introduction to theory, helping them to see that theory in practice, and then asking them to apply these theoretical perspectives to their own teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From the evidence of teacher thinking presented earlier in this paper, we see that students in English 610 are seeking for more types of teaching knowledge that will help them learn to “simply be teachers.” The English 423 course seems to offer potential solutions to the concerns

and challenges graduate instructors face while acquiring knowledge of students and knowledge of educational theory for their teaching. When we look at the responses of the 423 students in relation to the concerns of the 610 students, we find some interesting implications. First, we find that before 423 students get into the secondary classroom, they appear to realize the role that students play in their teaching. As 423 students Alice and Claudia's responses suggest, they realize that they must clearly outline their expectations for their students and they also understand the value of testing out assignments and providing models for students before entering the classroom.

While the responses of two English education majors may seem like a small sampling to make larger generalizations about a course (we do not even know if these students applied these concepts in their teaching), we do see that the foundations of teacher thinking, as it pertains to acquiring student knowledge, made an impression on them based on what they learned in this course. We see that the foundations of teacher thinking/teacher mentality have been planted in these students, even to a minimal extent. The responses of the 423 students indicate a type of teacher thinking that the graduate instructors I spoke with in their second semester of teaching are just learning.

Alice and Claudia's instruction in the 423 course was already informed by experiences in the classroom with their future students due to the structure of the English education major that allows them to go into the schools for observations during an introductory course in the major. According to Dr. Dean, the main benefit of this early exposure to the classroom for the students' professional development is that "it enriches all of the program courses [in the three major areas—reading, writing, grammar] because now when [students] are in my class they can talk

about what their experiences were like in 276: what was the student writing like that you saw, how can we help those students to develop as writers?” (Dean).

So here lies the difficulty with establishing collaboration and commonalities between a three-to-four year English education major and a two-year graduate program—time constraints. The 423 students had time to reflect upon the information that was given to them within the situational context of their prior classroom experiences in order to grasp the concept of “teacher thinking” much earlier than the 610 students do. The 423 students had more time to reflect upon their experiences and the actions/motives of the students within their high school classrooms, whereas 610 students become teachers in “real time” with what they feel is little to no time for reflection or mistakes.

Because of time constraints and other challenges, it would be impractical for many of the students in BYU’s master’s program to get opportunities like the 423 students did to meet with “potential” student populations before their first class. But it seems it would be highly valuable to their professional development if they could in some way observe a first-year writing classroom in the summer before school began, get clearer instruction about FYW students at the August training seminar (e.g. through role plays, discussions, having FYW students from spring term come in and talk about their struggles in the course), or be required to work in the writing center at their undergraduate institution before coming to the program so that they could use their experiences with observations there to begin to inform their teaching and the ways that they think about being a teacher in the fall.

The second benefit that we find from the evidence of teacher thinking in both courses is that effective instruction on teacher thinking provides novice teachers with scaffolding and

opportunities to test out teacher thinking as they gain knowledge of educational theory. English 610 students need opportunities to see and apply teacher thinking in practice. This idea of seeing the influence of theory through all aspects of teaching is taken from the English education major and how English 423 teaches theory developmentally in the course. The English education major allows students to build upon their experiences one course at a time suggests as the students grow and develop a teaching identity and ways to teacher think. While the graduate program cannot separate its writing teacher education into 5 separate courses, we could borrow from this idea by having all of our supplementary training programs (Weekly Instructor Meeting and the August Training Seminar) create a developmental nature within themselves, linking ideas and concepts from 610 throughout the graduate instructor's teaching experience in the program over time, creating a much needed scaffolding to understand theoretical insights and begin to put those insights into action.

In the August Training seminar and Weekly Instructor Meetings (WIM), students get instruction on practical and daily concerns in the classroom. These supplemental training experiences could be good starting points to begin to model to students how the practical concerns and applications addressed in these meetings relate to the various theories they are introduced to in 610. Discussions could be held at the beginning of 610 about what was learned in WIM on Thursday: "What theoretical perspective is this approach aligning with? What are the benefits and downfalls of doing this in the classroom?"

Robert Parker's additional view of theory in writing teacher education supports this idea. He suggests that "[novice instructors] need to have their sense of the nature and value of their writing practices and their discourse communities examined and questioned by theory" (qtd. in Smit 173). As we begin to help graduate instructors see and apply theoretical perspectives to all

aspects of their writing teacher education, they may begin to see theory as a lens through which they may better handle and understand its worth as they push through survival mode in “middle ground”—being simultaneously graduate student and graduate instructor. We can start constructing this developmental lens through engaging in conversations with English 423.

CONCLUSION

The Composition Practicum at Brigham Young University should be redesigned to include more teacher thinking practices and exercises into the course. In order to do this, the University Writing Program should consider collaborating and/or conversing with the University’s English education program. Despite bureaucratic divides, misconceptions, and misunderstandings that each program may or may not hold for one another, traditionally, this discussion illustrates that English 423 and English 610 seem to be complimentary to one another. As we saw in our discussion, the 423 course employs teacher thinking activities that seem to mediate the expressed concerns and struggles that graduate instructors in this program are having as first time teachers. But what does the evidence of teacher thinking in the two writing teacher preparation programs at BYU display for the Composition Practicum nationally?

Novice teachers’ understanding of the various contextual factors that go into teaching may influence their teacher identity and sense of professional development in the field. The evidence of teacher thinking displayed in each course shows that there are certain contextual factors that cannot be ignored in helping novice teachers to conceptualize their roles as teachers. Bramblett and Knoblauch simply describe these contexts as the “intricate layers of teaching” (9); each of these layers work in tandem, creating a teacher identity. Thus, if a novice teacher does not understand the role that students, theory, and self, play in the construction of teaching

identity, they may not be able to understand the events—both positive and negative—that occur in the classroom.

This experience could be likened to driving for the first time—the car may be moving, but you do not feel entirely in control. Without gaining more knowledge and confidence of how a car works and how to drive safely, you may turn away from driving all together because of fear. This driving analogy is similar to Guskey and Sparks' claim that a large part of the professional development of new teachers comes in understanding the contextual factors (work environment, students they serve, organization of the department, system, and culture) that they will face. These factors influence much of what goes on within their classrooms and how they perceive of their professional development as teachers (14).

Thus, the Composition Practicum in general will do its students a great disservice if they do not focus more attention on the various contextual factors such as knowledge of self, students, and theory (among many others) that go into becoming a teacher and helping graduate instructors feel more in control of their situations in the classroom. English education could help college and university writing programs to include clearer instruction on these contextual factors in the Composition Practicum because English education focuses much of its attention on many of these contexts as they help novice teachers to build teaching identities. One of the contexts that the Composition Practicum should include into its curriculum and instruction is the developmental stages of both graduate instructors and the students they teach and how those developmental factors influence classroom dynamics.

As Wendy Burke suggests, we should help future teachers to envision their “teacher training” as a developmental process determined by their life stages and experiences (Burke

184). Approaching training developmentally suggests that graduate instructors must not only think that their teacher training stops at the Composition Practicum, but they must strive to see the influence, activities, insights, and theoretical principles learned in the Composition Practicum in all aspects of their teaching and teacher training. Since English education programs seem to acknowledge and apply the various types of knowledge needed to teach future teachers, the Composition Practicum could gain from conversations with English education to help alleviate many of the concerns and challenges to professional development for its students.

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