

Academic Writing Development and Self-Efficacy: A Model for Linguistically Diverse Pre-Service Teachers

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Introduction

Scholars stress the need for more post-baccalaureate writing programs and research that investigates the graduate classroom as a place to foster academic writing and explore approaches for assisting students in developing as writers or teachers of writers (Goodson, 2013; Mullen, 2005). Researchers further underscore the importance of being more inclusive of second language learner writers and drawing on second language writing scholarship to support linguistically diverse writers in their disciplines (Cox, 2011). This focus is particularly important in graduate-level teacher preparation programs where students from linguistically diverse backgrounds often struggle with academic writing. Not only do their writing difficulties affect how they perform in their credential courses but the difficulties undoubtedly influence their ability to attend to the academic writing needs of their future K-12 students. Given the emphasis on literacy development and writing across the curriculum under the Common Core State Standards, it is imperative that new teachers enter the profession competent to model and teach academic writing.

In this article, we discuss an academic writing seminar we developed to address these academic and professional writing needs for graduate-level students in the Lurie College of Education at SJSU. First, we provide an overview of the seminar and describe the students we serve. Next, we discuss the goals and structure of the course, including our rationale for particular pedagogical approaches. Lastly, we share insights from our experiences with the seminar and discuss implications for future practice and research.

Participants and Methods

- **Components of Academic Writing Seminar:** Course takes an inquiry-based approach with class sessions structured around issues and questions emerging in student writing for other course assignments and professional writing activities. The seminar includes support in the writing process through mini-lessons, teacher instructional feedback, and peer feedback during classes.
- **Participants:** Participants in the seminar bring diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds and writing experiences. Although the seminar is open to all graduate students in the LCOE, the majority of our participants are ELs, including international students and recent immigrants. Some participants are Generation 1.5 students who were born abroad and speak a primary language other than English, but who received most of their schooling in the U.S
- **Methods:** Information about students' self-perceptions of writing was obtained from a survey given to students in the course each semester over three semesters (33 total) and is further elaborated on in Sidman-Taveau & Karathanos-Aguilar (2015)
- Student discourse from end-of-semester reflections in which students were asked to describe how their writing process had changed over the semester and areas they wanted to continue to focus on in their writing were analyzed and coded as themes/patterns emerged.

Results

Participant Self-Efficacy Survey Results

Upon entering the seminar, most students in the AWS expressed low self-efficacy in their overall writing effectiveness. They indicated little confidence in their ability to apply their knowledge about effective writing to their own writing processes, to organize their writing, and to use appropriate vocabulary, and they were especially insecure about their knowledge and application of grammar and mechanics.

Qualitative Results

In their end-of course reflections on the writing process, students not only consistently shared specific skills and strategies they have learned and now apply in their writing, but their reflections also revealed a pattern of increased confidence and self-efficacy in their writing.

Students further described benefitting from the following three elements of the course design 1) relevant context, choice, and flexibility, 2) peer writing sharing and 3) developing self-regulation.

Relevant Context

"Over the course of this class I took what I had learned and implemented it everywhere. I wanted to make sure that I generalized the new things in writing emails, letters, class assignments, short write ups and even little sticky notes."

Writing Sharing

- "During the seminar, our professor asked students to share [our] work with the rest of us...This was quite uneasy for someone like me, who is very self-conscious...As we commented on students' writings, we also learned how to "critique" the work. It was common for a student to make similar mistakes so we learn to minimize same critiques and focused on main problems that he/she needs to improve. It was also interesting to read other students' essays as everyone is unique in their style of writing and their perspectives."

Self-Regulation

- "My teacher and peers helped me focus on my learning goals that I had set-up in the beginning of the course. Now I use transitions words to make my writing more explicit to the reader. I pay attention on use of articles and avoid sentence fragments or comma splices...As a matter of fact, this course didn't only address my learning goals, but also help me realize and improve my writing flaws that I wasn't even aware of.

Self-Efficacy/Confidence

- "Over time I gained the confidence I had lost. My confidence was sky high when my fellow classmates complemented me on my shared writing. It reassured me that I am a capable writer."
- "I can say now that I am a better writer and that is very important for my confidence as a student."

Results

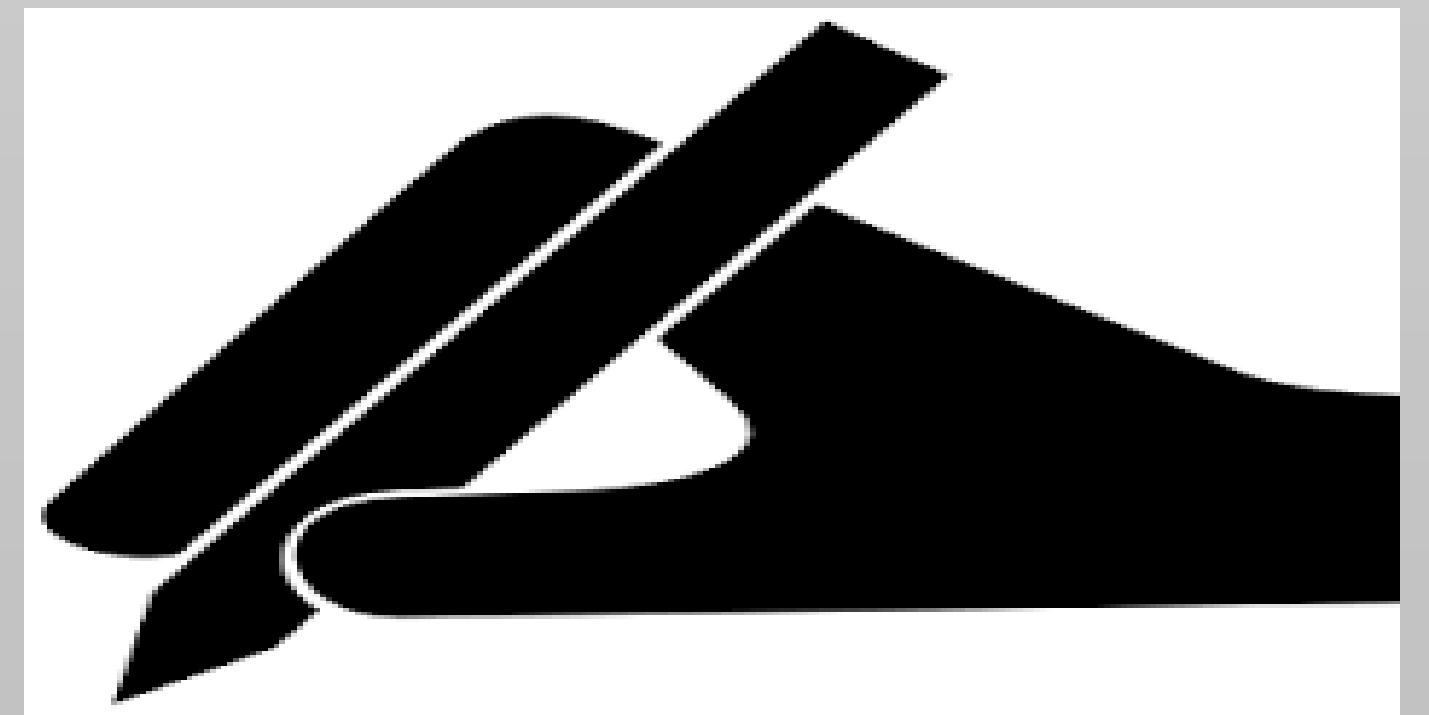
Self-Efficacy/Confidence

- "Prior to taking this seminar, I was reluctant to write anything. I was even afraid to write a personal essay, let alone a paper. After taking a semester of this course, I feel more confident in my own writing. As I look back at my first reflection, I had a fear of writing in English. At least, now I am up for a challenge."
- "Now, when I look over my papers and look over papers written by other people, I can begin to recognize the errors, correct the errors, and understand why (and how) the errors need to be corrected. As a result, I can purposefully and confidently edit written works, so they can be clear and concise."

Conclusions

The experiences of the pre-service teachers in our seminar corresponded with research findings on low teacher confidence in writing (Street & Stang, 2009) and the absence of contextualized writing support for teacher candidates (Sidman-Taveau & Karathanos-Aguilar, 2015). Most of our participants struggled with and initially expressed low writing self-efficacy in relation to writing process, organization, vocabulary use, mechanics, and grammar, and they were especially insecure about their ability to edit their own and other's written work. Their struggles with academic writing and low self-efficacy is of particular concern because as teachers they must not only engage in professional writing, but they must also be prepared to teach the CCSS to our linguistically diverse K-12 population in California.

Our writing seminar model addresses these needs for linguistically diverse pre-service teachers. Key components of the model include context, choice, and flexibility; writing sharing; and self-regulation. The development of self-confidence and transferable skills such as student metacognition and self-regulation reported by participants are among the most important goals for linguistically diverse future educators because struggling writers can rarely solve all of their writing issues in one semester. It is critical that they develop skills and strategies they can transfer to a variety of academic and professional writing situations, including helping their own K-12 students develop as writers in specific disciplines.



Literature cited/Lit Review

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