



NCTE Journals and the Teacher-Author: Who and What Gets Published

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While conducting research on professional development, the National Writing Project, and teachers as writers over the last several years, I have become increasingly intrigued by the rich tradition of teacher-authors in English education and the paths by which K–12 classroom teachers come to publish articles about their work. I became curious, for example, about the extent to which articles by classroom teachers are published in peer-reviewed journals in language arts relative to articles by university-based researchers. I wondered, too, about the nature of teachers' contributions to those journals. Seeking answers, I undertook a project to clarify the extent and character of contributions classroom teachers have made to three journals that have become the standard-bearers for scholarship directly applicable to language arts classrooms: *Language Arts* at the elementary level, *Voices from the Middle* at the middle school level, and *English Journal* at the secondary level, particularly high school. I think this information can help us not only to know ourselves and our profession better but, more importantly, to also consider how we instantiate in our publications the priorities and problems of our field, how we invite teachers to make their work public, and how the different kinds of participants in language arts scholarship—classroom teachers, university researchers, and

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others—are variously situated within our literature. Especially with the increasing influence of teacher inquiry movements across the past two decades (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goswami & Stillman, 1987), the voices of classroom teachers have become valued and important parts of the canon of scholarship in language arts, with articles by teachers comprising a growing—and, in teacher inquiry circles, celebrated—portion of the published literature of the profession. Insofar as those articles appear in NCTE journals (and I am mindful that *English Journal* first appeared in 1912, just one year after the birth of NCTE in 1911), NCTE has thus played an important role in disseminating the voices of teachers across the field through publication and in shaping the published literature of the field in a way that prized classroom experience and insight.

Whether teachers should write and, if so, how teachers should write has been a pertinent topic in the language arts community at least since the advent of process and social approaches to the teaching of writing in the late 1960s and 1970s. This discussion surfaced most notably, for example, in a series of articles appearing in *English Journal* in 1990 and 1991 debating whether, as was increasingly claimed throughout the 1980s, “teachers of writing must also write” (Christenbury, 1990; Jost, 1990a, 1990b; Krest, 1990; Robbins, 1992; “Should Writing,” 1991; “Why Writing,” 1990), in which teachers expressed a range of opinions. A subsequent article in the *Quarterly of the National Writing Project* (Gillespie, 1991) articulated the position of many within the National Writing Project, which had in the 10 years leading up to the *English Journal* exchange been a main proponent of the notion that teachers of writing should also write. Gillespie cites three reasons teachers should write: first, “when teachers write, we establish our own authority” (p. 4); second, writing helps teachers “expand our repertoire of useful responses to students” (p. 5); third, demonstrating that we can do what we teach enhances teacher professionalism (p. 6). Interestingly, none of these reasons has to do with the contributions teachers might make to the field through publication; they focus instead on the benefits that individual teachers gain through the process of writing.

Despite the barriers to teacher publication, which include not only constraints of the classroom context but also the conventions of the academic article and its status as an instrument of scholarly discourse (Burton, 2005; Casanave & Vandrick, 2003; Fecho, 2003), many classroom teachers have published articles. In many cases these publications come as a result of participation in professional development that encourages writing and publishing. Writing by teachers is already a prominent feature of some of the most influential and pervasive professional development efforts in lan-



guage arts—work undertaken, for example, by the National Writing Project (NWP), now serving over 130,000 teachers at its 200 sites nationwide; by the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, which now numbers approximately 300 teachers and has led to hundreds of teacher-authored publications in books and journals; and by the many and varied teacher-research initiatives underway across the nation. When I was a high school teacher, I was fortunate to publish two small articles in Bread Loaf and NWP publications as an outcome of my participation in those two networks, and this, too, influenced my interest in these issues (indeed, it influenced my decision to enter the field of English education altogether).

There is some empirical research that has examined teachers who write about their teaching, whether for publication or for some other outcome. This literature focuses exclusively on the writing as it affects individual teachers rather than on the questions of the influence that teacher-authored publications might have on the field. Robbins (1996), for example, studied the writing and teaching lives of four teachers, finding that writing or even identifying oneself as a writer does not necessarily mean that the writing will result in a process-based approach to teaching writing (as has often been implied) or even that it will affect one's teaching at all. I became interested in the reasons teachers undertake writing for publication and how their publication experiences affect (if at all) the way they think about and teach writing. Since the National Writing Project (NWP) has had such an influence on teachers as active professional writers and since so much of my work has originated within NWP, I began with a small qualitative study of the publication experiences of teachers within the NWP context. That study highlighted the importance of the NWP network as a counternormative space that facilitated changes in authors' senses of authority and of audience (Whitney, in press-b). Next, I turned my attention to the field beyond the NWP network to consider language arts teachers more generally. How much of what I had learned had to do with the particular and remarkable atmosphere of the NWP, and how much might be true for any language arts teacher working in an elementary or secondary classroom who elected to open up his or her classroom door through publishing about practice? I have begun a larger study to investigate exactly these issues, but as I embarked on that project, I quickly learned that an interim step was in order: Before I could get far with why and how teachers write for publication or its impact on classroom teaching, I would need to know how many such teachers there are, who is represented among their ranks, and how their work fits into the wider published landscape of our field.

The purpose of the study I want to report here, then, was to examine



the characteristics of articles and their authors in the journals *Language Arts*, *Voices from the Middle*, and *English Journal* between January 1998 and May 2008. I sought answers to several specific questions: What professional positions do article authors hold, and at what grade levels do they work? Was there a relationship between position and/or grade level and types of articles published? Was there a relationship between position and/or grade level and whether articles are single- or coauthored? How many article authors have published more than one piece over the 10-year period? Have there been trends over time with respect to any of these variables?

While teachers might publish their writing in a variety of venues, including newspapers, the publications of professional development networks (such as those that accepted my first two articles), local professional newsletters, or general education publications, I elected to focus this study on three journals published by NCTE: *Language Arts*, *Voices from the Middle*, and *English Journal*. I selected these three for several reasons: they have always included teachers as authors alongside university researchers and envision teachers as their primary audience; they represent the three “flag-ship” journals at each respective grade level in the language arts field and as such signify a high bar for teacher-authors to reach for; and they are peer-reviewed by both teachers and university researchers and as such may reflect the degree to which contributions by teachers are taken up as legitimate contributions to the field. I identified a period of 10 years as long enough to encompass at least one transition in editors for each journal and to reflect some range of political and historical conditions for education over time, yet short enough to reflect current trends in scholarship, teacher inquiry, and publication.

Using publicly available information from the tables of contents, author blurbs, abstracts, and the article text, graduate students and I compiled a database of all article authors. I excluded from the study editors’ columns, department pieces written by the department editors, and nonarticle contributions such as photographs or poems. I analyzed the remaining articles with attention to several variables in addition to each author’s name and article citation information. “Position” categories included active classroom teacher, retired classroom teacher, university/college faculty, graduate student (while many teachers also go to school part-time, this designation was used for full-time students or those listing “student” as their primary role), other positions in education (such as building administrator or curriculum developer), or outside education (examples included novelist and lawyer). “Grade level/department” for classroom teachers included elementary (PK–6), middle (7–8), or high school (9–12). College faculty were categorized as



either English/composition, education, or other when that information was given. I also roughly classified articles by “article content,” as either research reports (including teacher research), descriptions of teaching practice (i.e., accounts of particular lessons or units), essays/arguments (e.g., an essay arguing against censorship but not focused on specific ways to teach about censorship or empirical research about censorship), book or media reviews, or other (e.g., an interview). Finally, I categorized article “authorship” as single-authored or coauthored.

The completed database contained 1,772 author entries (keeping in mind that some authors would have more than one entry if they had published more than one article in the 10-year period). I calculated frequencies, and I examined correlations using Pearson’s r assuming significance below p -values of 0.05.

What Professional Positions Do Article Authors Hold, and At What Grade Levels Do They Work?

Table 1 and Figure 1 display how many article authors fell into each position category for the three journals taken together.

Table 1: Positions held by article authors, with grade levels/departments within each position

Position	Frequency (percent of total)	Grade level or department	Frequency (percent of position)
Classroom teacher—Active	627 (35.4)	Elementary (P–6)	104 (16.6)
		Middle (7–8)	146 (23.3)
		High School (9–12)	286 (45.6)
		Other or not indicated	91 (14.5)
Classroom teacher—Retired	12 (0.7)	Elementary (P–6)	1 (8.3)
		Middle (7–8)	2 (16.7)
		High School (9–12)	5 (41.7)
		Other or not indicated	4 (33.3)
College or university faculty	886 (50.0)	English or composition	124 (14.0)
		Education	478 (54.0)
		Other or not indicated	284 (32.0)
Graduate student	89 (5.0)		
Other in education	90 (5.1)		
Outside education	56 (3.2)		
Not indicated	11 (0.6)		
Total	1,771 (100.0)		

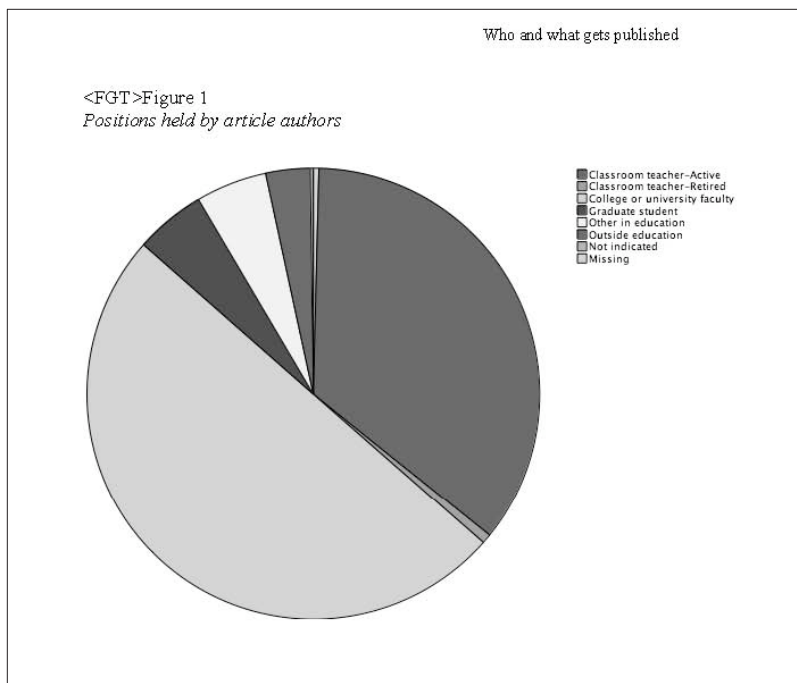


Figure 1. Positions held by article authors

Half of the article authors were college faculty. This confirmed my assumption that more authors would fall into this category than any other, for writing for publication is an explicit and high-stakes part of a college professor's work life, whereas few K-12 environments support or reward writing for publication. Of those college faculty, 54% were education faculty, 14% English, and the remainder unspecified or in another field. While this study does not explain why that was the case, one possibility has to do with the locations in which various language arts specialties reside in most universities: reading and literacy faculty are almost always found in a department, school, or college of education, whereas with secondary English education we equally often find positions in departments of English. Patterns of scholarship vary across these settings, with faculty in English often pursuing literary scholarship while education faculty would be more likely to work in a social science research tradition.

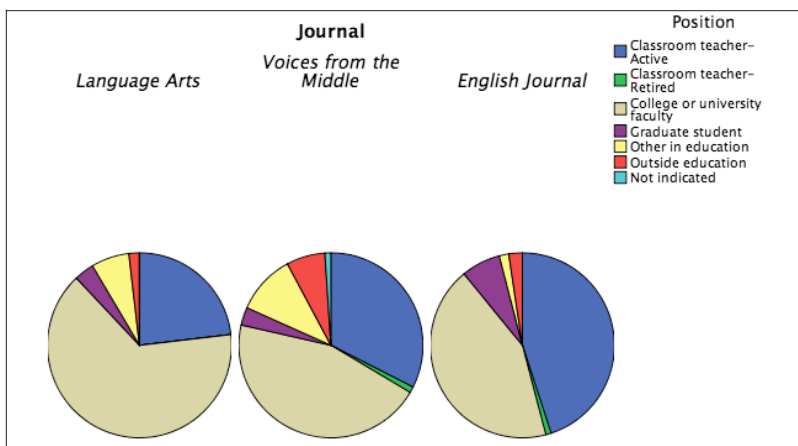
Of the classroom teachers, 45% worked at the high school level. This could be explained in part by the number of articles in a single issue of various journals: an issue of *English Journal*, in which high school teachers



are most likely to publish, typically includes between seven and nine full-length articles in addition to columns and features, whereas an issue of *Language Arts* or *Voices from the Middle* typically includes just three or four. But it is also possible that high school teachers, who traditionally are encouraged to think of themselves as disciplinary specialists, have a different sense of their own expertise and thus find entry into professional writing easier than elementary and middle school teachers, who have generally been positioned less as experts in a field and more as generalists and, perhaps, as less expert in general. That could also account for differences in the distribution of author positions across the three journals. Table 2 and Figure 2 depict position data organized by journal. Classroom teachers made up 44.9% of authors published in *English Journal*, compared to just 23.1% of authors in *Language Arts* and 32.5% of authors in *Voices from the Middle*.

Table 2: Positions held by article authors, by journal

Position	Journal Frequency (percent of total)		
	<i>Language Arts</i>	<i>Voices from the Middle</i>	<i>English Journal</i>
Classroom teacher—Active	125 (23.1)	124 (32.5)	378 (44.9)
Classroom teacher—Retired	0 (0.0)	4 (1.0)	8 (1.0)
College or university faculty	350 (64.8)	172 (45.0)	363 (43.2)
Graduate student	19 (3.5)	12 (3.1)	58 (6.9)
Other in education	36 (6.7)	40 (10.5)	14 (1.7)
Outside education	10 (1.9)	26 (6.8)	20 (2.4)
Not indicated	0 (0.0)	4 (1.0)	0 (0.0)

**FIGURE 2.** Positions held by article authors, broken down by journal



Is There a Relationship between Position and Types of Articles Published?

There was a significant correlation between position and article type ($r = .264$, $p < .001$). Table 3 displays article content by position.

Descriptions of teaching practices made up 50.2% of the articles published by classroom teachers, followed by research reports (26.8%) and essays/arguments (20.4%). This distribution was quite different for the college faculty, 40.6% of whom published research reports compared to 22.7% publishing descriptions of teaching practices and 32.5% publishing essays or arguments.

These results highlight the contrasting or, perhaps, complementary ways K–12 teachers and college faculty contribute to the literature of the field of language arts: While practical contributions are made by both classroom teachers and college faculty, a much greater proportion of college faculty contributed research reports. College faculty contributed 60.4% of all research reports published in the three journals across the 10-year study period; in comparison, just 28.2% of all the published research reports were contributed by classroom teachers. These figures were disproportionate to the proportion of teachers vs. college faculty in the sample as a whole. On the one hand, this result was to be expected, as it was consistent with my expectation that college faculty have formal research training and are explicitly rewarded for research, whereas classroom teachers do not and are not. However, given the ascent of the teacher-research tradition over the

TABLE 3: Article content by position held

Article content	Position Frequency (percent of authors within position)							
	Classroom teacher—Active	Classroom teacher—Retired	College or university faculty	Graduate student	Other in education	Outside education	Not indicated	Total
Teaching practice	314 (50.2)	4 (33.3)	201 (22.7)	36 (40.4)	19 (21.1)	5 (8.9)	0 (0.0)	579
Research report	168 (26.8)	3 (25.0)	360 (40.6)	33 (37.1)	29 (32.2)	3 (5.4)	0 (0.0)	596
Book or media review	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	22 (2.5)	1 (1.1)	5 (5.6)	2 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	30
Essay or argument	128 (20.4)	5 (41.7)	288 (32.5)	17 (19.1)	30 (33.3)	31 (55.4)	0 (0.0)	499
other	16 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	15 (1.7)	2 (2.2)	7 (7.8)	15 (26.8)	4 (100.0)	59
Total	626 (100.0)	12 (100.0)	886 (100.0)	89 (100.0)	90 (100.0)	56 (100.0)	4 (100.0)	1,763



past 20 or 30 years and the call for teacher inquiry to take its place alongside more traditional scholarship in the literature of our field, it would have been reasonable to expect a more even distribution of article content across positions. It's possible that teachers simply submit fewer research reports for consideration, either because they do not conduct classroom research or because they conduct classroom research but do not think of it as of potential interest to the field. It is also possible that teachers would publish classroom research but are stopped by unfamiliar conventions for the research article or are intimidated by the notion of peer review. It is possible, too, that teachers are writing and submitting research for publication but are not successful due to problems in the research methods or in the writing, or because peer reviewers do not value classroom research as highly as other research, or simply because editors feel they must include a wide range of article types in any one issue and thus reject teacher-research pieces due to space considerations in favor of other kinds of work.

Is There a Relationship between Position and/or Grade Level and Whether Articles Are Single- or Coauthored?

Anecdotal evidence certainly suggests that teacher inquiry and perhaps publication are likely to be successful when supported by colleagues or done in collaboration with colleagues. For this reason I suspected that classroom teachers might show higher rates of coauthorship than authors in other positions. However, I found no significant correlation between authorship and either position or grade level.

How Many Article Authors Have Published More Than One Piece over the 10-Year Period?

We can think of teachers who publish articles as either “repeaters” or “one-hit wonders.” For some classroom teachers who publish an article, the publication arose out of specific circumstances, such as a graduate course or in-school collaboration, and, once those circumstances change, the impetus to write for publication changes also. For others, writing for publication becomes part of a teacher's professional practice, an activity in which he or she engages repeatedly over the course of a career. In the three journals examined in this study, just 42 classroom teachers published more than one article across the 10-year study period.

It is possible that some teachers who have only published once in these three journals over the decade did in fact publish additional pieces in other



venues, such as local language arts publications or general education journals. Nonetheless, this finding raises questions about what motivates repeaters and how their publication experiences change over time—and, conversely, about why there are so many one-hit wonders if publication does confer all the benefits suggested by the literature.

Have There Been Trends over Time with Respect to Any of These Variables?

Based on my sense of the varying goals of successive journal editors, the changing landscape of available publication outlets, and on the continued emphasis on practitioner research in graduate programs and professional development sites, it might have been reasonable to expect changes in these factors over the past 10 years. For example, I speculated that after the discontinuation of the elementary-level practitioner journal *Primary Voices K-6* in 2002, a significant increase in publications in these three journals by elementary school teachers might follow (under the logic that articles that might once have landed in *Primary Voices* would now be submitted to *Language Arts*). However, I found no significant correlations between publication year and any other variable that could not be explained by the smaller number of authors and articles published in the truncated year of 2008.

Moving Forward

Taken together, these results show that while teachers are important voices in the literature of the field of language arts, the contributions that teachers make differ both in number and in nature from the contributions of others working in the field, such as university-based researchers. The study raises a series of questions to which I think the field should pay attention if we wish to work toward the promotion of teachers' voices and the inclusion of classroom expertise in the knowledge base of our field. My interest in these questions stems from my background in the National Writing Project and from a set of interests that have defined my career thus far. One is an interest in writing as a tool for learning and transformation, which I have studied both in educational settings (Whitney, 2007) and in general (Whitney, 2006). Another is an interest in how teachers grow and change in response to professional development experiences, particularly with respect to issues of voice and authority—and writing frequently plays a key role in those experiences. I have taken up such issues in earlier research in the context of the National Writing Project. One example was a study of classroom practice that ap-





peared last year in *English Education* (Whitney et al., 2008). Another was my doctoral dissertation (discussed in a recent article in *Research in the Teaching of English* and another forthcoming here in *English Education*), which focused on the role that writing plays in “teacher transformation” in the NWP (Whitney, 2008; Whitney, in press-a). That research has highlighted, among other issues, the ways in which teacher change is tied to issues of authority and how the attention to audience and rhetorical stance inherent in almost any writing task can foment dramatic change in a teacher’s relationship to his or her work.

In the course of conducting those studies and working with teachers in the NWP, I became interested in the notion of the “teacher as writer” and how that idea is tied to the way we see both writing and professional development. We tend to talk about the teacher as writer without clarity about what kind of writing we think teachers should do (I discuss this question in an article forthcoming in the April 2009 *English Education* as well) or how the writing will happen. When a teacher is a writer, what is he or she authorized to write about? What audience awaits the writing? Colleagues? The research community? Or is it just good for teachers to write, period, regardless of audience? I have contacted the teacher-authors described in this essay for a survey focused on the process of preparing an article as well as connections between publication and professional development, career path, and classroom practice. I will then be contacting a subset of survey respondents for in-depth interviews exploring the place of published articles in a teacher’s career history and personal history along with tracing the origins, development, and implications of a specific published article as the teacher-author understands it.

Work like this poses some tough but interesting problems for our field. It troubles the notion that practitioner knowledge and more traditional works of research and theory can and should coexist in the literature. It’s appropriate that people working in different settings and within different traditions will produce different kinds of texts at a different rate. This also raises questions for journal editors and complicates their task considerably: Are editors including what they should to move the field forward? What is the editor’s role with respect to supporting teacher-authors, to whom offering editorial feedback might also be offering professional development? Given the complexity of the histories and relationships between classroom teachers and university-based researchers in our field, and given the differences

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in publishing patterns that rightly follow from the differences between these two groups, it's difficult to estimate what reasonable or ideal proportion of articles *should* be contributed by teachers—half? Most? A small sprinkling, as though for flavor? Quotas elude us. Instead, when we talk about including teachers' voices in the knowledge base, I think we are talking about what gets read and what gets used. We need empirical research to examine, for instance, how the distribution of authors across positions compares to the distribution of readers across positions—is it the case that teachers form the majority of the audience for these publications but play a reduced role in generating their contents, for example, or are the respective numbers of teachers and professors publishing in them proportionate to the numbers reading them? Even more helpful would be a study of how and in what contexts various kinds of literature are taken up, read, cited, and applied. Analysis of citation patterns, for example, would offer one way into this problem. Studies such as these would get at the heart of the goals of teacher publication: What purposes can publication by teachers serve? How might a scholarly community that incorporates practicing teachers and university researchers as equals differ from one that mainly excludes teachers from the conversation or, more likely, a rich scholarly community in which teachers speak to one another but in which few outside the classroom participate? Is the purpose of having teachers publish as part of a process of teacher inquiry to enrich the field or to enrich themselves?

To the extent that it is the latter, we also need to better understand why and how classroom teachers approach writing for publication as well as what they make of it for their careers and classroom practice. For example, one such study could follow published teacher-authors into their classrooms and schools after publication to observe how writing for publication might affect relationships with colleagues or how having written about a classroom practice changes the subsequent enactment of that practice. My current study takes another approach by focusing on motivations and resources for writing for publication. It is my hope that through work such as this, CEE can enrich and extend the already fine tradition within NCTE of honoring—and, more importantly, learning from and responding to—the voices of classroom teachers in its publications and in general.

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