

Preservice Teachers as Writers:  
Finding a Writing Identity  
Through Visual Imagery, Discourse, and Reflective Journaling  
by  
Ann Hodgins

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Debby Zambo, Chair  
Cory Hansen  
Gayle Galligan

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## ABSTRACT

Past experiences influence how teachers identify as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing and impacts what they do in their classrooms, including their motivation and effectiveness in teaching writing. When teachers fail to identify as writers, they tend to spend less time teaching writing and may find it difficult to model a genuine passion and love for writing. Because of this, it is important to address the writing identities of preservice teachers before they enter their own classrooms. However, there is a lack of research on writing identity. This action research study aimed to fill this gap.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate and address preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing using an adaptation of a visual literacy strategy known as full circling. Quantitative data were collected through a pre- and post Teacher/Writer Identity Survey and qualitative data were collected through classroom discourse transcripts, student reflective journals, field notes, and the researcher's reflective journal. Data analysis included a *t*-test comparison of pre- and post survey results and open and axial coding of qualitative data to establish major themes from emerging codes.

The following conclusions were derived from the data: a) past experiences in writing affected the writing identities of the preservice teachers in the study; b) the full circling process provided a platform for the preservice teachers to build knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing; and, c) through full circling the preservice teachers demonstrated shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. Findings provided evidence that using a full circling strategy

assisted preservice teachers in uncovering their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

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## DEDICATION

A doctorate in education was number one on my bucket list for most of my adult life, yet it hardly seemed a possibility. When the opportunity arose, I made a commitment to not only further my own education, but to make a difference in my practice. I strongly believe that preservice teachers are the change agents for education, particularly in the area of writing. It is through these future teachers that students will grow and thrive and truly see themselves as writers. But for this to happen, preservice teachers must in turn see themselves as writers, and thus began this life-changing adventure. Many people have been a part of my journey, and it is because of them that I was able to complete this process in spite of many bumps along the way.

To my family: Your patience, understanding, and support during the long hours spent at the “doc dock” made it possible for me to reach my dream. My amazing parents, role models for life-long learning, high personal standards, and perseverance: Thank you for your unconditional love and for raising all of your children to be strong, independent adults who are not afraid to take a chance. To my friends and extended family: Thank you for standing by me even when I seemed far away and out of touch. Knowing you were there cheering me on gave me the courage to stay the course. My personal Jiminy Cricket: For the gentle reminders and constant encouragement that kept me on track and made me believe I could accomplish what seemed to be an impossible task.

The completion of this journey is not an ending, but a beginning. I have grown and changed over the past three years and I look forward to discovering who I will become as I move on to my next great adventure.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The latest statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011) indicate slow progress in improving the writing proficiency of our nation's children. On the latest assessment only 24% of eighth grade and twelfth grade students tested at the proficient level for basic writing skills and only 3% performed at an advanced level. This lack of progress and low proficiency becomes problematic as students move into college because they are expected to write at advanced levels using more complex skills (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, & Radencich, 2000; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007). Findings from the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (NCW) indicate that more than half of first year college students are unable to write papers that are relatively free of errors and produce writing that analyzes and synthesizes information (2003).

This lack of skill is especially troubling for preservice teachers since they will be the ones teaching their students to write. Preservice teachers enter their education programs with writing abilities and histories built on a multitude of experience. How preservice teachers were taught and the feelings they have developed impact their writing capabilities, their beliefs about their identities as writers, and their perceptions of writing (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd, & Radencish, 2000; Norman & Spencer, 2005; Pajares, 2003). Some have had positive experiences and because of this have developed a passion for writing. Others have had negative experiences and do not enjoy writing, fail to practice, and become struggling writers (Ng, Nichols, & Williams, 2010; Street, 2003; Weinburgh,

2007). Preservice teachers who have had negative experiences often feel inadequate as writers, and perceptions like these are enacted in their own teaching practices (Street, 2003; Weinburgh, 2007; Yeo, 2007). This problem caused the National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2003) to write *The Neglected "R,"* and in it set forth recommendations that successful completion of a writing course be a prerequisite for teacher licensing. Providing preservice teachers with the tools they need to develop a solid foundation in writing and writing pedagogy as well as a positive disposition toward writing may help preservice teachers acquire positive identities as writers and gain the confidence they need to teach writing skills to their students (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Pajares, 2003; Street, 2003).

Educators who prepare preservice teachers are key to ensuring that their students are able to positively impact their future students' achievement in writing (Draper et al., 2000; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Nietfeld & Cao, 2003). Steps can be taken in these courses to identify and provide appropriate and intense remediation for students with skill deficits (NCW, 2003). Targeting struggling writers as they enter a teacher preparation program allows time for remediation of skills before they move on to student teaching and graduation. Remediating writing skills at this point in their careers could result in more skilled teachers of writing and individuals who have a more positive view of themselves and writing (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Street & Stang, 2009).

However developing writing skills is not enough, especially for individuals who do not see themselves as writers. Preservice teachers also need to develop identities as writers because identity affects what teachers do in their classrooms (Cremin & Baker,

2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Walkington, 2005), including their motivation and effectiveness in teaching writing (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Van den Berg, 2002). Identity as a writer includes how teachers see themselves in their role as a teacher, a writer, and a teacher of writing, as well as how others see them in these roles, how they meet the standards connected to the roles, and their social behaviors as a teacher, a writer, and a teacher of writing (Burke & Stets, 2009). If preservice teachers fail to view themselves as writers, they may find it difficult to model a genuine passion and love for writing (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Draper et al., 2000). College instructors can be instrumental in providing opportunities for preservice teachers to explore and confront the attitudes and prior perceptions that may affect their identities as writers. By doing so, they can help preservice teachers develop and nurture positive identities as writers (Street, 2003; Street & Stang, 2008).

Hoveid and Hoveid (2008) suggest that when preservice teachers are placed in an environment where they can express their thoughts, discuss their feelings, and talk about their ideas for educational practices, they begin to bridge the teaching of content with themselves; that is they begin to see themselves as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. This view aligns with the idea that preservice curriculum should include both pedagogical content knowledge and personal reflection (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Ivanic, 1994). Shulman's (1986) framework of pedagogical content knowledge stresses the importance of deep knowledge of theories, principles, and concepts of subject matter along with knowledge of the teaching process, curriculum, and how students learn, combined with personal reflection. College instructors can play a pivotal role in helping

preservice teachers build identities as writers and teachers of writing by providing rich experiences in content, curriculum, and pedagogy and providing time to reflect on what it means to be a teacher and writer.

Bailey and Van Harken (2014) propose combining visual images and discourse to help preservice teachers build knowledge and theoretical insights that can be incorporated as effective practices in their future classrooms. By using a multimodal approach, preservice teachers can build knowledge and make connections in a way that would not occur when using a singular mode. Selecting powerful images and using oral language to describe what the images represent can lead to collaborative construction of meaning as students reflect on their connections to the images (Bailey & Van Harken, 2014).

One strategy that may help build writing identity is a visual literacy strategy known as full circling (Long, 2008). This strategy was successfully used with adolescents to help them think critically and reflectively about a selected photograph of historical significance. Using the cognitive and affective domains, full circling encourages students to step into the shoes, or take on the identities, of individuals in the photograph. This same practice of focusing on the identity of individuals in photographs can be used with preservice teachers to engage their cognitive and affective domains and help them examine their beliefs about writing and the teaching of writing (Griffin, 2003) as they explore their identities.

### **Local Context**

In my experience as a literacy instructor, I have been troubled by the deficiencies in writing skills of the preservice teachers in my courses. Preservice teachers' writing

skills are also a concern among colleagues and administration at the university where I teach. During a monthly faculty meeting in the fall of 2011 a breakout session was held to focus on deficiencies in the writing skills of students entering the elementary education program. Discussion notes collected from faculty at the session clearly indicated the need for early intervention to ensure that preservice teachers gain the needed skills before they enter their yearlong student teaching residency. This universal concern led me to focus my action research on remediating the writing skills of my students. During a review of the literature, a common theme began to emerge regarding the need for teachers to identify as writers in order to become strong writers and effective teachers of writing (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Morgan, 2010; NCW, 2006; Street, 2003; Street & Stang, 2009). As a result, my action research project evolved into developing a unique platform to help the preservice teachers in my classroom build their identities as writers.

I have been teaching EED 433 Language Arts Methods, Management, and Assessment since the fall semester of 2010. The purpose of the course is to instruct undergraduate students on techniques and strategies for teaching writing at the elementary school level. The basic tenets of my class include community building as a means to create a safe, vibrant classroom environment for students to collaborate, share, and learn. It was my hope that this environment would help students develop a passion for writing and build their identities as writers and teachers of writing. Yet, until I did some preliminary data gathering, I did not know if this was true.

During my first action research cycle conducted in the spring of 2012, I wanted to understand how my students felt about writing and themselves as teachers of writing. In



this cycle, I discovered that the preservice teachers in my classes were willing to openly express their apprehensions about teaching writing in the elementary school. Through attitude surveys and semi-structured interviews, it became apparent that even though I had set up a collaborative environment, most of the preservice teachers I was working with did not view themselves as proficient writers. Many noted past negative experiences as the major factor as to why they viewed writing and the teaching of writing with disdain, citing writing to irrelevant prompts and harsh criticism of their writing as the two areas that had the most impact on how they felt about writing. Participants in my study did not believe they had acquired the skills necessary to teach writing and did not feel confident in teaching writing when they entered the elementary education program.

At the completion of my first cycle of action research with data derived from pre- and post writing samples, pre- and post attitude surveys, and individual exit interviews, I came to understand that the preservice teachers I was working with grew as writers and were exhibiting a much more positive attitude toward writing. Overall most of the preservice teachers viewed themselves as more proficient in writing skills than they were upon entering the elementary education program and most felt a bit more confident in their ability to teach writing, yet they still did not see themselves as writers. The results of my first cycle emphasized the importance of understanding students' perceptions and creating a collaborative environment to help my students become proficient writers and teachers of writing. But it also left me wondering if there might be a way to understand and enhance the writing identities of my students. So I conducted a second cycle of action research in my EED 433 course in fall of 2012.

Participants in the second cycle included 17 females and 4 males ranging in age from 19 to 43 years of age. The participants were from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Using interviews and class discussions, I found that students in this course, like the others, expressed apprehension toward writing and a decided lack of confidence in teaching writing. Data reiterated the findings of the first cycle. Preservice teachers again cited previous writing instruction and harsh criticism of their writing as factors in their view of themselves as writers and teachers of writing. To understand these feelings, cycle two was an investigative cycle using visual images of teachers as a catalyst for preservice teachers to explore their identities as writers and teachers of writing. Data results from this cycle indicate that using visual images of teachers followed by classroom discourse and journaling about what it means to be a writer and teacher of writing might help preservice teachers build writer identities by examining and confronting their beliefs and values regarding what it means to be writers and teachers of writing. Therefore, the intervention for my action research dissertation is an adaptation of a visual literacy strategy known as full circling.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to investigate and address my students' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. The research questions guiding my action research project were:

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

1. How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
2. Will discourse help my students become more in tune with shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
3. Will reflective journaling capture shifts in preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
4. How will I change and evolve as a result of this innovation?

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL FRAME AND LITERATURE REVIEW

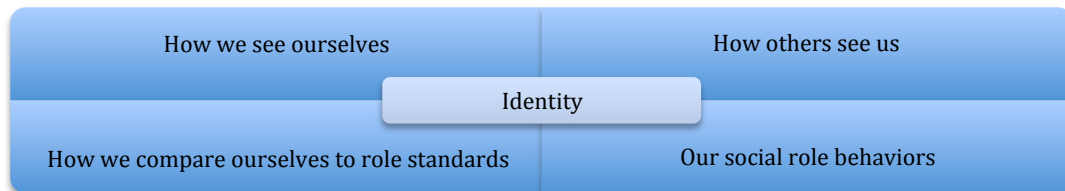
The previous chapter discussed the need to build preservice teachers' identities as writers. This chapter includes the theoretical frame and a review of existing literature that guide this action research project. The first section describes the overarching framework around which the study was developed. The second section reviews the literature and perspectives that inform this study, including why identity matters, imagery and text, discourse, and reflective journaling.

#### **Theoretical Frame**

Burke's Identity Control Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) focuses on the nature of an individual's identity and the relationship between identity and their behavior in the social structure in which the identity is embedded. Burke holds that identity is "the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (p. 3). People take on multiple roles in society, and therefore possess multiple layers of identity. The set of meanings used as a reference for an identity depends on which role they occupy. For example, a person may be a teacher, a mother, a spouse, and a musician. When an identity is activated in a particular role, feedback on that identity comes from (1) how the person sees themselves, (2) how others see them, (3) how the person compares themselves to the social expectations of the role, and (4) the meaningful behaviors exhibited by the person that are a function of the role. To identify as writers, preservice teachers need to see themselves in the role of a writer, understand

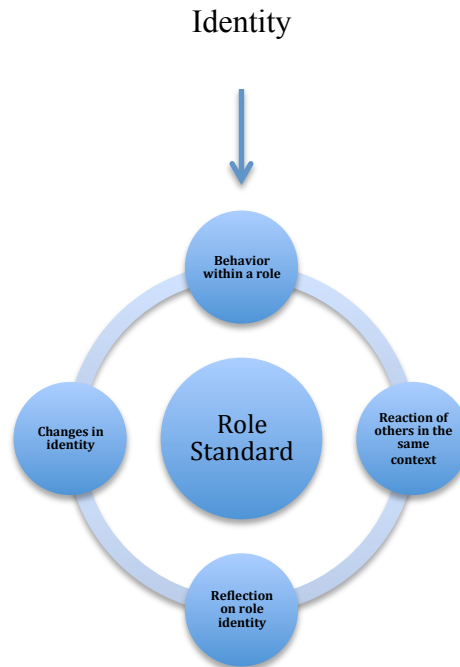
how others see them as writers, meet their own expectations of the functions of writers, and exhibit the behaviors of persons who function as writers (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Figure 1 captures Burke and Stets' identity model:



*Figure 1.* Components of Burke & Stets' (2009) identity model.

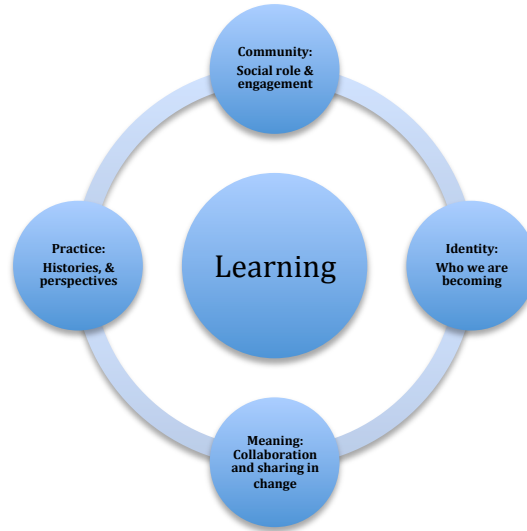
These components of identity are organized into what Burke terms as a control system where individuals choose their behaviors based on how they view their identity in a specific role compared to the standards of the role. As they practice the chosen behaviors, they respond to the reactions of others around them. If they do not like the responses of others or do not feel that their behaviors are representative of the expectations of others or to the standards of the role, they will reflect on ways they can change or shift their identity to meet the acceptable standards and behaviors for the role (Burke & Stets, 2009). These identity shifts take on a social context as an individual strives to meet the role standards and behavior expectations of a specific group. The shifts come not only from identifying with a group but also from being accepted as a member of a group. This social acceptance reinforces the expectations of role standards and leads to a continuation of the acceptable role behaviors (Stets & Burke, 2000). Figure 2 captures Burke & Stets' identity control model:



*Figure 2.* Components of Burke & Stets' (2009) identity control theory.

Wenger also views identity from a social perspective. In Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning, identity develops through participation in social practices where meaning making takes place. In this perspective, there is a strong link between identity and practice because identity "is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (p. 151). According to Wenger, identity is built upon connectedness, expansiveness, and effectiveness. Connectedness is created through sharing histories, experiences, reciprocity, affections, and mutual commitment, while expansiveness allows individuals to easily transition among the many roles they occupy in their lives, and effectiveness enables learning through inclusive social participation.

These building blocks are incorporated into the components of Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning. The components include meaning, practice, community, and identity. Meaning is how we are changing in our ability to experience our lives and the world as meaningful. It encompasses the way we compare ourselves to role standards and then adapt our social behaviors to reflect the standards. As we participate in a role, we interact with others who are fulfilling the same role and analyze their reaction to our role behaviors. The reaction of others either reinforces specific behaviors or precipitates a change in behaviors to meet the standards of the role, bringing meaning to who we are as a member of the role community (Burke & Stets, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Practice is the shared histories, social resources, and perspectives that help to sustain mutual engagement. This includes the multitude of experiences members bring to the community and how these experiences impact us as we interact and learn from others (Burke & Stets, 2009; Miller, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Community involves our active engagement in the world--how we see ourselves, how others see us, and our social behaviors within a role (Burke & Stets, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Identity is the way learning changes our behaviors in the context of a role. As we participate in a community and adapt to meet the role standards, we take on the attributes of the role and begin to see ourselves as a member of the role community (Burke & Stets, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Each of these four components is interconnected and reflects learning as social participation, shaping who we are and what we do within a learning community (Wenger, 1998). Figure 3 captures Wenger's social theory of learning.



*Figure 3.* Components of Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning.

### **Why Identity Matters**

Preservice teachers are expected to meet the rigorous demands of college-level academic literacy (Harklau, 2001), yet many are struggling with negative perceptions of themselves as writers. Preservice teachers who hold negative perceptions of themselves as writers often feel uncomfortable teaching writing and may be less likely to teach writing on a regular basis (Morgan, 2010; Street & Stang, 2009). It is important for preservice teachers to build identities as writers before they enter their student teaching residency to help them become more effective teachers of writing (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; NCW, 2006; Street, 2003; Street & Stang, 2009).

Ivanic’s (1994) seminal research summarizes the aspects of writer identity in relation to four specific categories. From Ivanic’s perspective identity includes the autobiographical self, the discursal self, self as author, and possibilities for selfhood. The autobiographical self is the identity writers bring to the act of writing based on their



social and experiential history. According to Ivanic (1998), our writing is an encounter between our many past experiences and the demands of our current socio-cultural context. Direct and indirect encounters with others, our interests, values, beliefs, sense of self-worth, and past practices all influence how we approach a new socio-cultural context. As we interact with others in a new context we begin to take on another layer of identity that reflects the attributes of those in the context. Our writing identity is influenced by what we bring to a new socio-cultural context and what we take from the context.

The discorsal self (Ivanic, 1998) is the impression of oneself that a writer conveys either consciously or unconsciously in a written text. This impression is multi-faceted and may be somewhat contradictory because it is constructed from the values, beliefs, and power struggles within the socio-cultural context where the writing takes place. The discorsal self permeates a writer's identity because it reflects the voice the writer wants to present in a specific piece of writing, rather than the stance the writer takes in the piece. The writer's voice leaves an impression on others in the socio-cultural context and creates a social identity of the writer within that context.

In contrast, self as author (Ivanic, 1998) is how a writer sees himself or herself as an author and how the sense of authorship is conveyed through the writer's positions, opinions, and beliefs. A writer's autobiographical self has an influence on self as author in that past experiences impact the way a writer communicates and whether or not the writer establishes a strong authorial presence. This is particularly prevalent in academic writing, where there is a considerable difference in how writers claim authority for the

content of their text. Some writers establish themselves as an authority on a topic while others attribute their ideas to outside sources. The extent to which writers see themselves as authors is relative to the extent they present themselves as authors.

Ivanic (1998) also provides a social perspective of writer identity in possibilities for selfhood. In this perspective, identity occurs during the socio-cultural aspect of writing in an institutional context. An educational institution can provide a variety of opportunities to develop identities across disciplines, where writers identify with different subjects based on their social group memberships. In this way written and oral language is shaped by the social context where it occurs, yet it also shapes the context as members contribute resources to the culture of the community by bringing the context of culture into the context of situation. It is through this give and take of resources that change in social identity takes place.

The implications of Ivanic's (1998) research on writing and identity apply to the learning and teaching of writing in the educational setting. Ivanic asserts that approaches used to teach writing should openly address these areas of identity with students as they develop a sense of self as a writer. Ivanic states:

The overarching implication is that writer identity should be included in any programme (sic) of study concerned with academic writing. Not only is it a significant factor in any act of writing in the ways I have shown in this book, but it also connects a particular act of writing to the bigger picture: discussing the writer's identity places an act of writing in the context of the writer's past history, of their position in relation to their social context, and of their role in possible futures. Bringing identity explicitly onto the agenda in the learning and teaching of writing transforms it from a local "fix-this-essay" undertaking into a much more broadly conceived project. (p. 338)

Burgess and Ivanic (2010) contend that writing requirements in educational settings are in actuality demands of identity because students are asked to identify with people who write in the multiple settings within an academic context. Lea and Street (1998) found that students switch literacy practices between one setting and another and use a linguistic practice appropriate for each setting, thereby meeting the social meanings and identities of each setting. Aspects of identity evolve and change with each piece of writing as writers develop a sense of identity in the various roles they occupy. Thus, Lea and Street (1998) argue the need to go beyond merely teaching skills. Instructors should consider writer identity and its implications because identity impacts how preservice teachers will position themselves as writers and teachers of writing in their future classrooms.

Cremin and Baker (2010) examined the factors influencing the way teachers position themselves as teachers of writing. They found that shifting identities between teacher and writer created internal tensions and because of this suggest teachers would benefit from exploring their past experiences as writers during the process of building their identities. Yeo (2007) asserts that teachers who have already developed the habit of writing in their personal lives tend to carry the benefits of such practice to their classrooms, yet many teachers are not aware of the extent to which their writing histories affect their classroom pedagogy and practices.

By the time preservice teachers enter education programs they have had countless opportunities for writing both in and outside of the classroom and have been exposed to a vast range of pedagogical practices. These experiences influence how they feel about

writing and how they see themselves as writers (Norman & Spencer, 2005), shaping their belief systems and values and influencing how they approach learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992). Critically examining past experiences can help preservice teachers understand how their beliefs impact learning and teaching practices and how their performance is linked to their identity as writers (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, Norman & Spencer, 2005).

When preservice teachers have negative identities as writers, reflective practices may help them redefine their role as writers (Burke, 2006). By exploring what it means to be a writer through reflective practices such as visual imagery, discourse, and journaling, preservice teachers may be able to develop strong, positive identities as writers that can be carried into their future classrooms.

### **Imagery and Text**

For many years writing instruction has centered on the five-paragraph essay (Choo, 2010). As visual literacy becomes more prevalent, education is challenged to meet the needs of a visual society. Choo (2010) suggests that instead of focusing on writing rules and conventions, writing skills can be taught through the use of imagery. Imagery allows students to become aware of the aesthetic composition of the text, rather than merely connecting an image to the meaning of an accompanying written text. Separating the image from the text allows students to explore both cognitive and emotional domains of the image as they process understanding of what they are seeing.

Paivio's (1971) Dual Coding Theory asserts that there are two cognitive subsystems, one for processing verbal representations and the other for processing mental

images. Paivio proposes that these two systems, or codes, function independently but can interact as we process information. When activity between the systems is connected, a verbal memory can initiate recall of an image or an image can initiate recall of verbal material. Yet both systems can operate independently of the other, with activity in one but not the other, or in parallel with separate activity in both systems at the same time. Activity occurring between the systems is carried out through referential connections, with words evoking images or images evoking words, while activity occurring within one system is carried out through associative connections, with words evoking words and images evoking images (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). Applying dual coding theory in education by using both verbal and nonverbal systems in the classroom may enhance cognitive processes (Paivio, 2007).

Brezemer and Kress (2008) assert that writing and images are being combined in ways that function differently than ever before. They point to the way curricular content is now visually represented and displayed as being a social and epistemological change moving beyond mere representation of pedagogy to a way of life. To understand the changes taking place, Mitchell (2002) cites the essential characteristics of being critically literate. They include understanding that text is constructed rather than being a window on reality, developing and demonstrating awareness as both a composer of multimodal text and a reader of multimodal text, and developing an ability as a communicator and reader rather than opting for being a passive observer. To this end, Choo (2010) envisions the curriculum as a hybrid space where students integrate multimodal texts with reading and writing practices.

Full circling is a literacy strategy that was originally used with adolescents to develop visual literacy and critical thinking skills for enhancing understanding of historical events (Long, 2008). The four-step process involves developing a curiosity about a visual as text related to an event in history while students view a compelling photograph of an historical event. As they work through the process students become aware of the many kinds of texts related to the photograph, observe and analyze the ethical conflicts related to the visual, and finally reflect upon what they have learned through a variety of mediums, such as writing, art, dance, and music.

However, even though Long used visual literacy, there is considerable debate among researchers as to just what visual literacy means, with some researchers rejecting its very existence. Scholars have also argued over whether there is a theoretical organization for the idea of visual literacy (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011). Yet today's society is increasingly integrating visual images into all aspects of life, such as advertising, video games, web site construction, billboards, books, and photography. With this influx of images comes the need to develop visual analysis skills in education as a means to understand the visual world around us (Howkins, 2010).

For preservice teachers who are developing identities as writers, using a visual image to make emotional and cognitive connections may lead to reflective practices that can enhance identity development (Ivanic, 1994; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). The quality of reflection appears to be related not only to providing preservice teacher with time to reflect, but also in giving them options on the mode they use for reflection (Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Stevenson & Cain, 2013). Using a multifaceted approach

incorporating imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling can provide preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in reflection at a deeper level of introspection (Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Stevenson & Cain, 2013; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000).

### **Discourse**

Gee (2012) defines discourse as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities by specific groups” (p. 3). Ivanic (2004) agrees with Gee’s definition but takes a multi-layered approach by adding that discourses of writing are “constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs” (p. 224). Ivanic views discourse as having four layers, including text, cognitive processes, the event, and the sociocultural context. Text is the linguistic substance of language, which can include visual or written text. Cognitive processes consist of the mental processes of meaning making involved in using language. The event is the observable characteristics and purposes of use of language in the specific social context, while the sociocultural context is the resources that are available for communication, such as multimodal practices, within the context where the discourse is taking place (Ivanic, 2004). As such, Ivanic views discourse as a social, cognitive, and rhetorical process.

Discourse in academia combines a social, cognitive, and rhetorical process that can involve a high degree of internal and interpersonal struggle for many preservice

teachers as they confront their past experiences and beliefs about writing (Duff, 2010). Identity and negotiation of educational and disciplinary pedagogical practices are at the core of discourse and are part of the dialogic qualities of a discourse community within the classroom (Edens & Gallini, 2010). Brown et al. (1993) characterized the culture of classroom discourse communities as having five main features: (1) respect among the community members in open sharing, (2) responsibility for each individual to participate in communal sharing, (3) a shifting of the roles of members to distribute knowledge and expertise, (4) constructive discussion and meaning-making through activities that stimulate conversation and sharing, and (5) development of a framework providing participants with room for exploration and inquiry into pedagogical practices and personal growth. Providing preservice teachers with an environment that is conducive to discourse can help them re-conceptualize how they see themselves as teachers and writers (Duff, 2010).

From a social constructivism perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), classroom discourse provides a framework for understanding the role standards and social behaviors that are connected with being a teacher and writer. During discourse, preservice teachers bring their histories and meanings to the discussion and interact with others in the same role to build knowledge on what it means to be a teacher and writer (Burke, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Discourse provides the opportunity for preservice teachers to seek a common understanding of the expectations of being a teacher and writer and to reflect on how their own identities are shifting toward the role standards. This knowledge building



process requires that discourse contain content that can be transferred to a context outside of the discourse in which it was created (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006).

### **Knowledge Building**

In contrast to most contemporary educational practices, knowledge building emphasizes collaborative inquiry rather than individual inquiry (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994). From this perspective, knowledge does not merely accumulate but advances as new information and ideas are added to the students' collective body of knowledge (Gilbert & Driscoll, 2002; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006) contend that the driving force behind knowledge building is the desire to connect with what is most meaningful to societal roles. According to Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006), "It involves students not only developing knowledge-building competencies but also coming to see themselves and their work as a part of the civilization-wide effort to advance knowledge frontiers" (p. 97).

In a shift from traditional classroom practice where students gain knowledge "about" a topic, knowledge building provides students with an understanding "of" a topic. Knowledge about a topic implies the use of textbooks, tests, projects, and research papers to gain a basic procedural knowledge of content while knowledge of a topic implies a deep structural understanding that is richer and more intuitive than procedural knowledge (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). Because knowledge building is a community endeavor, Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006) contend that the only place knowledge building can exist is through discourse. Teachers become facilitators rather than knowledge brokers as they set forth problems and tasks that are meaningful to students.

The pedagogy of knowledge building is based on the premise that authentic knowledge work can take place in the classroom. For knowledge building to be successful, teachers must believe students are capable of deliberately building knowledge and should be able to elicit real ideas from students (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). To support knowledge building, Scardamalia (2002) asserts that certain conditions need to be in place. These conditions include:

- Work should be focused on problems that arise from attempts to understand the world;
- Students should work with the goal of improving the quality, coherence, and utility of ideas;
- Students must negotiate a fit between their ideas and the ideas of others and use any differences as a catalyst to advance knowledge;
- All students must participate in contributing to the advancement of the community's understanding and knowledge building;
- Students must take a critical stance as they make use of different information sources;
- Discourse must be knowledge building rather than knowledge sharing, with students engaging in constructing, refining, and transforming knowledge.

The activities that take place within this environment are focused on developing a collective knowledge base within the community and improving students' problem solving skills (Gilbert & Driscoll, 2002). Yet students need time to engage in evaluating and integrating what they have experienced. Discourse followed by reflection can help

students articulate their thoughts and confusions and assess their understanding of the knowledge building process (Davis, 2010).

### **Reflective Practices**

Dewey (1933) conceptualized teaching as being more than just a routine activity led by impulse, tradition, and authority. Instead he proposed that teaching is a reflective action where those involved in the learning process play an active role in creating knowledge. This perspective on teaching has led to a growing trend in reflective teaching practices (Valli, 1993). Schon (1987) cited reflective practice as a critical process in improving skills by recognizing the similarities between one's own skills and the skills of successful practitioners.

When preservice teachers enter education programs they bring with them what Lortie (1975) terms an "apprenticeship of observation" based on their past experiences in education. These experiences create assumptions about teaching and learning that can be positive or negative. Reflective practices allow preservice teachers to connect to both the cognitive and emotional domains of writing as they analyze and assess their preconceived assumptions about writing and practice the skills needed to fulfill the role of a teacher of writing (Cleary, 1991; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007).

Preservice teachers may also be able to reshape their identities as teachers and writers through self-reflection, since meaning is attached to experiences through the telling and retelling of personal stories (Binks, Smith, Smith, & Joshi, 2009). Storytelling can enable preservice teachers to make the connection between theory and practice as they relive their histories and relate them to course content and field experience in their

internship classrooms. The connection between theory and practice can then be utilized to develop plans for personal growth based on the individual needs of the preservice teachers (Binks et al., 2009). Reflection enables preservice teachers to become more cognizant of what and how they are learning and to understand the importance of their learning. As preservice teachers continue to engage in reflective writing and dialogue and link their experiences and emotions, they develop a better understanding of the importance of the learning process and its impact on themselves as learners as they build their personal style and identity as writers (Fink, 2004).

Hatton and Smith (1995) state that preservice teachers in education programs need to develop their personal style and philosophy of teaching, recognize the problematic nature of teaching in a classroom and making decisions on curriculum, explore teaching in supportive environments, and build an extensive repertoire of skills. Reflection and discourse can promote and encourage these characteristics when preservice teachers focus on personal development and identity as they analyze their learning and practices (Schon, 1987).

### **Reflective Journaling**

Reflective journaling is one way of promoting, encouraging, and documenting identity development and change. Journal writing encourages students to articulate feelings, analyze how their feelings impact their identity, and question past assumptions and beliefs (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Dewey (1933) states that reflective thinking begins as a state of doubt or perplexity about beliefs that weaves its way through the search for resolution or clarity. He believed that reflection does not occur naturally, but

must be taught. However in a study on reflective journals in the college classroom, Hubbs and Brand (2010) found that less than half of the instructors in their study provided students with criteria or guidelines for journaling. In a study of scaffolds to enhance online reflective journal writing, Lai and Calandra (2007) found that reflective journaling is only effective if educators expose preservice teachers to the principles of reflective journaling and provide conceptual frameworks, such as question prompts and modeling of journal writing. When instructors provide criteria and guidelines to connect a learning experience to reflective journaling, it can become a meaningful activity for both personal and professional development (Hubbs & Brand, 2010).

In the latest *Unit Standards for Effective Teacher Preparation*, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2008) cites the ability to reflect as a model of best professional practices in teaching. In the document, professional education faculty are charged with teaching in a way that encourages preservice teachers to demonstrate the ability to reflect. In addition, Norman and Spencer (2005) state that preservice teachers must critically examine their experiences and beliefs as well as the beliefs of their peers to understand how personal beliefs and experiences impact their learning and teaching practices. Through this type of reflection, preservice teachers can look at perspectives or approaches that they might not have considered as they develop their identities as teachers and writers (Hubbs & Brand, 2010; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Walkington, 2005).

## Summary

Identity is central to teachers' beliefs, values, and practices in classrooms and is a factor in their motivation and effectiveness (Day, Elliot, & Kingston, 2005; Van den Berg, 2002; Walkington, 2005; Wenger, 1998). Building an identity as a writer and teacher of writing calls for both pedagogical content and personal reflection within the context of a community and a profession (Ivanic, 1994; Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Discourse and reflective journaling can help preservice teachers determine if they are meeting the role standards of a teacher and a writer (Hubbs & Brand, 2010; Lai & Calandra, 2007; Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

## Chapter 3

### METHOD

The previous chapter provided a theoretical frame and research-based support on the need for this study. This chapter will provide a description of the setting and participants, my role as a researcher/teacher, the innovation, data sources and collection, and the analytical strategies for analysis.

#### **Context and Participants**

This action research study took place at a large urban university in the southwestern United States. The participants were 14 preservice teachers in their first semester of an Elementary Education program. This was a convenience sample because the participants were students in my courses. The preservice teachers were all undergraduate students enrolled in EED 433 Language Arts Methods, Management, and Assessment, a required course that provides techniques and strategies for teaching writing skills to elementary school students. The class consisted of culturally diverse students who ranged in age from early 20's to late 40's, including three students pursuing a second career as a teacher. Participants included 12 female and 2 male students. Their writing abilities ranged from a basic level of proficiency to an above average proficiency, with the majority of students writing at just above a basic level of proficiency. Their perceptions of themselves as writers ranged from weak to strong with the majority of students perceiving themselves at a midpoint in the range. Participation in the study was voluntary with no consequences for non-participation and no privileges or rewards for participation. All 14 students enrolled in the course chose to participate.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the instructor of EED 433, I participated as a teacher and researcher practitioner by assessing students, providing instruction, and creating the full circling strategy, while collaborating with students in the full circling process to work toward a common goal of becoming better teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

It should be noted that some results might be skewed by the teacher/student relationship inherent in this study. Some students may have felt obligated to participate because I was the instructor of their course. Students might also have provided inaccurate information in an effort to give a positive perception about their identities as writers rather than relating their true feelings. It is possible that they may have said what they thought I wanted to hear in an effort to please me. There is also the possibility that my own biases, either positive or negative, toward some of the participants may have affected my judgment of the data through the Halo Effect.

### **Innovation**

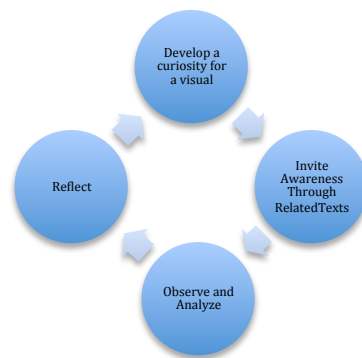
The innovation for my action research study was an adaptation of a literacy strategy known as full circling. The strategy was originally used by Long (2008) to develop her students' visual literacy so they would gain a deep understanding of historical events. Long used strong visual images to help her students establish an emotional connection to the images. Students observed, analyzed, discussed, and wrote as they were immersed in both the cognitive and affective domains related to the visual.

In Long's (2008) version, the first step involved sharing an authentic photograph of a person in an historical event while encouraging students to look beyond the image



and imagine what might be happening with the person in the photograph. In the second step, students heard and read excerpts from related texts to provide a variety of perspectives on the photograph. During the third step, students were asked to place themselves in the photograph to observe and analyze the multiple perspectives using the multitextual context of the photograph in much the same way they would imagine themselves as a character in a fictional story. The last step brought the process full circle as students reflected on their feelings and connections to the photograph.

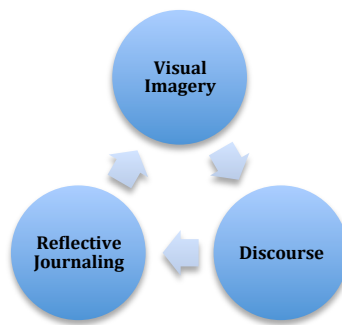
Figure 4 represents Long's (2008) full circling process.



*Figure 4.* Full circling process (Long, 2008).

Like Long (2008), I used a multi-step full circling process that incorporated strong visual images, discourse, and reflection. However, my process was adapted to fit the needs of my students and the course I teach. For this study the full circling process focused on finding a writing identity. There were three cycles of full circling within the 15-weeks that my class met, including identity as a teacher, identity as a writer, and identity as a teacher of writing. In the first step of each cycle, students created a strong

visual image and shared what was captured in the image and why they chose the image. In the second step, students were asked to place themselves in the image and imagine what they would see, feel, and hear from that perspective. This was followed by student-led discourse to analyze how their images captured the attributes that are part of the role standards of an effective teacher, writer, or teacher of writing. In the third step, students reflected on their feelings and connections related to the image and how they saw themselves in the role of teacher, writer, or teacher of writing. Figure 5 represents the adapted full circling process.



*Figure 5.* Adapted full circling process.

### **Data Collection, Tools, and Procedures**

Quantitative data were collected through a pre- and post- Teacher/Writer Identity Survey (see Appendix A). The identity survey was used to understand how the preservice teachers in my course viewed their identities as writers. Constructs included (1) their

view of themselves as writers, (2) their perceptions of writing, and (3) their confidence in teaching writing. The survey contained 18 items and used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. The pre-survey also had two open-ended items that asked students to describe a positive experience from their past related to writing and a negative experience from their past related to writing. Pre- and post-surveys were compared to denote any changes in how my students viewed their writing identities after participating in the full circling innovation.

Qualitative data were collected through student discourse audiotapes and reflective journals as they engaged in the full circling process. Students were audiotaped as they discussed focus questions relating to their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. During the first cycle, discourse centered on defining the qualities of an effective teacher. The second cycle focused on what it means to be an effective writer. Discourse for the third cycle included how my preservice teachers identified as teachers of writing and how confident they felt in being effective teachers of writing. Discourse audiotapes were transcribed and coded using open and axial coding to discover emerging themes on preservice teachers' changing identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

Students wrote in journals throughout the study, reflecting on their identities as writers and what, if any, changes they experienced as a result of participating in the full circling process. Journaling for the first cycle included reflection on the impact of past teachers and what these past experiences meant to them as future teachers. In the second cycle, preservice teachers were asked to reflect on their feelings about becoming an

effective writer in order to teach writing skills and to explain what actions they were taking to becoming an effective writer. During the third cycle, reflection focused on how the full circling process of visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling may have changed their identity as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. Reflective journals were coded using open and axial coding to discover emerging themes on preservice teachers' shifts in identity as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

Both field notes and a reflective journal were used to discover how I was changing and evolving in my own practice. Field notes included an ongoing description of the full circling process, highlighting behaviors, events, and insights not captured in audio tapes or reflective journals, and adaptations made to the full circling process as a result of data analysis and my own personal reflection. My reflective journal was used to record insights on the implementation of the full circling process, as well as personal thoughts and feelings about the shifts I was seeing in the writing identities of my preservice teachers and in the evolution of my own practice. Field notes and the reflective journal were analyzed using open and axial coding to understand any changes occurring in my practice as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing as a result of implementing the full circling process.

The first cycle of full circling took place during Week 2 of the course. My students were asked create a two slide PowerPoint, one slide with a visual representation of a teacher who had a profound effect on them, whether positive or negative, and another slide with a paragraph describing the qualities of the teacher and the impact the teacher had on them. Students chose either a photograph they had taken of the teacher, a

photograph of the teacher found on the Internet, or an image retrieved from the Internet used to represent the teacher. The PowerPoint slides were shared in pairs with each student explaining why he or she chose their picture and what the picture captured in terms of their beliefs of effective teaching practices. Paired discussions were followed by whole-class discourse and reflective journaling. Discourse during the first cycle focused on defining the qualities of an effective teacher and why the chosen teacher had an impact on the student. The guiding questions for discourse in the first cycle were:

- How do you feel about this teacher?
- Why did this teacher have a profound effect on you?
- Place yourself in the image. What do you see, hear, feel?
- What are the qualities of an effective teacher?

During journaling students reflected on past teachers and how the way they taught and what they taught may have had both a positive and negative impact on their educational histories and what those experiences meant to them in their roles as future teachers.

In Weeks 3 and 4, I added to instruction on building an identity as a teacher, emphasizing the standards equated with the role of being an effective teacher and the meaningful behaviors associated with the role of an effective teacher. Discourse and reflective journaling focused on how my preservice teachers' growing knowledge of identity as a teacher was impacting their weekly internship experience. Table 1 displays the data collection timeline for the first cycle of full circling.

Table 1

*First Cycle Data Collection Timeline*

Date Collected	Instrument Used	Instruction/Data Analysis
Week 1	Identity pre-survey	Instruction: Identity Full circling-modeling
Week 2	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Full circling-teacher Identity as a teacher Reflective journaling
Week 3	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a teacher
Week 4	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a teacher

Week 5 consisted of data analysis and self-reflection. Discourse tapes and my personal reflections were reviewed after the first discourse session. I then adapted my level of participation based on the content of discourse recordings and personal reflection by removing myself from the discussion. Through a review of the data, I found that during the first discourse session I was leading the discussion by posing questions, rather than providing an open discussion forum led by students. Beginning with the second

discourse session, I posed a focus question and then moved to the side of the classroom and remained seated until the discourse came to a close.

The second cycle of full circling began in Week 6 of the course. During the second cycle, I added instruction on building identity as a writer. Students created a two slide PowerPoint of a writer who had a profound impact on their lives, perhaps an author, a teacher, or a family member, and why the writer had such a powerful impact on them. PowerPoint presentations were shared in pairs with preservice teachers explaining why they chose their picture and what the picture captured. Discourse and reflective journaling focused on what it means to be a writer and how the students identified themselves as writers. The guiding questions in the second cycle were:

- How do you feel about this writer?
- Why did this writer have such a profound effect on you?
- Place yourself in the image. What do you see, feel, hear?
- What are the qualities of an effective writer?
- What will you do to become an effective writer?

During journaling, students reflected on their feelings about the process of becoming an effective writer. The guiding question was: What are your feelings about becoming an effective writer in order to teach writing? What are you doing to become an effective writer?

In Weeks 7 and 8, I continued instruction on building identity as a writer, with an emphasis on the standards equated with the role of being an effective writer and the meaningful behaviors associated with the role of an effective writer. Discourse focused

on how my students' growing knowledge of identity as a writer was impacting their weekly internship experience. For reflective journaling, students explored how their growing knowledge of identity as a writer impacted their role as a writer in both academic and personal writing.

Table 2 provides a timeline of data collection for the second cycle of full circling.

Table 2

*Second Cycle Data Collection Timeline*

Date Collected	Instrument Used	Instruction/Data Analysis
Week 6	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Full circling-writer Identity as a writer Reflective journaling
Week 7	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a writer
Week 8	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a writer

Week 9 consisted of data analysis and self-reflection. As a result of reviewing discourse, student reflective journals, and my own reflective journal, I continued to remove myself from discourse. I also reviewed the elements of reflective journaling with my students in an effort to enhance the sparse contents of their reflective journals.

The third cycle of full circling took place in Week 10 of the course. The third cycle included instruction on building identity as a teacher and writer. My students



created a two-slide PowerPoint that depicted their identities as teachers and writers. The first slide consisted of a picture of themselves involved in writing or the teaching of writing. The second slide explained why they chose that image to represent themselves as teachers and writers and what the image captured. PowerPoint presentations were shared in pairs. Discourse and reflective journaling focused on the insights the preservice teachers gained about being a teacher and writer through the full circling process. The guiding questions in the third cycle were:

- Do you see yourself as a writer? Why or why not?
- Do others see you as a writer? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about this?
- How confident are you in being an effective teacher of writing?

The guiding question for reflective journaling was: How has the full circling process of visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling changed your identity as a teacher and writer?

Weeks 11 and 12 included further instruction on building identity as a teacher and writer with discourse and journaling continuing to focus on what my students learned about themselves and their identities as teachers and writers through the full circling process.

Table 3 consists of the Data Collection Timeline for the third cycle of full circling.

Table 3

*Third Cycle Data Collection Timeline*

Date Collected	Instrument Used	Instruction/Data Analysis
Week 10	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Full circling-teacher/writer Identity as a teacher/writer
Week 11	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a teacher/writer
Week 12	Discourse recordings Student reflective journals Field notes Personal reflective journal	Instruction: Identity as a teacher/writer
Week 13	Identity post-survey Field notes Personal reflective journal	

Week 13 consisted of post assessment using a post- Teacher/Writer Identity Survey. During Weeks 14 and 15 aggregation and analysis of data from the action research study began.

**Analytical Strategies**

To enhance reliability, I performed a Chronbach's Alpha test to ensure consistency between constructs and survey items on the Teacher/Writer Identity Survey. Surveys were aggregated using SPSS with descriptives provided and means from pre-

and post- surveys compared using a *t*-test. Qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed using grounded theory, and brought together to compare findings.

Transcriptions of discourse and reflective journals and two open-ended questions from the pre-Teacher/Writer Survey were coded using an open coding system to identify words and phrases related to identity. Axial coding was then used to uncover major themes from repeated words and phrases. Results of coding from discourse and reflective journaling were compared to make assertions regarding changes in how my students viewed their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Field notes and my own reflective journal were coded using an open coding system to identify words and phrases related to changes in my own practice. Axial coding was then used to uncover major themes from repeated words and phrases. Results of coding from field notes and reflective journaling were compared to make assertions regarding how I was changing and evolving in my own practice (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Several precautions were taken to enhance reliability and validity. One type of reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. In other words, a measure should be replicable or repeatable, and results should remain nearly the same over time (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Member checks were used to review open and axial coding data on discourse transcripts and reflective journals to ensure credibility and trust of qualitative data. The major threats to validity in my study were the Hawthorne Effect and Experimenter Effect.

### **Hawthorne Effect**

The Hawthorne Effect was a concern for this study since participants were the students in my class. They may have felt obligated to stay in the study and may have given positive responses during discourse and on surveys because I was the instructor of the course. I kept field notes and a reflective journal on student behaviors related to the study and analyzed them for evidence of the Hawthorne Effect.

### **Experimenter Effect**

Experimenter Effect was also a concern in this study. As much as I tried to remain neutral to the events in the classroom, I may have still unintentionally sent signals that could have biased the study. Students may have felt obligated to give responses they thought I wanted based upon my unconscious or unintentional verbal or non-verbal signals. To maximize validity, I used member checks to cross check codes for discourse and reflective journals. I also analyzed discourse tapes after each session to monitor any possible bias reflected in my tone of voice or any remarks I might have made during discourse in an attempt to alleviate as many distractors as possible. Throughout the study, I provided rich descriptions in field notes and in my reflective journal as part of an audit trail to provide documentary evidence of the steps and procedures related to my research study.

## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Chapter 3 provided information on the design of the study, a description of the setting and participants, my role as a researcher/teacher, the innovation, data collection tools and how they were used, and the analytical strategies for analysis. Chapter 4 presents the methodology used in this study and the results of the completed analyses of qualitative and quantitative data. These results were framed by the following research questions:

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

1. How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
2. Will discourse help my students become more in tune with shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
3. Will reflective journaling capture shifts in preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
4. How will I change and evolve as a result of this innovation?

#### **Methodology**

Action research is a systematic approach used by practitioners to improve professional practice or solve a local problem. Action research uses a non-linear framework of looking at a problem, thinking about the problem, and acting on the

problem (Stringer, 2007). In the “look” phase of action research, data are gathered to define or describe a perceived problem or issue. During the “think” phase, the data are used to analyze, interpret, and explain the problem or issue. In the “act” phase, a plan of action is implemented, evaluated, and modified if necessary, and the cycle begins again.

In my study, I used Participatory Action Research (PAR; Lewin, 1946) to understand if using a visual literacy strategy, discourse, and reflective journaling would build my students’ identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, and improve my own skills as a teacher. I chose PAR for its emphasis on collaboration between the researcher and participants because I hold the belief that collaboration is vital if sustainable change is to take place within a learning community. It was my hope that through collaboration my students would interact to create, build, and share their knowledge as we worked toward the common goal of becoming better teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

Quantitative data results from a pre and post Teacher/Writer Identity survey are presented in the first section. Results include numerical data from a construct analysis of survey items and a comparison of pre and post means. Qualitative data results follow and include interpretive outcomes from three cycles of classroom captured in discourse, student reflective journals, field notes, and my own personal reflective journal. These data sources were triangulated to provide validity and corroborate findings from quantitative and qualitative data sources (Creswell, 2009; Greene, 2007).

## **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data includes numerical data from the pre- and post Teacher/Writer Survey. The Teacher/Writer Survey was used to address the following research questions:

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

1. How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

A Cronbach's Alpha was run to ensure consistency between constructs and survey items on the Teacher/Writer Identity survey. Constructs included preservice teachers' view of themselves as writers, perceptions of writing, and confidence in teaching writing. Surveys were aggregated using SPSS 21 and descriptives (means and standard deviation) run. Means from pre- and post- surveys were then compared using a *t*-test.

### **Teacher/Writer Survey Analysis**

Close-ended items on the Teacher/Writer Survey were analyzed to determine the reliability of the three constructs using SPSS 21. Cronbach's Alpha values were determined for the constructs based on pre-survey responses of the participants. Nunnally (1978) considers a .7 coefficient of reliability as acceptable while George and Mallory (2003) provide a range of > .9 as Excellent, > .8 as good, > .7 as Acceptable, > .6 as Questionable, > .5 as Poor, and < .5 as Unacceptable. Reliability of each construct

ranged from .875 to .950, indicating an acceptable reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of reliability are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of Reliability*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha Co-efficient of Reliability
Preservice teachers' view of themselves as writers	.937
Preservice teachers' perceptions of writing	.875
Preservice teachers' confidence in teaching writing	.950

The Teacher/Writer Survey was researcher developed to understand if preservice teachers' views of themselves as writers, perceptions or writing, and confidence in teaching writing were altered through the full circling process. The survey had three constructs of teacher/writer identity and contained both closed- and open- ended items. Their analysis results will be presented in the qualitative section. The online survey was developed and data were gathered using Survey Monkey. Of the 18 closed ended items, six assessed preservice teachers' view of themselves as writers, six assessed preservice teachers' perceptions of writing, and six assessed preservice teachers' confidence in teaching writing. Participants responded to closed-ended items by indicating their degree of agreement or disagreement on a six-point Likert rating scale: (6) = *Strongly Agree*, (5)



= *Agree*, (4) = *Somewhat Agree*, (3) = *Somewhat Disagree*, (2) = *Disagree*, (1) = *Strongly Disagree*. The six-point scale was chosen to provide a deeper understanding of the nuances of identity than could be gained from a four or five point rating scale.

Participant responses for pre- and post-surveys were entered into SPSS with data categorized according to constructs. Data were calculated and analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to compare pre- and post results. Table 5 displays the means, standard deviations, and *t*-test results for each of the three survey constructs.

Table 5

*Means (SD) and t-Scores for Teacher/Writer Identity Survey*

Construct	Pre-survey Mean (SD)	Post Survey Mean (SD)	Two Tailed <i>t</i> -test
Preservice teachers' view of themselves as writers	4.35 (.68)	4.86 (.67)	.006*
Preservice teachers' perceptions of writing	5.38 (.48)	5.46 (.52)	.544
Preservice teachers' confidence in teaching writing	4.78 (.57)	5.13 (.37)	.111

\*  $p < .05$

The first construct asked the preservice teachers to rate their view of themselves as writers. This construct was designed to understand if preservice teachers agreed or disagreed as to their confidence in their ability to express themselves in writing,

considered themselves good writers, and saw themselves as reflective writers. The mean for the pre-survey was 4.35 with a standard deviation of .68 and the mean for the post survey was 4.86 with a standard deviation of .67. The results of the *t*-test indicated a significant difference in how strongly preservice teachers' saw themselves as writers.

The second construct asked the preservice teachers to rate their perceptions of writing. This construct was designed to understand how strongly participants agreed or disagreed as to their need to develop and practice writing skills, their perceived value of writing, and their perception of the emphasis and amount of time that is spent on writing in our schools. The pre-survey mean was 5.38 with a standard deviation of .48 and the post survey mean was 5.46 with a standard deviation of .52. The results of the *t*-test indicated no significant difference in preservice teachers' perceptions of writing between pre- and post survey.

The third construct asked preservice teachers to rate their confidence in becoming teachers of writing. This construct was designed to understand how strongly participants agreed or disagreed as to their confidence in the skills they possess to teach writing, their confidence in being an effective teacher of writing, and their feelings toward becoming a teacher of writing. The mean for the pre-survey was 4.78 with a standard deviation of .57 and the mean for the post survey was 5.13 with a standard deviation of .37, indicating no significant difference between the pre- and post survey.

In sum, the survey shows agreement to strong agreement that participants felt their views of themselves as writers, perceptions of writing, and confidence in teaching writing were altered through the full circling process.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

In this mixed methods study, qualitative data were weighted more heavily than quantitative data. The qualitative data sources included student discourse, student reflective journals, two open-ended question responses on the Teacher/Writer Survey, field notes, and my personal reflective journal. Table 6 shows the richness of this data set.

Table 6

*Description of Qualitative Data Sources*

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Data Source	Word Count
Identity as a Teacher Discourse Transcription	3,161
Identity as a Writer Discourse Transcription	3,759
Identity as a Teacher of Writing Discourse Transcription	6,585
Student Reflective Journal 1	4,067
Student Reflective Journal 2	4,113
Student Reflective Journal 3	2,728
Survey Open-Ended Question 1	529
Survey Open-Ended Question 2	675
Field Notes	4,625
Personal Reflective Journal	6,673
Total Word Count	36,915

---

Each data source was analyzed using a grounded approach. The following sections report this approach with links to each research question.

### **Student Discourse**

Student discourse was used to address the following research questions.

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

1. How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
2. Will discourse help my students become more in tune with shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

As explained in Chapter 3, student discourse took place in three cycles. Students were asked to discuss their identity as a teacher, a writer, and a teacher of writing. Each cycle of discourse was recorded using two digital audio recorders. In sum, there were 14 participants present during each cycle and all participated, with the exception of one student who did not participate in discourse regarding identity as a teacher of writing. The student who chose not to participate did so because of a case of laryngitis.

Recordings were transcribed and coded using an open coding system based on the study's theoretical framework (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Raw data were segmented and a preliminary list of concepts, ideas, and meanings was developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Repeated readings of the data were conducted with initial codes being checked and reformulated by adding, collapsing, or removing codes as needed to create new

emerging codes. Axial coding was then used to uncover major themes from emerging codes. Results of coding were compared to make assertions regarding changes in how students viewed their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. Assertions were backed with supporting quotes.

### **Student Reflective Journals**

Student reflective journals were used to address the following research questions.

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

1. How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?
2. Will reflective journaling capture shifts in preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

Overall journal writing tended to be completed in a more academic style of writing rather than in a reflective style. Entries were not extensive, with most being one paragraph in length and an average of 18 lines. Preservice teachers often delayed writing in the journal, stating that they did not enjoy journal writing.

In the first journal entry, students were asked to answer the following guiding question: How and what past teachers taught may have had a positive and/or negative impact on your writing history. What do these experiences mean to you in your role as a future teacher?

The second cycle journal entries focused on the guiding question: What are your feelings about becoming an effective writer? (e.g., How you feel about writing? Is it important to be an effective writer in order to teach writing? Are you working at becoming an effective writer? What are you doing to become an effective writer?).

The third cycle journal entries included the guiding question: How has the full circling process of visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling changed your identity as a teacher and writer?

Each cycle of student reflective journals was initially coded using an open coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) based on the guiding question for the cycle. Raw data were aggregated to develop a preliminary list of concepts, ideas, and meanings for each guiding question. While coding, it became evident that responses from each cycle included data pertinent to other guiding questions. As a result, each cycle of reflective journals were then coded for data related to guiding questions from other cycles. Data were then merged according to each guiding question and initial codes were checked and reformulated as larger categories were identified. Themes were established from the existing codes and assertions were then developed based on the identified themes.

### **Open-Ended Survey Responses**

Two open-ended survey items were used to address the following research question.

Overarching question: How, and to what extent, will using a full circling strategy help my students uncover their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

How, and to what extent, will incorporating a literacy strategy using visual imagery help build preservice teachers' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing?

Open-ended questions included:

1. Describe a negative experience you have had in your writing history and how this contributes to the way you see yourself as a writer.
2. Describe a positive experience you have had in your writing history and how this contributes to the way you see yourself as a writer.

The open-ended questions were coded using an open coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to determine the effect of past experiences on preservice teachers' writing identities. Data were gathered on both positive past experiences and negative past experiences. Codes were first developed by aggregating raw data to form a list of a priori codes. Codes were then separated to develop a preliminary list of concepts, ideas, and meanings. Themes were then established from the existing codes and assertions were formed based on the established themes.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were used to address the following research question: How will I change and evolve as a result of this innovation?

Field notes were coded using an open coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to determine changes in my own teaching practices as a result of this research study. Raw data were used to develop a preliminary list of concepts, ideas, and meanings related to changes in my practice and my identity as a teacher of writing. Initial codes were checked and reformulated by adding, collapsing, or removing codes as needed to create

new emerging codes. Themes were then established from the existing codes and assertions were developed based on the themes.

### **Personal Reflective Journal**

My personal reflective journal was used to address the following research question: How will I change and evolve as a result of this innovation?

My reflective journal was coded using an open coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to determine how I was changing and evolving in my own teaching practices and in my identity as a teacher of writing. Raw data were collected and a preliminary list of concepts, ideas, and meanings were developed. Data were then segmented and initial codes reformulated as needed to create new emerging codes. The existing codes were used to establish themes and themes were used to develop assertions.

### **Themes**

There were originally 71 codes identified related to students' writing identity. Through critical reflection and ongoing revision of codes, three major themes emerged. These were: (a) influence of past experiences, (b) knowledge building, (c) shifts in identity.

Table 7 presents the theme related components and assertion that emerged from initial coding on the influence of past experiences. Themes from the analysis led to the assertion included in the table.



Table 7

*Theme: Influence of Past Experiences*

Theme Related Components	Assertion
1. Positive past experiences in writing enhanced positive writing identity in participants	Past experiences in writing affected the writing identity of participants
2. Negative past experiences in writing had long term effects on writing identity in participants	

Table 8 includes the theme related components and assertion derived from initial coding on knowledge building.

Table 8

*Theme: Knowledge Building*

Theme Related Components	Assertion
1. Participants were able to discern traits of effective teachers through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	The full circling process provided a means for me to help my students build knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.
2. Participants were able to discern the skills effective teachers possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	
3. Participants were able to discern traits of effective writers through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	
4. Participants were able to discern the skills effective writers possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	
5. Participants were able to discern traits of effective teachers of writing through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	
6. Participants were able to discern the skills effective teachers of writing possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling	

Table 9 displays the theme related components and assertion derived from initial coding on shifts in identity.

Table 9

*Theme: Shifts in Identity*

Theme Related Components	Assertion
1. Full circling provided opportunities for participants to explore their shifting identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing	Through full circling participants demonstrated shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing although some parts were more accepted and useful than others. Journals evoked complaints and little detail but imagery worked as a catalyst for reflection and discourse provided a space for students to use the language of writers, change their views, learn through quiet moments, build their own knowledge, and find a voice to talk about writing and themselves.
2. Full circling provided opportunities for participants to chronicle shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing	
3. Full circling provided the opportunity for the researcher to chronicle shifts in identity as a teacher, writer and teacher of writing	

## Chapter 5

### FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presented the methodology used in this study, the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and themes resulting from coded data. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings based on the data analysis and the literature used to frame this study. The findings of this study led to three assertions derived from the major themes and descriptives. The assertions were: (a) Past experiences in writing affected the writing identity of participants; (b) The full circling process provided a means for me to help my students build knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing; and (c) Through full circling participants demonstrated shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

To understand if my innovation was successful I used a concurrent mixed methods approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Using a mixed methods approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of the use of full circling than could be gained by using either a quantitative or qualitative method of inquiry in isolation. Mixed methods combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data, with quantitative data providing specific numbers to capture the nuances of growth in preservice teachers' writing skills and identities as writers, and qualitative data providing the voices of the participants in the study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed using a triangulation process. However more weight was given to the qualitative data. The triangulation process allowed for corroboration of data from multiple sources and increased the

validity of the findings (Denzin, 1978; Greene, 2007; Greene et al., 1989). Figure 6 below represents the Concurrent Triangulation Design used in this study.

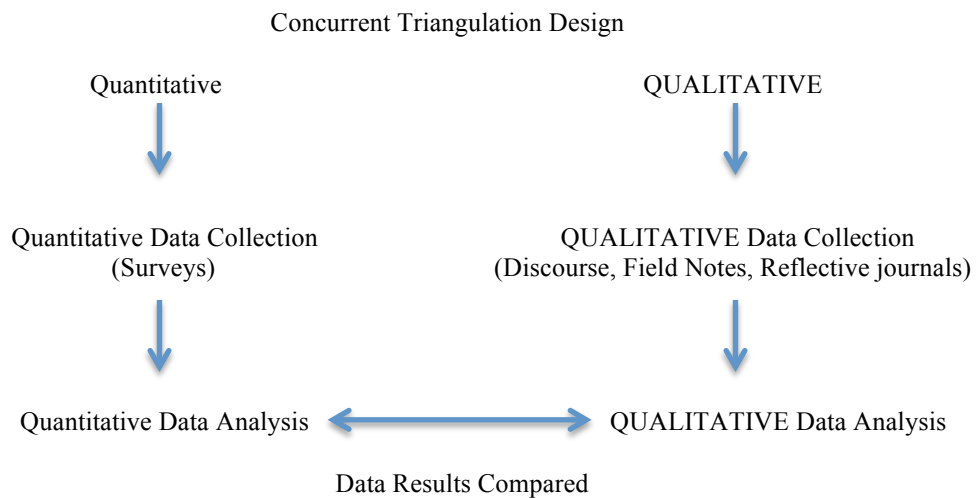


Figure 6. Concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 2009, p. 210).

### **Influence of Past Experiences on Writing Identity**

*Assertion 1: Past experiences in writing affected the writing identity of participants.*

Theme related components that led to this assertion included: (1) positive past experiences in writing enhanced positive writing identity in participants, and (2) negative past experiences in writing had long term negative effects on writing identity in participants. Survey responses, discourse, and reflective journaling provided insights into how both positive and negative experiences in writing affected the writing identities of participants.

## **Positive Past Experiences in Writing**

All of the 14 participants in the study related at least one positive experience that enhanced their writing identity. Positive experiences were most often related to a specific teacher who had a profound effect on the preservice teacher in both academics and from a personal perspective. Joanne (a pseudonym, as are all others) wrote about her high school English teacher:

She is definitely the one teacher who had a positive effect on my life. She was very dedicated to what she did and she was passionate about having her students become better writers...She became a mother figure to us all, if anything went wrong while we were at school she was the one who we would run to. (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013)

Carrie credits her mother for her positive writing identity. Her mother is a teacher and “instilled a love of writing in me. She constantly told me I was good at writing, that it was one of my strong points” (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013). In her senior year of high school Carrie chose the Creative Writing course as her elective. She wrote of the safe classroom environment and how “I truly saw myself as a writer in her class” (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013).

However two preservice teachers wrote that sometimes the teachers who had a positive effect on their writing identities were not ones they considered to be the most caring. Jessie wrote about her high school English teacher who “I thought I loathed. She was the most intimidating woman I had ever met.” Yet the teacher “wrote little notes on the bottom of my papers telling me that my paper was great and that she always enjoyed reading my papers.” Jessie commented, “I still take out those papers sometimes and read those notes just to feel good about myself” (student reflective journal entry, September 3,

2013). Laura related an experience in second grade when she was placed in the back of the classroom because she talked too much. She wrote:

And that's all I remember from second grade, sitting in the back by myself and feeling shame. Don't get me wrong, she wasn't a bad teacher. She actually is the first teacher who instilled in me the love for writing! I just do not agree with her methods of teaching. (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013)

### **Negative Past Experiences in Writing**

Negative past experiences in writing were a substantial influence on preservice teachers' views of writing. The lasting impact of negative experiences were described by 13 preservice teachers as being a factor contributing to their lack of confidence in their writing abilities. Six preservice teachers wrote of the negative effect of harsh criticism. Janet recalled an incident where she "had a teacher destroy one of my papers during a writing lesson and it completely shattered my confidence as a writer" (open-ended survey response, August 27, 2013). Jill wrote about her fourth grade teacher who was "extremely critical about my writing skills and always had negative things to say about my writing" (open-ended survey response, August 27, 2013). Sandy described the effects of a teacher who judged her writing harshly, stating "the experience scared me away from fully expressing myself" (open-ended survey response, August 27, 2013).

Yet negative past experiences were also mentioned by nine of the preservice teachers as a catalyst for becoming a teacher who will change the system. Describing a series of negative experiences in her first journal response, Susan wrote, "However I think these negative aspects have fueled my desire to become a teacher because I want to change this" (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013). Kathy stated that her negative experiences "show me what I need to do and what things I shouldn't do when I

become a teacher” (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013). For Linda, an incident in elementary school “burned that memory into my mind forever.” She wrote:

There was a time in my elementary school education that my teacher asked us to write a story. I wrote mine about a penguin who had found love, and I loved my story. But when I got it back my teacher had me rewrite the whole thing over again because I had not put sufficient space between my words. Now, as a teacher, I can understand that students need to differentiate their words and learn to write properly—but it was that ghastly red pen that burned that memory into my mind forever. (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013)

Linda went on to state:

What I take from this memory now is that students are impressionable—when I was young I was horrified that I had to rewrite my assignment and I should expect my students to act and feel the same way. Therefore, I will do my best to uplift my students and make sure that they improve without being torn down by teachers, particularly me. (student reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013)

Positive experiences came from caring teachers who were themselves positive about, and dedicated to, writing. Their classrooms were safe environments for writing and they consistently offered encouragement to students at all levels of writing ability. However, preservice teachers also cited experiences in stressful environments as contributing to convictions that the writing classroom must be a safe and nurturing environment. Negative experiences were carried with students throughout their education. The lasting impact led many to feel a decided lack of confidence in their writing skills and their ability to teach writing.

As the preservice teachers participated in full circling, they explored how these past experiences influenced their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing and noted how full circling helped them to come to a better understanding of the impact of past experiences. Jessie stated, “I fully believe the full circling process has helped me



build my identity as a writer. I think reflection upon what you have learned and experienced is an integral part of the learning process” (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013). Joanne elaborated by writing:

Past experiences help build who you are and what you become. A negative or a positive experience can change the way you think or act. I have experienced several positive and negative experiences in my educational history. I value all of these experiences because they will shape what kind of teacher I will be. I can remember the negative experiences and make sure I do not make the same mistakes with my own students. The positive experiences can help me decide what practices and methods to include in my own classroom. I think overall these experiences will help me be an effective teacher. (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013)

These insights reflect the importance of critically examining past experiences to help preservice teachers understand how their beliefs impact learning and teaching practices and how their performance is linked to their identity as writers (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Norman & Spencer, 2005).

### **Knowledge Building**

*Assertion 2: The full circling process provided a means for me to help my students build knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.*

Another theme supported by qualitative data was knowledge building by the preservice teachers who participated in the research study. Theme-related components that substantiate this assertion are: (1) participants were able to discern traits of effective teachers through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling; (2) participants were able to discern the skills effective teachers possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling; (3) participants were able to discern traits of

effective writers through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling; (4) participants were able to discern the skills effective writers possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling; (5) participants were able to discern the traits of effective teachers of writing through visual imagery, discourse and reflective journaling; and (6) participants were able to discern the skills effective teachers of writing possess through visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling.

At the beginning of the semester all 14 of the preservice teachers in the study expressed concerns about their ability to be effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. Through the full circling process they began to create their own knowledge about what it means to be an effective teacher, writer, and teacher of writing and examined how they were changing to meet the standards of these role. Each cycle of full circling began with the preservice teachers creating and reflecting on a powerful image as a precursor to discourse and reflective journaling. The first cycle opened with an image of a teacher who had a profound effect on the preservice teacher's life. The image in the second cycle centered on a writer who had an impact on the preservice teacher. The third cycle included an image of the preservice teacher writing or teaching writing in an internship classroom. At the beginning of each cycle, students shared their images and the feelings associated with the image in pairs. Full class discourse and reflective journaling followed.

As discourse progressed throughout the semester, the discussions became more complex, with preservice teachers expanding on the guiding questions and exploring their feelings and beliefs related to the process and the topic presented. Linda stated:

I believe the full circling process has greatly helped me build my identity as a teacher, as a writer, and certainly as a combination of the two, a teacher of

writing. To be able to build ideas off of one another in the classroom has been a valuable experience, as we are all a part of education and in understanding that we are together, we have grown together and helped build each other up (student reflective journal entry, November 19, 2013).

During full circling, the preservice teachers began to formulate what they believed to be the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. The traits and skills that were formulated were directly related what are considered to be the role standards of an effective teacher, writer, and teacher of writing.

### **Traits of Effective Teachers**

Traits of effective teachers were expressed by words such as passionate, kind, caring, nurturing, fun, positive, energetic, enthusiastic, inspirational, intelligent, and untraditional. Preservice teachers wrote about and discussed the effective teacher's ability to create a positive learning environment and expressed a desire to be able to create that same environment in their future classrooms. They also noted the effective teacher's ability to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students, using a unique teaching style that made concepts understandable, and the ability to relate content to students' lives.

Past teachers who had a profound impact on the preservice teachers were cited as role models for the traits of effective teachers. Mary described a favorite teacher as "full of energy and love and dedication to all the kids." She went on to state "I would love to be that teacher and I strive to be that teacher" (classroom discourse, September 3, 2013).

Linda remembered a high school teacher saying:

She really cared about me and I could tell. That was a big thing for me in my sophomore year because I was super insecure and I didn't talk at all... I was super shy and she still noticed me and she still cared about me and she

worked with me. That meant a lot to me because I didn't have that great of self-esteem. (classroom discourse, September 3, 2013)

A common thread throughout discourse and reflective journaling was the desire to emulate the positive traits that were characteristic of those teachers who had a powerful impact on the preservice teachers.

### **Skills Effective Teachers Possess**

Skills effective teachers possess included knowledge of pedagogy and content. Preservice teachers commented on the need for effective teachers to have academic knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and the ability to combine both to make content understandable and relevant to students. Janet spoke of a teacher who “really made learning come alive.” Dan described his drafting teacher as having high expectations with both a formal and informal style of teaching:

He had high expectations that he holds you to but his classroom was very informal. He had formal where he would do the teaching and tell you about the drawings, dimensions, and stuff like that, talk about it, and then you would have time to draw. (classroom discourse, September 3, 2013)

Sandy spoke specifically about writing, saying:

I think we know at this age that we're at, we know it's important to use good conventions and things and we know when it's fine not to. Kids, they don't know. They see all writing as the same thing so I think it's our job to show them, OK when you're writing this kind of thing in a journal it's OK to write however you want, but when it's an essay it's more formal. I think it's teaching them the difference and stuff. (classroom discourse, November 19, 2013)

Kathy wrote about teachers sharing their expertise to motivate their students. She

lamented that teachers don't share their work often enough saying:

I don't know why teacher do not share examples of their own work very often, because as a student I love to see the amazing things my teachers can do. When I was in an acting class I always wondered at how good my teacher actually was

at acting. At the end of the semester, he shared with us a monologue he was going to do for an audition and asked us for feedback. I loved the demonstration, because not only did he show us his expertise, but he also communicated to us that even though he was the expert that he could still learn things from us. (reflective journal entry, September 3, 2013)

Yet Lisa expressed a concern about how “daunting” it is to be an effective teacher. She felt that:

It’s also kind of hard because I know one of the things my teacher did that I think made her a really good teacher was the way she taught theme units and so we would have like a space unit and everything revolved around that theme. All of our social studies, all of our reading. Everything revolved around it. The way No Child Left Behind has it, you can’t do it the same way. They’re a lot stricter about how you teach. A lot of times I think teachers can’t be as unique as they were when we were in school. There are a lot more restrictions. (classroom discourse, September 3, 2013)

Throughout discourse and reflective journaling, the preservice teachers repeatedly spoke of the need for teachers to possess knowledge in all content areas and to be able to make content accessible and meaningful to students.

### **Traits of Effective Writers**

When discussing and journaling about the traits of effective writers, preservice teachers cited a variety of persons they considered to be effective writers. Among these were well-known authors such as J.K. Rowling, past teachers, family members, and friends. Common traits of these writers were their love of writing, their passion for writing, and their need to communicate through writing. When describing a favorite author, Estella said:

She loves writing so she would just write and one of the things she wrote about is how you just need to write, you need to create, you need to love what you are doing, and one of the things is to shut off the inner perfection when you need to get something out and you can always go back and rewrite and that is an art

itself, but just to sit down and open a page and write. (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013)

In contrast, Brenda shared that one of her favorite authors stopped writing because, “He didn’t feel the passion anymore and he didn’t think it was fair to his audience” (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013).

Preservice teachers also spoke of the constant practice involved in being an effective writer and how effective writers are continually learning their craft. The preservice teachers felt the greatest barrier they currently face is finding time to write and expressed a concern about being able to incorporate personal writing into their schedules as beginning teachers.

### **Skills Effective Writers Possess**

Skills attributed to effective writers included the ability to connect on an emotional level with their audience, the ability to communicate in a way that appeals to a large audience, and the ability to reflect upon and evaluate one’s own writing. Dan stated “A quality of a really good writer is that they have to connect with their audience, like emotionally. There is nothing more powerful than emotion really” (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013). Lisa added that authors “put themselves in their writing” so they can do more than just connect with their audience, they can share their own personal experiences to connect with their readers” (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013).

Three of the preservice teachers also suggested that effective writers tend to be effective readers because reading and writing as so closely connected.

The preservice teachers felt that a shift in education toward a focus on expository writing has made it more difficult for students to acquire narrative skills. They expressed

a concern about becoming effective writers and teachers of writing unless these skills are acquired.

### **Traits of Effective Teachers of Writing**

The preservice teachers expressed the need for effective teachers of writing to be passionate about writing and to instill that same passion in their students. They believe that effective teachers of writing continually practice to become better at writing and share their learning with their students. Linda wrote about a middle school teacher, “She helped me to see I’m a good writer. I’m good at these things” (classroom discourse, September 3, 2013). However, one student cited her own mother as being the most effective teacher of writing. She stated:

But my mom, I mean I didn’t like writing before. It was a chore for me but my mom would sit down with me when I just wrote...and she would say you really need to work on this and she showed me how and I feel like I learned to write through my mom and she wasn’t ever a teacher but she sat down with me and it is a lot like writing workshop where you sit down and you talk to your students and you tell them. She made me feel confident in my writing and I learned through her patience. (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013)

The preservice teachers spoke of their belief that a teacher’s approach to writing has a profound impact on students. They cited past teachers who instilled a love of writing in students by modeling a passion and love of writing and expressed a concern about the influence of past teachers who overtly expressed a dislike of writing and rarely taught writing.

### **Skills Effective Teachers of Writing Possess**

The skills specified for effective teachers of writing included the pedagogical knowledge to teach writing and the ability to model effective writing practices. All 14

preservice teachers stated that teachers of writing need to be effective writers themselves in order to teach writing, and they should be able to provide quality feedback on student writing. Lisa wrote:

I think it would be very difficult to teach writing if your don't know how to write. If you are not a good writer, what are you going to do when students ask for an example? It will not benefit the kids if you cannot even produce an example. And the students know when a teacher doesn't know what they are doing. (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013)

Joe felt that “teachers need to become effective writers so they can grade writing. If they do not have the skills they do not know what to look for and what feedback to give to help the students” (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013). Kathy wrote:

I think that it is so important for teacher to be effective writers. If we are supposed to be GOOD writers with passion, we need to be confident in our own abilities, passionate about our own writing, and BE good writers already... I just think teachers should be lifelong learners. Because that's what we want to instill in our students! Life long learners of reading! Life long learners of writing! Learn about yourself, learn about the world around you. (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013)

Each of the preservice teachers expressed their belief in the importance of being an effective writer in order to teach writing. They discussed and wrote of the difficulty of holding students accountable if the teacher does not have the needed writing skills or the ability to model effective writing.

As the preservice teachers built knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, they also began to develop an understanding of the need to go beyond merely teaching skills and to consider how identity impacts the way they will position themselves as writers and teachers of writing in their future classrooms (Lea & Street,1998). Susan wrote:



I think it is important for teachers to be effective writers. If we are supposed to teach our students to be GOOD writers with passion, we need to be confident in our own writing and BE good writers already...I am working to become an effective writer! (reflective journal entry, October 22, 2013)

### **Shifts in Identity**

*Assertion 3: Through full circling participants demonstrated shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing although some parts were more accepted and useful than others. Journals evoked complaints and little detail but imagery worked as a catalyst for reflection and discourse provided a space for students to use the language of writers, change their views, learn through quiet moments, build their own knowledge, and find a voice to talk about writing and themselves.*

Theme-related components for this assertion were: (1) discourse while full circling provided opportunities for participants to explore their shifting identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, and (2) full circling provided opportunities for participants to chronicle shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.

### **Discourse**

Student-led discourse was used during all three cycles of full circling, and this discourse changed over time. During each cycle, the preservice teachers were presented with a PowerPoint slide consisting of a list of guiding questions related to the focus of each cycle. Students were instructed to use the guiding questions as prompts if needed during the discussion and were encouraged to engage each other in the discussion with a caution to speak one at a time in order to ensure quality recordings of the discourse.

Discourse during the first cycle focused on defining the qualities of an effective teacher. The guiding questions for discourse in the first cycle were:

- How do you feel about this teacher?
- Why did this teacher have a profound effect on you?
- Place yourself in the image. What do you see, hear, feel?
- What are the qualities of an effective teacher?

During the first session of full circling, the preservice teachers seemed hesitant to begin the discussion. Their conversation was somewhat stilted and at times there were long pauses between speakers. In the next session, preservice teachers appeared to be more comfortable in sharing and comments began to reflect many of the qualities associated with the role standards of effective teachers. Kathy described a teacher who had a profound impact on her, saying, “She’s always do little things...that were so personal. She wasn’t just a teacher to me, she was a lot more” (classroom discourse, August 27, 2013). Five preservice teachers described effective teachers as being “non-traditional,” using creative teaching strategies to reach students. Jessie stated that her favorite teacher was a “beautiful soul. She was just so loving of who we are as students and accepted us all” (classroom discourse, August 27, 2013).

However, discourse in this early full circling did not reflect a personal connection between the preservice teachers’ knowledge of the traits of effective teachers and their roles as teachers in their internship classrooms. When the preservice teachers spoke about their internship experience, they described it as “my internship classroom” or “in my

teacher's classroom." Students in the internship classroom were described as "the kids in my teacher's room" or "her kids."

The second cycle of full circling focused on what it means to be a writer and how the students identified themselves as writers. The guiding questions in the second cycle were:

- How do you feel about this writer?
- Why did this writer have such a profound effect on you?
- Place yourself in the image. What do you see, feel, hear?
- What are the qualities of an effective writer?
- What will you do to become an effective writer?

During the second cycle of full circling, changes occurred in discourse as preservice teachers began to control the conversation and interacted more freely with each other. Conversation in this cycle focused on identity. Preservice teachers spoke of seeing themselves as writers and discussed emulating good writers as a habit of practice. Linda talked about how "your true voice comes out when you write for fun" (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013). Results of the post survey reflected this shift in identity as preservice teachers showed a marked change from the pre-survey in their confidence in their writing abilities and how they saw themselves as writers. The post survey indicated that the preservice teachers were not as nervous about the quality of their writing and viewed themselves as being more reflective in their writing practices.

Shifts in the way preservice teachers spoke about their internships were also taking place. When Kathy described a project in her internship class she stated, "I know

in my classroom they are getting ready to write their own tall tale or own fairy tale...and then I have students who just do not think and just sit down and go.” Kathy also talked about how to “nourish students to pursue things that inspire them, pursue creative thinking and reading and things in life” (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013). Discussion focused on the qualities of a good writer and how preservice teachers can “make something they don’t care about into something they do care about” in their writing lives (classroom discourse, October 22, 2013).

The third cycle of full circling focused on the insights the preservice teachers gained about being a teacher and writer through the full circling process. The guiding questions in the third cycle were:

- Do you see yourself as a writer? Why or why not?
- Do others see you as a writer? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about this?
- How confident are you in being an effective teacher of writing?

Further changes occurred in the third cycle of discourse as preservice teachers showed a decided shift in how they viewed themselves as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. The post survey reiterated this shift in the preservice teachers’ identities. The survey indicated that the preservice teachers felt more confident in their writing abilities, the skills they possessed to teach writing, and in being effective teachers of writing. When asked if they viewed themselves as writers, Linda responded with “Definitely more than I used to. In the beginning of the semester, oh I’m not a writer, I just do academic writing” (classroom discourse, November 19, 2013). Carla stated, “I think the fact that all

of us wish we had more time for writing kind of makes us writers because that means we enjoy it” (classroom discourse, November 19, 2013), while Susan added, “To me that’s one of the things that makes me feel really good about being a teacher of writing is that I really enjoy writing. I feel that’s the key of writing that empowers a lot” (classroom discourse, November 19, 2013). Discussion centered on preservice teachers’ new or renewed sense of themselves as writers, their enjoyment of writing, the craft of writing, and their plans for how to teach writing in their future classrooms. When asked if they were aware of the shift in how they viewed themselves as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, Kate responded, “I think we shifted into talking about what we do in our classrooms and what we see in our classrooms now and we put ourselves in the role of teaching” (classroom discourse, November 19, 2013). Mary expressed her feelings about full circling and the impact it had on how she sees herself as a teacher. She wrote:

The full circling process has helped me to see myself as a competent future teacher. Before this class I was unsure of myself and doubted in my abilities to truly run a classroom and teach adequately...Now, I know that with practice I can be a competent teacher. I see myself as a teacher now, and I haven’t even started. The most beneficial part of full circling was the discourse. Somehow by bouncing ideas off of others in the class on a sincere level (I say sincere because by our discourse you can tell that we all really care about what we are talking about) I have realized that not only do others have fantastic ideas that I would never have thought of, but so do I. (student reflective journal entry, November 19, 2013)

The full circling process helped students develop their personal style and philosophy of teaching, recognize the problematic nature of teaching in a classroom and making decisions on curriculum, explore teaching in supportive environments, and build an extensive repertoire of skills (Binks et al., 2009; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

## Shifts in Researcher Identity

The full circling process was instrumental in evoking changes in my own practice and in how I view myself as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. Before initiating the full circling process, I considered myself to be an effective teacher. Yet I found there were many areas that could benefit from changes in my practice. During the first cycle of full circling, I came to the realization that I needed to allow my students to create their own knowledge, rather than trying to guide them to learn what I felt was important. In my personal journal entry after implementing the first cycle I wrote:

The first cycle was definitely a learning cycle. I made a lot of mistakes. I was organized so everything ran smoothly from the standpoint of giving directions and transitioning from one step to the next. However, I realized after I started the discourse conversation that students were looking to me for guidance even though I had emphasized that I would not be part of the conversation – I was strictly an observer. But I wasn't acting as an observer, either. I found myself giving feedback, either through body language or verbal acknowledgement – “mmm-hmm”, “yes.” It took me a while to realize what I was doing and I finally sat in a chair behind the computer at the front of the room. Big mistake – tall chair and they could see me. Most still looked to me whenever they spoke and all turned to me when the conversation flagged.

As a result, I have consciously worked at changing how I interact when students are participating in classroom discourse. My role is no longer the leader of the discussion, but is changing to that of an outside observer. I also have learned to let silence remain as students process information. My field notes document several entries where I interrupted long pauses in classroom discourse. As I practiced allowing the time to lengthen before I stepped in, I discovered that the pauses generally ended with a very profound statement or discovery from a student. After one such instance a student wrote, “There were so many instances in class when people would mention things and I would be amazed that I

had never had the same thought. There were also times when I was surprised by what I, myself, said” (reflective journal entry, November 19, 2013). This reinforced the idea that students need time to think before responding to give them time to process what others are contributing to the discourse. Another student wrote “the long pauses really help students create a comment” (reflective journal entry, November 19, 2013). This entry helped me understand the value of letting students process during discourse.

The preservice teachers showed great insight into what it means to be an effective teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. Their discourse and reflective journals have encouraged me explore my own identity as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. As I considered what I was reading and hearing, I became aware of subtle changes in my own practice brought on by participating in the research study. An entry in my personal journal captures the conflict in what I was seeing and hearing and in what I was doing as a teacher at the beginning of the full circling innovation:

Journaling was a bust. I thought going in to this that the journal would be the key to identity change, but not so. The journal entries are short and somewhat stilted. It almost appears as if they were writing an assignment rather than reflecting on the focus question. Maybe it was an assignment? The writing was not free-flowing and mainly reiterated what was said during discourse. Most of the students didn’t even answer the second question right away regarding the impact of their experiences on their future roles as teachers. This is something I need to address.

Time to reteach reflective journaling.  
What is a reflective journal? What is the purpose of the journal?  
How do I respond in a reflective journal?

I also wonder if having them write immediately following discourse was a good idea? They were high on the conversation but it was intense enough that they appeared to be a little burnt out on the subject after the discourse. Is this something I should have them do at home – or is that too much like homework? Would they be even more stilted if they were assigned the journal as homework?

Does it become a writing assignment then? 6+1 Traits here we come! What to do?  
What to do?

This entry caused me to re-evaluate what I thought I could control in my role as the researcher/teacher and led me to realize that the richest data was coming from the discourse. This was a turning point where I discovered there was much I could learn from my students about being a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing.

Through the full circling process, preservice teachers were able to capture shifts in their writing identities. Using visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling, the preservice teachers examined the effects of past experiences and explored the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing as they developed their writing identities. In my own practice, the full circling process provided the opportunity for me to assess my writing identity and ultimately led to changes in my practice and in how I view myself as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing



## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 provided the findings from data analysis that led to three assertions derived from major themes emerging from triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. The assertions were: (a) Past experiences in writing affected the writing identity of participants; (b) The full circling process provided a means for me to help my students build knowledge on the traits and skills of effective teachers, writers, and teachers of writing; and (c) Through full circling participants demonstrated shifts in their identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. Chapter 6 includes a discussion of lessons learned, implications for practice, implications for research, limitations of the study, and a personal reflection.

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate and address my students' identities as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. Over the past several years the preservice teachers I worked with expressed concerns about their writing skills and their ability to teach writing. In prior cycles of action research I explored ways to improve preservice teachers' writing skills; however I discovered that although skills improved my students did not see themselves as writers. Literature and research show that preservice teachers who hold negative perceptions of themselves as writers often feel uncomfortable teaching writing and may be less likely to teach writing on a regular basis (Morgan, 2010; Street & Stang, 2009). Because of this, it is important for preservice teachers to build identities as writers before they enter student teaching to help them

become more effective teachers of writing (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; NCW, 2006; Street, 2003; Street & Stang, 2009). The full circling process in this study allowed me to use visual imagery, discourse, and reflective journaling to help the preservice teachers I work with understand and develop their writing identities.

When the study began I was still exploring the idea of writing identity and was uncertain as to the extent to which writing identities could shift during a 15-week innovation. I believed reflective journaling would be the catalyst for change and fully expected journaling to be pivotal in building writing identity. However, the preservice teachers were resistant to the idea of journaling and expressed their dislike of having to write to prompts. In conversations with students they shared that they believed visual imagery and discourse were key in building writing identity within the study. Creating and sharing powerful visual images encouraged the preservice teachers to reflect on the traits and skills of effective teachers and writers who had a profound effect on them. When the preservice teachers participated in discourse, they expressed their perceptions, and in doing so, were able to build their own knowledge of what it means to be an effective teacher, writer, and teacher of writing. By the end of the study, the preservice teachers were talking about the shifts that were occurring in their identities and their confidence in teaching writing in their internship classrooms. Evidence of their shifting identities inspired me to make changes in my own practice.

### **Implications for Practice**

At the beginning of the full circling process, the preservice teachers expressed concerns about their view of themselves as writers, perceptions of writing, and

confidence in teaching writing. As they participated in the full circling process, there was a decided change in the language they used to describe their view of themselves as writers and their perceptions of writing. Many commented that they “found their writing voice” or that writing was “fun again.” During the last cycle of full circling, all 14 of the preservice teachers spoke or wrote of their newfound confidence in their writing abilities and elaborated on the changes in their identities as writers. Yet they were in agreement that they still did not feel confident in their ability to teach writing.

In the final discourse session, the preservice teachers spoke openly of their insecurities about being effective teachers of writing. As discourse continued, the conversation moved from their own insecurities to a critique of their internship teachers’ writing skills and styles of teaching writing. The conversation then turned to how the preservice teachers planned to teach writing in their own classrooms, with descriptions that encompassed the traits and skills of effective teachers of writing. Toward the end of the session, I asked the preservice teachers what their conversations have been about. They again reiterated their lack of confidence in their ability to teach writing. As we talked through the key points, they began to realize that they had the knowledge they needed to become effective teachers of writing and they had a plan for their future classrooms.

In the remaining weeks of the semester, the preservice teachers spoke positively of their identities as writers and many shared their plans to implement a full circling strategy in their own classrooms. The following semester the same group of students was enrolled in another course that I teach. Their writing identities continued to grow and

develop, and they appeared to be more confident in their ability to teach writing. Because of the shift in their writing identities, I chose to implement the full circling strategy with students in the next Language Arts Methods, Management, and Assessment class. I recently completed the first cycle of full circling with a new group of preservice teachers and experienced similar results in building writing identity. This led me to make the decision to include full circling as an integral part of the course content in coming semesters.

However the preservice teachers were not alone in experiencing a shift in identity. I had always believed that my teaching style encouraged active participation and knowledge building, but during the first cycle of full circling I came to realize that I was often guiding students rather than allowing them to build their own knowledge. When I stepped aside and gave students control, they were very tentative at first. As they grew confident in leading discourse, the discussions became richer and more in-depth. What began as uncomfortable long pauses turned into moments of reflection leading to further discussion and a deeper understanding of the importance of building a writing identity. Their stories encouraged me to reflect on my own identity as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing and resulted in changes in my practice.

The greatest lesson learned from this study was to trust that students are not only capable of building knowledge, but they can build knowledge based on their own needs. The preservice teachers' insights on identity as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing proved to be a learning experience for myself as well as for them. As mentioned in Chapter 5, one of the more telling comments came from a student who stated, "There

were so many instances in class when people would mention things and I would be amazed that I had never had the same thought. There were also times when I was surprised by what I, myself, said” (reflective journal entry, November 19, 2013). I, too, was amazed that I had never had the same thoughts as many of my students. Full circling became a learning experience for all of us.

### **Implications for Research**

The innovation proved to be very positive; however there are a few changes I would make in future cycles of full circling. First, I would incorporate more extensive instruction on reflective journaling. Although the preservice teachers were resistant to journaling, there were still many valuable insights that came from journal responses. Upon further exploration of the literature on reflective journaling, I discovered that students often do not have the skills necessary for meaningful reflection and tend to view journaling as an assignment rather than an opportunity for deep personal introspection. Incorporating more extensive instruction may provide preservice teachers with the needed skills and help them understand the importance of reflection. I would also design measures to monitor reflective journaling skills so I could provide individualized instruction as needed.

In addition, since the literacy courses I teach are sequential, I have the same students two semesters in a row and would therefore extend full circling to two semesters. As discussed below in the limitations of the study, 15 weeks is not a sufficient amount of time to have a major impact on the effects of past experiences in writing. The preservice teachers in the study demonstrated positive changes in their writing identities

over the course of the semester, but it is possible that a longer period for the innovation may have resulted in a greater impact on identity with time to develop more depth in reflection and discourse discussions.

There is also a need for more extensive research on the topic of writing identity. Stringer (2007) suggests action research is a means to “systematically investigate issues in diverse contexts and discover effective and efficient applications of more generalized practice” (p. 6). Based on existing gaps in the current literature on writing identity, it would be beneficial to explore the topic further in a variety of contexts. Possible questions to inform future research may be, “How, and to what extent, can writing identity be leveraged to improve skills of struggling writers?” or “How, and to what extent, might students benefit from building writing identity in academic content areas?” These questions extend writing identity beyond the scope of preservice teachers and into the classroom to directly benefit students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with any research study, there are limitations that should be noted. This study used a non-random purposeful-convenience sample that limits the generalizability of the results. In addition, the  $n$  in this action research study was small ( $n = 14$ ) which may have affected the outcome. With the limited number of participants, the discourse timeframe was very manageable and provided an opportunity for all of the preservice teachers to participate in each discourse session. Discourse could prove to be problematic with a large number of participants in a limited timeframe.

The Hawthorne Effect was a concern for this study since participants were the students in my class. They may have felt obligated to stay in the study and may have

given positive responses during discourse and on surveys because I was the instructor of the course. I kept field notes and a reflective journal on student behaviors related to the study and analyzed them for evidence of the Hawthorne Effect.

Experimenter Effect was also a concern in this study. As much as I tried to remain neutral to the events in the classroom, I may have unintentionally sent signals that could have biased the study. Students may have felt obligated to give responses they thought I wanted based upon my unconscious or unintentional verbal or non-verbal signals. To maximize validity, I used member checks to cross check codes for discourse and reflective journals. I also analyzed discourse tapes after each session to monitor any possible bias reflected in my tone of voice or any remarks I might have made during discourse in an attempt to alleviate as many distractors as possible. Throughout the study, I provided rich descriptions in field notes and in my reflective journal as part of an audit trail to provide documentary evidence of the steps and procedures related to my research study.

The most significant limitation was the length of the study. This study took place over the 15 weeks of a college semester, a relatively short period of time to expect major shifts in a writing identity. When students have had negative experiences in writing, it is difficult to counteract experiences that they have carried with them since childhood (Norman & Spencer, 2005). The negative experiences shape their belief systems and values and influence how they approach learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992). Although the preservice teachers in this study demonstrated positive shifts in their writing identities, it is not known if increasing the longevity of the study could have provided an opportunity for more profound growth in writing identity.

## **Reflection**

As I reflect back on this action research project, I realize that I was extremely fortunate to have an amazing group of preservice teachers who took on this project with integrity and enthusiasm. Their invaluable insights on writing identity helped me examine my own identity as a teacher, writer, and teacher of writing and resulted in changes in my practice that will benefit students for many years to come.

When the study began, I had a vague idea that writing identity was important in becoming an effective teacher of writing, but I had doubts as to the extent it could actually make a difference. As full circling progressed and the preservice teachers shifted from reciting book knowledge to building their own knowledge, a metamorphosis took place. They saw themselves as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, others saw them as teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, they met the role standards of teachers, writers, and teachers of writing, and their social behaviors were those of teachers, writers, and teachers of writing. They became teachers, writers, and teachers of writing.



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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL





**To:** Debby Zambo  
4701 West

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 07/17/2013

**Committee Action:** **Exemption Granted**

**IRB Action Date:** 07/17/2013

**IRB Protocol #:** 1306009359

**Study Title:** Preservice Teachers as Writers: Building Skills and Finding a Writing Identity  
Through Visual Imagery, Discourse, and Reflective Journaling

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B  
TEACHER/WRITER SURVEY

**Teacher/Writer Identity Survey:**

Rate each statement by selecting the answer that most closely represents your level of agreement

<b>Perception of Self as Writer</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel confident in my ability to express myself in writing.						
I'm not a good writer.						
I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.						
I'm feel nervous about my writing.						
I am a reflective writer.						
My mind seems to go blank when I start writing.						

<b>Perception of Writing</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Expressing my ideas through writing is a waste of time.						
It is important to develop strong writing skills.						
Writing is boring.						
More time should be spent on writing in our schools.						
There is too much emphasis placed on writing skills.						
Good writing takes practice						

<b>Ability to Teach Writing</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I have the skills needed to be an effective teacher of writing.						
I am afraid to teach writing.						
I feel confident in my ability to teach writing.						
I don't think I will be effective at teaching writing.						
I look forward to teaching and assessing writing.						
I don't need to be a proficient writer to teach writing.						

**Open Ended Questions:**

- 1) Describe a negative experience you have had in your writing history and how this contributes to the way you see yourself as a writer.
  
- 2) Describe a positive experience you have had in your writing history and how this contributes to the way you see yourself as a writer.