

“Project P6”:
**A Program-based Portfolio and Professional Development Project
to improve Pre-Service Teachers’ Writing Performance**

Project Summary & Impact

Effective writing instruction for pre-service teachers is important not only for the students’ academic success, but for their future students’ success as well. This QEP action plan proposes to improve pre-service teachers’ writing by: 1) providing professional development to faculty teaching courses in the preK-6 program; 2) engaging preK-6 faculty in the collaborative development of interrelated writing assignments focused on the central theme of diversity; and 3) developing a digital repository to facilitate interaction with student writing across the preK-6 program.

In the professional development sessions, participating and consulting faculty will share writing and teaching pedagogy, especially writing strategies that enhance students’ understanding of diversity. Focusing the content of student writing on a single theme, diversity, will engender rich dialog about the diversity and writing goals of the preK-6 program and spawn the development of writing assignments that build on one another requiring increasingly sophisticated research, writing, and reflection from students. Establishing a digital repository will allow students, faculty, and administrators (including QEP), to interact with student writing over time, across courses, using multiple modalities, and for myriad purposes. It will serve as a program-based electronic portfolio documenting preK-6 students’ writing and diversity-related development.

To assess the efficacy Project P6, a four-pronged assessment plan will be employed. Faculty and student reflection and evaluations will be collected at the end of each implementation through a group meeting (faculty) and online surveys (faculty and students). Students’ writing self-efficacy will be measured in pre and post-tests to determine if students’ writing confidence has been affected by the interventions. Finally, course instructors will grade students’ diversity-related writing assignments using the QEP rubric and record the percentage of students earning a 3 (meets standards) or above on each criteria.

Project P6 provides a model for inter-faculty professional development and the collaborative creation of theme-based interrelated writing assignments within an academic program. It results in the development of a program-based electronic portfolio, beneficial as a showcase to accrediting bodies and as a model for departments across the university. The project directly affects one thousand upper-level undergraduate students and since the digital repository can be used indefinitely once it is created, the project is sustainable as long as faculty are willing to meet and share ideas. It is hoped that future funding from the QEP or other sources will generate incentives for additional faculty to join this project, or ones similar, and increase their teaching skills through inter-departmental professional development and collaboration.

Project Proposal

The need to improve upper-division undergraduate students’ (pre-service teachers’) writing:

Old Dominion University selected disciplinary writing as the focus for its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). This focus resonates with faculty in the department of Teaching & Learning where weak writing skills are viewed as one culprit for poor student performance on required comprehensive exams. The importance of effective writing transcends academic requirements for these students, however, as they will become preK-12 teachers. Teachers’ writing skills and attitudes toward writing impact their ability to teach writing to their students. Teachers who are confident and competent writers are more likely to integrate writing into their lessons and utilize writing-to-learn strategies (Draper et al, 2000). Teachers who enjoy writing are more likely to pass their passion for writing onto their students (Street, 2003).

The most recent NAEP results (NCES, 2011) indicate a clear need for effective preK-12 writing instruction. Only 27% of 8th and 12th graders received proficient or better scores on the writing assessment. Despite these statistics, reports suggest the teaching and practice of writing in both k-12 and higher education settings is neglected and many students' writing experiences consist of little more than short replies requiring minimal thought (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003). Likewise, numerous studies suggest pre-service teachers do not receive adequate instruction in writing and teaching writing (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Meanwhile a study suggests pre-service teachers' self-perceptions as writers are formed in large part based on interactions with their instructors (Norman & Spencer, 2005). In fact, all the elements said to enhance pre-service teachers' writing confidence relate to their teachers and courses: opportunities for creative and self-reflective writing, a caring teacher, and positive feedback. A related study found negative feedback from teachers adversely impacts self-confidence in writing skills and leads to negative attitudes towards writing (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011). Clearly, the need for effective writing instruction for pre-service teachers is important not only for the students' academic success, but for their future students' success as well.

Overall vision

This QEP action plan will improve pre-service teachers' writing by:

- 1) providing professional development to faculty teaching courses in the preK-6 program,
- 2) engaging preK-6 faculty in the collaborative development of interrelated writing assignments, and
- 3) developing a digital repository to support interaction with student writing across the preK-6 program.

Faculty and graduate student consultants, mostly from outside the department of Teaching and Learning, will provide writing- and diversity-related professional development to preK-6 teacher preparation program faculty. These consultant-led collaborative sharing sessions will enhance faculty's understanding of diversity-related issues and provide strategies for supporting student writing. Although the consultants will lead the discussions, partner faculty will take an active role, sharing strategies for teaching writing and using writing to develop students' understanding of diversity, thus making the meetings truly collaborative and mutually beneficial.

After a series of professional development sessions, preK-6 course instructors will collaboratively develop interrelated diversity-focused writing and sharing assignments to be implemented in the preK-6 program. Completing this task requires faculty to first discuss and establish writing and diversity goals for the preK-6 program and then determine what objectives can be addressed in each course. Once course goals are set, faculty can develop writing assignments that align with the goals. Because the writing activities will be interrelated and focused on a central theme they can build on one another, requiring increasingly sophisticated research, writing and reflection from students as they progress through the program. In this way, faculty can ensure all six student learning outcomes assessed on the QEP rubric can be integrated into the writing and sharing assignments. Assignments requiring students to write, then share, then reflect on one another's writing provides added opportunities for students to practice these skills. Furthermore, feedback on students' writing will have value beyond the semester it is provided as students build on their previous work to master more complex objectives. Thus, the interrelatedness of assignments enhances the formative aspect of feedback provided to students, making it a more powerful learning tool.

In order to facilitate interaction with student writing across time and courses, a digital repository will be developed. Because the digital repository will house student writing from courses throughout the preK-6 program, it will function as a program-based electronic portfolio for writing and diversity-related development. The digital repository will allow students to interact with their own writing over time and with their peers' writing across courses. The repository's longevity provides numerous advantages. Too often potentially valuable feedback is discarded at the end of a course with students' papers. A permanent program-based portfolio ensures students can revisit feedback indefinitely and use it to inform their future

endeavors long after it is initially written. Furthermore, students are able to track their progress from semester to semester, examining evidence of their academic growth.

The shared repository promotes self-reflection as well as peer-to-peer reflection. Student writing entries can be tagged and sorted by a specified feature, for example a demographic factor, or an expertise rating. Students can then leverage the backgrounds and experiences of a wide variety of their peers, including those enrolled in different sections and courses. Instructors may choose to build these types of cross-course interactions into their writing assignments, especially as they provide opportunities to address the QEP learning outcomes e.g. synthesize information from multiple viewpoints, conduct research related to their peers' beliefs, and reflect on their own and their peers' understandings. The digital repository also supports multiple modalities for providing feedback to students (e.g. text or video) and makes it easy for feedback to be given at different intervals (draft or final) and for different purposes (writing vs ideas; formative vs summative). In short, the digital repository allows students and faculty to interact with student writing artifacts multiple times, in multiple ways, for multiple purposes. Finally this digital repository can be accessed by administrators, such as QEP or NCATE officials, wishing to see documentation of student achievement.

Sharing strategies to improve writing

Project P6 brings faculty within a program together to discuss student writing along a central theme – diversity. Focusing the content of student writing on a single theme promotes rich, in-depth conversation from faculty as they grapple with effective writing strategies to help students master related goals. In other words, participating faculty will have the common goals of improving writing and increasing students' understanding of diversity, so they will benefit directly from sharing ideas and resources. Focusing on a central theme will also result in the development of a sequence of writing assignments, each requiring a more sophisticated level of research and reflection from students. So, students' writing skills and conceptual understandings can be monitored across semesters, and higher expectations can be established as students progress through the program. In this way, instructors build upon each other's work.

The theme of diversity was selected for a number of reasons. First, the population that schools educate is increasingly made up of children of color and Hispanic origin, while the population that educates these children remains largely Caucasian (Feistritzer, 2011; NCES, 2012). A significant achievement gap exists between students from low-income and minority backgrounds and their white, Asian, and middle-class peers. Research suggests white, middle class teachers are poorly prepared to effectively teach students from minority and low income backgrounds (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, Richards, 2006). Secondly, this focus on diversity aligns with department goals and the new mission for the Darden College of Education promoted by Dean, Linda DeVitis, to address “critical issues across Hampton Roads” and benefit “the lives of children and families and their communities” (DeVitis, 2012). Finally, diversity learning is listed as a high-impact education practice by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Kuh, 2005).

The central theme promotes inter-class collaboration so students can engage in discussion, research, peer-reviewing, and editing across sections and courses utilizing the digital repository, giving students access to peers with varying levels of experience and expertise. Pursuant to the diversity objectives, students can interact with a more diverse group of peers, especially when small sections can be homogenous. In terms of writing and writing pedagogy, using a common theme and repository increases students' opportunities to give and receive feedback, especially with a level of anonymity, which can be beneficial in peer reviews.

The primary strategy employed in this study is the use of a program-based digital portfolio supporting interaction with student writing across courses and semesters. The lead faculty, in cooperation with consultants, will develop the digital repository using existing technological applications (e.g. Drupal). The repository will allow:

- Faculty to provide formative and summative feedback (text or multimodal) on student work

- Students/faculty/administrators to track student writing across the entire preK-6 program
- Students to record (and later access) reflections (text or multimodal) on their work
- Students to provide formative feedback (text or multimodal) on other students' work across classes
- Students/faculty to "tag" student work so it can be accessed by theme, course, semester, instructor, or demographic variables for research or analysis purposes

It is expected that many writing strategies will arise from the professional development and planning sessions that are the heart of this proposal. Several such strategies arose in a current study implemented to pilot the activities planned for Project P6. In the pilot study, three instructors for TLED 301 met for three, 2-hour professional development sessions with faculty and graduate student serving as diversity and writing consultants. After two initial meetings focused on increasing faculty's understanding of diversity-related topics (e.g. identity development, intersectionality, power, culturally responsive teaching), the team met to share writing assignments tied to diversity-related objectives. Many excellent writing activities were suggested that allow students to practice the learning outcomes evaluated in the QEP rubric in low-risk environments. Several of these focused on peer interaction facilitated through web 2.0 technologies (e.g. VoiceThread, Blogs, wikis, screen casts, commenting/rating features within these tools), including:

- Faculty use web 2.0 tools to engage students in collective pre-writing activities within and across classes. E.g. Students post pro/con arguments, or position statements, on a VoiceThread prior to writing a position paper
- Students use web 2.0 tools to research and analyze opinions within and across classes. E.g. Students post an image that represents diversity on a class blog. Students analyze the entire class response or draw comparisons between specific posts/groups of posts.
- Students use web 2.0 tools provide formative feedback /peer reviews on one another's work. E.g. 1) students post comments (qualitative) or a rubric (quantitative) to provide feedback to their peers on scaffolded assignments e.g. theses, outlines, formal drafts etc; 2) Students use "rating buttons" to indicate when other students' work is exemplary, thought-provoking etc.

The uses of web 2.0 tools described here can be integrated into the digital repository planned for Project P6. As such, the repository can be a forum for both formal and informal writing activities.

The TLED 301 course instructors involved in the pilot study are currently developing a writing and sharing assignment to be implemented this spring. The project leader and the writing/technology consultant will develop a WordPress site to support the assignment and serve as a mini, course-based digital repository for the students' work. This smaller scale model will inform the development of the larger digital repository required for Project P6.

As was the case in the pilot study, several of the faculty participating in Project P6 have expertise using technology applications to support student interaction. The formal professional development sessions and informal sharing sessions will give participating faculty plenty of opportunities to help one another learn and practice these new tools.

Assessment plan

To assess the efficacy Project P6, a four-pronged assessment plan will be employed to assess 1) faculty reflections, 2) student evaluations, 3) students' writing self-efficacy, and 4) student writing performance. The PI will lead and monitor project activities to ensure professional development sessions are held, lessons are designed and implemented, and assignments are completed by students. Process evaluation sessions will be held at the end of the fall and spring semesters to encourage participating faculty to reflect on the progress and outcomes of the project and to devise revisions for future implementations. Specifically, faculty will be asked to reflect on the effectiveness of the professional development sessions, their diversity- and writing-related class activities, the writing and sharing assignment for their course, and the digital repository design and platform. Special emphasis will be put on faculty ideas for using the digital repository to promote increased peer-to-peer interaction and

student self-reflection on writing activities. A follow-up open-ended survey will be used to ensure documentation of faculty evaluations.

Web-based surveys will assess students’ reaction to the project including: students’ diversity-related attitudes, student evaluation of their course writing and sharing assignment, student evaluation of the informal writing activities (peer review, collective brainstorming and pre-writing, etc), and student evaluation of the digital repository- both technically and pedagogically. Students’ writing self-efficacy (Pajares, Johnson & Usher, 2007) will be measured in all participating classes pre- and post intervention. Comparisons will be made between courses to determine if students developed greater self-efficacy from the use of any particular writing strategies. Follow up questions will help identify which strategies students found to be most effective. These results will be shared with the participating faculty after the first round of implementation so instructors can tweak their class activities to reflect students’ preferences.

The most critical assessment will come from students’ performance on the diversity-related writing and sharing assignments for each course. Instructors will use the QEP rubric to assess students’ writing performance on all six student learning outcomes. The percent of students receiving a score of 3 (meets expectations) or higher on each criteria will be recorded. Results will be compared across courses to determine if any writing assignments resulted in higher proficiency rates. Additionally, the scores of students who completed two courses with participating faculty will be compared to the scores of students taking only one course to examine any cumulative effects of the writing activities.

Project impact

Within the preK-6 Teacher preparation program there is need for faculty to discuss the coherence and sequence of interrelated course objectives across the curriculum and to consider how critical components of teacher education, specifically writing and skills and understanding of diversity, are addressed in specific courses within the program. Project P6 will be a catalyst for such discussions. It will help establish program-related goals as they relate to writing and diversity and coherence in the diversity- and writing-related course objectives and assignments for the preK-6 program overall.

Six Teaching & Learning faculty teaching courses in the preK-6 program will participate, four of which have already committed to the project. Two additional faculty members will be selected from current, or hopefully, incoming faculty. Involving at least one of the three incoming preK-6 faculty is especially desirable, so the final selections will be made after the incoming faculty have been hired. Approximately one thousand undergraduate students will be directly affected by Project P6. The TLED 301 courses are large and the participating instructor teaches three sections. The participating instructor for TLED 430 determines the curriculum for all sections so every student taking this course would benefit. The remaining three TLED courses have approximately 20 students per section, with at least two sections taught per semester.

Course	TLED 301	TLED 430	TLED 479	TLED 432	TLED 435	TOTAL
Instructor(s)	Kidd	Sommerfeldt	TBD	TBD	Suh, Butler	
# of students (Fall ‘13 + Spring ’14)	280	480	80	80	80	1000

Project P6 models curriculum alignment for diversity- and writing-related objectives and the development of theme-based interrelated writing assignments across programs. It will serve as an example for other teacher-prep programs in Teaching & Learning and possibly for other programs within the college and beyond. It will result in the development of a program-based electronic portfolio, beneficial as a showcase to accrediting bodies such as NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education), and a model for other departments.

Sustainability

Once the digital repository planned for Project P6 is created, it can be used indefinitely. Accordingly, the project is sustainable as long as faculty are willing to meet and share ideas. It is hoped that future funding from the QEP or other sources will generate incentives for additional faculty to join this project, or ones similar, and increase their teaching skills through inter-departmental professional development and collaboration.

Budget

A small pilot project supported by the Center for Learning Technologies is currently being executed to test the methodology of Project P6 on a small scale. Three instructors of one course (TLED 301) in the preK-6 program participated along with consulting faculty and graduate students from other departments. The funds (\$3000) provided stipends for the participating faculty and consultants to meet for professional development sessions and to develop a shared writing assignment for TLED 301, and for the lead faculty to develop a small scale digital repository that supported the common writing and sharing activity for the courses. The results of the pilot study will be used to inform Project P6 in terms of tested writing strategies, the outcomes of the common writing and sharing assignment, the organization of faculty sharing sessions, and the development and beneficial uses of the larger scale digital repository.

Funds for Project P6 are requested to pay stipends for participating faculty, consulting faculty and graduate students, and one outside consultant, and to support participating faculty travel to present Project P6 research and receive writing-related professional development at conferences. A small amount is allocated for supplies.

Itemized Proposed Budget:			
Budget Item	Qty	Cost	Total
Lead Faculty (PI) Stipend (lead 13 meetings, monitor process, analyze data, develop and support digital repository, provide training): Jennifer Kidd	1	\$2000	\$2000
Partner Faculty Stipend (attend 13 meetings, develop and implement writing assignment in Fall 2013 and Spring 2014): Jody Sommerfeldt, Brandon Butler, Yonghee Suh, two other T & L faculty – TBD	5	\$1000	\$5000
Travel for Participating Faculty (\$1500/participant to travel to and present at a conference related to the QEP project)	6	\$1500	\$9000
Consulting Faculty Stipends – Diversity: Alonzo Flowers (Ed Leadership), Jeff Toussaint (Sociology) - (provide professional development @ \$75/hr for 6 hours)	2	\$450	\$900
Consulting Faculty Stipend – Writing & Technology: Shelley Rodrigo (English) (provide professional development and technical support @ \$75/hr for 10 hours)	1	\$750	\$750
Graduate Student Consultant Stipend – Diversity & Writing: Mitsue Blythe (Ed Leadership), Wendy Scott (T & L) (provide professional development @ \$50/hr for 6 hours)	2	\$300	\$600
Technology Consultant: TBD - (provide technical support in the development of the digital repository @ \$100/hr for 5 hrs)	1	\$500	\$500
Project-related Supplies (refreshments for meetings, small equipment e.g. headsets for faculty, web 2.0 tool fees/subscriptions)	1	\$300	\$300
TOTAL			\$19,150

Timeline of Proposed Activities

Participating faculty will meet over the summer to receive professional development from the consultants and to develop inter-related writing and sharing assignments for students in the preK-6 teacher education program. The digital repository will be developed over the summer as well so faculty can receive training prior to the start of the fall semester. Two implementation rounds will occur, one in fall, and one in spring, with analysis of assessment data and reflection after each round. The following timeline describes the planned activities in detail.

Time	Activity(ies)	Participant(s)	Purpose/Details
July 2013	Lessons learned from pilot study; Goal setting/ alignment	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Lead faculty shares results of the pilot study -Establish writing and diversity-related learning goals for preK-6 program and individual courses
July 2013	Faculty Training and Sharing	Lead/Partner Faculty; Diversity Consultants	-Diversity consultants provide professional development for preK-6 instructors.
July 2013	Faculty Training and Sharing	Lead/Partner Faculty; Diversity & Writing/ Tech Consultants	-Brainstorm and share writing activities aligned with diversity-related goals.
July 2013	Independent Work	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Each faculty develops a writing and sharing assignment that addresses all six QEP learning outcomes
July 2013	Faculty Training and Sharing	Writing/Tech Consultant	-Participating faculty share assignment ideas, receive feedback from the writing consultant, examine coherence and sequence of writing assignments across preK-6 program
August 2013	Independent Work	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Each faculty revises writing assignment based on feedback
August 2013	Independent /Group Work	Lead Faculty; Writing/ Tech Consultant	-Design digital repository to support writing and sharing assignments
August 2013	Faculty Training	Lead/Partner Faculty; Writing/ Tech Consultant	-Presentation of digital repository -Faculty training on use -Revisions to repository based on feedback
Fall 2013	Course Implementation	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Students complete writing and sharing assignments, post work in the digital repository -Faculty grade student work using QEP rubric -Pre- and post-test students' diversity attitudes & writing self-efficacy -Develop and post student evaluation surveys
December 2013	Process Evaluation; Faculty Sharing	All participants invited to attend	-Reflect on effectiveness of project activities: professional development, writing strategies and assignments, digital repository design and use, etc. -Faculty complete evaluation survey
December 2013	Student Learning Outcome Evaluation	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Student survey data analyzed -Student scores on writing assignments compiled to determine percentage of students scoring 3 (meets standards) or above on each criterion in the QEP
December 2013	Independent Work	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Faculty revise their assignments based on student learning outcomes from fall
Spring 2014	Course Implementation	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Course Implementation as described above (with revised activities/assignments)
Spring 2014	Faculty attend conferences; Share what was learned	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Present related research at conference -Learn and subsequently share new strategies for improving student writing
May 2014	Student Learning Outcome Evaluation	Lead/Partner Faculty	-Analyze results as described for Fall 2013 -Compare writing performance of students completing two participating courses with those completing one
May 2014	Project Evaluation; Faculty Sharing	All participants invited to attend	-Reflection on and evaluation of project activities -Generate suggestions for sustaining/ expanding Project P6

Project P6 will be led by an instructor with six years experience using technology to support student writing. It will provide training and foster collaboration between six preK-6 faculty members and over one thousand preK-6 students to improve undergraduate student writing. Student writing artifacts will document the six QEP learning outcomes and be accessible to project faculty and QEP staff through the preK-6 digital repository. The project and repository will serve as models for other departments throughout the university.

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Letter of support provided by Charlene Fleener, Department of Teaching & Learning



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January 31, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write this letter in support of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) project developed by faculty in the Teaching & Learning Department. Dr. Jennifer Kidd has taken the lead on this project and is basing the design upon a previously successful pilot project. This proposal promises to provide opportunities for candidates in the PreK-6 Teacher Preparation programs to develop their writing skills and expertise within disciplines and considering diversity. The project will include preparing a repository for writing products that will be easily accessible for both candidates and instructors for providing feedback and advice for refining submissions. Through the interchange candidates should develop greater skill and confidence in their own writing abilities as they move through the courses taught by participating faculty. Faculty will have opportunities to consider how writing instruction can be improved upon through the collaboration afforded by weaving projects through several courses using a common repository.

To be effective teachers of writing and to confidently employ disciplinary writing within their own classrooms, candidates must have well developed writing skills themselves. They must understand how to provide meaningful feedback that is useful to the writer for appropriate revision and editing. The proposed project would provide rich opportunities to build these skills and expertise through several courses.

After reviewing the proposal, the department is fully committed to sharing in the stated effort of the involved faculty members as outlined in the schedule of completion and the budget justification. Our mission is "to prepare professional educators, conduct research, and provide service to the greater community of learners."

This project has my fullest support and endorsement.

Sincerely,

Charlene Fleener, Ed.D., Chair
Department of Teaching & Learning

