But I was a Teacher!: Communities of Practice Supporting Teacher Educators' Development

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Abstract

Oftentimes, the transition to being a teacher educator may involve shifts in identities, responsibilities, and opportunities. We advance a model for inducting and retaining teacher educators into the higher education landscape. Drawing on the findings of a collaborative autoethnography, we share how a multi-institutional and varied positionality community of practice (CoP) is an approach that can support teacher educators with learning how to navigate the roles and responsibilities associated with teaching, researching, and serving in teacher preparation programs. We operationalize how this type of community of practice can be replicated.

> *"I was a teacher for years. How can being a teacher educator be so different and challenging?"*

Members of our research team have asked each other this question throughout our collaborative work. Similar to many teacher educators, our professional journeys began as PK-12 teachers. Each member taught in elementary school contexts for a different number of years prior to the transition to higher education. Some members taught for five years while others spent eleven years teaching elementary-aged students. We each transitioned to the role of teacher educator at different times, but all for the reason of seeking employment opportunities in teacher preparation as adjuncts, lecturers, or doctoral students. Our journeys into higher education came with new territories and shifts in the role of teaching. Often, demands of conducting research, securing funding, and engaging in service were added to the more familiar role of teaching.

For this study, we define teacher educators as individuals who teach coursework in formal teacher preparation programs, conduct research connected to teaching and learning, and provide

service to the field of education. We experienced, as the literature base has established, that shifting into the role of a teacher educator is not straightforward, but complex and challenging (e.g., Butler et al., 2014; Labaree, 2005; Williams et al., 2012). Thus, we began to wonder what approaches might support the induction and retention of teacher educators within higher education?

Drawing upon data from a collective autoethnography, we advance that one approach for inducting and retaining teacher educators is through communities of practice (CoP) that are multi-institutional and involve varied teacher educator positionalities (e.g., doctoral student, assistant professor, lecturer, professor). Each member of our community of practice (CoP) sought assistance with navigating roles and responsibilities associated with teaching, researching, and serving in the teacher preparation landscape. We refer to our CoP as the Connecting Contexts Group (CCG) to reflect our domain of interest. Table 1 details each member's demographics delineated according to when they entered the CCG in 2016 and their current demographics in 2024. Demographics include the member's position, number of years being a teacher educator, the types of teacher educator positionalities, and the number of higher education institutions at which they were employed. As Table 1 (see appendix) reveals, the members represent a variety of positionalities and years within teacher education.

In this article, we outline CCG members' discovered benefits related to their induction, retention, and ongoing support within the higher education community. Additionally, because the CCG involves members from multiple institutions with varied positions (e.g., doctoral student, assistant professor, lecturer, professor), the type of CoP we describe holds the potential to influence future scholars and the broader teacher educator community. Thus, we operationalize how this type of CoP can be replicated by others who seek to elevate the humanizing elements of teaching and learning while inducting and retaining teacher educators. We advocate for this model of a CoP so that teacher educators in their varied roles can leverage the support of peers and enhance the success of all CoP members.

Literature Review

The Teacher Educator Role

Teacher educators' development is critical as their expertise is integral to the success of new teachers (Kelchtermans et al., 2018). Individuals may enter the role of *teacher educator* from a range of positions such as doctoral student, novice faculty member, adjunct, or lecturer. Regardless of one's positionality, "the process [of becoming a teacher educator] involves critical changes in professional practice and identity" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 6). Research is still emerging that focuses on the professional learning, identity, and development of teacher educators (Loughran, 2014; Swennen et al., 2010), but extant research emphasizes that working in teacher education, in particular, requires a complex pedagogy of simultaneously *learning to teach* and *teaching to learn* (Loughran, 2006/2014). Despite this complex identity shift, Dinkelman et al. (2006) noted that many graduate programs do not provide enough support to doctoral students as they embark upon the field of teacher education. For example, some members of this research team were assigned as the instructors of record for undergraduate courses during their first semester of their doctoral programs. These members assumed this teacher educator role without any supervision or with only one introductory meeting about the course. Other members were tasked with performing research tasks such as compiling literature reviews without faculty mentorship or before taking doctoral coursework that taught how to engage in these scholarly tasks.

Similar to doctoral students needing instruction and support, especially in their first few years of their programs, Boyd and colleagues (2011) described the induction period for novice teacher educators as the first three years after an academic appointment has been secured. Their research demonstrated the additional support novice teacher educators required during this time and recommended that institutions be proactive, strategic, focused, and utilize effective communication methods during this unique time. Supporting graduate students with strong mentorship, support staff, coursework, and time and space to develop teacher educator identities in higher education can help the induction period go more smoothly.

Cochran-Smith (2003) revealed the lack of consensus on how to prepare or support teacher educators. A persisting belief that a doctorate indicates qualifications for and knowledge of how to prepare teachers does not consider institutional differences regarding the doctoral program's purpose and research intensiveness (Murray, 2017). That is, one doctoral degree-granting institution may focus on preparing teacher educators for a career in educational research, whereas another institution may focus preparation efforts on careers in institutions requiring intensive teaching loads. Additionally, learning to be a teacher educator is more complicated than simply learning how to teach adults. Being a teacher educator involves roles and responsibilities beyond teaching to include research and service, depending upon the hiring institution's focus (Butler et al., 2014; Hadar & Brody, 2017; Kleinsasser, 2017). Institutional expectations vary greatly regarding specified amounts of time devoted to teaching, scholarship, and service, which make guidance for navigating expectations crucial for retention (Young et al., 2017). Hence, learning how to be a teacher educator is often a solitary journey, depending on the size of the institution, and professional development opportunities available (Butler et al., 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2020).

Importantly, support for inducting and retaining teacher educators is warranted due to the well established trend of higher education faculty burnout and exiting from academia (Johnson, 1993; Lackritz, 2004; Watts & Robertson, 2011). This body of literature reveals that female faculty and younger faculty tend to experience higher levels of exhaustion. In addition, female faculty are also more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, partly due to the amount of care-work they do (Pope-Ruark, 2022). As Malesic (2016) argued:

> Burned out faculty cannot be the teachers and mentors that students need them to be. As the profession becomes more economically precarious…the working conditions foster burnout become more widespread…The response to faculty burnout, therefore, should not be to shrug and say that academic work is a labor of love, and some just aren't cut out for it. Instead, the response should be to find ways to give these highly skilled workers the rest, respect, and reward they need to stay healthy and effective. (para. 4)

Thus, one way to reduce burnout may be to design and implement effective strategies related to induction and retention.

Effective Approaches for Inducting and Retaining Teacher Educators

Despite institutional efforts to boost the retention of teacher educators, "Most influential professional learning for teacher educators, across all sectors, appears to take place in informal workplace settings and interactions in the department or team" (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 15). In 1992, Huling-Austin identified three factors that lead to the attrition of teacher educators: 1) ineffective mentorship or little support from more experienced teacher educators; 2) giving multiple course

preparations or subjects outside teacher educators' expertise; and 3) evaluating novice teacher educators with the same metrics as experienced teacher educators. Additionally, Huling-Austin argued that because learning to teach is a highly complex process, it requires time, reflection, and support from experienced teacher educators.

Other researchers have developed practices to assist in the induction of teacher educators. Koster et al. (2008) demonstrated how portfolios can assist novice teacher educators in establishing their identities within higher education. Kitchen and Parker (2009) argued that self-study and reflective inquiry was a necessary component of the induction process. Timmerman (2009) highlighted the value of role models in developing a new professional identity as a teacher educator, and Ritter (2009) stressed the importance of qualitative self-study in collaboration with peers as a beneficial strategy for retaining teacher educators. In the same way shifting identities does not have a one-size fits all model, finding what supports burgeoning teacher educators is not a one-size fits all approach. More research needs to be conducted that explores different ways of supporting novice teacher educators (Body et al., 2011).

Mentoring, induction, and retention of teacher educators depends upon levels of institutional support available, as well as teacher educators' proactive navigation of resources and their efforts to find a learning community that nurtures their identity as a teacher educator (e.g., Butler et al., 2014; Hadar & Brody, 2017). As research has demonstrated, professional development beyond the doctoral degree largely depends on the teacher educator's search for opportunities to learn from others in the profession, which can include engaging in communities of practice with other teacher educators interested in pursuing knowledge to improve teaching and learning (Gallagher et al., 2011; Tuval et al., 2011). Hadar and Brody (2017) described such communities as a self-guided path for professional learning, where research to improve practice can occur through self-study or through collaborative studies. Collaborative research efforts in such a CoP can solidify teacher educators' and researchers' identities in the academy while contributing to improved teaching and learning, and act as one possible solution to retaining novice teacher educators as they enter the workforce.

Self-Study Communities of Practice (SSCoP)

Self-study is a method for exploring one's own professional actions; it is both a practice and a form of research. Self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) has become a rigorous and imperative field of research whereby teacher educators study, reflect, and improve upon their practice (Kitchen, 2005). As Russell (1998) explained, "just as actions are said to speak louder than words, so how we teach may speak more loudly than what we teach" (p. 5). S-STEP has emerged as a way to better understand and reflect upon the *how* of teaching such that teacher educators can learn from their own experience and the experiences of others. Because being a teacher educator is a multifaceted endeavor, Kosnik and colleagues (2015) argued that studies of teacher educators "need to capture the complexity of their work by examining their identities, practices, backgrounds, transition, challenges, individual talents, and contexts" (p. 217).

Many scholars contend that the most powerful professional development exists within a community or network (Barack et al., 2010; MacPhail et al., 2014; Patton & Parker, 2017). Through these professional development networks, teachers change their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Guskey, 1986). Louie et al. (2003) argued that collaboration provides self-study researchers with much-needed social support, a deeper culture of reflectiveness, and increases the transferability of work to others. Communities of Practice (CoPs) were described by Wenger and

Wenger-Trayner (2015) as "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). CoPs come in many forms, but regardless of what they look like they are purposeful groups that revolve around authentic tasks.

SSCoPs have been conducted in a wide variety of settings. Some occur within the same institutions and educational departments. For example, Gallagher et al.'s (2011) CoP included pre-tenure faculty of one department as they explored their identities as teacher educators. Han et al. (2014) worked across different departments at one institution as a college-wide Diversity Committee; they incorporated culturally responsive teaching into their respective courses and reflected on the challenges and successes of collaboration. Teacher educators have designed collaborative SSCoPs that span institutions (e.g., Appleget et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2022). They found that working collaboratively allowed them to be vulnerable and avoid some of the fear they might have experienced doing the same work within their own respective institutions.

Both tenured and non-tenured faculty are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Tugend, 2020). Tugend found that more than two-thirds of the 1,122 college and university faculty surveyed in October of 2020 were struggling with increased workloads and over half were considering retiring or leaving. Given the complexities of becoming a teacher educator, researchers have called for more CoPs related to S-STEP (e.g., Butler et al., 2014; Kitchen & Parker, 2009). This scholarly essay seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by sharing how one multi-institutional SSCoP inducted, retained, and supported teacher educators at various points in their career. By sharing about this SSCoP, we hope that other teacher educators will seek out and form their own CoPs to continue their professional development, provide necessary mentorship, and ultimately, establish professional friends and colleagues.

Theoretical Framework

The nature of our multi-institutional and positionality community of practice was grounded in the theoretical framework of CoP (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger and colleagues (2002) outlined three main characteristics of a CoP, including (a) domain of interest; (b) community; and (c) practice. Common interests result in a shared space that creates an opportunity for social learning where members of varying levels of expertise join to advance knowledge in a specific topic. A CoP provides both short and long-term value to group members and the greater organization to which members belong. Membership allows for personal and professional growth beyond increased knowledge because members gain confidence in their abilities by confronting research challenges, accessing a shared knowledge bank, and engaging in meaningful work.

Applying Wenger and colleagues' (2002) characteristics to our group, the Connecting Contexts Group (CCG), our *domain of interest*s are instruction and research focused on literacy instruction for teacher candidates. *Membership* in the CCG does not exclude membership in other CoP, but all members remained active in the CCG since its inception in 2016. The literacy research community benefits from members that seek innovative solutions, remain current in the discipline, and enhance members belonging to the larger community. Finally, the *practice*—or meaning created together through this shared work—provides avenues for developing competency in our work (i.e., teaching and research). Members continue to teach and have vested interest in the instructional community.

The process of collaborative research has allowed us to cultivate our place in the CCG as our roles, experiences, and knowledge changed through participation (Wenger et al., 2002). Nov-

ice participants enter an authentic task and participate on the periphery of a CoP. As novices develop deeper understandings of the domain of interest they move through a continuum of mastery. While interactions between novice and expert practitioners create a trajectory of growth for novices, it could be argued that membership creates opportunities for growth for all members. We suggest that entering authentic practice-based problems offer opportunities for all members to learn and to consider new identities. Three of our members joined the CCG as doctoral students with nascent experience in research and two members were assistant professors. The last two members had a range of experiences that helped guide novices through aspects of research, such as narrowing research questions, exploring methods, investigating theories, writing, and publishing. Thus, the legitimate peripheral participation of our novice members was never stagnant, but "continuous, active, engaged, situated, and identity-forming" (Cox, 2005, p. 528). Over time, novices and experts in the CCG experienced growth in their confidence to conduct research, evolve their teaching practices, and (re)envision their service roles.

Lastly, working within a CoP reifies collaborative practices, which encourages sharing of expert knowledge. Subsequently, the CCG also formed a learning community as it promoted group norms that embraced a "culture of learning in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding" (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999, p. 271). In a CoP, all members take responsibility for sharing new ideas/learning. As Rogers (2000) noted, "no one individual…is burdened with the task of 'knowing it all'" (p. 384). For the CCG, we divided research tasks, maintained fluid roles within the group, and shared our various expert knowledge with each other.

The Connecting Contexts Group

Members came to participate in our CCG through membership in other CoPs, which are nested (see Figure 1). Initially, CCG members self-identified as education scholars at their individual institutions. CCG members first met when we attended the Literacy Research Association's (LRA) annual conference in December 2016. One LRA study group, the Teacher Education Research Study Group (TERSG), provides space where literacy scholars connect with others around shared interests for teacher education. TERSG's purpose is to advance research in teacher education through forming collaborative research groups around areas of interest pertinent to literacy research and educators' pedagogy. Our team of seven researchers shared an interest in addressing the intersection between literacy and teacher education. Through this shared interest, we developed into a collaborative research group that examined connections between literacy coursework and field work (Peltier et al., 2019, 2021; Shimek et al., 2021).

Figure 1: *Nested Communities of Practice*

Connecting
Contexts Group
(CCG)

Teacher Education
Research Study
Group (TERSG)

Literacy Research
Association (LRA)

Education Scholars
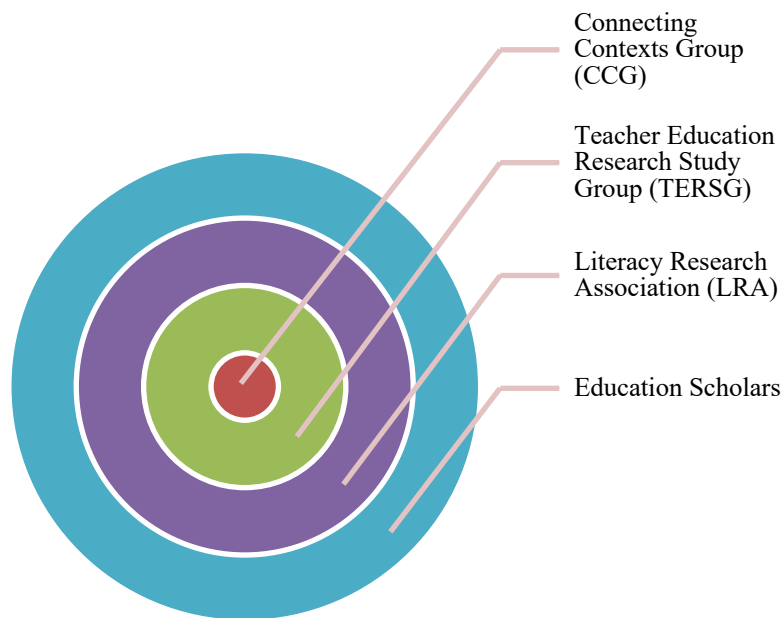
We want to emphasize that initially the CCG functioned as a collaborative research partnership rather than a community of practice. This was demonstrated by our focus on studying how other teacher educators connected their teaching to field experiences. We did not initially connect this research to our own roles and positionalities as teacher educators. During our three-year longitudinal study, the iterative process of data analysis created the space for our group to begin to shift focus and connect our research to our own personal work as teacher educators. It was during this time that our group transitioned from operating as a collaborative research group to a group that identified as a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002).

As our CCG recognized that our roles and interactions were shifting, we began to discuss how our teaching practices were impacted by the knowledge we gained from our research. We were curious to know if our CCG had influenced more than just our teaching practices so we employed a collaborative autoethnographic approach to determine how engagement in the CCG may have contributed to individual induction/retention, professional growth, and identity formation within the academy and field of education. Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that is both process and product designed to uncover how personal connections lead to cultural shifts (Adams et al., 2015). Sawyer and Ligget (2012) explained that autoethnography is both inherently systematic but also subjective in nature; it is the process of drawing upon personal experiences to better understand the culture(s) of which we are members. It is a method whereby "authors use their own experience in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions" (Holt, 2003, p. 19), seeks to dissolve the hierarchies in traditional research (e.g., power dynamics between researchers and participants; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012), requires significant self-reflection (Ellis et al., 2011), and is both a recursive analytic process and a process of always becoming (Holt, 2003). Collaborative autoethnography reflected the type of multi-institution and

positionality CoP that we had created–a CoP where hierarchies and longevity in the field did not elevate a members' experiences and ways of understanding.

Throughout our collaborative autoethnographic study, we met bi-monthly or monthly, dependent on schedules and deadlines. We videotaped our meetings as well as reviewed the extensive notes of conversations and decisions we made throughout meetings. In our reflective discussions, we documented changes in our teaching practices, approaches to research, and service roles. In addition to our meetings, we individually wrote reflective journals about changes we noticed in ourselves as our research, teaching, and service evolved over time. We shared these journals amongst each other during our meetings and then reread them outside our formal meeting times, resulting in a recursive and reflective process whereby we examined our experiences both as individuals and as a CoP. The personal journals along with the meeting recordings and documents became our primary data sources–revealing our knowledge, experiences, positionalities, and responsibilities as literacy teacher educators.

Hearing our Stories: Voices from the Community of Practice

Given that collaborative autoethnography emphasizes the collective, but also the individual lived experiences of a group, we determined that sharing reflections of the CCG would best support why the particular CoP we are advancing holds potential for inducting and retaining teacher educators. In this section, we share the findings of our collaborative autoethnography by each sharing an aspect of our professional and personal identities that were influenced through our involvement in the CCG. We elected to incorporate our personal identities (author names) into descriptions as a way to maintain the collaborative autoethnographic design. We then follow up with discussion about the importance of a multi-institutional and varying positionality CoP within higher education and provide implications for other individuals wanting to engage in a similar CoP.

Induction into Teacher Education - Laura

As a third-year doctoral student at a large research-intensive university, I wandered into TERSG during lunch one day at Marliese's invitation. I was looking for a research community that shared my interest in teacher candidates' education. Though I felt a little nervous and unsure of myself as a potential contributor, I was hungry for an opportunity to engage in productive academic work and collaborate with others who shared my research interests. TERSG had a proven track record of publications, and as a novice I was eager to both partner with and learn from them. I hoped this would help to demystify aspects of the research and publication process that I felt unequipped to tackle on my own while also supporting me in my teaching. I quickly found a subgroup of like-minded colleagues who were grappling with the same questions I was in my teaching— questions about preparing teachers for fieldwork and for future teaching contexts with curricular mandates and scripted materials. The CCG started with a focus on teacher preparation as our shared domain of interest. Within a couple of meetings, I felt I had found my home at LRA as we began planning our first research study. Through my final two years of graduate school, the CCG remained a productive and supportive network for me, both in my research and in my teaching. In addition to conducting research together, we frequently discussed teaching ideas and resources such as course texts and technology tools. By bringing together questions and issues I was grappling with as a teacher educator with my desire to grow as a researcher and academic writer, the CCG helped induct me into the role of teacher educator.

As I reached the end of my graduate school years, though I had grown to love the research and writing aspects of academic work, I decided to pursue a career at a small, teaching-focused college. My own journey into academia had begun during my undergraduate years at a faith-based, private, liberal arts college where my professors in the education department had cultivated my intellectual curiosity and passion for lifelong professional learning through a relational approach to mentoring. I could think of no career path more fulfilling than to work at a similar institution where I would know and mentor my students in this way. Even so, as I transitioned from being a doctoral student at a large research institution to being a teacher educator at my alma mater, I experienced challenges in learning to navigate my new role. My continued involvement in the CCG provided a productive and sustainable way to pursue my research interests while also continuing to grow as a teacher educator. Our regular group meetings kept me connected to a rich professional learning community beyond my small institution, helping me remain abreast of broader trends and issues in the field while also refreshing my teaching with new ideas. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, I appreciated having a group with which to puzzle through the new challenges we are all navigating in our teaching. Our collaboration continues to be vital to sustaining two core aspects of my scholarly work and identity—teaching and meaningful scholarship that grows out of my teaching practice. In this way, the CCG has supported not only my induction into the profession but also my retention.

Growing as a Novice Scholar – Elizabeth

When I joined the CCG in December 2016, I was a new assistant professor halfway through my first year at a regional comprehensive university. My role included a 3/3 teaching load, where effective teaching is highly valued, though productive research plays a crucial role in my tenure-track position as well. In seeking to merge my own teaching and research, I joined this group hoping to find support for my scholarship as an emerging scholar.

The CCG initially formed around a similar domain of interest–understanding how to merge coursework with fieldwork experiences for teacher candidates at our respective universities. I was excited at the prospect of merging the theoretical knowledge base I developed during graduate school with our group's first research project. My scholarly identity was budding from my dissertation work and early research endeavors, and I eagerly anticipated engaging with other literacy education scholars. Drawing on my dissertation research fostered confidence in my membership despite being a novice scholar. Our initial research project pushed me to new boundaries in my own identity as a researcher, as I had previously only conducted qualitative research projects. As the CCG moved into a mixed-methods study, I was uncertain about contributions I would be able to make regarding quantitative methods. These tensions easily faded when group members with more experience in mixed-methods took the lead and guided novices, like myself, in collecting mixed-methods data. It became clear at this point that membership in the CCG was indeed a collaborative process whereby our research efforts drew from a culture of learning where everyone was involved via Bielaczyc and Collins' (1999) notion of a collective effort for engaging in research.

As our collaboration and research endeavors progressed, we designed additional qualitative studies, interviews, and case studies. My former experiences with semi-structured interviews and case studies merged with practice-based problems identified by the CCG and enhanced my knowledge as a teacher education researcher. I excitedly engaged in designing interviews, reviewing documents, and coding qualitative data for our case study research. As I drew from theories

and methodologies studied in graduate school, I extended this knowledge in newfound ways as I was able to conduct research that ultimately improved how I prepared teacher candidates. Under the guidance of our fluid and shifting roles as novices and experts within the CCG, our authentic practice as a group further enhanced my own confidence as a researcher while shaping my ever-evolving identity as a novice scholar. My membership in this group fostered my ability to seamlessly merge practice and research. This contributed not only to my growth as a scholar, but also my development as a teacher educator. Six years after joining the CCG, I celebrated receiving tenure and promotion at my institution and undoubtedly value the impact of my membership in our group on my induction and growth as a teacher educator.

Engaging as a Scholar in a Non-Tenure Track Role – Stephanie

Participation in the CCG has helped each one of us carve out our individual roles at the university level. When we began meeting in 2016, we were in various positions which provided perspective and experience. Our six members are now in Lecturer, Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor roles. Rather than take on a tenure track position upon completion of my program in 2009, I decided to take the unconventional route and remain in a Lecturer role. A combination of location-bound and family obligations made this the right decision for me. This decision was met with varying responses of affirming, questioning, and even disapproval from mentors and peers. Further, this decision also developed an inner dilemma within me of doubting my contributions and questioning my university status. The inevitable loss of the individual research focus I developed in my doctoral program impacted my identity as a scholar.

As a Senior Lecturer, I have the desire to continue my involvement in research projects and to share this with the wider scholarly community. Continuing with research and writing are challenging but I had opportunities over the years to participate in groups that developed important questions and worked together to create and strengthen results of our efforts. Being a member of the CCG provided me with opportunities to collaborate with others dedicated to literacy instruction across the United States. Gathering data, analyzing results, and publishing are tasks that any professor can find daunting on an individual level. This collaborative effort provides the framework for a natural progression of continued work that has led to conference presentations, journal publications, and book chapters. All these experiences keep me involved in literacy research and provide me with opportunities to write. That would be more than most lecturers could manage with a demanding teaching load. My identity as a scholar extends beyond my required lecturer teaching load and includes this valuable research avenue I have chosen to continue to pursue.

Growing Through Service- Courtney

Being inducted into the CCG has not only enhanced my research acumen, but has provided invaluable connections and service opportunities. In 2018, I was approached by the two past TERSG leaders about serving as Co-Chair of TERSG despite being a novice doctoral student in the CCG and the broader TERSG. With mentorship and guidance of these two experts, I served as Co-Chair of TERSG for three years. The service, mentorship, and leadership role in a well-established and respected study group from an international professional conference benefited me in developing my identity as a teacher educator and an academic.

Serving both the TERSG and our broader LRA communities encouraged communication that allowed me to network with a number of professional colleagues and friends that I can turn to

for advice, connect with on projects, and to check in with as my career progresses. These relationships and support we provide each other as members of the CCG have been the most beneficial factor for me. As a novice researcher, assistant professor, and former graduate student, it was invaluable for me to enter a CoP where I did not need to know it all, but found I could contribute in some ways. I work hard to emulate the mentorship provided by experts before me and work to give back to the larger CoP. When I hear of doctoral students attending LRA for the first time, I explain how beneficial this group has been for me and encourage them to attend our TERSG sessions. Several decided to join research groups and are being mentored by other members of our community through their respective research projects. Being a part of a larger CoP requires members to recognize that the success of any research sub-group helps move our field forward, and we can support one another through acts of service.

Finally, other study groups expressed interest in how the TERSG operates. We shared the approach used by the CCG and other TERSG research groups with other LRA study groups and they are beginning to emulate their own versions of our process with their content foci as they work to induct new members and provide support for current members in innovative ways. In this way, the CCG serves not only group members and TERSG, but also the larger LRA community of literacy and teacher education scholars.

Developing as an Academic Writer – Ann

The age-old publish or perish statement reified the emphasis of writing as an integral aspect of professional success in academia. However, writing is not a natural process for everyone. The process of becoming a proficient scholarly writer, however, is a process and a skill that continues to improve the more you write. Participation in the CCG gave me a safe space for my own writing improvement. I joined TERSG with feelings of unease knowing that scholarship translated to research and written dissemination of findings. Through participation in the CCG, writing would not be a solo event, but a collaborative and communal process. Aspects of writing such as my knowledge of academic vocabulary and a scholarly voice would be evaluated by a group of individuals who I had yet to know on a personal level. I had to make myself vulnerable to share and receive feedback on my writing.

Fortunately, I found a group of early scholars and seasoned veterans who provided guidance on improving my writing practice. My writing identity continued to evolve as I read and collaboratively revised our work alongside group members. While at times intimidating, benefits of belonging to a group far outweighed the risks to my professional identity. The CCG enhanced my writing skills in a way that would not have occurred if I was writing solo. Our collaborative group focused on finishing written products (proposals, chapters, articles), divided up writing tasks, used our multiple perspectives to hone manuscripts, and most importantly, offered a safe space for being vulnerable in writing. Working collaboratively, for all the positive benefits, does make a scholar responsible to the group. As a writer in a CoP I have found a space to build my identity as a writer.

Finding an Academic Identity Through Collaboration – Roya

In 2009 I was hired to teach in a regional institution that emphasized teaching, where I am one of two reading faculty members. I chose my regional institution because I wanted to engage

in research for pleasure instead of being pressured to publish, but that also meant fewer opportunities for collaborations. TERSG meetings and collaborations are the best professional development I have ever experienced because of opportunities to participate in CoP. These opportunities directly contributed to my desire to remain in my teacher educator role. Discussions during TERSG meetings result in collaborative projects where we unite in our study of issues that inform our work with teacher candidates, in-service teachers, and with the larger education community. I find this stimulating and it helps me take part in projects that tackle issues extending beyond my region.

TERSG collaborations contribute to my professional development because I learn more about practices beyond my institution while being prompted to reflect on my practices as a literacy teacher educator and as a researcher. TERSG provided me with a research home that is not possible in my institution or by simply attending sessions in conferences. In TERSG and the CCG we value every voice, regardless of rank. First semester doctoral students work alongside professors of all ranks, and from all types of institutions - from research-intensive universities, regional comprehensives, and private institutions. All are welcome, all are valued, and we strive to solve problems of practice together while reflecting on our own practices. Practical findings from my involvement in the CCG strengthened my teaching and my institution's teacher preparation program. Most importantly, I found my voice as a teacher educator and researcher. Collaborations solidified recognition (by others and of myself) as a teacher educator and scholar, which I internalized. Being part of the CCG where others are fueled by the same desire to grapple with issues facing teacher education is energizing because I am part of the team who can make a difference. That shared passion and energy keeps me in the profession and continues to serve as a catalyst for positive change in teacher education, which would not be possible if I remained isolated in my regional university.

Identifying as a Collaborator - Marliese

I began my formal participation in TERSG in December 2016 when I attended the annual conference for LRA. One of my fellow doctoral students had recommended that I consider joining TERSG because of my research interests in literacy teacher education. Each day I grabbed to-go lunches and scurried off to TERSG. Over three days, the CCG formed with members from multiple teacher preparation programs. Together, we planned a research study, an authentic task, that we would conduct over the coming months. As a doctoral student and novice scholar, it was in the CCG that I felt less vulnerable. The CCG members validated my emerging scholarly knowledge– encouraging me to extend my thinking and incorporating my contributions into the broader conversation. At the time, I identified as a legitimate peripheral participant in the CCG even though I felt limited in my scholarly knowledge and research experience.

CCG members continued their validations and explicit apprenticed approaches beyond the conference into our research group meetings. CCG members mentored me through the processes of conducting collaborative group research, crafting conference presentations, and writing for publication. These learning opportunities defined my doctoral journey, shaping how I position myself as an education scholar. Over the years, I have transitioned from legitimate peripheral participation to more "expert" forms of participation. For example, my deepened understanding as a researcher and writer undergirded my ability to confidently serve as the lead author for several publications and presentations. Furthermore, I have also felt driven to join additional communities where I can mentor other novice researchers, supporting their transitions through the continuum of mastery. I look forward to continuing to pay it forward to future education scholars.

Discussion: Growing Individually and Collectively as Teacher Educators

The practice of forming and cultivating a CoP is widely discussed within the education field (e.g., Martin & Dismuke, 2015; Tuval et al., 2011). From explorations of the literature, articles speak to cultivating CoP within one's department, college, or university. Illustratively, Martin and Dismuke (2015) were colleagues at a single institution who examined their collaborative process of changing practices in their writing methods courses. Tuval et al. (2011) formed their CoP in response to a university mandate for the development of a teacher education program. In this article, we extend this research by sharing how to cultivate CoP beyond individualized institutional boundaries. In looking across our collective autoethnographies, membership in the CCG intersected with members' positive reflections about experiences related to induction, retention, and ongoing support within teacher education.

As previously noted, many graduate programs do not support doctoral students as they enter the field of teacher education (Dinkelman et al., 2006). In addition, Boyd et al. (2011) demonstrated in their research the need for supporting novice teacher educators and recommended that institutions be proactive, strategic, focused, and utilize effective communication methods. Illustratively, among our CCG, two out of seven of us received formal training addressing how to teach in teacher education programs during our doctoral programs. Upon receiving our initial faculty appointments, three of our CCG members received induction support for newly hired faculty. This ranged from a volunteer one-time orientation meeting to informal meetings with a mentor in the same department to address annual review, promotion, and tenure guidelines. The most extensive induction program involved a two-tiered approach where the CCG member met monthly with a mentor in the same department to receive guidance on research, teaching, and service. The second tier was mandatory participation in a university-wide induction program for all newly hired tenure-track faculty regardless of rank. The induction program met weekly for three hours and focused on a range of topics (e.g., learning how to use the learning management system, the university governance system, university diversity, equity and access initiatives).

With the stark absence of formalized and comprehensive induction assistance (i.e., focused on research, teaching, and service) for the majority of us, our CCG served as a tremendous support for the induction of our members who transitioned from graduate studies into tenure track roles and members who were novice teacher educators. Our CCG is proactive, focused, and utilizes effective communication methods. Our biweekly meeting structure creates opportunities to routinely share problems of practice. Our research has evolved so that we can be proactive in learning how to revise our pedagogical practices. This speaks to the need that McKeon and Harrison (2010) discussed regarding the difficulty in modifying pedagogical skills needed for effective teaching and higher education. By being multi-positional, we recognized that we can also be proactive in mentoring. We lean on others within the group with different contexts, experiences, and positions to help us know what to expect and learn how to navigate varying institutional challenges. Our personal reflections above speak to how the CCG filled the void and supported members with induction into their roles as teacher educators, and literacy scholars. Marliese, Courtney, and Laura joined the CCG as doctoral students or novices. Through members' mutual engagement and their shared repertoire of knowledge and teaching practices, these doctoral students and novice teacher educators felt capable and welcomed to legitimately participate in the developed research project–the joint enterprise of the CCG.

An additional strength of this particular CoP is how membership in the CCG relates to our individualized retention in the field of teacher education. Conducting research requires thoughtful,

purposeful, and structured methods, which can be time-intensive. The realities of conducting re-search can be at odds with institutional expectations around teaching and service. Nevertheless, each member encountered varying expectations that they remain engaged in research and scholar-ship. All CCG members benefited from the collective knowledge of scholarship. Six of the seven of us hold tenure-track positions with automatic implications for publication. Each member in their autoethnography highlighted the importance of this group to their growth as a scholar. We found that collaborative research brought about not just a better product (e.g., findings, implications for the field) but also supported the development of our critical thinking.

A final strength of our CCG is the ongoing support we provide each other. The CCG was founded around the idea that research should inform practice, especially our practice as teacher educators. For each of us, researching our own teaching practices led to intentional self-reflection of our own practices, ongoing professional development, and learning. Via conversation with each other, we borrowed ideas, made changes to our courses, and engaged in an ongoing and intentional, reflectional process. Because we set aside the time and space to do our longitudinal research, we also created spaces where we could talk about our own practices, share successes with one another, and intentionally adapt our teaching practices.

Our success as a CCG did not come without its challenges, as we navigated problems sur-rounding scheduling, technology, institutional guidelines, and varying perspectives and ap-proaches to engaging in the research process. Our various institutional appointments do not include a designated load to engage in work such as our CCG that focuses on our teaching. Young et al. (2017) delineated the ways in which institutional expectations vary regarding time for teaching, scholarship, and service and purported the significance of providing guidance for navigating ex-pectations to support retention in the field. Our CCG address these different institutional expecta-tions and while each of us embraces the value of this CoP, we all ebb and flow with the amount of time we are able to commit due to teaching loads, leadership roles within our institutions and professional organizations, and our personal family lives (loved ones battling cancer, the loss of family members, and the birth of children, to name a few).

Utilizing technology to engage in productive work within our CCG has presented various challenges over the years. We began our collaboration prior to the Zoom era and experienced technological hiccups with the use of programs that were new to us, such as Bluejeans for virtual meetings. Additionally, finding access to technology systems to engage in data analysis across seven different institutions has proven difficult at times. For some projects, Google Sheets proved effective to code data and for different projects we tried Dedoose. No one method came without its limitations, though we recognize this as a common challenge in the field of research. Moreover, the IRB process and its varying requirements and regulations presented challenges in the ways we share data for each of our projects. Despite our challenges, we purport that developing and sus-taining a CoP can provide tremendous support to teacher educators for induction and retention in the field, all while creating the space to elevate the humanizing aspects of teaching and learning. Engaging in the collaborative work of a CoP can provide opportunities to learn about the landscape of teacher preparation programs and also amplify our abilities to share this knowledge with others.

Implications and Conclusions

Cultivation of a cross-institutional and positional CoP has far-reaching effects for teacher educators' induction, retention and ongoing professional growth. This group—nested in contexts of local, national, and global literacy work—reified the construction of a CoP aligned with Wenger

et al.'s (2002) characteristics of domain (interest), community (shared learning and information), and practice (resources and tools) in the field of literacy education. Our collaborative work impacts our domain of interest, our local and national literacy body of knowledge, but also the practice of teaching and learning. Lessons learned from this experience (e.g., effort of finding shared meetings times, consensus on research, creating final products) may be transferable to other members of academia and how to navigate various experiences within institutions. As we reflect upon our involvement in the CCG we consider this work's impact on local institutions and their situated communities, and broader implications for the professional and national organizations.

First, what we learned in the CCG can be transferred to our individual institutions. This implication extends findings from Butler et al. (2014) in that involvement in a CoP supports teacher educators to "become more conscious of who we are as professionals and to develop a coherent professional identity" (p. 270). Membership in the CCG has helped aid our novices (i.e., doctoral students, novice faculty) to move to legitimate participation in research, teaching, and service. Over time, we have grown in knowledge–not isolated or siloed knowledge, but a shared space to become better at the *tasks* of our profession. For example, our research required online data coding with which many of us had limited experience. The need to learn "how*"* became an opportunity for professional growth.

Another implication extends beyond our immediate community, but to our encounters with teacher candidates and with other professionals in local, state, national, and international arenas. As members in the CCG grew in knowledge over the years, we moved through the continuum of novice scholars to becoming more experts in the field. Knowledge gained both informally (conversations) and formally (publications) is shared in multiple ways. As mentioned, membership in the CCG heightened our reflexivity and intentionality in teaching. Thus, teacher candidates benefitted as we improved our practice, especially around connecting our coursework with their fieldwork experiences. Our local institutions and situated communities reap benefits of this shared knowledge. Illustratively, teacher candidates were able to build bridges between the formalized teacher preparation coursework to the local school's classrooms utilized for field experiences. Our dedicated work added a new body of knowledge to national and international forums that other educators and literacy researchers reflect on and use as practice to advance the field of literacy education. Nationally, CCG members participate widely in professional organizations and research collaborations. We use knowledge gained in research design, methods, and data analysis to add value to these larger groups.

In all, our CoP provided us with increased knowledge of our field, confidence in our teaching, and areas of growth that we strive for in our practices. Through designing, conducting, analyzing, presenting, and publishing research together, we helped each other grow as individuals and as a collective group. We are more effective teacher educators as a result from our work together, and we experienced growth and development in our scholarship and service. Through this CoP, many of us were inducted into the life of academia, remain in the field, and continue to support one another as we navigate various roles in our institutions of higher education. Our CoP has shown us that together we can achieve so much more than we can as individuals, and confirms Aristotle's (980) saying, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

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Appendix

Table 1: *CCG Member Demographics*

	When Entering CCG				Currently			
	Position	Number of Years Being a Teacher Educator	Types of Teacher Educator Positionalities	Number of Higher Education Institutions Employed By	Position	Number of Years Being a Teacher Educator	Types of Teacher Educator Positionalities	Number of Higher Education Institutions Employed B
Marliese	Doctoral Student	5	Adjunct Lecturer Doctoral Student	2	Assistant Professor	12	Adjunct Lecturer Doctoral Student Lecturer I Assistant Professor	5
Ann	Assistant Professor	3	Doctoral Student	1	Associate Professor	7	Assistant Professor Adjunct Lecturer	1
Roya	Associate Professor	12	Doctoral Student Fixed Term Faculty Assistant Professor Associate Professor	2	Full Professor	19	Doctoral Student Fixed Term Faculty Assistant Professor Associate Professor Full Professor	2
Courtney	Doctoral Student	2	Doctoral Student	1	Assistant Professor	8	Doctoral Student Assistant Professor	2
Elizabeth	Assistant Professor	4	Doctoral Student	1	Associate Professor	7	Doctoral Student Assistant Professor	1
Stephanie	Lecturer	0	Lecturer	1	Senior Lecturer	13	Lecturer Senior Lecturer	1
Laura	Doctoral Student	3	Doctoral Student	1	International P-12 School Administrator	9	Doctoral Student Assistant Professor P-12 School-Based PD Leader	2