

A New Era of English Teacher Preparation? Findings from a National Survey

A proposal for the 2013-2014 Conference on English Education Research Initiative

## A New Era of English Teacher Preparation? Findings from a National Survey

The call for proposals for the CEE 2013-2014 *Research Initiative* asks the following questions:

- What constitutes an effective or innovative English/language arts education licensure program and how do we know?
- How does English/language arts education practice compare to various accreditation agency expectations?
- What are the relationships between research-supported English/language arts education pedagogies and effective secondary teaching?
- What are the connections/disconnections between the Common Core State Standards and research-based English/language arts teacher education?

These questions all assume that we know what English language arts teacher education looks like. Unfortunately, we do not. The last comprehensive study of “how English teachers get taught” was done by Smagorinsky and Whiting in their early 1990s collection and analysis of eighty-one English methods syllabi from public universities in the United States. Most research published on English methods courses since then has focused on specific aspects of one or a few programs. Our own review of the research literature on how English methods courses have addressed the curricular, cultural, economic and technological changes facing teachers since 1995 indicates very little research on how methods courses address most of the above-mentioned challenges, with the exception of technological changes (\_\_\_\_\_).

We are currently conducting a mixed-methods, national study of how English teachers are prepared, with data gathered through surveys, syllabi, and interviews of English educators. We request assistance from the CEE Research Initiative on conducting an advanced statistical analysis of the survey data that will enable us to ask more sophisticated questions of that data.

Our overall study replicates some of the questions Smagorinsky and Whiting asked about underlying theories, course readings, and activities in English Language Arts teacher preparation programs, but also focuses on 21<sup>st</sup>-century themes spotlighted in CEE position statements. Our combination of data sources and analyses will create a well-rounded portrait of how teachers are prepared that will provide a foundation for research on the effectiveness of different types and aspects of programs on teacher development and student outcomes.

Our national survey of English educators collected information on the institutional requirements and parameters of English education programs, details about the methods courses, and programmatic responses to changing conditions. We also requested that respondents submit methods course syllabi for qualitative analysis. At this moment, we have completed collecting survey data, and have a first pass at the quantitative analysis. We are continuing to analyze the qualitative responses to open-ended questions, and have begun to analyze the syllabi. according to a codebook we developed for this study. We intend to conduct focus group interviews during the coming school year. The grant from CEE would enable us to complete our quantitative analysis of the survey.

### *Aims of the Research*

1. Provide a current portrait of English teacher preparation, both at the level of the methods course(s) taken by teacher candidates and at the level of the program within which these courses are housed.
2. Trace the changes in concept and practice that have taken place in English teacher education programs since 1995 in response to changes in concepts of teaching literacy, accountability pressures at both the university and secondary school levels, standards-based reforms at the national and state

levels, the increased availability and use of technology both in and out of schools, increased cultural and economic diversity in classrooms, and pressures to get teacher candidates into the field earlier.

*Questions to Be Addressed*

1. How do programs differ in the opportunities they provide for teacher candidates to gain expertise in content and methods, both among institutions and between programs within institutions?
2. How do English language arts methods courses prepare teacher candidates to teach secondary English language arts in a changing curricular, cultural, political and economic context?
3. What opportunities exist for practicing the craft of teaching, both in courses and in the field? How are these opportunities related to coursework?
4. How do English teacher preparation programs respond to curricular and policy prompts for change?

*Importance of the Questions for the Organization*

Researchers inquiring into questions related to English teacher preparation currently lack a comprehensive view of what the status quo consists of (necessary to investigating innovation), the research base underlying current coursework (necessary to answering questions relating research-based methods to effective teaching), and how current coursework aligns with accreditation and teacher preparation standards. This study will provide a nationwide view of the response to recent calls for change in English teacher education put forth by CEE and NCTE. This study will also illuminate the extent of persistence and change in the philosophies, frameworks, and definitions of effective practice in English education outlined by Smagorinsky and Whiting in 1995. Because of the multi-focal nature of our questions, we fully expect that the results of this study will raise significant questions about these changes and their effects on student learning that will interest larger funders, such as the Spencer Foundation and IES.

*Literature Review*

*English teacher preparation.*

We have conducted a review of the research literature on English methods courses published in field-relevant journals since 1995 (████████████████████). We defined the ELA methods course in alignment with the Conference on English Education (CEE) as a class for preservice English Education majors that focuses on the representation and teaching of ELA content and involves inquiry into the beliefs or opinions of its participants regarding concepts of ELA at the secondary/middle school levels, the planning of lessons or courses of study, and classroom management related to the subject-area methods (CEE, 2008).

CEE position statements since 1995 have called for greater coherence in English education programs and redefinitions of methods course work (CEE 2005/2008; Dickson et al., 2006), better integration of field and university experiences (NCTE Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification, 2006; Dickson et al., 2006), more comprehensive support for culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the English classroom (Boyd et al., 2006; CEE 2005), and calls for increasing integration of technology with both English teaching and English teacher preparation (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema & Whiting, 2006; NCTE, 2008). Since 1995, there have been two rewrites of the NCTE teacher preparation guidelines (NCTE Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification 1996; 2006), and multiple revisions of the standards from those guidelines used in NCATE accreditation (e.g., NCTE, 2003; NCTE 2012).

We found that the research in English language arts teacher preparation over this time period included studies in few of these areas. Instead, researchers investigated effective means of teaching specific ELA methods, the development of English teacher identity during the preservice period, and studies of the methods course as a context or in the context of a larger program. How to teach methods to preservice teachers is certainly a valid topic for research on methods courses, as is

the development of teacher identity. However, in looking over this initial review, the authors found it of note that little research had been done on issues of concern raised in the CEE policy statements and on many of the 21st century influences on teacher education outlined above. The only focal topics that received much attention in the research literature were the teaching of literacy skills, whether in or out of methods courses, and integrating technology.

*Teacher preparation more generally.* The calls for reform in CEE policy statements parallel research on teacher preparation more generally. In response to critiques of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Grossman, 2008), universities have attempted to create programmatic contexts that meet the specific needs of beginning teachers. These include work on developing a vision for teaching the subject matter, developing the specific knowledge of the subject matter needed for teaching, understanding how learners learn, and how culture and context influence their learning, and having opportunities to apply this knowledge in developing a beginning repertoire, and learning to study their own teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The methods course cannot accomplish the totality of this work. Therefore, the aim of this project is to reimagine what it is the field knows about the teaching of method courses within the context of the larger program and associated field experiences. In conducting this multi-faceted research project, a comprehensive 7-12 English teacher education picture begins to take shape.

#### *Data*

The CEE Methods Commission National Survey consisted of four sections. Section I focused on how programs are structured, and included questions on types of courses taken, the extent and nature of field experiences offered, what subject-specific methods courses are required and who teaches them, and what programs are offered among bachelors, post-baccalaureate, Masters and alternative routes to certification. Section II asked how methods instructors were addressing CEE's calls to address disciplinary literacy instruction, content-area standards, changing demographics, and changing technologies. Section III asked how programs were responding to two types of changes: conceptual and curricular changes in the field (e.g., addressing the needs of English language learners, responding to changing conceptions of teaching and learning) and political and institutional changes ranging from new program assessments to financial challenges. Section IV collected information about our respondents.

Developing and disseminating the survey took almost two years. The first year was spent developing a contact list for programs that are on record as preparing English teachers for licensure. We identified over 1000 programs, but only 747 had one or more identifiable contacts for English education. We distributed surveys to 942 educators. We received responses from 236 institutions, representing all areas of the United States. As all of the responding institutions reported having subject-specific methods courses, we conclude that the survey is skewed towards larger programs that have some commitment to subject-specific pedagogy.

#### *Methods of Analysis*

To this date, we have completed a first pass through the data to collect the descriptive statistics. We know that 75% of our respondents have more than one type of program (e.g., bachelors, post-baccalaureate, Masters, alternative), and which are most common. We know the great majority of programs responding require at least four credits of subject-specific methods, indicating that taking one methods course before student teaching is no longer the default mode. We have frequency data for the different categories of course content we investigated, such as whether addressing language diversity is done through readings and lectures or working with students in field experiences. We also have findings indicating that almost all methods courses address the state K-12 content standards in assignments and field experiences, a finding that is not evident from either the scholarly literature or the syllabi we collected. However, what we were not able to do with our limited funding is do the analysis of how these elements are connected.

We wish to dig more deeply into our data to consider 1) significance and 2) connections among categories. This requires expert help. We are asking for funds to hire consultants at Michigan State University's Center for Statistical Training and Consulting (CSTAT). [REDACTED] at CSTAT helped us process the survey and ran the descriptive tests for the findings we have thus far. He would oversee the work of a graduate student staff member to do the statistical tests for this stage of the analysis.

Among the questions we wish to investigate:

1. We have information on how each of four different types of programs leading to certification (bachelors, post-baccalaureate, Masters and alternative) are structured in relation to courses taken, extent and types of field experiences, and how programs address 21st-century issues. Are the differences we observe in, for example, student teaching placements or where the needs of English language learners are addressed statistically significant?
2. We have questions related to the integration of field and course work in several places in the survey, as well as questions related to number of hours of field experience, expectations for what takes place in field experiences, and questions related to 21st-century content that ask if knowledge is applied in the field. Using these questions to connect field and course experiences in an articulate matter is a goal for this next level of analysis.
3. Is there a connection between where methods courses are located (in colleges of education or in English departments) and the ways in which methods courses address struggling readers and writers, state standards and assessments, the needs of English language learners, connections to field experiences, and different types of information technology?
4. When considering how programs have dealt with recent changes coming from political initiatives, changes in accreditation protocols, institutional and state assessment initiatives, and financial challenges, what kinds of responses tend to be made by larger vs. smaller programs? Those located in English departments vs. colleges of education?

These are just a few of the questions we have of our survey data, questions that involve the use of inferential statistics to explore whether and how variables are related.

The results of this survey analysis will provide background for the ongoing qualitative analyses that are part of the larger project: the qualitative coding and interpretation of the open-ended responses to this survey, the coding and analysis of the syllabi collected with the survey, and focus-group interviews with subsets of participants. The principal investigators on this project are experienced qualitative researchers with the ability to carry out these tasks.

In the meantime, we have divided responsibility for qualitative analysis of open-ended questions among the five PIs. Open-ended responses have made clear the importance of context in English language arts programs. Because our study highlights the fact that English teachers are prepared through a broad range of certification routes, we are able to trace the ways in which programmatic context affects the kinds of experiences that prospective teachers have while in their preparation program. Our analysis of these open-ended questions will help us to construct more nuanced for the continuing quantitative analysis.

#### *Plans for Dissemination of Findings.*

These findings will both provide material for future presentations and papers and a needed foundation for future research on the effectiveness of English teacher preparation. We have already presented at the CEE summer conference on the descriptive findings of the survey so far, and will be presenting the results of analysis of the open-ended questions at NCTE in the fall. We foresee continuing presentations at NCTE conferences as the larger study continues. We will disseminate the results of the full analysis of the survey in the Council Chronicle, and we are investigating the possibilities of online dissemination of the research on NCTE forums and the NCLE website, as well as in *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Conference on English Education*, and other academic journals

related to teacher research and higher education. In the future, we seek to not only identify the differences between approaches to preparing English teachers, but to investigate the differences such differences make through investigating how graduates differ in teaching practices, and how this influences student learning.

*References:*

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Work Plan

Code and analyze open-ended survey responses and refine questions	October-December, 2013
Work with senior analyst to finalize questions	January 2014
Work with senior analyst and CSTAT staff member to run appropriate tests	February-March 2014
Analysis and interpretation of survey results	March-April 2014
Write written report on survey for <i>Council Chronicle</i>	May-June 2014
Present final results on survey and syllabus Analysis at NCTE	November, 2014

New Era of English Teacher Preparation 8

CLIENT(s): ██████████  
 PROJECT DATES (required): 01/01/2014-03/31/201  
 DUE DATE: 9/22/2013  
 CLIENT'S GRANTOR: Nat'l Council of Teachers of English  
 PROJECT TITLE: Conference on English Education Research Initiative  
 CSTAT BID #: 14-102.1 CSTAT CASE ID: 14.102

<u>Staff</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Salary</u>	<u>YEAR 1</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
██████████, Sr. Statistician	AN	0.80%	\$95,093	\$761	\$761
<b>TOTAL STAFF SALARIES:</b>				<b>\$761</b>	<b>\$761</b>

<u>Graduate Research Assistants</u>	<u>Months</u>	<u>Rate</u>	<u>No Stu</u>	<u>YEAR 1</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Half-time RA TBN	1.07	\$1,852.00	1	\$1,982	\$1,982
<b>TOTAL GRAD ASSISTANT SALARIES:</b>				<b>\$1,982</b>	<b>\$1,982</b>

<b>TOTAL SALARIES:</b>	<b>\$2,743</b>	<b>\$2,743</b>
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<u>Fringe Benefits</u>	<u>SI Rate</u>			<u>YEAR 1</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
██████████, Sr. Statistician	0.3324	-	-	\$253	\$253
<u>(per RA student)</u>	<u>SUM</u>	<u>FALL</u>	<u>SP</u>		
Health	\$0		\$192	\$192	\$192
<b>TOTAL FRINGE BENEFITS:</b>				<b>\$445</b>	<b>\$445</b>

<b>TOTAL SALARIES AND FRINGES:</b>	<b>\$3,188</b>	<b>\$3,188</b>
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<u>Other - Beginning----&gt;</u>	<u>SUM</u>	<u>FALL</u>	<u>SP</u>		
Tuition/Fees			\$664	\$664	\$664



New Era of English Teacher Preparation 9

<b>TOTAL OTHER:</b>		<b>\$664</b>	<b>\$664</b>
<b>Supplies and Services</b>	Total Annualized FTE = 0.064		
Project supplies (\$1,748/FTE per year * Total Annualized FTE)		\$94	\$94
Software licenses (\$889/FTE per year * Total Annualized FTE)		\$48	\$48
<b>TOTAL SUPPLIES AND SERVICES:</b>		<b>\$142</b>	<b>\$142</b>
<b>TOTAL DIRECT COST (TDC)</b>		<b>\$3,994</b>	<b>\$3,994</b>
MTDC (TD < Tuition/Fees, Equip, Subcont)		\$3,330	\$3,330
Indirect Cost	0.0% of MTDC	\$0	\$0
<b>TOTAL COST</b>		<b>\$3,994</b>	<b>\$3,994</b>

Annotation:

We would be working with Michigan State University's Center for Statistical Training and Consulting (CSTAT). CSTAT prepared this budget based on their policies; see their budget justification below. We are requesting \$3, 994.

The senior statistician mentioned in the proposal, [REDACTED], ran the prior quantitative analysis of survey data, when [REDACTED] had an internal grant to fund the work, and is very familiar with our survey. Considering the size of the CEE grant, we decided that having [REDACTED] supervise the work of a graduate student statistical consultant would provide the best use of CEE funds. With careful planning and prioritizing of research questions, we should greatly extend the previous analysis with these resources.

New Era of English Teacher Preparation 10

**Michigan State University**  
CSTAT Budget Justification

NCTE  
Conference on English Education Research Initiative  
January 1, 2014 to March 31, 2014

- I. Personnel:** ██████████ an annual year MSU employee, working 2% over the life of the project (half of a percent annualized), will provide oversight to a graduate research assistant (RA), who will provide statistical analysis and data. The RA will work 22.7% effort over the life of the project which is the same as 68% of one month's stipend.
- II. Fringe Benefits:** It is MSU policy to use the Specific Identification method to calculate fringe benefit amounts. Fringe benefits include: FICA, worker's compensation, health insurance, dental insurance, retirement, life insurance, longevity pay increments, disability insurance, unemployment insurance and tuition remission. RA benefits include a prorated portion of health insurance and tuition.
- III. Supplies and Services:** CSTAT maintains a suite of specialized, state-of-the-art statistical software for use in grant funded work, allowing for added flexibility and security in our data analysis. The portion of this software's cost related to this project has been allocated to the budget.
- IV. Indirect Costs:** MSU's on-campus indirect cost rate of 53.5% for research projects is supported by a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) letter and has been applied to the Total Modified Direct Costs.