

# The Hidden Curriculum and Learner Autonomy

## Fostering Pedagogical and Professional Development in Pre- and In-service Teachers of English

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### Abstract

*A majority of tertiary-level language education students are not confident in their abilities to deliver an English language/writing curriculum at the secondary level, because of their tenuous content knowledge of the English language/writing curriculum; shaky grammatical competence; and, lack of confidence. Faced with this dilemma, an intervention to strengthen the content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as the philosophy of the 'ideal' English language teacher was implemented in a final-year writing course at the School of Education, The University of the West Indies, Mona, between 2012 and 2015. The objective was to boost learner autonomy within the course as well as within the real-life classrooms in which the students would eventually teach upon certification. This intervention encouraged reflection on class assignments, integrated incremental grammar into class seminars, and afforded students the opportunity to work collaboratively with peers to implement genre-specific writing workshops and e-portfolios as part of their confidence building towards personal and professional autonomy. At the end of the course, many of the student teachers self-reported that they felt a greater sense of confidence about teaching in the real world setting. Such an intervention has implications for institutional programmes seeking to foster learner autonomy within pre-service and in-service teachers of English preparing for the challenges of local and/or regional secondary school classrooms.*

**Keywords:** English language, writing, professional development, technology, teacher leadership, reflexive practitioner, learner autonomy.

## Introduction

THE ROLE OF TEACHER LEADERS IN FOSTERING student teachers' pedagogical and professional autonomy, in an age of diversity and educational reform is the central concern of this paper. The paper begins by exploring the roles of teacher leaders, especially within the context of preparing pre-service and in-service teachers of English for the educational landscape within Jamaica and/or the Caribbean Region. Next, the characteristics of the ideal English language specialist, in light of the taxonomies proposed by Craig (2014) and Bryan (2014), are discussed. Segueing from that discussion, we describe an intervention aimed at fostering teacher-learner autonomy in a group of pre-service and in-service teachers of English at The University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona who were doing a course on the teaching of writing. Our focus to improve the student teachers' learner autonomy was to enhance their ability to "develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude" for themselves as teachers in cooperation with others (Smith 2003, 1). Insights are then provided on the way forward for delivering an English language curriculum within Jamaican/Caribbean secondary classrooms. As such, this paper, situated within the qualitative paradigm, "deliberately enfranchise[s] and give[s] voice to the research participants" (Ballinger 2008, 45) through the student-teachers' narratives, personal experiences, and their developing consciousness as they grapple with taking charge of their learning on the pathway toward becoming autonomous practitioners.

## Teacher Leaders Scaffolding Pre-service and In-service Teachers of English

The concept of teacher leaders is not a new one within the global field of teacher education and teacher development. While as a concept it might recently be gaining popularity among educators within the Caribbean, it has long been practised without being recognized for its potential to transform teaching and learning. Rosenboltz (1989) identifies teacher leaders as those who "reach out to others with encouragement, technical knowledge to solve classroom problems, and enthusiasm for learning new things" (p. 208). Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) are of a similar opinion, that teachers are leaders when they are

“contributing to school reform or student learning (within or beyond the classroom), influencing others to improve their professional practice, or identifying with and contributing to a community of leaders” (p. 5). Killion and Harrison (2007) also offer ten roles of teacher leaders – as resource providers, instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, classroom supporters, learning facilitators, mentors, school leaders, data coach, catalysts for change, and learner – that, like the definitions before, resonated with us as we sought to scaffold and support final year pre-service and in-service teachers of English at the UWI, Mona, while teaching the course EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School*.

Viewing our roles and responsibilities as educators through the prism of the teacher leadership framework, and witnessing the shaky grammatical competence, tenuous content knowledge and low confidence level of a majority of our final year students, we went beyond the course’s curriculum boundaries to inspire within our students a sense of agency and disposition as autonomous language specialists, to be confident in content and pedagogical knowledge to teach secondary level English, as an “arena” (Bryan 2014), in post-independent Jamaica and/or the Caribbean region. Teacher leadership and learner autonomy for us entailed the following tenets, according to LeBlanc and Shelton (1997): (a) modeling positive attitudes and enthusiasm; (b) devoting time to doing whatever it takes to make the school work better; (c) enhancing student learning through working with other teachers on improving pedagogy and; according to Danielson (2006), managing change by motivating colleagues to become more skilled and thoughtful regarding their work, and encouraging them to do things better (p. 9).

## Preparing Pre-service and In-service Teachers to Be Autonomous English Language Specialists

The Jamaican/Caribbean educational landscape of the 21st century, with its attention to diversity and educational reform at the secondary level in the areas of equity, access, parental support, and community engagement, is demanding far more of teachers than before. With the call for students to perform more commendably in school exit examinations such as the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam-

ination (CAPE), to be effective communicators in writing and speech, and to enhance their critical thinking and literacy skills, it is no longer sufficient for teachers to wear only the badge of certification without the accompanying skill of expertise, demonstrable knowledge of the subject area, and the ability to critically assess and re-tool pedagogy in response to the evolving culture within Jamaican/Regional classrooms. Teachers must be in pursuit of a “pedagogy for autonomy”, according to Smith (2003). In the case of the Jamaican English language classroom environment, Craig (2014, 131), as early as the 1990s, made the point that “with education becoming progressively more egalitarian, even the more prestigious high schools will feel the increasing impact, as they are in fact already doing, of Creole language influences in their populations, and the absence of home experiences in reading among the children of the poor.” Given this situation, which is indeed the reality today, Craig’s (2014) charge to teachers and teacher educators is that they need to “find more explicit ways of teaching [English]” (p. 131), underscoring the need for a specific skillset to help our students excel in English. Based on these expectations then, we assumed the role of teacher leaders, with a view towards assisting our students with this transformation.

Bryan (2014), extending Craig’s point, offers four suggestions for teachers of English operating within a Creole-speaking environment. According to Bryan (2014), today’s teachers need to have knowledge of both English and Jamaican. First, they must know the structures – mechanical and grammatical, as well as the orthography – of the languages that children use within and outside of the English language classroom. This knowledge will better equip teachers to assist students with establishing a relationship between the two languages, and to build their language awareness through risk-taking and a “spirit of inquiry” (p. 28). The second suggestion, of a “principled post-method practice” (p. 29) – since one method is not sufficient – should be employed. Here, the teacher is aware of and is guided by the principles of input, authenticity, culture, planning, and awareness, proposed by Bryan (2014), for teaching English in a Creole-speaking environment (TECSE). Hence, the teacher in this “post-method” setting, teaching according to the TECSE principles, has to be a skilled and “knowledgeable language professional” (p. 29). Next, the teacher has to cultivate a disposition of critical language awareness. She or he must have a “culturally

situated understanding of English as arena — as contested and ideological, and as an instrument of social stratification, but also presenting opportunities for empowerment” (p. 29). Finally, the teacher ought to be a reflective/reflexive practitioner, that is, one who understands the impact of self-conscious reflection on himself/herself as agent and will provide his/her students with “meta-cognitive opportunities” to reflect on their own language use, for example, through language autobiographies (p. 29). In sum, Bryan (2010, 2014) envisages for today’s ideal teacher of English an engagement with what Smith (2003) characterizes as a “pedagogy for autonomy”, whereby, teachers are actively involved in their own retraining to enhance their knowledge, skills, and awareness so that they are more equipped for the real-world classroom.

Given these qualities that the ideal teacher of English ought to master means that teacher trainers serving as teacher leaders within higher educational institutions must take their responsibilities of mentorship seriously. Responding to Craig’s (2014) and Bryan’s (2014) charges, and cognizant of our roles as teacher leaders, we devised and implemented supportive strategies within the undergraduate course, EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School* (for students pursuing the B. Ed. Language Education programme), to help bolster our students’ content and pedagogical knowledge, their confidence, as well as their disposition as teachers of English. Our intervention, which privileged students’ self-reflections, included collaborative peer-writing workshops, the integration of technology into writing portfolios, and favoured an incremental approach to the teaching of grammar. These strategies had institutional relevance for the vision and core values of the Mona School of Education, to “strengthen the quality of . . . professional training for teachers . . . and approaches to the improvement of student learning” (Griffith 2013). Consequently, the intervention intersected several teacher leadership conceptual frames, specifically, promoting professional development of self and peers by focusing on teacher professional growth plans (Fenwick 2004); and teaching and learning in schools, primarily focusing on curriculum and teaching; staff programmes or professional development (Danielson 2006); as well as on developing teacher-learner autonomy (Smith 2003). These all held relevance for the pre- and in-service teachers as they sought to prepare themselves for the Jamaican/Regional educational landscape.

Given this theoretical background, the argument being proposed in this

paper is that within teacher training institutions, it is the responsibility of faculty to serve as teacher leaders, mentoring pre-service and in-service teachers towards professional readiness and learner autonomy within their respective disciplines, in the areas of content acquisition, pedagogical skills, and professional development. With regard to the English language specialist, there is also the need to inculcate grammatical competence and confidence in delivering an English language curriculum within the Jamaican/Caribbean secondary school system. With these measures in place, the transformation towards teacher-learner autonomy becomes that much closer to being realized.

### Description of the Course, EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School*

*Writing in the Secondary School* is an undergraduate level course delivered over one semester, intended to help participants understand the nature of writing, and examine contributing factors to some of the difficulties which secondary level students within Jamaica or the region experience in their attempts to complete writing tasks. This course is offered in the two-year (60 credits) and three-year (90 credits) Bachelor of Education programmes, and is offered before students commence their final year teaching practice experience. The course further seeks to introduce participants to assessment practices and instructional strategies that will help students who struggle with writing to experience growth and development in this area. By the time participants complete the course, they should be able to

1. demonstrate an understanding of, as well as familiarity with various writing approaches and strategies, such as process writing and writing across the curriculum
2. demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the problems secondary students face with writing, particularly within the setting of a Creole-speaking environment
3. demonstrate an understanding of the nature of a portfolio
4. explore the different strategies used to assess writing
5. effectively utilize technology in the teaching of writing

6. organize and demonstrate a writing workshop for the purpose of teaching writing at the secondary level.

### THE LEARNERS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

Between 2012 and 2015, there were three cohorts of students who completed the course, EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School*. Table 1 provides information on the composition of each cohort in terms of class size, gender and their prior teaching experience or certification. A brief synopsis of their perceived attitudes to teaching and learning, based on our observations, is also shared below.

	Cohort # 1 (2012–2013)	Cohort #2 (2013–2014)	Cohort #3 (2014–2015)
<b>Demographics of student teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 students (4 male and 23 female students)</li> <li>• 18–25 age range</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 39 students (3 male and 36 female students)</li> <li>• 20–30 age range</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29 students (all female students)</li> <li>• Predominantly within the 18–25 age range</li> </ul>
<b>Student teachers' academic qualification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of teacher training, 3 students had attended teachers' college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of teacher training, 13 students had attended teachers' college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In terms of teacher training, 5 students had attended teachers' college</li> </ul>
<b>Student teachers' attitudes to teaching/learning which surfaced during the course</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eager and enthusiastic group</li> <li>• Welcomed ideas to build their pedagogical skills</li> <li>• Determined to raise their confidence level to effectively deliver the English language curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keen and interested in learning from their peers who had prior teaching experience</li> <li>• Eager to incorporate new English language Teaching strategies for Teaching Practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enthusiastic group seeking to build their pedagogical skills</li> <li>• Eager to try new methods of English language teaching for teaching practice</li> </ul>

As we taught the course within the first few weeks to Cohort 1, it became obvious to us that in addition to learning the areas of the course's curriculum, the students had other critical issues which needed to be addressed, specifically, their shaky grammatical competence; their tenuous content-knowledge of the English language/writing curriculum; and their lack of confidence in their teaching abilities. Their demeanour and disposition as professionals – to 'grow' into that ideal teacher of English/writing – were woefully lacking, to the extent that some students could not visualize themselves being inside a real-life classroom effectively teaching the syllabus. Confronted with the dilemma of their challenges, and although this fell outside the remit of the course EDLA3110, we asked our students the following questions to see how we could assist them to become autonomous learners, equipped with the necessary skills and content for language teachers:

1. What are your weaknesses in English grammar?
2. What do you consider to be your weak areas in the CSEC English language curriculum?
3. How confident are you when it comes to delivering a lesson based on the CSEC English language curriculum?

In responding to the questions some of the students shared the following:

Before I started this course I feared writing as it was one of my weak areas. I realized that my weakness were in the areas of sentence structure and vocabulary. (Paula)

Statistical report writing and summary writing are elements of the CSEC English A syllabus in which I am particularly deficient. I have almost no recollection of these topics and I do not believe I was taught these areas very well. Thus, I will have to completely re-examine this content, so as to be equipped to teach it to my students. (Tara)

Upon entering this course, the first thing that I took notice of was its title which entailed a most significant word – "writing". As I reflected upon this word, I thought to myself, how am I going to possibly teach writing, when I have not yet mastered its art? As this thought darted through my mind, I started to feel anxious and uncertain about wanting to stay in the profession. To me, writing meant putting words on paper in a coherent and cohesive manner and making it sound 'pretty'; I can't do that. (Joan)

Interestingly, despite their self-reported weaknesses and fears, each student's articulation was quite cogent. Having students 'voice' their problems, and in so doing also hinting at their potential, helped us to frame the 'hidden curriculum' or intervention needed within the course to assist these pre- and in-service teachers of English to become and feel better about their craft.

### The Intervention: 'The Hidden Curriculum'

The intervention strategies selected were not overtly stenciled into the course's curriculum; they were determined based on the weaknesses we observed and those which were self-reported by the pre- and in-service teachers of English, and were incorporated incrementally within the course's curriculum to foster teacher-learner autonomy. The purpose of the intervention was two-fold: (1) to improve the grammatical competence of the pre- and in-service teachers; and (2) to shape their professional deportment and philosophy of the 'ideal' language teacher, equipped with a range of useful pedagogical skills for English language/writing classrooms. As we focused on these two goals, our data collection included gathering information based on our observations of students during their presentations over the last three years from 2012 to 2015, document analysis of students' reflective assignments for each cohort, and email interviews with three past students, which asked them to provide us with information about their continuing practices after they joined the teaching profession, and to respond to the following questions: (1) What strategies and philosophies of language teaching – shaped by *Writing in the Secondary School* – have resonated with you? (2) What philosophies and English language teaching strategies from your core Language Education courses have you integrated into your classrooms?

### The Intervention: Grammatical Competence

To improve our students' grammatical competence, we taught them via mini-contextual grammar sessions, making sure to seize language awareness windows whenever they presented themselves in the course, *Writing in the Secondary School*, or within any other courses that they did with us. The grammar sessions

were usually seven to ten minutes, either at the start or end of a class, or sometimes seized at relevant moments during the execution of a lesson to discuss matters ranging from etymology to usage, to specific rules and how they worked regularly or irregularly, and how they factored into the expectations of students' writing. These short teaching moments were purposeful, to help heighten students' language awareness, while also providing them with ideas about how they too could teach grammar to their students, contextually. The students appreciated the mini-moments taken to augment this critical aspect of their language development, as explained below by one pre-service teacher:

One of the best lessons in this course was grammar teaching. This was my area of weakness, but it has since improved significantly. This course has helped me in many ways. The lessons in grammar also taught me some “best ways” of teaching grammar, which I plan to use with my students. (Debbie)

Debbie's reflection reports on, but more importantly demonstrates her improved grammatical competence and confidence to teach grammar, based on the modelling of best practices provided by educators functioning as teacher leaders. This gives credence to the positions outlined by Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) and Killion and Harrison (2007), that teacher leaders serve as resource providers, thereby “contributing to school reform or student learning (within or beyond the classroom), influencing others to improve their professional practice, or identifying with and contributing to a community of leaders” (p. 5).

### The Intervention: Department, Philosophy and Pedagogy for Autonomy

Mentoring and nurturing our student teachers towards becoming that ‘ideal’ language teacher, of which Bryan (2014) writes, was executed deliberately as well as incidentally over the 13-week period of each of the semesters. As teacher leaders we did this through a variety of avenues, including modelling effective teaching aimed at cultivating within our students a sense of confidence, security, and pedagogical know-how – of taking charge of their teaching – when delivering an English language curriculum. We also utilized specific teaching strate-

gies within the seminars to enhance the student-teachers' professional development, to increase their confidence, attitude and disposition, namely the student-led teaching-writing workshops, viewing of a film titled *Take 20: Teaching Writing*, and, the electronic portfolio which contained written pieces. Each strategy is outlined below, followed by selected students' experiences of engagement and our analyses.

## The Writing Workshops

Atwell (1984) shared the experience of her success with a reading and writing workshop for middle-school students. Her approach took the form of a literary immersion, where students selected their own books or authors to read in class and at home. At the start of class each day, she discussed a literary element, or a particular author, or approaches to reading. Afterwards, students read for the rest of the class. While reading, they wrote letters to Atwell, their teacher, about how the book or author impacted them, and she responded, generating much literary dialogue, comparable to conversations that occur at dinner tables, or that adults have when discussing recent readings. At the end of the workshop, Atwell (1984) reported that the students emerged as avid readers and strong writers as a result of engaging with the experience.

Within EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School*, we saw where Atwell's (1984) idea of the workshop could be adapted, with great benefits for the students. Through the experience of actively participating in the student-led teaching-writing workshops, the potential for collaborative and constructivist learning was possible. The process began with students self-grouping around their favourite colours. Once done, the groups consisting of five or six students were to make plans for simulating a student-led, teaching-writing workshop in which they were to share with the entire class innovative pedagogies for teaching an aspect of writing that was a part of the CSEC syllabus. Below are Group Blue's and Group Yellow's tasks:

### Group Blue's Tasks

You are teaching **summary writing and writing statistical reports** to a group of grade 10 students (*consisting of 6 girls and 30 boys*) who are being introduced to

the topics for the very first time. These students attend a technical high school in East Kingston. **Design** the lesson so that it is in a workshop format, meaning, students do practical activities to learn the skills and content of summary writing and writing statistical reports.

### Group Yellow's Tasks

You are teaching **writing an argument** to a group of grade 8 students (*consisting of 33 girls*) who are noted to be keen, attentive, critical thinkers, and who show much academic promise. These students attend an all-girls' high school in Kingston & St. Andrew, and some of them are contemplating sitting the CXC English A exam at the end of the school year. **Design** the lesson so that it is in a workshop format, meaning, students do practical activities to learn the skills and content of writing an argument.

The above tasks were to be guided by the following questions during the planning phase of the workshop:

1. Consider the following while contemplating the design of your workshop:
  - What type of research is necessary to become sufficiently informed about the topic(s)?
  - How should the workshop be arranged (i.e. the physical space and the actual structure for executing the workshop)?
  - What media types and authentic resource materials can be used, effectively, within the actual workshop?
  - How can skills to heighten students' awareness of spoken and/or written language, reading, literacy, etc. be encouraged?
  - How can students' interest in and love for the topic be nurtured?
2. Do a practical demonstration of ONE aspect of the workshop experience from which the students will benefit. Call upon the members of your group or the entire class to role-play this experience. (*The group gets 30 minutes to present their response to the above task*).

The student-led teaching-writing workshops, usually six of them for each of the cohorts, took place in the regular three-hour seminar sessions allotted to

the course. If additional time was needed, it was taken from the next week's session, prior to discussing the strengths, weaknesses and assessment of the workshops.

For the students, planning the teaching-writing workshop usually began with some amount of trepidation and uncertainty, on account of their being asked to facilitate an unfamiliar activity and to deliver it as a teaching-learning experience for peers. One group member, Marcia, in representing her group, revealed aspects of the dynamics, which emerged as they negotiated and worked towards a common goal in the workshop planning:

For the assignment on the writing workshop, I would have appreciated the viewing of a workshop as an example. My classmates and I had many questions just before we presented . . . Many persons had different ideas about the mode of presentation that should have been used. The personalities in the group ranged from being 'extremely quiet' to being 'very active.' It was difficult for us to find that middle ground which meant compromising. At one point, I wished I could have done the assignment on my own. The group members demonstrated respect for each other and were able to finally make decisions collectively that would help us to get the highest possible marks.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the student-led teaching-writing workshop, Sharon, from another group, shared these thoughts on its teaching-learning benefits:

Included in the course's content was an important strategy necessary for creating that 'Grade A classroom', the "Workshop". Teachers were taught how to devise an effective student-based workshop for English language. The workshops presented ranged across the board, inclusive of different age ratios and gender ratios; transforming the lecture/seminar room into various different groups or styles of classroom environment we may come upon. This strategy, I am convinced will allow for a proper preparation for any given classroom environment.

Another student-teacher, Paula, highlighted benefits such as encouraging students to overcome writer's block, getting students to confront language and to be aware of its features, providing students with face-to-face feedback on their writing, group work and the skills learnt from it for future life roles, and also, how being a presenter helped to boost her confidence. She explains:

Moreover, the writing workshop is indeed a fantastic idea for imploring students to write in various genres. This allows students to be independent writers as they must develop their own topic and create their unique pieces within the English context. This may be time consuming but works best for the students' benefits as they develop an interest for practising writing as they are facilitated by their instructor and provided with feedback which will help them to realize their mistakes. Students will learn to appreciate language awareness while practising it during their presentations. The writing workshops also would help them to appreciate group work, as it did for me. It involves cooperation which is important to real life or holistic situations. The writing workshops have helped to boost my confidence due to my level of involvement in the presentation. My confidence being boosted will help to eradicate my shyness and to improve on my lesson delivery as a future teacher.

The students recognized the challenges of a workshop, but focused instead on its positive impact on future classroom practice, the students that they will eventually teach, and their own developing awareness towards learner autonomy. Their accounts demonstrated personal and professional growth, occurring within the evolving learning community of EDLA3110. By virtue of participating in and witnessing the student-led teaching-writing workshops facilitated by their peers, students were empowered, not only in the area of grammatical competence, but also in their pedagogy and emerging philosophy of language teaching. A marked improvement was also noticeable in their deportment and disposition as language teachers becoming more confident and well suited for the Jamaican/regional English language classrooms.

### VIEWING OF THE FILM, *Take 20: Teaching Writing*

In the fourth class of the semester, students viewed the film *Take 20: Teaching Writing* (Taylor 2009). In the film, 22 renowned teachers of writing and composition responded to 20 questions posed by Taylor (2009), with respect to their perceived roles, their first experiences upon entering the profession, some of the mistakes made and the life lessons learnt along the way, as teachers. Prior to viewing, the student teachers were given the following prompts to consider while watching the film:

1. Watch the film *Take 20: Teaching Writing* by Todd Taylor. As you view it, note any pertinent issues that you find striking because of their implications for:
  - a) the teaching of writing in the Jamaican/Caribbean school context.
  - b) the student (teacher), regarding how to teach writing.
  - c) your emerging conception or philosophy of writing or the teaching of writing.
2. At the end of the film, discuss your notes as well as articulate your personal philosophy regarding the teaching of writing at the secondary level.

After watching the film, one cohort participated in a general discussion of the question prompts; while for another cohort, students submitted exit slips with their responses. For the final cohort, students' reflections on the prompts were included in their electronic portfolios. Below are excerpts, from across the cohorts, tracing ways in which the film impacted student teachers' emerging consciousness as soon-to-be professionals:

The film showing veteran English language teachers reflecting on their own teaching profession was powerful for me, because I was impacted by the fact that even veterans can talk about their missteps, and be reflective about their journey as teachers. They admitted that they never always had it together, and at times they had to learn from trials and errors. I find this reminder encouraging for my own imminent journey. (Michael)

One of the many advices I received from the film 'Take 20' is the need to help students believe in themselves and the subject. (Sharon)

The viewing of the 'Take 20' film was motivational. I was truly inspired. As I listened to renowned practitioners of English share their experiences (failure and success) in the teaching of writing, I was moved on the inside. Just as the video started, I remember thinking about what had led to the selection of this particular set of educators. Half-way into the film, I found the answer. These teachers taught from their souls, were highly committed to their students and were proud to be offering the service of training. I made it my goal to 'catch their fire' and try some of the secret strategies that they shared about their classrooms. (Marcia)

The film “Take 20” really resonated with me as I felt like I was among the premiers of teaching while watching it. The teachers presenting took you back to when they first started teaching and this made me see that we all have to start somewhere and we won’t perfect the art overnight. I particularly liked some points that Nedra Reynolds made regarding encouraging students to write. She encouraged us to get students more involved in their learning by perhaps having them select their own topics or give them assignments that will allow them choices. She also urged for innovation in the classroom by noting that writing doesn’t have to be limited to a paper. (Ingrid)

Students were obviously pulling ideas and best practices from the film to inform their own pedagogies for autonomy, strengthening their own philosophies of language teaching, and, while doing so, becoming more confident and competent teachers of writing/English. For each student teacher, the teacher leader mentors referenced by Killion and Harrison (2007) were those within the film; not us, the lecturers, in this instance. Through the advice, passion, and shared experiences of the teacher leader mentors within the film, our student teachers in their reflections underscored their heightened levels of motivation and inspiration, as well as the knowledge they gained for improving their professional practice in real-life classrooms. The power and influence of the teacher leader, as Rosenboltz (1989) outlined, to “reach out to others with encouragement and the technical knowledge to solve classroom problems” in fact led to “enthusiasm for learning [and taking risks to try out] new things” (p. 208) for these student teachers, as confirmed in their reflective accounts above. Additionally, their reflections revealed their emerging consciousness, of what it meant to be teachers, the rises and falls along the way, coupled with the accompanying joys of the profession, to the extent that one wanted to “catch their fire” and transform her classroom using some of their “secret” strategies for effective teaching. Therefore, based on the “input” and “authenticity” provided by the film, the student-teachers began “planning” for effective teaching and comfortably visualized themselves transforming classroom “culture” and being catalysts of change for teaching and learning (Bryan 2014, 29). Their newfound consciousness and evolving autonomy mirrored the “principled post-method practice” that Bryan (2014, 29) envisaged for English language specialists teaching English in a Creole-speaking environment (TECSE).

## **ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO (WITH REFLECTIVE WRITTEN PIECES)**

The final course assignment – publishing an electronic portfolio on the Internet – caused the pre-service and in-service teachers to reflect, very deeply, on the totality of the course, accounting for its contribution to their holistic development as students and soon-to-be-certified teachers. The reason for insisting on an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio), published on the Internet, was to encourage students to consider using technology in their own classrooms, to increase their comfort level with new media, and also to generate beyond the life of the course a list of culturally-specific e-sites relevant for teaching writing in Jamaican/Regional secondary schools.

The electronic portfolio assignment was made available to students from early because of its reflective and sequenced approach to writing that was embedded in these three tasks explained below:

### **A. Nature of writing**

1. Explain in no more than 400 words one theorist's theory of writing, making sure to discuss the theorist's conception of the stages that facilitate good and effective writing.
2. Discuss three implications of teaching writing (at a secondary grade level determined by you) when you apply the theorist's conception of the teaching of writing.

### **B. Approaches to teaching an aspect of the CXC English A syllabus**

1. Select an aspect of the CXC English A syllabus (e.g. short story writing, statistical report writing, summary writing, essay (argumentative) writing, etc.
2. Present a classroom lesson (that spans 35 to 50 minutes) in which technology figures prominently.
3. Provide supporting e-resources to complement the lesson.

### **C. Reflection**

Throughout this course, you are expected to assume the role of a reflective practitioner. The course starts with each student orally reflecting on his/her experiences with the teaching of English and what motivated him/her to consider joining or continuing the teaching profession. In

your lectures and tutorials, you will explore many issues pertaining to teaching writing in the secondary school. For this assignment, you are required to write a reflective entry (not exceeding 500 words) that traces:

1. content and pedagogical ideas, garnered in this course, that have aided your professional development (please provide concrete examples);
2. your personal conception – shaped by number C1 (above) of how you will or are likely to approach the teaching of writing in the Jamaican/Caribbean secondary school classroom.

Below are excerpts from selected students' reflections on the experience of creating the e-portfolio within the course:

The creation of the E-portfolio was one of the most rewarding experiences for me. At first, I wished we were allowed to work with a combination of print and electronic media. I wondered how I would have pulled off a website . . . I feel led to keep this website even after the examination period and further develop it to aid pupils whom I will teach. I raise my 'hat' to my lecturers who unearthed the best in me. I accomplished something I thought I could not have done. (Marcia)

Now I must look back at the first time we were told about doing the electronic portfolio and how I became frightened. I have technology phobia and don't care much about learning or using it. However, I later became enthused about this task when I accessed You tube and saw the myriad of fun ways and activities available at my finger tips to teach and motivate my students. I started to get very excited and appreciative of this activity even more. As I worked on, I could not stop myself from dreaming about the days when I return to the classroom and the strategies and skills that I will now employ. (Dian)

The most important pedagogical skill I obtained in this course is how to implement technology in teaching writing. Initially I was skeptical about this approach until I learnt how to configure a lesson using educational websites and step away from the chalk and talk instructional methods. I believe that technology should be a principal means of teaching writing at the secondary level as we are living in a technological age and it is what students are interested in. (Joan)

Each of the student-teachers began the electronic portfolio development from

a place of fear and skepticism as they were not at all confident in their abilities to be technologically savvy and creative. As they continued to engage with the technology, however, they began to appreciate its attendant benefits of acquiring a relevant skill that many teachers, despite the proliferation and promotion of e-learning technologies within secondary schools within Jamaica, still cannot claim as a personal competence; of wrestling with a new high-stake learning challenge and emerging successfully with a tangible product – a teaching-learning resource site likely to motivate and captivate today’s generation of technologically attuned learners; and, most importantly, learning to plan and execute lessons that relevantly incorporate technology in TECSE contexts. These were only a few of the competencies that the pre- and in-service teachers took away with them as markers of learner autonomy, professional growth, and personal capacity building (Danielson, 2006) from engaging with this particular assignment.

Of equal importance to the assignment was the fact that several of the student teachers published their e-portfolios for global viewing at the end of the course, attesting to their heightened state of autonomy. Unfortunately, a majority of these Internet sites became unavailable after the free 30-day trial period expired, as many students opted to use this option only because they did not have the financial wherewithal to keep the sites indefinitely viewable. There were some students, however, who maintained their websites long after they completed the course. Below is a listing of some of them that remained accessible at the time of writing this paper:

<http://leijeaduncan.wordpress.com/>  
<http://spelltechnology.wordpress.com/?ref=spelling>  
<http://teachingwritingwithtechnology.weebly.com/>  
<https://engarde876.wordpress.com/>

Viewing them will reveal the creative and interesting work evident within the student teachers’ e-portfolios, that later led – across the cohorts – to the creation of a post-class blog space and emailing list to encourage continued viewing, using and referencing of the websites, on the one hand, and networking among the community of learners of EDLA3110, on the other, for the effective teaching of writing at the secondary level. Interestingly, although these pre-

service and in-service teachers started out being mentored by us the teacher leaders, by the end of the course, having now organized themselves as learning communities (Mitchell and Sackney 2001) and armed with individual professional growth plans (Fenwick 2004) and conceptions about how language ought to be taught in TECSE contexts (Bryan 2014; Craig 2014), they were well on their way towards learner autonomy and assuming teacher leadership roles for institutional capacity building within the schools to which they returned or would eventually be employed.

### Reflecting on the Intervention Strategies in Developing Teacher-Learner Autonomy

In looking more closely at each of the intervention strategies, we found that for the mini-grammar lessons, students appreciated the time taken to augment this critical aspect of their language awareness development, to differentiate the rules of Standard English (separate and apart from Creole rules), and to minimize their crossing of the two, an approach supported by several Caribbean linguists and educators (Pollard 1993; Christie 2003; Craig 2006; Bryan 2010, 2014). Not knowing the rules of English grammar, and, by extension, not being able to teach them effectively, were probably the main reasons for their lack of confidence in their abilities. With the intervention focusing squarely on this problem, to provide student teachers with the tools to help themselves and their students, the mini-grammar lessons took on greater significance – as markers fostering professional autonomy – for them.

With regard to the writing workshops, there were three enriching aspects: (1) that the student teachers were keen to get copies of their peers' presentations, or to get email links/websites that were referenced by the groups during their presentations, because they saw their relevance to teaching the same topics in real-life contexts; (2) student teachers learnt life skills of negotiation, collaboration, and team work in organizing and delivering the workshops, tantamount to teacher-learner autonomy (Smith 2003), and finally; (3) student teachers embraced the workshops as a potentially powerful pedagogy for teaching varied genres in the English language (or literature or communication studies) classroom, similar to what was achieved by Atwell (1984) in her literacy workshop.

Overall, students reported that they found the contents of the workshops useful for their future teaching, suggesting that they pulled key methodologies from it to complement their professional dossiers.

The film, *Take 20: Teaching Writing*, gained the most mileage for our 'hidden curriculum' initiative, impacting students tremendously. It was while viewing the film that a majority of the student teachers became fully aware of our intentions to transform them professionally towards autonomy and becoming the 'ideal' teacher of English. As such, the film provided a tangible model, a point of departure for them to think about how they too could approach and navigate the interior spaces of their real-life classrooms. The film, due to its reflective nature, was quite instrumental in getting many of the student teachers to adopt the principle of reflective practice for better teaching. This focus on the processes and substance of reflecting on the film, vis-à-vis what could be effectively transferred from it to their real-life classroom contexts, was critical to their continuing professional learning outcomes, as Tillman (2003) maintains, and also for the kind of impact they would wish to make on students when they eventually enter the profession.

The e-portfolio, the final intervention strategy, helped to develop the students' craft as teachers and equipped them with a practical, accessible, hands-on pedagogical tool to teach the English language curriculum within a TECSE context. It encouraged them to become comfortable with technology and to think about effective ways of utilizing it within language classrooms, consequent of the collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas they benefitted from as they viewed and engaged with their peers' e-portfolios. The power and pervasiveness of technology are attested to by Sidler, Morris, and Smith (2008), who make the point that "digital technology has become an integral part of education, impacting teaching, writing instruction and literacy", and that students "interact with technology every day, by editing drafts, exchanging information, creating multimedia writing projects, and doing a host of other activities" (p. 2). Through the experience of the e-portfolio task and its spin-off blog space, the student-teachers came to agree with and accept this position, appreciating how the technology facilitated networking within the EDLA3110 community, demonstrating for them how they too, within their individual real-life classroom spaces, can intelligently negotiate and manage technology for effective teaching.

Given this analysis, we felt that the e-portfolio assignment was the apex professional development exercise attesting to teacher-learner autonomy, if for no other reason, certainly for the tangible evidence of students' work that was made available online as e-resources to expand student-teachers' pedagogical store and novice teachers' classroom repertoire.

Within the course, the reflexive activities of retracing their emerging awareness, growth and development as professionals helped the student-teachers to see the extent to which, over one semester they self-actualized, becoming autonomous learners. Most importantly, they realized and were able to self-report significant shifts in their conceptions of language teaching and learning, as well as in their disposition as subject experts, occasioned by their growing confidence in their knowledge of English language grammar, content, and pedagogy for teaching students in a Creole-speaking environment. When asked about the 'hidden curriculum' and its impact on students in the course, two of the more compelling responses were that:

The 'hidden curriculum' aspect of the course has revealed to me that being a teacher of English is not just about teaching for an exam; we teach for life. We help students to have a voice, to express themselves, and that is a lifelong tool. I now see English teachers as the biggest motivators especially in the Jamaican secondary schools. With Jamaica being bi-dialectal we as teachers have to equip our students with the confidence to compete in a world that goes beyond the country or the region. Communication is key to succeeding in this world and it is our job as English teachers to afford our students this opportunity. I now realize that a student's learning is as much the responsibility of the teacher as it is the student. (Karen)

The "hidden curriculum" in this class has given me a little more confidence to stand up in front of a class and deliver. It has also helped me to consider my ideas as big, no matter how small. (Renee)

These two quotes – and several others not shared here – attest to the fact that the pre-service and in-service teachers who took the course, EDLA3110: *Writing in the Secondary School*, showed incremental signs of growth, not only in the content of the teaching of writing, but also, through deliberate effort and incidental occurrences, in the areas of grammatical competence, pedagogical

confidence, and professional deportment – all the key skills necessary for teacher-learner autonomy as described by Smith (2003).

## The Way Forward: Teaching in Jamaican/Regional Secondary Classrooms

As teacher leaders, we accepted our professional responsibility to help improve our students' professional practice and to facilitate the deepening of their competence for teaching within the Jamaican/Caribbean secondary school system. Our motivation to see this intervention through was anchored by the fact that within this exit course (*Writing in the Secondary School*), for soon-to-be English language specialists, were students who had limited confidence in their abilities to meet the demands of the profession when they graduated from UWI. Since these students would represent to the wider world the undergraduate Language Education programme at the UWI's School of Education, we focused our 'hidden curriculum' intervention on

1. strengthening our teaching to ensure student-teachers' learning, so as to "enhance [their] professional practice" (Danielson 1996, 16)
2. empowering student-teachers towards the profile of the 'ideal', a teacher who "knows English as both 'arena' and 'subject', as both ideological and pedagogical" (Bryan 2014, 30).

As teacher leaders, by beginning with the (above) "professional growth plans" for our students – a concept borrowed from Fenwick (2004, 259) – we were hoping that our students would grow into and eventually actualize these plans through a demonstration of professional knowledge skills/competencies in real-life secondary level classrooms. When polled, reports from three of our past students (now teaching in high schools) confirmed that they were poised to succeed as English language specialists and educational professionals, based on the competencies they took away from the course, insights gleaned from their colleagues, and the practical pedagogical strategies they were able to adapt for their classroom settings.

Past Student # 1 reported:

I have mostly taken the newer strategies associated with language teaching like workshops or even writing across the curriculum. However they may not be very strict versions of them but many of the ideas associated with them have framed many of my lessons.

Past Student # 2 shared:

Now in my classes, I use social media and other online platforms which I know students are very familiar with to aid in my delivery. An example of this was when I assigned the task of creating Facebook profiles for different characters of the play “Julius Caesar.” Students were all eager to complete the task and found pleasure (scoring good grades as well) in doing the assignment

Past Student # 3 relayed:

Another aspect of the course that was very significant to my professional development was the workshop we had to participate in. My previous teaching experiences did not give me a chance to instruct slow learners. However the task my group was given was centered on teaching grade nine boys with reading and comprehension deficiencies. This was quite an enlightening task for me as planning for these students was completely different from what I was used to. This exposure has helped to prepare me to teach writing to students with different reading levels. The chance to observe my colleagues’ presentations was informative as I was able to discover numerous techniques for different writing tasks, some of which now feature in my current classes.

Interestingly, these language education specialists (and we hope several others of their EDLA3110 contemporaries) are beginning to demonstrate “a deep and powerful knowledge of English as a subject to be taught, and pedagogical knowledge of how to teach it” (Bryan 2014, 30). Starting with the support of their learning community within the course, which continues to impact the present, they are developing their “personal capacity,” which will later impact “interpersonal” and “organizational” capacities (Mitchell and Sackney 2001) of English departments in Jamaican/Regional secondary schools. Already at the level of the past student teachers who are now trained teachers, through their reports and dialogue, we are seeing fruition of the intervention, of them “reclaiming their own professional growth and assessment by engaging in reflec-

tive processes” (Fenwick 2004, 262). At the level of teacher leaders, we continue to remain cognizant of the ten roles proposed by Killion and Harrison (2007), coupled with modelling best practices in teaching, to mentor our students towards pedagogical and professional autonomy in this age of diversity and educational reform. In going forward, our thoughts from our journals are that

. . . as we prepare for the next cohort of students doing Writing in the Secondary School, we continue to approach it from the perspective of “how can we help our students (who are a combination of pre-service and in-service teachers) to become more competent and confident as English language teachers when they enter the “real” classroom space? We will continue to engage in much reflection and pre-planning to ensure that lessons we deliver are of a high standard. We are always conscious of the fact that we might be models for our students . . . We are confident that our students will grow to become strong, solid teachers, with a wealth of content knowledge and pedagogical ideas to share with their students. They will demonstrate learner autonomy . . .

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