

Introduction

In 2007, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, one of the prominent journals in the field of TESOL, dedicated an entire issue to writing teacher education, indicating that the preparation of writing teacher has started to gain some scholarly attention (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Ferris, 2007; Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Weigle, 2007). Although the articles included in this issue address different topics in the preparation of writing teachers (e.g., preparing writing teachers to teach vocabulary and grammar or teaching writing teachers about classroom and large-scale assessments), the underlying assumption of this line of works seems to be that without qualified writing teachers, students' learning is likely to suffer. In other words, how teachers teach has a direct impact on student learning. While it is important to look into effective ways of professionalizing future writing teachers, it is equally important to find ways to help those already working in the field, i.e., in-service teachers. The current study addressed this issue by examining the professional development needs of writing teachers teaching at technological universities and colleges in Taiwan.

Literature review

Teachers' professional development

Teacher learning is now seen as a normative part of every teacher's career. It does not stop once teachers finish their education or practicum. Rather, it is a lifelong process, "emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts; as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and later as teachers in institutions where teachers work" (Johnson & Golombek, 2003; pp. 729-30; also see Bailey et al., 2001; Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

There are many reasons for teachers to pursue professional development (Bailey et al. 2001; Knight, 2002). The reasons range from the need to acquire more knowledge and skills to cope with changes to a possible increase in income and/or prestige as a result of participation in professional development. In addition to these reasons, Bailey et al. (2001) suggest that "continued professional growth and excitement can also help us to combat negativity in our teaching contexts" (p. 7). Moreover, teachers can meet like-minded people when taking part in professional development activities. As a result, they may feel less isolated and establish their membership in the larger community of teachers who are devoted to their personal and professional growth.

The literature of teacher learning also abounds with discussions on the types of different approaches to professional development. The current consensus seems to be that the traditional top-down, "event-delivery" models of professional development activities (e.g., one-stop workshops) are not the optimal type for teachers to engage in. According to Knight (2002), the problems with these traditional models include the cost and the inconsistency in the quality of such

provision. Also, there is often a mismatch between what is provided and teachers' real needs. The models favored by Johnson (2006) are those who would "allow for self-directed, collaborative, inquiry-based learning that is directly relevant to teachers' classroom lives" (p. 243). The examples discussed by Johnson include teacher inquiry seminars, peer coaching, cooperative development, teacher study groups, narrative inquiry, lesson study groups, and critical friends groups. These alternative professional development structures, as Johnson (2006) argues, create more equitable social roles among the participants; they also recognize the classroom where teachers spend much of their time as a legitimate site for teacher learning.

Faculty development

Like teachers teaching at other levels, college teachers also need to continue to pursue professional development to keep abreast of new development in teaching and research (Camblin Jr. & Steger, 2000; Lechuga, 2006; Marcinkiewicz & Doyle, 2004; Sorcinelli, et al., 2006). The literature of faculty development abounds with discussions on ways of helping college teachers develop. In a time where high education institutions are facing multiple challenges from different sources (fast-changing social landscape, diversity among students and their needs, the demands or accountability, budget cuts, to name just a few), faculty development is especially important to help faculty members not only to survive, but to thrive in the academia. As Torrey (2002) summarizes, the aim of faculty development is to help faculty members "improve scholarship, contribute knowledge to an academic or professional field, or keep current in a discipline" (pp. 15-16).

According to Sorcinelli et al. (2006), the term "faculty development" entails a different conceptualization in each phase of higher education in the United States, as summarized in Table 1:

Table 1 Five Ages of Faculty Development in the U.S. (summarized from Sorcinelli et al., 2006; also see Chen, 2010)

Phase	Time	Conceptualization of Faculty Development
Age of the Scholar	1950s to early 1960s	● Faculty development efforts focused mostly on improving and advancing scholarly competence.
Age of the Teacher	mid 1960s to 1970s	● Teacher development was viewed as key to faculty vitality and renewal, and attention mainly focused on improving teaching.
Age of the Developer	1980s	● Faculty development broadened to address curricular issues, faculty needs at different career

Age of the Learner	1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● stages, and collective as well as individual faculty growth. ● Student learning rather than teaching took center stage; greater student diversity called for a greater range and variety in teaching and learning methods, skills, and sensitivities.
Age of the Network	21 st century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meeting the higher expectations on the members of higher education institutions requires collaboration among all stakeholders.

As can be seen from Table 1, we are currently in the Age of the Network in which people in the higher education need to work with numerous changes and demands. How faculty can change and grow to meet these demands is indeed an important issue in the new millennium.

Second language (L2) writing teachers' professional development

In the field of L2 writing, some attention has been given to the professional development of writing teachers. A review of the literature reveals that most scholarly efforts have concentrated on suggesting practical ways of helping writing teachers to teach better. For example, Coxhead and Byrd (2007) discussed the use of several web-based resources to help writing teachers teach vocabulary and grammar of the academic prose while Ferris (2007) described her own approach of training writing teachers to provide feedback in her MA TESOL course. Another example is found in Weigle's (2007) article in which she outlined important reminders for conducting assessment in writing classrooms.

One empirical study in the field of L2 writing teachers' professional development is provided by Lee (2010), in which she examined how a course in an in-service MA program impacted four English teachers in Hong Kong. Lee (2010) was able to identify six areas in which the MA program impacted her participants. Upon the completion of the course, the four teachers were found to (1) question conventional approaches and assumptions about writing and writing instruction; (2) learn through first-hand experiences with peer feedback, teacher conferencing, and genre pedagogy; (3) learn to read research papers and see them as a valuable learning resource; (4) become active writers themselves; (5) develop a professional language to talk about teaching writing; and (6) start to consider the importance of balancing idealism and realism. Lee (2010) concluded that teacher education, instead of being seen as a "low-impact enterprise" (Grossman, 2008), did play a significant role in the trajectory of writing teachers' development. As Lee (2010) summarizes, writing teacher education can benefit in-service teachers by

“incorporating a focus on helping them see the challenges they face in their work contexts, providing opportunities for them to discuss coping strategies, and encouraging them to engage in communities of practices” (pp. 154-155).

Before encouraging L2 writing teachers to engage in any professional development activity, their needs and preferred ways of learning need to be understood. The current study was designed to shed light on these two fundamental yet important issues.

The current study

Purpose

The current study chose to focus on writing teachers partly because some previous studies in EFL contexts (Hirvela & Law, 1991; Lee, 1996) indicated that teachers rated writing their weakest area of competency. On the same vein, Reichet’s (2009) study found that EFL teachers generally lacked knowledge in teaching writing and that many EFL writing teachers may have received very little or no training on teaching writing. It was also found that many teachers did not feel confident with teaching writing (Reichet, 2009). An important implication from these studies is that writing instruction at the tertiary level seems to be an area which requires scholar attention to devise ways to help teachers teach better.

Besides the possibility of lacking professional knowledge and confidence, writing teachers working in technological universities and colleges in Taiwan face even more challenges. As Lee (2010) suggests, it is difficult to teach English writing at the tertiary level in some EFL contexts (e.g., Japan and Taiwan) because writing is not taught as a separate skill or subject until students go to college. In other words, students from these countries typically receive little formal and systematic training on English writing before they enter university. In terms of students’ general English proficiency levels, most students enrolled in technological universities and colleges in Taiwan come from vocational high schools where English classes are limited to two forty-minute periods per week (an exception is those who major in English at vocational high schools). Compared to their counterparts who come from regular high schools, students from the vocational track have much less exposure to English before they enter college. Moreover, because there is no writing component in the college entrance examination for vocational high school students, writing is seldom the instructional focus in English lessons in vocational high schools in Taiwan.

Another noticeable fact in the Taiwanese educational system is that in recent years, many high school and college students flock to take standardized English proficiency exams (such as GEPT and TOEIC) either to increase their likelihood of entering a college with good reputation or pass the graduation requirement in college. However, most colleges only require students to present scores in the reading and listening components (Chern, 2010), making writing an even more irrelevant part in students’ English learning and busy life.

Although writing is often neglected in the high school curriculum and students' self-study before students enter college, it is a top-ranked requirement once students leave college and step into the workplace (Chang, 2011). According to Chang (2011), among the four language skills, writing is ranked the second most needed skill (next to reading) by Taiwanese enterprises. Teachers at the tertiary level carry the responsibility of helping their students become skillful English writers before they step into the workplace. Before they can deliver successful instruction, writing teachers themselves need to be well-prepared in this domain.

With an aim to understand the professional development needs of writing teachers teaching in four-year programs in technological universities and colleges in Taiwan, this study was guided by the following three research questions:

- (1) What are the existing mechanisms in writing teachers' work sites to support them and what kinds of support do they need?
- (2) What areas do writing teachers want to improve on to better their writing instruction?
- (3) What are the types of professional development activities writing teachers most willing to participate in?

The first question was designed to understand the currently available support mechanisms for writing teachers as well as the types of support they still needed. The second question probed into the areas of *pedagogical content knowledge* (defined by Gingerich, [2004] as a set of knowledge needed for teaching) writing teachers hoped to improve on. The last question asked writing teachers to name the types of professional development activities they were most willing to participate in. Insights gained from this study will be helpful for understanding the current support mechanisms for college writing teachers as well as their needs. Valuable information will also be gained regarding how to better design related professional development activities to cater to teachers' needs and preferred modes of learning.

Instrument

A questionnaire (see the Appendix; the researcher's identity has been deleted in this version) developed by the researcher is the main instrument for this study. The questionnaire consists of two parts—respondent's background information and questions regarding writing teachers' professional development needs. Questions in the second part of the questionnaire can be further divided into three sections: (1) the existing mechanisms in writing teachers' work sites to support them and the kinds of support they would like to gain from their departments; (2) the areas teachers would like to learn more to improve their writing instruction; and (3) the types of professional development activities teachers most willing to participate in. The items for (2) came from Liou's (2008) survey study of EFL writing research in Taiwan in which various sub-categories of writing research were listed. Meanwhile, the items for (3) mostly came from Richards and Farrell's book (2005) which

outlined possible professional development mechanisms for language teachers. The questionnaire was mainly written in Chinese, the native language of the researcher and the participants, to avoid any possible misunderstandings.

Participants

To find prospective participants for the study, a research assistant and I first tried to identify all the writing teachers in the 56 technological universities and colleges which offer a four-year college degree in applied English or applied foreign languages. This was done by checking the department websites and each school's course registration system (if the system is open to the public). After a few weeks' efforts, a list of 370 writing teachers was compiled in November, 2011. In December, 2011, my research assistant sent all the 370 teachers a copy of the questionnaire and a returned envelope by snail mail. A total of 65 questionnaires were sent back to me (with a return rate of 18%) in the next two months. Out of the 65 copies, 2 had to be excluded from the data pool because they were incomplete. Findings from the 63 valid copies (17% of valid rate) will serve as the data base for this study. Table 2 provides a summary of these participants' background.

Table 2 Summary of Participants' Background

Items	Results
Gender	(1) male: 21 (33.3%) (2) female: 42 (66.7%)
Age	(1) 26-30: 2 (3.1%) (2) 31-45: 6 (9.5%) (3) 36-40: 9 (14.3%) (4) 41-45: 15 (23.8%) (5) 46-50: 11 (17.5%) (6) 51-55: 9 (14.3%) (7) 56-60: 8 (12.7%) (8) Above 60: 3 (4.8%)
Years of teaching	(1) 1-5: 21 (33.3%) (2) 6-10: 19 (30.2%) (3) 11-15: 8 (12.7%) (4) 16-20: 7 (11.1%) (5) 21+: 8 (12.7%)
Education level	(1) Master's: 22 (34.9%) (2) Ph.D.: 41 (65.1%)

As can be seen from Table 2, two-thirds of the participants were females, and about the same ratio of the teachers hold a Ph.D. degree.

Results

Research question (1): What are the existing mechanisms in writing teachers' work sites to support them and what kinds of support do they need?

The first question in the second part of the questionnaire is a simple yes-no

question, asking writing teachers to respond whether their departments had a writing coordinator or some sort of committee to coordinate their writing instruction. Nearly half of the teachers (N=30; 47.6%) said their departments did.

Following the first question, the second question in this section asked the participants if their departments held meetings or other events to discuss their writing instruction. While 12 teachers (19.0%) left this question blank, 21 (33.3%) replied yes and 30 (47.6%) said no. Among all the 63 participants, 32 teachers provided written comments to further elaborate their thoughts. Four of these 32 teachers indicated that their departments did not have any regular meetings or other events to discuss matters related to writing instruction; one of them explained that this was because there was only one class in each year level, implying coordination did not seem necessary. Four other teachers said that they engaged in informal discussion with their colleagues to learn about other teachers' experiences. The remaining 24 teachers commented that there were meetings to go over the syllabi, assessment, textbook selection, and other related issues. In some schools, teachers stated that meetings were held in the beginning and/or end of the semester; one teacher indicated that her school held monthly meetings for writing teachers while another teacher said that meetings were held four times a semester. Two other teachers commented that they participated in teacher development groups funded by the Ministry of Education's Teaching Excellence Award.

The next question in the questionnaire asked writing teachers to share the types of support they needed from their departments to improve their writing instruction. Table 3 summarizes the results:

Table 3 Types of Support Needed by Writing Teachers

Support Types	Frequency
Writing feedback software	11
Smaller class size	5
Teaching Assistant	5
More interaction with colleagues	5
Ability grouping of students	4
Classrooms with e-learning equipment	4
More teaching resources	3
Better coordination of the writing program	2
Setting clearer entry and exit requirement for students	2
Teaching fixed courses	1

Research question (2): What areas do writing teachers want to improve on to better their writing instruction?

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to choose three areas for which they wanted to learn to improve their writing instruction. Table 4 summarizes the results:

Table 4 Areas Writing Teachers Would Like to Improve on

Areas	Frequency
Providing feedback on student writing	40
Activity design	37
Integration of technology into writing instruction	31
Textbook & material selection	26
Teaching techniques	24
Course design	15

They were also asked to explain the reasons for the selected answers. The most common reason for choosing “providing feedback on student writing” was that teachers felt that they were overwhelmed by the amount of marking they had to do and would like to know if there were effective and efficient ways of providing feedback. With the advancement in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and proliferation of technological tools, many teachers wondered if they could make use of certain softwares to help them grade student papers more efficiently. Many teachers (N=20) also stated that they would like to learn how to apply the existing technological tools to better design their lessons and diversify their instruction to attract students’ attention. In fact, most of the participants’ qualitative comments pointed to teachers’ desire to learn more about the application of computer technology to grading and writing instruction in general. Some teachers also hoped to learn useful techniques and course design methods to diversify their instruction to attract students’ attention.

Research question (3): What are the types of professional development activities writing teachers most willing to participate in?

The last question in the questionnaire invited teachers to comment on the types of professional development activities they are most willing to participate in. Table 5 summarizes the results.

Table 5 Professional Development Activities Writing Teachers Are Willing to Join

Activities	Frequency
Workshop	42
Conference	37
Study group	31
Action research	21
Peer visit with reflection	13
Taking a course	11
Video/audiotaping	2

As some teachers elaborated, they already attended the first two types of activities (workshop and conference) regularly, and these activities were less intimidating than some of the more “personal” ones, such as peer visit or videotaping of one’s

teaching. Some other teachers believed that participating in study group may help them identify or tackle their problems more directly. “Action research” ranked fourth on the list. As almost two thirds of the participants hold a Ph.D. degree (Table 2) and should have some experiences with conducting research, their inclination towards examining their own teaching via conducting action research should not be taken as a surprise.

Discussion

Although the primary focus of this study was to understand the professional development needs of college writing teachers in Taiwan, the responses provided by the participants revealed the fact that most writing teachers were overwhelmed by having to provide feedback on student writing. This phenomenon echoes to Ferris’s (2007) observation that “providing feedback to their students is the most time-consuming and challenging part of the job” (p. 165) and that many writing teachers feel “frustrated and resentful about the time it takes” (p. 179; also see Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

The responses received from the participants also revealed a high expectation for writing softwares, or to be more specific, automated writing evaluation (AWE) programs (Warschauer, 2010), to lessen teachers’ burden on marking and providing feedback. However, as schools in Taiwan are working with limited budgets and rigid purchasing rules, it is unlikely that many teachers will be equipped with commercial AWE programs which usually cost a fortune. Even if funding is available for such tools (for example, funding from MOE’s Teaching Excellence Award which every school strives to obtain), teachers still need to be cautious with their uses (Chen & Cheng, 2008; Warschauer, 2010). Although these programs are capable of providing rapid feedback to students, they can never replace teachers and should be incorporated as “part of the social writing process—in which, for example, students write earlier drafts for review by the software, and later drafts to be submitted to the teacher or published online for peers” (Warschauer, 2010, p. 5). In other words, feedback from these softwares can never stand-alone and be the only feedback source for students. The bottom line is that these softwares will not be the quick-solutions or panaceas for writing teachers, and teachers still need to gain a solid understanding of related principles to make well-informed decisions when providing feedback to student writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

Data also suggested a wide array of needs perceived by the participants as necessary for improving their writing instruction (Table 3). It is indeed the hope of every teacher that more resources and assistance can be in place to help with their daily teaching. In the case of teaching college-level writing where there is no set curriculum guidelines and students’ profiles (e.g., proficiency and motivation levels) vary greatly, what each department can probably do is to bring together their writing teachers regularly through some mechanisms, such as regular meetings. Many activities can take place in these meetings, such as discussing students’ progress and deciding on textbooks and course requirement. More importantly,

these meetings can serve as learning sites as well as venues for all the writing teachers to talk about their personal triumph and frustration in their daily teaching. As one teacher commented on the questionnaire, simply reading other teachers' syllabi in their regular meetings for writing teachers was very thought-provoking and even eye-opening; she was able to learn how others designed the same course and "stole" their ideas to be implemented in her own instruction.

This part of the data (Table 3) also suggested that many teachers yearned for more institutional support on logistical matters, such as smaller class size, assistance from teaching assistance, ability grouping of students, better coordination of the writing program, and clearer entry and exit requirement for certain courses. All of these require more administrative support and careful organization of the writing program. Open and constant discussions also need to take place among administrators and writing teachers to reach consensus on how to better balance reality and idealism and work towards better instruction and student outcomes. As Ortega (2009) puts it, "a blend of realism and idealism is our best hope to deliver successful L2 writing instruction across EFL contexts" (p. 249). A highly practical, yet often neglected, way to guide writing teachers is for every department to provide a clear written guideline on the objectives of each course (e.g., the progression from paragraph writing, essay writing, to writing of research papers). Such a written document will be especially helpful for novice teachers who are still finding their ways to design their courses. One such example can be found on the homepage of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (<http://www.afl.ntust.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=230>). As can be seen from the website, description for each writing course is carefully written. With such documents in place, writing teachers can know how to design and sequence their writing courses.

This study also addressed the types of professional development activities most welcomed by the participants. This is an important issue because if we want teachers to participate in professional development activities, these activities must be designed to suit their preferred modes of learning. As revealed by the participants' responses (Table 5), many Taiwanese college writing teachers still favored the traditional models of professional development (e.g., workshops and conferences). As aforementioned, these activities are less intimidating for them, and many teachers are already familiar with them. While the self-directed, collaborative, inquiry-based modes of learning endorsed by many researchers (e.g., Johnson, 2006; Knight, 2002) are certainly welcomed by some teachers in this study (Table 5), the traditional types of professional development activities seem to be more popular. As Lee (2010) found in her study on the impact of teacher education programs, traditional modes of professional development activities can still be beneficial for in-service teachers if these activities are well-designed to address teachers' needs. Speaking from her years of experiences of providing

training to in- and pre-service writing teachers, Ferris (2007) advises that these activities should be designed to allow teachers to understand their own beliefs, consider their diverse students, and thoughtfully reflect and evaluate their practices.

Conclusion

Aiming to understand the professional development needs of writing teachers teaching in four-year programs in technological universities and colleges in Taiwan, this survey study reported findings gathered from 63 writing teachers teaching in technological universities and colleges around this island nation. This study is limited by the small sample size, mainly due to the low return rate. To ensure sizeable data which will help to depict a more complete picture, future studies should be initiated by school or even government authorities. Researchers can also consider distributing online versions of their questionnaires to see if they will gain more responses. Also, due to shortage of labor, the research assistant and I did not compile teacher lists from language centers or general education centers. As these centers also offer English writing courses and house writing teachers, it is possible that more data could have been collected if copies of the questionnaire were also sent to those writing teachers who worked at these places.

Despite the small sample in this study, important information was obtained from the 63 participants who spent their valuable time on completing the questionnaire. Future studies can consider conducting in-depth interviews with writing teachers to learn more about their needs. As mentioned in the literature review, we are currently at the age of the network in the development of higher education (Sorcinelli et al., 2006) in which different parties need to work together to meet the many demands and expectations on higher education. Future studies can consider involving other stakeholders (e.g., students, students' future employers, and school administrators) to understand how to better prepare writing teachers.

The effectiveness of different modes of professional development can also be examined to understand whether a certain mode is suitable for a certain teacher population (e.g., teachers of business writing courses or teachers who teach basic writers). Nowadays, a much-discussed mode of teacher learning is learning communities (Lee, 2010) in which teachers try to become members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As seen in the data of this study, some teachers participated in teacher development groups as government-funded projects required them to. Future studies can consider examining the effect of such arrangement, whether voluntary or compulsory, on teacher learning. Advancement in technology also makes it possible for teachers to engage in online communities (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). In other words, teachers can take advantage of modern technology if they cannot meet face to face. Effects of participating in face-to-face communities and those virtual ones can also be compared. Longitudinal studies are also needed to learn more about the long-term impact of a certain type of professional development activity. It is hoped that whether formally or informally,

college writing teachers in Taiwan can find opportunities to develop their professional expertise and their newly gained expertise and confidence will then benefit their students.

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Appendix

親愛的老師您好：

我是 XXX。本人正進行技職院校應外系英文寫作教師之專業發展需求調查，懇請您撥冗回答下列問題，填完問卷後，請利用回郵信封將問卷寄回。若有問題，請隨時與我聯絡。感謝您！

XXX 敬上

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I. 基本資料

1. 性別: ☐ 男 ☐ 女
2. 年齡: ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 51-55
☐ 56-60 ☐ 60 以上
3. 在貴系任教年資: _____ 年
4. 教育程度: ☐ 大學 ☐ 碩士 ☐ 博士
5. 請列出在貴系任教的英文寫作課: _____

II 英文寫作教師之專業發展

1. (a) 請問貴系的英文寫作課是否有教師協調/召集委員? ☐ 是 ☐ 否
(b) 您與其他同為英文寫作課授課教師是否有定期開會討論課程及教學事宜或分享教學經驗的機制? 若有，請簡述此機制之運作模式。

(c) 您希望貴系能提供哪些協助，讓您更順利進行寫作教學?

2. 為了能更順利進行寫作教學，您最想充實哪方面之知識?(可複選 3 項)
☐ 教材挑選 (textbook & material selection)
☐ 學生寫作批改 (providing feedback on student writing)
☐ 教學技巧 (teaching techniques)
☐ 教學活動設計 (activity design)
☐ 課程設計 (course design)

☐ 多媒體教學 (integration of technology into writing instruction)

☐ 其他 請說明: _____

請簡單說明您為何選擇這些項目:

3. 您較有意願參加以下哪些專業成長活動?(可複選 3 項)

☐ 研討會 (conference)

☐ 工作坊 (workshop)

☐ 修習一門課程 (taking a course)

☐ 研究小組 (study group): 在自願基礎下, 與同儕組成研究小組, 以增進專業技能。

☐ 同儕專業訪視 (peer visit with reflection): 邀請同儕協助觀察個人教學, 並提供教學省思。

☐ 行動研究 (action research): 研究個人之教學問題, 並提出解決之策略以改善教學。

☐ 錄音或錄影 (audio/videotaping): 錄音或錄影教學活動, 邀請同儕或專家針對教學錄影帶作反思對話。

☐ 其他 請說明: _____

請簡單說明您為何選擇這些項目: