

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

**Sustaining Professional Growth  
with a Side-to-Side Pedagogy:  
A Qualitative Case Study of the National Writing Project Focused on  
Seven Teacher Consultants**

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**Sustaining Professional Growth  
with Side-to-Side Pedagogy:  
A Qualitative Case Study of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants**

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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## Dedication

### The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

—*William Stafford*

For all NWP Site Directors, Co-directors, and Teacher Consultants who have shared the gifts of a *side-to-side pedagogy* over the last 50 years. You handed me a thread I've woven into a fabric of my own. Here's to another 50 years of centering students and teachers within their own writing and learning.

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My favorite poems both inspire and provoke. So too the people who have made this research, learning, and writing possible. Like the favorite people in Marge Piercy's poem, "To Be of Use," there are humans in my own life who "jump into work head first without dallying in the shallows." And they are many.

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## **Abstract**

In a qualitative case study, this research focused on the professional growth of National Writing Project (NWP) Teacher Consultants (TCs). The overarching question, *In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?* guided an inquiry of seven TCs—teaching in grades three through university and representing seven sites from diverse regions—who had developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Multiple interviews, videos, and artifacts allowed an extensive exploration of the conditions, contexts, supports, and challenges each experienced as they developed their classroom pedagogies and furthered their leadership over time. Findings included a rich description of the seven nested cases and a discussion of the following themes: a special kind of teacher, side-to-side pedagogy, authentic professional learning, conditions for success, and thriving in community.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The **Call to Adventure** is the first stage of the mythological Hero's Journey, mapped out by the work of Joseph Campbell (1968/2008). It may begin with a blunder, sudden crisis, or accidental chance, revealing "an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (p. 42).

*In my own case, it might have been a series of happenstances that drew me in. I'd returned to the classroom after a nine-year hiatus as a stay-at-home mom... after the end of an eighteen-year marriage... after having been focused on teaching speech and drama the first five years of my teaching career. But there I was, in a junior high school, teaching English to 7th- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students, in a school that separated the teaching of reading from the teaching of writing and grammar. It was my second first-year and tougher than the first—at least in my twenties, I'd had the confidence of someone fresh out of college. This time, that confidence was gone.*

*By the spring semester and long before I read the dismal results for my students' state writing assessment, I knew I needed help in the teaching of writing. I applied for a fellowship with the 2002 Summer Institute (SI) of the Oklahoma Writing Project, my local site for the National Writing Project. When Dana Loy, a teacher consultant, interviewed me, she asked, "As a teacher of writing, what expertise or other qualities, can you bring to our organization?"*

*Nothing.*

*I brought only my great need for their help. I responded, "Oh, I need you so much more than you need me."*

*My need to become a better teacher of writing was my Call to Adventure. It set me on a course to learn and develop a pedagogy for teaching writing. The National Writing Project came to my rescue and changed the trajectory of my teaching career. Serving as a teacher consultant empowered my teaching and changed the way I saw myself as a teacher, a researcher, a writer—I became someone with a voice. One experience led to another: National Board Certification, graduate school, a nomination for District Teacher of the year, and a Milken Educator Award. My self-efficacy flew off the charts.*

*When the context of my teaching began to change, however, things shifted once again. I held onto my self-efficacy but found myself facing new challenges. Benchmark tests crowded out instructional time, disrupting and remapping curriculum. Excessive testing in the spring tied up the computer labs my students and I once used to create final portfolios. Legislation and the push for accountability put constraints on the autonomy and creativity I once counted on for developing and nurturing an effective writing pedagogy.*

*In the meantime, past students continued to return, asking me to read something they had recently written. Three particular students seemed to have a lot in*



*common, especially their use of expressive writing in ways that helped them negotiate and cope with their young adult lives. Interestingly, all three had sat in my 8<sup>th</sup>-grade classroom, different hours, a year after my 2002 SI experience.*

## **Problem**

My experience with the 2002 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute changed everything. That experience transformed my teaching and led me to reflect more deeply about literacy, learner-centered teaching, and writing workshop strategies, as well as centering my focus on creating a sense of community in my classroom. Each year steadily became an improvement over the year before. Looking back, I see at least a decade where I enjoyed a high level of teacher capital, a nurturing space within the larger context of both my school and district where I felt valued and comfortable sharing my voice. I believed I was seen and heard, and my input was valued.

Then things changed.

Finding the time to focus on the expressive writing strategies I had developed as part of our writing curriculum, eventually, grew to be a challenge. The influential policies of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and my own state's writing assessments moved curricular focus away from expressive writing to stress passage-based writing limited to three modes: argument, informational, and narrative. CCSS justified these three purposes by citing the framework for the 2011 NAEP test (NAGB, 2010, p. 15; NGA, 2010, p. 5), which emphasized a percentage for each "communicative purpose," depending on the grade level assessed.

In a critical evaluation of CCSS, Calkins et al. (2012) noted the directional movement of the first three anchor standards beginning with argument, moving to informational, and ending with narrative (p. 113); then they argued that "learners grow into

these genres in just the opposite direction.” In other words, beginning with narrative engages writers with story and with their own experiences, growing their confidence and self-efficacy *before* challenging them to writing academically about others’ ideas. Research supports this directional movement of writing (Inkster, 1992; Kowalski, 1989; Moffett, 1989; Robertson, 1988; Whitney, 2009). Furthermore, Pajeras (2003) found that “students’ confidence in their writing capabilities” is key for writing motivation and other school outcomes (p. 141). If we want students to grow in their confidence and ability to write academically (integrating the ideas of others), it only makes sense to begin with personal/expressive writing that holds meaning for their own lives. Noted educators on the teaching of writing argue that the consistent and daily practice of this kind of writing is essential to build writing fluency, a sense of self, and to better learn the craft of writing (Atwell, 2015; Graves, 1994; Graves 2004; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Kittle, 2008; Murray 1978/2009a; Murray, 2005; Rief, 2003; Rief, 2018). The practice of focusing on fluency before form shows up, as well, in a study by Whitney and Friedrich (2013) as an *orientation* of National Writing Project teacher experiences.

First, teachers reported a commitment to the value of students’ ideas, and they worked to express that commitment and to elicit a similar commitment from students. Second, while they valued both the content of written products and the form of those products, they sequenced fluency before form in the way they framed writing experiences for students. (p.13)

Writing assessments were once grounded with a single prompt, allowing for students to *make it their own*, by developing an idea they connected with and demonstrating their ability to support the idea with details, reasoning, and evidence—paying attention to organization, sentence structure, word choice, and grammar. A formidable task to be sure. However, the district benchmarks and state assessments further complicated the writing

task, and thus, the curriculum, by tying writing assessment to the reading and synthesis of passages, as if the only thing worth writing about is someone else's writing. Thus, opportunities for exploring inner landscapes of memory and identity currently seem to be in short supply. Even before the current trends in standards and assessment, Yagelski (2009) found that

mainstream writing instruction largely ignores the capacity of writing to reflect deeply on the most complex and important dimension of our experiences as human beings, focusing instead on technical aspects of writing as a reflection of writing skill. (p. 18)

Similarly, teachers across the nation, according to a national survey (Troia & Graham, 2016), struggle with assessments that “fail to address important aspects of writing development and do not accommodate the needs of students with diverse writing abilities” (p. 1740). Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen (2016) argued that current trends, standards, and policies influence methods of teaching in ELA contexts, which are “problematically out of sync with real world contexts for writing” p. 349.

While the problem of curriculum mandates has long existed, Yearwood (1994), in situating a mandate for more “real-world writing” argued that mandates often come without helping teachers decide how best to make them happen (p. 7). Urbanski (2016) captured the essence of this problem as her research team spent three years working with an urban middle school under the direction of a grant through the National Writing Project. She explored the impact of the implementation of CCSS and the power narrative promoting “rigid accountability structures” that “shift power away from the teachers and administrators who know the students best” (abstract). When power is shifted away from teachers, their students, and the contexts in which they live and learn, the classroom and

curriculum are impacted in a way that, at best, hurts the learning process and, at worst, interferes with the self-efficacy of learners.

Similarly, Bilton and Sivasubramaniam (2009) noted that the problem for learning, whether in the EFL/ESL classroom or other subject areas, lies in “[t]he dominance of examinations” (p. 303). The focus on summative assessment and standards left teachers little time to focus on pedagogies like expressive writing. With a focus on meeting requirements and standards, students adopted a pathway of “cautious learning,” bereft of motivation and edification (p. 301).

*As a teacher who felt the impact of both supportive and challenging policies, it seems to me that the onset of assessing writing in the 1990s, helped teachers move to a better practice of teaching writing. In those beginning years, teachers seemed to be included in the process as we learned about holistic writing broken down into what makes good writing—writing traits, and in particular, Six Trait Writing (Culham, 2003; Spandel, 2008; Education Northwest, 2021). For many teachers, myself included, teaching writing became joyful as classrooms focused on creating community and developing the voices of our students. As CCSS came into play, I noticed changes from the administrative level as my district volunteered to pilot the new standards, an early embrace of what would inevitably impact state assessment. I recall a moment with my principal, who explained to me why the focus on writing should move in a different direction. “We did a great job teaching students to write descriptively. Students know how to do that now. It’s time to move on to more complex writing.” Those are close to the words he used. His point was not to abandon descriptive writing, but move toward a more academic writing curriculum, one focused on writing argument. His message, along with district decisions in pacing guides and benchmark tests, created for me a disruption in what I believed to be sound writing pedagogy. I don’t think I was the only teacher impacted.*

## **Significance and Purpose of the Study**

I began this inquiry curious about *expressive writing* in the classroom with initial searches with ERIC/EBSCO and Academic Premier for recent studies about the expressive writing applicable to the ELA classroom. Phrases such as “expressive writing

and writing assessment,” “expressive writing and identity,” and “expressive writing and theory” led me to several studies dated in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, and a few from the second millennium—far fewer in number than current studies of expressive writing in the medical and psychological fields. Studying what seems to be a serious gap could be of great significance in the fields of English and literacy instruction.

However, while a better understanding of the nature of expressive writing seems promising, shifting my focus toward writing pedagogy or what I will define as *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*, will better inform the issues I hope to address. How are highly effective teachers of writing negotiating the constraints of a narrowed curriculum? I am particularly interested in National Writing Project teacher consultants who have experienced a level of sustained professional growth with writing pedagogy. I want to know how teachers, utilizing elements of effective writing practice, learned from and/or affirmed by the National Writing Project (NWP), manage and negotiate the constraints of a narrowed curriculum. As Ackerman (1993) reminds us, utilizing writing as a tool for learning is likely not the panacea it has been made out to be. Surely there are other influences preceding innovative writing practices (p. 345)—influences that include the deep work of thinking about “philosophy and aims,” as well as shifts in thinking about students and learning, how to structure lessons and assignments, and creating the conditions for students to do their own deep work while exploring their own authority and creativity.

Recently searching ERIC/EBSCO with the terms “National Writing Project AND teacher consultants AND writing pedagogy” yielded no results, but when I remove the phrase “writing pedagogy” and the yield is 30 entries. While several seem informative and include NWP Teacher Consultants as part of the study, not one focused on their experiences

with writing pedagogy in the larger contexts of their schools and local NWP sites. Searching Proquest, on the other hand, yields over 200,000 dissertations, which can be narrowed to over 12,000 when I add “writing pedagogy” back as a third phrase. It’s obvious a great deal of dissertation research exists surrounding both the professional development model of the NWP Summer Institute and the transformation of teachers, or *Fellows*, in attendance.

What I believe would fill a gap in the literature and the larger context of the education community, is in studying the sustained professional growth of National Writing Project (NWP) teacher consultants who have transformed or further developed their teaching of writing. A foundational premise of the NWP is “Teachers Teaching Teachers” (Gray, 2000, p. 20). As such, it is structured in a way to move the Fellows of a summer institute into a position of teacher leader or teacher consultant. “Teacher Consultant” or TC is in reference to a member of a local NWP site, like the Oklahoma Writing Project, one site in a network of 175 sites. One becomes a Teacher Consultant after completing their fellowship in the Summer Institute and by participating in other facets of the local site, usually as a presenter or facilitator for professional development. Learning about the contexts, conditions, and other aspects of the teaching practices of these NWP teacher consultants, as well as about the barriers and supports encountered along the way, would benefit the teaching of meaningful writing, the practice of utilizing writing as a tool for learning, and, hopefully, help inform the policies that hold sway over the conditions and contexts in which teachers and their students learn and teach.

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences, contexts, and conditions of NWP teacher consultants who have experienced and sustained professional growth in the teaching of writing.

## **Research Questions**

The overarching question guiding this qualitative nested case study will be:

- I. *In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?*

At the same time, the following questions will help guide each case embedded within the larger context of this research.

- II. *What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?*
  - A. *In what ways have TCs developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?*
  - B. *How do TCs describe the trajectory of their professional growth, since experiencing the Summer Institute?*
  - C. *What factors do TCs attribute to their professional growth and the development of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?*
- III. *What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?*
  - A. *As TCs implemented and developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy, what supports did they find within their schools and districts?*
  - B. *What challenges did TCs face? In the beginning? Over time?*
  - C. *What are the personal qualities, observable or self-described, that might influence a TC's professional growth?*

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Sustained Professional Growth**

Borrowing from O'Meara and Terosky's (2010) definition for "professional growth" with minor adaptations, I use the following definition for *sustained professional growth*: a "continuous process" allowing "professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work." This growth sustains the professional through "learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments," and "is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined" (p. 45).

### **Expressive Writing**

After exploring the history of expressive writing and multiple definitions, I find the following definition by Waterman and Archer (1979) a particularly nice fit for this research study:

Expressive writing may take many forms, including the writing of poetry and fiction and the keeping of a diary or personal journal. The common element in the various forms of expressive writing is the attempt to express, in a concrete verbal form, matters of personal importance and concern. (p. 328)

While the first half of the definition provides examples of genres where one may find expressive writing, the latter half speaks to a *spark* or drive where the writer attempts to become part of a larger conversation, expressing "matters of personal" significance.

### **Expressive Writing Pedagogy**

I borrow this phrase from Andres' (1987) dissertation where she applied the heading "Modern Expressive Writing Pedagogy" to a review of a then-current debate over



expressive writing. Her aim was to distinguish “expressive writing” from other forms of discourse with specific features to be studied and interpreted. My use of the term pedagogy focuses not on how to interpret published writing but rather on how to deliver writing instruction in meaningful ways to students of all ages. With numerous descriptions of what makes an effective writing pedagogy, I find the ones informing my own classroom practice, especially those learned from my involvement with the NWP, are particularly conducive to creating space for students to share their own voices.

Thus, when I use the phrase *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*, I am referring to a set of practices and philosophies that teachers utilize to invite students into a bigger conversation with their personal worlds, the worlds of school, and the worlds in which they will negotiate their dreams, goals, and future relationships. An Expressive Writing Pedagogy focuses on the needs of the learner/writer, the one attempting to enter a conversation, and may include one or more of the following elements: time, choice, low-stakes / informal writing, modeling, mentor texts, collaborative learning, conferencing, reflective teaching, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to be seen.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Because I am a Teacher Consultant (TC) with the Oklahoma Writing Project with over two decades of particular experiences with my local site and within my own teaching contexts, my stance gives me a unique knowledge that may lead to assumptions about the experiences of other TCs. To counter this I spent time bracketing my thinking that may influence how I interpret the experiences of participants, allowing me to challenge my own assumptions.

The purpose of the initial survey was always meant to find participants for the qualitative case study, but the results seemed exciting. Nearly half of those beginning the survey completed the process, leaving finished results for 71 participants and of those, 62 participants indicated that they would be willing to be contacted for the next phase. Exciting as that felt, the number (<100) negates any generalizability. Furthermore, this research assumes those participating acted in good faith with authentic and correct responses. However, life and time are complicated. Participants may have put in information quickly and made mistakes. More than one participant in phase II contradicted information from their survey, details like number of years since their SI or the number of students enrolled in their schools.

The goal for maximum diversity of participants was achieved in many areas, like region, grade level, number of years with the Writing Project, and subjects. But of the seven participants, five are female and two, male, and all of them are white. Efforts to reach out to the very few of ethnic diversity were rejected due to other commitments from those participants.

## **Summary**

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to lay out an argument for a qualitative multi-case inquiry into the experiences of National Writing Project TCs. I considered the problem of disruption and interference into sound and effective teaching practices, namely: high stakes accountability and strict adherence to standards tied to systems of governance far removed from the contexts and realities of the classrooms and the lives of students and their teachers. And I established the significance of what might be learned in informing the field of teaching English Language Arts and teaching in general. The challenges a teacher

learns to negotiate and the supports found in the greater context of colleagues, administration, and developing philosophies have a great deal to teach us about establishing prime conditions for encouraging and integrating professional learning. Additionally, three key terms: *sustained professional growth*, *expressive writing*, and *Expressive Writing Pedagogy* have been defined and the research questions guiding this research have been introduced.

The next chapter, Review of the Literature, is organized into three main sections: Professional Growth, A Little History of the Teaching of Writing, and Expressive Writing Pedagogy. In the first section, *Professional Growth*, I consider the definition of professional growth, in general, and lay the foundation for thinking about professional growth with the National Writing Project. The next section, *Some History of the Teaching of Writing*, examines the difference between personal/expressive writing and utilitarian/academic writing. Looking further into the term *expressive writing* that will be used throughout this research, I examine some of the history and benefits of expressive writing in the English Language Arts curriculum. That history includes two important movements in the teaching of writing: the process movement and Writing Across the Curriculum, both embraced by the National Writing Project. The final section, *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*, will discuss the tenets of the National Writing Project, utilizing writing as a tool for learning, and the conditions that promote a sound writing pedagogy, which I define as *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*.

In Chapter 3, Methods, I share my theoretical framework and lay out the design for this research study. Taking a qualitative approach, I examine possible methodologies before settling on a nested case study design. After sharing the research questions, I discuss

the two phases of the study, including results from the initial survey and how they informed the choices made for participants for the nested case studies. Data collection, writing up the cases with “rich description” as part of the data analysis, along with coding procedures for finding themes are also detailed.

Focusing on descriptions of the seven nested cases, Chapter 4 is broken into seven sub-chapters, one subchapter for each nested case. After a brief description of the participants, each nested case focuses on the research questions using rich description from the interviews, videos, artifacts, and other data. Chapter 5 combines findings and discussion in a focus on the following five themes: a special kind of teacher, side-to-side pedagogy, authentic professional learning, conditions for success, and thriving in community. The chapter concludes with implications of these findings and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

“The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary anew are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades” (Campbell, 1968/2008, pp. 67-68). This stage of the Hero’s Journey is referred to as **Crossing the Threshold**, where the hero leaves behind the rules of the old world, embracing and growing competent in new ways of knowing and new ways of being.

*After the summer of 2002 and my experience as a Fellow with the Oklahoma Writing Project, the old world I would be leaving behind would include an old way of seeing myself. I was somehow changed and a new complexity within me began to grow. The rules and the ways of being a teacher I had once understood, no longer fit the kind of teacher I wanted to become.*

*On the day before our final gathering as Fellows of the 2002 Summer Institute (SI), Diane Holt-Reynolds, at the time-Director of the Oklahoma Writing Project, led our final quickwrite. She began by reading a children’s book, *How to Deal with Monsters* (Powell & Snow, 1991). I was familiar with the book because I’d read it to my own children. Each turning of the page illustrated a new monster and steps to take to deal with them. The monster behind the couch would enjoy a tea party. The monster under your bed would leave, if you jump on the bed while yelling loudly, “I enjoy doing this 100 times a day!” And so forth. After closing the book, we took out our journals and pens. Our quickwrite was divided into two parts. First, we wrote about the monsters in our own minds concerning the teaching of writing. What fears might we carry back to our classrooms? And then we wrote about one small change we could implement—what would be one thing we had experienced as writers that we could take back to our own classrooms?*

*This was an emotional quickwrite for me.*

*I had arrived at the SI with the hope of learning how to simplify my teaching practice. I wanted to be a better teacher of writing, but I thought I would end up looking more like the other English teachers at my school. That notion was completely disrupted with the SI experience.*

*Diane pulled up a chair next to mine and quietly asked, “What’s going on? Why the tears?” I tried to explain how much I loved all I was learning, but I was feeling overwhelmed by the uncertainty of what I’d be able to actually do when I returned to the classroom.*

*“Baby steps,” Diane replied. “We are just asking you to make one small change at a time.”*

## Professional Growth

Meaningful professional development in my own teaching career often felt like crossing a threshold into a new world. Just as often, it felt like the seeds of possibility had been planted in my psyche, and that given time, many would come to some fruition. I might attend a series of workshops filled with great ideas, but given the constraints of current circumstances, competing schoolwide, district, state, and national foci, as well as curriculum already in progress, I might not incorporate those ideas until a year or two later. As I look back over significant moments of professional development that eventually became part of my professional growth, I see a trend. The most significant moments almost always involved the Oklahoma Writing Project or the National Writing Project. Perhaps there was a writer inside me, just waiting for the opportunity to learn the craft. Or maybe that's just part of how learning works, in waves or like Gallagher and Kittle's (2018, p. 131) "laps around the track" of a discourse unit, where students return to deeper iterations of scaffolded learning and recursive application, each turn going further into the process and practice with a particular discourse or literacy skill. Whatever it is, the professional learning that has meant the most to me included *me*—my experiences and my voice in the process, inviting me to hold space within a larger community that valued my perspective as I grappled with new ideas. The sense of connectedness and belonging, gained over time, gave me a foundation from which to take risks and be vulnerable in my learning, as well as my leadership. Respecting my autonomy about what I would integrate into my teaching practice, while seeking my participation in and commitment to key projects were also important to my professional growth.

O'Meara and Terosky (2010) describe professional growth as "*change that allows professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientations*

to their work” (p. 45). Delineating four aspects: “*learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,*” they further assert that “faculty growth is a continuous process that is driven both by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined.” While the context of the work is important, so too are the identities, roles, and work of the individual pursuing professional growth. *Sustained* professional growth would seem to be the professional learning experiences that *sustain* the work of professionals and their experiences, centering individuals within greater contexts of the learning/working community, while also honoring the *spark* of their own drives and dreams.

While O’Meara and Terosky’s description focused on college faculty, I had difficulty finding definitions for professional growth for PK-12 educators. Hill (2009) wrote of a “broken system of professional learning” creating a shopping metaphor where a fortunate few find the *boutiques* of “research-proven programs” while the vast majority are left to “shop at the Wal-Marts of the professional development world” (p. 470). Hill makes several valid points like participation doesn’t necessarily mean direct results and even when the PD is decent, as in “containing no errors or unproven facts” (p. 472), the “problem is transfer.” It turns out that when teachers are overloaded with too much professional development, “instructional coherence” decreases, often undermining or confusing district goals.

Hill suggests that instead of “replacing one form of professional development with another,” we would be wise “to examine what exists and make it better” (p. 472). But later in the piece, Hill suggests linking professional development with “specific teachers’ weaknesses” (p. 475). *As if* professional development is a weapon to be wielded in a confrontation with

teachers, severing their weaknesses from the purity of an unquestionable system, busy measuring student learning in complete and accurate ways.

In his preface of *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi (2003) describes himself as “Situated at the intersection between acting and being acted upon...” (p. x). I want to borrow this idea of “being acted upon” for the context of PK-12 teacher professional development. Much of the policy discussion surrounding professional development for teachers seems to be a deficit approach, treating teachers as if they were the problem in need of being fixed or objects of professional development rather than the subjects of their own growth. Whitney and Friedrich (2013) bring up the tendency of professional development models to offer instructional strategies that “when implemented with fidelity, can affect student achievement” (p. 2). However, they counter that this does “little to help teachers make more fundamental shifts in practice,” nor does it create spaces for teachers to generate their own knowledge” (p. 2).

If only teachers would follow curriculum or prescribed interventions “with fidelity”—I heard a fellow grad student use that phrase to describe his position as a behaviorist, his level of expertise superseding that of the classroom teacher. Perhaps, because I was still in the classroom at the time, this phrase rubbed me the wrong way. But in many readings since, that phrase continues to pop up. What I find bothersome is the treating of the teacher as an object, someone being acted upon. When, in reality, the teacher will be the one applying the strategy and determining in real time, its impact on student learning.

Positioning teachers as objects to be acted upon is a byproduct of educational policy. Whitney et al. (2014) argued that current educational reforms have “emphasized market forces” and assumed “that measuring outcomes will uncover sources of educational problems,”



resulting in disenfranchising teachers and positioning them as objects—“consumers of educational products,” “workers in need of discipline,” or “representatives of status quo” (p. 178). The system of education seems to be moving in a direction opposite of authentic learning.

In a 2023 (Kittle) conversation with Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher, Sheridan Blau explained why he believed “Knowledge is the enemy of learning” and how schools traditionally value knowledge that is testable over creating the conditions learners need in order to generate knowledge. Schools often set a false notion of “Now, I know...” as the end goal, similar to what Friere (1970/2000) referred to as the “banking model” where teachers deposit knowledge and then students have it. Blau called this approach, “taking knowledge that belongs to somebody else.” According to Blau, “You can’t take someone else’s knowledge as your own.” Knowing what someone else tells you, even if you repeat it *with fidelity* is not learning. Learning begins when you are able to apply skills and strategies in pursuit of your own questions and projects. It does not end with a test or a grade—learning is an ongoing process you continue for the rest of your life. Blau further explained, “It isn’t my knowledge that is of value to students—it’s my capacity to learn.” Then he brought up the book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Postman & Weingartner, 1969), saying, “It’s true. Good teachers have to be subversive—they have to work against the culture of schools.” Kittle agreed, asserting that, “Working against the culture of schools has been the story of [her] teaching life.”

Perhaps that is why the authentic professional growth that has sustained my own professional work, my self-efficacy, and my role as an educator has seldom occurred when I followed someone else’s instructions or ideas *with fidelity*. For me, integration of new ideas is an ongoing act of co-creation, where learning new and effective ways of teaching happens

when those ideas resonate with my own understandings, my current classroom practice, and the relationships I’m able to build with my students.

Growth and learning are transformations. It is important to note the work of Mezirow (2000) and look at his theory of transformative learning. Mezirow asserts that “In transformative learning efforts, what counts is what the individual learner wants to learn,” (p. 31), at least as a starting point for a larger discourse leading to the critical examination of assumptions held by the learner, the educator, and others. Thus, the conditions and learning environments for transformative learning involve creating a space where the learner is empowered not only to seek their own objectives, but also to think critically and to question. Breaking down the ways in which learning occurs, Mezirow lists four:

- by elaborating existing frames of reference,
- by learning new frames of reference,
- by transforming points of view, or
- by transforming habits of mind” (p. 19).

<b>from Campbell’s Hero’s Journey</b>	<b>Phases of Transformation (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)</b>
Call to Adventure	1. A disorienting dilemma
	2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
	3. A critical assessment of assumptions
	4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
Crossing the Threshold	5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Road of Trials	6. Planning a course of action
	7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
	8. Provisional trying of new roles
	9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Return Threshold	10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

*Figure 1: Comparing Hero’s Journey & Phases of Transformation*

The phases in which transformations may occur remind me of some of the stages from Campbell's *Hero's Journey* (1968/2008). Both are listed in the table that follows (Fig. 1).

In referencing these two frameworks, I'm trying to make the point that authentic learning is, indeed, a real-life adventure. To be thrown into a learning curve can be disorienting as one is called into a new way of thinking and being. If the goal of professional development is authentic growth for teachers in charge of preparing students to learn and to think and to live in a democratic society, then the professional development offered would do well to keep these phases in mind. Yet, the phrase "professional development" implies one entity *acting upon* another in order to develop the other. Shifting the focus from development toward "growth" centers the teacher as the hero of their own story.

Borrowing from O'Meara and Terosky (2010) with minor adaptation, I use the following definition for *sustained professional growth*: a "continuous process" allowing "professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work." This growth sustains the professional through "learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments," and "is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined" (p. 45). Ultimately, professional growth is what sustains the individual and their work within the greater context of where and with whom they work.

*Recently, I listened to a podcast where Brené Brown (2021) interviewed physician and writer, Jason Karlawish. The topic was Alzheimer's, but the conversation moved to one of my favorite topics, writing. The physician explained that he derives immense satisfaction from the process of writing. That satisfaction rings true for me, as well. There seem to be two things happening for me when I write. First, I am writing myself onto a sheet of paper, almost as if I'm writing myself into being (Yagelski, 2009). There is a kind of spark I feel from having given myself the opportunity to create and to be seen. Secondly, in creating that spark, I enter into a new realm of discovery. Perhaps*

*I'm figuring out something I already knew, but often, writing down my thinking moves me into deeper learning, deeper knowing, and deeper understanding. Shaping thought and feelings into written words allows me to make meaning of my life experiences and to nurture connections with those who are making meaning with their own.*

*I don't always feel that way about writing. To be honest, writing has been a love/hate relationship most of my life. And I think that has to do with my fear of being judged and rejected. As I think back to my schooling, I can recall four indelible moments where I wrote expressively and found praise and encouragement from an adult (sometimes a teacher). They were four rare occasions in the first twelve years of my education, in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. They felt different than all my other writing experiences. I can recall feeling that spark of something lively happening as I wrote, and again as I shared those writings.*

*The vast majority of things I wrote for school, if I was even asked to write, was for some kind of assessment, like my ability to write with and label adjectives or to write with complete sentences. Even in high school, when I was asked to write essays, over topics I chose for myself, they were returned to me with so many markings, I could no longer imagine myself as a writer, or even one worthy to take part in that kind of discourse. I don't think my teachers meant for me to internalize my self-worth based on the comments and red marks on my papers—that's just the way assessment worked. But I feel the impact of those micro disapprovals, still today. Even as an adult, when I'm über-focused on a rubric or how my professor and classmates might judge me, I lose that creative spark that allows my words to flow. Instead, I sit in front of my computer, frozen. Or I persevere over something I've already written—the wording or the formatting—instead of moving my ideas forward.*

*Writing can be a joyous process, but it can also be a painful one.*

## **A Little History about the Teaching of Writing**

The teaching of writing in the English curriculum has travelled its own *Road of Trials* beginning with the focus of literacy. According to Deborah Brandt (2019), who links rhetoric with democracy in both Sweden and the U.S., literacy in mass universal schooling focused, first, on the act of reading, "...developed under the sponsorship of church and state" (p. 39). Reading so dominated public instruction, it was (and one might argue *still is*) seen as the foundation of other content learning, including writing. Because reading was what mattered to create informed citizens, reading was freely offered as part of schooling. Initially, mass literacy excluded writing. "Harder to teach, messy to learn, not as suitable a vehicle for religious or

social control, and especially subversive in the hands of the oppressed, mass writing spread separately from mass reading and more slowly” (p. 39). Brandt explains that while reading was taught freely, those who wanted to learn the craft of writing, did so by paying for private instruction, thus, rendering reading as a skill “for the many” while “writing remained for the few” (p. 39).

Things changed, according to Alice Brand (1980), at least in the U.S., around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the English curriculum. “No longer was the emphasis placed on classical studies and drill with the aim of cultivating pure scholarship among the intellectually able. World War I activated a call for citizenship in a fluid democratic society” (p. 63). Thus began a long history of debate between utilitarian writing and personal / expressive writing. Brand (1980) provides a comprehensive history of the teaching of creative (aka expressive) writing, specifically in the United States. “There has been an 80-year-old tension between the partisans of writing as communication and those of writing as expression” (p. 77).

Within the two distinct camps of *writing as communication* and *writing as expression* exist terms used interchangeably. Even the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) distinguishes the two, referring to utilitarian writing as “produced to achieve a specific purpose that can be quite disassociated from the writer’s identity or ideas” and to writing that can be “enormously personal” (NCTE, 2018). In the following table (Fig. 2) I have listed the various terms found in the research and my own teaching experience. While there may be nuances within each group, differentiating one from the other, it’s easy to see that each camp holds a common purpose.

Writing as Communication	Writing as Expression
Utilitarian	Personal
Functional	Expressive
Academic	Creative
Technical	Imaginative
Expository/Informative	Narrative
Argumentative/Argument	Poetic
Transactional	Inner focused
Outer focused	Private
Public	

Figure 2: Two Camps of Curriculum Focus

Yet, like the swing of a pendulum, the value of expressive writing versus utilitarian writing varies with political events and cultural needs. Expressive writing has enjoyed a status of value during times of progressive influence, often *following* periods of war, fear, and authoritarian stances—the time periods which pushed English curriculum toward the pragmatic and utilitarian purposes for writing to advance technology and our understanding of mathematics and science. In reading this history, I learned that neither I nor James Pennebaker (1997, 2018) were the first to wonder about the therapeutic benefits of expressive writing. In times when curriculum focus moves toward utilitarian focus, expressive writing still finds value, but is reserved for those deemed *talented* or *gifted*. When the pendulum returns to valuing expressive writing, it also returns to a learner-centered approach. Brand (1980) illustrated this swaying opinion of whether “writing should primarily serve the personal development needs of students or whether writing should serve informational, social, or purely cognitive functions...” (p. 63).

Similar to the expressive/utilitarian debate described by Brand, Bawarshi (1997) focused on a similar dichotomy between expressivism and social-constructionism. “These two approaches define the writer’s relationship to writing differently, at the same time as they both maintain the Cartesian split between the self (internal/individual) and the world (external/social)” (p. 69). Pushing back against Peter Elbow’s stance that writing is personal,

Bawarshi explores the stance of externalism, where “meaning is always already mediated by an interpretive interaction between self, others, and the world they share” (p. 71). Beyond an interpretive act considered *passing* due to shifting interpretations, Bawarshi believes that “every communicative act” is *divergent*, relying on and diverging simultaneously from the prior (p. 80).

Countering post-modern stances that take issue with his inward focus on writing, Elbow (2012) defended his stance on personal writing, “It’s always a question of which lens is most useful in any given situation. I grant the validity of the postmodern social-construction lens; but I often find it helpful to use the other lens and notice the differences between the words and ideas I experience as inner and those that I found outer—or thoughts that I am able or willing to make outer” (pp. 72-73).

The term “transactional writing” derives from the work of Britton, et al., (1975), who demonstrated that, foundationally, all writing is expressive writing (p. 83). Movement along a continuum, with transactional writing on the far left and poetic writing on the far right (Fig. 3), is determined by the role of the audience: participant role versus spectator role. It is as a writer matures that the writing develops from merely expressive and personal to that which serves the needs of an intended audience. Similarly, Murray distinguished “creative writing” (1973, p. 135) from that referred to as “functional,” “objective,” or “practical” by the impact of the writing on the reader. While “[m]ost writing simply communicates information,” the kind of writing that “makes the reader care about that information,” making him “feel” and “experience” the information and getting “under his skin,” according to Murray, is creative writing.

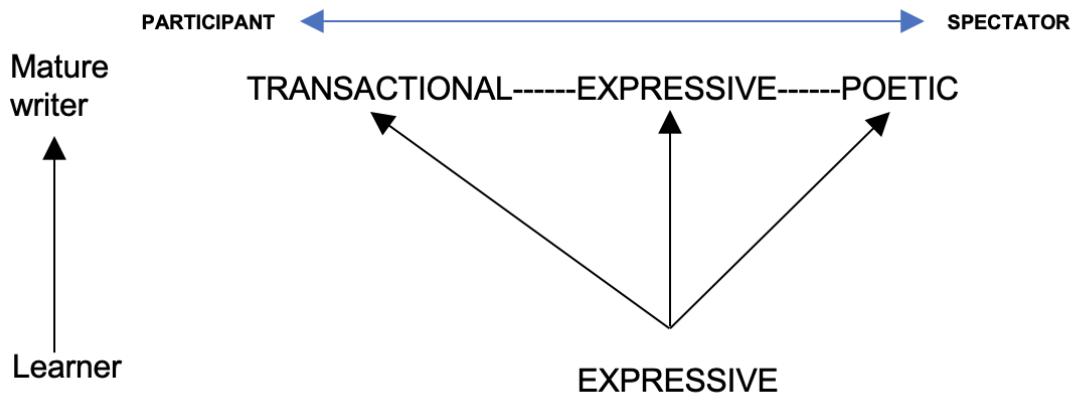


Figure 3: *The Expressive as a Matrix for the development of Other Forms of Writing* (Britton, et al., pg. 83)

Yearwood (1994), focusing on “real-world writing,” clarifies that the teaching of transactional writing should not displace the teaching of reading or literature—but could take the place of assessments and practices (e.g. writing prompts without real-world context and purpose, grammar worksheets). While the term *transactional writing* is often synonymous with *technical writing*, Yearwood’s call to action reminds me of Rosenblatt’s (1965/1995, 1978/1994) theory of transactional reading and Freire’s (1987) ideas for emancipatory literacy. Yearwood writes, “[...] we have a large step yet to take to ensure that when students learn informative and persuasive writing, they learn it as a means of transacting with the world, as applied rhetoric, as research and analysis, not as mindless filling up of prefab forms” (p. 10). And so goes yet another debate in the teaching of writing.

In support of expressive writing, Moffet (1989) proposes the making of space for other kinds of writing—writing other than the traditional expository and argumentative. Moffet specifically lists imaginative writing (fiction, plays, poetry), “thinking over/thinking through” (column, editorial, review, personal essay, thesis essay), “looking back” (recollection like autobiography, memoir), “looking into” (investigation like biography, profile, feature article), and “noting down” (journal, diary, logs)” (p. 18). “[...] I think that forcing exposition and



argumentation defeats itself and forces out those other kinds of writing that not only lead naturally into essay but that should be fully honored for their own sake” (p. 18).

In this section, I’ve attempted to share a little history surrounding ongoing debates that continue to swing practitioner focus in the teaching of writing. Tensions remain today between prioritizing utilitarian purposes or, as Brand pointed out, “the personal development needs of students” (1980, p. 63).

*As a teacher I’ve learned that both communicative writing and personal expression are important. It is expressive writing where I find connections between myself and the world. It is in writing my thoughts and feelings about what I’m learning that makes the subject come alive for me. In sharing those thoughts and feelings, something vibrant and complex springs to life. I find myself in the larger contexts of things that matter, because I suddenly seem to matter. It is writing expressively about matters of personal concern that allow me to write for utilitarian purposes beyond me—about matters of concern for an audience outside myself. Going inward allows me to go outward. I have not found the inverse to be true.*

## **Defining Expressive Writing**

When I first began researching the literature for *expressive writing*, I was vaguely certain of what I meant—to me it was the kind of writing I did that helped me make connections between my own experiences and other ideas out in the world. For me that included practically everything I wrote, but it was especially evident in my personal journal writing, my attempts at poetry and sometimes prose. As a teacher, I thought of students writing in their writer’s notebooks, journal entries, attempts at imaginative writing, poetry, and reflections on the writing, reading, and learning experiences and processes utilized in class.

When I talk about expressive writing, I’m not talking about a mode of writing nor genre—I’m talking about taking a mindful and deliberate stance, situating myself in relation to a text (whether in print, an image, or a life experience). At some point, audience becomes a part of the writing—but mostly expressive writing is the reader/writer/thinker’s attempt to

make a meaningful connection. Figure 4 includes various definitions of *expressive writing* and/or *writing* I found as I explored the literature.

Source	Defining Expressive Writing
Bouchard (1976, p. 46)	Personal—expressive of one’s person.
Brand (1980, p. 66)	“The designers of An Experience Curriculum ... defined creative writing as ‘the translation of experience into words’”
Britton, et al. (1975, p. 89)	(a) Intended for the writer’s own use – like thinking aloud on paper. (b) Attempts to record and explore the writer’s feelings, mood, opinions, preoccupations of the moment. (c) Personal letters written to friends or relations for the purpose of maintaining contact with them (as a substitute, so to speak, for being with them).
Elbow (2012, pp. 52 – 54)	Low stakes <b>private writing</b> – not to be evaluated – as in writing to learn. Writing to figure things out for yourself ... or in a low-stakes context, sharing with a partner or a small group.
Emig (1977), p. 123 & p. 124)	<b>Writing is</b> originating and creating a unique verbal construct that is graphically recorded. [A] symbolic transformation of experience through the specific symbol system of verbal language is shaped into an icon (the graphic product) by the enactive hand.
Gallagher (2011, p. 25)	First and foremost, expressive writing is personal writing. The writer shares thoughts, ideas, feelings and questions about his or her experiences. Usually written in first-person point of view, it exhibits the author’s voice. The author tells the reader how he or she feels.
Gersten & Baker (2001, p. 252)	Writing for the purpose of displaying knowledge or supporting self-expression.
Honeychurch (1990, p. 328)	Freewrites, journal writing, and other similar writing experiences that encourage students to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions.
Inkster (1992, p. 11)	Personal writing.
Jones (1997, p. 3)	The concepts of “expressive” and “expressivism” have a lengthy history in art and literature, and they generally refer to a personal vision of the human condition.
Levine, et al. (1993) as cited in Re, Caeran, & Cornoldi (2008)	“involves a series of executive process (working memory, planning, ideas production and organization, monitoring ...”
Murray (1978, p. 124)	The most accurate definition of <b>writing</b> , I believe, is that it is the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and to communicate it.
NCTE (2018)	Defining <b>writing</b> : “Writing” refers to the act of creating composed knowledge. Composition takes place across a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes. Defining <b>personal writing</b> : Writing that reflects deeply held beliefs and ideas of the writer.
Pennebaker & Smyth (2016, p. ix)	Expressive writing is a technique where people typically write about an upsetting experience for 15 to 20 minutes a day for three or four

	days[...] a brief writing technique that helps people understand and deal with emotional upheavals in their lives.
<b>Rief (2014, p. 17)</b>	<b>Writing</b> is thinking—it is a complex cognitive, idiosyncratic, reading process through which the writer moves recursively, building meaning by finding ideas, gathering information, organizing material, trying out ideas in drafts, revising and restructuring the content, editing for convention, and publishing.
<b>Robertson (1988, p. 21)</b>	Writing close to the self.
<b>Waterman &amp; Archer (1979, p. 328)</b>	Many forms, including the writing of poetry and fiction and the keeping of a diary or personal journal. The common element... is the attempt to express, in a concrete verbal form, matters of personal importance and concern.
<b>Wilson (1995, p. 241)</b>	Writing that is autobiographical.
<b>Whitney (2009, p. 238)</b>	Personal writing, as in memoir, poetry, and fiction.

Figure 4: Defining Expressive Writing

While Britton asserts (Fig. 3, 1975) that “all writing is expressive,” Bouchard (1976) provides insight into the nature of teaching expressive writing to teachers who teach writing. Her conceptual framework notes the importance of distinguishing the difference between “writing for oneself” and “writing for sharing.” She also notes that differences between expressive and discursive writing in *classroom* examples are hard to find elsewhere (p. 45). Elbow speaks of “private writing” (Fig. 4) as the kind of personal writing you do for yourself as you learn and sort through experiences and understandings. Private writing may also be experiences teachers can cultivate when they ask students to write without collecting it for a grade, where students do not have to worry about being corrected. Robertson’s definition of “writing close to the self” mirrors Elbow’s reference to private. Both Britton, et al, (1975) and Honeychurch (1990) include the notion of writing for the self and offer variations, depending on purpose.

After exploring the history of expressive writing and multiple definitions, I find the following definition by Waterman and Archer (1979) particularly fitting for this research study: “Expressive writing may take many forms, including the writing of poetry and fiction

and the keeping of a diary or personal journal. The common element in the various forms of expressive writing is the attempt to express, in a concrete verbal form, matters of personal importance and concern” (p. 328). While the first half of the definition provides examples of genres where one might find expressive writing, the latter half speaks to a spark or drive where the writer attempts to become part of a larger conversation, expressing “matters of personal importance and concern.”

## **Benefits of Expressive Writing**

### ***Therapeutic Benefits***

The therapeutic benefits of personal and expressive writing are abundantly clear, both in and out of academia. Pennebaker’s (1997) expressive writing protocol shows up in articles and podcasts, even when those making the point don’t realize they are talking about Pennebaker, they do know about the exercise: to write for 15 to 20 minutes three to four times a week about a traumatic or upsetting event. Doing so will make you feel better. Rob Bell (2019), uplifting and popular speaker on spiritual matters, talks about it in his podcast with his wife Kristen Bell (not the actress/singer)—they never mention Pennebaker by name, but use the vague phrase, “research shows…” instead. I recognized the protocol when they described the same exact process. Phelan (2018) writes about journaling in her column for the New York Times. She includes references to Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way*, research out of New Zealand, and an interview with James Pennebaker. Phelan shares her findings: “There are the obvious benefits, like a boost in mindfulness, memory and communication skills. But studies have also found that writing in a journal can lead to better sleep, a stronger immune system, more self-confidence and a higher I.Q.” (n.p.).

The work so often cited is a 1997 article where Pennebaker describes the paradigm and summarizes his findings. In the article, Pennebaker concludes that “Writing about emotional experiences clearly influences measures of physical and mental health” (p. 163) and that “Health gains appear to require translating experiences into language” (p. 164). To give you a glimpse into just some of the studies I’ve collected concerning the 1997 article, I’ll provide a brief description for four of the studies. Dannoff-Burg, et al., (2010) conducted an experimental study adding a narrative writing element to the paradigm. Hudson & Day (2012) conducted a qualitative study with a narrative analysis and semi-structured interviews with 16 athletes. Kliewer, et al., (2011) studied the impact of a writing intervention, conducted with 17 classrooms. Range and Jenkins (2010), in an analysis of existing research focused on a randomized controlled trial, tested the efficacy of two expressive writing interventions within the context of 17 classrooms. “When researchers asked participants, who had reported benefitting from expressive writing, to explain why they thought it helped, most thought help accrued because writing allowed them to gain insight into what happened to them” (p. 152). The benefit of insight from rendering experience as part of an English curriculum is supported by both Elbow (1990) and Romano (1995).

Explaining the backstory of his expressive writing research, Pennebaker (2018) explains, “I developed a working theory that keeping a secret was a form of active inhibition. Concealing or holding back powerful emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, I reasoned, was itself stressful. Further, long-term, low-level stress could influence immune function and physical health” (pp. 226-227). While he still likes the theory, he has yet to find “a shred of evidence” to support it. But it led him to his expressive writing paradigm. “If keeping a secret about a trauma was unhealthy, it made sense that having people reveal the secret should improve

health” (p. 227). Consistent literature about this use of expressive writing began to emerge and as of 2018 four to five meta-analyses had been conducted. By the way, “the overall effect size of expressive writing on health across over 100 studies averages about .16 (Cohen’s d)” (p. 227). Pennebaker credits the impact of the expressive writing topic to its being “so fundamental to human nature” (p. 228).

### ***Learning Benefits***

Expressive writing is a pathway to learning (Robertson,1988). Perhaps because it answers a human need. Graves (1978), in reflecting on the research of what came to be known as the Atkinson studies, wrote the following, from an essay first published in 1978:

People want to write. The desire to express is relentless. People want others to know what they hold to be truthful. They need the sense of authority that goes with authorship. They need to detach themselves from experience and examine it by writing. Then they need to share what they have discovered through writing (p. 20).

Recognizing that need, Graves grounded his research in observing children at work through writing. Many of the essential elements I will delineate for an *Expressive Writing Pedagogy* (Fig. 5) were first introduced by Graves as essential strategies for student writers, especially time and choice.

Brand (1980) categorized three general purposes of expressive writing: The first was to produce creative artists. The second was to provide motivation for writing in general that would result in improved expository and communication skills. Finally, was the notion that creative writing held intrinsic personal value and was, therefore, suitable for students regardless of their intellectual ability [...]” (p. 77). Bilton and Sivasubramaniam (2009) focused their study of six students writing about literature through a personal, expressive writing stance, and found the following themes:

1. A sense of engagement, enjoyment and involvement
2. Self-expressive fosters expressive potential
3. Expressive writing promotes motivation and fluency
4. Expressive writing fosters critical reading
5. Expressive writing fosters love of writing
6. Expressive writing helps prevent a closure-focused stance (p. 317)

Expressive writing includes the rendering of our own stories, our experiences remembered and brought to life through writing. Gruell (1999) believes that “Writing about the things that happen to us allows us to look objectively at what’s going on around us and turn a negative experience into something positive and useful” (p. xiv-xv). Additionally, expressive writing or writing to *render* deepens insightful and critical thinking. Jones (1997), another theorist referencing the work of Elbow, describes Elbow’s asserting “primacy of experience” and explains that “He values this experiential writing because he believes ‘discourse that renders often yields important... insights such as helping us see an exception or a contradiction’” (p. 10). The benefit of insight is additionally supported by Range and Jenkins (2010) who applied Pennebaker’s expressive writing protocol in a gender study. When participants who had reported a beneficial outcome were asked to explain why they thought writing helped, most thought it was “...because writing allowed them to gain insight into what happened to them” (p. 152). Gallagher argues that personal and reflective writing move “beyond recounting” to a sphere of discovery and insight (p. 25).

Affirming the benefit of insight, Miriam-Goldberg (1999) also writes about what might be termed *self-regulating* strategies today, “The words I scribble kept me from freezing up or closing myself off from the world. Writing, then and now, helped me feel—sometimes pain, often confusion, always doubt, and occasionally real joy” (p. 2). Other benefits include: discovering identity, self-efficacy and self-esteem, developing your writer’s voice, finding

purpose, nurturing inquiry—finding answers and new questions, enhancing creativity, connection with others, healing, a place to release emotion, finding and expressing joy, vitality, and discovering your dreams.

Schwarz (1987) believes expressive writing is connected to building the confidence of the learner; in particular, personal and creative writing help “shape the confidence, performance and development of the whole self” (p. 247). In addition to helping students feel like learners, expressive writing helps students feel like *thinkers* and *doers* (Bouchard, 1976, p. 46). The writer is encouraged to take a confident stance in beginning where they are, at whatever skill level. Through expressive writing, students learn to value the synthesis of ideas, feelings, memories, plans, etc. Understanding literature begins when learners write it themselves.

Additionally, Re, Caeran, & Cornoldi (2008) point out that the complexities involved with expressive writing—“the series of executive processes (working memory, planning, ideas production and organization, monitoring”—are also critical in ADHD (p. 541).

### **Writing as a Process**

*My first experience with writing as a process happened only after earning my Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Theatre. I enrolled in Advance Grammar and Composition where the professor proclaimed that good writing is rewriting and rewriting and rewriting... I didn't really learn stages of the writing process until I was already teaching. The idea of it was introduced at an optional district professional development experience in 1990 with several presenters from the Oklahoma Writing Project. I purchased my first book by Nancie Atwell, the first edition of Writing in the Middle (1987), along with an early edition of Kirby and Liner's Inside Out (1981). The majority of what I taught in 1990 was Speech, an elective for 9<sup>th</sup>-graders, where we focused on diverse forms of public speaking and drama, each class performing a one-act play for the entire school. But I also taught two 8<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. Teaching writing as a process was an odd idea for many the teachers who had been teaching English. But I embraced the process approach.*



*When I returned to teaching, nearly a decade later, the writing process had made it into state learning objectives and seemed widely accepted. The writing process was even in the textbook my new school had adopted, McDougal Littell's *The Writer's Craft* (1998), where Sheridan Blau was the Senior Author, and Peter Elbow, Consulting Author. Along with writing process, concepts like show versus tell and mentor texts termed "Literary Model" and "Student Model" seemed to support a workshop approach. But when I asked English and reading teachers about the workshop approach, no one knew what I was talking about. I learned, however, that many teachers expected students to understand the writing process. It showed up in their semester exams in the form of multiple-choice items. I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but that first year back in the classroom, they showed up in mine too.*

*So, in the decade I had stayed home to focus on my own children, the writing process and elements of the workshop approach found new footing, but in the contexts the Oklahoma junior high and district where I was newly employed in 2001, teacher-centered classrooms dominated by assign-and-assess approaches were still mainstream.*

While many teachers may acknowledge five steps of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, our current understanding has evolved over time. State standards often write about "the" writing process, but many writers and teachers of writers define the steps differently or argue that writers must discover a process that works for them. Kittle (2008) affirms that "Writing is a process and by focusing on the process and habits of a writer, writing improves" (p. 12). NCTE asserts that writing is more than the finished product and that learning to write includes an understanding of "the ensemble of actions in which [learners] engage as they produce texts (2016, p. 11).

For Graves (2003), "The writing process has many beginning points" (p.221) and refers to this beginning, not as *prewriting*, but "rehearsal." "Rehearsal refers to the preparation for composing and can take the form of daydreaming, sketching, doodling, making lists of words, outlining, reading, conversing, or even writing lines as a foil to further rehearsal. The works of Donald Graves and Donald Murray has been at the forefront of the process movement.

Murray (1978), a foundational influence in the writing process movement, emphasized the following phases: *prevision*, *vision*, and *revision* (p. 124). He disagreed with the “educational segregation of functional and imaginative writing,” (recall the history of an ongoing debate and tension) believing that the “process of discovery takes place in all writing” (p. 127). “You have to allow language to lead you to meaning.” Murray looks at revision as a model of growth, for both the writer and the piece of writing. He focused on two types: (1) *internal revision*, the discovery phase where the writer works to develop what they have to say and where the audience of one is the writer, and (2) external revision, where the writer focuses on communicating the idea to the reader – and audience that is not the self. Yearwood (1994) credits the *then* 20-year history of the “process writing movement” with slowly bringing greater alignment with “what real writers do” (p. 10).

### **Writing as a Tool for Learning**

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is a popular phrase and notion that teachers may have learned in various forms of professional development. Many may have experienced it through the official grassroots movement that began in the 1970s (McLeod & Soven, 1992) and can still be found as part of many universities. McLeod and Soven discuss the WAC briefly, along with theorists contributing to the movement. They define *writing across the curriculum*, “... as a comprehensive program that transforms the curriculum, encouraging writing to learn and learning to write in all disciplines” (p. 4).

Outside of the official movement, composition theorists like Emig (1977) have been thinking about writing as a tool for learning for some time. Emig noted eleven distinctions between talking and writing. In the 11<sup>th</sup> entry she wrote, “Because writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is more

readily a form and source of learning than talking” (p. 124). She points out that the slower pace of writing allows for the back and forth between “past, present, and future” (p. 127), an excellent medium for connecting “three major tenses” of our experiences for meaning making. NCTE’s 2016 statement includes the section, “Writing is a tool for thinking” and argues that

Regardless of the age, ability, or experience of the writer, the use of writing to generate thought is still valuable; therefore, forms of writing such as personal narrative, journals, written reflections, observations, and writing-to-learn strategies should be included in the curriculum. (NCTE, 2016, p. 13, cited in Whitney, 2021)

Honeychurch (1990), referencing Britton, et al.’s work (1975) writes about expressive writing as “the form of language in which we ‘first-draft’ our tentative or speculative ideas. In other words, it is an essential mode for learning—for the tentative exploration of new areas of knowledge” (p. 328). In short, expressive writing, the most personal and spontaneous forms of writing, gives students full rein on the writing and thinking process, allowing them to write, think, and learn. Honeychurch (1990) further affirms “writing as a pedagogical tool” for teachers of social studies, math, science, and other subjects. “These teachers have discovered the benefits of using freewrites, journal writing, and other similar writing experiences that encourage students to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions—appropriately called expressive writing” (p. 328).

### **The National Writing Project**

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a nearly 50-year-old network that began with James Gray, “a teacher educator and former English teacher,” who envisioned a teacher-leadership program for the improvement of the teaching of writing (NWP, 2021). Established in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley, the Bay Area Writing Project, just two years later, had grown into 14 new sites replicating Gray’s model in six states. Continued growth was made possible for Writing Project sites with foundation grants and local matching funds.

Then, in 1991, the NWP was authorized as a federal education program, expanding eventually “to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands” (NWP, 2022). Federal funding supported the NWP until 2011. During the height of funding support, the NWP network grew to over 200 local sites. Today, the network includes nearly 175 sites with six international sites adopting key principals of the model into their own writing programs. Housed on college campuses, local sites collectively prepare 2500 new teacher-leaders a year, who in turn work with 95,000 colleagues in professional growth opportunities to improve the teaching of writing, “ultimately strengthening the writing and thinking of six million students, pre-K through college, each year” (NWP, 2022).

With the 2011 change in federal funding, the NWP shifted toward i3 and SEED grant funding, which influenced two major programs: C3WP (focused on argument writing and civic engagement) and New Pathways (researching ways to redesign the summer institute to reach educators through digital formats).

At the heart of the NWP is the motto *teachers teaching teachers* and a professional development model that centers the expertise of teachers in the classroom (Gray, 2000). In 2013 the NWP was a network of 197 university sites in all 50 states (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013) partnering with local school districts with the intention of carrying on the work of improving the teaching of writing. Bringing teachers of diverse subjects from PreK to University, the NWP honors and celebrates the expertise of teachers.

In writing about the history of this teacher-centered model, Blau (2018) listed the following core principles that had sustained the “heart of the Project for all of its years” (p. 23):

1. **That all teachers are or ought to be teachers of writing** (since writing is the most powerful instrument available for learning), and all teachers of writing K-

university, and across academic subjects belong to a single, interdependent, collegial community with shared professional challenges that will best be met through collaborative efforts based on mutual professional respect.

2. **That teachers of writing must write:** that their authority as teachers of writing must be grounded on their own personal experience as writers—as persons who know first-hand the struggles and satisfactions of the writer’s work.
3. **That a truly influential professional development program requires the ongoing and continually renewed collaboration of teaching colleagues** who will continue to share their expertise and build professional knowledge together beyond an initial 5-week summer institute, and that inservice programs sponsored by a Writing Project site in local schools not be typical single-day or single-afternoon affairs but extended programs over several days throughout a school year.
4. **That what working teachers of writing know from their classroom experience constitutes valid professional knowledge,** but that, as members of a profession, such teachers also need to challenge, validate, and enhance the authority of the experience by familiarizing themselves with recent developments in composition research and theory.
5. **That while there may be no single right approach to teaching writing to all students, some practices have a strong research base** demonstrating their efficacy with particular populations of students, and any promising practice found successful by an experienced and thoughtful teacher deserves attention and experimentation. The participants in a reflective and informed community of practice are in the best position to design and develop the most effective and locally successful writing programs.
6. **That veteran teachers who are well informed and effective in their own practice are the most trustworthy and effective teachers of other teachers** as well as valuable partners in educational research, policy development, and curriculum planning. Collectively, teacher-leaders are the most valuable human resource for educational reform. (Blau, 2018)

Centering teachers as experts does not come without expectations. Collaboration in the teaching of writing can benefit students as well as teachers. Tapping into this powerful learning tool can help create a community of educators ready to do the work of improving instructional practices and student learning together. When teachers of writing write for authentic reasons—whether to model their own process or for publication—and as a regular practice, they experience the challenges their own students may face, as well as the spark that comes from

sharing your story. Working teachers carry an expertise from their classroom experiences, and this is significant knowledge—yet, staying informed and aware of research and theory is important. NWP does not endorse a particular way of teaching but believes that an effective practice is sharpened by reflection within a community of committed educators. Authentic professional growth is an ongoing process best experienced in collaboration with other committed teachers. Partnering with informed and effective teacher-leaders is a significant and valuable resource for improving the education of all our students.

### **Expressive Writing Pedagogy**

*My Road of Trials (Campbell, 1968/2008), as a teacher of writing, included embracing expressive writing as a way to understand writing as a process, as well as writing as a tool for learning. It would be 2005 before I considered writer's notebooks, the topic of my master's thesis, but as I look back over the teaching and writing processes of my career, I see salient and essential elements that I learned with the Summer Institute and through other experiences with both the Oklahoma Writing Project and the National Writing Project. These practices served to sustain me and my students as many of us learned to see ourselves as writers. In exploring the landscapes of our life experiences, the content we knew best, we built a bridge from our personal writing to writing we wanted to share with others, giving all of us a foundation for the other kinds of writing an education or place of work may demand.*

*I realize that's a fairly strong claim, but it's one based on the students who have returned to me, time and again, often with a piece of fresh writing in hand, who give credit to the writing they created in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA class.*

Paulo Freire taught that long before we read the word, we read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Writing can be a great way to help us read the life experiences we bring with us into the world. The act of shaping that experience into words to be shared with the worlds we create in school, particularly in classrooms where students are centered for the stories they bring, is an act of critical literacy.

At its best, a theory of critical literacy needs to develop pedagogical practices in which in the battle to make sense of one's life affirms and furthers the need for teachers and

students to recover their own voices so they can retell their own histories and in so doing ‘check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived’” (p. 15). (Inglis, 1985, as cited by Freire and Macedo, 1987)

Giroux (1987) believes, “Developing a critical pedagogy that takes the notion of student experience seriously also involves rethinking the very nature of curriculum discourse” (p. 178). Curriculum represents a narrative or voice, Giroux suggests, “one that is multilayered and often contradictory” as well as “situated within relations of power that more than not favor white, middle-class, English-speaking students.” Awareness of that narrative is essential for creating a classroom where everyone has access. A critical pedagogy must be “both empowering and transformative” (p. 178).

The salient and essential elements I gleaned from my experiences with the OWP and the NWP set me on a Road of Trials where I found practices that not only led me to a critical pedagogy, empowering and transforming my teaching, but also practices that resonated with my students and sustained my professional growth, along the way. As I will refer to these practices in my definition for Expressive Writing Pedagogy, the table in Figure 5 should be helpful in delineating these salient elements. Wording from the initial survey is included below each brief explanation, as noted in red. Following the table, I reflect on each element’s presence in my Summer Institute (SI) and provide an expanded description from the literature.

Element	Explanation	Sources
<b>Time</b>	Time is built into the curriculum for consistent writing opportunities, three or more times a week. Making time for consistent practice builds fluency and helps to create generative writers. <b>S: Time. I provide consistent writing opportunities: 3 or more times a week.</b>	Atwell, 1987, 1998, 2015; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Graves, 1983/2003; 2004; NCTE 2016
<b>Choice</b>	When students are given choices, their autonomy and sense of self are empowered. Choice in topic, genre, mode, etc. helps students make writer-ly decisions. There will be times when limiting choices is appropriate.	Atwell 1987, 1998, 2015; Emig, 1977; Elbow, 1997, 1999; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, Graves, 2004

	S: Student Choice. I provide opportunities for students to make choices in their writing (e.g. topics, genre, modes).	
<b>Low-stakes Writing</b>	Informal writing that utilizes writing as a tool for learning leads to learning, deeper thinking, and self-efficacy. S: Low-stakes / Informal Writing. I utilize writing as a tool for learning.	Donovan 2020; Elbow 1997, 1999; Emig 1977; Rief 2018
<b>Teacher Modeling</b>	The teacher models their own messy process of learning and writing. They may be by writing in front of the class while thinking aloud the decision-making process as they demonstrate an element of writing. Or they may share a draft already written with writing instruction in mind. Modeling also happens when teachers write alongside their students with a quickwrite or a generative writing exercise. S: Modeling. I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own processes for learning.	Atwell, 1987, 1998, 2002, 2015; Durham 2017; Gallagher, 2011; Graves, 2004; Kittle, 2008
<b>Mentor Texts</b>	Utilizing a well-constructed and compelling piece of writing, such as a published article, poem, or excerpt of literature, offers a model for students to use as they think about their own writing. Student examples of highly effective writing moves can serve as mentor texts as well. S: Mentor Texts. I share great examples of compelling writing with my students. This includes both professional writing and excellent student examples.	Atwell, 2002, 2006; Gallagher, 2011; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Graves, 2004; Rief, 2003, 2018
<b>Collaborative Learning</b>	Students work together in partners and small groups to learn, practice, and offer feedback. S: Collaborative Learning. My students work together in partners and small groups for various purposes.	Atwell, 1987, 1998, 2015; NCTE, 2016; Spandel, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitney, 2021
<b>Conferencing</b>	Formative assessment through teacher conferences with students are especially informative in one-to-one conferences where the teacher can give immediate feedback as the student grapples with their writing. S: Conferencing. Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.	Atwell, 1987, 1998, 2015; Graves, 2004; Kittle, 2008; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Whitney, 2021
<b>Publishing</b>	Sharing and displaying student work. "Having an audience other than the teacher" (Bryan, Interview 1). S: Publishing. Student work is shared through various forms of publishing. Examples may include author's chair, class blog, writing contests, and exceptional work display.	Atwell, 1987, 1998, 2015; Graves, 2004; Rief, 2014



<b>Portfolios</b>	<p>Keeping a collection of student writing, as a history of learning and the stories they shared throughout the year, offers opportunities for reflection and a way to build self-efficacy. Focusing on the portfolio can be a way of Beginning with the End in Mind.</p> <p><b>S: Portfolios. My students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared.</b></p>	<p>Atwell 1987, 1998, 2015; Gallagher &amp; Kittle, 2018; Graves, 2004</p>
<b>Reflective Teaching</b>	<p>There is a movement, or kind of dance, that reflective teachers do. We think about what we will teach, grappling with (often researching) how we will teach a particular skill. Then we teach it. Finally, through reflection on the process and examining the product (data/student work) we wonder what went well that we'd like to do again and what we would do differently the next time. Often this leaves teachers with questions they take into their conversations with colleagues or begin to research.</p> <p><b>S: Reflective Teaching. I focus on student learning while making adjustments in my teaching that will better meet their needs.</b></p>	<p>Atwell, 1998; Blau 2018; Freire, 1970, 1987; NWP, n.d.</p>

Figure 5: Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy

## Time

*I had never written as much as I did the summer of 2002. Every presentation contained elements of writing, usually within the first fifteen minutes where we wrote in our own journals. But we were also given extended time to write on our own and with our writing groups during the afternoons. While we left the Summer Institute most days by 4:00, writing did not end there. In the evenings we continued revising earlier drafts or began new pieces for both our portfolios and publication in the SI anthology. Time to write, coupled with keeping the end goal in mind (publication and final portfolio) became part of my classroom practice with 8<sup>th</sup>-graders.*

While Graves (2004) insisted that children ought to be writing at least three days a week, he believed, “Four or five days are ideal” (p. 91). Atwell (1998) explained, “Writers need regular, frequent chunks of time they can count on, anticipate, and plan for. Only when I make time for writing in school, designating it a high-priority activity of the English program, will my students develop the habits of mind of writers...” (p. 91). Gallagher and Kittle (2018) begin with the demands of time and acknowledge that planning for *this*, means less time for *that* (pp. 6-7), and consistent time for writing, as well as reading, remained an important part

of the curriculum they planned together. This notion of time is supported by NCTE (2016): “Writing instruction must include ample in-class and out-of-class opportunities for writing [...] Teachers need to support students in the development of writing lives, habits, and preferences for life outside school.”

## **Choice**

*While there were particular requirements for our writing as Fellows in a Summer Institute—like the number of pieces for our final portfolio, a Teacher Lore piece, a Synthesis Essay, and the inclusion of prewriting and drafts demonstrating our experiences with writing as a process—choice was built into every quickwrite, freewrite, and final piece. We spent time exploring our own memories, ideas, and imaginations in numerous quickwrites, freewrites, and brainstorming webs and lists to generate our own topics. I learned that choice included scaffolding writers in a way that helped them access their own thinking and make meaningful connections.*

In promoting writing as a learning mode, Emig (1977) shared research confirming “the importance of engagement in, as well as self-selection of, a subject for the student learning to write and writing to learn” (p. 126). Graves (1983/2003) research led him to believe “[c]hildren need to choose most of their own topics,” (p. xii). One of the drivers of choice can be the habit of writing. “For writers who compose daily, other topics come to them in the midst of writing about another subject, especially if they know they can exercise control over their choices” (p. 223). Learning from Graves research with the writing of elementary students, Atwell (1987, 1998, 2015) grappled with her own classroom practices where she had held control over the assignment and topics. Once she changed her practice and invested in helping her 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students learn to develop their own topics, everything changed. Choice helped her students “explore and capture what’s important to them, ask questions, solve problems, make sense of experiences, express feelings, and move,

entertain, and persuade readers” (2015, p. 11). Gallagher and Kittle (2018), citing the work of both Graves and Atwell, argue that “choice drives engagement” (p. 12).

## **Low Stakes Writing**

*The Summer Institute demanded a great deal of writing. I practically filled the journal I'd brought with me and wrote drafts upon drafts towards the required four final pieces of writing. None of this writing was graded along the way, but I began to internalize this new way of expressing myself and value the effort to put my ideas into words. We wrote and we shared our writing throughout each day. While creating the final portfolio with a Teacher Lore piece, a research-synthesis piece, and at least two more pieces of my own choice felt daunting, I included far more than the required pieces. I'd produced a great deal of writing for which I felt proud. The only high-stakes pressure I felt was the looming deadline when my portfolio would be shared with TCs and guests attending our final celebration.*

While Emig (1977) clearly makes a case for using writing as a tool for learning, she never promoted labeling with a grade. Elbow (1997) believed “if we assign lots of low stakes writing, students are much less liable to be held back by fear or inability to put what they know on paper when they come to high stakes writing” (p. 6). defined low stakes writing as “frequent, informal assignments that make students spend time regularly reflecting in written language...” (p. 7). Later, in delineating the difference between private and public writing, Elbow (1999) explored a benefit of this kind of writing.

As teachers with authority, we can nudge students into spaces where—although they cannot get away from culture—they can operate under less supervision. We can provide them with some crucial time-outs from their experience of the unending oversight and testing of their minds that constitutes schooling. When students write privately, they often notice how much they write for us anyway—and this noticing can give them a bit more awareness of their situation and a bit more space for choice and agency. (p. 167).

Donovan (2020) shared her experience with low-stakes writing when her 7<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA students “wrote on day one and wrote nearly every day after for an entire school year” utilizing Elbow’s freewriting exercises and Rief’s (2018) approach to quickwrites, ultimately moving

her classroom practice away from traditional grades toward authentic assessment that included students reflecting on their own work.

## **Teacher Modeling**

*When my Summer Institute Fellows and I were asked to brainstorm and write, our coaches and directors wrote too. This practice transferred to my own classroom, where I nurtured the habit of writing with my students. Additionally, teacher presentations, first from the directors, coaches, and other seasoned TCs included student samples of the lessons about writing or with writing, to model for the Fellows an important element we would include in our own presentations. We were learning new concepts about the teaching of writing or how to include writing as a tool for learning. But we were also learning how to present our own researched practices to others.*

Another concept made popular by Graves (1983/2003) is that of teacher modeling. “Children need to hear their teacher talk through what she is doing as she writes on the overhead or the chalkboard. In this way children witness their teacher’s thinking” (p. xxiii). Throughout all three editions of Atwell’s *In the Middle* (1987, 1998, 2015), minilessons demonstrate precisely how a teacher might model their own writing. Atwell asserts, “The most efficient, convincing invitation to students to think and act as writers is to show them how an adult tries to think and act as a writer” (2015, p. 107). One of my favorite Atwell minilessons illustrates this advice. Thus inspired, I used the lesson with my own students, and I wrote about modeling my own messy process for the NCTE journal, *Voices from the Middle* (Durham, 2017), in an issue filled with “Teachers Who Write (as Teachers of Writers).” Kittle (2008) wrote of her own journey into becoming a teacher who writes with her students. Both Gallagher and Kittle (2018) “believe that as English teachers we must be readers and writers because it is the heart of our content area. Just like those of our students, our reading and writing lives are being shaped by the evolving world and the new tools available to us” (p. 11).

## **Mentor Texts**

*Diane-Holt Reynolds kept emailing me in the Fall of 2002. She had recently purchased Atwell's Lessons That Change Writers (2002) and asked me to review it for her. It was filled with many of her best lesson plans for teaching writing and every lesson included a mentor text, either published writing or examples from Atwood's students. Schools depended on overhead projectors back then, so a three-inch binder filled with transparencies of these mentor texts was included. It wasn't long before I developed the habit of finding and sharing mentor texts I found in current events, favorite poems and prose, and student work.*

“Beyond teacher modeling in the classroom,” Gallagher’s (2011) “students benefit immensely from closely examining writing from the real world” (p. 20). Utilizing mentor texts—compelling examples of published, real-world writing—is a great way of showing students “all the places writing comes from” (Graves, 1983/2003, p. xii). At the 2014 NCTE Convention, Kelly Gallagher explained to an audience of high school English teachers that when they grow tired and frustrated with students who ask for the umpteenth time how to complete a writing assignment, it’s most likely because their students have not seen enough examples or models. Gallagher and Kittle (2018) teach their “students to read like writers by studying texts deliberately” where they name and notice “the craft of writing” (p. 40). Rief (2003, 2018) shared her use of quickwrites filled with mentor texts to help jumpstart student thinking and writing. Atwell (2006) provided a year of lessons with brief poems to begin class. Both Rief and Atwell included real life examples of published writing, along with student exemplars.

## **Collaborative Learning**

*My coursework as a communication/theatre major included a great deal of collaborative learning experiences, especially in acting classes and a course on discussion. But as a student teacher for eight weeks, and then a substitute teacher for two years, with the exception of classes like drama and band, I never saw this modeled. I first learned about the idea of collaborative learning in 1987, when a counselor*

*shared an article. But when I tried it with juniors in English III, it was received as something strange and uncomfortable—I was the only teacher trying it.*

*Later, in my experiences with professional development where Oklahoma Writing Project teacher consultants were presenting, as early as the 1989, I was instructed to share my writing with a group of three or four other teachers. First, we practiced brainstorming about childhood memories; then we wrote for about five minutes; and suddenly, I was sharing about my dog Babette—a poodle, pet, and childhood companion—who loved to toss rocks in the air so she could chase and catch them. It was a sad memory because it was in the chasing of a rock she had tossed for herself that she was suddenly struck and run over by a car that kept on driving. I found my 20-something year old self crying and grieving in a room full of professional development. I felt a little embarrassed. But mostly, I felt completely alive.*

Collaborative learning includes creating a sense of community in the classroom. Spandel (2005) asserts, “Writers need a classroom culture that supports writing, a culture in which everyone, including the teacher, is part of a writing community” (p. 41). She explains that our goals as writing teachers should not be about creating perfect texts, but, rather, leading students toward a place so comfortable about writing “that they will persist through three pages of random thought to an emerging clarity on page four because they have not one shred of doubt they will get there” (p. 72). That’s about building the self-efficacy of our students, and collaboration is an essential part of that.

NCTE’s (2016) statement on “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing” explained the importance of talk in its relationship with writing—a collaboration allowing the writer “to rehearse the language and content that will go into the writing.” So, it’s important for teachers “to build opportunities for talk into the supports we plan for our student writers” (Whitney, 2021, p. 29). In utilizing a workshop approach (Atwell, 1987), Whitney found that, “Simply asking writers to talk about what they’re trying to do helps (p. 3)” in a number of ways. All of this echoes Vygotsky’s understanding that “*human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those*

*around them*” (1978, p. 88). Providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively on projects they care about, helps to drive and deepen their practice as they are learning the skills they need.

## **Conferencing**

*Before my 2002 Summer Institute, I had read about Atwell’s (1987) workshop approach that built in time for students to confer one-on-one with the teacher and in partners or small groups with one another. During my SI I had several opportunities to meet one-on-one with a writing and presentation coach and a couple of times with Diane Holt-Reynolds, our site director.*

Graves research found that “Children need regular response to their writing from both the teacher and other readers,” (1983/2003, p. xii). Conferencing that happens in the midst of their writing may offer the best opportunities for learners who are grappling with craft. “

Teachers need to understand how children become conscious of what they are doing. The edge of consciousness is the teaching edge of the craftsman. It is the point where children are most aware of what they need to solve on the way to satisfying their intentions in writing.” (Graves, 1983/2003 p. 234)

Both Atwell (1987, 1998, 2015) and Kittle (2008) offer practical advice for feedback during conferences with students, including record keeping, how to fit brief conferences into a class period and what kinds of questions they typically ask. Gallagher and Kittle (2018) confer with their students on both their reading and writing. They “sit beside as many writers as possible, offering encouragement and suggestions, and keeping notes” (p. 41). Whitney (2021) asserts “we need to build opportunities for talk into the supports we plan for our student writers,” including “engaging students in conferences, whether with a teacher or with one another” (p. 29). This provides “feedback on their work,” but also serves to “help writers rehearse and compose” (p. 29).

## **Publishing**

*Publishing during the Summer Institute took many forms. In addition to publishing our writing in a portfolio for future reference in our classroom practices, each Fellow, the coaches, and the co-directors selected pieces for the SI Anthology. Each time I participated in a SII received a copy of my published writing. Informally, we published our writing each time we shared drafts of our work in small groups after a quickwrite or a piece for the portfolio with our writing groups. We also took at least one turn in the Author's Chair. All of these experiences found their way into my own classroom practice.*

*When our fellowship ended and we became Teacher Consultants, our local Writing Project encouraged us to enter our students' writing, as well as our own, in an annual Write to Win Contest. Attending these conferences with students and seeing their work published remain some of my favorite memories.*

Graves's approach to writing instruction included publishing (1983/2003). "Children need to publish, whether by sharing, collecting, or posting work" (p. xiii). He argued, "Writing is a public act, meant to be shared with many audiences" (p. 54) and shared details of a publishing process for elementary aged writers, including book binding. Moving students toward the stance of creator can empower them in ways that "contribute strongly to a writer's development" (p. 54). Furthermore, publishing helps teachers work with more skills—paying attention to conventions becomes important when young writers know they will have a real audience. Through her experiences as a teacher and writer, Rief (2014) found "that the more students are engaged in a piece of writing that means something to them and has an intentional audience for the writing, the more the students want to, and do, edit for the purpose of clarity for the reader" (p. 17). Atwell shared ideas for publishing student writing in all three versions of *In the Middle* (1987, 1998, 2015). In her final edition she wrote, "Publication in the workshop should be a given for everyone, never a reward bestowed on the 'good writers'." Providing a "sense of audience—knowing that someone beyond the teacher will read what students have written—is crucial [...]" (2015, p. 602) for every student.



## **Portfolios**

*I gave my OWP portfolio a title, A Possibility of Plethora. It is filled with writing pieces I spent time with, took through the writing process, and cared about during my fellowship at the 2002 SI and the 2004 SI when I was a writing coach. Each writing piece includes multiple drafts, a final copy, and a reflection on the process of writing it. Eventually, portfolios would become a mainstay of my classroom practice. I still have several my 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students let me keep for student samples.*

According to Graves (1983/2003), “Children need to maintain collections of their work to establish a writing history. Collections show that history when they are used as a medium for evaluation” (p. xiii). For Atwell (1998), the “goal of using portfolios is to collect evidence that documents what a student has worked on and produced, as and how he or she has grown. The portfolios are personal, but not idiosyncratic; representative, but not standardized” (pp. 301-302). Gallagher and Kittle (2018) depend on the End-of-the-Year Portfolio where students demonstrate the skills they’ve acquired throughout the school year. Their four sections include, “an introduction (title page, dedication, and table of contents), a writing section, a reading section, and a digital section” (p. 123). Their students understand these expectations from early on in the school year—adding value to every writing assignment for it may end up in the final portfolio. The portfolio holds value for the students as they move through three distinct “stages “collection, selection, and reflection.”

## **Reflective Teaching**

*As a Fellow in the 2002 Summer Institute, I nurtured a praxis—defined by Friere (1970) as a practice of “action + reflection”—at the close of each day. Diane Holt-Reynolds called for a Status Check. Sometimes we wrote for three to five minutes first, in a focused freewrite. Then we went quickly around the room sharing something we learned, an intention for our writing or other project we were committed to (like a presentation, creating the daily log, responding to writing in a group blog), or a question. This practice, along with the research project, instilled in me the value and habit of reflection. I was likely already reflective as a teacher, but the Writing Project made that habit visible and intentional.*

The National Writing Project believes that “participants in a reflective and informed community of practice are in the best position to design and develop the most effective and locally successful writing programs” (Blau, 2018, pp. 23-24). The NWP makes a case for “structured cycles of practice and reflection” (n.d.). For teachers, reflection involves both theory and praxis and is an important component of critical pedagogy (Freire and Macedo 1987). While Blau focused on a community of teachers, Atwell (1998) nurtured reflection among her student writers. She facilitated a “self-evaluation” asking questions to help students reflect on their writing (pp. 226-229). Learning to self-reflect and think about writing, reading, and learning can empower students. As teachers, it’s just as important to reflect on every aspect of our instructional practices. This is more than being “data driven.”

### **Defining Expressive Writing Pedagogy**

With numerous descriptions of what makes an effective writing pedagogy, I find the ones informing my own classroom practice, including those learned from my involvement with the NWP, particularly conducive to creating space for students to share their own voices and empowering students to think critically about their life experiences and the world around them. Thus, when I use the phrase *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*, I am referring to a set of practices and philosophies that teachers utilize to invite students into a bigger conversation with their personal worlds, the worlds of school, and the worlds in which they will negotiate their dreams, goals, and future relationships. An Expressive Writing Pedagogy focuses on the needs of the learner/writer, the one attempting to enter a conversation, and may include one or more of the following elements: time, choice, sense of belonging, modeling, mentor texts, shared learning experiences, and the opportunity to be seen.

An Expressive Writing Pedagogy is not limited to the ELA classroom. Writing can be a tool for learning (Blau, 2018; Emig, 1977). And as Britton, et al. (1975) wrote, “*writing as a pedagogical tool*” works well in “social studies, math, science, and other content-area classes.”

## Summary

In reviewing the literature, I have provided the groundwork for this research and a rationale for the definitions of *sustained professional growth*, *expressive writing*, and *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*. In addition to providing a little history of the teaching of writing, I’ve also provided a background for the process writing movement, writing as a tool for learning, and the National Writing Project.

My research questions, stemming from my experiences with the Writing Project and this review of the literature consist of I) the overarching question: *In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?* and two sub questions: II) *What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?* and III) *What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?*

In the next chapter I share my methodology for answering these questions, as well as my own theoretical framework and research design.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

“Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (Campbell, 1968/2008, p. 81). The **Road of Trials** represents the challenges faced as the hero continues to learn and apply new knowledge.

*“Getting Over the Fear of Getting Up Front” is the title of the presentation I prepared and delivered for OWP’s 2002 Summer Institute and the first I shared with a larger context of OWP TCs and teachers attending our first professional development. I reveled in my new and growing identity as I introduced myself by stating my name, followed by, “I am a teacher consultant with the Oklahoma Writing Project.” The presentation incorporated strategies from my days as a speech and drama teacher with a focus on writing. The next presentation I created focused on the requests of a local school district. I titled that presentation, “Scaffolding Writing for Assessment and Beyond!” creating several versions of that presentation for different venues over time.*

*Another opportunity to learn and grow as I served and worked with OWP was attending the National Writing Project Annual Meeting held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2002. Diane Holt-Reynolds, OWP Director, invited me, along with our cohort of SI Fellows to apply for a scholarship, with the caveat of joining the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and attending their annual convention, which coincided and overlapped the dates of the NWP Annual Meeting. To attend, I would have to miss three days of school and that seemed an awful lot to ask of my principal. Additionally, our district was discouraging out of state travel for professional development. I decided not to apply, but Diane sent me a personal email, offering funds to pay for a substitute, if necessary. Somehow, I overcame my fears of upsetting administrative folks—I actually had a supportive principal. He seemed to enjoy giving me a hard time about this request and many later requests to leave my classroom on behalf of OWP, but he always acquiesced once I was able to provide a rationale or agreed to abide by the work-around he devised.*

*One work-around was my request to take students to OWP’s annual Write-to-Win Workshop. I could not call it a workshop on the paperwork. My principal insisted that it was a competition. Which it was. Well, it was a kick-off to inspire students and teachers to enter the competition. But every November I wrote Writing Competition as the reason for taking five of my own students to an event that centered on the joy of writing. Often, other teachers from my school joined with five of their students. And in the spring, we returned with students who had won the competition to celebrate their efforts and receive an anthology that highlighted their writing.*

*Being part of the Oklahoma Writing Project and the larger network, the National Writing Project provided great opportunities for growth—I also applied for and*

*attended a Professional Writing Retreat as well as the Spring Meeting where I met with an Oklahoma cohort as we shared our stories with our Congressmen and Senators.*

*However, much of my growth came with the tensions created between what I was learning professionally and what state and local policies were asking teachers and administrators to implement. As I grew to understand the elements of effective writing pedagogy, there were times policy drove the curriculum in ways that seemed contradictory. At those times, being part of a group of professionals, dedicated to research and developing sound pedagogy, helped me find the language and strategies to work around policy-driven challenges.*

## **Theoretical Framework**

Curiosity drives my stance of *constructionist* and the belief that “we are all born into a world of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 54) constructed by a culture existing long before and long after my entering it. Making meaning out of life experiences happens within a context. Learning to look at that context, not only with a sense of wonder, but also a “critical spirit” (p. 58), helps me to question beliefs, values, and assumptions as I continue to engage with and make meaning of the world. In other words, I learn from studying the patterns others have modeled—then I put my own spin on things, creating new meaning particular to the unique context in which I find myself. From the foundation of social constructionism, I seem to move between two theoretical perspectives: *symbolic interactionism* and *critical inquiry*. Like Mead, I can see how “we come to be persons in and out of interaction with our society” (p. 62). Yet, I am also intrigued by Freire’s notion of conscientization and a critical thinking that “perceives reality as process and transformation, rather than as a static entity” as quoted in Crotty, p. 149. Crotty, however, seems to set the two perspectives as opposite from one another.

The world of symbolic interactionist [...] is a peaceable and certainly growthful world. It is a world of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication, in and out of which we come to be persons and to live as persons. As such, it contrasts with the world that the critical theorist addresses. The world of the critical theorist is a battle ground of hegemonic interests. (p. 63)

For me, the two perspectives are logically reconciled. As the researcher values the actor's perspective by "the putting of oneself in the place of the other" (p. 75), they use *dialogue* to grow "aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (pp. 75-6). Thus, the researcher may grow an awareness of the hegemony impacting the places in which the other exists. *Dialogue* plays an important role in critical theory, as well, especially in Freire's contribution. According to Crotty, Freire believes "all education ought to be programs of vital dialogue from start to finish. [...] The educator is the students' partner as they engage together in critical thinking and a quest for mutual humanisation" (p. 153). As a teacher/researcher, it seems that my position must be a willingness to put myself in the other's perspective, engaging in a humanizing dialogue, and in so doing, facilitate a deepening awareness on the behalf of the research participant of their inherent value and the inherent value of their experiences, which in turn becomes an opportunity for transformation.

The epistemology of constructionism, along with the theoretical perspectives of social interactionism and critical theory guide the purpose of my research to understand the phenomena of professional growth and Expressive Writing Pedagogy as manifested in the experiences of National Writing Project teacher consultants. Understanding how teacher consultants have utilized an Expressive Writing Pedagogy to grow professionally as teachers of writing will inform both my own practice as an educator and add to the bigger conversation in the field of English Language Arts (ELA). From the framework of social interactionism, I focused on participants' experiences from their unique perspectives and teaching contexts, working to see the meanings they assign to their experiences (p. 75). Because the participants are educators, working in the context of a larger system of power structures, critical theory

helps to frame my understanding of challenges faced by marginalized populations, which one could argue includes teachers (Katz, 2014), and the supports that may have provided a sense of agency within a dominant culture (Crotty, p.154).

## **Research Design**

### **Qualitative Case Study**

Qualitative methods share a great deal in common. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) pointed out, the design of each qualitative tradition includes the following:

- Focus on meaning, understanding, process
- Purposeful sample
- Data collection via interviews, observations, documents
- Data analysis is inductive and comparative
- Findings are richly descriptive and presented as themes/categories (p. 42)

What distinguishes case study from other qualitative traditions is the in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Merriam (1998) defined qualitative case study

... in terms of the process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit of analysis (the bounded system, the case), or the end product. As the product of an investigation, a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and not to be confused with casework, case method, case history, or case record. As in all research, the choice of a case study design depends upon what the researcher wants to know. (p. 34)

I wanted to know about the sustained professional growth experiences of NWP Teacher Consultants (TCs), to look closely at the different contexts for TCs from different NWP sites, teaching under different circumstances. While definitions for case study are often in conflict (Patton, 2015; Stake, 2006), a salient and common feature remains the “boundary-setting process” which “determines what the case is and therefore the focus of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 259). The units in this embedded or nested case study were bound by the participants’ involvement with the NWP, particularly as TCs with their local sites, beyond participation in

a Summer Institute. Additionally, because the phenomenon of sustained professional growth, along with the contexts of individual teaching settings and local NWP sites, were not “clearly evident” (Yin, 2018, p. 14), an in-depth investigation into the “real world context” of teacher consultants further supports a case study methodology.

In dealing with multiple participants from different NWP sites and different teaching contexts, I originally believed I would be conducting a multiple case study or what Stake (2006) called a multicase study. He explained, “In multicase study research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases” (p. 6). He goes on to explain that these individual cases share something in common and “are somehow categorically bound together,” forming a “quintain” or “target collection” (p. 6). Yin (2009), however, differentiates between holistic versus embedded case studies and defines four variations. Explaining a *single-case, embedded design*, Yin notes that incorporating subunits can “add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (p. 52), but he cautions that too much attention on the subunits could take focus away from the larger, holistic aspects of the case. In my mind, Yin and Stake are describing the same thing, but using their own jargon and definitions. Whether a quintain or larger context of the case study, the individual cases served to paint a picture of the National Writing Project model of professional growth. The individual cases for this research were NWP Teacher Consultants from diverse contexts geographically and otherwise, satisfying Stake’s (2006) main criteria for selecting cases: 1) relevancy to the quintain, 2) “diversity across contexts,” and 3) “opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts” (p.23).

Thomas (2016) notes the difference between different types of multiple case studies and uses the term “nested” rather than embedded to describe a collection of units “integral” to



forming a “broader picture” (p. 178). His definition helped me see the embedded or nested nature of the individual cases of professional growth experiences of NWP TCs within the larger picture of the National Writing Project. He wrote, “A nested study is distinct from a multiple study in that it gains its integrity, its wholeness from the wider case” (p. 177). Thus, with the nested nature in mind, I grappled with my original research questions.

## **Research Questions**

The goal of this qualitative nested case study was to examine the sustained professional growth of NWP TCs from diverse sites and backgrounds, but who share an experience with the phenomenon of having been a Fellow with a NWP SI coupled with engagement with their local site beyond the SI as a TC. To keep the design focused on the quintain or target of this case design, as well as the individual *nested* cases, I modified my two original questions to include an overarching question:

- I. **In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP teacher consultants?**

The original two questions, along with most of their sub questions, provided further guidance into the exploration of the individual, nested cases.

- II. **What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?**
  - A. In what ways have TCs developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?
  - B. How do TCs describe the trajectory of their professional growth, since experiencing the Summer Institute?
  - C. What factors do TCs attribute to their professional growth and the development of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?
- III. **What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?**
  - A. As TCs implemented and developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy, what supports did they find within their schools and districts?
  - B. What challenges did TCs face? In the beginning? Over time?

- C. What are the personal qualities, observable or self-described, that might influence a TC's professional growth?

### **Setting and Participants / Phase I**

There was no single setting for this inquiry. Rather, multiple settings have been represented within the context of each participant's teaching life, classroom practice (current and remembered), and in the spaces of experiences with a local National Writing Project (NWP) site. A request and link to the initial survey (Appendix A) were sent to the site directors listed with the 175 sites on the NWP official website, as well as the Write Time app, where many directors and teacher leaders remain active. Participants for 26 sites responded to the survey link. Of the 157 humans who began the survey, 90 finished. Of the 90 who finished, 71 marked "Yes" for being a Teacher Consultant with their local Writing Project, and of 71 of those TCs, 62 indicated "Yes" for further contact. 87% of qualifying participants agreed to further contact. The demographic data collected about the participants, the context of their teaching, and the contexts of their local NWP sites provided enough insight to work towards selecting a diverse group for Phase II of this study. Of the 71 participants 62 (87%) identified as female and 9 (13%) as male. As is typical of US teacher demographics, the vast majority were white (65, 91.5%) and female (62, 87 %). Of the six not identifying as white, five represented a different identification—one in each of the following categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin, or Some other race ("White + Spanish heritage"). One participant chose "Prefer not to answer."

Focusing on the phenomenon of having experienced both a NWP Summer Institute (SI) and becoming part of a local NWP site as a *teacher consultant*, selection of participants for this study was a purposeful criterion sampling. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explained,

“Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 157). While sites are unique, representing a context specific to a local culture, there exists a shared culture within the larger network of the National Writing Project. The shared phenomenon of a NWP summer institute seems to continue in events and experiences with the NWP, like the once viable Annual Meetings, National Retreats, and Spring Meetings where local sites sent teacher consultants to speak with their US representatives and senators. Traditional quickwrites accompanied by the optional sharing of that writing is a hallmark of every NWP event I have attended. Yagelski (2009) describes this habitual practice:

I quickly learned that almost all NWP events, whether local or national, large or small, begin with writing. And almost never is the purpose of that writing to produce a text to be read or used by someone other than the writer. We write-together-for other reasons, because writing as an activity matters, separate from any text that is produced. In that Indianapolis ballroom, writing was in fact an act of being, an intense awareness of ourselves in that moment: 1,000 individuals writing, together, in a moment in time and space. In this sense, writing is a potentially powerful vehicle for transformation, for it opens up possibilities for awareness, reflection, and inquiry that writing as an act of textual production does not necessarily do. Writing in the moment, I have come to realize, has the capacity to change. (p. 7)

### ***Why Teacher Consultant rather than Summer Institute Fellow?***

While all participants with a local NWP site begin with the experience of being a Fellow with a Summer Institute (SI), the shared phenomenon under study will be the experience of what happened afterwards, as they moved into a role of *teacher consultant* or *teacher leader* with their local site. While a Fellow experiences a summer institute and may begin to think of ways to further develop or change their classroom practice, a teacher consultant (TC) moves into an active role, supporting the local NWP site in a number of roles, such as presenter, facilitator or coach for the SI, a SI co-director, organizer or participant in outreach (e.g., youth writing events, contests, conferences), organizer or participant in

continuity events (e.g., stake holder meetings, writing marathons, writing retreats). Positioning oneself as a member with a larger group of TCs, who share orientations (Whitney and Friedrich, 2013) or philosophies in the teaching of writing, shows a level of commitment that could inform both classroom practice and the policies that govern those practices.

Furthermore, those Fellows who position themselves as teacher consultants seem committed to taking the conversation of improving writing pedagogy to other teachers (*Teachers Teaching Teachers*). Lieberman and Wood (2003) explain, “Becoming a teacher consultant is recognized as both an opportunity for growth and as a way to make a professional contribution to teaching as well as to the NWP. Teachers are paid for providing workshops, becoming coaches, leading special-interest groups, and more” (p. 37). Additionally, teacher consultants seem to remain committed to staying current in the conversation and research surrounding writing pedagogy. According to Kaplan (2008), “... the NWP contends that reflective and informed teachers who engage in writing themselves are in the best position to both design and develop writing programs” (p. 339).

### **Participant Selection for Phase I**

Searching for eligible TCs included: 1) Reaching out to NWP networks via email, list serves, and social media and 2) Asking site directors for recommendations and utilizing a snowball/chain approach (Cresswell and Poth, 2018, p. 159). I’m not sure how many site directors forwarded the research invitation, but 26 of the 175 sites were represented by at least one of their TCs (Fig. 6). Sometimes, to my surprise, it was the site director that responded. In fact, 14 TCs in higher education responded to the survey, second only to the 20 TCs teaching high school. Also included in the 62 responses available for Phase II were 9 TCs in middle

school, 10 TCs in elementary, 2 TCs teaching grades K-12, and 7 TCs who marked other (e.g., librarian, instructional coach, ESL, curriculum specialist).

26 NWP SITES REPRESENTED						
<u>Oregon WP at Southern Oregon University</u> 3	<u>Central Utah Writing Project</u> 9	<u>Central Texas Writing Project</u> 2	<u>Greater Madison Writing Project</u> 4	<u>Red Cedar Writing Project</u> 1	<u>New York City Writing Project</u> 1	<u>Shenandoah Valley Writing Project</u> 1
<u>San Joaquin Valley Writing Project</u> 1	<u>Nebraska Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Heart of Texas Writing Project</u> 1	<u>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Eastern Michigan Writing Project</u> 5	<u>Drew Writing Project</u> 4	<u>Virgin Islands Writing Project</u> 1
<u>Area 3 Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Oxbow Writing Project</u> 1	<u>Northwest Arkansas Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Illinois State Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Louisville Writing Project</u> 4	<u>West Chester Writing Project</u> 1	
<u>Boise State University Writing Project</u> 5	<u>Oklahoma Writing Project</u> 4	<u>Louisiana State University Writing Project</u> 2	<u>Chippewa River Writing Project</u> 3	<u>Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project</u> 4	<u>Capital Area Writing Project</u> 1	<b>(71 total)</b>

Figure 6: Total Responses from Writing Project Sites

Teacher Consultants (TCs) invited to be participants belong to a network of local sites that make up the NWP. The shared experience of having participated in a NWP Summer Institute could have taken place in 175 different settings, the number of local sites included on the NWP website (NWP, 2021). Responses to the initial survey came from 26 different sites in 18 different states and the Virgin Islands (Fig. 6, above). Of the 157 attempts to begin the initial survey (Appendix A), 71 participants, NWP TCs from various sites, completed it, and 62 of those TC participants agreed to further contact concerning the next phase of the research.

Boundaries around this nested case study included NWP teacher consultants whose teaching practices included at least one element of what I earlier defined as Expressive Writing Pedagogy. So, in addition to looking at demographics, I considered the results of their EWP

self-ratings. Qualtrics survey results for the 71 can be seen below in Figure 7 below and results for Phase II participants can be found in Figure 9.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	A) <b>Time</b> I provide consistent writing opportunities: 3 or more times a week.	41.00	100.00	86.94	17.80	316.84	71
2	B) <b>Student Choice</b> I provide opportunities for students to make choices in their writing (eg. topics, genre, modes).	2.00	100.00	80.00	22.96	527.01	71
3	C) <b>Low-stakes / Informal Writing</b> I utilize writing as a tool for learning.	30.00	100.00	88.31	18.14	329.20	71
4	D) <b>Modeling</b> I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own processes for learning.	10.00	100.00	82.49	22.65	513.12	71
5	E) <b>Mentor Texts</b> I share great examples of compelling writing with my students. This includes both professional writing and excellent student examples.	27.00	100.00	84.90	20.19	407.50	71
6	F) <b>Collaborative Learning</b> My students work together in partners or small groups for various purposes.	5.00	100.00	85.04	20.89	436.29	71
7	G) <b>Conferencing</b> Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.	15.00	100.00	82.48	23.11	533.86	71
8	H) <b>Publishing</b> Student work is shared through various forms [sic] of publishing. Examples may include author's chair, class blog, writing contests, and exceptional work display.	9.00	100.00	65.90	29.40	864.51	71
9	I) <b>Portfolios</b> My students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared.	0.00	100.00	69.87	35.72	1276.03	71
10	J) <b>Reflective Teaching</b> I focus on student learning while making adjustments in my teaching that will better meet their needs.	14.00	100.00	91.00	16.99	288.65	71

Figure 7: Qualtrics Data-Self Ratings for Elements of EWP in Phase I

## Settings and Participants for Phase II

Eight participants emerged (see below) to serve as nested cases within this qualitative case study. These eight TCs represented eight different sites where they began as Fellows in a Summer Institute and found leadership opportunities. The eight participants chosen as individual cases represent eight different settings for local NWP sites and their Summer Institute experiences, as can be seen on the map in below (Fig. 8). One of the eight TCs eventually earned his PhD and is currently a director of his own site. Figure 8 below shows the geographical regions of the original sites where the TCs first experienced the Writing Project.

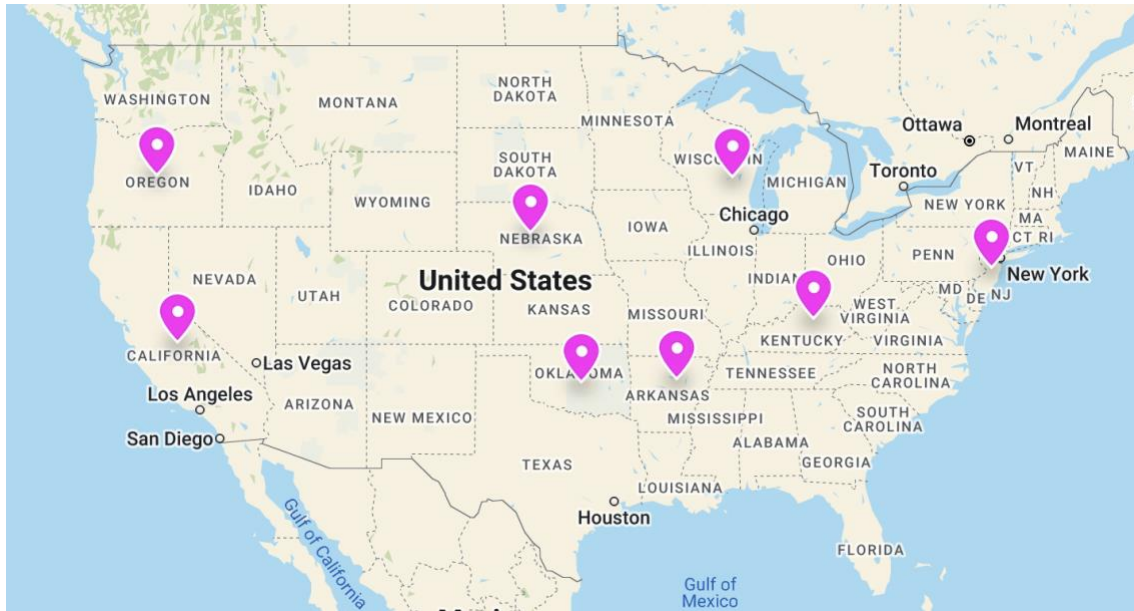


Figure 8: Participant Original Settings for Phase II

Research questions II and III focused on Teacher Consultants who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. The initial survey described Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy as classroom strategies and asked participants to move a slider to indicate how often they utilize each strategy. The slider results are listed as numeral percentages in Figure 9. Each element, as defined in the survey, is listed below:

- A) **Time.** I provide consistent writing opportunities: 3 or more times a week.
- B) **Student Choice.** I provide opportunities for students to make choices in their writing (e.g., topics, genre, modes).
- C) **Low-stakes / Informal Writing.** I utilize writing as a tool for learning.
- D) **Modeling.** I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own process for learning.
- E) **Mentor Texts.** I share great examples of compelling writing with my students. This includes both professional writing and excellent student examples.
- F) **Collaborative Learning.** My students work together in partners and small groups for various purposes.
- G) **Conferencing.** Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.
- H) **Publishing.** Student work is shared through various forms of publishing. Examples may include author's chair, class blog, writing contests, and exceptional work display.
- I) **Portfolios.** My students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared.
- J) **Reflective Teaching.** I focus on student learning while making adjustments in my teaching that will better meet their needs.

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low- stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collabor- ative	EWP.G Confer- encing	EWP.H Publish- ing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflec- tive	EWP AVG
<b>1</b> Bryan Ripley Crandall	100	100	100	100	100	100	70	30	30	100	83.0
<b>2</b> Tonya Kistler	65	2	65	80	50	75	75	45	4	65	52.6
<b>3</b> Stacy Phillips	100	100	100	100	85	100	100	100	50	100	93.5
<b>4</b> Danielle Johansen	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.0
<b>5</b> Monica Harris	53	100	100	91	75	50	77	51	53	100	75.0
<b>6</b> Tara Connors	90	100	100	100	81	100	80	50	100	100	82.8
<b>7</b> Aaron Mann	50	50	51	10	75	75	75	25	5	65	48.1
<b>8</b> Cynthia Price	81	100	85	96	95	95	100	73	37	90	85.2
Mean from 8	79.9	81.5	87.6	84.6	82.6	86.9	84.6	59.3	47.4	90.0	77.5
Mean from 7	79.7	78.9	88.0	83.0	80.9	85.7	82.4	57.3	48.9	90.0	76.4
Mean from 71	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	

Figure 9: Results from Self-Ratings for 10 Elements of EWP

Two of the original eight participants have moved from the secondary classroom into university teaching, where Bryan is an established director of his own NWP site and the other a first-year professor, Cynthia, focused on English Education. Both moves took them to other areas of the country, away from their original NWP local site. And one of those two withdrew from the study after the first interview. Additionally, multiple settings (e.g. schools, university spaces housing local NWP sites, and places for leading or attending professional development) were represented within the context of each participant’s teaching life, professional growth, and in the spaces of experiences with a local NWP site.

Focused on the phenomenon of having experienced both a NWP Summer Institute (SI) and becoming part of a local NWP site as a TC, a purposeful criterion sampling continued to guide the selection of participants for Phase II of this study. As Creswell and Poth (2018)



explain, “Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 157). While the various sites are unique, an important context specific to a shared culture exists within the larger network of the National Writing Project. As described above, Yagelski captured a glimpse of a culture ready to quiet themselves for the powerful event of writing in the same time and space—even “1000 individuals.” As one of the 1000 and a TC, I can verify that culture. Part of the shared NWP culture begins with writing and is sustained with writing for all kinds of reasons—using writing as a tool for learning and for many, as Yagelski argues, as “a way of being” (p. 7). Also central to that shared NWP culture is the professional growth TCs learn from one another, hence the NWP motto, “Teachers Teaching Teachers.”

From my personal experiences at various national events like multiple NWP Annual Meetings, a Professional Writing Retreat, a Spring Meeting, and, during the Covid pandemic, multiple online events, as well as my experiences with TCs from my local site and our state’s sister site, I can reasonably infer that nearly all the TC participants shared a sense of this NWP culture. From the remarks in the survey’s open-ended questions, I could sense that those in the initial survey were no exception. From their responses I attempted maximum variation by considering basic demographics collected in the Fall of 2021. On the survey, participants determined whether their regions were rural, town, suburban, or urban, terms from the NCES. I added Other, which two participants selected. In speaking with Bryan, he explained the checkerboard of zip codes that made up his region and the communities he works with, a kind of “zip code apartheid.” Aaron chose Other because his school is a private school not determined by districts—when we spoke, he explained it could best be described as suburban, thus both ratings of O and S are noted below (Fig. 10). In separating color-coded surveys into

piles representing grade levels (Elementary, Middle School, High School, College), I worked toward maximum diversity as I included regional geography, school level and size, and the other categories listed in the figure below.

Participant	Region				School Size	Race / Ethnicity	Gender	Yrs Teaching	Subject(s)	Grade Level(s)	Years a TC
<b>A Bryan</b> 1972	<b>Other</b> "Zip code Apartheid"				<b>University</b> 6,200	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>26</b>	Literacy Courses, Teacher Institute, Content Area Literacy	<b>K-Grad School</b>	<b>19</b> 2002
<b>B Tonya</b> 1975				<b>U</b>	<b>Middle School</b> 900 public	<b>White</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>23</b>	Humanities (English language Arts & Social Studies combined)	<b>6th</b>	<b>6</b> 2008
<b>C Stacy</b> 1975	<b>R</b>				<b>Elementary</b> 800-900 public	<b>White</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>15</b>	All subjects	<b>3rd</b>	<b>9</b> 2012
<b>D Danielle</b> 1968			<b>S</b>		<b>Middle School</b> 1400 public	<b>White</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>15</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr English, 8 <sup>th</sup> Gr Literacy Support, Methods of Teaching Assessment	<b>8<sup>th</sup> + College</b>	<b>4</b> 2018
<b>E Monica</b> 1964	<b>R</b>				<b>High School</b> 220 public	<b>White</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>31</b>	English Psychology Senior Seminar	<b>7<sup>th</sup></b> <b>10<sup>th</sup></b> <b>11<sup>th</sup></b> <b>12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>11</b> 2010 / 2015
<b>F Tara</b> 1969				<b>U</b>	<b>High School</b> 230 Public / specialized for medical academics	<b>White</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>14</b>	English 12 Gov/Econ Geography/Ethnic Studies	<b>9<sup>th</sup></b> <b>12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>6</b> 2015
<b>G Aaron</b> 1973			<b>O</b> <b>S</b>		<b>High School</b> <b>PreK-12</b> 450 Private	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>25</b>	IB theory of Knowledge (1 <sup>st</sup> time not teaching English in 24 yrs)  Head of School	<b>11-12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>6</b> 2015
<b>H Cynthia</b> 1978	<b>R</b>				<b>University</b> 900	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>16</b>	Education core classes for ed. majors, both elementary and secondary	<b>College</b>	<b>7</b> 2014

Figure 10: Participant Selection, Striving for Maximum Variation

While all eight of the participants participated in the initial survey and first interview, Cynthia, the first-year university instructor resigned from the study silently, not answering three follow-up emails. I have not used her interview as data for this study, mostly because of the unwieldiness of the data I had collected from the other seven participants. Additionally, participants included colleagues and students who emerged after the first interview. Original

participants were asked to submit videos and artifacts that seemed connected to their professional growth with the National Writing Project. This took different forms from NWP colleagues, colleagues in their current schools, as well as students. This is addressed in detail in Chapters 4.1-4.7 and Appendix B.

### ***Participant Selection for Phase II***

The nested case studies began with eight participants, chosen first through criterion-based sampling. In order to study the sustained professional growth experiences of NWP teacher consultants the following criteria guided the selection for the nested cases:

- The participant will have taught a minimum of three years beyond experiencing the Summer Institute
- Participants will either still be serving in active teaching roles or will have been active in a teaching role within the last five years.
- Participants will be serving or will have served or participated with their local NWP site as a Teacher Consultant (TC) in some capacity beyond the Summer Institute (SI).
- Participants will have integrated some of the elements of what I have defined as an Expressive Writing Pedagogy, such as student choice, the use of mentor texts, the practice of quickwrites, etc.

The intention was to find NWP TCs who experienced sustained professional growth related to their experiences with the Summer Institute. For the purpose of this study, an eligible TC would have participated in other Writing Project events at their local site and / or with the National Writing Project. For instance, after my 2002 SI, I attended the NWP Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, brought students to the OWP Write to Win Conference, and served as a writing coach the following summer. In the following years, I also applied for and secured a scholarship to attend a Professional Writing Retreat hosted by the NWP, as well as presented for OWP professional development, attending several OWP events, and serving on the Executive Board for a few years.

The TCs selected represent original Writing Project sites from rural (three), suburban (two), urban (two) and one a mix of regional descriptions. Two were teaching at the university level, three at the high school level, two at middle school, and one at elementary. Six identified as female and two identified as male. As a group they could all be considered veteran teachers, having taught at the time of the survey (Fall, 2021) from 14 to 31 years. While most of them taught English or ELA, many of them taught a variety of subjects as well. And three of them (Bryan, Danielle, and Cynthia) have taught at the university level—Danielle as an adjunct who maintained her classroom practice at the same time. At the time of the survey it had been between four and 19 years since their SI experiences. And all of them explained on the survey the ways they had been involved with their local projects.

## **Procedures**

### **IRB Process**

Because I wanted a representation of TCs from diverse grade levels and because of the emergent design, IRB approval proved a complex process with multiple steps (Fig. 11). The type of artifacts a TC participant might want to include as well as the ages of video participants were not predetermined, so I needed to be prepared for all the possibilities of consent and assent. Figure 11 shows the pathway and divergent needs for the consent process, depending on whether or not colleagues or students would be used, as well as the ages of the students.

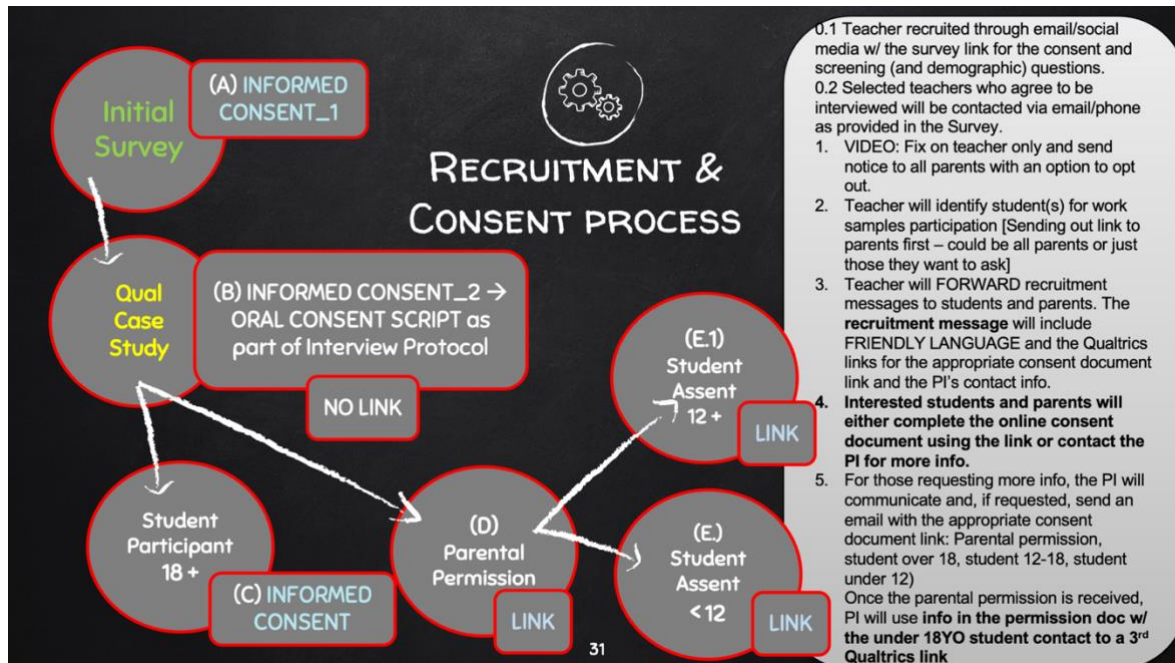


Figure 11: Recruitment & Consent Process

Additionally, in this emergent design, Danielle, Participant 4, suggested interviewing two of her students, who seemed, not only eager to share their work, but talk about their experiences in her classroom. This required an additional interview guide (Appendix H).

## Phase One Procedures

### Phase I Data Collection

After securing IRB approval, Phase I began with a distribution of the initial survey, via Qualtrics. Using the National Writing Project website, I emailed 175 site directors with a request to distribute the survey. I also reached out on the NWP app, as well as Twitter and Facebook feeds associated with the National Writing Project. The survey included questions asking for demographic information under the categories of Current School Context and Teacher Context, as well as questions concerning NWP Teacher Consultant Context, and questions concerning pedagogy—namely, the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy, as defined in Chapter 2 and noted in Chapter 4. Several questions required short responses, and

embedded within the many multiple-choice options were opportunities to choose “Other” with a short response. The survey also included three opportunities for longer responses with open-ended questions (Appendix A). According to Qualtrics data, 157 surveys were initiated and of those responses, 71 (45 %) surveys were completed, and of those, 62 (87%) participants indicated their willingness to be contacted about Phase Two, the nested case study portion of this research.

The Qualtrics survey was opened October 10, 2021 and was closed on November 17, 2021. Completed surveys (Questions in Appendix A) helped determine whether participants met the criteria. I sought maximum variation among those selected for the case study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), maximum variation sampling “consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites of participants and then selecting sites or participants that are quite different on the criteria” (p. 325). As I looked over the demographic portions of the survey, including geographical regions (rural, suburban, town, and urban as noted with NCES), subject taught, grade levels, ethnicity, and gender, I again worked toward maximum variation. Figure 8 represents regions of the eight different NWP Sites for which each candidate completed their original Summer Institute.

In additions to providing demographics, participants answered questions concerning their NWP Teacher Consultant context and questions concerning pedagogy—namely, the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy, as defined in Chapter 2 and noted in Chapter 4. Figure 7 (above) notes the Qualtrics data for the 71 participants completing the survey concerning their responses to questions focused on the elements of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy.

## Phase Two Data Collection

The initial survey determined eligibility and selection of possible participants. Part of the survey included elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy, to be included in the analysis of each case. In order to build an “in-depth picture” of each case, additional data from interviews, observations, and artifacts was also collected. Audio-visual materials were collected via recorded Zoom sessions and videos provided by participants. The table below (Fig. 12) indicates a general plan of order and specific form of data collection, time anticipated for the participant, and purpose. As data emerged, I realized that the need for a third interview was not necessary and I wanted to respect the participants’ time, so instead, I depended on email communication for answers to my final questions. Even so, for four of the participants (Stacy, Tonya, Danielle, and Tara) we met more than twice via Zoom and sometimes I recorded these, with their consent or their insistence.

Data	Approx. Time	Purpose	Appendix
<b>Survey</b>	15-20 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant selection</li> <li>Elements of <i>Expressive Writing Pedagogy</i></li> </ul>	A: Initial Survey
<b>Interview I</b>	45-60 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial questions to establish rapport and understand participant’s experience with their local NWP site, as well as their understanding of their own professional growth and learning.</li> <li>Establish a teaching and professional learning timeline before and after the summer institute.</li> <li>Discuss possibilities and IRB consent for the video.</li> <li>Artifact Collection.</li> </ul>	C: Interview Protocols
<b>Artifact Collection I</b> The participant will be asked for artifacts at the first interview, but may provide artifacts later, at their convenience.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeline Creation. Before the first interview, I will begin a timeline representing the first and subsequent years of teaching, noting the year of their SI experience.</li> <li>Writing and work samples to illustrate professional learning incorporated into the participant’s teaching life and classroom practice. This might be</li> </ul>	E: Timeline Creation

		personal writing, student work, or a combination. The participant will decide what they believe to be most relevant.	F: Artifact Collection
<b>Video Observation</b>	20-30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide context and insight into the teacher's classroom practice.</li> <li>To demonstrate an aspect of professional learning integrated into classroom practice.</li> <li>To check for elements of <i>Expressive Writing Pedagogy</i>.</li> </ul>	D: Observation Guide
<b>Artifact Collection II</b> Artifacts may be provided before, during, or after.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Materials and sample work related to Video Observation (Teacher choice of what might provide further insight or context.)</li> </ul>	F: Artifact Collection
<b>Interview II</b>	30-45 min.  (shortened to honor the time of participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide follow-up to Interview I</li> <li>To provide follow-up to Video Observation</li> <li>To ask questions focused on artifacts</li> <li>Share timeline of teaching / professional growth and ask participant to verify.</li> <li><del>Rate experiences on a 1 to 5 scale of positivity and negativity [P1 could not rate his experiences in that way; I did not ask the others to do so.]</del></li> </ul>	C: Interview Protocols
<b>Artifact Collection III</b> Participants will be invited to share any additional relevant artifacts, as might seem helpful. This might be w/ Observation II or with either of the final two interviews.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeline Creation. Before the second interview, I will add salient moments of professional growth, as described by the TC in Interview I. I will share an electronic version and ask the participant to check for accuracy. Then we will note and rate key teaching events, to create a trajectory.</li> <li>Additional materials and sample work that may seem relevant to the participant in providing insight and context to their professional learning and integration into their classroom practice.</li> </ul>	E: Timeline Creation  F: Artifact Collection
<b>Interview III</b> <b>Final Correspondence: Email</b>  In the midst and toward the end of data analysis  <b>A third interview felt unnecessary, so this step became an email correspondence.</b>	20-30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To share preliminary findings and double check for accuracy</li> <li>To ask clarifying questions</li> </ul>	C: Interview Protocols

Figure 12: Process of Data Collection



As an emerging qualitative design with the aim to learn about the unique circumstances surrounding each participant's professional growth and the challenges and supports within their teaching contexts, this study encouraged participants to choose what they might video along with artifacts they considered connected to their experiences with the NWP. Interviews took place and were recorded via Zoom. By enabling and saving the transcript, I utilized a machine transcription, which I later saved as a word document as I continued the process by listening/viewing the interview and checking for accuracy.

From the initial interview, ideas for the video and the artifacts emerged. Four participants requested or agreed to an extra conversation to help clarify the video and artifact collection. While some of those conversations were also recorded via Zoom to enhance credibility and help with triangulation, they were not transcribed for coding purposes.

#### ***A Modification in the Collection Plan***

In a follow-up email after our second interview, Participant 4, Danielle, sent me names of students whose class work I might use, but also mentioned the possibility of interviewing them. One student, included in the email chain, responded the same day that he would be willing for me to contact him. While this was outside the original plan for collecting data, I did not want to miss out on this rich opportunity. Since I had only anticipated collecting some student work *if* the participating teacher chose to submit it—and not interviewing students—I needed to make a modification for IRB, creating a protocol and documents for parental permission and student consent. Once that process was completed, I contacted two of the students Danielle suggested for this research. In 15- to 30-minute interviews, I planned four questions (see Appendix H). While the purpose of each interview was to choose student work,

only one student followed through, but both spoke about their various journals and the inquiry projects based on their own choices and interests.

***One More Modification: Participant 1 is revealed to be Bryan Ripley Crandall***

I originally referred to Participant 1 as Cory Wright, a pseudonym to keep his identity protected, as per the original IRB. Because participants might be utilizing student work and students are a vulnerable population, it felt important to include measures to protect their anonymity. However, since many of Participant 1's artifacts were publications and some coauthored publications, I faced a dilemma. Because Bryan had expressed an openness to being identified, my IRB advisor suggested that for *this one* participant, I secure an email stating I have his full consent to use his real name—which Bryan enthusiastically provided. All of the other participants have remained anonymous.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Analyzing the Surveys**

Data Analysis began with the survey submissions via Qualtrics. As suggested by Merriam and Tisdale (2018) and many others, analysis begins with the reading of data and jotting “down notes, comments, observations, and queries in the margins” (p. 204). As surveys rolled in, I noted date, time, and additional information I thought would be important for selecting participants. I learned how to apply a filter via Qualtrics that would help me focus on the finished surveys. Of those, 18 participants finished, but because they did not mark “Yes” for being a Teacher Consultant with their local projects, that left 71 surveys to analyze and consider for Phase II. These were printed and annotated with many descriptive notes used to help determine viable and diverse candidates for the next phase of data collection.

Additionally, data from the surveys was downloaded from Qualtrics into an Excel document where additional color-coding and highlighting aided in the selection process.

### **Analyzing the Interviews**

Data analysis began early in the collection process of Phase II, with note taking and memo writing with each interview, as well as with quality-checking of the transcripts provided via Zoom. In the process of quality-checking, questions emerged, as well as tentative ideas for preliminary codes and concepts. As Saldaña (2021) suggested, I made “preliminary jottings” (p. 31) which can be found at times bracketed and typed within the transcripts themselves, as well as in notes and tables I kept during the process. These tentative ideas gave me something to come back to as part of the constant comparative process. Coming to a stopping place with the quality check of each transcript felt challenging, as the process seemed a tedious and timely exercise with a final product that remained imperfect. However, I spent enough time with each transcript that I’m confident 95% of the wording is true and 100% of those words leading to analysis in codes, categories, and themes, have been quadruple-checked and more.

Once a transcript made it through a quality check, initial coding included either a line-by-line coding, a chunk-by-chunk coding, or a combination of both. The first two transcripts were coded line-by-line. Then those codes were meticulously entered into an Excel document revealing possible categories for coding (Fig. 13).

GROWTH [leadership]
TC Attribute or Personal Trait
Support for TC Growth
NWP info
Identity; Identity
Purpose
Challenge for TC Growth
"Community"
Pedagogy
Bridgework
Undecided

Figure 13: Early Categories from Coding Transcripts 1 and 2

After the tedious process of line-by-line coding and manually listing codes and data in an Excel document for the first two participants, I attended a Dedoose workshop and found an easier process. Eventually, I moved from line-by-line to chunk-by-chunk coding for meaning. Moving the first transcripts for Participants 1 and 2 into Dedoose, I integrated my first codes and categories with some revision. Then, after finishing the quality checks for the five remaining transcripts, I uploaded those to Dedoose and began with the chunk-by-chunk of meaning coding. I created a Code Book integrating codes from my initial process and Dedoose coding process. I could see some sense to categories and possible themes. But as I grappled with trying to hone in on those themes, out of so many codes and categories, I remembered the importance of writing up the cases with “in-depth description” (Miriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 37). As Yin suggested, “descriptive data about the cases being studied” could help a researcher’s “thinking about the overall form and structure” (Yin, 2009, p. 180), I began

writing up each of the nested cases, eventually choosing a structure to help make sure I addressed the research questions. Thomas (2016) suggested,

When you are offering thick description you are also offering an analysis. You are doing this by intelligently reflecting on the scene, imagining, putting yourself in another person's shoes, and genuinely interpreting what the other person is doing. You are doing this with the knowledge you have not just of people, but also of life and of the contexts that people inhabit – the stages on which they act. If you opt for doing this kind of thick description, it helps, then, to know something of the situation you observe. (p. 211)

Chapter 4 introduces each nested case, then embeds the longer description of for each participant in subchapters 4.1 through 4.7.

Once I'd written up each case I moved back to the categories and themes I thought had been emerging into selective coding. Thomas (p. 211) cites Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 116) who describe this final stage of analysis as “The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.” Throughout this process my codebooks took various forms from Microsoft Word to Padlet to tables in more than one Google document. Final themes discussed in Chapter 5 have been illustrated in Figure 48, in that chapter.

### **Member Checking**

Stake (1995) called case study participants “actors” (p. 115), and he defined *member checking* as a process where “the actor is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured [...] usually when no further data will be collected from him or her.” I emailed all seven participants with a copy of the best version of their case, calling it a chapter written all about them. I included their initial introduction from Chapter 4 and provided the following instructions:

As you read, please consider the following questions:

1. *What did I get right?*
2. *What did I get wrong?*
3. *What did I miss?*
4. *What do I need to consider or re-consider?*

Additionally, I asked questions and noted these either in bold purple with the document or in the comments. Five participants responded with minimal notes, and two were so busy with their teaching lives they could not find the time to read it through. Once finished with a draft for my dissertation committee, I will share the entire work, giving them page numbers and instructions for searching Chapter 5. They will have one final opportunity to suggest changes.

### **Risks and Benefits**

Participation in this study posed no substantial risks, other than the time and energy involved in being interviewed, observed, and sharing self-chosen artifacts to shed light on the experience of sustained professional growth as a National Writing Project teacher consultant. As the researcher, I did my best to respect the time and efforts of participants by keeping within our interview schedule—sometimes we went over, but with the participants' consent.

While discoverability as noted in the consent process is a general risk, despite anonymity, it became a dilemma of research integrity with three participants whose published works became artifacts for this study. For each participant impacted, I shared the writing and asked them to confirm that they felt comfortable with how the information was presented and their identity was protected in the way they wished. All three were comfortable with discoverability, but for two, I made minor revisions as requested.

For the most part, there are no benefits to participation in this study. Participants will receive NO financial compensation for their time. However, I will honor the time participants sacrificed by offering to be of service in their instructional and/or leadership practices. Once I

have completed the defense, I will provide a list of my favorite lessons and teacher workshops, as well as offer up to four hours of my time for each participant to utilize via zoom, handout packets, and/or presentation slides.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations included working with vulnerable populations of students. I included informed assent/consent processes with students and parents (Fig. 11 in Chapter 3). I worked closely with teacher participants as they navigated the protocols of their schools and districts. As I worked through IRB guidelines, I created appropriate descriptions of the research, purpose, risks and benefits, and the like, to make this process as smooth and effective as possible. Additionally, the consent process was included as part of the survey and first interview. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved, I closely followed IRB Guidelines, consulting with IRB as questions and issues arose and submitting appropriate forms for modifications.

Guidelines included the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of all involved, applied to their own identities as well as their schools and NWP sites—with one exception, Participant 1. From the beginning, Bryan was willing for me to use his real name. However, adhering to the IRB approved guidelines seemed prudent. With his first Member Check, Bryan noted the number of descriptions I would need to change so others in our field would not readily recognize him. Citing his coauthored articles also presented an issue of academic integrity. With the approval and guidance from an IRB advisor, I led Bryan through another consent process that allowed the use of his name. The other participants—TCs, colleagues, and students—remained anonymous.

## Trustworthiness & Validity

Qualitative research with an interpretive process is one influenced by researcher experience and implicit bias. Stake (1995) explained, “Researchers do not step outside their ordinary lives when they observe and interpret and write up the workings of a case” (p. 135). The questions driving this research emerged from my personal experiences with the National Writing Project as a Fellow in a Summer Institute in 2002 and then as a Teacher Consultant in the years that followed. At present, I am still a Teacher Consultant. While Stake wrote of this kind of personal connection as one to be valued, I realized my objectivity and thinking about professional growth within this institution could be of risk for undue influence. To counter my personal bias as I collected data and wrote up my findings, I utilized a practice from phenomenology, one of perspective taking known as *Epoche*, which was helpful in letting go of preconceived notions.

*Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33, as quoted in Patton, 2015, p. 575). Patton (2015) explains, “In taking the perspective of *epoche*, the researcher looks inside to become aware of personal bias, eliminate personal involvement with the subject material—that is, eliminate, or at least gain clarity about preconceptions. By making a habit of checking my preconceptions through a process of written and thoughtful reflection before, during, and throughout the data collection and analysis, I was better aware of my biases and preconceived ideas. Completely bracketing or taking out my personal experience was never the goal. Rather being transparent with my personal experiences and being aware of my biases has been an effort toward trustworthiness and validation.

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) reminded researchers that, “Probably the best-known



strategy to shore up internal validity of a study is what is known as triangulation. Usually associated with navigation or land surveying, wherein two or three measurement points enable convergence on a site...” (p. 244), triangulation can be achieved by “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods” (p. 259). This multiple case study design included triangulation through utilizing multiple participants and multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, and artifacts). Additionally, I used the participants, themselves, through their opportunities to member check what had been written and interpreted.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative nested study was to explore the professional growth experiences of National Writing Project TCs who have negotiated the challenges of integrating new practices within the larger context of a school that may or may not be supportive of those practices. Binding each case is the participant’s involvement with the National Writing Project, particularly as a teacher consultant with their local site, beyond participation in a Summer Institute. One over-arching question and two sub-questions drove this study:

- I. In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?
- II. What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?
- III. What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?

Interested participants completed an initial survey that helped provide the demographics and context needed to move toward maximum diversity. Through a series of in-depth interviews, video observations, and the collection of artifacts emerging from participant choice, as well as

the interviews and video, data analysis began with rich, detailed description. Coding and aggregating patterns and themes were analyzed and discussed as part of the findings.

## Chapter 4: The Nested Cases

“The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage” (Campbell, 1968/2008, p. 81). The hero makes their way with **assistance** from a **mentor** or some other source of inspiration and guidance.

*My own experiences with the National Writing Project felt like a “superhuman passageway” had been created—one filled with mentors from throughout my local site and state, as well as mentors I was able to connect with through national events. As mentioned previously, Diane Holt-Reynolds, OWP’s Director at the time, first coaxed my participation at a national event, the 2002 NWP Annual Meeting coinciding with the Annual NCTE Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. I joined several TCs from OWP, both from my Summer Institute and seasoned TCs—all of us receiving scholarships provided by a combination of federal funding and matching funds. We were reimbursed for travel and other expenses with the expectation that we fulfill two requirements: 1) Become members of the National Council of Teachers of English at our own expense and 2) Write an article about the experience for the OWP newsletter.*

*Attending the Annual Meeting with other NWP TCs had the same feel of the SI—we had shared similar experiences in our immersion of the NWP model of teachers teaching teachers. Each presentation I attended felt like an extension of the learning begun in the Summer Institute. In one presentation focused on Teacher Inquiry, I explored burning questions about my classroom practice. In another presentation focused on increasing reading comprehension across the curriculum, I read an historical memoir piece connected to the Viet Nam War and composed my first found poem. On Saturday morning, as the only TC from my site I found myself at home among TCs and Site Directors from an array of sites from across the country, I participated in a four-hour Writing Marathon led by Richard Louth from Southeastern Louisiana University. Later that evening I attended Fountain of the Muse, hosted by Dr. Michael Angelotti, a past site director for my local site, and I read my found poem to an audience of poets.*

*I would continue attending NWP Annual Meetings and NCTE Conventions over the next several years, filling my own thirst for quality professional development, and in turn, working as a TC with my locale site, exploring Teacher Inquiry, and enriching my own classroom practice.*

Phrases like “supernatural helper” and “superhuman passage” may seem a little far-fetched for a research study, but both are important comparisons with educators

working toward better teaching. Examining the assistance received from a mentor or some other resource of inspiration and guidance provides a foundation for answering the overarching question: I. ***In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher consultants?*** But in particular, the nested case descriptions will utilize that foundation to focus findings in answer to questions II and II, along with their sub questions.

II. ***What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?***

- A. In what ways have TCs developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?
- B. How do TCs describe the trajectory of their professional growth, since experiencing the Summer Institute?
- C. What factors do TCs attribute to their professional growth and the development of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?

III. ***What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?***

- A. As TCs implemented and developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy, what supports did they find within their schools and districts?
- B. What challenges did TCs face? In the beginning? Over time?
- C. What are the personal qualities, observable or self-described, that might influence a TC's professional growth?

Focusing on the questions above, each nested case does two things: 1) “*provides descriptive data about the cases being studied*” (Yin, 2009, p. 180) and 2) lays out those descriptions in answer to the research questions. This chapter serves as a foundation for Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion and includes data specific to each of the seven nested cases, pulling from both phases of data collection—the initial survey, along with the series of interviews, video observations, and collection of artifacts. After a brief introduction of each participant and their teaching context, the nested cases follow with detailed descriptions in answer to the research questions. In the following chapter, we will further explore findings specific to the first question.

## The Participants—An Introduction

### One: **Bryan Ripley Crandall / Ubuntu**

As explained in Chapter 3, Bryan is the only participant whose identity is revealed, as per IRB and Bryan's consent. Thus, descriptions about his local sites and teaching contexts will be specific, where those of the other participants will not be. In Bryan's initial survey his enthusiasm for the National Writing Project (NWP) practically leapt off the page. His NWP experience had so influenced him, he pursued a PhD and ended up directing a site of his own. In responding to the initial survey question asking participants to list "all the ways in which you have supported your local NWP site," Bryan wrote, "Phew. Can I attach a CV? My life is NWP." With his extended and diverse experiences with the Writing Project, I took to heart his final comments in the initial survey, "feel free to set up an interview" and emailed him over the winter break. Our first interview took place January 3, 2022.

While Bryan graduated summa cum laude with a BA in English Literature from a Binghamton University in New York, he chose to begin his career as a teacher of writing in Kentucky, a state that had embraced Portfolio Assessment as a way to improve the writing of all its K-12 students. He arrived in this Louisville in 1994 and, in Bryan's words, he "...immediately started [his] master's degree in teaching, [...] got very involved with writing instruction, and all roads led to the Louisville Writing Project. He compared his experiences of learning and teaching here with winning a trifecta. Teaching high school English at J. Graham Brown School, a magnet school, Bryan grew deeply engaged with portfolio assessment and in leading professional development for the state. In 2002, he became a Fellow of the Louisville Writing Project (LWP) Invitational Summer Institute and remained involved

as a teacher consultant (TC) until he left to pursue a PhD in literacy with Syracuse University in 2007.

At the time of his summer institute, Bryan taught 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade at a magnet school, J. Graham Brown School, in the urban district of Louisville, Kentucky, where they “were working with equity, diversity, and inclusivity, long before they were even buzzwords.” According to the school website (2023), the same school currently enrolls approximately 750 students. When Bryan was on staff, the enrollment was 600 and “they took one boy and one girl from each of the zip codes” in his urban city and “super diversity was its mission.”

Currently, Bryan is an associate professor of Educational Studies and Teacher Preparation at Fairfield University in Connecticut, enrolling 6,019 students in Fall 2022—4757 undergrads and 1262 graduate students. When he joined the faculty in 2012, their Writing Project affiliate had one site director and two co-directors, Bryan being one of the co-directors. Today, due to a major loss in federal funding for the National Writing Project, Bryan serves his NWP site as the only director. While he teaches both graduates and undergrads, he also works with K-12 students through his Writing Project site’s summer programs and other bridgework with local school districts throughout the academic year.

Bryan’s interests in spreading what he calls “mixing it up”—committing to an “inclusive writing pedagogy” (Chandler-Olcott, et al., 2021, p. 1)—may have roots in his volunteer work. In Louisville, where Bryan began his teaching career, he volunteered as a tutor for young immigrant men in their late teens. Later back in upstate New York as a doctoral student, he mentored another group of young refugees from Africa, who became the subject for his dissertation. Ubuntu, a “South African philosophy” meaning “humbled togetherness,”

(Chandler-Olcott, et al., 2021, p. 8) has become a framework for the youth literacy labs of Bryan’s current site.

*Ubuntu* is also a great word to summarize what I’ve learned about Bryan through our conversations, the video he provided, and the numerous artifacts of his published writing. His was the first transcript coded, line by line—then chunk of meaning by chunk of meaning. In vivo codes that made it into theme findings include important concepts gleaned from Bryan’s experience with NWP—like “Side-by-Side” pedagogy, “Mixing it up,” and “Bridgework,” all grounded within community. Bryan’s experience of community within the National Writing Project has deeply influenced his pedagogy as he creates communities of writers in his own classrooms, as well as the youth writing camps and workshops he directs each summer. Additionally, that sense of community is deeply embedded in his work with colleagues, whether part of the local schools in his region or national organizations like NWP and NCTE.

## **Two: Tonya Kistler / Authentic**

Tonya describes herself as “a nerd who loves to learn.” One of the reasons she agreed to participate in this study was because in the midst of the COVID 19 Pandemic she found herself with few opportunities for professional growth. For Tonya, a consummate learner, professional development is not only learning how to be a better teacher, but it’s also about engagement with life and having fun. She intentionally seeks new and rigorous experiences, like training for a triathlon or working part-time with Target, to remind herself what it’s like to be a learner doing something hard. During the 2021/2022 school year, Tonya taught 6<sup>th</sup>-grade Humanities—a block class combining Social Studies and ELA (2 hours, 15 minutes for each block) at an urban middle school—6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>-grades—with approximately 900 students in a midwestern state. Typically, teachers at Tonya’s middle school teach 5-6 periods

lasting from 45 to 52 minutes, depending on the schedule, with 25-32 students. Even though 6<sup>th</sup>-grade is part of the middle school, they operate under their own schedule, offering the opportunity for Tonya's two sections of Humanities with a total of 65 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. This is her second school and second district since returning to her home state in 2001. After finishing her student teaching and beginning her career in Houston, Texas, Tonya carefully researched and found a district that offered both encouragement and financial support for pursuing graduate school, as well as other kinds of professional development. She came to her local NWP Site through a "conglomeration" of school and district support as she pursued a master's degree in educational administration, earned in 2008.

For our first interview, Tonya met with me on January 5, 2021, after teaching 6<sup>th</sup>-graders for a full day. Her Zoom background displayed an image from her school's media center filled with bookshelves, cozy chairs, and oval tables for learning and collaborating. Earth tones of blue, brown, and gray held the space with calm, while table chairs of bright blue, green, and yellow brought a sense of intentional energy. *Intentional energy* is something else I picked up on from my conversations with Tonya. I felt a sense of someone passionate about teaching and learning and moving the state of education forward, whether she would be working with students, parents, or colleagues.

We met for our second interview on July 12, 2022. This time Tonya zoomed from her living room, where a large, framed picture of John Deere tractors hung on the wall, along with several framed photographs. We both jumped into the conversation right away, catching up a little before I began asking my follow-up questions. She had just begun a new course of professional development with the same university that brought her the Writing Project. Tonya enthusiastically explained,



You know that first Writing Project workshop was just like this. It was 6 credit hours. It was like four weeks of like nine to four. You're with the same 25 people. You get really close. You get really deep. You reflect a lot. (Interview 2)

Later, after the conversation moved onto other professional development, Tonya mentioned the connections she has made over time and exclaimed, "...like the class that I'm taking right now—the biggest thing I love about it is the people that I meet!" After having just met that same summer, they had already gathered a couple of times for lunch and making art, and four of them were planning a camping trip within the next a couple of weeks. Being able to collaborate with other educators, enthusiastic about life, learning, and teaching, seems an important part of what sustains Tonya's professional growth.

For the school year 2022/2023, Tonya was no longer teaching the Humanities block. Beginning her eighth year at the same middle school, Tonya had an opportunity to teach a course called, Contemporary Communications, a semester long course for 7<sup>th</sup>-graders. With an overarching theme of social responsibility, according to Tonya, the course "includes storytelling, slam poetry, oral communication practice, editorials, [and] art integration/visualization for metacognition" (P2 Timeline commentary). While she was not ready to let go of teaching the Humanities block, teaching a 7<sup>th</sup>-grade course, called Contemporary Communications, had been in her sites as a career goal. When the position opened up, a rare occurrence, she did not want to miss her opportunity.

*Authentic* is the word I associate with Tonya, as a teacher, a learner, and a human being. Not only does Tonya remain an authentic learner by pushing herself into new learning curves, she values authentic learning for her students. In our first interview, Tonya explained "There is a huge difference between learning and school. Learning can happen at school, but [...] learning happens a lot of other places, almost everywhere else." Thus, NWP's focus on

publishing writing for real audiences resonated with Tonya. Since her first SI in 2008, a foundation of her classroom practice remains “authentic audiences and real writing,” from finding opportunities for her students to publish book talks with the school paper or creating curriculum in her Creative Writing classes where students write for their own purposes and chosen audience.

### **Three: Stacy Phillips / Teacher Soul**

A popular presenter for NWP Site 3, Stacy is “forever a student” with a warm and encouraging presence. She has taught 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades for two elementary schools, and she has taught at the university level as well. For the school year 2021/2022, Stacy taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in a rural school in a southwestern state and served as her district’s Reading Specialist. Within an eight-year period between 2008 and 2016, she had been selected Teacher of the Year *three* times in two different districts, once before her Summer Institute in 2011 and twice since. For the school year following our first interview, Stacy became the principal of the same elementary school where she was teaching when we met for our first interview.

We met via Zoom on January 10, 2022, at the end of her teaching day. She wore a warm red long-sleeved knit top and sat at her teacher desk in a classroom empty of students. From my vantage point I could see a portion of the classroom with student desks arranged in pods of four to six. Along the wall of this corner of the room were student cubby holes; shelves of curriculum materials; and stacks of baskets possibly filled with community supplies like pencils, glue sticks, and markers. The front of the room hosted a white board, chart paper, and various posters of basic anchor concepts like the times table. From the ceiling hung colorful paper fans and lanterns. Although my Wi-Fi connection experienced a little technical difficulty

that day, each time I signed on, Stacy remained connected and seemed steadfast in her focus, likely wrapping up the work of the day.

For our midway conversation that took place the following June and our official second interview that took place on November 26, both via Zoom, Stacy sat in an overstuffed armchair with upholstery of patterned gold. She seemed relaxed in her own living room, a cream-colored sofa in the background.

Stacy's journey into education began in pursuit of a career in law enforcement. She explained that she was following in her father's footsteps when she earned an associate degree in Sociology in 1995 and worked with offenders for the next 10 years. While pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with an emphasis in Criminology, Stacy also worked toward teaching certification in high school sociology and science. She was working part-time as a substitute teacher when a principal convinced her to take on a full-time substitute position, teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade along with Homeroom ELA and Science for 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades from February through May. Stacy discovered a love for teaching. By the end of this experience, she decided to seek and achieve an alternative certification for elementary (grades 1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>).

Stacy seemed to downplay her alternative certification. She explained that what she had learned through the alternative process had not been enough to help her be the teacher she wanted to be. True to her motto, "Forever a Student!" Stacy would continue to pursue her own professional growth by seeking training in Literacy First, working with at-risk and low performing students in an after-school tutoring program, and beginning a master's degree in education—Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum with an emphasis in Reading.

A phrase that seems to capture Stacy's passion for teaching and learning, as well as her encouraging spirit is "Teacher Soul." It emerged from the beginning of our first interview as

she shared her first impressions of her local Writing Project. “Just good stuff. It’s an uplifting environment. It’s a learning environment. It’s what we need that’s good for our teaching... but it’s also good for our souls” (Interview 1). Stacy’s teacher soul seems evident throughout our interviews and her artifacts, including her resumé where she includes, “I aim to connect with teachers, students, and families through our shared commitment of being the best.”

#### **Four: Danielle Johansen / Spark**

Danielle teaches 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Literacy Support in a suburban school with an enrollment of just under 1400 students in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> (Survey, GreatSchools.org) in a northeastern state. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English in 1990, worked in business for two and a half years, then stayed home to devote time to her children when they were young. During those years, Danielle helped run a family construction business and sometimes took care of other children, in addition to her own. In 2007 Danielle earned a Master of Arts in Literacy and began her teaching career at the same school where she taught during this research. She attended the first Summer Institute for her local NWP site in 2018, helped lead the 2019 Summer Institute, and served as a co-director for the new site until 2020.

In her initial survey (2021), Danielle described three journals she asked her students to keep. One of them she called a Sparks & Starts Journal where they “use mentor texts to prompt expressive writing and play with the tools of the craft.” In the Wonderings Journal they pursue “all our wonderings, curiosities, and fascinations that arise from living each day and from our reading.” And at the end of each class in a Growth Reflection Journal, students note their thinking and feelings about the daily lesson and how “they believe it might affect their reading and writing” with an option for personal notes about whatever is going on in their life or

anything about class. During the process of this research, the journals have evolved into four journals. Wonderings has been renamed Inquiry Journal and is used throughout the school year as students pursue questions and research of their own choosing. Danielle's current students also keep a Book Thought Journal, where they "capture what [their] books are making [them] think about." The goal is to move students "beyond the four corners of the book and gel it with their life's experiences and knowledge."

Meeting Danielle for the first time via Zoom, I was greeted with an enthusiastic smile and eyes sparkling with an earnest passion for her work as both a teacher and teacher-leader. At the beginning of the interview, Danielle explained why she was willing to participate:

I honestly like moving education forward. And I feel like I have to be a voice in it. [...] I'm told all the time, *You've got to share your practice*. And that's the only way to get it out there, for others to see what can be done. Right?

Later she would tell me that she planned to live to 100, so she can accomplish all her goals. After about 45 minutes of inspirational conversation, I moved to bring the interview to a close, out of respect for her time, but Danielle had a little extra time and was all in for continuing. When I asked if she were sure, she laughed and said, "Listen Shelly, I'm passionate about this."

*Spark*. It's the first word that comes to mind when I think about Danielle and her work with her students. In our second interview, I asked her to define "spark," and she responded: "It's about allowing curiosity and thinking... everything you see [is] a spark." Her classroom is founded on giving her students a place to think, on valuing their thinking, and on allowing students "to follow their sparks and their questions and their thoughts." Danielle's spark and her passion for facilitating literacy was also clear in speaking with two of her students, one past (8<sup>th</sup>-grader in 2021/2022) and the other current (8<sup>th</sup>-grader in 2022/2021). Both mentioned

following a curriculum unique to their class with Ms. Johansen, a curriculum that allowed them to be adventurous, take risks with their writing, and be in charge of their own learning.

### **Five: Monica Harris / Professional Growth Junkie**

With 31 years teaching experience, Monica has been at her current rural school, a combined junior/senior high school, since 2003. She is one of 15 teachers for 182 students and is responsible for multiple preps: Sophomore English, Senior English, Senior Seminar, and Psychology. She has also taught American Lit for juniors, Social Studies and electives like Speech and Creative Writing. At the time of our interview, Monica was working on an action research project, studying about Carl Newport's concept of *Deep Work*, and applying ideas from her makeSpace trainings to both her classroom and her presentations with her local Writing Project. She is also the author of 31 books on curriculum.

I met Monica via Zoom on January 27, 2022. It was the end of a school day in this rural northwestern school district, and she sat at her desk surrounded by typical teacher paraphernalia—colorful school pennants hung on the wall behind her, along with a winter photo of a barren tree in a field of snow and a blue oval plaque promising, “Good Things Are Going To Happen.” The heart of that aphorism can also be found in Monica's teaching philosophy where she expresses a love for “helping students find their potential and their interests” (Interview 1).

When I asked Monica about her first thoughts concerning professional growth, she smiled sheepishly and said, “Professional growth is my forte—I'm kind of a professional growth junkie.” While she achieves well above the required PD hours each year, Monica explained that the National Writing Project is the professional growth that fits her the best and described her experience of learning with her local site: “Your teacher-self is watching *how*

something is being presented, as well as the content that's being presented in any workshop.” She finds something valuable in every presentation, a stance enhanced by her work with the Writing Project and one she applies to other professional development experiences. Throughout our second interview, Monica explained that the Writing Project “jumpstarted” her growth as a teacher of writing in her own classroom, as well as her role as teacher-leader.

After looking over her resumé and verifying a timeline with Monica, I clearly understood that when she described herself as a *professional growth junkie*, she wasn't kidding. In addition to remaining involved with her local Writing Project site as both participant and presenter, she is involved with her local Council of Teachers of English—presenting for conferences, writing for their publications, and serving as a board member. She's also a participant in long-term professional development like makeSpace and other action research projects, as well as contributing to her own growth through the vast and numerous books she's read both traditionally and audibly. Additionally, she has enjoyed district and whole school initiatives like PBIS, Character Strong, and serving on her district's professional development committee.

In the video (Video 4) celebrating a district award for her teaching, her principal described Monica as, “a joy to be around” and spoke of her “incredible grace and compassion” for working with students from all kinds of backgrounds. A colleague lauded her mentorship and collaboration, along with noting Monica's specific help with curriculum planning and sharing her resources. The student who began the nomination—they collected around 80 signatures—spoke of Monica's capacity to respect students “where they are” while at the same time, pushing them “to develop and grow.” Throughout our interviews and working with her artifacts, it is obvious to me that Monica is a beloved teacher and significant member of her

school and community—someone who puts her heart and soul into her work with students and other teachers.

### **Six: Tara Connors / A Passion for Learning and Unlearning**

Tara and I met via Zoom for a total of three conversations. Our first interview was on January 30, and only became an interview once Tara had a chance to ask questions and make sure her participation with this research would not overwhelm her schedule. At the time she was seriously considering an EdD degree. Tara's passion for teaching and for learning, as fiery as her red hair, drew me into a natural conversation, long before I realized she was addressing my questions—just not in the order I had planned. I was so captivated, that it would be 15 minutes of following Tara's thread of thought before I would find my way back to my interview protocol.

At the time of this first interview, Tara was teaching three subjects: Medical English 12, Government & Economics, and Geography & Ethnic Studies. The following school year she would not be teaching English but working with three different plans. In addition to teaching her social studies classes, she would be working to add new credentials for teaching a basic math class (Conversation 1.5) and Public Health (Interview 2). Tara began her teaching career later in life—she was 38—at a small high school designed for students planning to pursue a career in medical health professions. This small magnet school is nestled within an urban school district in a western state. Originally hired as the drama teacher, Tara began her career as a paid intern, writing her own curriculum because there was not a curriculum or textbook for performance. This experience would later serve her as an English teacher when teaching the textbook did not seem to be serving the students. From the beginning Tara has been creating or adjusting curriculum to meet the needs of her students, and she has been part



of writing curriculum for both her district and the state's Expository Reading and Writing Program.

Tara's passion for learning has long been a mainstay for her professional growth. Early on in her career, she trained to be an instructor with her state's Expository Reading and Writing Program, a curriculum for teaching literacy that would help prepare high school students for college reading and writing. Tara's experience as a Fellow with her local NWP Summer Institute, taught her that she had been more focused on reading than on writing. While the units integrated with her high school's focus on health sciences, Tara realized that the writing would inevitably be a persuasive essay at the end of the unit. What she learned from her Summer Institute experience included strategies to use writing as a tool for learning as well as to help students integrate a writing process that would help them develop projects, authentic and applicable to a profession in the health sciences.

When I asked Tara her thoughts on professional growth, I could see her eyes light up. She compared professional growth with maintaining a toolbox, one passed down through previous experiences as both a learner and a teacher. Teaching requires looking deeply into what is already in the toolbox, getting rid of what no longer works (e.g. old pedagogies and assumptions), and filling it with tools that will allow her to build "instruction in a way that shelters and nurtures my students and their growth" (Interview 1). For Tara, professional growth is not about building students, but building "a place for [students] to be what they need to be and learn who they want to be" (Interview 1). For Tara learning is as much about *unlearning* as anything else.

## **Seven: Aaron Mann / Already a Leader**

On his initial survey, Aaron wrote “first time not teaching English in 24 years.” Instead, he was teaching International Baccalaureate (IB) Theory of Knowledge and focusing the rest of his time on an administrative position facilitating the adoption of the IB program for grades 5 through 10, the “IB Middle Years Programme,” at his private school in a midwestern/Great Lakes state. In our first interview I learned that Aaron’s first gig as an educator included being Head of High School at a private school begun in 1997, looking to expand from elementary and middle school to include a high school. Aaron had completed his coursework for a PhD in English and was working as an instructor and graduate assistant, designing curriculum, and delivering instruction to undergrads—when opportunity came his way. Having interviewed for another position, he was surprised when the school called to offer him the position of Head of High School. Aaron told me, “It was crazy. I was so under qualified.” The qualified person they had previously hired for the position had changed his mind at the last minute and Aaron joked that “they needed a warm body.” I suspect Aaron was being humble. In both my conversations with Aaron, I noticed a calm, self-assured presence of a leader who seems genuinely interested in the work of education, centering learners, and engaging other educators in authentic conversations about learning. I imagine that the school who hired him to be Head of the High School likely perceived those same qualities. Aaron served as Head of the High School from 2002 to 2008 while also teaching at least two sections of English; he began with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and eventually would teach English in the upper grades, along with Theory of Knowledge.

I learned in our second interview that Aaron did not hold a public education certification. We both considered for a brief moment the possible blessing of not having had a

single educational course in college. Clearly, professional growth into education has multiple pathways. Aaron's professional growth as an educator began at the college level with his work as a graduate student and instructor. His work as both teacher and administrator furthered that growth. Grappling with the responsibilities of designing and developing a curriculum for the high school and the accreditation processes, as well as working with consultants and the stakeholders involved, likely helped shape who Aaron would become as an educator. In addition to participating in several visits for the Independent Schools Association of the Central States accreditation, Aaron led schoolwide, year-long professional development in Writing Across the Curriculum seven years before his Summer Institute and in Assessment Values after the SI. In 2008 Aaron moved from his administrative position as Head of High School to become the IB Coordinator, a position he would hold as his school entered the process of bringing the IB Diploma Programme to the 11th- and 12th- grade curriculum, his teaching expanding to IB English and Theory of Knowledge. By the time of our first interview, Aaron was in the midst of integrating the Middle Years Programme. In our second interview, he admitted that of all the significant experiences sustaining his professional growth, facilitating his school's integration into an IB school had had the greatest impact.

Aaron joined his Writing Project's Summer Institute in 2015 having already made the journey into several leadership roles. Additionally, as an innovative English teacher and English Department Chair (2013-16) at his school, he brought the writing workshop model to all the grades. Aaron explained that his transformation with the Summer Institute did not necessarily have the typical and transformational impact of moving him toward the *teacher as leader* role as it may have had on the other Fellows. Instead, Aaron's transformation happened within the *teacher as writer* role – opening Aaron to “a greater degree of flexibility and

appreciation for” (Interview 1) the students in their unique learning and writing processes. He further explained that while learning concepts from one particular article or lesson may have value, that was never his main goal. The whole mission of Aaron’s teaching was to lead his students “to think.” His experience with the Writing Project tied nicely in with that goal, prompting him to question the one-size-fits-all approach to writing. For example, when a student struggled to get started with the initial parameters of an assignment, Aaron made adjustments to meet the student where they were in need and to facilitate a path that may not have been part of his original lesson plan. If a student had a great idea for a short story to write during a unit on essay writing, Aaron would honor student autonomy, recognizing that the same essential skills in mastering sentence control or stylistic choices in language could also be accomplished through a path the student felt motivated to follow. The refrain that drove his instructional choices became, “Are these kids thinking?”

Much of what the Writing Project typically offers as a fresh take on student centered learning aligned beautifully with the professional knowledge Aaron brought with him. Not only did he bring his leadership skills, he was already sold on the importance of teaching students a writing process and had brought the practice of writing workshop to his school. Aaron’s big takeaway from the Writing Project—*teacher as writer*—however, fueled something new for Aaron, in addition to deepening his understanding of the student’s perspective. It might have something to do with the “authentic conversations” he values.

Aaron and some of his colleagues from the SI became, for a while, part of a core planning group as his fairly new Writing Project made plans to grow as a site. He and another TC brought up that while their SI provided space for a lot of important conversation, they wished they’d had more time for writing. One of their solutions was the possibility of a blog,

where TCs could practice more of the *teacher as writer* stance. Their site director thought that was a great idea and immediately put Aaron and his colleague, who shared responsibility for the idea, in charge of creating a blog for their site. In the summer of 2016, Aaron and his TC colleague lead a week-long institute that would continue to meet throughout the following school year, essentially becoming the first local site of the National Writing Project to host their own blog. It continues today and last I counted, Aaron had 28 blog posts, his latest titled, “Predictable and Average: Generating Thoughts about AI and Student Thinking.” Aaron is a teacher leader engaged in his own processes for writing, learning, and leading. He demonstrates a determination to facilitate those same processes for those invested in education.

### **The Nested Cases**

What follows are the seven nested cases, detailed descriptions for each participant, presented chronologically according to the dates of first interviews. To answer research questions and their sub-questions, each case has been organized into following sections:

- *Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP) II.A*
- *Experiencing the National Writing Project I, III.A, B, & C*
- *Sustaining Professional Growth II.B & C, I*

Under *Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP)*, we examine each participant’s portion of the EWP results from the initial survey (see Figure 14):

- A) **Time.** I provide consistent writing opportunities: 3 or more times a week.
- B) **Student Choice.** I provide opportunities for students to make choices in their writing (e.g., topics, genre, modes).
- C) **Low-stakes / Informal Writing.** I utilize writing as a tool for learning.
- D) **Modeling.** I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own process for learning.
- E) **Mentor Texts.** I share great examples of compelling writing with my students. This includes both professional writing and excellent student examples.
- F) **Collaborative Learning.** My students work together in partners and small groups for various purposes.

- G) **Conferencing.** Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.
- H) **Publishing.** Student work is shared through various forms of publishing. Examples may include author’s chair, class blog, writing contests, and exceptional work display.
- I) **Portfolios.** My students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared.
- J) **Reflective Teaching.** I focus on student learning while making adjustments in my teaching that will better meet their needs.

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low-stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collaborative	EWP.G Conferencing	EWP.H Publishing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflective	EWP AVG
1 Bryan Wright	100	100	100	100	100	100	70	30	30	100	83.0
2 Tonya Kistler	65	2	65	80	50	75	75	45	4	65	52.6
3 Stacy Phillips	100	100	100	100	85	100	100	100	50	100	93.5
4 Danielle Johansen	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.0
5 Monica Harris	53	100	100	91	75	50	77	51	53	100	75.0
6 Tara Conners	90	100	100	100	81	100	80	50	100	100	82.8
7 Aaron Mann	50	50	51	10	75	75	75	25	5	65	48.1
8 Cynthia Price	81	100	85	96	95	95	100	73	37	90	85.2
Mean from 71 *	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	86.9
Mean from 8	79.9	81.5	87.6	84.6	82.6	86.9	84.6	59.3	47.4	90.0	77.5
Mean from 7	79.7	78.9	88.0	83.0	80.9	85.7	82.4	57.3	48.9	90.0	76.4

Figure 14: Self-Rated Percentages for Elements of EWP

In the initial survey, participants were asked to rate themselves for each element of EWP. Specifically, participants were asked: “To what degree are each of the following teaching strategies a part of your pedagogical beliefs or teaching practices? Move the slider to indicate how often you utilize each strategy.” Qualtrics converted the slider responses into percentages and these responses helped determine which participants would be asked to participate in the next phase of the study. Thus, each case includes their portion of the larger graph showing how

each participant rated themselves, along with a description of how the data may or may not have supported these ratings. After exploring the evidence for EWP in the interviews, video, and artifacts, I examine other practices beyond EWP.

In the next section, *Experiencing the National Writing Project*, I provide an overview of each participant's local NWP Site, along with a description of their involvement with the site. Then I describe the context of their school and classroom, examining the supports and challenges each participant encountered as they applied the concepts and pedagogy while pursuing the work envisioned from their experience with the Writing Project. Finally, under the section title *Sustaining Professional Growth*, I explore the professional growth of each participant by creating a timeline of significant professional growth experiences. Next, I summarize the ways in which the NWP has sustained that growth and consider the personal traits that may have helped guide and negotiate their experiences. As an addendum to each nested case, I've included a list of references or resources mentioned in the interviews or found in the artifacts, specific to the participant, unless otherwise noted in the References.

## Chapter 4.1: Nested Case One—**Bryan Ripley-Crandall**

Bryan completed the initial survey on October 15, 2021. In Figure 15, you can see how Bryan rated the degree to which each element was part of his instructional practice. Two interviews followed on January 3 and June 22, 2022. It was a late morning in early January that Bryan and I first met via Zoom. Surrounding Bryan were bona fide bookshelves in his university office. Three place card holders rested on the shelf next to Bryan’s shoulder, all holding the same place card with the message “HOPE.” This same shelf held numerous journals of the daily writing begun the summer of 2002 when Bryan attended his local site’s Summer Institute. Bryan wore a cream-colored, long-sleeved knit shirt with a walnut, down vest. Bryan greeted me warmly and recognized my Oklahoma accent almost immediately.

Our second interview took place on a summer late afternoon, five months later, where once again we met via Zoom. This time the setting was a newly enclosed front porch, Bryan sitting against a backdrop of brightly colored pillows. He warned me early on that Karal Lynne, his year and a half old dog might be joining us. And she did. Through much of the interview, a collie/terrier mix draped herself on the back of Bryan’s patio chair, resting regally while soaking in the last of the day’s sunshine and surveying the landscape of her domain through a wood-framed window.

### Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP)

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low- stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collabor- ative	EWP.G Confer- encing	EWP.H Publish- ing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflec- tive	EWP AVG
<b>1</b> Bryan Ripley Crandall	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	83.0
Mean from 7	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
Mean from 71	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	81.7

Figure 15: Bryan’s Ratings for Elements of EWP



## **Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts**

For the video and artifact collection, Bryan shared a link to a Padlet designed as professional development for instructors at his college. Early in the COVID 19 Pandemic, he and a colleague, another NWP Site Director, Sheila (pseudonym), worked in collaboration to create a video presentation (Bryan’s shared video for this research) and example Padlets. Some of the artifacts referenced here are embedded in the Padlet Bryan playfully called, “The Pedagogical Possibilities of Padlet: Primping Presentations & Professional Performance,” along with the video collaboration already mentioned. Bryan had first learned about Padlet from his friend Sheila. The two of them joined forces to create asynchronous Professional Development for utilizing Padlet as a way to engage with students while teaching online. Bryan’s Padlet includes the following: “The Presentation” (the video), a “Tutorial,” three “Sample Courses” from Bryan, five posts of “Sample PD w/ Teachers” from both Bryan and Sheila (pseudonym), two of Bryan’s “Sample Workshops,” one “Sample Training,” and seven posts under “Community Engaged Scholarship.” The posts, except for those where his colleague is specifically mentioned, are of Bryan’s making. In addition, the Padlet resources include five published pieces of writing—four shared by Bryan and one discovered as part of my research. Additionally, Bryan allowed access to his daily habit of blogging, a practice he has kept officially according to his CV, since 2011, but one he began in 2007.

### ***Time—100%***

It is clear from the artifacts embedded in the Padlet link, as well as his published writing, that time for writing is embedded in everything Bryan does as an instructor, PD collaborator, and NWP Site Director. From the two course syllabi, his graduate students would be making time to write, in either *writer’s notebooks* in a course called Extending Literacy or

through writing *think pieces* in another course called Literate Learners. In the latter syllabus, Bryan quotes Dr. Maria Piantanida, PhD in defining the concept of Think Pieces,

A “think piece” is a form of writing that is less polished than a formal paper or presentation but more fully developed than an entry in a personal or professional journal. Initially, think pieces are written for an audience of one—the author—who is writing to discover what she/he is thinking about a particular topic. (Syllabus 2)

Piantanida further explains the informal and reflective nature of these Think Pieces, which definitely spills over into the element of Low-Stakes Writing. The youth literacy labs that are like summer writing camps are also filled with vast moments of time for participants to write about the topics they care about—as is the summer institute Bryan directs for future Teacher Consultants. Bryan’s own habit of daily writing seems to speak to the NWP principle, “... teachers who teach writing should write.”

### ***Choice—100%***

In Artifact G, Bryan described the structure of each Youth Literacy Lab, which runs for a full, single week. In addition to orienting students to their community space, Mondays help initiate the beginning stages of writing with brainstorming possibilities in writers’ notebooks. Tuesdays bring in guest speakers and workshops for scaffolding possible ideas into initial pieces of writings. Choice would be embedded throughout both of these days – as writers’ notebooks are centered on the writer’s experiences and the exploration of their own writer-ly decisions. Writer’s notebooks also appear in other areas of Bryan’s work, like the Teacher Institutes and at least one of his graduate classes.

Additionally, in Artifact G, a published chapter (2016), Bryan wrote, “Choice is important because it is the foundation of what motivates a student to want to write” (Crandall, p. 20). He further explained that the flexibility that comes from choice allows writers to

discover their own purposes for writing which, in turn, creates a natural investment in their writing outcomes.

### ***Low-stakes Writing—100%***

The use of writer’s notebooks referenced throughout many of Bryan’s artifacts is a great example of low-stakes writing. In the writer’s notebook, the writer makes choices about topics and genre, practices craft, brainstorms ideas, invents characters and story lines, draws, tapes in images and clippings, and ultimately uses the notebook for their own purposes, perhaps leading to a larger project, perhaps not. In his syllabus for Extending Literacy, Bryan writes:

#### **Writer’s (Literacy) Notebook—15 Points**

One of my goals this semester is to make our course highly interactive, collaborative, and community-focused. Often, you’ll be expected to respond to a prompt that will guide the goals of each class. I encourage you to actively participate by asking tough questions, sharing your own experiences/ideas, and listening openly to the experiences/ideas of your peers. The writer’s notebook is simply a space that I will offer to you, in which you will store any in-class assignments and activities that we complete on a weekly basis. At the end of the semester, you (YES, YOU) will be asked to review the documents in your literacy notebook and give yourself a class participation grade, based on your contributions to our “community of practice.” The writer’s notebook belongs to you. A first step this semester will be for you to design its cover. More to come on that. (Syllabus 1).

Additionally, Bryan’s use of the Thinking Pieces in both coursework and workshops offer a “starting point” (artifact quote) embedded in the writer’s own experiences. The focus is not on getting a *right* answer – but, instead, on integrating an idea that is of “personal interest and concern” (Waterman & Archer, 1979, pg. 328) to the one thinking. Interestingly, the intended audience of a Think Piece is simply the writer, writing for their eyes only. Bryan’s use of Low-Stakes Writing seems to be aligned with the metaphor of planting seeds. Some will produce fruit, while others serve to grow the process of planting.

### ***Modeling—100%***

From Interview 1, referencing his journal from his 2002 Summer Institute, Bryan spoke of the many seeds in that journal that had manifested into major life/career projects. The first seed Bryan shared was writing about the refugees he had worked with, young immigrant men prepping for the GED. They just could not grasp the poetry portion. So, Bryan wrote poems about each young man, as a way to provide models for the poetry content they were trying to understand.

Another seed from that summer and in his notebook were his ideas for bringing 10-minute plays to his own school. Bryan explained, “We had to write in every genre like we make our kids. I had gone to a 10-minute play festival, and I... and one of my students asked, *Well what if we started a student 10-minute play festival at our school?*” Bryan knew if they were going to do that, his students would need models, so he found a couple of mentor texts and began writing 10-Minute Plays of his own, as models for his students. Bryan has left a legacy of 10-Minutes Play Festivals that continue still in the city of his Summer Institute, the city where he earned his PhD, and the town where he currently teaches.

His video project shows further evidence of modeling. In the video Bryan provides professional development designed for instructors planning to move their college courses online via Zoom. For professors used to lecturing in the classroom, finding ways to engage students in active learning presented tremendous challenges. In visiting with a friend and colleague from the NWP network, Bryan learned about Padlet, a cloud-based educational service that allows for collaboration through virtual bulletin boards. Groups work together in real time or asynchronous time to share all kinds of content. Watching Bryan and Sheila,

director of another NWP site, present side-by-side via a Zoom recording, included both presenters providing models of the Padlets they and their students had created.

Additionally, Bryan wrote about the importance of modeling idea development in an online chapter (Crandall, 2016). Citing Lassonda and Richards (2013), he explained “...effective teachers model their thinking in front of students.”

### ***Mentor Texts—100%***

Throughout Bryan’s video and Padlet creation are examples of and the links to models of Padlets created for the purpose of collaborating and interacting with various groups, such as Bryan’s classes, his work with in-service teachers, and the 2019 Summer Institute he led at his current site. Not only do these example Padlets serve as mentor texts for those learning how to use Padlet, embedded in those Padlets I found a plethora of mentor texts or what Bryan referred to as “models of writing” (Crandall, 2016) for students and participants, intentionally tied to specific lessons. For example, within the Padlet Bryan created for teaching Extending Literacy, Grades 3-6, I found course materials that included his syllabus, a link to a Google folder with the same resources, and links to mentor texts like poetry from Matt de la Pena and Jacqueline Woodson, along with Ted Talks, video clips, book covers, children’s stories, and news articles, to name a few. Additionally, in one of Bryan’s artifacts of published writing, he wrote, “For each literacy lab, we select relevant texts that we feel will benefit student writers: YA novels, essays, children’s books, and other genres that serve as great mento texts for prompting student writing” (Crandall, 2019, pp. 12-13). The NWP colleague from Bryan’s video also shared examples of how she has used Padlet.

### *Collaborative Learning—100%*

Referencing his journal, Bryan recalls a collaborative moment during his SI with a Fellow who encouraged Bryan to use more than mere words—thus creating a book of visual art as much as a book of writing. A product from Bryan’s SI was a video collection of Fellows demonstrating ways writing could be used across content areas, very much a collaborative effort. The video Bryan shared with me was one in which he collaborated with a colleague, a fellow site director from another NWP site, offering training with a great collaboration tool, Padlet. Collaboration seems a major part of Bryan’s work, whether he is co-writing an article or book chapter or working with youth and teachers. Additionally, the course syllabus for *Extending Literature* utilizes writer’s notebooks, not only for low-stakes writing, but to intentionally, “make our course highly interactive, collaborative, and community-focused.” Collaboration in community seems to be at the heart of Bryan’s work and speaks to the philosophy he learned from his volunteer work with young immigrants. “Ubuntu,” Bryan writes, is “the South African ideology for togetherness, humanity, and community engagement” (Crandall, 2019, p. 12).

This collaborative spirit of “humbled togetherness” (Crandall, 2020, p. 613) can be seen in Bryan’s work with his current Writing Project site’s youth literacy labs. Not only do TCs and instructors leading the labs work to create collaboration among the youth attending the summer camps, but also between the groups attending, including the teachers in their own leadership institute. The entire thing is built on collaboration with the community and extends beyond the summer as Bryan’s coauthors worked with their state institute for Refugees and Immigrants, as well as the university to cocreate an organization called HOPE (Harboring Optimism and Perseverance through Education).” Additionally, in Artifact C, the authors

write, “Another result of [local Writing Project]’s redesign has been the drive of participating teachers (and students) to embrace ubuntu in cross-district collaborations” (Crandall et al., 2020, p. 612) resulting in digital collaborations, book clubs, and a three-day festival connecting educators and students with published writers.

### ***Conferencing—70%***

This is the first element Bryan marks below 100 percent. Instruction in a graduate course that meets only weekly may not offer much time for one-to-one conferencing. However, Bryan designs youth literacy labs with this kind of conferencing in mind. The opportunity for youth to work with teachers who will give one-to-one feedback on their writing comes in the middle of the week. On Wednesdays students choose a piece of writing to share. Interestingly, Bryan calls the NWP practice of *teachers teaching teachers*, “side-to-side” learning. He also explained that Fellows from the SI could bring side-to-side learning to their classroom practices in allowing students to learn from one another—*students teaching students*. Furthermore, as a site director, Bryan helped to recreate the four-week teacher institute into a five-week program, operating “in tandem with summer programs for youth” (Crandall, et al., 2020, p. 608). Doing so allowed their local NWP site to put their “scholarship in action” and they made it possible, not only for “young people and adults to write together” (p. 608), but also to learn from one another.

### ***Publishing—30%***

Along with Portfolios this is the lowest rating he gives himself among the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy. This might be because both EWP elements are limited to the Summer Institute and youth literacy labs. However, in our first interview, he talked about his own high school students writing, developing, and producing *scholarship in action* projects

that were shared with the school wide community, along with student creations shared in a 10-Minute Play Festival. In searching through the links provided in his artifacts, I found a video montage collection, created by a collaboration between youth and teachers, connected through the NWP site Bryan directs. Furthermore, each Literacy Lab includes a Friday Prom where students promenade their writing by sharing it with a public audience. In addition to this public sharing, each youth participant has their writing published in an anthology, a practice Bryan recalls from the National Writing Project. Each summer Bryan's Writing Project publishes an anthology of participant writing, titled POW: The Power of Words. "We publish their writing with teachers in books. [...] and those books get mailed home, and then the kids can take it to their teachers and say, *Hey look, Teacher, I was published!*"

In our first interview, Bryan echoed a NWP principle that teachers of writing should write themselves: "if you're going to teach writing, you've got to be a writer, and you've got to have audiences beyond the teacher." Practicing what he preaches, Bryan has kept a daily blog since 2007, not only writing but publishing that writing, often via social media like Twitter.

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—30%***

While Bryan may rate his current work with portfolios at 30 percent, recall that he made the intentional move to another state so he could learn more about and work with writing portfolio assessment. In our first interview he also mentioned his seniors completing their portfolios while simultaneously focused on other final work like taking AP exams, college applications, and a 10-page research paper for his class. While the 10-page research paper might otherwise be part of their portfolio work, it served as a collection of research writing that would springboard into and/or coincide with a passion project. Bryan explained, "They



had to do *good* from that research—they had to do a community project that would give back to the world, instead of take from it.” The culminating projects, along with the research, were presented to parents and other stake holders as part of their senior boards.

### ***Reflective Teaching—100%***

Bryan’s teaching life seems a confluence of several forces, the National Writing Project being an important tributary, but so too his experiences with students and faculty where he taught. His high school’s membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools included the Critical Friends Group Network, additional tributaries into Bryan’s habit of reflection. He learned to use protocols which encouraged Bryan to “think deeply about the teaching practice.”

Reflection is not only part of Bryan’s instructional practice—it seems a natural and innate practice he shares with both youth and adults—recall his use of writer’s notebooks with both literacy lab participants and grad students. The reflective nature of Bryan’s leadership certainly influenced the transformation of the Youth Literacy Labs. Reading about the first year of the Ubuntu Academy, the two-week program focused on English Language Learners, revealed an ah-ha experience that only results from being reflective. The team observed both teachers and young participants “gravitate toward students in Ubuntu Academy at lunch and during breaks” (Crandall et al., 2020). These were the students who had brought to life the Ubuntu philosophy with “an authentic drive for collaboration and community” (pg. 610). The team realized they had siphoned “the English learners into a separate space on campus” and “quickly adjusted.” The following years would see intentional integration of all the Literacy Labs.

## **Beyond Elements of EWP**

“Writing together is a way to grow together” (Crandall et al., 2020). Whether inside the classroom or directing youth writing camps, Bryan grounds his instructional practices on building a community of writers and learners. Early in his career, working with young adult refugees supersized Bryan’s notion of community into Ubuntu, a South African Bantu philosophy of “togetherness and community – translates as ‘I am because we are’” (Fairfield Writing Project). Artifact C (Crandall et al., 2020), a coauthored publication, illustrated how Bryan collaborated with a team of TCs to expand a two-week writing camp into a system of youth literacy labs, connecting an eclectic group of educators, students from diverse backgrounds, and surrounding cultures into mini-communities with opportunities for bridge-building. The coauthors wrote:

Six years of embracing ubuntu helps us make an argument for building reading and writing communities with adolescent writers wherever they are. More importantly, the philosophy of humbled togetherness has pushed us to create spaces to mix up our communities as much as we can so young people and teachers learn from the varying perspectives of others. (Crandall et al., 2020, pg. 613)

Building on that sense of community in the classroom, Bryan facilitated what he called “scholarship into action,” where students apply their learning to real world needs. Outside of the classroom, as a leader, community remains important as Bryan does what he calls “bridgework” between higher education and K-12 schools, between national, state, and local systems charged with educating all students, and between members of diverse communities.

## **Experiencing the National Writing Project**

### **Bryan’s Writing Project Site of Origin**

Bryan is the only participant with vast experience from two NWP sites. This description focuses on the Louisville Writing Project, the site responsible for bringing him into the fold

with the 2002 Summer Institute and initial experiences with the Writing Project. One of five sites in Kentucky, Bryan's first Writing Project is over 40 years old and, according to their website in 2022, was considered "a crown jewel of the NWP network." They worked "with schools to provide and promote professional development in literacy for teachers of all grade levels and content areas." More than a summer opportunity, this site "also sponsors advanced institutes, study groups, demonstration sites, mini-conferences, teacher publications, and social events for [...] network members" (Louisville Writing Project, 2022). According to Bryan, in 2002, all roads of his leadership and professional growth in the state led to the Louisville Writing Project. Aligned with the National Writing Project as an approach to the teaching of writing, they were "open to the best that is known about the teaching of writing" from scholarly research to "the insights and experiences of successful teachers at all levels."

Many local sites post basic assumptions or principles of the NWP as part of their website or other distributed materials. A brochure for the Louisville Writing Project's 2022/23 Summer Institute cites the following:

- Writing is fundamental to learning. Summer Institutes therefore involve teachers from all disciplines and levels of instruction, primary through university.
- As the process of writing can best be understood by engaging in that process, teachers of writing should write. The summer institute focuses in part on teachers as writers.
- Teachers are the best teachers of teachers; successful practicing teachers have greater credibility with their colleagues than outside experts. A central part of the summer institute involves participants presenting their best lessons to one another.
- Real change in classroom practice happens over time. Working as partners, universities and schools can articulate and promote effective school reform. The school year component of the institute therefore involves teachers sharing what they have learned with their colleagues.
- Effective professional development programs are ongoing and systematic, bringing teachers together regularly throughout their careers to examine successful practices and new developments (NWP, 1998). Louisville Writing Project, therefore offers lifelong PD, with members taking on leadership to sustain the work.

## **Bryan’s Experience with his Original Writing Project Site**

Early in our first interview, Bryan shared a strongly held belief about his experience with the Writing Project. “It’s the greatest thing that ever happened to me as a human being, not just as a teacher.” Through his leadership in writing instruction with his state, Bryan found himself presenting for his local Writing Project site, long before his Summer Institute (SI). After his student teaching and once he was hired to teach English, colleagues were telling him to do the Writing Project SI and listed abundant reasons like “It will change your life forever. It will sustain your career. It will keep you motivated, and it will provide you a network of people—a community—that will be with you for life.”

After the summer institute, Bryan continued working with his local Writing Project “*every year*,” presenting both locally and nationally. His classroom practices changed due to the Writing Project, but also in conjunction with what Bryan considered a “trifecta.” Not only was he working in a state leading the nation in groundbreaking portfolio assessment, but Bryan was also working at “the coolest school in the universe” where “they took one boy and one girl from every zip code [in an urban district], and superdiversity was its mission.”

Bryan shared an indelible moment, what he called a “funny memory,” from his summer institute. Experiencing the summers in Louisville included superhot weather and crazy humidity. During his SI he sustained a horrible sinus headache. The days of the SI can be long, and Bryan recalls the director of the institute witnessing his discomfort. In the midst of her talking with the group of Fellows, she moved toward the microwave with a wet washcloth, heated it up, then brought it over to where Bryan sat and gently placed it on his forehead. He smiled as he recalled how much it had helped him and laughed as he explained that he’d “never experienced anything like that before.”

After sharing that story, Bryan reached behind to his bookshelf and pulled out a journal covered in blue with a pattern of intricate silver etchings that might be Chinese dragons and flowers of smoke. This was the journal from his summer institute, nearly two decades before our first conversation. Thumbing through it, he found all sorts of memorabilia and explained that “almost everything [he] did that summer,” captured in his journal, were seeds that “turned into humongous lifelong projects.” Bryan lifted up a newspaper clipping with the headline, “Slain refugee’s spirit and ambition recalled at service,” and explained his volunteer work with young refugee men, teaching them to write and helping them prep for the GED. One of the men had been murdered, and Bryan has since dedicated his life trying to figure out how “to best support *all* kids, including relocated refugees.”

He shared other seeds that began in the SI and continued to grow into a lifelong career, like the rough drafts of 10-minute plays Bryan would use as models for the 10-Minute Play Festivals currently being held in at least three locations due to his influence. As a classroom teacher, Bryan wrote his first publication about argumentative writing because one takeaway from his SI was “If you are going to teach writing, you’ve got to be a writer.” Writing for an authentic audience beyond the classroom gave Bryan the opportunity to model real writing for his students.

As Bryan thumbed through those pages of his SI journal, he continued to find other seeds that influenced his teaching. The idea of “visual literacy” such as drawing, adding photographs and images from multiple sources in multiple ways was born out of a collaboration with another Fellow whom Bryan described as an artist. During the institute, she looked at Bryan’s journal and said, “Look at all those words. Why aren’t you doodling?” From that point on, that journal and each one that followed became “an art book.” Before the term

“multimodality” came into the widespread vernacular, Bryan tapped into this resource as part of his regular classroom practice. “Kids can do video work. Kids can do performance. Kids can do art. Because it communicates too.”

Another seed that came from that summer was Bryan’s playing around with iMovie. Bryan generated his own project for the SI, where he videoed the other Fellows and their teaching demonstrations, then edited it for Lessons in Content Writing. Bryan gave each of the Fellows their own video copy and brought professional development to his own school. Today, he continues to provide accessible PD for his colleagues, as seen in his Padlet and video. This metaphor of seed work, illustrated in his journal, is continued with his current work as a Writing Project site director.

### **Bryan’s Current Writing Project Site**

“Dedicated to improving Student Writing,” Bryan’s current Writing Project site is housed in his university’s Graduate School of Education and Applied Professions.” As a site they believe:

in the power of words, in the weight of a story, and in the importance of literacy. We believe that writing has the power to transform lives, create deeper learning, and connect us to each other. We believe that access to high-quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. (website, 2023)

Their program partners include the university, the National Writing Project, and an organization Bryan mentioned in our first interview, Hoops 4 Hope.

Bryan’s current Writing Project supports young writers, educators, and the local community. According to the website, they have provided “35,000 hrs of exceptional writing instruction [for] 6,000 young writers” within 16 local school districts. Additionally, “450 educators received over 2,700 hrs of professional development” (Fairfield Writing Project). In addition to contact information, the website tabs included: “2023 Literacy Labs for Youth,”

“2023 Teacher Leadership Institute,” and “Cultivate Women’s Collective.” The last tab provided information about being the recipient of a \$25,000 grant from the 2022 New Era Women Writers Program where the Writing Project coordinated with teacher-leaders to work with young female writers from eight districts to learn to read, write, and act like writers (website news).

The Teacher Leadership tab describes the site’s willingness to design professional development with local districts and schools, but focuses on the Summer Leadership Institute, where “6 hours of graduate course credits or a small stipend are available.” Fellows will meet Tuesday through Thursday from July 5 through August 3. Five one-week youth literacy labs are offered for Summer 2023: Little Labs for Big Imaginations I and II (Grades 3-5), Novel I: Main Characters Matter (Grades 6-8, 9-12), Novel II: Plot Matters (Grades 6-8, 9-12), Who Do You Think You Are? A College and Personal Essay Seminar (Grades 9-12). All one-week camps charge \$350 for the week, with partial and full scholarships available. Additionally, since 2014, Bryan’s NWP site offers a two-week Ubuntu Academy, invitation only, focusing on “first-generation Americans [arriving in the US] as “English as a Second Language” learners. “The two-week lab provides young people an opportunity to counter summer literacy loss through vocabulary enhancement, performance, writing, reading, and opportunities to speak” (Fairfield Writing Project).

### **Bryan’s Experience with his Current Writing Project Site**

When Bryan arrived at his current Writing Project in 2012, the site supported the work of two directors, one co-director, and a full-time administrative assistant. When federal funding for the NWP grant was pulled, support dried up. Currently Bryan, as the only director, does “it all,” albeit with a team of teacher-leaders. In 2012 the Youth Literacy Program consisted of

two one-week writing camps and charged what Bryan believed to be an exorbitant cost, \$1,800. His university campus was located in the midst of what he referred to as “Zip Code Apartheid,” a kind of checkerboard of vast wealth or vast poverty. On the wealthy end, parents could afford \$3,000 a week for tennis lessons, so the logic followed, why not \$1,800 for a week of writing camp? The issues with inclusivity are obvious. So, Bryan worked to lower the cost to \$350 for a week, and for every kid who paid, he took a non-paying kid. Their youth programs went from serving 30 mostly white and affluent kids each summer to serving 240 youth from mixed backgrounds culturally and economically. They were “mixing communities... and it was changing everyone’s lives” (Interview 1).

Bryan coauthored a description of this transformation in Artifact C (Crandall et al., 2020), where a team of teacher consultants reimagined the Youth Literacy Labs. With the intention to better serve “... the heterogeneity of the youth communities” in their region (Crandall et al., 2020, p. 608), Bryan, alongside teacher consultants with his local Writing Project, reconsidered the structure of a four-week teacher institute with two separate weeks of student writing camps. Wondering, “What would happen if young people and adults could write together?” the team morphed the teacher institute into five weeks, “working in tandem” with the youth literacy labs. Mixing it up with “learners and educators from multiple backgrounds” and the new format extended community building “within and beyond the National Writing Project model” (pg. 608). The team credits the students from the inaugural year of the Ubuntu Academy in 2014 for bringing the Ubuntu “philosophy to life” as they “came with an authentic drive for collaboration and community” (p. 610). Now they “explore togetherness and human relationships in all of our programs and encourage the strength of the individual in relation to the collective” (p. 610).



## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

Just as we considered the contexts and setting of the two Writing Project sites from Bryan's experience, it will be important to think about the two contexts of his teaching, the high school where he began his career and the university where he currently teaches and serves as the NWP Site Director.

### ***High School Context***

At the time of his summer institute, Bryan taught 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades at The Brown School, a public K-12 magnet school located in downtown Louisville, where, according to Bryan, they “were working with equity, diversity, and inclusivity, long before they were even buzzwords” (Interview 1). According to the school website, they currently enroll approximately 750 students (2023), while it was closer to 600 during Bryan's tenure. When Bryan taught from 1996 to 2007, there was almost no tracking, and achievement gaps between different demographics were the opposite of state and national trends. Bryan explained, “People would come to our school saying, *What are you doing? How are you achieving this?* And the answer was we're mixing kids up and we're holding the bar high for everyone.”

### ***University Context***

Currently, Bryan is an associate professor of Educational Studies and Teacher Preparation at a Catholic University in a northeastern state, enrolling approximately 6,200 undergraduate and graduate students. When he joined the faculty, their Writing Project affiliate had one site director and two co-directors, and an administrative assistant. Originally, Bryan served as one of co-directors. Today, due to a major shift in federal funding for the National Writing Project, Bryan is the *only* director. While he mostly teaches graduates, he sometimes teaches undergrads, and he also works with K-12 students through his Writing Project site's

summer programs and other bridgework with local school districts throughout the academic year.

### ***Support***

Bryan describes the beginning years of his career as “Nirvana. It was [...] teaching writing Nirvana.” He was in a state that provided resources for portfolio assessment, teaching at a magnet school with a mission of super-diversity, and with the experience of his local Writing Project, he found himself in a “Mecca” of writing instruction. After his summer institute, Bryan experienced nothing but support for his growing practice of teaching writing. State and national policies aligned to *support* his work—integrating his expertise into leadership that shared his practices. His school’s administration and colleagues supported him, as well as the parents of his students. His instruction grew as did his reputation for excellence in the teaching of writing. The students knew about Bryan long before entering his classroom—thus his teacher capital, along with his ability to create a community of writers, meant he never had discipline problems.

What Bryan now can see as a NWP Site director is the impact of funding on state and national systems when they work together to support students and teachers. He came into the Writing Project during the time of federal funding. Experiencing that kind of support helped Bryan to enjoy his work and excel as a teacher and a leader.

### ***Challenges***

Then it changed. “It was perfect, and then it ended.” Bryan further described the national and statewide policy changes and the accompanying frustrations with the sound of an explosion and hand gestures outlining a mushroom cloud. The changes seemed to happen at the same time. For Bryan, it was *not* No Child Left Behind that was problematic. He found the

shift in assessment focus toward those who had been traditionally marginalized of significant value. “I thought it made all my colleagues accountable to all students, which was a good conversation.” However, once Common Core State Standards (CCSS) came into being, things changed.

Once CCSS took up space in Departments of Education, previous programs fell by the wayside, including the Portfolio Assessment Reform Act that had inspired Bryan’s move to another state. “I watched the [state] Reform Act crumble. I watched writing instruction get destroyed. And I was just devastated.” Writing assessment was narrowed to passage-based writing, where students were given something to read and asked to write a response specific to that passage. Bryan explained, “The only way they wanted us to test was give them this reading passage, have them read it, you know, have them do an open response to it, and that wasn’t writing.”

As his state department was re-allocating funds for new assessments, resources and supports for the work he loved fell by the wayside. His own school’s administration changed and Bryan found challenges to simply continuing the classroom practices that had worked so well with his students—the focus of many of his presentations with local and national conferences. Suddenly, according to Bryan, “You couldn’t do it anymore.” Once he saw what was coming, Bryan decided to focus on a PhD “to fight [the challenges] from a different angle.”

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Professional Growth Experiences

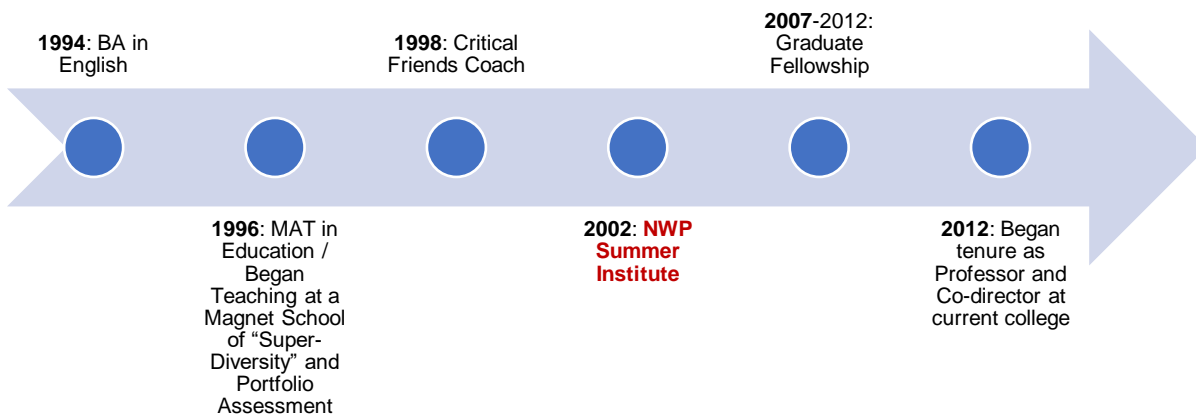


Figure 16: Highlights of Bryan's Timeline for Significant Professional Growth

With information from Bryan's first interview and help from referencing his CV, I constructed a timetable of his significant professional growth experiences. When we met for the second interview, I asked Bryan to help identify what he considered the most significant. The plan was to have him rate each one, but he grimaced and shook his head from side to side, leaving me to believe that was a daunting task and unfair to ask on my part. Many diverse experiences contributed to Bryan's growth. I found myself wanting to learn more about his teaching in Denmark, his Fulbright scholarship in Japan, the Cambridge Shakespeare program, and the Bread Loaf School of English. But we focused on the most significant professional growth experiences that he credits for sustaining his career.

As you can see in the timeline above (Fig. 16), Bryan's four most significant experiences are captured between the beginning of his career in 1996 and becoming a professor

and NWP co-director in 2012. Beginning with his move to another state to engage in a state legislated Reform Act for portfolio assessment, Bryan found himself teaching at a magnet school in his urban district, where the school was a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools. As such, they intentionally engaged in a diverse and inclusive community and “believed in the power of student ideas.” Citing Meier (1995) in Artifact D (Crandall, 2019, p. 9), he wrote,

At the heart of [our] mission was a dedication to engage in the community within the school by celebrating and involving the many communities where our students resided. [...] Our students’ cultural differences were used as a bridge, rather than a barrier, to in-school learning success.” (p. 9)

Working with the state Reform Act in Portfolio Assessment, was, for Bryan, an opportunity to invest in student voice. “The reform act emphasized multiple forms of writing and, as teachers, we worked hard to counter the testing traps commonly found as a result of state writing assessments” (Crandall, 2019, p. 9).

Bryan brought up the Critical Friends Group (CFG), a precursor to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in our first interview. The subject came up when I asked him about the adapted definition for Sustained Professional Growth used for this study.

A “continuous process” allowing “professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work.” This growth sustains the professional through “learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,” and “is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined.” (O’Meara & Terosky, 2010, p. 45)

The definition resonated with Bryan, “one hundred percent,” especially, “this idea of learning, agency and professional relationships.” And it reminded him of what he learned from working with the CFG Network, “*The best PD comes from within*, sort of like the National Writing Project.”

While Bryan's SI was in 2002, his experience with his local NWP community began before, in line with his work on assessment. He credits his experience with his local NWP site for "a transformation toward teacher-leadership" (Crandall, 2019, p. 9). He explained a belief learned through NWP, about how "Individual writers achieve more when they belong to and are engaged with a larger community of writers that has respect for the many communities to which the individual belongs." What Bryan learned about being part of that writing community applied to the "much larger community of professionals" he found himself in, as part of his experience with the National Writing Project.

Beyond the National Writing Project, Bryan credits his experience as a doctoral student as a professional growth experience that has also sustained his career. We were talking about his transition from the high school classroom to the academic research and writing required for doctoral work. In the midst of all that, Bryan felt himself in crisis and from his advising professor learned a phrase to name that experience: "identity restructuring." He had left a "phenomenal" and happy teaching career to enter an unknown world. "I was doing great stuff. I was doing all these things, and I never heard of any of you people in this academic world." His advisor, acting very much in line with the NWP belief of tapping into the expertise of the learner, taught Bryan "the poetics of research." Bryan explained, "I think poetically. I think artistically. I think creatively." Because that thinking seems contrary to academia, it took him awhile to learn, "There's an art form to interview. There's an art form to dissecting and analyzing data. There's an art form to creating methods." While NWP planted seeds for his creativity, Bryan's academic work has helped him craft those seeds into art.

## Writing Project Contributions to Bryan’s Classroom Practice

“Community. Community. Community.” These words were Bryan’s immediate response when I asked him the first thing that came to mind when he thought of the National Writing Project. He learned to be a better writer in a community of writers and a better teacher of writing in a community of teacher writers. He was not given a prescriptive list of how to teach writing. Instead, he was immersed in a community continuously demonstrating the model of side-to-side pedagogy, *teachers teaching teachers*. In Artifact C (Crandall et al., 2020), Bryan wrote, “Writing together is a way to grow together” (p. 613). It seems he was able to take that model learned in the SI and extend it into his high school classroom, as well as his university classroom and NWP site programs with *students teaching students* and *students teaching teachers*. In creating a space of community where all members bring their own expertise, he developed and nurtured his own pedagogy and a professional growth that has sustained his career.

And while Bryan did not say *Writing. Writing. Writing.*, his daily writing seems an important factor in his professional growth and nurturing of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Since 2007, Bryan has kept a daily blog, where he writes at the end of each day. “I’m on my fifteenth year and I have never missed a day. [...] it started with the writer’s notebook, right?” Most of the time he holds a steady readership “between thirty and forty people.” But “sometimes I write something and it goes kind of mini-viral.” According to his CV, those mini-viral moments have brought him between 15,000 and 50,000 readers, depending on the year. What exactly does Bryan write about 365 times a year? As he explained on January 1, 2023, he writes his “nightly thinking,” a kind of “mental dump” that often feels like reflection. From skimming through over 5,000 posts, I see that Bryan writes about everything—from his

daily work, whether working with teachers, authors, or the youth in his writing camps like the Ubuntu Literacy Lab. He writes about his dog who loves sleeping on his lap in the midst of a 14-hour workday. He writes of students, friends, and colleagues and documents misadventures ending in trips to the emergency room and stitches. Writing, according to one post, has long been part of his life, even before his summer institute. Nonetheless, writing in community, an idea developed that summer and nurtured over time, is one that has sustained Bryan's work and well-being.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Bryan's Sustained Professional Growth**

Bryan explained that my research pursuit was at the core of his very being. As a classroom teacher in the SI, he could see possibility. "The National Writing Project allowed me as a classroom teacher to see that dreams can come true. If you think it and you want to do it, it can happen." For Bryan professional growth became "the norm."

Even when policy change made it difficult and Bryan realized, "the educational system itself was making it impossible to teach kids," Bryan had "a family and a community to go to—to help [...] counter all the negativity, to help [...] counter all the naysayers," and "to help [...] counter bad practice that you see going on in your building."

While "not a quick fix," the National Writing Project requires "a huge commitment of time and energy." Bryan explained that "It's a lot of mental work to become a writer and [...] to celebrate writing." It may be that mental work, along with the sense of purpose that comes from being part of a larger community, focused on and committed to something worthwhile, that has sustained Bryan's professional growth. "The bridgework between K-12 schools and higher ed," along with "the community work" has made the National Writing Project, "the



perfect blend of state systems, national systems, and local systems trying to do what's best for kids.”

It was during Bryan's first interview that the code, “a special kind of teacher” emerged. In our discussion he explained, “National Writing Project is not a quick fix. The National Writing Project requires teachers to be devoted, to be focused, to dream large, to be invested, umm... and always to be highly reflective of *How can we do things better the next time around?*” Certainly, Bryan pulls from these traits to create collaborations, community, and Ubuntu in the classroom, in his summer institute and youth literacy labs, and in the bridgework he facilitates between communities. I would add two more traits I see in Bryan—a love for learning, along with his creative and artistic ways of seeing and being in the world.

## Chapter 4.2: Nested Case Two—Tonya Kistler

Tonya currently teaches Contemporary Communications, a semester-long course for 7<sup>th</sup>-graders with an overarching theme of social responsibility. When she completed the initial survey and at the time of our first interview, Tonya taught 6<sup>th</sup>-grade Humanities—a block for teaching both Social Studies and ELA at the same urban middle school with approximately 900 students enrolled in grades 6-8, in a midwestern state. Two of her biggest experiences with her local NWP site have coincided with the beginning years at two different schools in two different districts. In 2008, while teaching in a smaller suburban district, Tonya experienced the Summer Institute. In 2015, shortly after moving to an urban district, she served as one of four co-facilitators for another Summer Institute. She completed her initial survey on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Two interviews took place on January 5<sup>th</sup> and July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Tonya’s self-rating for the degree to which she practiced each of the elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy can be found in Figure 17.

### Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP)

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low-stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collaborative	EWP.G Conferencing	EWP.H Publishing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflective	EWP AVG
<b>2</b> Tonya Kistler	<b>65</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>52.6</b>
<b>Mean from 7</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
<b>Mean from 71</b>	<b>86.9</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>85.0</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>81.7</b>

Figure 17: Tonya’s Self-Rating for EWP

### Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts

On the initial survey ratings for Elements of EWP, Tonya rated herself highest in Modeling, Time for Writing, and Reflective Teaching. Interestingly, of the seven participants, Tonya rated herself lowest for the elements of Choice and Portfolios (Fig. 17). Her average

rating of 52.6 was the second lowest average, which may be due in part to the constraints she faced from following district mandates and assessment-driven curriculum. In our first interview, she referenced a Creative Writing class where she designed the curriculum with a Genius Hour heavy with student choice. When I asked her if she was able to do anything similar in her ELA classes, she replied that it was not to the same extent, due to preparations for state testing (a writing assessment at that time). Still, her commitment to real writing and authentic audiences drove “small changes within the [ELA] curriculum.”

In both interviews Tonya stressed the importance of authentic audience and the writing process. In the second interview I learned more about how she combined Vicki Spandel’s *Six Trait Writing* (2008) with steps in the writing process, never focusing on more than one trait or one step at a time.

Tonya provided a 2-part video to demonstrate her professional growth related to her experience with the Writing Project. On January 10, 2022, she sat with her schools Gifted and Talented (GT) coordinator to plan out a joint project between one her classes and a small number of GT students. After announcing the date and time, Tonya introduced her colleague, Melissa (pseudonym), and shared a quick view of both their masked faces. Moments later, she explained that they didn’t know one another that well, but they are looking forward to working together. Tonya uploaded the video in two parts, due to accidentally ending the first. The combined time for both Video I (16:32) and Video II (22:13) was 38 minutes and 45 seconds. The video is mostly audio, as the phone was faced down on the table most of the time. Other than a brief glimpse of their faces, Tonya shared a view of the planning materials via Project Based Learning (PBL). The occasion of the video was to collaborate on a project between one of Tonya’s classes of around 30 students with another three students from the GT program.

Interestingly, this idea for coming together was inspired by one of Tonya’s students who had created an “historical image” representing Black Lives Matter. In the beginning of their discussion, Tonya and Melissa considered a *social justice* focus, but as that is covered in upper grade curriculum, they chose to focus, instead, on historical transformations in their own community. By the end of their planning session, Tonya and Melissa decided students would work on similar projects grounded with the central question, “How can we, as historians, design a virtual museum app, that would showcase the transformative ideas throughout the history of [their city, state].”

***Time—65%***

Tonya rated her use of time for daily in-class writing at 65%. It is clear through our conversations, her video, and her artifacts that this element is significant in Tonya’s work with students. While students may not be coming into class with their own writing ideas on a daily or weekly basis, they seem to be writing with consistency. It’s important to note, however, that her creative writing class likely had more time to write than her other classes.

***Choice—2%***

I’m still surprised that Tonya rates herself at only 2 percent for this element. I found a great deal of evidence that choice is something Tonya regularly builds into her lesson planning. Immediately following the SI, Tonya had the opportunity to create the curriculum for a semester-long Creative Writing class for 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. Tonya incorporated a Genius Hour where students chose the topics of their inquiry and writing. She structured the project with the following elements: *topic*, *audience*, *purpose*, and *product*, all elements to be chosen by the students.

Additionally, in the video where Tonya collaborated with Melissa, the GT teacher, they ruminated throughout about how to weave in *choice*, whether it would be the topic, the specific project, or in the student groups. In consideration of project options, Tonya suggested, “If we want to give them choices, we should narrow it to three,” to make the work more manageable. But she included creating space for students who may “have a different idea burning” or might need another option, that the teachers be open to negotiating with that student. Their conversation went back and forth, attempting to keep the project manageable. This was their first time working together and it would be easy to be overwhelmed by too many possibilities. By the end of their planning session, Tonya and Melissa decided students would work on similar projects grounded with the central question, “How can we, as historians, design a virtual museum app, that would showcase the transformative ideas throughout the history of [local city, state].” After brainstorming topic ideas, the plan would be for students to choose a topic believing they would be working on the project by themselves. Once Tonya and Melissa gathered the ideas students would be interested in researching, students could be partnered up or grouped, according to their chosen topics.

### ***Low-stakes Writing—65%***

In an open-ended section of the survey, Tonya wrote, “I don’t grade every piece of writing and when I do, students can use my descriptive feedback to revise before they receive a final grade.” While we did not discuss the specifics of her grading system, Tonya’s self-rating of 65 percent seems to align with her focus on authentic learning and the assessment practices she brought up in our interviews. In our first interview, when Tonya explained that she took the approach of “These are some things that writers do,” she juxtaposed that with “*Not*: this is your rubric and this is what you need to do to get an A.” In our second interview

Tonya mentioned freewriting and strategies to help young writers generate ideas, which generally falls under low-stakes assignments that may or may not be graded. When the conversation moved to the digital museum project from her video collaboration, she noted, “Honestly, I did not grade those at all. I never put one grade in the grade book, and not one kid asked me like, *Are we going to get a grade for that?*” Instead of formal assessment, they utilized a system of feedback where students worked with their partners helping them to make sure content was set and then proofing their work to make sure their digital museum was “clean and edited” as well as “very smart and professional.”

Later, in the second interview, Tonya recalled a rubric she loved—based on the six traits, it was one her state used several years ago with 8<sup>th</sup>-grade writing. Students were given a descriptive writing prompt, and the writing was assessed based on the six traits. While that is not necessarily low-stakes writing practice, grading on one trait at a time certainly lowers the stakes of writing for students.

### ***Modeling—80%***

At 80 percent this element holds the highest of Tonya’s self-ratings. While how she modeled writing, reading, or learning with her students was not specifically discussed, I caught a glimpse of this element in her video discussion with the GT teacher. Both Tonya and her colleague assigned themselves research before their next meeting, Tonya suggesting they note their own research phrases so that they could share that process with students.

### ***Mentor Texts—50%***

We did not discuss the use of Mentor Texts extensively, but both Tonya and the GT teacher touch upon providing examples for possible student products. Additionally, they talked about a video on the PBL website that could offer ideas and student inspiration for their own

final products. Additionally, resources on the PBL website included a core value of teaching with mentor texts.

### ***Collaborative Learning—75%***

Tonya talked about collaborative learning experiences throughout both interviews and modeled how she collaborates in the videos she shared of her planning with the GT coordinator. Collaboration just seems second nature with Tonya. In fact, her favorite professional development provides fun and engaging opportunities for teachers to learn and plan together.

Tonya also collaborates with her students. When musing over what may have been a trend in education—breaking down a standard into its component parts—Tonya described how she broke down her state standard for revision. Becoming analytical she asked questions like, “What does it mean to revise?” and “How is revising different from editing?” Working with her students, they came up with a list of revision activities to choose from to help specifically with Word Choice. This happened about the same time that her district first provided laptops—very new technology for a school district in the early 2000s. Teachers were told to just do their best as they were trying them out. Tonya opened the learning opportunity to her students. “I told my students, like, if you think there’s anything that we can do easier, better, or in a more fun way on the computer, tell me.” The fourth activity from the most recent checklist (Artifact C) came from a student who told her about a Word Cloud app. Students could copy/paste their entire essay into the app, allowing its algorithm to calculate the words used the most, illustrating them as the largest in the cloud. Thus, the largest words appearing in the cloud would signal over-used words that could be revised. “And I learned that from a kid. Like, he’s like, *You could do this, you know*. And I was just, I mean I could cry still thinking about that—like that kid is so awesome.”

Additionally, Tonya shared a lesson she’s developed over time with help from her ELA students. In trying to differentiate two steps of the writing process—revision and editing—she facilitates class discussions that result in two separate lists, Artifact C, mentioned earlier and titled, “Word Choice Revision,” and the other, an editing checklist, the most recently titled, “6th Grade Writing Expectations Checklist.” The Word Cloud exercise became item four on the Word Choice Revision list. For the latter list, Tonya asks students to work in small groups to create a list “of the things that they think a 6<sup>th</sup>-grader should definitely know and be able to fix in an editing situation” (P2 Interview 1). At some point in the discussions, Tonya gives examples about how to be specific with these imperative statements. She reminds them that there are at least 10 specific rules about commas and asks them to make sure they include at least one on their lists. The collaboration continues as groups pair up to share lists and create a refined list. Finally, Tonya uses their compiled lists of specific grammar rules that every 6<sup>th</sup>-grader (or 7<sup>th</sup>-grader) should know and creates a master list to be used for editing (Artifact D).

Then, Tonya gives her students “time in class to edit using that checklist.” And she both models the process and reinforces it on their papers.

I tell them [...], *If I find more than five of these errors, these very simple errors—like we’re talking super simple—I’m just going to draw a line on your paper or highlight a line on your paper and say I found five by this spot, and I’m not going to grade it. And you have to go back and edit it for real.*

Both strategies for revising and editing are part of the writing process and classroom practices generated from Tonya’s experiences with the NWP.



### ***Conferencing—75%***

The act of conferencing came up in our second interview, talking about the digital museum project. Tonya explained, “I did not give them feedback *after* the fact.” While her students did not receive a specific grade for the project, both Tonya and Melissa (GT Coordinator) took time to sit beside student groups, offering constructive feedback as they were generating ideas and beginning the project. She believed a strength of the project lay in the two separate rounds of students conferring with one another. In the first round, groups paired up and used a checklist to begin the conference. She told her students “You want your partner to look good. So go through this other group’s project and just check off that they have all these things” (P2 Interview 2). In the second round, “They had to [...] just go through their project and see if there’s any spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors and just fix them [...] We wanted our museum as a group to be clean and edited [...] very smart and professional.” Providing feedback in either a one-to-one or small group experience appears to be part of Tonya’s regular classroom practice.

### ***Publishing—45%***

“Real writing and authentic audience” was a foundational take-away from her Summer Institute. Just as the Writing Project asked of her, Tonya asked her students to take the stance of the writer. She would tell them, “Okay we are writers. And these are some things that writers do.” One of those things was writing for real audiences. So instead of an assignment where students wrote a letter to a fake person, Tonya created opportunities for her students to write a letter to an actual person. Her school newspaper was another avenue for publishing. Her previous class of 6<sup>th</sup>-graders had published Book Talks in the form of presentation slides. Tonya explained that her students “were really enthused about editing because they didn’t want

their book talk to look bad in the school newspaper.” Real writing was not limited to her ELA students. Tonya shared that in the Academic Edge class where she created the curriculum she taught, her students “wrote thank you notes to the presenters. That’s pretty authentic.” With her Genius Hour in the Creative Writing class, a major piece included students choosing their own audience. And with the collaborative history project with the GT teacher, students shared their digital museums with other classes of students—a formidable audience, indeed.

#### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—4%***

Tonya rated this element at 4 percent and collections of student writing over time never came up in our interviews or other artifacts.

#### ***Reflective Teaching—65%***

In listening to Tonya talk about teaching and learning, reflection seemed to be a natural part of who she is. Early in our first interview she shared, “I felt like the push for an authentic audience, [...] it just helped me to realize, [...] if I am having them write everything with *me* as their main audience, that they don’t really become very [...] flexible, as a writer. Additionally, as Tonya put herself in challenging learning curves like a triathlon or working retail at Target, she focused on what she could learn about what it’s like when “learning is really hard.” That intention extends deeply into her reflective teaching practice. Tonya’s value for reflection can further be seen in the Project Based Learning collaboration with Melissa, the GT teacher. Reflection from both teachers and students is one of the essential elements of Project Based Learning (PBL, 2023). Furthermore, in our second interview when Tonya compared her the ART Team project with the Writing Project, reflection was a key element both had in common.

## **Beyond Elements of EWP**

Tonya's classroom practice, of course, includes elements not delineated in my definition for Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Beyond the rating scale, the survey included opportunities for open responses. In describing additional ways of teaching writing or including writing as a strategy for learning, Tonya wrote, "I love using the Six Traits and the Writing Process intertwined with middle school students." We talked about this in our second interview where Tonya gave credit to Vicki Spandel (2008) and shared how she likes to focus on one of the *Six Traits* at a time, in conjunction with focusing on one step of the *Writing Process* at a time. Two of her artifacts Tonya shared, a word revision check list and a final editing check list, illustrate different traits, as well as different steps in the writing process. For example, the Word Revision Check List combines the writing trait, *Word Choice*, with the process step, *Revision*.

Acknowledging the unique context of each student, Tonya explained, "I just always focus on one part of the process at a time. And obviously, it gets blended because there's always a kid that's ahead and always kid that's behind." As she guides her students to take the stance of authentic writers, Tonya teaches the steps of the writing process and reminds them, "If you're a writer you have a process, and it might not look like this." To help her reference these steps, a huge poster, shaped like a giant pencil, hangs in her classroom, "15 feet long at about a foot high, and it has each step of the writing process." Tonya focused first on one part of the process at a time, and then one trait. For instance, after focusing on brainstorming as a strategy for the prewriting phase, she would tie that to a writing trait goal for idea development. Also hanging in her classroom were posters representing each of the *Six Traits*. Additionally, Tonya's use of process extended to the collaborative history project with the GT coordinator.

## Experiencing the National Writing Project

### Local Writing Project Site

Tonya's local NWP Site is situated in a midwestern university, offering "an array of [graduate] courses to support several degree and certificate programs in the department of English and the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education." In 2022 their site's website showed a strong network with two directors, two co-directors, and an advisory board of 16 educators who have remained involved with the project in numerous ways since attending their own summer institute. As of 2024 the same website lists one director, four co-directors, and a board of 14. Links to graduate courses, various institutes, and degree programs show multiple options for including the local Writing Project with the work of local in-service teachers pursuing professional development. This local site has capitalized on creating a large network and community of educators and writers "that provides opportunities to improve, enhance and celebrate writing for classrooms and communities across" their state. In addition to a variety of institutes, this NWP site offers writing retreats, teacher writing groups, youth literacy camps in the summer, writing marathons, and a special program for veterans and their families called Writing Warriors. Their Belief Statements include:

- The best teachers of writing are writers themselves.
- Teachers provide the best instruction for other teachers.
- Anyone, no matter their ability level, can improve their writing in a supportive context with other practicing writers.
- True school reform comes through democratic partnerships across grade levels.
- Teachers, students, and communities benefit when teachers form networks with other teachers and draw on collective expertise. (Local NWP website, 2023)

For Summer 2023, this NWP site offered two summer institutes happening simultaneously between June 5<sup>th</sup> and June 21<sup>st</sup> titled: Hybrid Summer Institute and Humanities Institute.

## **Tonya's Experience with her Local Writing Project Site**

Tonya came to this local NWP site, through a “conglomeration” of school and district support in a suburban district where she was really encouraged to do all she could to keep learning. That included taking classes with a state university, of which the summer institute was worth six graduate hours. Tonya recalled that the district covered her tuition, while the local NWP site offered a stipend. It did not cost Tonya anything for the graduate hours accompanying the institute nor the technology course/institute she took three summers later. Her initial leadership institute took place in 2008, when she was teaching 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade English and Speech Communication in a suburban district. At least one other ELA teacher in her middle school had experienced the Writing Project.

In addition to the first summer institute, Tonya has delivered presentations on behalf of her local NWP Site at local and state conferences, attended and helped plan a writing marathon, and served as one of four co-facilitators for a Summer Institute in 2015. She had recently moved to a new middle school in an urban district, same state, and was teaching 7th grade at the time of the SI. She continues to remain loosely connected her local NWP site, receiving updates via the list-serve and occasionally delivering the NWP tub of table materials for a state conference on technology. In both interviews, Tonya mentioned a number of colleagues at both her current school and the last school who were also TCs with their local site.

And yet, Tonya confessed a waning of continuity with her local NWP site. In both interviews she pondered why she no longer felt that pull to pursue the numerous opportunities offered by her local site. In the first interview she explained, “... like I haven't done a writing marathon lately, or I haven't taken a class with them [...] I'm not sure that it's all [...] what I need right now, maybe?”

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

Tonya experienced her local Writing Project within two different teaching contexts. Within the arc of her active engagement from 2008 until 2022, she added important concepts to her classroom practice where she found support and negotiated challenges.

### ***School Context #1***

When Tonya returned to her home state after teaching for three years in Houston, Texas, she chose her new district with intention—she chose the district that both encouraged and provided resources to pursue graduate work and other professional development. In a smaller, suburban district embedded within an urban area, Tonya taught for thirteen years at the only middle school in this district. All the 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders. Approximately 1000 students (based on 2023 enrollment) were housed in the same middle school. At the time, her ELA 8<sup>th</sup>-grade team consisted of four teachers. They shared foundational philosophies about teaching and learning, and they worked well together. Tonya remembered, “I think it was two of us out of four had been to the Writing Project and the other two were very open to trying new things.” Additionally, they experienced a great deal of autonomy when creating lesson plans— “we had a lot of say in the curriculum [...] We created the curriculum together based off of our state standards. And so, we did a lot of things with... voice and audience.”

The culture of the whole district was all about professional development and teacher learning. As a new teacher with the district, Tonya had her own mentor and found herself in an environment where everyone believed in continuous growth. She often heard, “*You need to keep learning. Just because you went to college for four years and now you’re a teacher...you’re not done. Like, Keep going!*” While teaching here, Tonya experienced what she called “a conglomeration” of forces that brought her to her first Summer Institute. Between

the encouragement to grow professionally, the pursuit of a Master's Degree in Educational Administration, and teaming up with other teachers at her new school, Tonya found herself in the 2008 Summer Institute for her local Writing Project site. Bringing in strategies to teach the writing process was met with great support, as the writing process was part of the state standards and "new teacher professional development," in both districts was, "...all about taking a standard and then breaking it down into its components, and then scaffolding it for kids."

### *School Context #2*

After marrying in 2014, Tonya moved to a new city and an urban district in the same state. At the time of our first interview, 910 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders were enrolled (District Website). While school enrollments were fairly close, the size of the districts differed greatly. Tonya moved from a district with one middle school to a district with twelve. Initially, she focused on 7<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA, but also taught other grades and subjects like typing, computer science, and drama. The year she began as a participant with this research, Tonya taught 6<sup>th</sup>-grade Humanities, a block combining both ELA and Social Studies. The following year she taught 7<sup>th</sup>-grade Contemporary Communication. In our first interview Tonya stressed the importance for all new teachers to have a mentor. Her current district no longer had a mentorship program. I wondered if it was due to state funding, much like my own state. Nonetheless, Tonya had grown professionally under mentorship as a new teacher with her previous district. In her new district, Tonya was able to reconnect with a Fellow from the 2008 SI. They were excited to work together once again. She found other TCs to support her as well. "I got a lot of support from [the] Writing Project when I moved [here] because there were people that worked here that were in my cohort or in my class when I was the facilitator."

## *Support*

Tonya gave this larger district credit for supporting her when she wanted to be a co-facilitator for the 2015 Summer Institute. “Even though [local NWP leaders] were asking me to do it and they needed somebody, I still had to have like letters of recommendation and... some time off and like I can still use my computer from school. So, a lot of [...] like in-kind support.” She also felt supported by the curriculum specialists with both schools, when she wanted to implement new things, “within reason.” However, while the larger district supported Tonya’s continued work with the Writing Project, it just wasn’t to the same level as the smaller suburban district.

The smaller district supported her with both encouragement and resources for pursuing her master’s degree and the Writing Project—they paid her tuition while she earned a stipend. Additionally, Tonya was able to pursue National Board Certification and because of the support from district administration (including payment for application fees), time out of her classroom to write, and someone to video her teaching for the portfolios that required video. And to top it off, when she failed one of the four portfolios, the one for whole class discussion, Tonya was able to convince her principal to send her to an institute in New Mexico to learn Socratic Seminar. The district paid for the training as well as travelling expenses, and in 2011 she passed and became a National Board Certified Teacher. In considering the support she received, Tonya explained, “There was just so much crazy support, it was ridiculous. Now looking back, like how lucky I was.”

When implementing the practices she learned via the Writing Project, Tonya was also met with great support. At the first school they had a lot of autonomy, as long as they integrated the state standards into their instruction. Here is where Tonya had the chance to teach Creative



Writing to 8<sup>th</sup>-graders and had the opportunity to bring more of what she'd learned from the Writing Project to her curriculum as she integrated a Genius Hour with student choice in audience, topic, product, and purpose. Admittedly, Tonya had greater freedom in her creative writing class, as her ELA classes were driven by her state's standards and preparation for the then state writing assessment. There seems to have been a confluence of timing between taking the technology course through the Writing Project and the onset of Chromebooks. The professional development with her local site along with the access to Chromebooks and the newness of Google Classroom seems a great example of bridgework between higher education and public schooling. Her colleagues and teams at both schools were supportive of the ideas she wanted to try in her classroom, as were the district coordinators. It seems Tonya placed herself in great circumstances with the schools she chose for her teaching and in the courses and professional development she curated with the Writing Project.

### ***Challenges***

Even amid these supportive contexts, Tonya found challenges to implementing the best practices learned with the Writing Project. On the survey, she wrote about the challenge of district pacing guides:

Every time I switch to a new grade level or a new curriculum, I have to figure out ways to ADD personal choice and real audiences to the curriculum we are given. My school district has an extensive pacing guide with some flexibility but embedded within the curriculum are very few "nonacademic"/creative writing opportunities.

When I asked about the challenges in our first interview, Tonya responded, "I don't like retooling other people's lesson plans." She was talking about, fitting in the philosophy or the ideology that of the Writing Project into what districts are teaching or wanting to teach, especially currently." She even wondered if it was due to her own limitations or her capacity

to teach all the things she was expected to teach, while fitting in what she believed would be best practice.

As she thought more about the expected curriculum, she came to another possible conclusion: “Sometimes [it’s] just a ton of effort to take what you think is best, and put it in there, as opposed to starting with what’s best.” On the one hand, Tonya had the autonomy to revise district curriculum, but on the other hand, she also had high standards for those creating it, stating, “Because I feel like, if they’re the curriculum specialist, then shouldn’t they have done it... *right*, quote-unquote, *right* the first time?”

The other challenge Tonya brought up was about the waning focus on writing in the curriculum. Her state no longer had a writing assessment. She explained, “For a while they had a text dependent analysis, and then everybody started teaching TDA straight up all the time, every day, so that they could pass that.” Once that assessment was dropped, Tonya no longer believed there was “a lot of accountability for writing in curriculum.” When writing assessment focused on student generated ideas from a writing prompt, students were able to demonstrate generative writing skills based on their own prior knowledge. However, text dependent analysis focused on complex reading skills and the ability to demonstrate analysis of someone else’s knowledge. Assessment became computer-based, moving away from human readers. Tonya explained how human assessment worked, “I actually met somebody from the Writing Project. They used to a double score everything...and if the scores weren’t the same, they put it on to a third [assessor].” Tonya speculated about why states moved away from that type of assessment. “Do you know how much money that costs? And they don’t do that anymore because...”

Here, I interjected, “That’s an investment in people.” Before my interjection, Tonya may have concluded with the high costs of human-driven writing assessment, but she gracefully added, “It’s also a great training tool, because if you go to that and learn how to grade, then you are seeing hundreds of pieces of writing that are not your own students.” Tonya partially moved her thinking toward solution with “So, something about writing being important in the curriculum...” then pivoted to another challenge she found in the curriculum embraced by the states and the NWP—the focus on *argument* writing. The last institute that she’d been invited to focused on Argument. (It may have been the C3WP initiative supported by the National Writing Project.) According to Tonya, “They spent a lot of money on argument writing... Schools wanted to teach argument writing—that was like the best new thing that you could possibly teach. But then that’s like *all* that people were teaching.” She didn’t take the course on argument writing and she explained that students “...don’t need to do argument writing every year from sixth grade to twelfth grade...like *all* the time.”

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Professional Growth Experiences

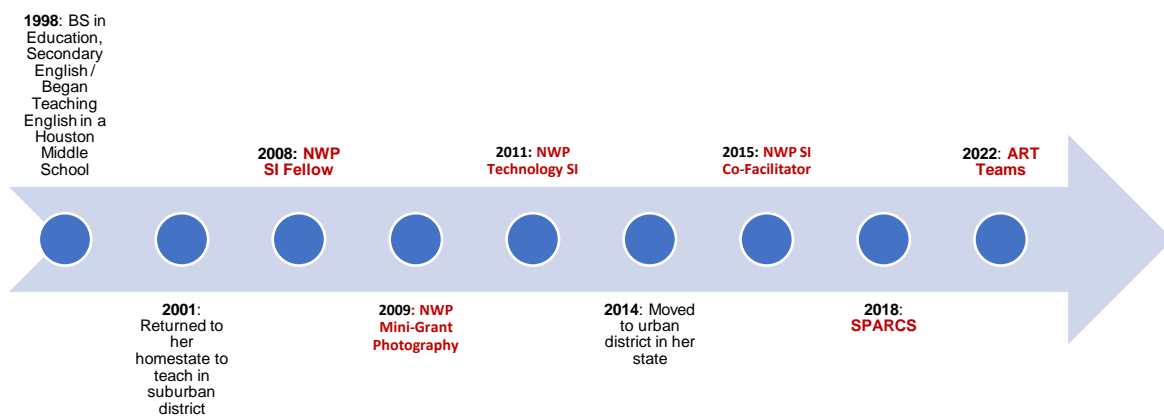


Figure 18: Highlights from Tonya’s Timeline of Significant Professional Growth

With 25 of years in education, Tonya’s actual timeline representing her professional growth is extensive and impressive. Not shown in Figure 18 are meaningful experiences like 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Train the Trainers, Boys Town Administrative Intervention, Professional Committees for Grading and Learning, National Board Certification and so much more. Tonya’s timeline in Figure 18 represents only a few highlights of Tonya’s professional growth. As part of verifying the timeline, I asked her to note the most significant experiences—she noted: Writing Project, SPARCS, and ART Teams.

Returning to her home state and teaching in a district that honored her professional growth with encouragement, mentorship, financial support for pursuing a master’s and, later, National Board Certification gave Tonya a solid foundation to grow and make meaningful connections with other teachers. It’s also what led to her initiation into the Writing Project as a Fellow of the 2008 Summer Institute.

The Writing Project aligned well with her quest for authentic learning. In our first interview, Tonya explained a philosophy that she shares with her students: “there’s a huge difference between learning and school” and “learning happens a lot of other places, almost everywhere else.” She linked authentic learning with the idea she learned from the Writing Project about writing for authentic audiences and meaningful purposes. During the time in between her 2008 institute as a Fellow and the 2015 SI where she served as a cofacilitator, Tonya completed her master’s degree, took additional courses/institutes with the Writing Project, and embraced Chromebooks and Google Classroom. The Writing Project seems to have served as a bridge with both districts, providing foundational support as she settled in. That’s how she keeps the two SIs straight in her memory. The first came in the first five years with the suburban district and the second came soon after starting in the urban district. Having

been part of her local NWP site, not only gave Tonya additional resources as she transitioned from one school to the next but continues the arc from classroom teacher to teacher-leader.

During the 2018/2019 school year, when Tonya taught nothing but electives: 6<sup>th</sup>-grade typing, 7<sup>th</sup>-grade general computers course (animation, spreadsheets, docs, etc.), 8<sup>th</sup>-grade computer science, and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade drama. This coincides with SPARCS, a year-long opportunity to learn “computer programming with followup (sic) throughout the school year.”

The Teaching with Art and Emerging Media (ART Teams) project is a collaborative effort housed at the same state university as the Tonya’s local Writing Project site. The goal is to “...establish a professional development curriculum for 40 [state] teachers to integrate arts and emerging media into their curriculums. Researchers aim to foster inclusive, arts-based classroom approaches that embrace students’ cultures and voices” (Green, 2022). Tonya began this two-year project the summer of 2022, earning six graduate credit hours. She earned four more during the school year (two in the fall and two in the spring). Beginning late summer and extending into the following school year, she will earn an additional 10 credits. During the first year, teachers were paired up in teams of diverse subject areas and artists, where the teachers considered intersections between subjects as they created lesson plans. Tonya’s excitement about this project reminded her of what she loved about her involvement with the Writing Project—the intensity, the opportunities for reflection, and the people. Both projects involved four weeks in the summer, working with about 25 teachers from diverse grades and subject areas, and included a degree of continuity—engagement beyond the initial institute.

In fact, all three of the professional growth experiences that Tonya highlighted had something in common. She wrote:

...Writing Project, SPARCS and now ART Teams have probably been the big three overall for me - what they have in common is a group/cohort of committed teachers

who really care and WANT to learn more, a focus on learning that is integrated, and follow-up/long term implementation and coaching.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Classroom Practice**

When I asked Tonya to describe her classroom practices resulting either directly or indirectly from her experience with the Writing Project, she shared the story about Genius Hour, but also the influence of the writing process. “So, I became really interested in the writing process, because if we’re writers, then we use the writing process. And it’s not just like a one draft and you turn it in and you’re done.” As she applied the idea of a writing process with her students, Tonya noticed they often confused two of the steps: revision and editing. Thus, she developed over time lessons to help her students apply specific strategies for each of those steps. Two lessons involve Tonya’s facilitation of class discussions that result in two separate lists, one titled, “Word Choice Revision,” and the other an editing checklist, most recently titled, “6th Grade Writing Expectations Checklist.” In our interview, after musing over what may have been a trend in education—breaking down a standard into its component parts—Tonya described how she broke down her state standard for revision. Becoming analytical she asked questions like, “What does it mean to revise?” and “How is revising different from editing?”

In our last interview, July 2022, Tonya had just begun a new professional development with the same university hosting her local NWP site. ART Teams is the shorter version of Teaching with Art and Emerging Media Projects. Much like the NWP Summer Institute, the ART Team is grounded within a community of learners, educators wanting to be better at their jobs. While her Summer Institute with NWP was worth 6 hours of credit, the work she and her cohort will eventually complete with ART Teams will be worth 18 hours of credit as part of the 2-year experience. Tonya seemed so excited about this new opportunity for professional

growth and explained that what she loved most was collaborating with other teachers. Pairs of teachers from different subject areas will work together Their purpose, according to an article Tonya shared, is to integrate arts and emerging media into their curriculum. And much like the Writing Project, process is foundational in their learning. Tonya said their facilitators had to keep reminding the group that “Completion is not the goal.”

### **Writing Project Contributions to Tonya’s Sustained Professional Growth**

Tonya came to her local Writing Project with personal traits that integrated well with NWP philosophies. She was already determined to be a lifelong learner, eager to engage with other educators excited about learning. Her reflective nature was nurtured by the long-term commitment to growing as a teacher of writing, as a writer, and as a teacher-leader. And her compassion for students who face challenges in their learning made her willing to try new and challenging experiences, just as a reminder that learning can be hard.

The Writing Project met Tonya where she was a teacher, learner, writer, and leader. Her local group helped sustain her professional growth by providing her a community of like-minded colleagues who have supported her in various ways. To begin with, the Writing Project provided engagement in the learning process and lesson planning, where she was able to ensure that her students have a voice in their writing, as well as choices in their instruction. Additionally, the Writing Project served as an anchor for which to ground her teaching practice with “authentic audience and real writing.”

She felt free to contact the site director and anyone connected with the Writing Project. “I feel like people have been super generous with their time and sharing information.” And when she moved to the larger district, she was able to reach out to other TCs to discuss, not

only what they had learned in the SI, but important things to note about the district, “like how it’s different. Or the same. Or what’s allowed [laughing].”

While Tonya seems to have moved on to a new well of inspiration with the ART Team project, the National Writing Project has played a sustaining and pivotal role in her professional growth, spanning from 2008 until even now.



### **Chapter 4.3: Nested Case Three—Stacy Phillips**

Stacy and I met via Zoom on January 10, 2022, at the end of her teaching day. She wore a long-sleeved knit shirt of warm red and sat at her teacher desk in classroom empty of students. From my vantage point I could see student desks arranged in pods of four to six, but only part of the classroom. One wall was filled with shelves of curriculum materials; stacks of baskets possibly filled with community supplies like pencils, glue sticks, and markers; and student cubby holes. The front of the room hosted a white board, chart paper, and various posters of basic anchor concepts like the times table. From the ceiling with fluorescent lighting, hung colorful paper machete fans and lanterns. For our midway conversation that took place the following June and our official second interview that took place on November 26, both via Zoom, Stacy sat in an overstuffed armchair with upholstery of patterned gold. She was in her living room, a cream-colored sofa in the background.

While our first interview was recorded and transcribed, our second official interview on November 26th was recorded, but something went wrong with Zoom. Working with IT soon after the recording was to no avail. However, working on my own, I was able to retrieve two folders. One contained a copy of the chat. But the other was empty. I took handwritten notes during the interview and typed them up soon after. Rather than try to conduct another “second” interview, I relied on the notes and the comments made on Stacy’s timeline, as she verified the information.

## Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low- stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collabor- ative	EWP.G Confer- encing	EWP.H Publish- ing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflec- tive	EWP AVG
<b>3</b> Stacy Phillips	100	100	100	100	85	100	100	100	50	100	93.5
Mean from 7	79.7	78.9	88.0	83.0	80.9	85.7	82.4	57.3	48.9	90.0	76.4
Mean from 71	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	81.7

Figure 19: Stacy's Ratings for Elements of EWP

### Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts

Stacy met with me three times via Zoom, two for official interviews and once in between to recalibrate next steps and brainstorm what she might provide for artifacts. At that in-between meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup>, I was prepared to move forward without a video. Time had gotten away from both of us, and Stacy had ended the school year without having made the teaching video we had envisioned in January. Since she would be the principal of her school and not a teacher the following school year, the opportunity for a teaching video had passed.

However, as we talked about possible artifacts, I remembered from working with Stacy and her Writing Project site for a Summer Series of TC Presentations in 2021. Still negotiating the constraints of the pandemic and needing sources of revenue, Stacy's Writing Project leaders asked interested TCs to volunteer an hour of their time in June or July. Stacy volunteered for two presentations. As the grad assistant that summer, I was in charge of setting up and recording the Zoom meetings, and I often participated. With Stacy's consent and both Writing Project directors' permission, I viewed both videos and selected a 15–20-minute excerpt that would be appropriate for this research. I chose a section with no participants in the video or audio recording and where no student work was shared. I shared the excerpt with Stacy, and she gave the okay to use it before our November 26<sup>th</sup> interview.

In addition to her video, Stacy provided the following artifacts: her resumé, three lesson plans, two slide presentations created for her local Writing Project. Two of the lesson plans, “Informational Writing” and “Opinion Writing,” served as handouts for a presentation Stacy gave to help teachers prepare their students for the state writing assessment. The third lesson plan Stacy provided had been created for exploring the Chisolm Trail and life during the 1800s. The final product students would create for that lesson would be an infographic illustrating the differences between “Then and Now.” This lesson stemmed from Stacy’s work with the NWP/NEH grant, *Engaging Humanities Through Art on The Chisholm Trail*. Additionally, Stacy shared slide presentations for “Fun Fraction Poetry,” a 60-minute presentation from the 2021 Summer Series, and her “Writing Across the Curriculum” presentation—a longer session that contains some the Fun Fraction Poetry, along with writing in other subject areas like social studies and science. Below (Fig. 20) is a screenshot from Stacy’s presentation, “Get Those Pencils Dancing!” shared here because of its relevance to the Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday/Mon.
<p>It is a recursive process that does not follow a 1, 2, 3 order.</p> <p><b>Over 70% of your students' time should be spent engaging in prewriting activities.</b></p>	<p>-Prewrite IDEAS trait</p> <p>Introduce the Skill - Whole Group</p> <p>Small Group, Partners, Brainstorming</p> <p>Class discussions.....</p> <p>-SHARE OUT</p>	<p>-Draft VOICE Trait</p> <p>Mini-lesson on the focus skill. "Hooks, Transit. words, Summary.</p> <p>Get it on paper! We use a squiggle line for vocab and spelling errors.</p>	<p>-Draft/Edit/Revise</p> <p>Organization, Sentence Fluency, Word Choice Traits</p> <p>Small Group, 1-1 Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill help</li> <li>• Different -iation help</li> </ul>	<p>-Draft/Edit/Revise</p> <p>Sentence Fluency, Conventions, Word Choice Traits</p> <p>Small Group, 1-1 Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill help</li> <li>• Different -iation help</li> </ul>	<p>-Edit/Revise/Publish</p> <p>Sentence Fluency, Conventions, Word Choice, Presentation Traits</p> <p>**1-1 Confers if needed.</p> <p>Author's Chair Presentations of Work...</p>

Figure 20: Sample of Writing Agenda for the Week

### ***Time—100%***

Stacy engaged her students in some phase of the writing process every day and with multiple subjects. Additionally, writing was an essential tool for learning in Stacy’s practice. On the initial survey, she wrote, “I utilize writing in the classroom daily. We use it for many purposes from math, science, social studies, to ELA. My students use their journal to QW and to complete writing assignments.”

In her “Get Those Pencils Dancing!” presentation, Stacy shared her weekly plan for writing that included brainstorming and drafting most days of the week, with revising, editing, and publishing at the end of the week. Stacy’s students wrote in notebooks, separate notebooks for each subject. They wrote daily and filled their pages with brainstorming ideas for future writings, quick writes about the topics from their brainstorming, and intentional writings focused on the Tuesday mini lesson. In this and other Writing Project presentations, Stacy includes research that supports writing as a process, along with a statement often cited by her local Writing Project, “Over 70 percent of your student’s time should be spent engaging in prewriting activities.”

And Stacy practiced what she preached by including time for quickwriting, as a way for participants to engage with and process the big ideas she offered. One example from Fun Fraction Poetry prompted participants to: “Imagine you have to tell someone who you are, but you cannot use your voice. What would you have in your trunk that would explain to someone who you are?”

### ***Choice—100%***

Stacy built choice into her curriculum in multiple ways. By helping students to brainstorm ideas, choices for possible topics filled their pages. Stacy modeled *choice* in her

presentation quickwrites either with multiple prompts or by framing the prompts around writer perspectives, whether setting personal goals, sharing about summer celebrations, listing 2021 highlights, or exploring their thoughts on “What time should teachers go to bed on Summer Break?”

### ***Low-stakes Writing—100%***

Stacy provided her 3<sup>rd</sup>-graders opportunities to write without worrying about losing points for misspellings or other mechanical errors. She explained in her video, that she does not grade for spelling until the end, *after* they’d had time to focus on the publishing stage of the writing process. During the beginning of the week, as students wrote, Stacy encouraged them to use a Squiggle Line strategy when they wrote a word they did not know how to spell. Much like the squiggle lines that once appeared under misspellings on a word document, students would note words to look up later, in the publishing stage, by drawing a squiggle line underneath. Stacy found that this Squiggle Line move gave her students “the freedom to keep going” as they grappled with getting their ideas down on paper. Furthermore, when Stacy graded finished writing, she made it a practice to grade for one writing trait at a time. she explained in our second interview that teachers tend to think they have to grade everything, but she has learned to look for one trait at a time.

She also used low-stakes writing as a learning strategy in various journal work. In addition to their writing journals, Stacy utilized journals for science, social studies, and math. In our second interview, she explained an often-used strategy in their Math Notebook (also a composition-styled notebook). For example, she would ask her students to draw lines separating a page into four sections. In one of the four boxes, students were asked to write a story problem that would have a sum of 32 or include the concept of multiplying. While Stacy

played around with keeping journals for different subjects, towards the end of her classroom experience, she had grown partial to keeping one journal.

### ***Modeling—100%***

Early in her video, Stacy shared her goals for the presentation, “We will WRITE!!” and explained, ““We will write because *teaching writing well means we model well*... we’re going to practice what we preach.” As a teacher leader, Stacy models modeling in her presentations with examples of student work. Her student samples span the steps of the writing process—the brainstorming phase as well as the published. Often, after teaching a new concept or studying a mentor text, Stacy would model for the class how to integrate that new knowledge by working as a whole class to create a new product. Her Artifact F demonstrates this and is explained below. Another subtle but significant example of Stacy’s modeling focuses on an important NWP belief—that teachers of writing should be writers themselves. Her About Me slide (Artifacts D and E) includes that she loves “to write short stories” but “struggles with endings.”

### ***Mentor Texts—85%***

We did not speak of mentor texts in our interviews or midway conversation. However, Stacy’s lesson plan for Opinion Writing listed Kaufman Orlaff’s *I Wanna Iguana* as a text to use for thinking about writing structure as well as “vocabulary and concepts.” In Artifact D, presentation slides for a “Writing Across the Curriculum” presentation, Stacy shared a poetry anthology by Sara Holbrook, *Zombies! Evacuate the School!* as a model for writing poems involving fractions. In Artifact E, presentation slides for “Fun Fraction Poetry,” also a Writing Across the Curriculum presentation, Stacy shared a specific poem by Holbrook, “100% Me,” clearly using that as a model for both participants and their students to study before creating

their own fraction poems. Stacy's "Then and Now Lesson Plan" (Artifact F) included three texts: *Pappy's Handkerchief* by Devin Scillian, *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom* by Tim Tingle, and a text about Stacy's home state. While the lesson suggests reading the text before the visit to the Chisolm Trail Center, it's possibly a way to build a little background knowledge or schema to help make learning connections with the museum experience. However, the instruction, "Model a 2-sided infographic for students," seems imply find published 2-sided infographics, to study, before the step: "Create a Teacher/Student infographic as a whole class." Mentor texts and modeling can work well together.

### ***Collaborative Learning—100%***

Looking at Figure 20 above, it is clear that Stacy incorporates partner and small group collaborations throughout the week. In the video, Stacy stressed the importance of brainstorming in small groups and then as a whole class. First students work in small groups or with a partner to begin generating ideas for a writing topic, typically generating a list or a web of possible ideas. Then they come together as a whole class and share out. Stacy believes that

class discussion and the ability for students to share out is really beneficial to your struggling writers because your struggling writers can sometimes sit there and say, [here she slows down and mimics a voice that almost sounds like Eeyore] *I don't know what to write about, I don't have any ideas, I can't do this.* (Video)

She explains to students that sharing out loud does not mean they will write the same stories. The value of sharing out is in allowing their ideas to help other students remember an experience or to spark a possible topic they could write about. For Stacy, "sharing is a great scaffold" (Video).

### ***Conferencing—100%***

In her presentation, Stacy talks about her plans for small group or one-on-one conferencing. According to Figure 20 above, Wednesdays and Thursdays are dedicated to conferences either for differentiation or help with skills. However, when I asked Stacy about one-on-one conferencing in our interview, we were focused on writer’s notebooks. She replied that although she wished she could, there just wasn’t time.

### ***Publishing—100%***

Publishing in Stacy’s third-grade class looks different, depending on where students are in the process. Sometimes, she asks students to read their writing out loud via FlipGrid, and on Friday, “they watch everybody’s FlipGrid” video, as one way to publish. Publishing might also be writing a “beautiful” or “handwritten” piece that is displayed on a bulletin board. Stacy embraced the idea of publishing by sharing writing aloud, either in front of whole class or with a small group or single partner. Stacy used a “turn and read to your neighbor” strategy, almost daily, to make sure each of her students get to “publish” their writing to at least a partner.

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—50%***

While Stacy rated this category the lowest, we did not discuss the ways she kept collections of student writing over time. Nor did I find evidence for portfolio collections in the video or the other artifacts.

### ***Reflective Teaching—100%***

Evidence of Stacy’s reflective nature exists throughout both interviews and video. First of all, she recognized her need to improve her teaching in order to help her students become better readers. Stacy deliberately pursues professional development that will meet a need she



sees in her students. And just because something generates growth, like earning her master's degree and later becoming a reading specialist, it does not mean she is done. When we met for our first interview, Stacy was engaged in a new training, LETRS, which she explained taught the science of reading. It also seems that her yearning to have conversations with others passionate about teaching and learning about their classroom practices, brought her to and has kept her involved with her local Writing Project. It may also be why she volunteers for research projects like this one and another with two professors from her field of study. Reflection can be about examining data from students you've attempted to teach. But sometimes it might mean thinking forward. For the preservice teachers Stacy worked with as a college instructor, she explained that she never asks others to do, what she would not do herself. Stacy explained that teaching at the college level "...makes me practice what I preach."

### **Beyond Elements of EWP**

Stacy included classroom practices that reach beyond the Elements of EWP. You can see in Figure 20 that she integrated "mini-lessons" into her writing pedagogy. A mini-lesson typically takes 10-15 minutes, utilizes an anchor and/or mentor text, and allows time for students to practice the new skill as the teacher conferences with individuals or small groups. In her video, Stacy explained that there are always students a little ahead and a little behind, that she sometimes extends the final day into Monday of the following week, showing how she works to meet students where they are and differentiate instruction as needed. Additionally, it is clear how much of her practice is grounded in research. Her About Me slides include the latest book on classroom pedagogy she is reading, her resumé includes a short list of favorite works influencing her teaching, and her presentations include research references (quotes from the same books) that connect with the lesson she is going to share.

## Writing Process & Six Trait Writing

As you can see in Figure 20 above, Stacy utilizes the steps of the writing process, building it into her weekly writing curriculum so students have opportunities to practice the entire process. Her writing notebooks are a space for quick writes throughout the day, but also for capturing their ideas early in the process, before revising, editing, and publishing. On her survey she had explained, “Journal work is often one and done, while writing assignments follow the entire writing process.” In Figure 21 below, Stacy illustrates to participants in her “Get Those Pencils Dancing” presentation, how she integrates the writing process with the Six Traits of Writing, an idea she borrowed from Ruth Culham (2005, 2008).

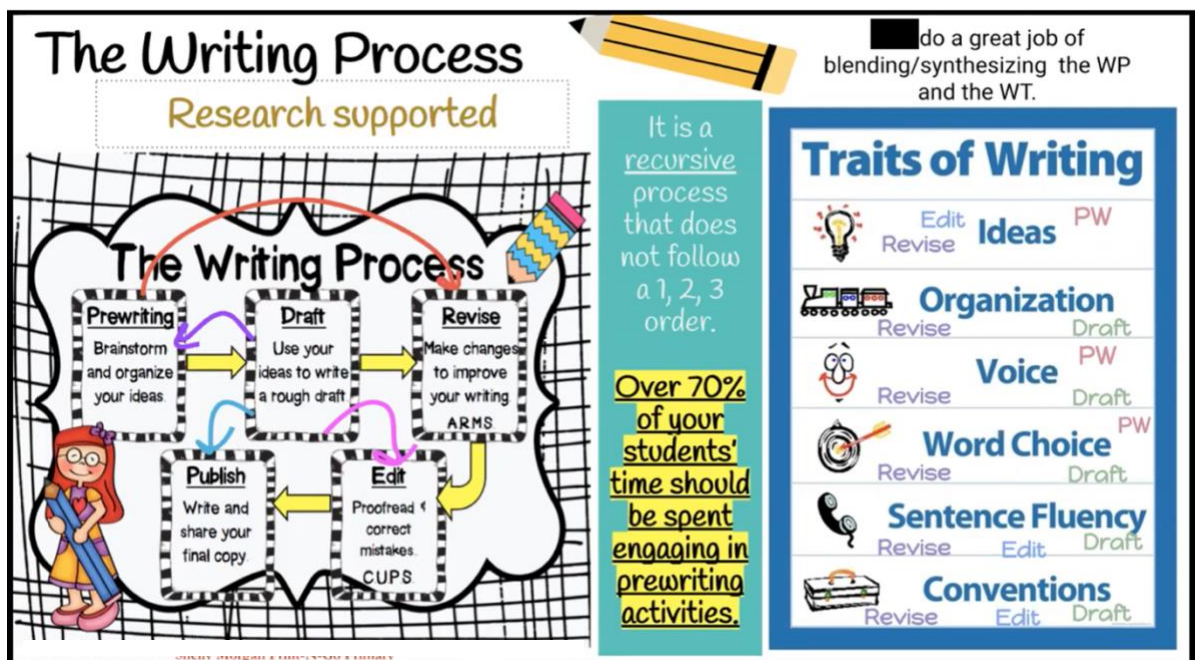


Figure 21: Integrating the Writing Process and Traits of Writing

## Writing Process + Writing Across the Curriculum

Not only did Stacy utilize writing as a way to learn in subjects other than reading and ELA, she also utilized the writing process as students created finished their products. In Figure 22 you will see a lesson plan from the slides for “Fun Fraction Poetry” for teacher participants.

Beginning with whole class engagement with a mentor text and brainstorming together as they create an anchor chart, she provides students time to create individual lists. After applying a math skill—converting percentages to fractions—students craft their poem utilizing the ideas from their prewriting (Artifact E). Included in the same artifact are slides that show variations of the same concept with coins and measurements.

## Experiencing the National Writing Project

### Local Writing Project Site

Stacy’s Writing Project, established in 1978, is a program housed in the College of Education with her local university. In addition to providing teacher development through partnerships with local schools, Stacy’s Writing Project traditionally hosts student conferences each Fall to kick off their Write-to-Win contests for K-12 students and again in the Spring to

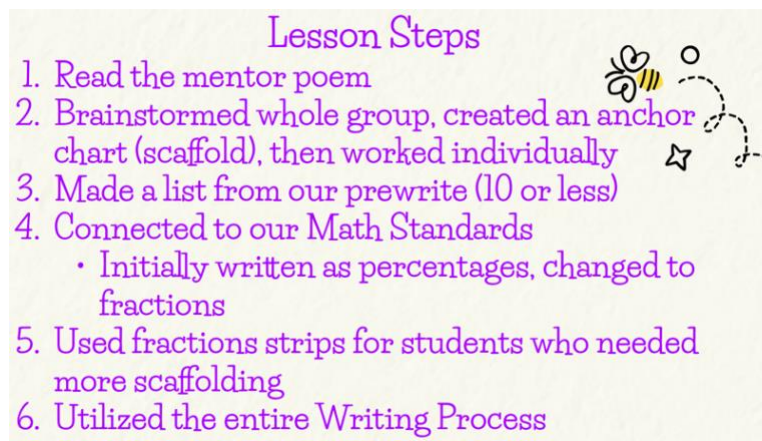


Figure 22: Lesson Steps for Fun Fraction Poetry

celebrate the winners and share their published work in the Write to Win anthologies. Their Invitational Summer Institute takes place over three weeks in the summer. Other teacher development opportunities included Building a More Perfect Union grant work: “Engaging Humanities Through the Arts,” , and State Standards Conferences (website, 2023). According to their 2023 SI application:

The aim of the summer institute is to gather educators from diverse backgrounds to evaluate research, deliberate writing techniques, and participate in both professional and personal writing exercises. The Writing Project values the skills of successful classroom teachers and seeks to utilize their expertise to educate others. The model prioritizes proven and potential success in all classrooms, recognizing and honoring exceptional teaching and teachers.

While the site's website did not list out NWP beliefs or principles, "Teachers teaching teachers" was prevalent, along with abundant evidence of the NWP model that values the expertise of teachers.

### **Stacy's Experience with her Local Writing Project Site**

Stacy had been involved with her local Writing Project since 2013—for 10 years as I write this. Long before applying for her fellowship with the Summer Institute, she had long heard about the Writing Project and attended many of their conferences and workshops. Since her SI in 2013, according to her survey, Stacy has since continued to participate in the following ways: "Presenter, SI-Coach 2yrs, stakeholder meetings, student writing marathon at Cowboy Museum, Write the Zoo (several times), and co-directed a 6-Traits Symposium." Additionally, she presented for the 2021 Summer Series mentioned earlier, and was also an important presenter for *Engaging Humanities Through Art on The Chisholm Trail*, a \$68,000 grant through the NWP and National Endowment of Humanities.

The arc of Stacy's transition into leadership roles also includes serving as a SI coach in 2014 and 2016. Coaching, along with presenting best research-based practices in the teaching of writing, seems pivotal in helping Stacy see herself as a teacher leader. Another significant practice is Stacy's willingness to engage in research, both in reading to learn more about teaching and learning, as well as reflecting on her teaching practices and how her students are learning. Stacy explained that the presentations she gives today are based on research and a presentation format she learned with the Writing Project.

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

### ***School Context #1***

While Stacy taught in two different schools within her teaching career, the first was before her experience with the Writing Project. She described the first as “a little bitty rural school” in the eastern part of her state—in 2023, according to their website, the enrolled approximately 300 students (PK-12). Stacy taught there from 2007 to 2013, serving as a both a full-time teacher and the tutor for at-risk and low performing students in grades K-3.

### ***School Context #2***

Another rural school, Stacy’s second school, an elementary with grades PK through 5<sup>th</sup>, is much larger than her first, with an enrollment of 419 (state School Report Card. Stacy explained, “I teach at a good school with good parents.” A predominately white population (64 percent, according to their State School Report Card), the 28 percent of district enrollment fell into the category “Economically Disadvantaged.” The elementary school houses approximately 18 teachers with two to three teachers per grade.

### ***Support***

When I asked Stacy about the support she may have received from her school as she implemented changes inspired by her Summer Institute and Writing Project experiences, she paused. She could not recall specific support but acknowledged that she felt free to make whatever changes she found helpful. Stacy explained in her first interview, “Anytime I want to do anything, or I’ve asked to do anything [...] I kind of have free reign to do that. [...] they’re supportive of my adventures...” (Interview 1).

## *Challenges*

With no constraints placed on her as she made her own curricular choices, Stacy experienced great autonomy in her teaching. At the same time, all the “adventures” she had with teaching had another effect. The more she learned and accomplished, the greater expectations of her grew with her school. Because she was so invested in improving student learning, she was asked to do more.

Stacy faced a frustration, something she explained, “...hurt my heart,” as she returned to teaching with new classroom practices from her experience with the Summer Institute. She explained, “I think the more I learned, the more I [...] want[ed] to share that knowledge and those ideas and [...] just talk about it.” But many of her “co-teachers were not interested at all” (Interview 1). Some were, but with so much “good stuff” to share, it was disappointing when others were not receptive. “When we have such a passion for what we do. We want other people to have that passion too.” She made the point, though, that this was not the case with her SI cohort, the “friend group” she found with the SI.

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Professional Growth Experiences

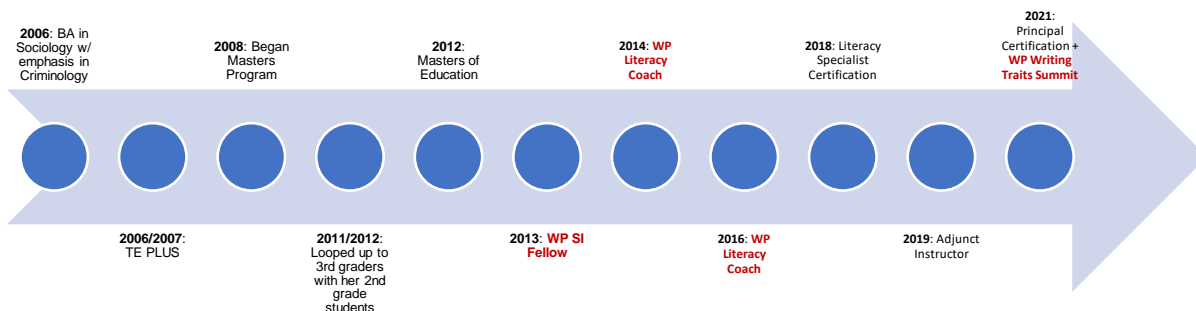


Figure 23: Highlights from Stacy's Timeline of Significant Professional Growth

In our second interview, Stacy and I looked at a timeline table I had drafted from studying the transcript from our first interview, along with her initial survey and artifacts like her resumé and the About Me slides from the slide presentations (Artifacts D & E). We began our discussion, focusing on *shifts* in her teaching. Stacy named three important shifts: 1) *beginning grad school in 2008 to learn how to better teach reading*, 2) *grant work that brought her local Writing Project to her school*, and 3) *shifting from teacher to teacher-leader*. The first shift began after her first year of teaching when Stacy realized that she did not know how to teach reading. Despite the alternative certification and her training from the TE-Plus program, when it came to teaching elementary students to read, she felt a vast gap. Wanting to meet her students' needs, Stacy began a master's program with her local university in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum with an emphasis in Reading. About the

same time, Stacy was trained in Literacy First. It's not listed here, as it was not noted as one of the most significant growth experiences.

The second shift (not noted on the timeline) came from the grant work brought to Stacy's first elementary school. The visiting professors, both instructors Stacy would work with to complete her degree, planted a seed that grew into curiosity about her local Writing Project. The grant work process was a first peek into learning as a community of teachers—Stacy found both the process and community “enlightening.” So, a few years later, when... Stacy would attend the 2013 Summer Institute for her local Writing Project.

The final shift we discussed continues today. Stacy's experience with the Writing Project grew into a platform for sharing best practices through multiple venues. First as a TC giving workshops for her local site, then as a coach working with new SI Fellows in 2014 and 2016, and today that platform includes sharing the work of the Writing Project with the teachers at her school. She has encouraged several teachers from her school to apply for and attend the summer institute.

While Stacy tends to downplay her alternative certification, she also admits that the training she received through the TE PLUS program helped her in significant ways. That first year of teaching, however, left Stacy reflecting on the gaps between what she knew about teaching and what she still needed to learn—namely, how to teach reading. That's why she began her master's program in the fall of 2008.

By the spring of 2011, Stacy had grown confident and highly effective in her ability to teach reading but realized that all she had accomplished with her second graders would be for naught, without the continuity of instruction. So, she asked her principal, making a case for her to loop up to the third grade with the same students who had been her 2<sup>nd</sup>-graders. Stacy counts



this as a significant professional growth experience because she was able to intentionally reflect on the effectiveness of her teaching practice as she studied the student growth.

Stacy completed her Master's in 2012, but without the Literacy Specialist Certification she originally hoped for. At the time, she was ready to be done with grad school and to take a well-earned break. The following summer, Stacy began an intense three and a half weeks as a Fellow with her local Writing Project's Summer Institute. As Stacy double checked the timeline, she paused here to note that the Writing Project is her #1 Significant Experience of professional growth. In addition to her Summer Institute, she includes her experiences as a coach in the 2014 and 2016 summer institutes. Coach is a term that continues to morph into different names and purposes, depending on the local site and depending on the times. Stacy's role as a Literacy Coach for her WP's Summer Institute was to coach one group of Fellows with their writing and another group of Fellows with their Presentations. She continued her work as a leader with her site, as she facilitated a Writing Traits Summit in 2021 and was one of the Teacher Consultants leading professional development with the Engaging Humanities with Art grant in 2022.

Towards the end of our first interview, Stacy explained, "I don't know that I've ever had a professional development, like the Writing Project."

### **Writing Project Contributions to Classroom Practice**

When asked if she noticed a difference with her students after her 2013 Summer Institute, Stacy explained that her students learned to expect "lots of writing" with "tons of quickwrites" and an intentional focus on writing process. It was no longer about "one and done," but something deeper. With all the quickwrites She learned to empower her students by making sure they read something aloud they had written—often utilizing a "turn and talk"

strategy—most every day. This served as “publishing” their writing and gave each student the opportunity to be seen and heard by at least a partner or small group as daily practice throughout the school year. Stacy also explained that she became more organized and intentional in her teaching of writing, less focused on “red ink” and more focused on process and believes these changes, “made my students better writers.”

She was quick to point out in our interview, as well as her video presentation, that while she is more focused on the process, not *everything* students write goes through all phases of the process to publishing. In her video, she explained that at least 70 percent of what students write should be spent in pre-writing activities—a essential stage that allows for the generation and development of ideas. Her students learned to expect daily writing and that for a week or for two weeks, they would also be developing one of their ideas into a finished piece. Daily writing often included other subjects, like creating a math problem or notetaking—students wrote every day in math, English, and reading. When her students wrote in social studies, they wrote about what they learned and sometimes wrote stories. She explained that when students write about the concepts they’re learning, “they being to own it.” Having a conversation about what they are writing helps to “internalize it.”

### **Writing Project Contributions to Stacy’s Sustained Professional Growth**

Stacy came to the Writing Project with unique traits that likely helped as she learned the NWP model and integrated certain principles into her classroom practice. She explained in our first interview that she intentionally learns something new every year. Certainly, her stance as “forever a student” would make her receptive to the tenets and philosophy undergirding the work of the Writing Project, especially as it asks of Fellows of Summer Institutes to take on stances of *teacher as writer*, *teacher as researcher*, and *teacher as leader*. Additionally, in our

second interview Stacy shared that she'd been writing short stories since she was a junior in high school. Taking on the stance of teacher as writer may have been an easy transition for Stacy. In addition to her warmth and encouraging presence, Stacy demonstrated a curiosity about how students learn that seems to have driven her to deepen her understanding of pedagogy, improve her practices, and turn toward research. Another important trait to consider would be how Stacy values connections and community. She talked about the Writing Project being what we all need because it's "good for our souls" and how it hurts her heart to have such good things to share but be met with what seemed like indifference or disinterest of many of her colleagues.

That sense of community seems to have been an important way to sustain Stacy's professional growth—through a professional community. In speaking about the Writing Project, Stacy often used the pronoun "we," which seems to indicate how closely she identifies as a member of this group. When she read the definition for Sustained Professional Growth, she explained,

I love the *identity, roles and work are defined*, because I think the identity portion ... We're just [...], as a group, the [...] Writing Project is... we're just pretty special. And so I definitely identify with just being part of that group. I love the *diverse knowledge*, I think that [...] we challenge ourselves to not be okay with status quo, but to learn more and be better and do more and share that knowledge ... and, and I love that.

In challenging the status quo, Stacy seems to be speaking about the research piece where SI Fellows and TCs identify the burning questions they have about their classroom practices, explore what the research says, and try it out in the classroom. Then, once a TC has reflected on the effectiveness of their teaching by looking at student work, namely student writing, they can pull what worked well for their future presentations.

In our first interview, Stacy referred to her “Writing Project friendship group.” She may have been referencing her original cohort or may have included additional connections with TCs as she facilitated two Summer Institutes as a coach, as well as the other work she has done. But in our second interview, Stacy specifically referred to her original group of Fellows in the 2013 SI and explained that the vast majority of them, all but two, moved on from their original teaching context into leadership positions either within or outside where they had been teaching. It seems that the Writing Project has been a transformational experience for Stacy and that likely stems from being part of a community that values her wisdom, her experience, and her voice. That sense of community seems to have created a space for Stacy to try research-based or proven practices with her own students. Additionally, her community with like-minded professionals—other teachers passionate about teaching, research, writing, and teaching writing—gave Stacy important opportunities to lead, as well as learn.

Stacy admitted that she has never experienced professional development like the Writing Project. It seems to have sustained her professional growth, first into becoming a better teacher of writing and then as a teacher-leader working beside others wanting to improve their own teaching, then as an instructor of preservice teachers. Finally, the Writing Project allowed Stacy to see herself as a leader. She may have, eventually, made her way into administration without the Writing Project, but it seems to me that her NWP experiences helped to smooth that part of her journey.

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## Mentor Texts Referenced by Stacy

- Holbrook, S. (2010). *Zombies! Evacuate the school*. Illustrated by Karen Sandstrom. Wordsong.
- Kaufman Orlaff, K., & Catrow, D. (2004). *I wanna iguana*. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

## Online Resources Shared by Stacy

In addition to sharing the link to her State Department of Education, Stacy shared:

- Florida Center for Reading Research – <http://fcrr.org>
- Education Northwest - <http://educationnorthwest.org/traits>
- National Writing Project - <http://www.nwp.org/>
- Read, Write, Think - <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

## **Chapter 4.4: Nested Case Four—Daniel Johansen**

Danielle Johansen began her teaching career in the fall of 2007, just after completing her master's degree in literacy the spring before. By then her own children were no longer in elementary. It had been important for Danielle to remain home when her daughter and son were younger, so she found other sources of income, like caring for other children and running a small construction company with her husband. She began her career as an educator teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts in a middle school nestled in a small, affluent community, part of a larger township. In addition to teaching in a public school, she has served as an adjunct instructor two local universities.

In 2018, Danielle gave herself the gift of immersing herself for a full month into a fellowship with her local Writing Project's Summer Institute. The following school year, she served as co-director for their NWP site and the following summer, co-led the next summer institute. As a teacher consultant (her site uses the term "teacher leader"), Danielle continues to present for advanced institutes, presents for students as well as in-service teachers, and consults with local schools.

Before her summer institute, Danielle had already been questioning the results of her teaching. In particular, she and her team questioned the annual research assignment that provided minimal results. Despite an investment into scaffolding students with better strategies and greater support, the results remained lackluster at best. About this same time, she recalled overhearing students leaving her classroom all abuzz about "points on the rubric." This really bothered her. She explained in our first interview and reiterated in later conversations, "I want them walking out talking about learning."

When Danielle arrived at her local Writing Project’s Summer Institute, she was ready for transformation. Perhaps transformation is the wrong term. Throughout much of our three conversations, Danielle explained how much the Writing Project affirmed for her much of what she was learning as part of her teaching journey. She had already helped to pilot an educational program that partnered her students with 8<sup>th</sup>-graders from Bangladesh, a project she continued after the SI, but with greater intention and purpose. Affirmation that teaching could be something other than the traditional classroom began as a seed planted, first with her master’s research on intrinsic motivation that led her to learn about National Writing Project, and then from her Summer Institute Inquiry Project/Presentation that fed her curiosity about gradeless classrooms and creating an environment conducive to student driven learning.

Before learning her classroom and Writing Project stories, however, I learned from Danielle’s initial survey how she rated her classroom practice for each of the elements of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (Fig. 24).

### **Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy**

<b>Participan</b>	<b>EWP.A</b> Time	<b>EWP.B</b> Choice	<b>EWP.C</b> Low-stakes	<b>EWP.D</b> Modeling	<b>EWP.E</b> Mentor Texts	<b>EWP.F</b> Collaborative	<b>EWP.G</b> Conferencing	<b>EWP.H</b> Publishing	<b>EWP.I</b> Portfolios	<b>EWP.J</b> Reflective	<b>EWP</b> <b>AVG</b>
<b>4</b> Danielle Johansen	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Mean</b> from 7	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
<b>Mean</b> from 71	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	81.7

*Figure 24: Danielle’s Ratings for Elements of EWP*

### **Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts**

Danielle’s first interview took place via Zoom on January 26, 2022. Three days later she withdrew from the study due to a family emergency. I’d found our interview so compelling, that I emailed her in February, asking permission to use her interview, despite her bowing out

of further research. She emailed me back, explaining that while she did not have time to gather artifacts or create a video she could do a second interview, which happened August 8, 2022. In our conversation, several ideas for artifacts came up and Danielle uploaded several Google links in the chat: a simple resumé; a curriculum map for Schools to Watch application called a “Classroom of Inquiry;” an outline for a book she plans to write about her curriculum; a workshop outline titled, “Authentic Writing Sparked by Mentor Texts;” and two articles cowritten with the director of her local Writing Project, one a published chapter and the other an unpublished article.

I gave Danielle time to decide about a video—we’d discussed the possibility of videoing a workshop presentation. However, on September 20<sup>th</sup>, she sent a video highlighting her contribution to the pilot and subsequent collaborations between students in the US and students in another country, along with two additional artifacts: a link to a Google doc with prompts for her 2022/2023 Growth/Reflection Journal and a Canva link to an infographic inspired from leading an Advanced Institute with her local Writing Project.

Additionally, in a September 2022 email she also suggested a couple of students who might be interested in being interviewed. While we had not discussed this previously, I was intrigued, especially, when one of the students in the email chain responded within the same hour. According to my IRB, this would require a modification in my methods design—namely, creating new documents for parent permission and student consent to include video recording (approved September 28, 2022). I interviewed two students: Michael (all names are pseudonyms), a male student from Danielle’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade class of 2021/2022 and, Sahna, a female student from her then current class of 2022/2023. Both interviews have been transcribed.



Michael joined me via Zoom on November 23<sup>rd</sup> and provided several artifacts via email. Within the email he copied the text for a NYT OP/ED contest submission, two unfinished writing prompts from his Sparks and Starts Journal, along with a response based on images. He also share several Google links to other work completed while in Danielle’s class: a shared document of questions from students in the Bangladesh project (which I will not use because I don’t have consent from the other students), a link to his Growth/Reflection Journal, three Edu/Blogs, a NYT Book Review Submission, a link to the Inquiry Journal where he contemplated year-long inquiry, and a script of his TED Talk, the final product for his research.

Sahna met me via Zoom on November 26<sup>th</sup>, but she has not yet sent artifacts. We talked about her sending the following: an example that shows off her growth as a writer / her ability to write freely and “authentically,” her memoir pieces (100-word memoir, 500-word memoir, and a poem), and couple of examples from each of your journals (Sparks & Starts, Growth Reflection, Inquiry Journal). Her words appear on the image of the Wonder Wall Danielle sent and I quote Sahna’s wondering in the paragraph below.

Danielle’s final interview took place in June 2023. I had emailed her with a few questions, and she suggested we meet face-to-face. This time, in our Zoom conversation, Danielle sat at her desk in her cleared-for-summer classroom. Afterwards she sent me images of the Wonderwall and a picture of her classroom reading corner. The Wonder Wall was labeled in block yellow letters, “WHAT WE WONDER,” against a teal background. It was filled with colorful squares and triangles with large print, wondering questions from her students, like, “Will we ever learn to break the habit of comparing ourselves to others” (Sahna). Their wonderings appeared to be a spark for their curiosities and possibly for their yearlong pursuit of inquiry. The Wonder Wall included a few parent wonderings, as well.

Danielle’s classroom reading corner looked like a cozy space, hosting a lovely gray and white rug with an assortment of gray bean bags and blue and navy bean bag chairs (six seats total), surrounded by seven gray two-shelf bookcases, loaded with a classroom library. Displayed atop each shelf are what might be recommended books for student consideration: I can see familiar titles like Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*, Jason Reynolds’ *Ghost* and *Lu*, John Green’s *Turtles All the Way Down*, and the focus of one of Michael’s writings, *Boys on the Boat*. These are but a few, along with other titles from authors like Mitch Albom and Ayn Rand. The cinderblock walls of this reading corner are painted in a golden yellow and host a wall quote in black lettering, large enough to take up the entirety of one whole cinderblock—words by Pablo Neruda: “The books that help you most are those that make you think the most.”

***Time—100%***

*Time* for writing is built into each day with the different journals (most often a Google doc set up as a table) her students currently maintain four journals: Sparks & Starts for ideas, observations, and wonderings; Growth Reflections where they reflect on their daily learning, Book Thoughts where they jot down their connections, questions, and respond to the books they are reading, and Inquiry Journals as they flesh out their ideas that will eventually turn into a TED Talk. Writing is a daily activity. Students write for multiple reasons: to explore their wonderings about what they are reading and experiencing in life, to reflect on their learning for the day, to generate ideas and thinking about their yearlong inquiry projects, and brainstorming what they might ask of the students they partner with in Spain and Bangladesh. They also write to examine their own learning and contemplate their next steps in ongoing projects. Sometimes they simply write whatever is on their mind. They write every day.

Their daily writing serves as sparks and seeds for bigger ideas and projects. After a mini-lesson or 10-minute opener by Danielle, students will most often write in their Sparks and Starts journal – a great space for *seed work*, but mostly for getting their “thoughts onto paper” (Sahna, S2 Interview). I found examples of daily writing in Michael’s artifacts. In our conversation he explained that his Sparks & Starts journal would have the most writing overall (30 pages worth), writing that happened at the beginning of class. The samples Michael shared included an unfinished piece of a narrative and a response to two images. The narrative included bits of a suspenseful plotline unfolding on a school bus at a particular time at the end of the school day. I found myself wanting to read more. Michael’s other example was in response to two images, a bridge and something he called the “I’m sorry picture.” His responses to both showed a writer willing to be curious by focusing on descriptive details, followed by insightful thinking. For example, Michael wrote:

... bridges represent going to a new area, a new chapter in life. This bridge is uneven and looks hard to cross, it is broken and poorly taken care of. Sometimes that's how people are to themselves too. They think that crossing that broken bridge is impossible so they don't try...

Michael also shared links to his Reflection Journal, where students wrote at the end of class, and to a Google doc labeled, “Inquiry/Reactions Journal” where he posted questions and grappled with his research. In addition to writing in journals, students also wrote blogs based on their wonderings and connections with the self-chosen books they read for class.

Additionally, time is important to Danielle’s classroom practice in ways that go beyond writing. In Artifact I, “Inquiry Ignites!” Danielle and her coauthor share a core belief about authentic inquiry *not* beginning “with a thesis statement but with an exploration that takes time.”

## Choice—100%

As an inquiry-based classroom, Danielle’s students have an abundance of choice. The yearlong inquiry project begins with students exploring two key elements: their life’s purpose and their wonderings. In our first interview, Danielle explained,

Wondering [...] always starts in the beginning of the year. I want them [...], when they read [...] anything or hear anything, [to] start to collect questions about what they’re wondering about. So, it captures what they’re curious about life.

<b>Date:</b> 3/16/22
<b>Today’s Guiding Question or Thought:</b> How do different people’s views on their standardized test scores change how they learn or teach (In the case of a teacher looking at students’ scores).
<b>Source:</b> Mindset The New Psychology of Success - Carol S Dweck
<b>Thoughts (observations), learnings (insights), questions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bottom of page 178 - top of 179, talking about kid who frequently scored in the top 99% on standardized tests and believed he was better than everyone else but wouldn’t take on new things, standardized testing causes insecurity and thinking you will fail??</li><li>• Sentence examples on page 181, she seems kinda crazy and sometime what the kids want is just for someone to tell them straight up and not do the weird leading around it or stuff like that.</li><li>• 185 - Parents blaming coaches and referees for the loss, could this be in part to the constructive criticism they got or why do they do this, what could’ve caused them not to talk when they were talked to?</li><li>• How many people think they have a growth mindset but don’t actually.</li><li>• How does “Expert” advice affect people and when they don’t take it why don’t they?</li></ul>
<b>Powerful Expert Thoughts / Compelling Evidence I want to cite and use / Statistics:</b>
<b>Ending Question after today’s research (This question may be the same one you started with, an expanded question, a narrowed question, or a totally different question that was sparked from today’s reading/listening/viewing.)</b> How does advice change how we think?

Figure 25: Modeling Example for the Inquiry Journal

Danielle’s first semester intentionally provides structures for students to explore both their purpose and their wonderings. As second semester begins, students rely more heavily on the

Inquiry Journal, where choice remains an essential element. As she explained in our first interview and as I could see in Michael’s shared example, each entry begins and ends with a question. Note in Figure 25 how the Ending Question gives student options for the question they will begin with on the following day. This was important for Danielle because she wanted to keep the inquiry an authentic pursuit of knowledge, centered on the aspirations and curiosities of her students.

Both Michael and Sanna appreciated the choices offered by Danielle’s curriculum.

Michael explained in our interview that the freedom to choose what they read and how that led into his thinking about his other work was one of his favorite things about the class. He wrote in his Reflection Journal:

As a result of having the overall choice of our book [...] made it easier to pick out what we wanted to research and learn more about. I think it also helped me find out what I wanted my topic to revolve around, it helped me decide on that aspect of it and really changed my mind on some issues. (pg. 10)

Sanna reiterated the positive side of having the freedom of choice. In our interview she shared:

I think that, like the freeness of our ability, like our ability to do whatever we want in our class, and to explore the material that we want, and really engage, in ... you know, engage in our interests and grow in whichever ways to we choose to really helps us to improve in all areas.

Danielle talked briefly about choice in our first interview. She encourages teachers to “stop worrying about” teaching a specific novel, because in a diverse classroom, “There’s no way there’s going to be one book that’s good for all of them, necessarily.” And she directs them to the NCTE position papers, saying “It should be choice.” Further evidence of Danielle’s belief in choice can be found in Artifact I where the authors shared this value: “Students must have choice and direct their own learning to challenge themselves.”

### ***Low-stakes Writing—100%***

On her survey, Danielle wrote about how her students keep a Growth/Reflections Journal for formative assessment, rather than traditional grades, “to create an environment

where they can play and learn while gaining the reading and writing skills of an 8<sup>th</sup>-grader.” Danielle seems to base her entire class on low-stakes writing, as well as low-stakes learning. While the idea of a gradeless classroom piqued her interest in her master’s research, it was the Summer Institute that moved her to explore this concept within her classroom practice. She “kept seeing grades as a way of getting in the way” (Interview 1) of learning and of students seeing themselves as writers. In the yet-to-be published article she co-wrote with her NWP director, Danielle explained, that students “were performing for grades, or test scores, and not for the love of learning” (Artifact D, Author & Turner, 2021). In their first published article, they wrote about Danielle seeing grades as a hindrance to “curiosity and creativity” (Artifact E, Author & Turner, 2020).

In order for her class to be “about evolving and practicing and trying to see what it was like to be a writer” (Interview 1) and to focus her students on learning, rather than achievement (Artifact D, Author & Turner, 2021), Danielle abandoned traditional grades, essentially giving every student an A, and focusing on more meaningful and authentic assessments. Rather than labeling student work with a letter or percentage grade, her formative assessments included the daily reflections logs, written by the students. These served as guidance for conferences and data to inform an unfolding curriculum, designed to meet the specific needs of her students. Additionally, Danielle kept a spreadsheet of “Student Lives” with extensive notes and details about each student’s “skills, interests, past scores, struggles, and personal information” (Artifact I). Students wrote quarterly letters to their parents about what they were learning. Danielle used all of this rich and authentic data to write detailed “progress reports in lieu of entering traditional grades” (Artifact D).

Both of Danielle’s students had something to say about this gradeless approach. For Michael, having no grade made a huge difference. He wrote in his Reflection Journal:

Having no grades changed how I write and I think it accomplished exactly what it was supposed to, overall it really made it a lot easier to write and learn how to research well and how to write with a purpose showing others what you are thinking. The lack of grades made it easy to spend time doing other things besides just working and doing something as fast as possible to meet a deadline or show that you’re an efficient worker. (Artifact 1.e)

At first, Sahna didn’t see the point of no grades, of simply having the class “as a space to grow.” But by the time she spoke with me in November, she had a better understanding. “Because while exploring our own interests and growth, we’ve also grown as readers and writers. She further explained, “I think that it’s really nice to just have a place to let it all out, with like no criticism or no grade.” Without the fear of getting it wrong or making mistakes, Sahna believed she was free “to explore more adventurous forms of writing that I probably wouldn’t be able to try out in any other classes.”

***Modeling—100%***

“As the lead learner and writer” in her classroom, Danielle models anything she asks her students “to do so they see [her] struggles and learning journey.” She shares her “own writing pieces—texts that highlight craft and ideas that are relevant to students.” Not only does Danielle keep “models of [her] own journals to show” students, she also models her thinking—allowing students to see how she stretches and connects “ideas from book to book, drawing upon [her] life experiences to make observations about humanity.”

Additionally, the concept came up again and again throughout our conversations and in the artifacts she provided. In our second conversation she brought up a state she’d heard reiterated as a central Writing Project concept, “Teachers of writing should be writers.” We were talking about teachers who depended on formulaic kinds of writing for their students and imagined that if they were forced to write with the intent of publication, they would teach

differently. When teachers write authentically, they have to grapple with all the issues students must struggle with. In working toward more authentic reasons for writing and the concept of publication, Danielle’s students “appreciate” when she shares her own writing. Danielle is not talking about sharing final copies, but rather her process, including the places where she struggles or gets stuck.

Much of the modeling we discussed and that can be found in her artifacts seems to focus on in-service teachers for whom Danielle has provided professional development or the preservice teachers she has instructed. In discussing the workshops she offers for her district’s Staff Colleges—Danielle shared that while many topics is about literacy, but she covers other topics as well, topics like “Changing Our Nutrition.” No matter the topic, within the presentation she models “how to read with a questioning stance” (Interview 1). She is modeling a strategy for her colleagues to take back to their own classrooms and try with their own students. It’s not the content, so much as the modeling a literacy practice to deepen the learning.

The authenticity she brings to her teaching of writing is also present in how she models her process for learning and for being a perceptive and compassionate human being. Danielle explained in our second interview:

I just always want to mirror me being an active learner. I just want to always create that environment for my students, and I think you know the reason I read and write so much is because I care about what I’m doing.

During our last conversation, Danielle shared an infographic (Artifact H) inspired by a recent advanced institute, reminding participants that “The Teacher Is the Model.” The top heading reads, “The Kind of Human in the Front of the Classroom Matters,” comparing the traits we hope to instill in our students as traits teachers need to model as they teach. Instructions included six salient points: 1) “Have a Growth Mindset,” 2) “Be Lifelong Learners,” 3) “Value



Children’s Thoughts,” 4) “Be on a Self-Awareness Journey,” 5) “Be Curious,” and 6) “Be Brave.” For Danielle, modeling goes beyond mere strategies, because “No matter what goes on in your classroom, it begins with who you are as a human being” (Interview 3).

***Mentor Texts—100%***

Many of the pages in the Sparks and Starts Journal are filled with “sparks” of mentor texts—poems and excerpts from books and articles that Danielle uses “to spark a writing idea and expose” her students “to a writing tool/craft.” Evidence of Danielle’s use of mentor texts can be found in the artifacts she provided. In the Curriculum map for Inquiry Year (Artifact B), used by her school for their “Schools to Watch Designation” (Interview 1 and school website, 2023), mentor texts are used in a year-long collaboration with a first-grade class. She included, “Throughout the year-long process, students will use mentor texts to guide

and inspire them.” Danielle’s students spent time getting to know a class of 1<sup>st</sup>-graders, and studying children’s books, in order to write their own children’s book for a specific child. In their first published manuscript (Artifact E, Author & Turner, 2021), Danielle’s coauthor



Figure 26: Mentor Texts as Writing Tools

mentioned the use of mentor texts for a yearlong inquiry project, specifically, Kelly Gallagher's *Article of the Week* and the *United Nation's Sustainable Goals*. Additionally, Danielle shared the outline (Artifact F) for a Writing Project presentation she created delivered to a nearby school district, "Authentic Writing Sparked by Mentor Texts." In the introduction of the outline, she wrote,

Workshop attendees will experience how mentor texts spark relevant and personal writing, learn how these sparks become the seeds of pieces that can be developed into longer ones for an authentic audience, and play with the craft from the mentor texts so they can feel why this practice will advance their students and their own writing skills.

Figure 26, an infographic and original creation linked in the outline, makes a case for the use of mentor texts, along with advice like "Give students plenty of time to explore..."

Furthermore, example mentor texts could be found embedded in her template for the Growth Reflection journal (Artifact G). These mentor texts took various forms from book excerpts to entire articles. When students worked on their own 100-word memoirs, they had access to 16 examples from the New York Times. The use of mentor texts is clearly a practice well integrated into Danielle's teaching. She later explained that the texts used for the Sparks and Starts Journal were also linked to their Growth Reflection Journal" allowing students easy access to the writing and tool they "played with that day."

### ***Collaborative Learning—100%***

There was not a conversation with Danielle where we did not end up talking about some kind of collaborations, whether with parents who commented on student blogs or collaborations with other countries like Bangladesh or participating in the Global Read-Around. While some of that happened before the Summer Institute, Danielle's SI experience "cemented" (Interview 3) for her the need for authentic audiences, along with writing and learning for real purposes, driven by her students' interests. To recreate that authentic learning

experience with real audiences, Danielle teamed up with a colleague who was teaching Environmental Science to seniors at a nearby high school. Their first collaboration focused on the TEDEd Student Talks her 8<sup>th</sup>-graders presented. Danielle wanted, “them to have an audience that was beyond the students in their classes, where [...] they were going to share their knowledge and get feedback back and forth as they were building their talk” (Interview 1). Later, Danielle evolved the TED Talks into a collaboration with Spain, where students served, not only as authentic audiences for one another, but genuine collaborators, asking probing questions and providing feedback throughout what grew into a year-long process. Both Michael and Sahna mentioned the projects with Bangladesh and Spain, as favorite experiences in Danielle’s classroom.

During the pandemic shutdown of 2020 (Interview 3), Danielle collaborated once again with her friend who teaches high school science, both abandoning curriculums that were not working in an online/virtual environment (Artifact I). Instead, they found a way to combine classes and brought their students together for writing that reflected that moment in time. They centered their students’ reading and writing on what personal impact the pandemic and shut down were having in their own lives. Rather than grouping students in search for right answers, their small group collaborations formed with the intent “to spark ideas based on what they were reading” (Article I, pg.10) for the articles they wanted to write.

This joint venture between two teachers and their students created a plethora of other collaborations. For example, they brought in experts, like the journalist to was writing about the COVID pandemic to help students read information critically and become “credible creators” (Artifact I, pg. 9) in their own writings. Students ended up collaborating with others

outside of the project, interviewing experts through their own research and family connections to learn about their experiences with the pandemic.

While Danielle shared extraordinary experiences (including the Global Read Around, not described here) with outside collaborations, she also made Writing Groups a practice within her classroom. In artifact G, the template for her 2022 Growth/Reflection Journal, Danielle included a link for completing a “Writing Memo” as preparation for meeting with small groups to workshop their writing pieces. Figure 27 shows a screen shot taken from a link Danielle provided, guiding students as they workshop each other’s writing.

Group Members:		
Writing Workshop Guidelines	Group Norms	Stems for Discussing Writing
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Come prepared with your <a href="#">writer's memo</a>. (What do you want your readers to focus on?)</li> <li>2. Share your piece with the group members.</li> <li>3. The author should read the piece aloud while the group members read along silently. Listeners may take notes</li> <li>4. After the author shares the piece, the author needs to remain <b>quiet</b> and listen as the group members: share what is working, summarize the piece, and share their questions and ideas. The author may take notes.</li> <li>5. Now, the author and members can discuss and ask questions. The author might want to jot down any insights, so he remembers when he comes back to the piece.</li> </ol>	<p>Listen and stay focused on the person sharing.</p> <p>Be kind and helpful.</p> <p>Thank the person for sharing!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I love..</li> <li>• I wanted to know more about....</li> <li>• Did you intentionally ...</li> <li>• I wish you would include more details here and “paint the picture”...</li> <li>• You might consider...</li> <li>• I’m still confused....</li> <li>• I wonder/I wish</li> <li>• Have you thought about....</li> <li>• Who is your audience?</li> <li>• What is your purpose?</li> </ul> <p><b>Add sentence starters/stems as you engage in writing workshop to help facilitate discussion:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>

Figure 27: Guidance for Writing Groups

The “writer’s memo” link took students to another Google Doc for the author to complete a brief “about” statement and spaces to note the intended audience and purpose. Additional space encouraged authors share the aspects they feel “comfortable with” and questions for the reader—all with the intention to help drive the feedback process.

### ***Conferencing—100%***

While we did not talk specifically about conferencing, I asked her how she managed all the journals her students keep via Google docs. She does not need to “manage” them necessarily. While she does make comments on their journals, she mostly focuses on having “real-time” conversations with them. She has “65 language arts students doing 65 different things.” Through her conferencing, she is better able to meet each student’s individual needs as they learn research skills about their own questions and topics.

Additionally, Danielle wrote about conferencing in the unpublished article (Artifact D, Author & Turner, 2021). She and her coauthor explained that conferencing was used for both assessing where a student needed help and providing direct feedback. Danielle wrote,

Some of the most important data I collect comes from the individual and group conferences, which is how I spend most of my class time. In short, five-ten minute blocks, I can listen to their struggles and offer strategies to help them evolve. (Artifact D, Author & Turner, 2021, p. 6)

Both one-on-one and group conferencing were essential to the yearlong inquiry project, as well as Danielle’s formative assessments described above (Artifact E, Author & Turner, 2020).

### ***Publishing—100%***

For Danielle, authentic writing goes beyond the teacher and the grade and must be focused on reaching an authentic audience. In her presentation outline (Artifact F), Danielle wrote, “...this workshop focuses on creating authentic Writing Projects. The best writing has a real purpose and an authentic audience, neither of them being the teacher or grade.” While Danielle’s class is set up for sharing their writing with one another, her students work towards final products they share with extraordinary audiences like students in other countries in Spain and Bangladesh. They also spend the year writing for contests like those in the New York Times.

Danielle’s student, Michael, share both the final script for his Ted Talk and a Book Review about *Boys in the Boat*, he wrote for the New York Times. While his entries were not selected out of the tens of thousands of entries, both he and Danielle assured me that she has had several students published. Michael’s topic for his yearlong inquiry project and TED Talk explored the history of standardized testing, the positive effects, along with negative impact and many inconsistencies. After exploring the “tremendous effect on both students and teachers” he posed an important question for his listeners/readers, “Should standardized tests still have such a significant effect on the way we teach and learn in 2022?” (Artifact, 1.h.2).

Both Danielle and her student, Michael, mentioned the app Book Creator (<https://bookcreator.com/>) as a space where students shared and collaborated. It allowed them to publish more than words—audio and video could be published as well, creating a professional look for a multi-mode final product. It was central to the collaboration between Danielle’s 8<sup>th</sup>-graders and the seniors in Environment Science, allowing them to create a 579-page book—579 pages filled with students’ thoughts, feelings, interviews, and artwork.

Publishing can take many forms and is not always saved for final products. It can happen along the way, as students share from their journals or other writing in various stages. The example I found from Danielle’s practice came from Sahna. Danielle wrote that she and her students “develop Wondering Journals where we post all our wonderings, curiosities, and fascinations that arise from living each day and from our reading,” (Survey). This past school year (2022/2023), Danielle and her students created a “Wonder Wall” where they each chose a significant wondering from their journals to post or “publish.”

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—100%***

For Danielle’s students, the portfolio is not a single manilla folder nor a single electronic file, but the consideration of their work and final products as a whole. The use of Google Classroom and the Book Creator app allowed each of Danielle’s students to create a collection of their work in-progress as well as final products – copies of contest entries, blogs about their readings scripts for their TED Talks, and in Book Creator, students were able to post videos of their TED Talks. In our final conversation, Danielle shared that her students and the students in Spain voted on the Top Ten TED Talks from each country, sending those speakers on to the next level with the TED Ed program.

In reflecting over the pieces for which he was most proud, Michael wrote:

[...] two pieces of writing come to my mind right away with those being the book review contest for the NYT and my ted talk script so far. Both of these projects were completely new forms of writing to me and I think that I did a really good job with both of them. If I had to choose one though, it would have to be the book review. After re-reading the review many times it still reads as one of my favorite pieces that has really changed my writing style. (Growth/Reflection Journal)

Both pieces were born of topics meaningful to Michael—he chose them after given time to choose. And both pieces were written with an intentional audience in mind, an audience beyond his teacher.

In our final conversation, Danielle talked about Dream Portfolios. In a recent workshop she had asked teachers to think about their dream portfolios—in a perfect world, what authentic products and experiences could they imagine their students creating and curating? Danielle asked those teachers to compare the assignments they gave with the imagined Dream Portfolio and “they couldn’t think of one assignment in high school that wasn’t for them, or the grade.” (Interview 3). When I asked Danielle about the Dream Portfolio she envisions, she replied,

something like the [...] Ted Talk, a podcast. I want them to be able to do interviews and then write articles, and [...] reach out to people [...] to have made contact with

somebody that they want to speak with or are fascinated with, and you know struggle with getting that contact. (Interview 3)

Not only does Danielle seem to be always thinking of the next experience to practice “reading, writing, listening, and speaking” with her students, but she is also pushing forward an interesting way to consider what a portfolio is. With the components of authentic purpose and audience, a portfolio in Danielle’s classroom is certainly more than a mere collection of writing.

### ***Reflective Teaching—100%***

Not only has Danielle demonstrated her own reflective teaching, she uses her students reflections in their Growth/Reflection Journals to assess their learning and build relationships.

She wrote in the survey:

We also maintain a Growth Reflection Journal because I give all my student’s “A”s to create an environment where they can play and learn while gaining the reading and writing skills of an 8th-grader. They post reflections on each day and how they feel about the lesson, how they believe it might affect their reading and writing and there is a column for personal notes - just basically a place for them to share what is going on in their life or a note to me about something from class. [sic]

Reflective teaching seems to be at the center of who Danielle is as an educator. Perhaps it was completing her master’s degree during her first year of teaching that made it so. That research certainly drove her to consider the environment she was creating for her students. Perhaps her reflective nature comes from her own curiosity. From the beginning of her career, she seems to have questioned how to help her students be better researchers, writers, and learners. Whether reflection was an innate quality Danielle already possessed or something she learned along the way, it certainly has been nurtured through her experience with the Writing Project, both in the collaborations with people who pushed her own thinking and in the writing about her classroom practice with the co-director of her local site.



Evidence of her reflective nature permeates the descriptions of several Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy above, including her decision for a gradeless (all As) classroom. But I think Danielle provides a recipe, so to speak, for all of us in the front of the classroom that would nurture our own ability to be reflective teachers. Artifact H, the infographic titled “The Kind of Human in Front of the Class Matters,” was “sparked by an advanced institute” (Interview 2) and suggests the following:

1. Have a Growth Mindset
2. Be Lifelong Learners
3. Value Childrens’ Thoughts [sic]
4. Be on a Self-Aware Journey
5. Be Curious
6. Be Brave

Remembering that “the type of human being you are matters” certainly suggests a measure of reflective teaching.

### **Beyond Elements of EWP**

From our conversations and the artifacts both with Danielle and her students, it’s easy to see why she scored 100 percent for each element on the survey. However, Danielle’s classroom practice goes way beyond the 10 elements of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. She creates an authentic environment for learning, based on her students’ interests. She nurtures a community of learners that makes writing and reading workshop viable in her classroom. She has developed a year-long inquiry that works as a project-based learning experience culminating with TED Talks at the end of the school year. And she has connected her classroom with other classrooms on a global scale through projects like the Connect Students Around the World (CSAW) project, Global Read-Around, and TED Ed for Students. Furthermore, Danielle creates a classroom practice based on inspiring her student’s exploration

of authentic learning, centered on their own questions, and driven by discovering their own purposes for engaging in the complex skills of literacy.

## **Experiencing the National Writing Project**

### **Local Writing Project Site**

This local Writing Project is a young site with the NWP, established in 2018 (NWP, nd., website) and housed at a university in a northeastern state. Clicking on the *View Website* option from the NWP Local Sites webpage, viewers are taken to the university site for both preservice and in-service teachers. Those seeking certification can tap in a unique center that combines the resources and work of the Writing Project with a Digital Literacies Collaborative.

The website clearly demonstrated a NWP vision of “a future where every person is an accomplished writer, engaged learner, and active participant in a digital, interconnected world” (Writing Project Website, 2022) It further included links to both an Invitational Summer Institute where SI “Fellows develop as teacher-leaders by engaging in personal and professional writing as well as conducting inquiry into educational areas of interest” and an Open Institute, a five-day workshop for teachers and administrations interested in joining “teacher-writers” in an exploration of artifactual and historical literacies with a local museum. The option for college credit comes with additional reading, writing, and tuition, but scholarships are available. Information about school partnerships and programs for youth and family can also be found on the website. Additionally, the site in 2022 shared the NWP Core Principles:

- Teachers at every level—from kindergarten through college—are the agents of reform; universities and schools are ideal partners for investing in that reform through professional development.
- Writing can and should be taught, not just assigned, at every grade level. Professional development programs should provide opportunities for teachers to work together to

understand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.

- Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.
- There is no single right approach to teaching writing; however, some practices prove to be more effective than others. A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.
- Teachers who are well informed and effective in their practice can be successful teachers of other teachers as well as partners in educational research, development, and implementation. Collectively, teacher-leaders are our greatest resource for educational reform. (Website, 2022)

In 2023, the website is still linked to the NWP site, but much of the content has been revised and updated. Following a link to “How to become a @WP Member” takes inquirers to information about the Summer Institute and application process. Another link to Professional Development provides further links to “School Partnerships,” “Workshops,” and “Certificate in Teaching Writing.” *School Partnerships* seems to be focused on Writing Project Work, while *Workshops* offer a combination of Writing Project and the teaching college. The Certificate in Teaching Writing seems to be from the college. The link, “Community and Youth Programs,” takes you to the link for “Building a more Perfect Union” that houses the secondary and elementary curriculum from 2022 and an electronic anthology of their writing and art products created in the past year.

### **Danielle’s Experience with her Local Writing Project Site**

Danielle’s first experienced her local Writing Project site as a Fellow with the Summer Institute in 2018. Immediately afterwards, according to her survey, she

became the co-director the teacher development strand, but I stepped down from that and now I am a consultant for the school partnerships and present. I taught one year of the Invitational Summer Institute, but wanted to spend more time researching and in the youth programming before I considered that role again. (Survey)

In our first interview, Danielle explained that she took the model of the Summer Institute and replicated it in many ways, like with different pieces they created for their portfolios: “a digital piece,” “an evocative piece,” and “a reflection on our learning.” They also had an inquiry project where they would “research a question, an idea, some pedagogy that [they] were passionate about and create [...] the presentation, the demo.”

In Danielle’s initial survey she wrote that the National Writing Project, “completely changed [her] practice.” She also explained that “[i]mmediately after the Summer Institute, [she] became the co-director [of] the teacher development strand.” She has since stepped down from that role, but continues to present as a TC with school partnerships. In addition to co-directing the Summer Institute in 2019, Danielle contributes to her local site with research, working with youth programming, school partnerships, and presenting advanced institutes. She played a major role in the Building a More Perfect Union, a project funded by a grant with NWP. Danielle’s work with her local Writing Project has also afforded her opportunities to work with NWP leaders, as well as co-writing publications with her site leader.

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

### ***School Context***

Since Fall 2007, Danielle has taught 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Language Arts at the same middle school, and in 2018, the time of her Summer Institute, would have had 15 years teaching experience. For the 2022/2023 school year, she taught three 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Language Arts classes (18-22 students each) and two Literacy Support classes (3-4 students each) for a total of 65 students. Located in an affluent community, the school enrolls about 1400 6<sup>th</sup>- through 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students. In addition to taking Language Arts, students also take English. According to the school’s “Program of Study,” there seems to be some overlap between the two classes, but

compositional skills, in general, seem more prevalent in Language Arts, while English focuses more on literature and writing literary analysis. Michael explained that Language Arts was “more writing-focused” while English is more “reading-focused.” Sahna described it differently:

My English teacher enforces more of like... traditional writing, as opposed to in our Language Arts class, where we're able to experiment with whatever we want, and just get our thoughts on the paper. And I think what makes it even better is that there's no grade. (S2, Interview)

Both students agreed that Ms. Johansen's curriculum was less traditional than their English class, and Michael believed her curriculum to be unique from even the other Language Arts teachers. He explained, “She [...] made her own curriculum [...] that included the best of writing and the best of reading” (S1, Interview).

Danielle began questioning the wisdom of following a team-curriculum lockstep *before* her Summer Institute (Artifact D). Recall, she didn't want students leaving her classroom talking about a rubric (Interview 1)—instead, she wanted her students engaged in and talking about what they were *learning*. So, her experience in those four weeks as a Fellow of the Summer Institute immersed her in her own literacies of reading, writing, researching, and reflecting. And in the process, her questioning and critical stance towards a traditional curriculum was affirmed. Danielle's experience with the Summer Institute and research from those four weeks affirmed her questioning and critical stance, and she felt empowered to try new approaches in her own classroom.

One positive result of Danielle's own curriculum helped her school earn acknowledgment for a number of years, as one of the *Schools to Watch*, a statewide program for highlighting innovative middle schools. The state website explains, “Schools to Watch are Middle-Grade programs recognized for their best practices and continued journey towards

excellence.” Danielle’s innovative classroom practices, especially those born out of her affirming and empowering experience with the National Writing Project, have contributed in major ways toward this distinguishing acknowledgement. Each year, Danielle’s principal asks her to write up the inquiry project and the ways she connects her students globally (Artifact B, “Curriculum Map for Inquiry Year”), a curriculum Danielle created that is vastly different from the other Language Arts and English teachers.

### *Support*

Danielle seems to have received support for the changes she made in her teaching practices from her students, their parents, and the principal. She continues to receive numerous emails from past students sharing things like, “You made me a writer” and “I miss the writing that we did” (Interview 1). She attributes that to the NWP model, “the model worked. I knew, if it was working for me, it would work for them.” The model certainly seems to have worked for Michael and Sahna. Michael believed that Danielle’s curriculum made a difference.

We didn’t really stick to that curriculum like I know a lot of the other classes did or all the other classes did. Like really, I’m not sure what the exact projects were, but they weren’t what we were doing. And I think just like comparing [...] what they learned to what we learned. I still think that we did better not following that curriculum. And I think that... yeah, I think just not following that curriculum and doing it how [Ms. Johansen] did, it was just better in the long term. (S1, Interview)

Danielle’s ability to communicate clearly with both parents and administration helped negotiate challenges and garner support for her non-traditional practices. In the published chapter Danielle wrote with her Writing Project Site Director, they explained that in the beginning, her practices were “understandably questioned.” But Danielle was able to justify her choices with research and “evidence of her students’ growth,” turning those “questions into support of her practice” (Artifact E).

Her principal has been remained an important support, encouraging her in her curriculum choices. Danielle shared,

Honestly, what really cemented it for my principal was that my test scores went up. When I really adopted this practice [...], my state test scores went up, much like 50 percent over my peers. And that was a pretty big thing for our district. (Interview 1)

There were those who said, “*Oh, maybe it’s you. You’re very inspiring*” (Interview 1). Danielle admits that “...attitude matters. I believe in every kid. I love every kid!” But she also believes it’s her job to “spark” each student and “give them an opportunity to read and write about things they care about.” Danielle believed her principal to be behind her, “because she understood” what Danielle was doing and why. Both her commitment to her teaching practice and her relationship with her principal seems to have given Danielle the teacher capital to make innovative changes in her pedagogy and to challenge the system within her school and within the district.

### ***Challenges***

Danielle explained, “I really did have a challenge in my district, and there are times I still have a challenge with them.” Thus, she “loved” both the research content and learning a practice of research from the Writing Project—as she now includes her research when writing her lesson plans, often writing “according to...” (Interview 1). When she communicates directly, she explains, “*This is good instructional practice. This is why I’m doing it.*” And she also pushes back with, “*Please explain to me why you want me to teach that or this way or that curriculum.*”

Danielle described a specific challenge she faced with a supervisor who likely, “...was fearful that [she] wasn’t following *the curriculum...*” (Interview 1). With 500 8<sup>th</sup>-graders and five Language Arts teachers, Danielle considered the perspective of the supervisor, “*What*

*happens if every other kid wasn't going to have the same experience?"* The supervisor even made a comment on Danielle's lesson plans that she was "not following the curriculum." This, despite Danielle's stance of open and clear communication. She explained that she reaches out during the summers with the teaching practices and curriculum changes she plans to make during the school year. She attempted communication concerning grades, the Bangladesh project, the Global Read-Around, and working with Spain on inquiry projects and TED Talks, but he did not respond to her summer emails.

This came to a head when he wrote on her Lesson Plans, "not following the curriculum." On the same day her principal made a request for her to write up all her inquiry projects—the ones that helped them achieve the Schools to Watch award. Frustrated, Danielle responded with, *"Do you know how much time it takes outside of school for me to establish [...] and create these projects. [...] I know it's just a common complaint and you're going to tell me to ignore him."* Danielle took her frustration and turned it into written scholarship, citing the NCTE position papers and pointing out that the school "curriculum [was] not supporting [the research]" (Interview 1). Despite her frustration, Danielle conceded the challenge her supervisor faced from parents whose students did not receive automatic As and did not participate in TED Talks. In her Member Check, she explained that he has since "started to push the NCTE position papers out to everyone and ask that we read them." Additionally, he leaves Danielle to teach her own curriculum, often acknowledging, "I know you are teaching the skills, but doing different projects."

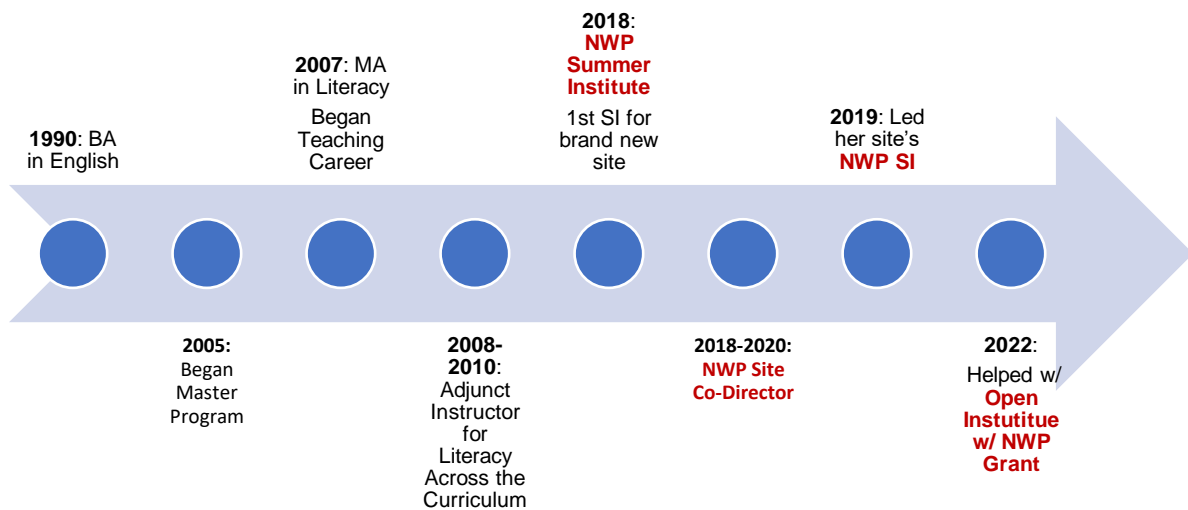
Danielle, as a teacher "subverting the curriculum" (Artifact E, published chapter) recognized the fear that drives her colleagues to "feel tied to the curriculum" (Interview 1). Danielle's experience with the National Writing Project moved her first to question her



instructional practices, which in turn moved her to question the curriculum to which her colleagues felt compelled to follow. Fortified with research, confidence in her teaching practices, and at least a little teacher capital, she was able to push back.

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Professional Growth Experiences



*Figure 28: Highlights of Danielle’s Significant Professional Growth*

Using information from our first interview and Danielle’s two-page resumé, I constructed a timetable of her significant professional growth experiences. In our second interview, Danielle reviewed the table to help verify dates and via email, she helped revise the final NWP experience on the timeline. I did not ask her to rate the experiences, as she adamantly assured me the National Writing Project is the only experience that has provided authentic and significant growth, professionally. You can see in the timeline a gap between earning her bachelor’s in English and a master’s in Literacy. During that time Danielle worked in business for two and a half years, brought a daughter and a son into the world, and worked

from home. Staying home when her children were young was important to Danielle—when she wasn't helping with the construction company, she brought in income by taking care of other children. She began her teaching career in the fall of 2007, just after completing, in the spring, her MA in Literacy.

You can see on the timeline that once Danielle experienced the Summer Institute with her local Writing Project, she became a leader with the brand new site, acting as a site co-director for a two-year stint, and facilitating the next Summer Institute in 2019. She remains an active teacher leader working with students, as well as teachers. When she verified the items on the timeline in August of 2022, she shared that she helped lead an Open Institute, her focus on the students attending. She has presented for her local Writing Project since then and continues to be an active teacher consultant.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Danielle's Sustained Professional Growth**

The National Writing Project both transformed Danielle's classroom practice and validated her search for solid instruction. In her initial survey she explained,

Like you, my experience has completely changed my practice. My class is centered around authentic projects where my students' reading and writing is shared with the world and has impact on themselves and others. We are currently doing TED Talks for the fourth year and have partnered with Spain. My students maintain three journals: A Sparks and Starts Journal where we use mentor texts to prompt expressive writing and play with the tools of the craft. We write in these 2-3 times a week. We develop Wondering Journals where we post all our wonderings, curiosities, and fascinations that arise from living each day and from our reading. We also maintain a Growth Reflection Journal because I give all my student's "A"s to create an environment where they can play and learn while gaining the reading and writing skills of an 8th-grader. They post reflections on each day and how they feel about the lesson, how they believe it might affect their reading and writing and there is a column for personal notes - just basically a place for them to share what is going on in their life or a note to me about something from class. (Oct. 2021)

While her SI experience wasn't until 2018, Danielle had tapped into their resources long before, citing research she'd found earlier for her masters' thesis. She knew early on it was

something she wanted to be a part of and in our first interview Danielle explained that the research in researching intrinsic motivation for her master's thesis, she came across research that included the NWP and she thought, "Gosh, that's something I want to be a part of" (Interview 2).

Finally experiencing the Summer Institute gave Danielle agency to make the changes she had been thinking about, along with a model for how those changes might look within her own classroom. Danielle decided to take the framework she'd worked in as a Fellow and apply it to her own teaching. She wanted to mirror the writing portfolio process of the SI within her class inquiry project, utilizing all the literacy skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, along with other essential elements from the NWP model like time, collaboration, and most importantly student-centered learning and writing for an authentic audience. Danielle explained that before the Writing Project she was teaching books, now she "was going to teach reading and writing as a skill set and do it in a natural, authentic way" (Interview 1).

Danielle seems to have succeeded in transforming her classroom into an environment filled with authentic learning and real audiences. In his Growth/Reflections Journal, Michael wrote:

I think the biggest thing that I have learned over the course of this last year in class is that writing and reading should be able to be chosen from whatever a kid wants, they should be allowed to choose what types of writing and what they want to write about. Teachers shouldn't always choose what the kids should read and [sic] write instead allowing more independence and showing what the kids really want to learn about. It can still be incorporated into projects but the independence aspect of it will allow for it to change the way kids learn as a whole. (n.d.)

In our final interview, Danielle reiterated once more, "The National Writing Project is the best professional development I've ever received." As we talked about projects with students from other countries and students from a senior environmental science class at a nearby high school, Danielle explained, "

The National Writing Project cemented for me, how badly I needed to make sure my students had an audience for their reading and writing. That it was authentic, [...] That we were doing it for real reasons. And so, I was seeking out opportunities where I could make learning authentic [...]. I didn't want to teach them to be a better reader and better writer. I wanted to create an environment that required advanced reading and writing skills, and that would drive them to that.


Giving her the stance of teacher-researcher, the NWP opened a pathway for Danielle to tap into her innate curiosity—not only to reflect on her own practice, but to seek out her own professional growth much like an inquiry project through the professional texts she chooses to read and the professional collaborations she curates for herself and for her students. More importantly, this stance of teacher-researcher also positioned Danielle to challenge the status quo.

Danielle challenges the status quo in numerous ways, not only in citing the research in her lesson plans or by pushing back against those fearful of her curriculum. Danielle believes in the model she was able to integrate into her practice. So much so, she brings it, not only to her classroom practice, but to the professional development or “staff colleges” she leads for her district. As her coauthor explained in Artifact E (Author & Turner, 2020), Danielle negotiates curriculum by subverting a system that defaults to fear, so everyone ties themselves to a curriculum that overlooks the authentic needs of the students.

Throughout our conversations, Danielle referred to herself as “a curious teacher.” Her curiosity certainly drove her to seek a curriculum that would better meet the needs of young writers and readers. But for Danielle to move past the fears of her colleagues and be a risk-taker also took courage, the ability to reflect on herself and her instruction, and the willingness to search critically and fearlessly for the research to support her classroom practices. Her skills as both a communicator and a collaborator certainly have helped her be the lone teacher moving a student-centered curriculum forward, and one with results—her students outscore those of her peers. Like her infographic in Figure 29 (Artifact H) shows, Danielle truly believes that “the person in front of the classroom matters” (Interview 2). In fact, each of the six traits listed are traits that Danielle possesses in spades.

THE KIND OF HUMAN IN THE FRONT OF THE CLASS MATTERS

The traits we seek to cultivate in our students are the traits we should be cultivating in ourselves.





**1) HAVE A GROWTH MINDSET**

Teachers should have a growth mindset to cultivate the mindset of the learners in front of them. You need to believe you can affect your intelligence in order to help students affect their intelligence.

**2) BE LIFELONG LEARNERS**

Teachers need to be lifelong learners, curious human beings, readers, writers, deep, reflective thinkers that are on a constant journey of knowledge, truth and wisdom.







**3) VALUE CHILDRENS' THOUGHTS**

The humans in front of you have powerful, interesting and valuable thoughts. Allow your students to share them, write about them and express them. Those thoughts should be the focus of all inquires.

**4) BE ON A SELF-AWARENESS JOURNEY**

As a human being leading children in learning experiences, you should continuously seek understanding about the roots of your actions and words. Your coping mechanisms are always on display.






**5) BE CURIOUS**

Curiosity is what makes us human. Read with wonder and a curious and questioning mindset. Question everything! Your curiosity breeds curiosity. Show your students your curiosities and how they feed your reading and writing.

**6) BE BRAVE**

In doing what is best for our students, we sometimes need to challenge traditional methods that are not rooted in current research and effective practice. Be brave and do the work to prove your practice.



THE TEACHER IS THE MODEL

Figure 29: The Teacher Is the Model

## Referenced by Danielle in Interviews and Artifacts

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## Chapter 4.5: Nested Case Five—Monica Harris

“Our students are complete and complex human beings with rich and varied lives.” As a finalist for state Teacher of the year in 2021, Monica grounded her philosophy for teaching in “the full humanity of the magnificent children who enter [her] classroom.” (Teaching Philosophy, pg. 1) The student-centered learning in her philosophy may have been affirmed by her experiences with the Writing Project, but it also seems to be a value, long foundational to who Monica is as a teacher. So too, her innate curiosity and drive to read and learn. In the last few years, Monica has researched topics like determination theory, deep work, and more.

With 31 years teaching experience at the time of her initial survey (October 2021), Monica brings a wide range of diverse experiences to her teaching. Before teaching, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 1988 and two years later a master’s in education: Curriculum and Instruction. She did not begin a full-time teaching career right away, as she wanted to time home to care for her own children. To stay in education and bring home an extra income, Monica worked as a substitute teacher and freelance writer, writing articles for several publications and 31 curriculum books for teachers. It was in working with 6<sup>th</sup>-graders during summer school that Monica got her first idea for a book on teaching (Video 4). With the understanding that this class would be filled with students who did not like English, she centered the curriculum around writing reviews (e.g., music reviews, movie reviews, book reviews). Her students were so engaged, she ended up publishing a book titled, *Writing Critical Reviews* (see Sustaining Professional Growth below for details).

Monica has taught in the same rural area in the northwestern region of the US for most of her teaching career, teaching multiple subjects (e.g., psychology, speech, English, American literature, Senior Seminar, creative writing) and multiple grades from 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. Her

school is a combined junior/senior high school, where she is one of 15 teachers for 182 students. Recipient of several awards including the district Crystal Apple award, and as a finalist for her state's Teacher of the Year, Monica has also held positions with her local Council of Teachers of English, as well as her district's Professional Development committee. At the time of our first interview in January 2022, Monica was working with another educator for an action research project, studying about Cal Newport's concept of *Deep Work*, and applying ideas from her makeSpace trainings to both her classroom and her presentations with the Writing Project.

Monica attributes much of what she has learned with the Writing Project for influencing her classroom practice and jumpstarting deeper dives into trying other classroom pedagogies. She also explained how the Writing Project both encouraged and enhanced her role as a teacher leader in her community.

I met with Monica twice via Zoom, on January 27<sup>th</sup> and again on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022. At the time of our second interview in July 2022, Monica had just returned from visiting her daughter's home in a different part of the state. She had also recently wrapped up her commitment with her Writing Project's "Teach from Your Best Self" institute, by presenting to the next cohort of Writing Project Fellows. The two-part video she shared the previous February, was a shortened version of one of the presentations she'd created, as a Fellow with the original institute. Moving forward, Monica was making plans to bring writing workshop into her classes from the beginning of the school year, rather than "sprinkling" elements of this approach later on.

Before our first interview, Monica completed the initial survey in October 2021. Results from the Expressive Writing Pedagogy questions can be found in Figure 30, below.



## Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy

Participant	EWP.A Time	EWP.B Choice	EWP.C Low-stakes	EWP.D Modeling	EWP.E Mentor Texts	EWP.F Collaborative	EWP.G Conferencing	EWP.H Publishing	EWP.I Portfolios	EWP.J Reflective	EWP AVG
<b>5</b> Monica Harris	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	75.0
<b>Mean from 7</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
<b>Mean from 71</b>	86.9	80.0	88.3	82.5	84.9	85.0	82.5	65.9	69.9	91.0	81.7

Figure 30: Monica's Ratings for Elements of EWP

### Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts

In addition to the initial survey and our two conversations, the first interview on January 27, 2022 and the second on July 14, 2022, I found evidence of Monica's Expressive Writing Pedagogy in the artifacts collected during the research process, including the slides for one of her Writing Project presentations, her resumé, a Philosophy of Teaching written as part of her nomination for her state's Teacher of the Year, and several pieces of her own writing and one student sample.

#### *Time—53%*

While Monica's rating for time, consistent writing opportunities, is among the lowest among participants, 53 percent is a formidable percentage of her lived curriculum. On her initial survey she explained, "The amount of time I give students to write depends on the class engagement level. This year, I have started with less time than I prefer, but am building on it every week." In our second interview we talked how she establishes a space for writing at the beginning of the year with writing journals, no matter the subject, that will be used throughout the year, alluding to her comment on the survey where she included, "For the past few years, I have provided writing journals, and that has helped students value their writing."

Monica admitted in our first interview that smaller classes like her Creative Writing Class or Writing 120/121, a dual credit class, were easier to manage generally, but especially

for effective Socratic Seminars and opportunities for workshopping student writing. For her larger classes, she managed to sprinkle in a lot of great writing ideas from the Writing Project, but they seemed to hold more barriers to the kinds of teaching Monica strived for. In our second interview, July 2022, Monica proudly shared about working towards expanding writing workshop into two of her larger classes of Senior English, and for her juniors as well. Rather than sprinkling in a new practice after the year began, her plans included a habit they would build from the first week of school. Her idea was to focus on a different text, print as well as nonprint, each week. Nonprint texts could include images, film-clips, and Pixar Shorts. Focusing on one text a week, Monica’s plans included writing practices like journaling about possible themes on one day, looking at the piece as a mentor text for craft moves, and examining the structure of the piece as a whole are a part (e.g. a particular sentence). She sounded hopeful that beginning with writing workshop as part of the class structure, that writing and creative deep work would have a regular space with her students, a norm, rather than something novel to try.

While Monica had been giving students time to for generative writing with the journals off and on throughout the school year, her comments about being more intentional with writing time demonstrate both growth in this area, as well as a habit of reflective teaching.

***Choice—100%***

While I was not privy to lesson planning, nor did I see Monica teaching her own students, I witnessed her presentation to colleagues, a shortened version of a Writing Project presentation, titled “Reflection as Stress Reduction,” that included student samples, as well as practices learned from her Summer Leadership Institute, many of the same practices she has integrated into work with her own students. To “Clear Our Heads” (Artifact B, slide 2), Monica

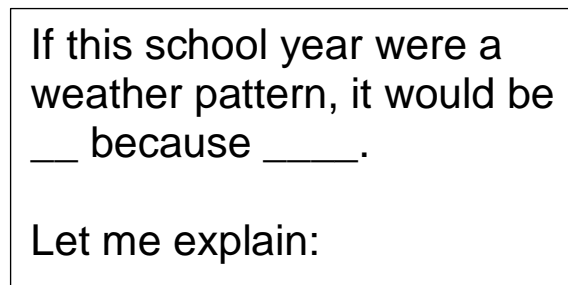
suggested beginning with the date and quoted poet, Kim Stafford, who suggested that simply “putting pen to paper” as a way to move through writer’s block. Then she led the group through two quick lists title “Backburner” and “Trash.” The Backburner list would be in the journal and included things that are on your mind and need to be remembered, like “picking up eggs on the way home” and “remembering to set your alarm early tomorrow.” The intention is to place those pressing matters out of your mind for the moment, knowing you can return to them later.

Monica also explained the Trash list that would be written on scratch paper and provided examples like “Oh, I hope we don’t have to read these out loud—I don’t think I’m a very good writer” and “I had a fight with my husband this morning and I know I was right, still”—basically, anything that your mind needs to just “get rid of for good” (Video 1). Other than writing the present date, the prompts for both lists are general enough that a writer can choose from their own context whatever details are most significant to them. Participants had two minutes to write both lists and Monica can be seen in the video writing her own. When a participant asked, 90 seconds into the writing time, about the Trash List, Monica offered another example and gave additional time. Then for the Trash List, Monica modeled crumpling up her list and throwing it into the trash can, and her participants followed suit.

The next activity would be to help focus thoughts with an activity called “Mindful Mark Making,” an activity from her makeSpace training. Participants were handed two-inch squares and three minutes to cover the square with a spiral, a variation of a spiral, or sketching some other shape or image. Choice was clear that the image could be whatever the participant wanted, yet participants were also offered ideas to help get them started. Additionally, the slide

title, “Slowing Our Racing Thoughts” included a patchwork of examples her students had created.

In the final example of writing and choice I could observe in her presentation (Video 2), Monica gave participants a sentence stem to complete by creating a metaphor for teaching. From a slide titled, “Let’s Get Honest,” the prompt read as in the Figure 31 below.



If this school year were a weather pattern, it would be \_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_.

Let me explain:

Figure 31: Writing Prompt for Videoed Presentation

Before writing, she let participants know they would be sharing their responses aloud, and then Monica settled into writing alongside her participants. To kick off the sharing, Monica shared her metaphor of a cloudy day. Other responses included a snowstorm, erratic weather, windy weather, a plate of locusts (because students struggle to stay on task), a drought, foggy weather, a tsunami, and one participant chose *all* the weather patterns. Their *why*'s were often in line with a similar reoccurring theme that captured both highs and lows, as well as the unexpected. Additional writing prompts from the presentation slides included open ended prompts like “What’s Working? What’s Not?”, options for Talk Back or Forgiveness poems, and “Gratitude Journal Options” at the end (Artifact B).

### ***Low-stakes Writing—100%***

Quickwrites like those demonstrated in her video presentation would be low-stakes writing opportunities. Monica shared in our second interview journals and journal writing had long been part of her classroom practice. Monica later explained that “students basically get

effort points for journal writes. They are not assessed for writing mechanics or idea development but are used to increase writing fluency and comfort with writing” (Member Check). Furthermore, Monica wrote about the “use of visual and performing arts in formative assessment of student learning,” clearly beyond traditional grading. She explained in teaching philosophy:

Allowing my students to use Play-Doh© to sculpt a representation of the tone of a poem engages the diverse learners in my classroom. Acting out a scene from Macbeth lets my students show understanding of plotline without language barriers or writing deficits obscuring their ability to demonstrate their grasp of the learning target.

Being learner centered, for Monica, seems to include forming assessments that allow students diverse ways to develop and demonstrate their learning.

### ***Modeling—91%***

From Monica’s presentation (Videos 1 & 2), I can see clearly how she models her own literacy practices, as well as her teaching pedagogy. Each time her participants wrote or doodled, she set a timer and participated until the timer chimed, the only exception would be when a participant asked a question or when a teacher-participant entered the classroom after the start time.

Modeling seems so inherent in Monica’s work, that when one student asked her about why they had to write poetry? (Interview 2), she responded by writing a poem titled, “Why Poetry.” And to inspire her own students to send out their work for publication, Monica submitted hers to her state’s English Journal and it was published in the Spring/Summer 2022 edition (Artifact D). Reprinted with permission from the Oregon English Journal, I share an abridged version of the poem below.

## Why Poetry

"Why poetry?" Cameron  
"It's stupid."

Yes, It is stupid  
and smart.  
Funny  
and sad.  
Beautiful  
and ugly.

Poetry is every motion and emotion,  
every personality  
every state-of-being.

Poetry is the water color of language  
That allows us to paint the world  
In vivid hues that bring forests  
and snowstorms and single red roses  
to life on the page

It is the sandbox of letters  
That we bulldoze into  
scraps of half-sentences,  
Or squish into red plastic buckets  
before adding water  
and molding them into tiny castle kingdoms  
protected by metaphorical moats.

Poetry is the fiery bar of a rap you can't get out of your head.  
the chorus of a country tune that makes you want to hug your girl.

The roll of your eyes at a wordplay riddle  
The banter you toss around at a party  
The gossip you whisper into your best friend's ear  
The sass you throw at your teacher  
when she makes you read poems  
our loud  
for attendance.

Poetry is the question: WHY POETRY?

\* \* \*

Poetry is the bridge that unites  
Dead with living  
Father with son  
Continent with continent  
Rich with poor  
Culture with culture  
Teacher with student

When meeting in the middle of the bridge of a poem  
We touch hands  
And embrace each other's humanity.

\* \* \*

Why Poetry?  
Because Poetry is life.

***Mentor Texts—75%***

Monica talked about using the work of Linda Christensen in our first interview, and when asked about specific titles, she mentioned two: *Teaching for Joy and Justice* (2009) and *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (2017). Both books are filled with mentor texts. So even though we never talked about specific professional mentor texts, it's possible that Monica used “what the mirror said” by Lucille Clifton in the “Talking Back” section (2017, pp. 81-85) or “forgiving my father” also by Lucille Clifton in “Forgiveness Poems” or any of the student samples included in both.

On February 11, 2022, Monica presented a shortened version of the presentation she created as part of the “Teach from Your Best Self” institute (Videos 1 & 2). In that shortened version, she led her participants through a series of quickwrites, scaffolding them for the opportunity for self-expressive writing in the form of a poem. The video stops before getting to the part, but in the slides (Artifact B), I see three examples that could be used as mentor poems in the presentation, and with her own students. First are two “Talk Back” poems written by two different students. And then a “Forgiveness” poem written by Monica. One student referred to by initials only (the initials below are a pseudonym) consented to using his work (Fig. 32).

**Teachers Think**  
By J.B. 2019

Teachers think  
All I do is mess around  
and get in trouble;  
I never have my pencil  
or other supplies.  
What they don't know is  
I never know what to do--  
And that's why I just sit there.

Figure 32: Student Talk Back Poem, w/ consent.

In our first interview, Monica explained, “A talk-back poem is kind of like society tells you, *you should be this way*. Talk back to that.” In giving her students permission to “talk

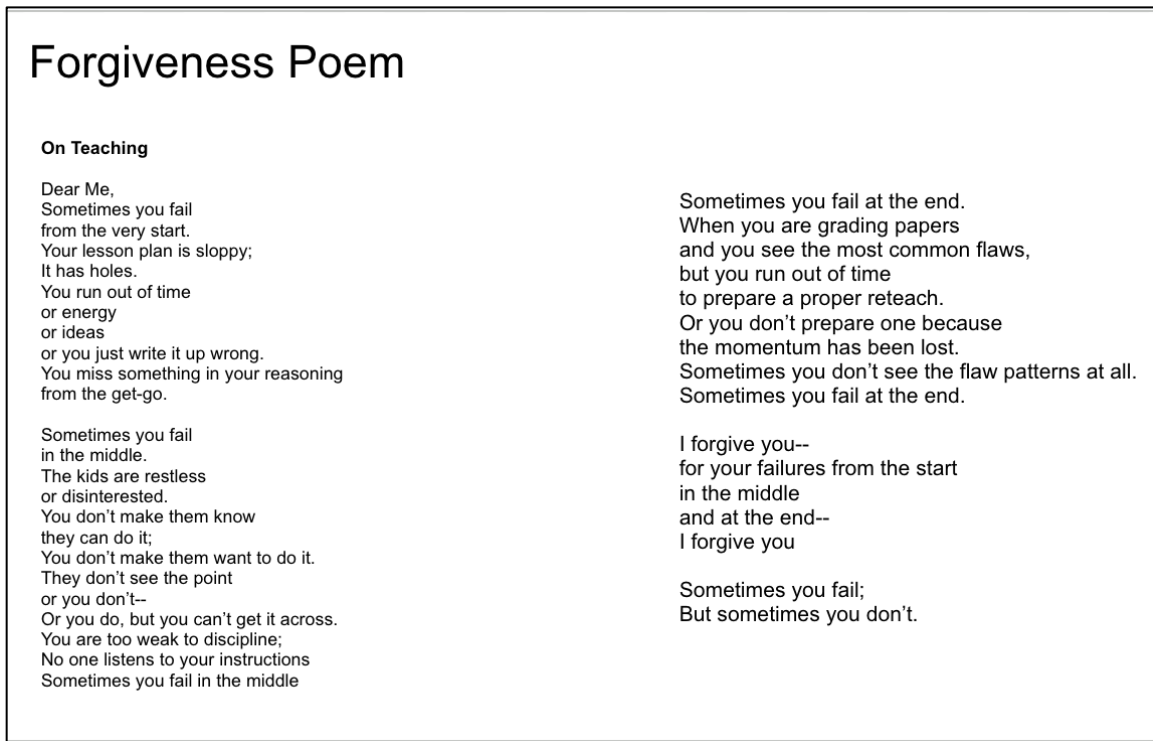


Figure 33: Monica's Forgiveness Poem

back,” Monica cultivates practice in critical thinking, and often, as in much writing that is self-expressive, her students reveal an inner perspective that can help teachers learn about their students.

Monica's presentation also included a Forgiveness poem that she spoke briefly about in our first interview, “Society did this to you, or your mom did this to you, or whatever.” Student forgiveness poems would be a way to grapple with the wrong in their lives while working toward forgiveness. Monica shared her own forgiveness poem with the participants in the video (Fig. 33). In her poem, Monica speaks to her teacher self and all the possible ways of failing, from the start, in the middle, and at the end, failures I imagine most reflective teachers could relate to. There is a lovely twist at the end that sums up why many of us keep teaching. “Sometimes you fail; But sometimes you don't.” In sharing her own poem about



grappling with failure, Monica models for her participants how she models for her students with at least one way to face something challenging in their own lives, something real. And she provides a mentor text as a “great example of compelling writing” (Appendix B).

### ***Collaborative Learning—50%***

On the initial survey, Monica wrote, “Collaborative learning is lower than most years because I am engaged in a study of *deep work* this year, which focuses on mind wandering for creativity and independent concentration for idea creation.” She is referencing the concept Newport (2016) explores in his book of the same title. When I asked Monica about Writing Project practices she might use in subjects other than ELA, like her Psychology class or in Senior Seminar (Interview 1), she shared a few details about how she used Socratic Seminar – and typically, how it was easier with smaller numbers. At the time she had between nine and 13 students in Psychology (Interview 1). Socratic seminar is basically a collaborative discussion, but Monica mentioned several strategies she used with larger classes that would require greater and more complex collaboration, as in “with partners” or “inner and outer circles.”

While the 2021/2022 school year may have incorporate less opportunity for collaboration, during the 2020/2021 school year, Monica and her students took part in a “virtual field trip exchange” (Artifact C) where, separately, each group created final products (i.e., vlogs and slide shows) celebrating the “families and communities” of student lives. Monica explained, “The project allows students to select their own subject matter, build their competence, and connect with others.”

The other activity she mentioned where there may have been collaborative learning was in how she incorporated “slide shows for content development and organization of

thoughts” (Survey). When asked about this in Interview 1, Monica explained, why she liked to use Google Slides as a learning tool, “because it helps students organize” and “almost [...] creates paragraphs for them.” Utilizing the slides allowed students to see the organization of the whole text versus “the organization of a single paragraph.” Her students seemed “to understand beginning, middle, and end, much better that way” When they worked with nonfiction, the slides helped note main ideas and their “supporting points” even when they were listed “as bullet points” (Interview 1). What makes me think about the elements of collaboration was in the end, the slide show became a tool for students to utilize as they taught the class.

Whether working with students or with her colleagues, Monica seems collaborative in her very nature. Video 3 included words from both her principal and a teaching colleague who support that conclusion, the teacher sharing that she would be lost without Monica’s support in lesson planning and the sharing of her own materials. Collaborating with another group of students in

### ***Conferencing—77%***

We didn’t really talk about this, but Monica wrote in her survey, “Individual conferencing is not as high as I would like it to be due to time constraints.” I’m not sure what conferencing looks like in Monica’s classroom, but it seems apparent that it exists from her student’s comments in Video 4. One young man described Ms. Harris as “someone who really respects [students] where they are but is at the same time pushing them to try new things and to go to a different level to develop and grow.” When I asked Monica about this in her Member Check, she explained,

I work with Google Docs when conferencing with students. I work with one student at a time as others do group peer editing circles. The student and I each have the student’s

document open, and we discuss what works with the writing and what areas might benefit from a second look.

***Publishing—51%***

Publishing student writing did not come up in our conversations. I'm not sure if she displays student work or asks her students to enter writing contests. But I could see in her presentation videos that she opened the space for participants to share aloud their writing, which counts as a form of publishing. And in an essay she wrote for her state Teacher of the Year, Monica wrote about her students publishing "vlogs and slideshows about their lives and communities" to be an exchange "with inner city students who will do the same" (Artifact C).

Additionally, Monica has published her own work as a freelance writer, working with publishers to write 31 curriculum books for teachers, along with writing for a magazine whose readers are professionals working with the senior population in nursing homes and retirement centers (Video 3). And Monica writes for her state's Council of Teachers of English who publish an online encyclopedia about the state—Monica has written and published two entries (Timeline) here, in addition to an English Journal, for which Monica has been published several times. In the 2019 Fall/Winter issue, Monica's essay about a traveling adventure to visit the homes of 14 American writers was the first subject of the school interview (Video 3). Part of her intent was to place herself back in the learner's seat, so she could learn how better to teach her own students. Interestingly, in Video 4 Monica shared about her first essay published and described its premise, "which basically argued that students should be able to select what they want to learn." It sounds like she's advocating for a student-centered curriculum.

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—53%***

I'm also not sure how this works in Monica's classroom—our conversations never covered this, nor the videos and artifacts. In her Member Check, however, she explained, "I do not create full-year portfolios with students, but we often pull the best of works in a single unit together to create both individual booklets and class booklets"—which sounds like a way to collect and publish at the same time.

### ***Reflective Teaching—100%***

Evidence of Monica's reflective teaching abounds, within our conversations and throughout the videos and artifacts. For example, early on in our first conversation, Monica shared something she valued about the professional relationships she was able to form with the Writing Project in being able to work with teachers "from all stages of the profession. Referencing the Teach from Your Best Self institute, she explained that there were a couple of teachers close to retirement age, a couple of teachers in the middle years of teaching and a couple, who were in their first years. Recalling an event that included teachers "from all stages of the profession." Not only is it "fun to learn from each other," Monica appreciated that each TC brought diverse skills and strengths to offer one another. She might benefit from their ease with technology or discipline, and she has her own experience with writing pedagogy and skills to offer. Understanding that learning from others is ever available and that you have an important voice to add to that process, seems foundational to reflective teaching.

Monica wrote on her survey, "I am engaged in a study of Deep Work this year, which focuses on mind wandering for creativity and independent concentration for idea creation." In discussion, she pointed out that Deep Work was not an idea handed to her. Rather, it was born out of her own questions about her students. She was encouraged to bring her own inquiry to

her work with makeSpace, a professional development focused on nurturing and utilizing creativity. According to the website, “Participating teachers engage in online self-paced courses, virtual synchronous institutes, optional weekly check-ins, and other forms of sharing across a regional community of practice” (makeSpace, n.d.). Monica shared that she was beginning her third action research project. Beginning with questions about her own classroom practice, Monica wondered how she might “get students to be more time on task in a concentrated way” (Interview 1). That line of thinking helped her stumble onto “deep work research” where she found Carl Newport’s book, *Deep Work* (2016). Similar to the Writing Project, makeSpace involved an initial institute. Teacher participants could then follow up with additional institutes where they conducted action research with support from leaders with makeSpace. Monica’s search into her own student’s ability to concentrate, as well as her commitment to look for a solution and study the outcome, is a great example of reflective teaching.

Another important example of reflective teaching involved Monica’s adding Poetry Out Loud to her curriculum several years ago. Like many things teachers add to a curriculum, Monica began small, focusing on students memorizing and reciting a poem. Then she “added a whole poetry unit” with “both reading and writing poetry.” She reflected, “It’s not like everybody loves it and is excited about it, but I’m hitting a population that wasn’t hit before.” There does seem to be something about helping students discover their voices through poetry that can be engaging. And when students are able to express an inner truth, like in J.B.’s Talk Back poem above (under Mentor Texts) it offers further opportunities of reflection. Monica’s reflective teaching allows her to apply strategies like the Talk Back poem and the Forgiveness

poem to the characters they study in the literature they read, as well, helping students deepen their understanding of a character's perspective.

Monica further reveals her reflective nature an article she wrote for her state's English Journal (2019) about her summer "Field Trip" in New England to visit, completely on her own, the homes of American writers. Opening with a memory of being a young university student, Monica retells the field trip where she was in charge of six lively eight-year-old boys for five hours and the terrifying moment when she realized one was missing. After an extensive search by several adults, he turned up on the school bus. Monica wrote:

I was forgiven for my blunder and permitted to march on toward my teaching credential. Thirty-one years later, I got up the nerve to take another field trip on which the potential for getting lost was high. This time, I would be the student venturing out on my own (OEJ, Fall/Winter 2019).

Monica framed her entire trip from the perspective of a teacher determined to experience what it was like to be in the vulnerable position of a learner. To follow her passion for American literature and the history of its writers, she faced her own anxieties and fears and was reminded, that in stepping out of her comfort zones and facing uncertainty and challenge, learning could be exhilarating.

### **Beyond Elements of EWP**

Monica incorporated many elements into her classroom practice, going well-beyond the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Her work as a freelance writer, originally born out of her early teaching experiences and capacity for reflective teaching centered on student needs, is one example. Freelance writing likely provides Monica with a unique perspective on the generative processes involved in various writing stages and may offer her insights into the challenges her student writers may face. Making herself vulnerable by submitting her writing for publication and possible rejection likely helps her see writing from

her own students positions and may be one of the reasons she is seen as meeting students wherever they are.

Bringing creativity into her classroom as a learning tool through her work with makeSpace seems instrumental in giving Monica a teacher stance of inquiry. Watching her lead fellow teachers through an exercise of *mark making* in her presentation video brought to mind our January 2022 conversation where she was working to bring more moments of creative concentration to her classroom. When we spoke of it, she seemed a little excited about the possibilities she'd hope for, but a little embarrassed that they didn't feel successful. She'd chosen one of her "more challenging classes, ever" as participants for her action research.

I attempted something where students [...] did one of several kind of doodling activities, after being given a prompt and *before* actually writing, to see whether that would slow them down enough to kind of think about what they're writing. (Interview 1)

She wasn't focused so much on "would their writing become better" but was more interested if they could "stay on task and focus longer." Her conclusion in our first interview was, "It didn't really work very well." But I see the attempt and her willingness to try something different, and with one of her challenging classes, as the heart of education, not to mention, reflective teaching.

I also see her making room for more poetry in her most recent years of teaching, as a way of making space for creative self-expression that, ironically, goes beyond the elements I defined as foundational for an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Her recognition that there is a population of students not normally reached by the traditional curriculum, along with her willingness to expand Poetry Out Loud into a larger unit (Interview 1), shows yet another example of Monica's determination to reach more students (Video 4).

Monica’s student-centered philosophy is made manifest in this recognition that not all her students will want to learn to love English or Shakespeare (Video 3) and that there are students who need more than what traditional schooling offers. Connected to what likely prompted action research and inquiry into her practice, is a grounded belief in the passions and goals of her students. In our first interview, she explained, “I’m trying to not make school an obstacle, where students have to graduate *before* going out and finding themselves.” In her teaching philosophy, Monica wrote,

Most learners work their way through the system. Some of them even love the journey, the way many of us did. But our classrooms are also filled with students who would rather plant gardens or play video games than read Shakespeare or memorize the Pythagorean Theorem. (Teaching Philosophy)

## **Experiencing the National Writing Project**

### **Local Writing Project Site**

According to Monica, her local Writing Project is about “helping students find themselves through writing” (Interview 1). This stance complements what you can find on their website “About Us” page that begins with a quote by William Stafford, poet and scholar:

A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them. (Local Writing Project, n.d.)

At one time, Monica’s state boasted four Writing Project sites, but today, hers is one of three. Of those three at least one is on an official hiatus for the 23/24 school year. The other may also be on hiatus, but their website was difficult to find, with only one update noted—concerning youth writing camps and a hope to return to them in 2024.

Monica’s Writing Project site, on the other hand, is housed in the College of Education at a state university and serves educators and schools in the southwest region of the state. In



2022 I learned theirs is a robust website. Established originally in 1977 (NWP, 2022 or n.d.),, the 2020-21 NWP Site Report states that “From 1992 to 2010” they were “an active site supported by a combination of [NWP] federal block grants.” According to their 2021 NWP Site Report, from 2010 to 2012, the site became inactive due to “lack of university support in the wake of the loss of federal funding to the NWP” (p. 1). In 2021 this site was in its “ninth year of re-affiliation with the National Writing Project” (p. 1).

When I returned to the site in 2023, I found additional details about this project site that “welcomes and fosters a diverse community of teachers at all stages of their career who are passionate about teaching writing” (Website, 2023). Their current website lists the following principles as guidance for their work:

- Writing is fundamental to learning in all disciplines.
- Effective teachers of writing regularly write themselves.
- Teachers learn best from other successful teachers.
- Universities, districts, and schools deepen their work through collaboration.

Perusing their 2021 Annual Report for the National Writing Project (the last report posted), I found rich offerings for professional growth, as well as opportunities for young writers. Professional workshop titles included “Tips for Teaching: Bringing the Science of Reading into the Classroom,” “Spring into Poetry: A Workshop with Linda Christensen,” and “Teach from Your Best Self!” Additionally, course offerings with reduced tuition were available. While six Young Writer’s Camps were planned, four were conducted. Three were taught online: Poetry, Sci-fi/Fantasy, and College Application and Scholarship Essays. An Upper Elementary Writing Camp met on the Writing Project site campus. Additionally, the site “served as an adjudicating site for Scholastic’s Alliance for Young Artists and Writers Awards” (2021 Site Report).

## Monica's Experience with her Local Writing Project Site

In my latest perusal of Monica's local Writing Project website, I also noticed an image of a group of TCs for the "Teach from Your Best Self Institute," and among them, was an image of Monica, herself. Of course, I imagined a Harry Potter magical image where Monica was jumping up and down, smiling, and waving at me. In another report, there she was in another frontpage image with her cohort from the 2015 Literacy Leadership Institute, the same one that expanded her identity to include "Teacher Consultant" (Interview 1).

There was some discrepancy in the data as for when Monica attended her first summer institute. On the survey she wrote, "Approx. 2010." In her timeline, it looked more like 2013. In our interviews, it was difficult to pinpoint which experience came first. One thing for sure is that Monica attended her local Writing Project's opportunities for professional development, like "Teaching Argument Writing," which Monica described as a "[s]tate discussion about argument writing vs persuasive writing [which] led to deep discussion of *mixed genres* and *artificial divisions*" (Timeline)—taking place before Monica attended the leadership institute that would transform her into a Teacher Consultant. Whether she attended the full day workshop or the seminar consisting of eight two-hour sessions occurring throughout the school year remains unclear. There may have been other Writing Project events, but in 2015 Monica attended her local Writing Project's "Literacy Leadership Institute." It was at the end of this three-week experience that Monica took on the title of Teacher Consultant (Interview 1).

While she continued to participate in Writing Project Institutes for "Teaching Grammar," "Writing with Sources," and "Humor Writing," it would be the "Teach from Your Best Self Institute," a yearlong, 60-hour (Writing Project Website, 2021) endeavor that began in the summer and met monthly throughout the school year, that influenced the presentation

Monica shared in in Videos 1 & 2. As part of the first cohort, the intention was for her to present to the new cohort the following year. And she did, at least once. But because of the distance, a two-hour, one-way drive through the mountains, and because they moved the date to Friday evenings rather than Saturday mornings, Monica opted out of committing to the year-long presentations. She did mention that her Writing Project welcomed her attendance at any of the dates she wanted to join, but she would not be a paid presenter (Interview 2).

Video 1 (12 min., 34 sec.) and Video 2 (8 min., 18sec.) are two parts of the same event, the first half of a presentation Monica gave to her colleagues at the high school where she teaches. The presentation she delivered on February 11, 2022, is a shortened version of the one she developed with the “Teach from Your Best Self” institute and was titled, “Reflection as Stress Reduction.” In the videos, Monica explained her involvement with the local Writing Project, the Teach from Your Best Self institute, and then she led her participants through several reflections, both in the form of writing and drawing.

In researching Monica’s local Writing Project site, I happened upon a link to her 2015 Leadership Literacy Institute’s blog, where Fellows took turns summarizing each day’s highlights in a “Daily Log.” On her turn, Monica described each event and activity, giving credit to the Fellow/TC in charge, and two five-star ratings, one for its value to writers and another for its value to teachers (all falling in the four- to five-star range). What I especially appreciated is her opening lines where she captured the spirit of a Writing Project Summer Institute:

To teach writing effectively, instructors must both practice the art of writing themselves and engage their students in meaningful writing experiences. The [state] Writing Project aspires to provide teachers with lessons and space that allow both to happen (Artifact G).

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

### ***Context***

For most of her career Monica has taught at the same rural secondary school for grades 7-12. For the 2022/2023 school year, 187 students were enrolled. As one of 15 faculty members, Monica teaches multiple preps which have varied over the year. At the time of our first interview in January 2022, Monica taught Psychology, sophomore English, Writing 121/122 (a dual college credit class for seniors), and Senior English. For other school years, she has taught other classes like Creative Writing and Speech for younger grades, and she usually taught American Literature to juniors. Monica explained that American Lit was one of her favorite subjects to teach but she laid out this particular year so a colleague would have that opportunity. Her class sizes are often small with 9 to 13 students enrolled in classes like Psychology or Writing 121/122. But they can be as large as 31, like her Senior Seminar class in 2021/2022 (Interview 1).

According to Monica's state encyclopedia entry, the Jr/Sr High School is nestled in a rural town of about 400 residents. The town serves a surrounding community of 4,600 as a hub "where ranchers, mountain residents, and seasonal hunters and fishers stock up on supplies and local news" (Artifact H.1). Having taught most of her teaching career in this rural hub in the northwestern region of the US brought opportunities for collaboration and insight to Monica's role as an educator. Her tiny district is close to a larger one, so a high turnover in both colleagues and administrators—beginning educators who eventually move on to the larger district (Interviews 1 and 2)—was not uncommon. Teaching in this context created a natural need Monica was more than willing to fill. Each new year brings new colleagues, most of

whom she collaborates with and often mentors (Interview 1, Video 4), when those colleagues are open to collaboration.

When I asked Monica about the changes influenced by the Writing Project that she may have implemented in her classroom practice, she explained that her summer institute “did not immediately change my teaching in the classroom” (Interview 1). Instead, Monica’s Writing Project experience “broadened my support as a teacher and let me find so many more conferences, workshops, and resources that it expanded my way of teaching.” Her classroom practice was “slowly modified” (Interview 1). She talked about trying different things she’d learned, and while some of them worked, others did not. Monica was *not* a TC whose whole way of teaching was transformed. Rather, for Monica, it was a process of figuring out how to integrate the things that fit her needs and the needs of her students. While Monica did not conduct a traditional writing workshop, she found ways to work it in occasionally—like for six weeks on Fridays. As she explained, “I have found what works for me” and she has “plugged [those strategies] in different spots throughout the years” (Interview 1). Rather than transforming her classroom practice, Monica’s teaching and professional growth expanded.

### ***Support***

I asked Monica about the possible support she received from her school community—colleagues, administration, parents, and students—as she tried new things learned with the Writing Project and as she grew professionally. She explained that the support at her school “waxes and wanes a lot.” Because of its proximity to a much larger district, Monica’s school seems to serve as a “starting ground for a lot of teachers and administrators.” There are some years she’s seen as the “writing consultant for the entire school”—leading workshops where they look together about what plagiarism is or how to write a paragraph and what that looks

like in different content areas. Then there are times when the administration changes and no one really understands what she is doing in her classroom. She describes the English classroom next to hers that had been a “kind of revolving door for many years” until they found an engaging and collaborative, albeit brand new, teacher who worked with Monica, “sharing ideas for [...] how to teach paragraph structure” and “the four basic comma rules.” Monica described this as highly supportive for both of them, but then the new teacher recently had a baby and won’t be returning. So, Monica was left to face the “revolving door” once again (Interview 1).

We talked about parental support, but mostly in the context of school wide / community events. Among her school’s population, parent support or involvement is not great. If they offer food at community events, according to Monica, more parents tend to show up. The writing aspect of those events is limited to talking about FAFSA or writing essays for scholarships. We did not go into the details of what that looks like.

Monica added that she had experienced school-wide support for other professional development like Character Strong (which they were doing in January 2021), Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and other initiatives implemented throughout the years.

### ***Challenges***

Other than the revolving door for administrators and colleagues, the only other challenge Monica mentioned explicitly was the “I-hate-writing attitude” that inevitably surfaces with too many students (Interview 1). In our second interview, Monica mentioned revising her curriculum to begin the year with more of a writing workshop approach, rather than sprinkling in writing strategies after the year began. Each week was to focus on a new mentor text (print and nonprint) where writing and crafting could springboard throughout the

week. And in a recent email (August 2023), Monica wrote that she took 10 students to the state's annual Writing Festival, cohosted by one of the state universities and their local Council of Teachers of English. The Writing Festival is a space where writers in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade through 12<sup>th</sup> collaborate in small groups, while listening to local authors, composing their own pieces, and sharing their writing with one another (OCTE, 2023). In addition to taking students in May of 2023, Monica presented writing workshops to two groups of middle schoolers.

As I think about the challenges Monica faced in expanding her classroom practice and in pursuing her own professional pursuits, there seems to be a trend of inquiry driving Monica's growth. I'm not sure if the changes she made to her curriculum helped her work with "I-hate-writing attitudes," or not. But changing her curriculum to embrace a writing workshop approach earlier in the year, might be connected to those 10 writers Monica took to the state writing festival. Monica, in her Member Check, offered additional insight:

I would not say students who don't enjoy writing enjoy it much more now, overall, but students who engage in writing with a clear, real-life purpose enjoy it more, and students who see that writing can be used as part of slide shows, videos, and other non-essay forms enjoy it more. (Sept. 1, 2023)

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Professional Growth Experiences

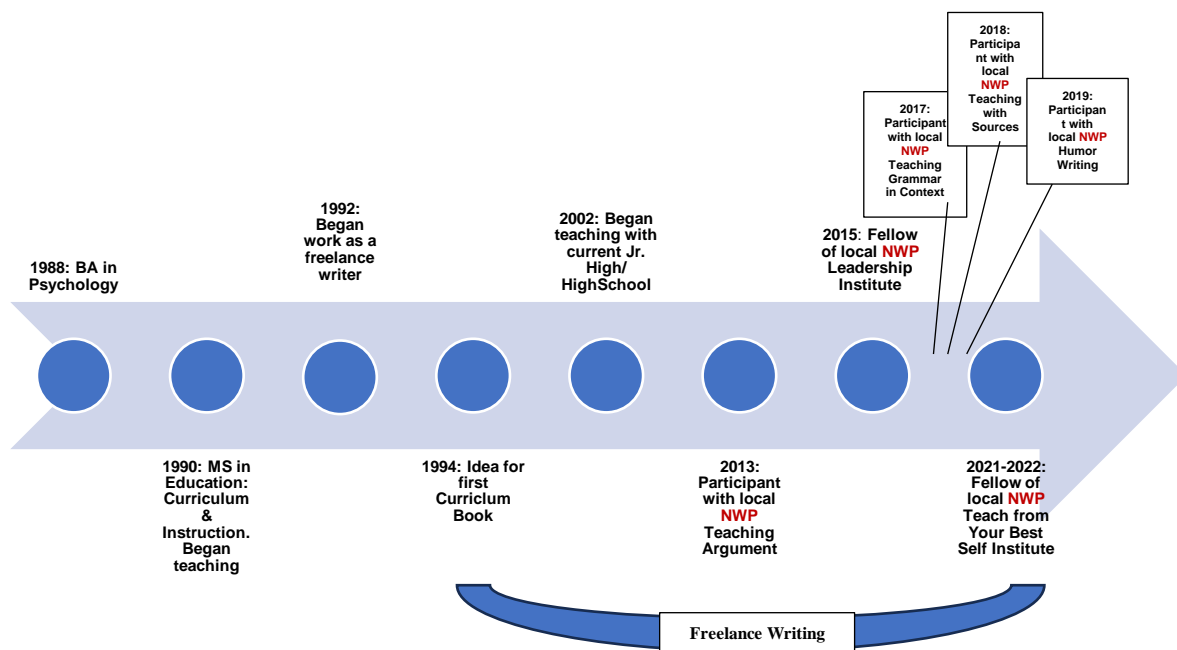


Figure 34: Highlights from Monica's Significant Professional Growth

You can see on the timeline (Fig. 34) that Monica graduated with her first degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, in 1988. Two years later, in 1990 she earned her Master's in Education: Curriculum and Instruction and began her teaching career in the fall of 1990 in California, focused on elementary, K-3<sup>rd</sup> grades. By summer 1991, Monica began raising a family and opted for more flexible hours by substitute teaching and, eventually, freelance writing. The turning point that led Monica to write curriculum books occurred in 1994 while teaching Summer School English for 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. Knowing that her class would be filled with reluctant writers, Monica envisioned a curriculum focused on teaching reviews (e.g., movies, books, music). Her students were so engaged and motivated to write, it occurred to her that



other teachers might be interested. Monica explained in Video 4 that she wrote up her curriculum for the summer, then she went to the local bookstore and perused the curriculum books for publisher information. After she wrote up a practice chapter, she mailed a copy of it along with a book proposal to several publishers. Monica smiled broadly as she shared that she received eight rejection letters. Then followed that with one acceptance letter for one publisher and a counter proposal from another. While our conversations and artifacts focused mainly on the influences of the Writing Project, Monica noted that her experiences with freelance writing, for periodicals as well as the 31 curriculum books for teachers, has been significant in sustaining her professional growth.

Monica's being a "professional growth junkie" made capturing every significant growth experience on her timeline difficult. Before our first interview, she tried to capture all her Writing Project experiences and then shared her resumé to we could look at over three decades of her professional growth experiences. What you don't see on this timeline includes an early experience in 1996 with a California Writing Project site as an instructor for a Youth Writing Conference. Nor have I listed the several workshops' titles Monica created and presented outside of the Writing Project or those she's presented with her local Council of Teachers of English, nor that she has served that organization as vice-president since 2019. She's also served on state and district committees, as well as worked on assessment teams both writing questions and scoring items. Also not listed here are three significant learning experiences: 1) MakeSpace, the action research-based work Monica was integrating into her classroom, as well as her Writing Project presentations; 2) Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (Northwest PBIS, n.d.), whose website describes them as "implementation specialists" who "provide professional development and coaching in all things Positive

Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) & Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS);” and 3) Character Strong, research-based curricula and professional training “focused on engagement, well-being, and belonging” (Character Strong, n.d.). Both PBIS and Character Strong involve working schoolwide with other colleagues. Monica’s involvement with PBIS had been in a schoolyear before our first interview. Both MakeSpace and Character Strong were current pursuits at the time of our first conversation.

What I thought I noticed early on was this gap in time, leading up to her involvement with her Writing Project around 2013 and 2014. I wondered if it was the Writing Project that inspired renewed involvement. I mentioned that in our second conversation and Monica said that was likely true. But in a follow-up email, she explained that the experiences she listed were the ones she could remember. But that there were several things she attended that are not listed. Of course. She is, after all, a “professional growth junkie.” But she continues to credit the Writing Project for expanding her professional growth and for being the one most aligned with her professional beliefs about teaching.

The timeline above captures the significant experiences with her local Writing Project. Beginning in 2013, Monica joined as a Fellow of the Teaching Argument Institute. She described it as a state-wide conversation that discussed and debated definitions, terms, and the writing of argument. In 2015, she attended the Literacy Leadership Institute that officially brought her into the fold as a teacher consultant (TC). And she has remained involved as both participant and presenter with the Writing Project ever since. Monica was in the first cohort of the Teach from Your Best Self Institute when she completed the survey and during our first interview. At the time of our second interview, she’d just presented to the new cohort and made

the decision to not commit to a second year—due to the change in time and the two-hour driving distance.

Yet she continues to nurture her professional growth by redesigning a curriculum to include regular time for writing workshop, to take 10 of her students to a Writing Festival, and to present writing workshops in venues beyond the Writing Project.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Monica’s Sustained Professional Growth**

Monica repeatedly gave credit to the Writing Project, not only for the creativity she incorporated into her own classroom, but in how she began to work as a mentor for other teachers. In our second interview she explained,

The [State] Writing Project has inspired me to find ways to mentor other teachers surrounding—not just language arts—[...] a philosophy that reading and writing are thinking and expression, and that there are also so many different avenues that connect with that. And so, anything where I can find ways to help teachers connect creativity with—not just reading and writing but—thinking and expression for students, I think that has that’s grown out of [the Writing Project]. Some of it is just the confidence from [the] Writing Project to look at myself as a mentor and to present ideas to other teachers—and feel comfortable, not just presenting in my own classroom, but expanding ideas further.

While Monica explained that the Writing Project is the professional development that most closely aligns with her own philosophy, her the timeline table where we gathered 32 years of data shows multiple tributaries adding to the river of Monica’s professional growth. From her undergrad studies to her master’s degree and beginning teaching years, Monica has shown a wide interest in many things. When she began her teaching career in California, she taught all subjects in grades K-3. When she stayed home when her kids were young, Monica stayed involved with teaching by substituting and she honed her craft of writing by working as a freelance author, writing a total of 31 curriculum books over the course of her career.

Once well-established as both a freelance writer and a secondary teacher, Monica began a new pathway in her journey—not one that changed everything, but one that expanded both professional resources and community for Monica to continue her professional growth. One of the things she appreciated the most was connecting with educators with diverse teaching experiences, from beginning teachers to nearing retirement, from rural to urban educators. While she used the term “expanded” in our first interview, “jumpstarted” was a repeated phrase in our second interview, where Monica continues to credit the Writing Project for “jumpstarting” her growth as a teacher of writing in her own classroom and her role as a teacher-leader, as well. While she’s never been disappointed in an experience with her local site, Monica did admit that the Teaching Grammar Institute was the “least transformative” as she still found teaching conventions challenging. Still, those three weeks in 2017 were made enjoyable by the company she kept, other TC’s who shared her love for teaching writing.

Monica explained early on that the Writing Project is the professional growth experience that best “matches [her] educational philosophy,” a student-centered approach. She also valued the “professional relationships” (Interview 1) that allowed her to have conversations about the craft of writing and the craft of teaching. Surrounding herself with like-minded master teachers in pursuit of being better learners, better writers, better researchers, and better teachers of writing. One surprise Monica found, with an event where rural teachers were brought together with urban teachers. She had no idea how similar inner city students could be with rural students. She explained:

Teachers who taught in inner cities matched a lot of the motivation issues that I have I have students that live in rural areas where [...] literally their parents are kind of hiding out from the law. And they have poverty issues, and they have violence issues, and they have trauma issues, and so there’s a lot that can be learned from both your own area, but also from having that mix. (Interview 1, pg. 11)

Monica, a self-described introvert, gained a great deal from her experiences with the Writing Project. It seems in having the opportunities to learn with a diverse group of teachers, her own best qualities helped her make the most of what she valued in teaching: being learner-centered, tapping into student passions, and integrating creativity to inspire and engage all students. Most significantly, I believe Monica's reflective nature set her up for inquiry into her own teaching practices and opened the door to the research-based practices with the Writing Project, as well as MakeSpace and her work with her state's Council of Teachers of English.

### **Referenced by Monica in Interviews and Artifacts**

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Character Strong – <https://characterstrong.com/>

makeSpace – <https://www.makespaceproject.org>

Northwest PBIS – <https://pbisnetwork.org/>

## Chapter 4.6: Nested Case Five—Tara Connors

When I first met Tara with her fire-engine red glasses framing large blue eyes, both complementing her henna red hair, I was struck by her bright and colorful spirit, enthusiastic about teaching, professional growth, and the importance of “unlearning.” In later conversations her soulful eyes would be brown, and in our final conversation the glasses framing those eyes were tortious shell, but her hair remained as fiery as her passion for teaching. In the midst of the 2021/2022 school year, Tara was teaching three preps at a small public school nestled within a large urban district close to the west coast. According to their 2021-2022 School Accountability Report Card, 208 students were enrolled at this Health Professions High School, “A small, innovative high school with a health care emphasis that focuses on preparing our students for college and career” (school website, n.d.). While mostly female (74 percent), this diverse student body included the following demographics: 47.6 percent Hispanic or Latino, 19.7 percent Black or African American, 12.5 percent White, 11.5 percent Asian, 3.4 percent native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native. 4.3 percent of the students identified as two or more races, 14.4 percent are students with disabilities, 2.5 percent are English Language Learners, 1.4 percent are homeless, and 1 percent are migrants. 72.6 of the students were categorized as Socioeconomically Disadvantaged. Tara explained (Interview 2) that her school qualifies for 100 percent Free and Reduced Lunches, making them a Title I school.

Tara began her teaching career in 2008 with this same school as a paid intern, hired to be the drama teacher. She came into the field at 38 and as the drama teacher, she was encouraged to create her own curriculum, as there were no textbooks. This generative act of creating curriculum designed to meet her student’s needs seems to have served her well—when

she began teaching English, she knew to look beyond the textbook in order to meet the needs of the students in her classroom, an instinct not all teachers have. Additionally, the experience in designing her own curriculum likely served her well as she became a contributing member of the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) Professional Learning, founded with one of the state universities. Participating teachers with ERWC bring an approach to learning focused on “reading strategies, rhetorical situation, and grammar” (Interview 1) in a “student-centered, text-rich, English Language Arts program” (Katz, et al., n.d.). Tara spoke of her membership and experiences with the book, proudly—she had helped to create some of the modules in the curriculum. And students who passed her class with an A or a B, received college credit.

In 2021/2022 Tara taught English 12, Government, and Economics to seniors, and Geography & Ethnic Studies to freshman (Survey, 2021). According to her survey, she had also taught drama and a course called Infographics & Epidemiology. Working at a small innovative school requires teachers to hold several credentials. At the time, Tara’s credentials allowed her to teach English and Social Studies. Later she would add Math and Public Health. When Tara began teaching, the enrollment at this magnet school was much higher, but never over the 500-enrollment capacity. However, when numbers dipped in 2012, the protocol for letting teachers go followed the last hired rule and Tara had been the newest hire. She worked just over two and half years “on the other side of town” where there was less diversity and the parents seemed to have a greater sense of entitlement (Interview 2). When enrollment once again made room for another fulltime teacher, midway through the second semester, Tara was able to return to the school where she started and has remained there ever since.

In 2022 Tara and I met via Zoom for three conversations: Interview 1, January 30<sup>th</sup>; an in-between chat, June 4<sup>th</sup>; and Interview 2, December 18<sup>th</sup>. To illustrate her professional growth with the Writing Project, Tara chose a teaching video, and remains the only participant whose video involved teaching students. As per IRB, the camera focused on her teaching, with the only view of students being the backs of their heads and an occasional masked face. Nine of her students submitted consent forms to share their work as artifacts, all at the age of 18 or older. Of those nine students, Tara shared the work of seven. Because of IRB constraints, the focus of the video was on Tara, her teaching, and her classroom.

### **Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>EWP.A Time</b>	<b>EWP.B Choice</b>	<b>EWP.C Low- stakes</b>	<b>EWP.D Modeling</b>	<b>EWP.E Mentor Texts</b>	<b>EWP.F Collabor- ative</b>	<b>EWP.G Confer- encing</b>	<b>EWP.H Publish- ing</b>	<b>EWP.I Portfolios</b>	<b>EWP.J Reflec- tive</b>	<b>EWP AVG</b>
<b>6 Tara Connors</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>82.8</b>
<b>Mean from 7</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
<b>Mean from 71</b>	<b>86.9</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>85.0</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>81.7</b>

*Figure 35: Tara’s Ratings for Elements of EWP*

### **Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts**

I found evidence of Tara including elements of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP) within her classroom practice in an abundance of data: her initial survey; three interview/conversations and their transcripts; her resumé; two videos—the teaching video Tara provided for this research and a video of her addressing parents about what to expect in class found on the school website; and in eight samples of student work, consisting of quickwrites/notes and narrative drafts (via Google Classroom documents, Tara’s teaching video was, in part, a culmination of a unit titled, “Medical Narrative,” a module written by one of Tara’s colleagues with Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) and modified



by Tara to fit the particular needs of her students. The lesson plan included elements of EWP, as well.

***Time—90%.***

On the same survey where Tara marked 90 percent for the consistent time she provides for students to write, she also wrote, “I still feel I don’t write enough in my classes or focus on writing enough.” Yet, evidence from the teaching video (details below, under Choice) and the student work she shared suggests this is an element she values. In her teaching video, Tara gave both guided timed quickwrites and time to begin drafting the medical narrative, her lessons had been scaffolding students toward. Before that day, I’m under the impression that she’d given time, as well. I found additional evidence for daily writing, whether about self-chosen topics or in response to their reading, in Tara’s 2017 – 2018 Medical English 12 Syllabus. Listed as a daily requirement to have in class was “Writer’s/Reader’s Notebook” as provided by the high school. That was pre-pandemic. It was not clear to me about the use of journals or writer’s/reader’s notebooks in class, but I could clearly see the use of electronic devices among some of the students.

On her survey and in our first interview, Tara explained that while the ERWC is an excellent curriculum for preparing students for college writing and the future writing they may do in the medical field, it’s focus is on “reading strategies, the rhetorical situation, and grammar” (Survey). In our interview she explained that her experience in the Summer Institute led her to believe that the demonstration she prepared for the SI was focused more on reading and not enough on writing. In our midway chat (June 4, 2022) she reiterated that she felt she had not included enough writing. While I was not witness to the daily routines, when I look at the overall scope of her 2017/2018 curriculum map (Artifact D), it was filled with opportunities

for writing working on various parts of the writing process with headings like: “Drafting,” “Revision Workshop,” “Editing,” and “Poem Fabrication.” Tara, in our in between chat, credited her experience with the Writing Project for her devoting more time to quickwrites, process writing, and scaffolding students into longer pieces of writing, like the Medical Narrative.

***Choice—100%***

It was easy to see, in both the teaching video and her presentation slides (Artifact E) guiding the writing for the day that, Tara offers an abundance of choice to her high school writers. The video begins as students are wrapping up one quickwrite. Slide one gave them four prompts to consider, one about the short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1899) with the other three concerning the role family/friends may play in medical care, the power dynamics of the doctor/patient relationship, and what it means “to be heard” (Artifact E). Her video begins after this first writing warm-up, when she reminds the class about the protocols for quickwrites (Fig. 36). The protocols provided additional choices for students, as they worked to keep writing, especially when they “get stuck.” Referencing the quickwrites from the day before, where some student provided Googled definitions for “malpractice” rather than the kind of generative thinking that comes from writing, she reminded students that quickwrites help build stamina and reviewed the protocol. While previous quickwrites had been limited to two minutes, the next quickwrite on this February day would extend to five.

## WRITING PROTOCOLS

1. EVERYBODY WRITES
2. KEEP WRITING FOR THE FULL TIME
3. IF YOU GET STUCK:
  - a. rewrite the last line
  - b. write “I’m waiting for inspiration”
  - c. begin describing a place in great detail

UNTIL TIME IS UP, OR YOU’RE ABLE TO MOVE FORWARD (WHICHEVER COMES FIRST)

Figure 36: Writing Protocols

After reviewing the protocol, students were offered four more choices, geared to scaffold their focus on a character and ideas toward writing the first draft of their medical narrative:

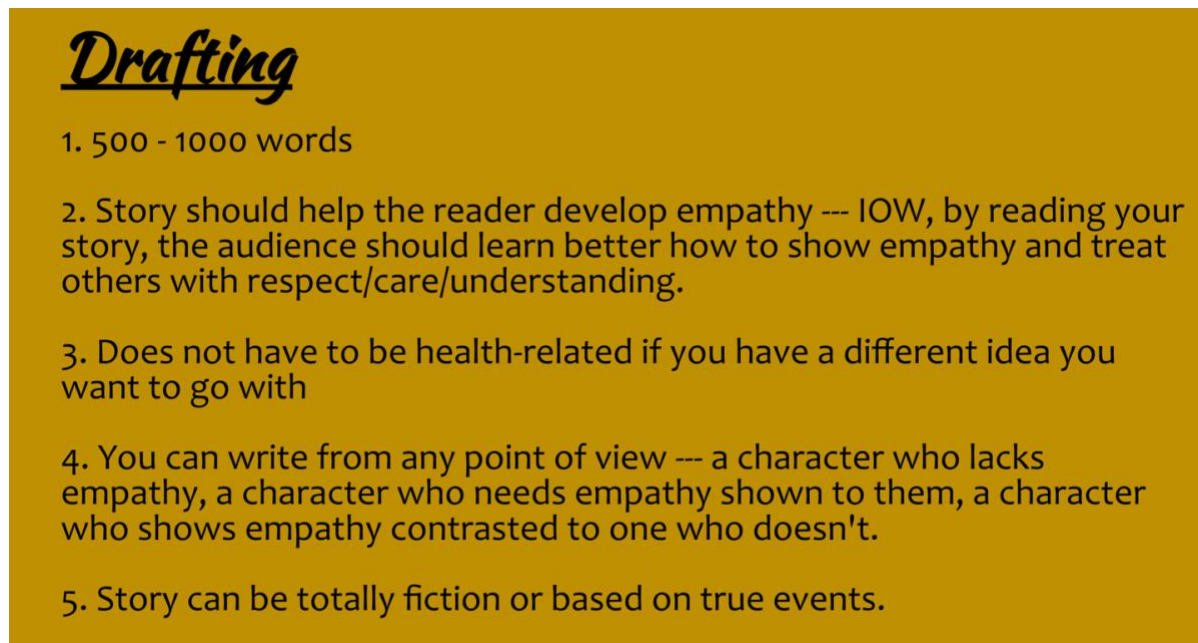
1. Think about a time in your life when you experienced a lack of empathy from someone. Write about that situation - you may fictionalize it if you choose.
2. Imagine a character who is able to see something that no one else can see or that they are aware of something that no one else believes can happen.
3. Think about a health care provider who lacks empathy. How might they see their patients or their duties? How might they write in their own journal or notes about a patient?
4. Imagine a character who shows unexpected empathy in a difficult situation - how do we empathize with people we don’t like? What might that look like? (Artifact E)

While empathy is an important skill for someone going into a health profession, and part of what will drive the plot of their stories, in “teaching something about empathy” (Teaching Video), Tara has offered her students multiple ways to imagine a character or themselves into a possible narrative.

In her teaching video, I noticed that students had further choices in how they were writing. Some wrote on the devices, what might have been chrome books or laptops. And some seemed to be writing on paper or in journals. While Tara uses Google Classroom for students

to turn in their work, she seemed open to accepting work in multiple ways. In an exchange with one student who had not submitted earlier work on the Google Classroom platform, Tara asked, “What would be easiest for you?”

Choice remained an important avenue once students began drafting their narratives (Fig. 37). While the focus is to “help the reader develop empathy,” the story could be “totally fictional or based on true events,” and written “from any point of view.” Moreover, for students with a “different idea” to write about, Tara opened up space with the option for the narrative to not be health related. The focus was on moving the reader with empathy.



***Drafting***

1. 500 - 1000 words
2. Story should help the reader develop empathy --- IOW, by reading your story, the audience should learn better how to show empathy and treat others with respect/care/understanding.
3. Does not have to be health-related if you have a different idea you want to go with
4. You can write from any point of view --- a character who lacks empathy, a character who needs empathy shown to them, a character who shows empathy contrasted to one who doesn't.
5. Story can be totally fiction or based on true events.

*Figure 37: Choices in Drafting*

In reading through the student samples of quickwrites, notes, and narrative drafts, I found where the students took the element of choice to heart. In writing a name for the narrative, Student A.A. chose her own name along with “or Alf.” Other students, when posed with the prompt, “What is one thing you want to accomplish in the future?” listed more than one thing. Clearly, Tara had instilled the sense of choice students had in their writing. And

several of them took up the choice to write about something not health-related, but still focused on evoking empathy in the reader. Of the six narratives from Tara’s students, three of them dealt with topics other than health—one a house fire, one living with the loss of a childhood friend, and one dealing with the negotiating the friendships and relations of adolescence.

Further evidence of choice in Tara’s classroom practice could be found in a practice she referred to as Labor-Based Grading (Inoue, 2022). In listening to her explain the practice to parents and students in her Welcome Back video from her teacher website, I learned, “This system of grading rewards work and effort, so that all students, regardless of initial starting point, can achieve the grade they strive for.”

### ***Low-stakes Writing—100%***

Quickwrites provide low-stakes rehearsal (Donovan, 2020) in writing practice, by allowing students to write as quickly and specifically (Rief, 2018) as they can about a topic of their choosing, without the risk of being penalized for grammar, spelling, or other mistakes. The idea is to practice generating topics and ideas for writing about those topics. Assessing the completion of that practice, rather than imposing a rubric or grading for grammar, is a best-practice many teachers learn from their experiences with the Writing Project—instilling in students a process of writing before focusing on a final product.

That idea fits well with the Labor-Based Grades practice Tara began in (year?) (Interview 2, Welcome Video), where students establish goals and receive weekly credit for the work they complete as opposed to having writing assessed in accordance with a rubric or some other system. Tara attended a workshop called Anti-Racist Writing Pedagogies in Assessment led by Asao Inoue, and in our last interview shared a point Inoue made: “No English teacher anywhere can tell you what the difference is between a B+ and an A- essay—

it's very subjective.” Since students come into an English class with varying goals and needs, creating contracts with students based on their labor creates lower-stakes, and thereby, meaningful goals within their reach. The slide Tara shared as she explained Labor-Based grades can be seen in Figure 38. In our mid-way chat, Tara explained that “additional ‘A’ work” could be making changes to a piece of writing.

**Labor-Based Grading Policy**

- This system of grading rewards work and effort so that all students, regardless of initial starting point, can achieve the grade they strive for.

Grade	Requirements
A	100% work completion, 1 or fewer late assignments, additional 'A' work assignment (just one a week)
B	100% work completion, 1 or fewer late assignments
C	100% work completion, 2 late assignments
D	One missing assignment
F	Missing multiple assignments

- Grades are based on work completion and assigned by the week rather than by the assignment.
- Tests and quizzes are used solely to identify students' discrete knowledge.

Figure 38: Tara's Labor-Based Grading Policy

Creating an environment for low-stakes practice is clearly an important part of Tara's classroom and is evident in the low-stakes ways she guides students in responding to new writing. Tara's experience, and later formal training, with the Amherst Artists and Writers protocols came up on her initial survey and in every conversation we had. She first learned the protocol as a co-sponsor of her schools Creative Writing Club. The protocol she used in the writers in the club is the same she uses with her English students when reading their writing aloud. Everyone treats the writing shared as a piece of fiction—focusing on the writing rather than a significant event in the writer's life. And everyone responds to the piece by considering of the three questions: “What was strong? What stayed with you? What did you love?” (Survey, Interviews 1 and 2). Later, once students are preparing their writing for an audience, they might

be pushed with ways to improve the piece. Pat Schneider (2003), founder of the Amherst Writers and Artists method, would also insist that critique be balanced with as much affirmation as there are suggestions for change (pg. 214).

### ***Modeling—100%***

While we did not talk specifically about the ways Tara modeled writing and reading with her students, I was able to see her model writing in the teaching video (another practice of the Amherst Writers and Artists). When the students wrote their quickwrites, she stood at the podium and looked like she was writing along with them. While this is a common practice in Writing Project Summer Institutes, I didn't want to make an assumption. I asked Tara in our second interview about the teaching video, and she confirmed that she was, indeed, writing her own response to the quickwrite prompts while the students wrote in their various journal forms. Writing at the podium in the Teaching Video was a great example of modeling her own writing.

### ***Mentor Texts—81%***

Mentor Texts were woven into the ERWC Module for Medical Narrative. The three-week unit called for two specific texts: Rita Charon's "Narrative and Medicine," and article published in the New England Journal of Medicine, and Danielle Ofri's "It's All Relative" offering, a video talk about an early intern experience in learning how to determine the death of a patient, while in the midst of their family. And to help guide reflections at the end of the unit, the plan included two haikus from Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*, "How to Listen #7" and "How to Listen #10."

Additionally, as part of the scaffolding for the narrative, Tara integrated the short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Why I Wrote the *Yellow Wallpaper*," by written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. While not specific mentor texts for this unit, Tara, in her teaching video,

references two texts the class was familiar with: John Greene's *The Fault in our Stars* and *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. It wasn't clear if she was referencing the books or the movies or if they had read or viewed them as a class. But the titles had obviously been part of their class conversations as they worked through this unit of empathy building and centering on the narrative of someone in need of care, with a story to tell.

### ***Collaborative Learning—100%***

The teaching video focused on Tara leading her 3<sup>rd</sup> period through a series of quickwrites, then beginning a draft for their Medical Narratives. The work that day was independent and solo. The constraints of the IRB for this research meant focusing the camera only on the teacher and did not allow for the videoing of students, so I did not have the opportunity to witness live collaboration in Tara's classroom. However, in her initial survey, Tara explained how her students worked collaboratively in response to one another's writing. She wrote, "Students do anonymous peer reviews for academic writing but share creative writing only by volunteering. We follow the Amherst Writers & Artists protocols for feedback." Additionally, the Medical Narrative module included opportunities for students to collaborate—once in practicing for interviews and at the end, before writing up self-reflections over their writing, there was an opportunity to pair up and discuss the two haikus by Woodson.

In all our conversations, we talked about Amherst Writers & Artists methods, first introduced to Tara by another ELA colleague teaching with her. When students share their writing aloud it is always voluntarily. The method is meant to be a "generative process" Where the only feedback classmates can give are guided by three questions: "1) What was strong? 2) What stayed with you? 3) What did you love?" (Chat, June 2022). So whenever students are sharing in an open forum in their small groups, Tara explains to her students that in her class



they will never debate—rather they will have discourse, where “nobody’s trying to convince anybody [...] We’re going to put this stuff out there and we’re going to pick all the parts of it, and we’re going to come to a better understanding” (Midway Chat). She added that they might not come to an answer but focusing on genuine discourse “takes out some of that hostility or need [...] to shine and need to overpower others” (Midway Chat).

I got a taste of Tara’s ability to collaborate, herself, in our third conversation, Interview 2, where she turned the tables and asked me about my favorites from the Writing Project. I share details in the final section her case study write-up, but want to point out her the significance of Tara’s own ability to collaborate—likely an important connection to facilitating collaborations in her classroom.

### ***Conferencing—80%***

While having smaller classes would make conferencing logistically viable, we did not speak specifically about how this looked in Tara’s classroom.

### ***Publishing—50%***

I’m not sure what publishing looks like in her classroom. Technically, whenever a student shares their work with someone else, they’ve engaged in a form of publishing and Tara did talk about how sharing new writing aloud in her class worked, following the Amherst Writers and Artists protocol. But that’s all I gleaned from our conversations and the data—the six narratives were in draft form. However, also talked about the Creative Writing Club which Tara co-sponsored. Each year they published an anthology of student work. In the beginning Tara and her colleague and co-sponsor worked to create the anthology themselves. For a couple of years 916 Ink, an “arts-based creative writing and literacy nonprofit that provides workshops and tutoring to transform Sacramento youth into strong readers, confident communicators, and

published authors” (916 Ink, n.d.). Her colleague’s—let’s call her Diane (pseudonym)—connection to the organization helped their club to be chosen as a kind of pilot. For at least two years, 916 Ink helped run their Creative Writing Club and published the anthology for them. Currently, the club/school pays to have the anthology published.

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—100%***

This is another element of Expressive Writing Pedagogy we did not have a chance to talk about. At the end of the school year, I’m not sure what their portfolios looked like. I never worked with Google classroom as a teacher, but there seems to be a feature of Google Classroom that allows for an easy way to for students to keep track of their collections of writing. It would be interesting to learn how that worked in Tara’s classroom.

### ***Reflective Teaching—100%***

I found an abundance of evidence concerning Tara’s ability to reflect—to focus on student learning and make adjustments in her teaching in order to meet their needs. She seems to be one of those teachers for whom reflection comes intuitively, but her experience with the Writing Project may had some influence. On her initial survey, Tara wrote, “I still feel I don’t write enough in my classes or focus on writing enough. Some of this is due to our curriculum requirements - ERWC (expository reading and writing course) which mostly focuses on reading strategies and rhetorical situation and grammar).” English can be a class with competing constraints on the curriculum and Tara felt this tension, even as she helped write some of the modules and served on the curriculum committee for her district. Yet this awareness of the need for more writing opportunities drove Tara to modify the unit with questions to help drive their quick writes and thinking before writing the narrative. She even added the “literature piece to round out the unit” which also served as a mentor text.

Tara explained in our midway chat, that she had worried she had not done what was needed for the research—she had—but she had decided that if she could not be the example she might “be a warning.” We both laughed and talked through what had been completed—the teaching video, guided quickwrites, and first drafts of narratives. As she thought through all she had done, she explained, “When I go back and look at what was my instructional practice like before I did the Summer Institute [...] I would never have tried to do something like this before going through the Writing Institute—I wouldn’t have known how.” Tara was talking about layering the writing and guiding student thinking in between the mentor texts, as they worked toward writing their own narratives. The narrative module seemed a solid unit, but Tara integrated what she learned with the Writing Project into a layered flow of connections for her students, accomplishing two things: a deepened understanding of the importance of empathy and in the process of narrative writing, her students incorporated elements of story as they considered a variety of experiences. That unit evolved because of Tara’s ability to reflect on her teaching.

In our first interview we talked about the definition this research uses for Sustained Professional Growth, and the phrase “specific socio-cultural needs” resonated with Tara. She said,

You know, most of us teachers are middle aged, middle class, white ladies—that’s really more like 80 percent of the teaching profession. And while there are very few people in the world who get up in the morning and rub their hands and say *ooh I want to be as evil as possible*. Um... Most of the harm that we do is not even... not even just unintentional, but unknowing. But that doesn’t mean it’s not harm. (Interview 1)

Then she stressed the importance of learning and teaching to the specific needs of different cultures and different classrooms, adding, “I would not teach on the other side of town the way that I teach in my classroom, because it’s a totally different set of students.” Expanding on this,

Tara described this kind of learning, in learning about different cultures in the classroom as a “reflective process” where she questions her “blind spots” and the areas she is likely to “get defensive.” So, while she liked the definition, she would add the idea “that you do have things to unlearn.” For Tara, *unlearning* is a vital part of the reflective process of professional growth.

### **Beyond Elements of EWP**

Beyond the elements listed above, Tara has curated teaching practices that enhance her Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Her experience with the Amherst Writers and Artists’ protocol influenced her teaching, even before the SI, by helping her establish a safe space for young writers. On the survey she explained that students “share creative writing only by volunteering” and classmates respond by focusing on, “What is strong, what stayed with you, what did you love[?]” Additionally, her work with the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum grounded Tara in some of the practices included in EWP, like choice, collaboration, modeling, and utilizing mentor texts.

But I think another element that Tara brings to her classroom is this notion of *unlearning*. It’s part of her reflective teaching, but it reaches beyond that and is likely related to her commitment to “social justice and anti-racist education,” a statement on the first slide of her Welcome Back video, followed by, “The first rule of my classroom is that we be compassionate with one another. I believe that if we prioritize compassion and empathy, we all learn better and achieve more.”

## **Experiencing the National Writing Project**

### **Local Writing Project Site**

Established in 1981, Tara’s local NWP Site is described via their website as a “professional development network for [State] teachers and administrators.” Like the other sites in this study

the network “follows the Writing Project teachers teaching teachers model” and they offer the following principles as part of their foundational philosophy:

- Student writing can be improved by improving the teaching of writing, and the best teacher of other teachers is a successful classroom teacher.
- Programs designed to improve the teaching of writing must involve teachers of all grade levels and disciplines and should be collaboratively planned by schools and universities.
- Large-scale educational change occurs only over time and can best be accomplished by those who work within the schools.
- What is known about the teaching of writing comes from research and from the successful practices of those who teach writing.
- Teachers of writing must also write, for only by writing can teachers fully understand what they are asking of their students.

Part of a 15-site state network, this site focuses on a seven-county region, offering professional development through an “Invitational Leadership Institute for the Teaching of Writing, demonstration workshops, summer programs, and professional learning opportunities” (website).

Their 2023 Summer Institute consisted of three 4-day weeks, one orientation day in April and one day during the school year. As tradition, Fellows would be expected to “give an inquiry-based teaching demonstrations” focused on teaching an aspect of literacy. Reflection was woven into the application process, asking applicants to “[p]rovide a written snapshot of their classroom,” in response to the following questions:

- Describe your students and their writing strengths and challenges.
- What does typical writing instruction look like?
- What successes and challenges do you face as a teacher of writing?
- In what ways do you collaborate with other teachers?
- What inquiries into your teaching would you like to investigate? (WP Website)

In addition to the Summer Institute, six other workshops were offered between October 2022 and August 2023, one of which was a Super Saturday event that ended up cancelled. Workshops lasting 90 minutes included, “Bringing Joy to the Entire Writing Process,” “Joy

Infusion,” and “Building Shelf Love.” A one-week workshop based with a charter school, but open to others was titled, “Write from the Start,” and a two-week workshop combining two Writing Project sites in a professional development via Zoom, titled, “Ethnic Studies Critical Literacies Institute.”

### **Tara’s Experience with her Local Writing Project Site**

Tara attended her local Summer Institute (SI) in 2015. Before that and since, she attended several Super Saturdays. Tara explained that Super Saturdays are how she stays connected with her Summer Institute. They are “where people who’ve been through the [Summer] Institute actually lead a class” (Midway Chat). In our first interview she explained before going through the SI she would pay a nominal fee like \$15 to attend and that,

It was the finest professional development I’ve ever experienced. Um... It was always good—there was always something to learn. And [...] you could trust it because it was teachers who were still in the classroom and knew what the heck they were talking about. (Interview 1)

In addition to the Super Saturdays, Tara took on a leadership role with her site and later participated in “antiracist book club.”

In describing her decision to apply for the SI, Tara explained that she “had worked with another teacher from a different site who told her, “*You know, you really need to do this.*” Tara explained the nomination process and described interviewing. “You’re really nervous and you’re like, *God I hope they pick me!*” (Interview 1).

When I asked Tara when she first considered herself a Teacher Consultant, she replied “Never” (Interview 1). Despite her involvement with her site and her collaboration with other Fellows from different SIs, she never really thought of herself as a TC because she was not going out and giving presentations about teaching writing. A pivotal moment in her SI came when, “it was kind of pointed out it to me that a lot of what I had been doing had been focused

on reading comprehension. So, the first part of [the presentation] was great, but there wasn't enough writing in it." While this may have seemed a barrier for Tara in considering herself a TC, she returned to her classroom determined to include more writing.

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

### *Context*

Tara began her teaching career and has spent all but just over two and a half years teaching at the same school she is teaching now, a small innovative academy focused on health professions. Students from a large urban district apply to attend this 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade facility, built in 2007. Its capacity is for no more than 500 students. The year of this research, enrollment was at 208, according to their 2021-2022 School Accountability Report Card. Because of the small enrollment, teachers at this school hold multiple credentials. At the time of our first interview, Tara held credentials to teach English Language Arts and Social Studies. By our final interview in December 2022, she was working on credentials for public health and maybe math. When we met in June for our midway chat, Tara was excited to tell me there would be three TCs from her Writing Project (including herself) teaching at her school, all with ELA credentials. That's one more than when we began the research in the 2021/2022 school year. Tara serves several roles at her school, a co-sponsor of the Creative Writing Club, a mentor for new teachers, and she has served on multiple committees at both school and district level.

The number of students who qualified for free and reduced lunches was high enough that 100 percent were provided for, making this high school a Title I school. While the girls outnumbered the boys about three to one, students of color made up the majority (see specific percentages in the introduction of this case study). Teaching with equity and inclusion seemed

an important foundation for this school—their mission, “to provide students with an anti-racist education rich with culturally-relevant academic, career, and leadership experiences while exploring health and medical sciences.” When Tara described the difference between the parents at this school with those from the other side of town, she explained that these parents were more down to earth, less entitled, and were more likely to approach their student’s education as being part of the same team.

In 2021/2022 Tara taught English 12 (both semesters), Government (one semester) and Economics (one semester) to seniors, and Geography (one semester) and Ethnic Studies (one semester for Freshmen. The class she recorded for the teaching video was her 3<sup>rd</sup> Period. Nine of Tara’s seniors agreed to have Tara share their work, as part of this research. As they were all over 18, they signed appropriate consent form. of those nine, Tara was able to locate the Google Classroom assignments for seven students. Two students had submitted their work by a different means. All of the seven included quickwrites and preliminary notes—six included the first draft of the narrative.

While class sizes have been kept to a minimum at Tara’s school, her classroom space seemed large, spacious, and could have, perhaps accommodated 30 or more students. Although in the video I could only count nine to 10 students present. I could not see their faces. Mostly the backs of the heads and an occasional side view of a masked face. From what I could see in the video, Tara’s classroom may have held 10 to twelve 6-foot tables with green topsides. Three blue standard classroom plastic chairs were placed on one side of the tables, so students faced the front, but could easily be moved for collaboration. In the center front of the classroom, a large projector screen allowed for projection slides from Tara’s computer. Tara used a rolling podium upfront, not to lecture from, but to model her own writing, while students



engaged with the quickwrites. When the large screen was not in use, I could see floor to ceiling wood cabinets and shelves covering much of the front of the classroom.

### *Changes*

When I asked Tara about the changes she implemented into her classroom practice, as inspired by her experience with her Writing Project's SI, she talked about a first-grade teacher who created posters from their research and class discussions. Then when it came time to write, students had access to their ideas and words. Their first-grade writing went beyond what you would think is possible. Tara also shared that another teacher's presentation focused on infographics. She offered strategies that began with student observation, asking "What do you notice about this?" and scaffolded participants into creating their own infographic. Taking those same ideas, Tara created a curriculum for a semester-long elective course called, "Infographics and Epidemiology."

Tara also connected her use of the Amherst Writers and Artists method with a Fellow from her cohort who had built a unit around using that method—a method she described as "a generative writing process" and one she continues to use in Creative Writing Club and in her classroom. A Word Slinger acts as the facilitator of this process by offering a prompt that participants may or may not use, depending on their own writing inclinations. And Tara explained, "You also write. It's not like your students write and you watch them write. Everybody is writing." Sharing is optional. "If people want to share-out, they can." And there is no negative critique. The focus is on what was "beautiful and wonderful and striking in what you wrote." Additionally, everything written, autobiographical or not, is treated as if it is fiction. The convention is to use phrasing like, "The narrator said..." or "The writer..." rather focus on the student sharing the story. It adds a layer of safety begun in one of the original

groups of Amherst Writers and Poets, women who working their way about of abusive situations. According to Tara, “You needed to have that buffer and so it turns out to work really, really well with kids.” Then Tara reiterated the focus on what is good in the writing: “If you stress the things that are good, kids do that more.” This is super important, especially in the beginning of the writing process. For Tara’s students, the time to focus on copy editing will come for projects that will be published. But in the beginning, “Just get your words on paper. Just get your stuff out.”

### *Support*

The support Tara received, for implementing the changes she made because of her experiences with the Writing Project, both waxed and waned, depending on the administration. When she first joined the school, her principal encouraged Tara to create her own curriculum, to think outside the box of traditional teaching, and to attend all the professional development she could. In fact, it was an expectation—well, writing her own curriculum for the drama courses she taught was necessary, as there was no textbook. But that served her well when she took on English classes. And the encouragement and expectation for Tara and her fellow teachers to seek out professional development continued. After her SI in 2015, when Tara integrated a new habit of writing in her class curriculum she found support—at one point the school even purchased the notebooks students would use for their reader’s and writer’s notebooks. Additionally, Tara had the teaching capital to design a curriculum for and teach an elective course that was directly influenced by another Fellow’s presentation with infographics.

The support she received from her administration, early on, was important because she worked with two English teachers with traditional approaches, heavily dependent on the

textbooks. Tara could see at the time, how they might better meet student needs. Administrative support for professional growth and applying new approaches to her curriculum, allowed Tara to explore and find ways that fit her students.

Additional support for implementing sound writing pedagogy would come from a colleague teaching Medical Science, also from Tara's local Writing Project. She knew and helped Tara learn the Amherst Writers and Artists method and co-sponsored the Creative Writing Club. Another form of support came from working with other colleagues who have also gone through the Summer Institute. When we ended our midway chat just before the 2022/23 school year, Tara was excited to share that their English department would be three people strong, and all of them had gone through the Summer Institute. She explained, "So, they're really strong and they both have like 10 or more years." In addition to sharing a sound writing pedagogy, they have common practices in fostering independent reading like, "student-choice" (June 2022). Even though in 2023/24 Tara is teaching subjects other than English—she and her colleagues can build on those habits of literacy to enhance learning in other areas, as a tool for learning.

Additionally, Tara's membership in and work with the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum created a supportive foundation of "project-based learning and integrated curriculum" that would pair well with the strategies and practices she learned with the Writing Project.

### ***Challenges***

The challenges Tara faced in implementing new curriculum came from administration, both at her school level and district level. Occasionally a principle would come along who seemed more interested in walking lockstep with district mandates and who believed it was

their job to make sure teachers were doing their jobs. One principal stressed to Tara that he expected her to follow the district curriculum map, the same curriculum map, ironically, for which she helped author. At least a couple of principals were “hammering, hammering, hammering on standardized tests” (Interview 1).

School support for seeking your own professional development, at times, was discouraged by local administration or, sometimes, the district. And when Common Core came to be, Tara’s district was one of the first to sign on to the new curriculum. At first, Tara was excited, but the rollout at the district level seemed dysfunctional. Tara eventually did her own research and found other districts offering practices, curriculum, and strategies that made more sense. At the district level, other decisions can create barriers to implementing your own researched and proven practices. Tara mentioned that for a time, benchmark testing became particularly disruptive, “Every two weeks I turn around and it’s time for me to give my kids another [...] benchmark.” Tara read their writing every day and believed that formative assessment helped her know how her students were doing. Most of the time, the principals at her school were a buffer between district mandates and their teachers’ autonomy. But when they weren’t, teaching any curriculum modifying a curriculum to center on student needs grew challenging.

Tara explained that her students seldom challenged her, apart from the expected few who might say, “I hate to read” or “I hate to write.” Tara believes that “If you are kind and you have a relationship with [your students] and you respect them, they will pretty much... they’re up for almost anything.” The trick is in how you ask. “You’ve got to invite them in the right way.” Then Tara illustrated how her students might respond to being invited. “They’re like,

*Ahh, we're doing what today? Okay. You haven't let us down so far. We don't think that looks fun, but we'll try it."*

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Professional Growth Experiences

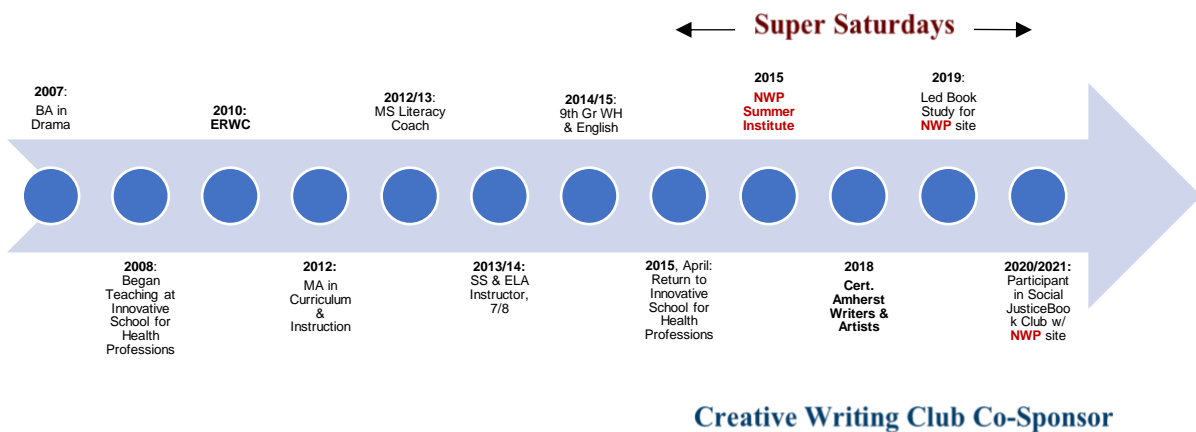


Figure 39: Highlights of Tara's Significant Professional Growth

Tara told me in our first interview that she became a teacher because she loves being a student. Much of her professional growth has been driven by her love for learning. You can see on her timeline that Tara completed her Bachelor of Arts in Drama in 2007 and began teaching at her current school in 2008. Two years later she joined a professional development program with one of the state universities, called Pathways (EPT?) at the time, that would eventually become the group writing curriculum modules for the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum. For at least two years, Tara helped to write ERWC curriculum modules and has maintained an active membership since.

Because enrollment numbers dropped for the health professions high school, Tara's position was lost. For nearly three school years, Tara held different positions at different schools within the larger urban district: a literacy coach for a middle school, a Social Studies and ELA teacher for 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-graders at a K-8<sup>th</sup> community school, and a World History and English 9 at a high school. Once enrollment numbers were back up, Tara jumped at the opportunity to return to the school where she began her teaching. She'd heard about the Writing Project from other teachers she'd worked with and began attending Super Saturdays. In 2015, she attended the Summer Institute. Soon after the Summer Institute, Tara teamed up with a Medical Science teacher at her school to co-sponsor a Creative Writing Club and deepen her understanding of the Amherst Writers and Artists Method and publishing anthologies of student writing, including working with 916 Ink for two to three of their publications. In addition to the SI and Super Saturdays, Tara stayed connected with her Writing Project by leading a book study in 2019 and participating in a Social Justice Book Club in 2020/2021.

While I think this timeline captures the most significant experiences of Tara's professional growth, her resumé includes mentoring new teachers, serving on committees like the Common Core Implementation Committee for ELA for four years, designing and writing district curriculum maps for secondary ELA, including technology standards. Tara has been part of the PBIS team, as well as the Y-PLAN work connected with her school. And is earning certification in Public Health as well as a Mindfulness Teacher Certification. Clearly, much has contributed to Tara's professional growth and sustained her as an educator over the course of her career.

In our first interview, when I asked her What comes to mind when she hears the phrase professional growth, Tara stressed the importance of "leaving behind things that don't work."

Then she explained how everybody comes into teaching with a toolbox. “And you think it’s all about teaching but a lot of it is baggage from when you were a student or [...] that teacher I really admired and they did it this way. Or I didn’t really like it, but isn’t that the way school is supposed to go?” So, whether Tara is “going to a seminar” or “doing a book study, whether with other people or on my own,” what most important is making sure there is room in her toolbox. And do that she has to be intentional about looking at her practice and removing those things that may be harmful or getting in the way. For Tara professional growth includes asking questions like: “What’s in this box that I can get rid of?” and “Why have I been holding on to this thing? It doesn’t work.” Then she asks, “What can I put new in the box?” and “How do I build my instruction in a way that shelters and nurtures my students and their growth?” Her professional growth is never about building a student—rather, she focuses on how to “build a place for them to be what they need to be and learn who they want to be.”

Certainly, many forces have come together to help form this beautiful stance Tara has toward a professional growth that causes not harm and does not act on students but acts, instead, on creating a space for them to learn and thrive wherever they are in life and for whomever they choose to be. Working at a school whose mission includes culturally relevant and anti-racist education would have a great deal to do with that. But it seems the National Writing Project has contributed to that as well.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Tara’s Sustained Professional Growth**

In our first interview, when I asked Tara when she began to think of herself as a Teacher Consultant, she explained that she really didn’t. Because her demonstration was focused more on reading comprehension strategies than on writing, she did not go on to give presentations. She served her Writing Project in other ways—attending Super Saturdays and leading or

participating in books studies—but never called herself a Teacher Consultant. Still, her experience with the Writing Project has sustained her professional growth in many ways.

Tara remains a member of a community of master teachers dedicated to the improvement of the teaching of writing, as well as using writing as a tool for helping students discover and share their voices and unique perspectives in the world. Even before the Summer Institute, Tara tapped into the energy of her Writing Project community by attending their Super Saturdays. The SI, however, directly impacted her classroom practice with ideas she integrated into her English curriculum, using a habit of writing as a scaffold of generative thinking before students settled into the writing of their “medical” narratives exploring and evoking empathy. Other Fellows from her SI sparked inspiration into a practice with the Amherst Writers and Artists method and for creating a curriculum for an elective class called Infographics and Epidemiology. At one point, Tara’s school told her she might be teaching math. In our midway conversation Tara talked about how she might get students to write about the math—and realized that she could tap into the wisdom of her Writing Project community.

Tara’s Writing Project also gave her a connection with other colleagues at her school who had experienced a Summer Institute. Their shared language and understanding for writing pedagogy, along with the importance of choice and voice serves as a support when breaking away from the textbook or other forms of traditional pedagogy. And the Writing Project seems to have affirmed many of Tara’s best instincts when it comes to teaching. She was already learner centered, recognizing the harm that happens when a teacher believes that students come to them already a writer or not a writer. By connecting with the research and with other TCs, Tara’s classroom choices were either affirmed or perhaps even challenged. She talked in the first interview about the importance of teaching with representative literature and materials, as



well as having compassion for students who had been abused by writing instruction. She explained that “there is no such thing as the right kind of writing” and that teaching writing is a social justice issue. “Writing is first for you, the writer, before it is for others. And sometimes it’s never for others.”

Tara’s enthusiasm as both a learner and a teacher is contagious. She brings her own authenticity and, much like the Amherst Writers and Artists method, a way of looking for what’s good. But she is also reflective and willing to do the hard work of unlearning what’s not best in herself or in her teaching practices. Every time we met for a conversation, it was almost like meeting an old friend and someone I knew I would enjoy working with. In our conversation between official interviews (June 4, 2022), Tara turned the table and asked me about my favorite writing process learned from the Writing Project.

That conversation took us into an exchange about guiding student responses to one another’s writing and where I recalled a time with NWP where Summer Institute (SI) Fellows from various sites connected with one another in a kind of blog. Fellows were to respond to one another’s writing, depending on how the writer asked for a response. The three choices were Bless, Address, or Press. Her Amherst Writer’s & Artists protocol of focusing on one of three questions (What is good/strong? What stayed with me? What did I love) when responding to a classmate’s writing reminded me of the “Bless” part of responding to SI writing. We compared that with another protocol I had used with preservice English teachers in a methods course that did not always go so well. Our back-and-forth exchange turned into a creative session of new possibilities. In the end we talked about leaving the positive responses (Bless) of What’s strong? What stayed with you? What did you love? for the whole class or small group forum. But the tougher notes that fall under Address and Press would be better served

in a less vulnerable setting of a one-on-one response. It's this generative kind of conversation that I personally came to value from my own experiences with the Writing Project, and here we were in the middle of one. Tara summed it up with, "Look at us, innovating!"

On the timeline I created from our first interview and her resumé, Tara confirmed her Summer Institute and local Writing Project as a significant professional growth experience. She wrote in the comments,

YES!! Absolutely. I think I mentioned the Super Saturdays because they're how I keep reconnecting to my SI experience. It changed the way I teach writing and how I assess and support student writing. If I had to choose only one PD experience to keep out of everything I've attended or participated in over the last 15 years, it would be the Summer Institute.

Tara believes that out of all the professional development she has participated in, that the Writing Project has had the greatest impact on her teaching. Throughout our conversations she reiterated, "I don't care who you are or what you do—Everyone should go through the Writing Project!"

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## Chapter 4.7: Nested Case Five—Aaron Mann

Aaron is not your typical teacher consultant, nor a typical educator. From the beginning of his career in education, he found himself in a “rare” opportunity to both teach and lead. He continues to teach with the same private school on a campus less than 10 minutes from the state capital. Nestled on 40 acres that includes a spacious and beautiful outdoors, his school’s enrollment for 2023 was 456, representing PreK through grade 12. During school year 2021/2022 when Aaron and I began our conversations, the school would celebrate its largest graduate class thus far—40 graduating seniors. Part of Aaron’s administrative work as Head of High School included overseeing their first and subsequent accreditations with the Independent Schools Association of the Central States, as well as integrating the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (grades 11-12) and Middle Years Programme (grades 5-10).

At the time of our first interview, Aaron had been with his school for nearly twenty years and was in his 6<sup>th</sup> year in education since attending his local project’s Summer Institute. His experience with the Writing Project had expanded his flexibility and made him more aware of opportunities to be student-centered. Aaron shared with me a memorable phrase from a Fellow of his SI that continues to guide him: “I teach writers, not writing.” He shared a second phrase from another SI colleague, “I used to *assign* writing, and now I *teach* writing.” Both speak to how Aaron moved to a more student-centered / writer-centered way of teaching, allowing himself and his students to stray from pre-designed plans or parameters of an assignment, if that’s what it would take to help the student to grow, think, and be able to write.

Aaron completed the initial survey on October 25, 2021. You can see in Figure 40 below how he rated his usage of the 10 elements of an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. When we first met via Zoom on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, I believe Aaron was in an office. He was teaching

two sections of IB Theory of Knowledge and working the rest of the day as the IB Coordinator. It was his first year to *not* teach English. In the background of Aaron’s Zoom screen, I could see a diploma framed and matted, hanging on the wall just over Aaron’s right shoulder. On the opposite end of the same wall, stood a set of red metal lockers, two tan filing cabinets, and a sundry of neatly stacked educational paraphernalia. Aaron greeted me with a warm smile and engaging eyes, wearing a long-sleeved knit shirt in royal blue with school initials in white block letters across his chest. After wrapping up the consent process, we dove into a lively conversation about Aaron’s unique circumstance in both leading and teaching, as well as how his experiences with his local Writing Project have impacted his teaching and professional growth.

### **Developing an Expressive Writing Pedagogy (EWP)**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>EWP.A Time</b>	<b>EWP.B Choice</b>	<b>EWP.C Low- stakes</b>	<b>EWP.D Modeling</b>	<b>EWP.E Mentor Texts</b>	<b>EWP.F Collabor- ative</b>	<b>EWP.G Confer- encing</b>	<b>EWP.H Publish- ing</b>	<b>EWP.I Portfolios</b>	<b>EWP.J Reflec- tive</b>	<b>EWP AVG</b>
<b>7 Aaron Mann</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>48.1</b>
<b>Mean from 7</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>76.4</b>
<b>Mean from 71</b>	<b>86.9</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>85.0</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>81.7</b>

*Figure 40: Aaron’s Ratings for Elements of EWP*

### **Evidence of EWP from Interviews, Videos, and Artifacts**

In addition to the initial survey and two interviews, Aaron provided a video demonstrating what he believed was important professional growth connected with the Writing Project. Aligning with one of the things he most valued from the Writing Project, “authentic conversations” about instruction, Aaron videoed such a conversation with a teacher colleague, one of the teachers he works with and mentors. Let’s call her Elizabeth. At the beginning of the video, she mentioned, “since working here for the last 10 years.” Aaron explained that

Elizabeth is also a Writing Project alumni, often swinging by his office to share her ideas and get a little feedback on the instruction she is planning. The video captured this process as he sat in Elizabeth’s classroom—both wearing masks, because it was still early in the pandemic—while they discussed an upcoming Writing Project for her 6<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA students that included both humorous and memoir writing.

Other artifacts include two images and one document to help me make sense of their video conversation. During their conversation Aaron took a picture of the handout of “stylistic choices” and “audience imperatives” that Elizabeth referenced in the video (Artifact B), as well as the whiteboard in the back of the room displaying mentor texts and project headlines on a kind of continuum moving from Humor toward Memoir—from humorous short stories to humorous memoir to more serious memoir. On the ledge of the chalk board rested several “mentor texts,” aligned under the appropriate headings. Figure 41 below shows a cropped screen shot from the larger image (Artifact A). What you cannot see below is a bulletin board to the left with folders for handouts of individual short stories, but notice the arrows pointing that direction.

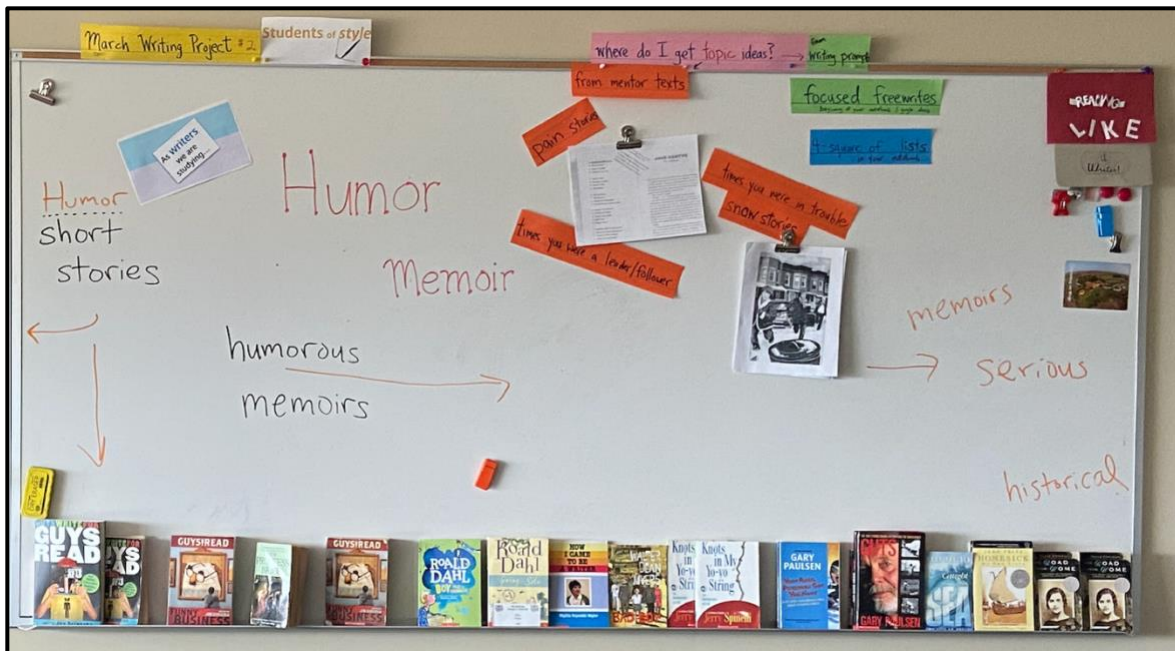


Figure 41: White Board in Catherines Classroom

The third artifact (C) was a pdf of IB MYP First Year (Grades 5 and 6) Criteria for Language and Literature, defining standards for “Analysing,” “Organizing,” “Producing text,” and “Using language.” Additionally, one of the first artifacts Aaron provided in the initial survey was a link to his local Writing Project’s blog, which he helped create in 2016 and continues to be a part of today with no less than 28 posts since its beginning.

Just before our second interview, Aaron shared with me his resumé (Artifact D) and his own timeline (Artifact E), he created in tandem with his resumé to help me create a timeline of his professional growth, which he verified during that interview. Afterwards, he shared with me the two publications (Artifacts F and G) listed in his resumé and two posters (Artifact H.1 and H.2) he worked for three years to create for the English curriculum during his reign as Department Chair. In addition to looking through Aaron’s Writing Project blog, I researched other resources like his school’s website, the IB website, and his local Writing Project website to gain better understanding of Aaron’s teaching contexts. Using our conversations and all of

these artifacts, I explored his use of the elements of EWP below, as well as attempted to answer the research questions later.

### ***Time—50%***

Aaron rated his use of time in the Fall of 2021 at 50%, which may seem odd, in light of his belief in giving students time to write. However, that school year was his first to not be teaching English. He taught one class called The Theory of Knowledge—those students were writing too, just not within a workshop framework. The rest of his time was spent in his role of IB coordinator, integrating the Middle Years Programme and aligning it with the Diploma Program already he'd already helped usher in. Nonetheless, evidence for consistent time for his own and his students' writing can be found in Aaron's blog posts. In 2017, Aaron wrote a post examining a favorite strategy he'd learned from the Summer Institute called the "write-in." He described how write-ins worked during his SI:

We began and ended every day with writing, an experience that made [me] enjoy writing and thinking: free from the pressure to "do" something with the writing, I could write down my inner-most feelings, reflect on ideas that were bouncing around my head, and experiment with writing forms. (2017, Nov. 27)

Since the SI, Aaron had committed the first 10 minutes of "just about every English class" to the same strategy, approximately "one sixth of [his] entire year class time." The post explored his dilemma in that not all his students seemed focused on writing during that time. The remainder of the blog shares the "de-briefing" responses from the five colleagues who participated in the conversation around what would become Aaron's modeling of an action-research experience.

Write-ins remained an important practice for the writing workshop model Aaron had long used for teaching English. Typically, the writing workshop model builds in time for writing, student choice in topics and/or genre, collaborating with other writers, and one-on-one

conferencing with the teacher. Time is created by limiting whole class instruction to a 10- to 15-minute mini-lesson, often including a mentor text for inspiration or learning a craft move. Students then spend time working on a piece of writing, while the teacher conferences individually with students about their ideas, progress, and writerly moves.

Aaron actually writes about the workshop model in at least two of his blog posts. In a 2017 post Aaron focused on structures and systems within the workshop framework, and described a preference he shared with a colleague for

less ‘teaching’ time and more ‘student thinking’ time: any whole class mini-lesson or debriefing time should be as brief as possible, so as to give students the opportunity to write, to read, and to talk, as the practice and reflection time is when young writers learn their craft. (Writing Project Blog, January 16, 2017)

Aaron broke down the time students spent each week under “direct teacher instruction” versus independent work (time writing and time thinking about writing in peer conferences), which Aaron computed to be approximately 10 percent direct instruction and 90 percent writing and peer response. The goal for the workshop was to create space and practice for “the singular focus that characterizes deep thinking.” In addition to utilizing the workshop model in his own classroom, Aaron, as the department chair (2013-2016), brought the workshop model to his school, along with practices for Writing Across the Curriculum. Whether in English or in another subject, the students at Aaron’s school have a lot of time to write.

### ***Choice—50%***

While we did not discuss “choice” in either of our interviews, the concept of choice appears repeatedly in his blog posts. In a November 26, 2018 post, Aaron wrote,

This is but one reflection and, combined with the other students’ reflections, offered me valuable insight into my students’ writing process and enabled me to better plan the next revision cycle: giving students clear options at various stages and directing them towards successful choices based on both their stage of writing and personal preferences.



In a 2018 (Apr. 21) blog post, Aaron shared a lesson for helping his IB English juniors in preparing for their an important IB assessment, Individual Oral Commentary over the works of writers like Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, and Elizabeth Bishop. To help them deepen their understanding of the choices writers makes, Aaron believed, “the best way to appreciate another writer’s choices is to have made one’s own choices as a writer.” While the lesson Aaron shared asked students to write a poem that specifically imitates the writerly choices of Bishop, somewhat constricting choice, when they wrote commentary comparing their own attempts to Bishop’s style, students responded to two open-ended prompts. Their literary commentary would be grounded in the text, but choice would emanate from their thinking about their own original work, alongside the work of the poet.

In the video he provided, Aaron and his colleague, Elizabeth, a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade English and social studies teacher, also an alumni of Aaron’s local Writing Project, were bouncing around ideas for her March and April Writing Projects. The projects were filled with a plethora of choices for students who will be creating a collection of writings combining Humor and Memoir, as well as including at least one poem. Choice is obvious in the mentor texts (see Figure 41 above) they had to choose from for both inspiration and form, as well as stylistic choices. The pieces students chose to create for their collection could have been humor, humorous memoir, serious memoir, or a combination. While Elizabeth wanted to include at

Style: <b>word choice</b>	Style: <b>sentence structure</b>	Style: <b>repetition</b>
Style: figurative devices — <b>hyperbole</b> (a.k.a. exaggeration)	Style: figurative devices — <b>simile, metaphor</b> (comparisons)	Style: <b>reference or allusion</b> ... to a person, event, other text that the reader is familiar with
Style: <b>imagery</b> (language that appeals to the five senses)	Style: figurative devices - <b>personification</b> (giving human attributes to an animal/thing)	Helping the reader feel <b>antipathy</b> (dislike) or <b>sympathy</b> (pity) or <b>empathy</b> (sharing the character's feelings)
<b>Form</b> (the structure or shape of the writing)	<b>The mood or atmosphere</b> (the overall feeling the reader gets)	<b>The tone</b> (writer's attitude toward the subject of their writing)
<b>The title</b>	<b>The lead</b>	<b>The ending</b>
<b>motifs</b> (aka ideas/images that occur again & again) & <b>themes</b> (messages)	<b>Visual images and layout</b>	<b>Onomatopoeia</b> Sound words

Figure 42: Stylistic Devices and Audience Imperatives

Imperatives” intended their writing. In Figure 42, you can see the upper half consists of style devices assessed by the IB MYP and in the lower half, are important concepts for writers that Elizabeth referred to as “audience imperatives.”

As I viewed and listened to the video, it felt less like an administrator/teacher conversation and more like the conversations I experienced at my own NWP Summer Institute. Before Aaron offered his own thinking and ideas, he did two important things. He asked a lot of clarifying questions, some of which opened up options Elizabeth might consider. For example, after Elizabeth explained her vision of combining memoir with humor, Aaron asked if the students would be allowed to write fiction. Elizabeth’s response included a “Yes,” along with examples of specific and additional genres like “propaganda,” “poems,” and “personal narratives.” Aaron’s other helpful conversation move seemed to be his ability to report back

least one poem, she was also open to students writing short stories, propaganda, or some other form of written text that would help them demonstrate an understanding of stylistic choices. What she planned to assess was not the collection as a whole, necessarily, but each student’s “commentary about how they produced their texts,” which would include reflections on the final writing collection, the stylistic choices, and what she called “Audience

what he thought he was understanding, often including what he deemed as strengths—like the “nice range” of options Elizabeth’s parameters were allowing. When he did offer directional ideas for Elizabeth to consider, he’d already reflected back what was strong and good in her plan. And still, Aaron left her with choices to think about.

Their video conversation seemed to reveal the importance of choice, a strategy that centers on engaging and empowering the student, which also seems to be an approach Aaron includes with his teacher conversations. Even when he emphasizes the importance of assessing for the writing process (which will be detailed below under “Beyond EWP”), Aaron leaves room for Elizabeth to make the final call. He also reiterated that he loved how Elizabeth had given students choices in this project.

Another idea Elizabeth explored in their conversation was an observation she’d been making over time about students who struggled with dysgraphia or getting down the written word, legibly. She noticed with both English and history writing, those same students struggled to elaborate or support their thinking with evidence and details. For assessing the reflection over their writing collection, she wanted to find options for those students who struggled with putting words on paper, that would not punish them during their reflective process and commentary. Aaron related right away to his own efforts to get students to reflect on their work and wondered if they were not simply writing what they wanted him to hear versus something authentically reflective. Together Elizabeth and Aaron fleshed out an idea where students could be videoed with an image of the work, highlighted for the purpose of pointing out examples of their stylistic choices or audience imperatives. They talked about the technology that might be involved, and agreed this was a viable option for students to demonstrate what they had learned.

Aaron’s understanding of the importance of choice as an instructional strategy likely happened before his Summer Institute in 2015. In our second interview as we reviewed an initial timeline of his professional growth experiences, focusing especially on the ones that seemed significant and had sustained his career, Aaron mentioned an article written in 2010. It reminded him of working with his coauthor as a research participant for *her* dissertation. His class just before lunch had been one of three groups— “writing sites” —studied in a dissertation that examined the impact of choice on student participant with writing. The amount of choice, free of a grading system or preparation for a test score seemed to drive greater engagement and joy in writing. In addition to Aaron’s classroom, the two other writing sites were an online writing group and a summer writing camp. Aaron declared, “And guess what! The punchline of the dissertation is that the more [...] choice the students have to participate— not my classroom—the more they like writing.” The choice Aaron provided as part of his pedagogy, while greatly beneficial, had nothing on the other two options where students chose to sign up or participate. His was still a required class. Still. Choice seems an important lesson Aaron learned earlier in his career that aligns nicely with the National Writing Project model, as well as Expressive Writing Pedagogy.

***Low-stakes Writing—51%***

While Aaron and I did not explicitly discuss assessment or “low-stakes writing” in either of our interviews, I found several allusions to it in both conversations, as well as specific references in the larger body of data. Already mentioned under “Time” was Aaron’s use of “write-ins” at the beginning of class. In a blog post where he questioned the practice, Aaron wrote:

I believe that this writing must be free and that I must not see it or assess it in order for the write-in to serve the purpose of helping students develop their own voice, generate

their own ideas, see writing as a thinking tool, and improve their language skills. (2017, Nov. 27)

Teaching his students to think was a common theme throughout this collection of data. On the survey, Aaron explained, “I try to share with students the difference between writing to think versus writing to publish, that both are useful skills when appropriately used.”

It seems likely that in guiding students in their *writing-to-think*, Aaron creates a low-stakes environment for students to take risks in their writing and to negotiate their own writing process. And this may be where his experience with the NWP has held the greatest influence. In our first interview, Aaron noted that a significant impact from the Summer Institute centered around a NWP belief that teachers of writing should write, themselves. This notion moved Aaron and a colleague to suggest greater opportunities for his site’s alumni and incoming SI Fellows to write about their own teaching practices in a local blog. Aaron’s work with the blog site was at least one way where he engaged in his own writing process. While he wasn’t sure the SI “necessarily transformed” his “curriculum” or his “approach,”—he was already teaching with writing workshop and facilitating students through a writing process—engaging in his own writing process heightened his awareness of his students’ needs as novice writers. In our first interview, Aaron explained, “For me, the biggest thing was, ***now that I was actually doing some writing*** [...] I think I became better, more sensitive.” Aaron seems to be talking about an improved ability to meet his students’ specific needs, essentially meeting them where they are in their learning and their writing process. He learned to ask questions like, “What stage in the process are you in?” (Interview 1) to help determine the next steps or task to move them forward. While the writing process and the workshop approach were already elements of Aaron’s classroom, his growing flexibility added a new level of low-stakes writing opportunities for his students.

Aaron explained about this growing flexibility in our first interview, "...it's okay, if I'm teaching these kids to think and ask questions, it's cool if we go off my little plan." In our second interview, he elaborated with an example about a specific student for whom he'd "tweaked the assignment." She had come to him with comments like, "I don't know how to get started," "I have too many ideas," and "I don't know how to organize" (Int. 2). Since a goal of Aaron's was to "teach every student a writing process so that they know how to go through all of the steps," he modified the assignment to meet her specific needs. He elaborated:

I said "Right. What we're going to do is you're going to come up with three different ideas for this piece. You're going to come up with three different organizational structures. And you're going to track both. I'm going to give you three, sorry, I'm going to give you three different ways to organize your thoughts. And I want you to track which ones seem to offer you the most insight. Because I have noticed that in your last few assignments you've had trouble getting going."

And she's like, Well, that's not fair to others if I don't have to write the full piece."

And I'm like, "Well, yeah, but it's really important that you learn because you're always going to get stuck. And as much writing as you're going to have to do in college and beyond, I think it's really important that you learn these tactics right now and you learn a process that works for you." (Interview 2)

I found more on Aaron's thinking about assessment practices in skimming his blog posts. In one, titled "When Failing an Assignment Earns a Grade" (2019, Jan. 14), Aaron shares about an assignment to "imitate" one of the writers they had been reading. After sharing the student's reflection that they believed they had failed the assignment, Aaron explained that his understanding and use of assessment ultimately shapes "his students' writing experiences throughout the process of composition" and the opportunity to incentivize his "student writers towards effort and reflection." Thus, while the student accurately assessed her ability to imitate the specific writer as having failed, Aaron assessed her effort and reflection on her writing with an A.

### ***Modeling—10%***

On the survey, the statement for modeling read, “I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own processes for learning.” So, at 10 percent, Aaron’s second lowest rating of the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy, it looks like modeling is part of his classroom practice, just not as often as other practices. Our conversations did not reveal how he might or might not model his writing and learning processes for his students, but in a blog post (2016, Sept. 12) Aaron wrote about his “own notion that writing is a cognitive apprenticeship.” It seems that Aaron found multiple resources and models for nurturing that cognitive apprenticeship outside of his own examples, namely in utilizing mentor texts (below).

. In an April 2018 blog post titled, Aaron wrote about helping his students “write beside” a poet, in this case Elizabeth Bishop. He led his students through process to better understand the poet’s writing that included writing their own poem. After brainstorming “small moments” and “specific scenes” from their own lives and before drafting their own poems, the students type out a selected poem to get the feel of the poet’s “rhythm” and “flow.” In this blog post, Aaron wrote, “In doing this task myself last week, I realized how Bishop anchors her lines with identical or rhyming words in a way that I had not understand in over 20 years of reading her poetry,” (2018, Apr. 21). Here would be an example of Aaron’s modeling a learning strategy and sharing the impact of that process.

Additionally, it seems to me that Aaron further demonstrates the practice of modeling with his leadership in helping to create his site’s Medium Blog. In facilitating other teacher leaders with their participation, Aaron provided many models of how to write about and reflect on your own teaching and writing practices.

### ***Mentor Texts—75%***

Aaron rated this element and two others with 75 percent, the highest rating he gave to any of the elements of EWP. While *how* he uses mentor texts did not come up in either of our conversations, I ran across at least two blog posts where Aaron wrote about having students choose writers to imitate. In addition, to the post titled, “When Failing Earns an A” mentioned under Low-Stakes Writing, Aaron also wrote about this classroom practice in a 2023 post titled, “Predictable and Average.” While the post contemplates AI and student thinking, Aaron shared a practice he moved towards in the last few years of teaching English. Below he explained his “emerging approach to teaching writing in English”:

[S]tart students reading a good writer, have them articulate the elements of the writer’s style and genre, then imitate the writer to learn something about writing and something about their life. When students do this, reading & imitating such writers as Joan Didion, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jamaica Kincaid, Elizabeth Bishop, they invariably improve and I invariably read a set of engaging, insightful, and moving pieces. Though imitative, this approach enables students to develop their writing skills while giving them a form to develop their own ideas about their experiences. (Blogpost, 2023, Sept. 5)

Additionally, Aaron’s post, “The Art of Imitation,” (also described above under “Modeling”) details the steps his students follow in studying the writing style of Elizabeth Bishop, along with the steps to writing their own poems, mimicking that style.

In Aaron’s video submission, Elizabeth talks freely about Mentor Texts throughout the conversation. Mentor texts seem central to her classroom practice, whatever she is teaching, from memoir to humor writing, and are included explicitly for the memoir/humor Writing Project, the focus of the video conversation (see Figure 41 above). In addition to a folder of humorous shorts stories attached to the bulletin board on the side, the titles of texts moving from humorous short stories toward memoir, humorous, serious, and historical include: anthologies from the *Guys Read* series, *Princess Bride*, Roald Dahl’s *Boy: Tales of Childhood*,



and *Going Solo*, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *How I Came to Be a Writer*, Walter Dean Myers' *Bad Boy*, Jerry Spinelli's *Knots in my Yo-Yo String*, Gary Paulsen's *Guts*, *How Angel Peterson Got His Name*, and *Caught at Sea*, as well as *Homesick* by Jean Fritz and *Road Home*, the author of which was indiscernible. To help scaffold students into studying mentor texts for stylistic choices and audience imperatives (see "Choice" above), Elizabeth created what she called "Doodle Sheets," a legal sized sheet with callout shapes of varying sizes, for students to make notes as they studied various mentor texts together or on their own.

Additionally, Elizabeth had a plan to use past students as "visiting dignitaries" to present their past memoir and humor pieces as mentor texts. In the past she called it the "Humanities-a-tarian" where the student picked something they were proud of, shared, and the writing was put up on display.

### ***Collaborative Learning—75%***

Similar to other elements of EWP, Aaron and I did not discuss the particulars of how he facilitates collaboration among his students in either of our interviews. However, in a blog post titled, "Seeking Feedback, Giving Feedback" (2016, Dec. 12), Aaron shared a writing workshop practice where he asks his students to seek and provide feedback for their work according to the stage of writing process the work is in. He suggests that the onus is on the writer to set the stage for appropriate feedback from their readers, based on the stage of their writing. These stages, borrowed from the work of Peter Elbow, are laid out below in Figure 43, below (I created the table to share with students). The idea is to invite a reader into an open and intentional "mental space" in order to offer the "most relevant feedback."

Brainstorming “Believe”	Drafting “Report”	Revising “Doubt”	Editing “Edit”
When you are in the generative stages of forming ideas, freewriting, searching for the spark that will move your thinking forward, ask your readers to “believe in [your] work, looking for ideas, scenes, and metaphors that could be developed: ‘I want to read more about...’”	When you are writing more and beginning to understand what your piece is becoming, asking your readers to report what they notice or what “Peter Elbow calls the ‘movie of the mind’” is a helpful reminder to “not judge” the piece, but simply share their connections with comments like, “This image reminds me of me of...”	Once your draft is down and you are interested in shaping the piece for an audience, you can ask your reader to “Doubt” the writing, to look for the places where the purpose is unclear or not achieved. Readers might respond with: “In this section, in order to achieve your purpose, [you might consider]...”	When you are at the final stages and “checking the mechanics, spelling, grammar, conventions” of your piece, ask your readers to “Edit” and to respond specifically with corrections and comments like “The correct spelling is...”

Figure 43: Table Created to Represent Content from Aaron’s Blog

In addition to sharing this insight about feedback fitting the state of the writer’s process, Aaron described a similar protocol in his blog, “The Art of Imitations” (2018, April 21). It’s the exercise of imitating a poet—Elizabeth Bishop, mentioned under the Mentor Text section. Within the steps of this process—after studying the poet, brainstorming, writing their first draft poems, and taking a 2-day break from the writing, Aaron led students a “short writer’s workshop” where readers were asked to make two kinds of comments:

- Categorical: “In this passage, your writing is like Bishop because [identify technique]”
- Causal: “In this passage, your use of [identify technique] caused me to [see, think, feel, etc] [insert what you thought]” (Blog Post, 2018, April 21)

It’s interesting to note how Aaron adapts the process of feedback to meet the needs of his students along with the purpose of the assignment. His use of collaboration for writing feedback may have been a practice *before* the influence of his local NWP site. However, collaborating with other teachers as they wrote about their classroom practice brought something new to Aaron’s stance as a teacher of writing.

On his initial survey, Aaron shared that he “led a year-long program” connected with the blog site for his local NWP site. In our first interview, Aaron explained that he and a few other TCs were brought together as a core group to discuss possibilities to support and grow their site’s capacity. Aaron and a partner TC talked about how transformative their SI had been and the idea that “English teachers of writing should also be writers,” concluding that “the only thing that was lacking in our summer cohort was enough writing” (Interview 1). During the meeting they suggested, “Wouldn’t it be cool if [their site] had a year-long [program where] the focus was writing and like you have a little [local site] blog, essentially? And everyone writes a blog.”

His site director loved the idea and responded, “That’s a great idea. I’m signing you two up to run it.” They protested that they were simply brainstorming, but the director remained determined. “Okay, that’s great but you guys are going to do it, so cool.” And so Aaron and his colleague did. The following year, they presented about their process at the NWP Annual Meeting (Resumé/Timeline). They were told this was the first blog for a NWP local site.

As a school leader, Aaron, demonstrated how his school promotes collaboration between academic departments – promoting Writing Across the Curriculum—mentioned on his resumé, as well as in the video with Elizabeth, a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade English teacher, Elizabeth, also a NWP alumni, where Aaron demonstrated his own ability to collaborate with a colleague about instruction. In that conversation she mentioned the collaboration with 6<sup>th</sup>-grade Science, as students in English read and discussed *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, while in the science teachers helped them focus on science concepts. Concerning the end of the year Writing Project, Elizabeth’s students would have options to create the project singly, as

partners, or as a small group. And throughout the process, collaborating along the way, as well as sharing the final product would take place in small groups.

### ***Conferencing—75%***

On the survey, Conferencing is described as “Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.” This makes the third element of EWP where Aaron gives his highest ranking at 75 percent. That is likely due to his long-standing practice of Writing Workshop. In our first interview, Aaron explained, that he had volunteered to serve as the English Department Chair and under that capacity, he was “the one that brought the writing workshop model into our school.” A major component of the writing workshop model is the time for one-on-one conferencing. As mentioned earlier, writing workshop allows students to confer with the teacher while the rest of the class focuses on their own topics and stages of the writing process.

When talking about working with his students, Aaron gave a couple of examples alluding to one-on-one conversations about their writing. Because of the insights gained in his Summer Institute, Aaron took time to ask questions specific to their learning, their writing, and their thinking, often modifying assignments, if it served the students learning needs. He argued that their writing workshop was time “designed to get [students] writing and thinking and learning how to be a better writer[s] and thinker[s].” He allowed students to take different directions in the assignments, as long as they could explain what they were “learning as a writer and a thinker” (Interview 1). Recall the example detailed under Low-Stakes Writing where he gave the student an assignment focused on brainstorming three different approaches to organizing for the assignment versus completing a final draft of the writing. I imagine this happened within a one-on-one conference about their writing and thinking.

Aaron wrote about conferencing with his students in one of his first posts on his local NWP site's Blog in a piece titled, "Teaching Beliefs" (2016, Aug. 1). His lead for this post is a brief description and dialog from a one-one writing conference from the spring. Readers learn a lot about Aaron's teaching beliefs in what looked like would be a brief exchange. The student came with the intent to improve her writing. In what seems an unusual move for a writing conference, Aaron offers her a choice to work on her writing piece, which is already strong and already worthy of an A, or to look at the piece, "sentence by sentence." She chose the latter and they spent 45 minutes looking at ways to improve her writing.

After opening with a scene from his classroom practice, Aaron explains two beliefs that support this pedagogy: 1) "Learning writing is very difficult" and 2) Learning writing is like a cognitive apprenticeship." The following words toward the end of the piece offer a rationale for one-on-one conferencing: "I think of writing as a vital cognitive tool for every thinking person, and the more I can ask these apprentices to practice and offer appropriately timed feedback, the better students will develop their craft."

### ***Publishing—25%***

Aaron ranked publishing at 25 percent, representing his teaching beliefs and/or classroom practices. Aaron's work on his local site's blog for all TCs, as described under the Collaboration section, seems evidence for his belief in publication, as well as his belief in *teachers of writing should write*. Not only did Aaron facilitate a year of writing with his site's TCs, he created the Blog Site and many of the initial posts. His work served as a model, as well as an actual vehicle for publication. As for publishing the writing of his students, I found evidence of some publishing in the blog post, "The Art of Imitation" (2018, April 21) at the end

of their Write-like-Bishop exercises. For one of the final steps in writing beside the poet's poem, Aaron explained,

And then the students were done. No grade, no assessment, just an exercise in writing that I then asked them to share with the world. Using their school email accounts, they logged on to Medium and published their stories on a quickly created site. (2018, April 21)

In the post, Aaron included a link to the *Medium* site title, "Writing Like Bishop." There I found six poems with titles such as "Like You, a Leaf," "Familiarity," and "The Climb."

In Aaron's video with Elizabeth, his colleague and fellow NWP alumni, mentioned several ways she publishes student work. She mentioned a display where each student picks selects the writing they are most proud of. Elizabeth also shared how in the past year her students shared their final humor projects in small groups. One of her small groups gathered in the hallway, while she monitored their progress via Zoom. Students were sharing and laughing, when she heard a younger student exclaim, "Wait—what class is this?" He was in her class at the time of the video and Elizabeth explained that he has been asking again and again about the fun project he witnessed in the hallway. I share this because I think it speaks to the power of publication—when students simply find a way to share their voices there is power there.

Additionally, as mentioned under the Mentor Texts section, Elizabeth makes a practice of having past students serve as "visiting dignitary[ies]"—past 6<sup>th</sup>-graders sharing the best of their writing with her current 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. She has called the person sharing a "Humanities-atarian." The point being to allow students to share publicly the writing they are most proud of and to talk about their creative process.

### ***Portfolios/Collecting Writing—5%***

Portfolios, where “students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared,” received Aaron’s lowest ranking. Interestingly, in response to a follow-up survey question, “If you wish to explain any ratings from Item 21,” Aaron wrote, “These numbers reflect my practice, but not always my theory (e.g. I would like to do more with portfolios).” While the use of portfolios did not come up in either of our interviews (I missed an opportunity for a follow-up question), I searched Aaron’s local NWP Blog Site for “writing portfolios” and found one TC writing about portfolios in four different posts. So the concept is alive and well among the TCs writing about their classroom practices. Perhaps Aaron’s wanting to do more with them was inspired by these posts.

In the video conversation with his colleague, Elizabeth, they discussed her end of the year project, a collection of finished pieces of writing (humor, memoir, poem). Aaron made a direct comparison, “Ahh... sort of like a portfolio model. Here are my drafts. Here are the things I’m most proud of... the final writing assignment is to polish off one or more of your final pieces.” Elizabeth’s explained throughout the video that her students would have access to several pieces they’d already brainstormed. So technically, while the project might not have included a collection of all their writing, her parameters seem to include a collection that represents important learning.

### ***Reflective Teaching—65%***

While Aaron gave Reflective Teaching the second highest of his ratings for elements of EWP, reflection came up again and again throughout both interviews. Not only does Aaron reflect on his own classroom practice, but a great deal of his teaching is guiding students to reflect on what they are learning. Early in our first interview, Aaron mentioned having been

part of another dissertation with a colleague I will call Jane. Aaron’s class of IB English students had participated as one of three groups of writers, for her research on the impact of choice for writing motivation. In our second interview, when we talked about his timeline of significant professional growth experiences, Aaron pointed out a publication he and Jane had cowritten in 2010 and brought up the dissertation once again. He explained that as one of three writing sites—the other two were an online writing community and a summer writing camp—his class seemed to enjoy writing the least. It turns out that “the more [...] choice the students have to participate—not my classroom—the more they like writing.” While he brought in choice through writing workshop, his students reminded him that they were still being graded and the focus of the class remained the IB score for their writing assessment.

Interestingly, it was the process of having Jane visit his class a couple of times a week and then afterwards, debriefing, that Aaron referred to as a significant professional growth experience. With each observation of his class, they would debrief afterwards. While they planned to spend 15 to 20 minutes discussing the observation, Aaron explained that sometimes their conversation would be up to an hour or more. That’s where some of their ideas for the article emerged. Furthermore, Aaron shared why the experience was so significant:

[...] it was having someone observe my class for a couple of months. And then, immediately talking about it [...] to start a conversation like a genuine inquiry mode. Not like *What did I do good? What did I do bad?* But like, *What was happening there? What did you notice?*

Describing these conversations as “fantastic” and “awesome”, Aaron’s seems to have experienced, with Jane, authentic reflection on the questions that “make us think about teaching.” This significant professional growth experience occurred five years before Aaron’s Summer Institute, and I suspect that reflecting on his teaching practices, as well as his leadership practices, comes naturally to Aaron.



Nonetheless, reflective teaching remained important through this experience with his local project. In his first two posts on his local site's blog, Aaron lays out a fundamental premise for the posts that TCs and non-NWP readers alike could expect to read about: "Teacher Beliefs" (2016, Aug 1) and "Teacher Inquiry" (2016, Aug 1), co-written with his NWP colleague. Concerning teacher beliefs, Aaron shared about a "current journey exploring what I really believe about teaching and learning, forcing me to articulate and challenge some of my long-held assumptions along the way to, well, I'm not sure yet." What an excellent description for reflective teaching. In the co-written piece on teacher inquiry, Aaron and his colleague helped define the "teacher workshop" or presentation that has been a traditional piece of the NWP Summer Institute.

To facilitate this process of inquiry, all [Local NWP Site] Writing Project participants are asked to conduct a Teacher Workshop, in which all participants learn alongside the presenter. In the workshop, the presenter shares their question, their research, their provisional answers and asks participants to engage in exercises and reflections that enable both the presenter and participants to reflect on our teaching.

This model of shared inquiry is reflected in this publication, in which writers explore their teaching beliefs and explore the material presented in both their own and their colleagues' workshop. (2016, Aug. 1)

This captures the shared NWP model of teacher inquiry along with the role of reflection within that inquiry.

In several other posts, Aaron continued to reflect on his classroom practice, including a piece titled, "Questioning the Write-In" (2017, Nov 27), where he shared a dilemma he faced with his classroom practice. While Aaron believes in "the power of the write-in: a 10-minute free write on the daily prompt," he noticed that not all of his students were using that time to write. In the piece he considered the idea of "enforcing" some kind of accountability, but that, too, presented a challenge:

Simply put, my dilemma is that I believe in the power of the write-in as a private, free writing exercise but I want to start imposing the sort of checks and assessments that might force more students to engage deeply but, I suspect, would take away the very power of the exercise.

As part of a group of TCs committed to teacher inquiry, Aaron took his “action research” to his colleagues and in the piece he shared some of their suggestions, as well as “thoughts” gathered post-script from his students.

In “Reflection as a Thinking Tool” (2018, Nov. 26), Aaron shared how he is cultivating a practice of student reflection, not only as a tool for their own learning, but as one that helps him to assess more authentically their needs for feedback about their writing. Timewise, he allots no more than five minutes for students to share their insights and often projects anonymously the findings for the class to consider. At the time of the post, Aaron wrote: “I have found that this self-reflection on the part of students is enabling me to ignore assessment and to give much better feedback, based on the expressed thoughts of my students.” He further explored both reflective teaching and student reflection in other blog posts: “Reflection as a Fork in the Road” (2019, May 9), “End of the Year Reflection” (2019, June 7), and previously mentioned, “The Art of Imitation” (2018, Apr. 21). Additionally, in “When Failing an Assignment Earns an A,” Aaron, through analysis of one student’s work in modeling their writing after an author. While the student evaluated their final outcome as falling way short of mimicking that particular writer’s style, it was their reflection, along with their attempt, that Aaron most valued. The student’s insight, along with evidence of their learning, earned the A, despite the final product.

Further evidence of reflective teaching can be found in the video Aaron shared of his conversation with Elizabeth, the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA/social studies teacher. This conversation seems to be an example of how Aaron helps to provide space for another teacher to not only plan

instruction but reflect on her students' needs. Throughout their conversation, Elizabeth brought up what she'd learned from past instruction and student work. She shared how she's noticed that students have grown weary of writing personal narratives from writing so many in elementary. And as they discussed how this current project would be assessed, she shared a pattern she was beginning to notice with students with dysgraphia, (described in greater detail under "Choice" above).

Interestingly, in our second conversation, I asked Aaron about working with teachers like Elizabeth, other Writing Project alumni, and how that might be different from working with teachers who were not alumni with his local Writing Project site. He paused for a moment. He explained afterwards that he hadn't really thought about it before. He meets "with a lot of teachers from different areas, [...] both in English and outside of English." With those who are Writing Project, "there's a spirit of inquiry and exploration," where the focus is less on defending a teaching practice and more on exploring what seems to be working, what's not working, and wondering why. Other teachers seem more defensive about their particular teaching choices and less able to "talk about teaching" or think "about how students are going to benefit from different tactics we use."

### **Beyond Elements of EWP**

In studying Aaron and his teaching practice I see glimpses of pedagogy that goes well beyond the elements I originally defined as part an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Two important ways include teaching students to think and teaching students a writing process. Even on his initial survey, Aaron hinted at both of these: "I try to share with students the difference between writing to think versus writing to publish, that both are useful skills when appropriately used."

### ***Teaching Students to Think***

In our first interview Aaron explained that the Writing Project had driven him to be a teacher of writing who writes. That practice resulted in his more flexible stance where he considers “a holistic view of [his] students’ needs” (Blog post, 2019, Jan. 14). As referenced in “Choice” above, Aaron explained, “If I’m teaching these kids to think and ask questions, it’s cool if we go off my little plan.” In our second interview, Aaron confirmed that this stance allowed him flexibility to meet his students where they were as writers and learners, and provided a specific example of a student for whom he adapted an assignment. The goal was to make sure she had the capacity to think through her own writing process. Aaron also wrote about his goal of getting students “to think” in several of his posts on his local site’s blog. One example shared above, under “Conferencing” included this statement: “I think of writing as a vital cognitive tool for every thinking person...”

This stance of teaching students to think is certainly supported by the NWP model, but I suspect that the groundwork for Aaron’s practice may have first been laid by his work with the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum that Aaron helped bring to his school. Skimming the IB website I found a focus on inquiry-based learning and under “Benefits to Students,” the webpage claims that “IB learners are encouraged to think critically and solve complex problems.” And Aaron’s school website, he wrote about the IB curriculum as one that “Assesses original thought, not examination techniques.” Bringing the ability for students to “think” is definitely central to Aaron’s teaching and schoolwide leadership.

### ***Teaching Every Student a Writing Process***

Early in our first interview, when Aaron explained about the main impact of his experience with the Writing Project, he also shared that he had long been comfortable with the

writing workshop model, as well as teaching the writing process. In fact, he had volunteered to be Department Chair for English from 2013 through 2016. In those three years he helped bring the writing workshop model to his school (Interview 1) and led the English department to create and agree on what the writing process might look like, depending on grade level (Interview 2).

In the video he shared of his conversation with a colleague and fellow NWP alumni, Elizabeth, Aaron asked a pointed question about the writing process. He said to Elizabeth, “Can I ask about the reflection though? You said a couple of different things. It’s about the stylistic choices. You also said it’s about reflecting on their writing process. Is it both?” Elizabeth took a moment to think about this. She began with, “Yeah,” then paused to ask, “Well, is Writing Process, reflecting on that, part of the MYP Criteria, though?” As both Aaron and Elizabeth were wearing masks (still early in the pandemic) when he dropped the volume on his voice, what he said initially to Elizabeth was indeterminable. Elizabeth replied, “Yeah,” like she understood and followed up with a laugh, saying “We’ll make it part of the criteria.” Then he clarified an idea he had for utilizing a writing process as a way to scaffold student reflection responses.

Their discussion over the writing process and MYP was not over. He seemed to back off of telling her what she should do and suggested that she “answer that question” (what she needs to assess from the MYP criteria the most), before designing her final assessment. Elizabeth found a copy of the MYP Criteria for her grade (Fig. 44 below) and handed the copy to Aaron, who announced, “Now, I feel more like an MYP Coordinator), then he asked, “Which ones do you need to assess the most?”

Year One Language and literature (Grades 5-6)	
Criterion A: Analysing	Criterion B: Organizing
Students should be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. identify and comment upon significant aspects of texts</li> <li>ii. identify and comment upon the creator’s choices</li> <li>iii. justify opinions and ideas, using examples, explanations and terminology</li> <li>iv. identify similarities and differences in features within and between texts.</li> </ol>	Students should be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. employ organizational structures that serve the context and intention</li> <li>ii. organize opinions and ideas in a logical manner</li> <li>iii. use referencing and formatting tools to create a presentation style suitable to the context and intention.</li> </ol>
Criterion C: Producing text	Criterion D: Using language
Students should be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. produce texts that demonstrate thought and imagination while exploring new perspectives and ideas arising from personal engagement with the creative process</li> <li>ii. make stylistic choices in terms of linguistic, literary and visual devices, demonstrating awareness of impact on an audience</li> <li>iii. select relevant details and examples to support ideas.</li> </ol>	Students should be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. use appropriate and varied vocabulary, sentence structures and forms of expression</li> <li>ii. write and speak in an appropriate register and style</li> <li>iii. use correct grammar, syntax and punctuation</li> <li>iv. spell (alphabetic languages), write (character languages) and pronounce with accuracy</li> <li>v. use appropriate non-verbal communication techniques.</li> </ol>

Figure 44: IB MYP Language and Literature Criteria

Ultimately, Aaron left it up for Elizabeth to decide about which criteria to focus her assessment, “Obviously, you don’t have to do all four.” But he also offered his own explanation of the criteria: A/Analysing would be “What have you gotten out of the mentor text?”, B/Organizing “would be what are you going to do with your draft, and C/Producing text and D/Using language “would be... all this,” pointing to Elizabeth’s handout for stylistic choices and audience imperatives (Fig. 42 under “Choices”).

In our second interview, I brought up this exchange and how he kept circling back to the writing process. Then I asked Aaron why the writing process might be important or how it fit with the MYP criteria. He explained,

I find that it’s not a huge part of that MYP program. And [...] it’s probably my personal perspective. I find that lots of English teachers want to talk about the product, which is, which is important, right? We use mentor texts, that’s really good. We want to give the kids different genres, different structures, et cetera. Like we need to give them that content. But the thing that I fought hard for my school was [...], *teach every student a writing process so that they know how to go through all of the steps.*

According to this same conversation, the concept of writing as a process became important to Aaron before his experience with the Writing Project. He explained that when the school first began, they lacked a “unified approach.” Then several English teachers “started to look at the six traits or six plus one traits” and that made sense to Aaron. “They’re starting to look more like Lucy Calkins and the writing workshop” (Interview 2). However, he could also see what was missing. So as they grew more aligned with the writing workshop approach, he was able to help push for agreement on what the writing process might look like as they focused on various writing traits. It took them three years for everyone to agree, but in the end, his school as two posters of the writing process. One for grades 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> (Fig. 45) and one for grades PreK-4<sup>th</sup> (Fig. 46).



Figure 45: Schoolwide Poster Integrating Writing Traits with Writing Process, 5th-12th



Figure 46: Schoolwide Poster Integrating Writing Traits with Writing Process, PK-4th

I’ve removed the school name and insignia from both posters. It is essentially the same as the poster for the upper grades, but some of the language in the circles, focused on writing traits, is different. The posters have merged specific traits from the 6-trait model: Idea Development, Organization, Voice, and Conventions. While not using the terms Word Choice or Sentence Style, those concepts seemed to be covered by other vocabulary. In the first poster (Fig. 45) Diction works for Word Choice and Syntax for Sentence Style. In the second poster (Fig. 46), “Descriptive and precise language” seems a replacement for Word Choice, while “variety of sentence structures” replaces for Sentence Style. There are other minor differences with simpler language for the younger grades. In addition to the six traits language, both posters address audience and purpose, and at the bottom the steps of the writing process are aligned with the traits that seem most prevalent for that step. For example, brainstorming is a prewriting



strategy important to both ideas and organization, with drafting and revising in the middle of the process, while editing for conventions is best saved for final copies.

In addition to talking about the writing process in both interviews, including it in his conversation with Elizabeth, and leading his school to ground the IB curriculum within the framework of a writing process, Aaron has also written about how he utilized the writing process in his classroom. In “Reflection as a Fork in the Road” Aaron shared one student’s reflections throughout a six-week writing process. In “The Art of Imitation” he lays out a unit focused on studying the writerly moves of a significant author, each step of the assignment, broken into chunks supported by the writing process. And in “Seeking Feedback, Giving Feedback” Aaron delineates the kind of feedback writers might seek, arguing that the kind of feedback sought and offered should depend on where a writer is in the writing process (See Figure 43 under “Collaborative Learning”).

## **Experiencing the National Writing Project**

### **Aaron’s Writing Project Site**

Underneath their website name, Aaron’s local Writing Project includes the following: “Teachers at the Center. Students at the Heart.” Established in 2011, this Writing Project “affiliate” offers both “professional development for educators” and “enrichment opportunities for children and young adult writers” (Writing Project Site, 2022, website) Their vision places teachers at the center and students at the heart of their “education revolution through writing.” The mission of nurturing, inspiring, and empowering “educators to be engaged writers, researchers, leaders and activists in their schools and communities” is intended to be passed forward to their students. In addition to the Core Values of “Imagination and Creativity,”

“Passion and Optimism,” “Diversity and Equity,” and “Mentorship and Collaboration,” their belief statements include:

- We believe that educators are experts, and inspired and empowered educators can change the world.
- We believe in writing as a reflective and creative practice that is essential to having voice in one’s life.
- We believe all people can learn and that all learners deserve an engaging and enriching education.
- We believe educators are lifelong learners.
- We believe in a holistic approach to education that considers the whole person.
- We believe in intentional and sustainable growth for ourselves, our students and our organization.

According to their website, their 2021 Invitational Summer Institute had been cancelled, and teachers were directed instead to a yearlong “What We Can Become” institute begun in 2020, the beginning of the pandemic. For Summer 2022, the most updated institute for educators was a Teacher Leadership in Writing: “Yearlong Institute, meeting for a week in July, then monthly throughout the school year. Beginning with inquiry into a question about their own classroom practice, educators would “follow that question throughout a year-long action research cycle.” Additionally, the website highlighted a symposium for high school and first-year college instructors, as well as writers’ camps and other opportunities for students (Writing Project Site, 2022).

For Summer 2023, the website focused on a year-long institute title, “Human-centered Writing Instruction: 2023-24 Yearlong Institute.” Similar to the year before, this institute will take place for one week in the summer and continue to meet throughout the school year, following “an action-research model.” Their focus would “ground participants in practice and pedagogy that centers humanity in writing instruction” (Writing Project Website, 2023). In addition to this institute, this site offered a 2-day symposium: “Teaching in the Age of ChatGPT.” The Fellows of the “Human-centered Writing Instruction” institute would be

joining a wider community of participants for the 2-day symposium. On their site's blog, I noticed several posts all about ChatGPT that I imagine had their beginnings as part of the symposium.

While the institutes and PD offerings have changed to reflect the current context of teaching and living, their mission, core values, and belief statements have remained consistent as of Fall 2023. As so their vision: “to lead an education revolution through writing where teachers are at the center and students are at the heart of every classroom, school and district in our nation” (Writing Project Site, 2023).

### **Aaron's Experience with his Writing Project Site**

Aaron experienced his local site's Summer Institute in 2015. During that summer he connected with other Fellows, enjoyed collaborating and becoming part of a professional development that treated teachers as experts. In our first interview I asked Aaron what comes to mind with he thinks of the National Writing Project. He paused a moment, then replied, “It's all rooted in my [local Writing] Project. Good friends. Authentic conversations. And real, actual, [...] proper professional development.” And then he shared two phrases he remembers from his summer institute, from colleagues who were part of that same experience: “I teach writers, not writing” and “I used to *assign* writing, and now I *teach* writing.” The first phrase focuses on the writer rather than the content—a learner centered stance. The second phrase hints at the processes of learning, writing, and engagement—moving focus away from the end product onto the learner.

Early on, Aaron explained that his transformation with the Writing Project has less to do with seeing himself as a teacher-leader and more to do with how he saw himself as a teacher who writes. The stance of teacher as writer helped Aaron better see the learning of writing

from the student's perspective. In our second interview, Aaron further illustrated this point with a story about working with a student who had trouble figuring out how to approach a particular writing assignment. Aaron wanted to make sure the student truly understood that writing is a process and the importance of learning what that process looks like for the writer. He explained, "Whatever the assignment was the end product was a piece of writing." She was struggling with beginning the writing because, "she was so *I don't know how to get started. I have too many ideas. I don't know how to organize.*" So Aaron, who had noticed she'd experienced similar getting-started challenges in previous assignments, modified this assignment for her. He told her,

What we're going to do is [...] You're going to come up with three different ideas for this piece. [Then...] I'm going to give you [...] three different ways to organize your thoughts. And I want you to track which ones seem to offer you the most insight.

At first the student protested because it would not be fair to the others who would be turning in "the full piece" as opposed to her three different rough drafts. Aaron's response:

Well, yeah, but it's really important that you learn because you're always going to get stuck. And as much writing as you're going to have to do in college and beyond, I think it's really important that you learn these tactics right now and you learn a process that works for you.

Aaron explained that he thought this student fell into a "category of kids" who "are really good at proofreading but they don't know how to get to a really good piece that then needs proofreading." Then there are those kids who have "a million ideas" and quickly get down their ideas onto a draft and think they are done and ready for more first draft kinds of writing. For both groups, Aaron explained that the goal is to help them expand their writer's toolbox by helping them "think through a way to get it done."

After his Summer Institute in 2015, Aaron, along with other Fellows from that SI, were invited to be part of planning the growth of their still new Writing Project Site. It was in one

of their gatherings that he and a colleague noted, “*The only thing lacking in our summer cohort, was not enough writing,*” and that perhaps a blog could make a more intentional space for teachers of writing to be teachers who write. The site director replied,

*That’s a great idea, so... I’m going sign you two up to run it. And we’re like, No, we were just brainstorming. And he’s like Okay, that’s great but like, you guys are going to do it. So, cool. So, we did. Now there’s that website. (Interview 1)*

Thus, in 2016 Aaron and his colleague served as co-directors for a year-long leadership institute that included creating a blog for their Writing Project site, the first local site blog in the NWP network. As of Fall 2023, he’d shared 28 posts, sometimes introducing the writing of other TC’s but most of his posts share his own thoughts and experiences grounded in the teaching of writing.

When I asked Aaron when he first began to take on the title and see himself as a Teacher Consultant with his Writing Project, he explained that it was during this year-long experience. In our first interview Aaron stressed, “English teachers of writing should also be writers, like you just, you’ve got to.” It is this *Teacher as Writer* stance that has emerged from his work with the Writing Project and manifested into Aaron’s own classroom and leadership practices.

## **Applying New Concepts and Pedagogy**

### ***School Context***

Aaron works at a private school with an enrollment of 456 students from PreK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (school website), coming from 32 different zip codes, 34 percent of whom are students of color. The average class consists of 18 students, and with 76 faculty members the student-to-teacher ratio is 7 to 1. Despite the exclusive nature of being a private school, the school provides tuition assistance to 32 percent of their students. While the school rests on a beautiful 40-acre campus within 10 miles of the state capitol. It is nestled close to a public

school district that would be considered suburban. Aaron marked the district size question as “Other” but I re-categorized it, after our first interview because Aaron considered the area where the school was located more of a suburban area. Aaron’s school website boasts of several accomplishments: an Average ACT score of 30.3, and 18 National Merit Scholars. In addition to the details shared here, when I visited the school website’s About Page, the phrase, “The Independent School for Independent Minds” headlines the top of the page. Depending on the grade—and in the upper grades, the subject—class size varies between 16 and 22 students.

Aaron has played multiple roles at the school, which until 2021 always included teaching English. But in the beginning, he was also hired as Head of the High School. He explained in our first interview, “I sort of fell into leading an entire high school from day one.” Aaron had been hired as an English teacher and then, in June, the person who’d been hired to be Head of the High School changed his mind. Aaron began his teaching career the same time he began his administrator career, teaching 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English in the middle school half of the school day and, in the remaining time, managing the administrative decisions for designing the high school that would eventually open and expand the grade levels on their campus. As the school grew, Aaron experiences grew, teaching English at each of the high school grade levels, in addition to his leadership positions. Once they transitioned to an IB curriculum Aaron also developed curriculum for and taught “Theory of Knowledge to 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders.”

Interestingly, long before Aaron attended his Writing Project Summer Institute, he had already brought the writing workshop models to his school, along with the writing process. What changed in his classroom practice was the importance of taking the stance of teacher as writer. It seems to have both affirmed and expanded his learner-centered pedagogy, resulting

in Aaron “being more open” and “flexible” in making modifications that would better fit his students’ needs and in trying various avenues in their writing (Interview 1).

### ***Support***

As a leader at his school, the one who helped start the high school and as someone invested in the school’s success for over two decades, Aaron’s locus of control allows him a great deal of autonomy. For 10-plus years he’s taught juniors and seniors, working with the same group of students for two years. Because of his established practice in both leading and teaching, Aaron has earned the trust of those he works with and teaches. He explained, “I’m the person who started the high school... everyone knows like, *Okay, yeah, he does the things...* and... *He’s in charge of things.* [...] You talk about a locus of control, I can kind of do whatever I want to [laughing], to a certain extent.”

Having helped design the high school and his initial role of Head of High School brought the IB Curriculum to his attention. Coordinating, first the Diploma Programme and then the Middle Years Programme, gave Aaron insight into ways of thinking about teaching similar to the NWP model. Aaron shared some of the similar concepts: “process-oriented... deeper is better than wider... You’re teaching children rather than like just hammering home content” (Interview 1). His school’s environment, duly influenced by the IB curriculum, likely made for a receptive space for Aaron’s growing practice with the Writing Project.

Additionally, Aaron enjoyed the support from his students, crediting it largely to his “track record” with teaching juniors and seniors for a decade, as well as his success in helping them achieve college credit. In working with Juniors and Seniors, a two-year commitment, Aaron found his Juniors with a “a level of trust” when it came to doing writing exercises Aaron elaborated:

... like, *We're writing this crazy little short story. Are you sure this is going to like prepare us for the exams? Yeah, nobody asked that of me, because everybody knows... you're going to get... Like If you just do what he says, you're going to get end up with a good score on the IB English Exam.* (Interview 1).

Aaron's successful track record in both leading the school and teaching his students certainly helped to create the support he enjoyed.

### **Challenges**

In Aaron's multiple roles of teacher, school leader, and IB Coordinator, he faced no challenges in bringing new pedagogy to his classroom practice. He is in a unique position as he said, "I'm almost my own boss." To illustrate just how much he is his own boss, Aaron shared an indelible moment. In working with his NWP colleague—let's call her Kris—the one who helped facilitate their local site's blog and the year-long program to help TCs write about their classroom practices, they "needed a little bit of funding" (Interview 1). Both her principal and Aaron's Head of School provided the funding. And as their schools were only two miles apart, Aaron's Head of School drove over to the Kris's school and both of them decided to check out the workshop. While Jen and Aaron understood they would check in "at some point" neither had any idea they would be popping at that time. Aaron explained,

*It was very friendly, just like, Oh, hey, how's it going? We just, you know, we thought we'd actually, you know, come in and just kind of see what's going on for 15 minutes."*

*And there was a pause, and I looked him. I said, Well, actually, we're doing sort of more personal writing and it's kind of a revision [...], so this actually would be, you know, this wouldn't be a fitting time for you to observe for 15 minutes.*

*And they both looked at me and like, Oh yeah, no, that's a fair point. Okay, yeah, how's it going...with everything going great? And they walked out.* (Interview 1)

Once they closed the door Aaron "turned back to the group" ready to get back to work, but the participants just stared at him, "wide-eyed." When he asked, "What?!" they replied, "You just told like the principal to leave the room!" None of the participants "would have dared to say



that to [their] principal or Head of School. Aaron just explained that “They didn’t need to be here. They’re not offended.”

## Sustaining Professional Growth

### Timeline of Significant Growth Experiences

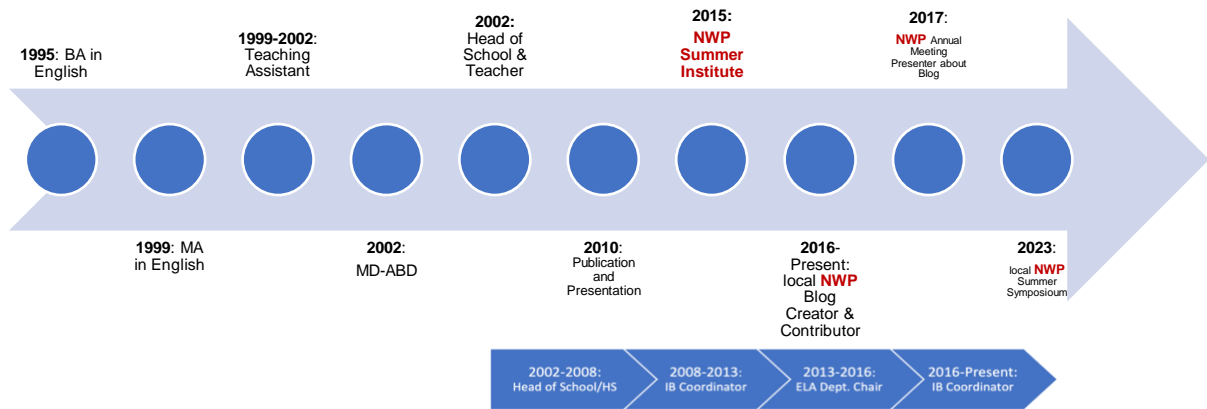


Figure 47: Highlights of Aaron’s Significant Professional Growth

Aaron graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1995 and a Master of Arts in English in 1999. From 1999 to 2002 Aaron completed graduate course work towards a PhD, while also working as a Teacher Assistant, where he was solely responsible for “designing, teaching, and assessing undergraduate courses in rhetoric and composition, literature” (Artifact E: Resumé Timeline). In our second interview we talked about a certification and an award he received for this work. Aaron had had little guidance about teaching itself (e.g. pedagogy and assessment). He told me, “There really wasn’t much teaching advice that I got. I had to work it out on my own for those three years.” Working teaching out on his own is likely an important

factor that made Aaron a great mentor for other teacher assistants, even those outside of the English Department. But other factors like enjoying the work and his natural capacity for working with others seem likely to have contributed to his success, as well. In our first interview, when Aaron talked about this same experience, he shared, “What I realized [...] in those three years was I really like teaching in the classroom. And I really liked working. It seemed like I knew what I was doing pretty quickly. And I also enjoyed working with other teachers. Like, *Hey, actually, have you thought of this?*”

In 2002 Aaron was all but dissertation in his program when life took his career in another direction. He and his wife would be beginning a family and she wanted to begin Law School, so they moved back to the Midwest in an area they had been talking about. Working with a placement agency for private schools, Aaron interviewed with his current school and was hired to be both an English teacher for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the Head of School who would help design curriculum for and usher in the High School. He grew the program from the first group of 11 freshmen to the current enrollment of 200 high school students, freshmen through seniors.

An important part of his legacy with this school, as well as the most significant part of his professional growth has been bringing the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum to his school. He began the process in 2008, as the IB Coordinator, integrating the Diploma Programme, grades 11-12, first. Most recently, he helped integrate the Middle Years Programme for grades 5-10. In his role of administrator, Aaron provided additional services, not included on the timeline above: participation in “evaluating and reporting on the schools accreditation cycle,” leading “two all-school professional development initiatives, Writing Across the Curriculum (2008-09) and Assessment Values (2015-16),” and as a result of the

George Floyd murder and the turbulence that followed, he “codesigned a summer program of critical thinking about race to increase inclusiveness of the school community” (Artifact D: Resumé).

You can see on the timeline, that Aaron’s professional growth was well underway before his Summer Institute in 2015. But that experience began a new thread of growth that continues to influence his work today. Following the SI, he became part of a core team of TCs invested in the continuity and growth of their local project. Co-facilitating the year-long program that began their local site’s blog, placed Aaron more consistently in the role of teacher as writer, which, as discussed earlier, influenced his approach with students, allowing greater flexibility in meeting their individual needs. Their success with creating their local site’s blog led to presenting at the 2016 National Writing Project Annual Meeting, reinforcing his connections with his fellow TCs at his local site, as well as connecting him with TCs from other sites. The timeline also notes a 2023 Symposium focused on “Teaching in the Age of ChatGPT.” Aaron referenced this work in a post, “Predictable and Average” (2023, Sept. 5), and I’m assuming he either attended or helped facilitate the event.

In our second interview, I asked Aaron to look over a draft of his professional timeline to verify its accuracy and choose which events were most significant. Aaron chose three. Definitely, his work with his local Writing Project was significant—not only in ways that impacted his teaching (as previously described), but in providing him with a cadre of colleagues interested in having authentic conversations about writing instruction and classroom practices. The experience of a bona fide conversation about his classroom practice is at the heart of another significant professional growth experience. Aaron pointed out a 2010 publication that was the result of spending time with an educator working on her dissertation

(described under “Choice” above). It was the experience of having someone observe his classroom practice and debrief afterwards, that created significant growth—but not that alone. Their conversation drove the ideas behind the publication. Writing about those ideas likely allowed the threads of their conversations develop into deeper, or at least extended, growth.

It was in our first interview that Aaron shared about his experience with the International Baccalaureate: “I would say, being an IB teacher over the last decade plus—that has been the other main area of growth for me, [...] transformative growth.” On his school’s website, Aaron wrote about the history of IB becoming part of the school curriculum: further explained once the high school was a couple of years begun,

A couple of years after starting the high school, the faculty wrote out their ideal vision of what an [...] high school could look like: it would offer a coherent, challenging program that taught students to read, write, and think in all subjects as well [as] developing their interests so that the students were not only prepared to succeed in college but in their personal lives and as active citizens. After research, it became clear that the Diploma Programme offered all these qualities, as well as a worldwide network of educators and experts who would continue to develop the program to meet the changing needs of students. (School Website)

Aaron, in the first interview, put his experience with the Writing Project into the context of his experience with the IB. “When people come to the Writing Project and learn that there’s this whole [...] process-oriented... deeper is better than wider... you’re teaching children rather than like just hammering home content...” He compared all the “big lessons that one gets from the Writing Project, you get from being an IB teacher.” Because of his experience with IB, Aaron was “very comfortable” with what may have been new to many of the Fellows from his Summer Institute.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Aaron’s Classroom and Leadership Practice**

When I asked Aaron in our first interview to respond to the definition for *sustained professional growth*, adapted from O’Meara and Terosky (2010), he really liked the phrase

about “new and diverse knowledge” Two other phrases stood out. About “new and diverse knowledge,” he explained, “I like being with people who are not from my school because that brings me diverse experiences.” To see how other teachers in various school settings grapple with teaching writing provides insight into shared challenges, as well as new ideas and ways of thinking. Aaron believes it’s good to reflect on what he does differently as a teacher, what his school does differently, and to ask *why*? Another phrase that resonated with Aaron was, “driven by what the individual wants, but also by their specific context.” Aaron drew a connection with his Writing Project site’s “yearlong initiatives” and “larger workshops.” He explained that both “the tenor of the conversation and the work” they “do is always: Yes, and..” The ideas and pedagogy they learn is “not just some fantasyland” where everyone sits around wishing, “*Oh, wouldn’t school be great if like everyone just did this.*” The *yes, and* is about addressing your specific context. “*Yes, and... How are you going to bring this back to your school? How does this work in your school setting?*” Aaron’s Writing Project helps their Fellows and TCs to focus on their “locus of control.” So rather than asking teachers to take on the whole of a new practice or pedagogy, their Writing Project leaders ask them to stay focused on their context, with questions like, “What aspects of that can you actually change in your classroom for your students?”

When Aaron initially shared what first came to mind when he thought of his local Writing Project, he shared two phrases that have stayed with him, both from other Fellows of his Summer Institute: “I teach writers, not writing” and “I used to *assign* writing, and now I *teach* writing.” That thinking seemed to capture something that deepened within his own classroom practice as his belief in student-centered learning was affirmed and his practice of being a teacher who writes, allowed him deeper insight into the individual challenges of

learning to write. He grew more flexible in his approach to working with students, allowing where they were as writers and their needs to reveal and drive next steps and ways to differentiate the assignment.

Additionally, his Writing Project has provided Aaron with “great friends,” “authentic conversations,” and what he called “proper professional development.” In his video with Elizabeth, a colleague and fellow Writing Project alumni, he illustrated how he participates in an authentic conversation about writing instruction and curriculum planning. As I listened, I was reminded the writing groups and the presentation groups with my own Summer Institute. It was no rubric or scoring guide. Aaron did not offer advice, only listened and asked questions. He reflected back what he felt was strong, asked questions for clarity, and remained engaged and interested throughout the conversation. To be fair, the conversation focused on Elizabeth’s practice, but in choosing this event as an example of how the Writing Project has influenced his growth, Aaron also demonstrated how his practice in the role of school leader. Indeed, their conversation concluded with a focus on the IB’s MYP Criteria. Despite donning his IB Coordinator hat for a few moments, Aaron left the final choices up to Elizabeth, respecting her autonomy and her ability to grapple with the cognitive demands of curriculum, planning, and assessment. Their conversation, much like a writing group might, helped Elizabeth sound out her thinking, her rationale for, and the parameters of the Writing Project. It seemed to help her envision a time frame, as well as a possible outcome. Aaron had served as a sounding board and a resource.

These kinds of authentic conversations are not always readily available among non-Writing Project teachers. When I asked Aaron (Interview 2) about how his conversation with Elizabeth and other Writing Project teachers compared, he explained that with Writing Project

teachers, whether they teach English or other subjects, that “there’s an openness in terms of... we’re both their questioning the practice.” There is a spirit of “inquiry and exploration” in these conversations no matter who’s teaching strategies they are discussing. With teachers who have not participated in the Writing Project, they tend to be more “defensive” of their teaching. Perhaps, in trying to protect the way they teach, they tend to lose out on the possibility of growth. And it seems that they miss out on the possibility of connection with other colleagues who could be both a resource of inspiration and a comfort in a shared struggle.

While the Writing Project did not necessarily change Aaron’s practice in dramatic ways, he still considered his experience transformational in his stance as a teacher of writing who writes. As I reflect on my conversations with Aaron and the data I’ve share here, I feel like Aaron is the kind of teacher Jim Gray had in mind when he created his first Invitational Summer Institute—someone who already teaches writing well and has the capacity to share his wisdom with other teachers. His local Writing Project seems to have deepened his way of thinking about his classroom practice, giving him the space to find “new and diverse knowledge” as well as a space to creatively share his classroom and leadership practices.

### **Writing Project Contributions to Aaron’s Sustained Professional Growth**

When Aaron shared his thinking about professional development through his local Writing Project (Interview 1), he explained, “What’s best about the Writing Project [...] conversations and projects is *I don’t change anything immediately.*” Questions posed from his Writing Project experiences required time to think through to deeper implications. In comparing this with a typical one-hour workshop, where he may “gain a few quick tip tips that help me just do what I already do, just a little better,” Aaron believed it was thread of thought initiated from the questions that lead to “deeper growth.” He alluded to this same phenomenon

when explaining how conversations with Writing Project teachers at his school compared with conversations with other educators. He hadn't really thought about it before, but in our second interview conversation, Aaron thoughtfully responded, "...as I think about meeting here with a couple of different Writing Project folks [...] on-site and [...] conversations throughout the years. [...] I realized that there is a thread through [...] every conversation. Like, *Oh yeah, we're here to question and learn.*"

Similarly, Aaron's blog posts also speak to this questioning and learning. With over 24 publications and his facilitating other TCs with the writing about their classroom practices, this seems to have also served as a significant space for his professional growth. In one post, "Why is Writing so Difficult?" Aaron wrote about the cognitive hurdles his student writers must face: "...a single sentence may require thought about the event being described, about the words being selected, about the structure being formed, about the figure of speech that compares one aspect of the event to another unrelated object, and so on" (2016, Aug. 22). The cognitive demands would likely be just as complex for teachers writing about their classroom practices. To do this work and facilitate the writing work of other educators may likely deepened Aaron's thinking about his own practice, and in so doing, helped to sustain his professional growth. It also has resulted in placing Aaron within a network of like-minded thinkers—*like-minded* in the sense that they are able to have open conversations, genuinely curious about facing the challenges inherent in the teaching of writing and in exploring the questions they have about their teaching.

Aaron's timeline above clearly shows a rich trajectory of sustained professional growth from his final semesters in graduate school through assuming the responsibilities of building a school and integrating the IB curriculum. His Writing Project experiences along with his



personal traits of curiosity, a love for learning from diverse groups and circumstances, a willingness to be surprised (both, and...), a natural capacity for collaboration have added to Aarons sustained professional growth. seem to make Aaron a perfect fit for the NWP model.

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## Chapter 5: FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

**The Ultimate Boon.** “The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy, and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever-expanding realization” (Campbell, 1968/2008).

*My journey with the Writing Project resulted in transformative moments within my teaching practice, my own “ultimate boon.” The first changes I noticed seemed immediate and to have direct impact on my students. At the time I taught both 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade English. A young man who had been in one of my 7<sup>th</sup>-grade classes the previous year (2001/2002) looked so disappointed when he walked back into my classroom as an 8<sup>th</sup>-grader. I will call him Michael (pseudonym), and I think we were both concerned that our relationship might be a little strained. Michael’s desk happened to be up front in those early days of a new semester. Over the summer I had purchased a tall director’s chair to serve as our Author’s Chair—a practice I incorporated from my Summer Institute. Every class began with a quickwrite, where students had choice—if not in prompts, then in their ability to modify a prompt to fit their own writing needs.*

*I don’t remember the prompt I shared one particular day, but it fit with one of my pieces from the Summer Institute, about my Nana. I was excited to try some of the new strategies I’d learned but felt vulnerable to be reading something so personal aloud. When I finished my turn in the Author’s Chair, I was struck by Michael’s response. Shaking his head slightly from side to side, he began clapping his hands, seeming genuinely impressed. When it was time to respond with a quickwrite, Michael wrote. He even took a turn in the Author’s Chair. This is an indelible memory, an early moment where I felt a visceral change in my teaching.*

According to Thomas (2016), “interpretive inquiry seems made for case study” (p. 204), in that “each assumes an in-depth understanding and deep immersion in the environment of the subject” (p. 148). These social situations cannot simply be “fractured into variables” (p. 204), and immersion requires a vast collection of data, which in turn requires finding “points of congruence and similarity – places of coherence...” (p. 204). This chapter explores the results of my search for such coherence. Each theme seems its own kind of *ultimate boon*, an interpretation emerging from the diverse teaching experiences of the seven participants. In the last chapter each case study was described in relation to the research questions. In this chapter,

we focus on themes elicited from the constant comparative method of coding, categorizing, and returning to the data again and again. Five clear themes emerged from the seven nested case studies: a special kind of teacher, side-to-side pedagogy, “authentic” professional growth, conditions for success, and thriving in community. Rather than fitting in a linear kind of way, the themes merge and overlap to paint a much broader picture of a Teacher Leader’s experience with the Writing Project (see Figure 48 below).

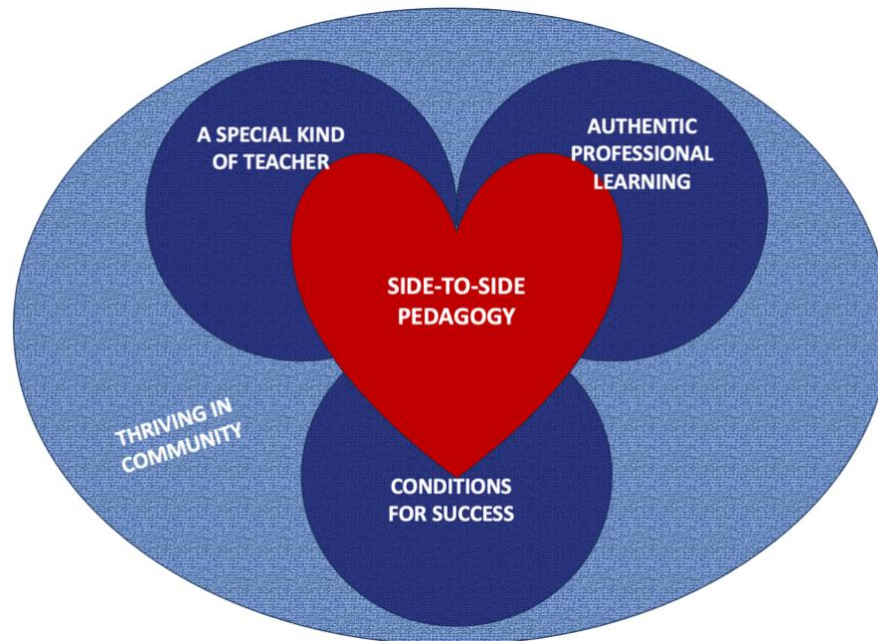
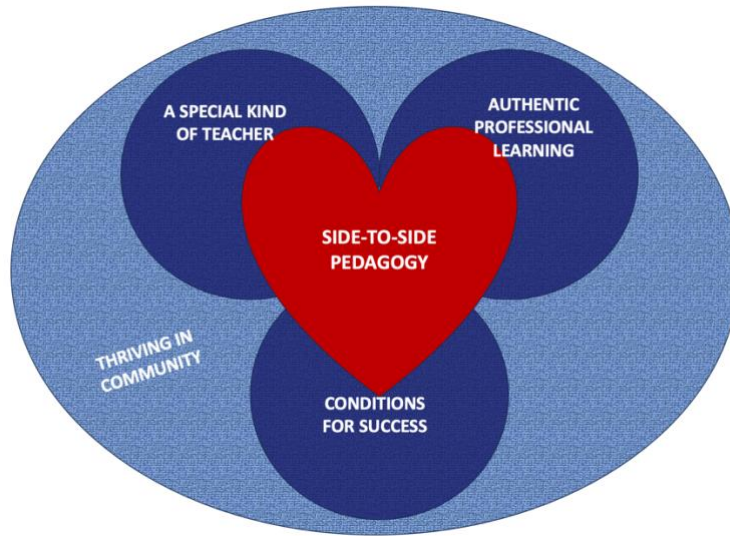


Figure 48: Graphic Representation of Findings

In answer to the overarching question for this research, “*In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?*” each theme can be worded as its own ultimate boon:

1. Experiences with the National Writing Project helped to develop and nurture the attributes and personal traits of Teacher Consultants, contributing to the effectiveness of “*a special kind of teacher.*” Whether a Fellow comes to the SI already *a special kind of teacher* or grows into one is an important question to consider.
2. The National Writing Project shares a specific model for instruction and professional development in the teaching of writing and was described by one participant as a “*side-*

- to-side” pedagogy.* This *side-to-side* model begins with “teachers teaching teachers” and includes “students teaching students” and even “students teaching teachers.” At the heart of this pedagogy is the inherent value of every learner, who brings with them important knowledge and expertise.
3. **“Authentic” professional learning** with the National Writing Project begins with teachers at the center. The term *authentic* in relation to professional growth first emerged as I focused on Participant 7, Aaron, who responded to the question *What first comes to mind when you think about the Writing Project?* with, “Good friends. Authentic conversation. And appropriate professional development.” Authentic professional learning with the Writing Project captures the importance of learning situated in their lived experiences and the very real and personal questions teachers have about their teaching practices, as well as the process that turns “ownership of learning over to the learners” (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, pg. 41).
  4. The initial leadership institute, historically called the Invitational Summer Institute, has long been responsible for providing and modeling *the conditions for success* in effective writing instruction. However, once Fellows leave the intimate community established during the SI, they must negotiate the conditions of teaching communities outside the influence of their Writing Project. This theme describes some common challenges and explores the resources supporting TCs as they integrate new practices within their classrooms.
  5. The National Writing Project experiences of the seven participants illustrated an ultimate boon of *thriving in community*. This theme could easily nestle as a sub-theme underneath any of the other four, but will be treated here on its own, as both backdrop and an essential element for sustaining the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants.



### **A Special Kind of Teacher**

Bryan, Participant 1, inspired by what he considers the NWP’s “investment” of resources and time into the work of “good” teachers, explained, “And that investment [...] was wonderful, because it takes *a special kind of teacher* to want to do [...] the National Writing Project, because it’s a huge commitment of time and energy, and it’s a lot of mental work to [...] become a writer and to celebrate writing.” This theme of *a special kind of teacher* emerged partly in response to Research Question 3.C: “*What are the personal qualities, observable or self-described, that might influence a TC’s professional growth?*” Originally coded as “TC Attribute or Personal Trait,” I noted the differences in the phrasing. Some of the participants spoke about TCs in general terms, so I described the code, *TC Attributes*, as “Participants may describe attributes of Teacher Consultants/Teacher Leaders.” And for *Personal Traits*, I wrote, “These codes are specific to the participant, either self-described or observable through interview, video, and artifacts.” Working with Participant 1, Bryan’s transcript, I was moved to revise this into the *in vivo* code, “a special kind of teacher” and defined the broader theme here as *the qualities and personal traits of a TC that may attract them to a local Writing*

*Project and that are nurtured and further developed by their experiences with the Writing Project.*

In our first interview, Bryan explained that because “[t]he National Writing Project is not a quick fix,” teachers who engage in the work of their local sites, beginning with the Summer Institute, are required “to be devoted, to be focused, to dream large, to be invested, [...] and always to be highly reflective of *How can we do things better the next time around?*” (Interview 1). It’s fair to say that all seven participants in this study could be described as teachers who are all those things: devoted, focused, invested, and dreaming large about the teaching of writing, as well as highly reflective. They shared other traits like being creative, curious, and passionate about their work. It occurs to me that I might go back to pinpoint which traits brought them to their local Writing Projects and which traits were developed and nurtured because of the Writing Project, but that’s not really how the categories emerged. With the notion of “a special kind of teacher,” however, I began to wonder *Does it take a special kind of teacher to do the Writing Project? or Does the Writing Project make “a special kind of teacher?”* I don’t see a clear answer unless it’s a little bit of both. So, this theme will be organized under two subthemes: *Traits and Attributes Nurtured and Developed* and *An Expanding Professional Identity*.

### **Traits and Attributes Nurtured and Developed**

Whether these are personal traits naturally possessed by the participants or qualities that can be attributed to their experiences with the Writing Project is difficult to determine. It is clear, however, for the seven participants, the following categories are qualities nurtured and further developed from their experiences with their local Writing Project sites. We’ll begin with *Practices of Reflection and Collaboration*, described earlier in their nested case

descriptions. Additionally, each of the participants made a *Deep Investment into Their Own Learning* and demonstrated a *Sense of Autonomy and Agency*. Here will be a summary and reminder of how these categories manifested in their classroom and professional practices.

### ***Practices of Reflection and Collaboration***

In each of the seven nested cases, I detailed the participants' practices with both reflection and collaboration. Here I provide a summary, highlighting these two traits under a single subheading. Like many of the participants, Bryan's reflective practice seemed to come naturally to his teaching and leadership practices. In our first interview, the shelves behind Bryan held writer's notebooks, filled with his reflections on his practice as well as the seeds for "dreaming big" about teaching. On the college level, his students—preservice teachers—kept writing journals for their own reflections. And as a director of his own NWP site, Bryan facilitated groups of teachers and students to continually reflect on their own work as well as help one another reflect on their own writing and work. The current structure of Fairfield's Ubuntu Literacy Labs was born out of such reflection, integrating not only students from different backgrounds, but teachers too—Fellows in their own five-week Writing Project Summer Institute—to collaborate with one another and those from other literacy labs, furthering Bryan's love for a sense of community. A reflective community begets collaboration (maybe it's the other way around) and an essential element of Bryan's work is collaboration. In one of his syllabi, Bryan explained that the intention of the writer's notebooks would be to "make our course highly interactive, collaborative, and community focused."

Tonya also came with what seemed an innate propensity for reflection. Curious about how students learn when it's hard for them, she put herself through challenging and hard learning experiences. "Authentic audience" became important to her as she reflected on what

her own students might need in order to feel like “real” writers. And her natural tendency for reflection was evident in the video she shared, a collaboration with the new literacy coach, where they planned a digital museum lesson where students would collaborate in the process of creating and developing within their own class—then would collaborate with other classes in sharing knowledge and showcasing their final products.

Like Tonya, Stacy’s reflective nature drove much of her teaching and choices in what she wanted to learn next, in order to meet her students’ needs. Becoming a Reading Specialist and signing up for the Writing Project were born out of such reflection. This reflection extends to the workshops she leads with her local Writing Project, as well as her work with preservice teachers—Stacy believes it’s important to practice what she preaches, which keeps that reflective wheel turning. A favorite strategy she learned from her Summer Institute is a practice she continues whether working with “littles” (how Stacy referred to her young learners) or teachers—the Turn and Talk. This kind of collaboration allows writers to share their voices, ensuring that everyone will have at least an audience of one every day. Turning and sharing your work, whether a poetic piece, fiction, or reflection, deepens the writer’s thinking about the content. Collaboration seems a central component for reflection and reflection for collaboration.

Danielle’s curious nature likely drives her reflective teaching. One of the journals she asks her students to keep is a “Growth Reflection Journal,” which she uses to write detailed reflections on what students are learning—for the letters she writes to parents for progress reports. Like Stacy, she practices what she preaches and keeps her own Growth Reflection Journal to use as a model. Her whole curriculum seems to rest on her students’ practice of reflection, beginning with what they wonder about the world, to drive their reading and writing



choices, throughout the year. Collaboration is also a major element of Danielle’s curriculum design where students learn first to work together to share their learning and writing. Later, they will work with other groups of students, providing an audience for their work, as well as collaborators in grappling with new knowledge. Danielle wisely provides scaffolds for collaboration like the Writer’s Memo (Fig. 27), and the mentor texts and prompts she provides for their different journals.

Monica’s reflective nature is likely what drives her to be a “professional growth junkie.” Her resumé of professional development was one of the longest of all the participants—and incomplete, at that. Throughout both of our conversations, Monica spoke of the students for whom school was *not* made—whose voices and perspectives did not always have a chance to shine. Utilizing the “Talk Back” poem as well as other forms of poetry helped. They are the reason she eventually “developed a full unit on poetry.” Before that, “they had few chances to explore the reading or writing of poems in [her] classes.” In the presentation I viewed from her video and in her publications with her state English Journal, reflection on indelible moments from her own teaching were quite evident. The opening slide in the presentation is of a tree, with the heading, “Reflection as Stress Reduction.” Everything teachers were asked to write held some element of reflection, including, “What’s working? What’s not?” Monica’s own Forgiveness Poem model was a reflection on the “failures” that became part of her teaching process. In the 2021/2022 school year, Monica was engaged in what she called “Deep Work” after Cal Newport’s (2016) book with the same title. Because of the time needed for allowing minds to wander “for creativity and independent concentration for ideal creation,” Monica explained in the initial survey, “[c]ollaboration is lower than most years.” Yet, her appreciation for collaborative opportunities was evident throughout both

interviews. Monica appreciated working with diverse teachers in both teaching contexts and stages of their teaching careers.

Tara's reflective nature shined from the beginning of her teaching career, focusing on how to scaffold students into meaningful learning, first in drama, then in English, as well as other courses. She learned early on that teaching focused on students and their learning needs would mean letting go of old ideas about teaching, especially if those ideas came from your own learning history. Understanding what works and doesn't work means reflecting on your current methods and focusing on the students in front of you and their work. It was in collaboration with Teacher Consultants and Fellows with her Summer Institute that Tara reflected on her own practices and realized she could do more to incorporate creative writing strategies, as well as literature into her curriculum of expository reading and writing. Collaboration in sharing writing was also clear as Tara used different protocols for peer response, depending on the kind of writing students were sharing. Additionally, all students were expected to share their academic writing for the peer review process. However, when sharing something creative or more personal, students were *invited to volunteer*—not required. While Tara considered her local Writing Project colleagues her first go-to, when she had questions about her teaching practice or trying out new ideas, she particularly valued the Writing Project teachers who were part of her teaching team. Collaborating with other teachers from the Writing Project meant lesson planning with others who are learner focused.

Finally, for Aaron, evidence for his practices in both reflection and collaboration can be found throughout his interviews, the video, and other artifacts. When he worked as a graduate instructor/teacher assistant, teaching English 101, Aaron found himself in a position of mentor to other instructors as he worked out curriculum and strategies. This is where he

discovered his love for teaching and working with other teachers. Asking questions like, “Hey, actually, have you thought of this?” came naturally to Aaron, and his university honored his work with a “Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award” (resumé, Interview 2). His ability to work with his colleagues as a collaborator, despite his administrative positions, was clear in his work with Elizabeth, as he listened and asked probing questions. Helping his own students to collaborate on their writing was evident in more than one of his blog posts, in particular, the 2016 post titled, “Seeking Feedback, Giving Feedback.” Aaron’s ability to reflect on his work seemed natural and appeared throughout most of his blog posts. In “Teacher Inquiry” (2016, Aug. 1) Aaron described a “... journey exploring what [he] really believed about teaching and learning, forcing [him] to articulate and challenge some of [his] long-held beliefs.” In “Questioning the Write-In” (2017, Nov. 27), Aaron described an inquiry into a practice he had embraced from his Writing Project Summer Institute—revealing continued conversation with an inquiry group, as well as a willingness to reflect on a beloved strategy that worked for him but did not seem to be working for all of his students. In this particular inquiry, Aaron collaborated with his students as well as his Writing Project colleagues in search of deeper understandings and strategies to help all students benefit from the Write-In.

### ***Deep Investment into their own Learning***

All seven participants could be described as life-long learners. Even before attending their initial summer institutes, the participants sought to learn and improve their educational practices, not to simply to tick a box for PD hours, but for the sheer joy of learning and becoming a better teacher and stakeholder in their teaching communities. In our second interview, Bryan’s early experiences away from home came up—he described “waking up every day, happy, [with] complete joy because [he] loved learning.” His engagement with

learning, especially concerning the teaching of writing, began long before he led his own classroom. After finishing his MAT in English Education, Bryan moved from upstate New York to Kentucky to intentionally learn about their groundbreaking work with student writing and portfolio assessment. In 1996, Bryan began teaching and working on his second master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. His tenure at The Brown High School in Louisville included significant professional learning with the Critical Friends Group, a Fulbright Memorial Scholarship in Tokyo, Cambridge University Shakespeare Program, the Louisville Writing Project, and the Bread Loaf School of English. Not to mention his doctoral work and research as a professor with Fairfield University and Director of their Writing Project. His love for learning shows no sign of waning. Amid the pandemic Bryan and NWP friend and site director worked together to help their colleagues who had suddenly found themselves online and in need of strategies for engagement. His video artifact included modeling how to utilize Padlet as an online strategy for engaging college students.

In our first interview, Tonya described herself as “a nerd who loves to learn.” On her resumé, underneath “Special Skills,” Tonya listed that she personally enjoys “reflecting, learning, and becoming a better teacher.” She was encouraged and expected by a school culture early on to keep learning, which included graduate classes at a state university and, eventually, a master's degree, as well as earning National Board Certification. Capitalizing on the support from her second school and district—where they not only paid tuition but provided time to work on National Boards and personnel to help create the required videos—Tonya learned to seek funding for much of her professional learning. Her resumé of professional learning included a vast number of technology related opportunities, as well as a diverse list of programs from Applebaum Training Institute to Boy's Town Administrative Training and Seven Habits

of Highly Effective People: Train the Trainer. In addition to institutes like the Writing Project offerings associated with her university, as of our second interview, Tonya was in the middle of a two-year university institute to integrate creativity and art into her curriculum. When she wasn't learning professionally, Tonya created her own growth experiences by taking on learning challenges like a six-day bike ride (35-50 miles a day); a triathlon; a one-half Olympic that included a 25-mile bike ride and six-mile run; and a challenge to learn a new job by working for a month at Target. Tonya explained that she took this *stance of learner* to be able to relate to her students and deepen her understanding of the challenges they may face as readers and writers in their own learning curves.

When Stacy, Participant 3, presented for her local Writing Project, she shared an About Me slide that included “Forever a Student!!!” as part of her self-description. Much of both conversations included the ways she has remained a forever-learner. She shared, “I’m always jumping on the bandwagon to learn something new, and to try something that I haven’t tried before.” Motivated in the beginning of her teaching career to raise her students’ reading levels, Stacy invested in learning everything she could about reading, including Literacy First in 2007 and in 2021, LTRS—described by Stacy as “the science of Reading,” more of a “brain-based, phonics instruction.” In between learning those two approaches to teaching reading, Stacy finished a master’s degree in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum, attended her local Writing Project’s Summer Institute, and completed certification to become a Reading Specialist. Most recently, Stacy completed a Principal Certification Program and has become the principal of the elementary where she had taught since 2013. Like the other participants, Stacy has a long list of professional development she has attended, but what stands out are the presentations she’s delivered on behalf of her Writing Project, requiring the kind of learning

that involves researching and trying out strategies with her own classroom practice, like “The Writing Process and the Traits in Grades 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>” and “Motivating Writers in Grades 1-6” to name just two.

Beginning with “curiosity” to drive her own inquiry into her classroom practice, Danielle, Participant 4, has been asking questions about how to better meet her students’ needs since she began teaching. She recalled hearing her students leave her classroom one day, all abuzz about the rubric for an assignment, talking about they would have to do to get an A. Danielle didn’t want that to be the focus. Rather than “points on a rubric” she wanted her students’ conversations to be “about learning.” Much of Danielle’s learning has focused on how to create the kind of classroom where students are motivated and engaged in learning for their own purposes. Since the Writing Project, collaboration has been at the heart of that, connecting her students with other classrooms, at first a high school science class, then with programs like the Global Read Aloud, and later with classrooms in Bangladesh and Spain. Additionally, like several of the participants, Danielle presented for her local Writing Project—her presentations, grounded in research with examples from her classroom practice. During our conversations, Danielle mentioned learning from reading the works of Kyleene Beers and Robert Probst, Kelly Gallagher, and Penny Kittle, to name a few. But what seems particularly compelling is the learning she has engaged in, concerning her own classroom practice. Her curiosity has led her to develop engaging practices as listed on her 2019 resumé:

- Implemented an inquiry, project-based classroom for language arts, motivated by students’ curiosities to advance them naturally as readers, writers and critical thinkers
- Cultivated a growth-mindset, grade-less classroom that was rooted in written and verbal feedback, from the teacher and stemming from the child
- Provided authentic experiences for all real world projects
- Facilitated TED-Ed club for all classes

- Developing a social emotional curriculum language arts middle school curriculum focused on mentor texts that spark self-reflection and ignite inquiry into problems of the world
- Published inter-period class newspapers for parents (Participant 4, resumé, 2019)

This investment in her own learning has also led Danielle to instill the value of lifelong learning with the in-service and preservice teachers she works with. In Figure 29, Artifact H, she wrote, “Teachers need to be lifelong learners, curious human beings, readers, writers, deep, reflective thinkers, that are on a constant journey of knowledge, truth, and wisdom.”

As a “professional growth junkie” and consummate learner, herself, Monica has been both recipient of professional trainings and presenter of the impact of her research and learning. Like many Teacher Consultants, when Monica learns something new and applies it to her own classroom practice, she has the makings of a new presentation. The video she shared for this study focused on Monica presenting to fellow teachers at her school, what she had learned from her Writing Project’s *Teach from Your Best Self* Institute. She credits her local Writing Project for much of what she’s learned, but on her way to Writing Project events and programs that are generally a couple of hours away, Monica would listen to a podcast or book that was ultimately about teaching. Among the books that have influenced her practice, she included *Deep Work* (Newport, 2016) as one that helped her tap into her students’ creativity. While she enjoys learning via school wide initiatives like *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support* and *Character Strong*, she has signed up for learning with programs such as *MakeSpace* that included her participation in action research projects. Additionally, Monica has created her own learning experiences, like spending a month backpacking by herself in New England, touring the homes of 14 American authors. She explained in her published article about the trip that she, “wanted a reminder of what it felt like to be in the learner’s seat” (Author 2, 2019)—much like another participant, Tonya and her self-curated challenges.

Tara, Participant 6, embraced learning with both a creative and critical stance. Beginning her teaching career as a drama teacher with no textbook, she dived into writing her own curriculum from the beginning. Tara explained, “So from my first day as a teacher, I was writing curriculum, and it never occurred to me that I shouldn’t or that I wasn’t supposed to need to.” With a background in theatre, Tara had the benefit of teaching content she “really, really knew well” and was able to focus on students learning through engagement. In other words, she learned how to deliver instruction as opposed to adopting an assign and assess approach. So, once she began teaching English, she had a framework for how to scaffold students into learning. While she appreciated learning from her colleagues, she also understood that a textbook could be “awful” and a teaching philosophy should be questioned. One colleague told Tara that students come as they are—either good writers or bad—and “that at this point, the good ones were going to continue to get better and the bad ones were not because they just weren’t capable.” Perhaps attitudes like this are why Tara believes that unlearning is as important for teachers as learning. Tara’s learning has since included experiences where she not only learns curriculum and pedagogical practices but helps design and write curriculum. Her work with the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum is one example. She happened upon the opportunity while participating in another program at a local university. Like the National Writing Project, ERWC began with a summer institute and emerged into a continuous process where Tara helped develop units she could use specifically with her own students. When she discovered her local Writing Project, Tara’s sense of unlearning continued as she came to realize much of her teaching with ERWC focused more “on reading strategies and rhetorical situation and grammar” (Survey) than on writing. She has since adapted her units to include more writing. Additionally, inspired by both a Writing Project Fellow and a teacher at



her school, Tara continued her learning journey through certification with the Amherst Writers and Artists method. Depending on writing circumstances, Tara utilizes different protocols for sharing writing and responding to that writing. At the time of our interview, Tara's unlearning extended into participation in an Antiracist Book Club with her local Writing Project.

Much like Tara, whose learning and unlearning were integrated with and directly applicable to her teaching, Aaron's deep investment into his learning seems to be integrated with and directly applicable to his teaching and leadership. In accepting a Head of School position, along with teaching 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade English, Aaron began leading fellow educators just as he began his teaching career. He wore multiple hats as he took on beginning a new high school and being a teacher of secondary students—early adolescents at first, but eventually of the young adults attending the high school he helped to begin. Part of Aaron's significant learning included looking at the broader picture—not only a classroom—of teaching. He counted his service on 11 teams for ISACS accreditation as important learning, as well as the experiences of integrating the International Baccalaureate Programme among achievements on his resumé. His IB experiences, as both learner and leader, created much of his significant professional growth and made the conceptual underpinnings of his local Writing Project affirming, rather than brand new. Aaron's unique position as both teacher and administrator afforded him multiple perspectives when it comes to professional growth.

One particular attribute Aaron gleaned from his local Writing Project was a stance Fellows and TCs are asked to take as learners, a “Yes/And approach.” As opposed to rejecting an idea outright or taking on the whole ideology, Aaron thought it was more important to have a conversation where participants consider a new idea, strategy, or pedagogy and “what aspects of that can you actually change in your classroom for your students?” A teacher's context of a

school setting and particular classroom is just as important as the content and practice they are learning. Connected with this idea of “Yes, And...” is Aaron’s notion of “being surprised by the growth” (Interview 1). Working as the IB Coordinator means working with teachers from diverse grades and subjects, facilitating their transitions into IB classrooms. Several teachers making the shift have remarked, “This is making me think differently” or “I hadn’t anticipated some of the ways it was making me think differently.” For Aaron, what he appreciates about his own learning experiences have not necessarily aligned with quick learning strategies or those things picked up in a one-hour workshop. So, with the Writing Project. Aaron explained that he did not “change anything immediately.” Instead, his learning and growth happened at a deeper level, where he was surprised by the process of thinking differently.

*Sense of Autonomy and Agency.* Perhaps because of their deep investment into their own learning or their innate practice of reflection or their ability to collaborate, the participants also showed a sense of autonomy and agency. In early coding, I wrote, “Either as a support for professional growth or a trait exercised by participants empowered with agency, autonomy speaks to the freedom exercised in making choices in the curriculum and with student instruction.” I’ve since simplified the definition used for a “sense of autonomy and agency” to mean “a belief that the teacher could effect change in their teaching practices and learning outcomes for students.” While I sensed that other participants experienced autonomy and agency, Tonya was the first to express that she “had a lot of say in the curriculum.” She was talking about the school and district where she first took a job in her home state after returning from teaching in Houston. This is the same context in which she first experienced her local Writing Project. It was easy to incorporate the practices and strategies she was learning with the Writing Project because she had so much freedom within the curriculum, a freedom that

would become more constrained with time and growing demands from educational policies. Another sense of autonomy for Tonya included her search for a district that would support her goals for continued education, and later, her choosing intentionally, professional development that would come with funding.

Similarly, Bryan exercised agency in choosing the state where he would begin his teaching career—aligning himself with the promising practice of portfolio assessment which at the time was cutting edge in writing instruction. In his time as a high school teacher, he had autonomy over how he taught and included creativity, like the 10-Minute Plays that eventually became festivals celebrated in at least three districts. Stacy’s teaching positions seemed to come with a respect for her investment in her professional learning and growth. Perhaps because she continued to invest her time and energy into learning better teaching strategies for her students, she enjoyed autonomy over the choices she made in her classroom. She explained, “Anytime I want to do anything, or I ask to do anything, [...] I have free reign to do that.”

Because Danielle had a proven track record investing in her own learning, as well as raising her students’ test scores, she was allowed to not follow the curriculum that the other 8<sup>th</sup>-grade ELA teachers were following. She fielded criticisms from her immediate supervisor by citing the research behind her curricular choices, explicitly in her lesson plans. When he wrote, “not following the curriculum” she exercised the courage to push back and stand up for the teaching practices she was learning with the Writing Project and from the practitioner research she was reading (e.g. Nancie Atwell, Penny Kittle). When she researched programs that would connect her students with classrooms in Bangladesh and Spain, she reached out to communicate the things she wanted to do. Her due diligence strengthened her sense of autonomy and vice versa, seeds from her Writing Project experiences.

Perhaps because she was in a rural district, Monica also had a lot of say so in creating units and curriculum for her students. This autonomy extended to developing lessons with other English teachers. However, because of the transitive nature of her school district, working as a team wasn't always something she could count on. She learned to seek out the professional learning that would meet her students' needs, often without support, but also without a lot of pushback.

Like Tonya, Tara enjoyed a great deal of say so in creating her own curriculum. She was encouraged to curate her own professional learning, and, in the beginning, Tara was supported with resources when they were available. It wasn't until the shift to teacher accountability and an onslaught of benchmark testing that she felt challenged by an administrator. One principal wanted to make sure she was following the curriculum map—failing to see her name as one of the authors of the document. Even with some of the challenges and constraints, Tara's sense of autonomy and agency has remained.

Aaron, who had been Head of School and later IB Coordinator, along with his teaching responsibilities, has been leading from day one of his teaching career. He explained in our first interview, "I can kind of do whatever I want to—to a certain extent." To illustrate, he shared a story about facilitating a year-long institute where his principal and a principal from another school, both supporters of this initiative with resources like time and space and funding, dropped by to observe. Because they were in the midst of personal writing, Aaron explained that it would not be a good time. The two principals were undaunted and agreed to pop in another time. When Aaron closed the door, he noticed the surprised faces of his teacher participants. They could not believe he had said "no" to his own principal.

For all seven participants, Writing Project experiences helped to significantly grow the attributes of reflection and collaboration, investment into their own learning, and a sense of autonomy and agency. In addition to sharing common attributes, the participants took specific stances in their roles as teachers, writers, researchers, and instructional leaders.

### **An Expanding Professional Identity**

In a study by Lieberman & Wood (2002), distinct social practices were found to be essential to the success of the National Writing Project network. One social practice focused on “Rethinking professional identity and linking it to the professional community.” As teachers become part of a larger community focused on professional learning, they become “colleagues” with value and expertise, with a common goal of improved learning and teaching. Furthermore, as active members of a local network of master teachers engaged in “creating and implementing” professional learning, “teachers develop an appreciation of the continual challenges of teaching and a sophisticated notion of what it means to be a professional teacher capable of responding to the needs of diverse students in a changing world” (2002, pg. 48). This experience moves many of the Fellows of an Invitational Summer Institute to see themselves as Teacher Consultants who belong with their local site and part of a wider network of NWP Teacher Leaders.

One important boundary of this case study was to focus on the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants. I set the requirement for this somewhat loosely, choosing participants who had “served or participated with their local NWP site as a Teacher Consultant (TC) in some capacity beyond the Summer Institute (SI)” (Chapter 3). In Chapter 3 I explained that I was interested in studying the phenomenon of what happened after the SI as teachers moved into an “active role” with their local site. All of the participants qualified, with most of

the participants identifying clearly as a TC. Bryan exclaimed, “My whole life is NWP,” and Stacy insisted that her local site, “as a group,” was “just pretty special.”

However, a couple of participants surprised me. Tonya, in our first interview, asked me to explain the term, *Teacher Consultant*, leading me to think that there may be sites not using that title. Perhaps *Teacher Leader* was becoming the term to use? Tonya did a little research into emails from her site and found a newsletter welcoming the newest Fellows into the fold. She shared a Google link with me during a follow-up Zoom in between our two interviews. At the top was written, “As a graduate of the [ ]WP Summer Institute, you are now a Teacher Consultant (TC).” She shared the link and admitted she felt a little silly for not recognizing it. I recalled that in our first interview Tonya had also shared that lately she had not been the “strongest member” (Interview 1). Yet, she had served as a facilitator for one summer institute in 2015 and in 2022, she was in charge of setting up a booth for their Writing Project at a state convention on Technology. Tara was the other participant who surprised me, by saying, “Honestly, I never think of myself as a Teacher Consultant, I really don’t.” The presentation she created for her Summer Institute did not develop with a focus on writing, and Tara had not moved into the role of presenter. Nonetheless, she remained active with her local site attending Super Saturdays, facilitating a book club for other TCs, and in 2020/21 she attended Anti-Racist Book Club. The other five participants identified more readily as Teacher Consultants with their local sites. It seems interesting that to identify as a Teacher Consultant means something a little different to each teacher, depending on their context and a multitude of other factors.

Coding for identity took different directions in the beginning, such as “like a writer,” “teacher identity,” “student identity,” “TC identity,” and “leader identity.” But as case

descriptions unfolded, the participants seemed to take on or expand the following stances: *Teacher as Teacher of Writing*, *Teacher as Writer*, *Teacher as Researcher*, and *Teacher as Leader*.

***Teacher as Teacher of Writing, Focused on Learners***

With a focus on teachable writing practices, no matter the subject, the TCs in this study expanded their teaching and curriculum to include writing, as a focus of study, a tool for learning, or a combination of both. Bryan began to see an important change in his students' ability to achieve "at higher levels" (Interview 1). He attributed this, in part, to including multiple ways of expressing their knowledge, learned from a SI Fellow, an artist, who encouraged Bryan to move beyond words in his writer's notebook. After experimenting with visual literacy and including drawings, doodles, photographs, and clippings into his collection of ideas and inspirations, he integrated this practice of multimodality into everything he did in his classroom. Bryan explained, "if you look at the way I teach, everything incorporates all of that because [...] I want to appeal to the most learners I possibly can."

Asking her students to take on the role of writer, Tonya began to include them in creating shared rubrics and check lists to help with their revision and editing work. Stacy expanded her focus from teaching reading to teaching writing and used writing as a tool for learning in all subjects. Danielle embraced a workshop approach and curriculum different from her colleagues, focused more on learning than on grades. In bringing authentic audiences to her students, she moved them to write for reasons beyond a typical rubric and raised student test scores at the same time. While Monica did not make immediate changes to her teaching after her SI, what expanded for her was access to resources and supports – she found more conferences and workshops to attend, which over time influenced her teaching, reaffirming the

importance of learner-centered teaching. Tara added writing into her curriculum in direct response to her SI experience. Not only as a required assignment, but one with lots of writing scaffolds, like freewriting their thoughts as they learned and discussed the content. At the beginning of our first interview, Aaron shared two quotes from SI colleagues that remained significant to his own classroom practices: “I teach writers, not writing” and “I used to *assign* writing, and now I *teach* writing.”

### ***Teacher as Writer***

While a couple of the participants may have seen themselves as writers before their Summer Institutes—certainly Monica with her published textbooks for teachers, Aaron with two articles published in different State English Journals, and possibly Bryan who had written a masters’ thesis—all the participants took on an expansive view of themselves as writers. As Bryan quoted a common Writing Project refrain, “If you’re going to teach writing, you’ve got to be a writer.”

In our first interview, Bryan pulled his first journal from the bookshelves behind him, one among 150 journals in the years since that summer in 2002. He illustrated how he utilized the journal as a writer’s notebook filled with words and multimodal texts as seeds for bigger projects in writing, teaching, and learning. While Tonya did not share personal writing with me, she did include taking on the stance of a writer, as she talked about helping her students take on the stance of writer. “Everything we did focused around [...] thinking about writing as writers,” as opposed to a “school assignment.” In her Writing Project presentations, Stacy shared early on that her favorite genres to write is short stories. Then she modeled her own writing during a quickwrite and shared that writing to help make participants comfortable in sharing theirs.



Danielle explained in our first interview that the SI “really was about evolving and practicing and trying to see what it was like to be a writer.” In addition to co-writing multiple articles with her site director, she uses her summers to work on her ideas for a book about curriculum. She utilizes her writing skills along with data from student growth reflections to write letters about student progress for parents, beyond traditional progress reports. Monica has long been a published author, using the income from the curriculum texts to allow her to stay home with her children when they were small. However, in the last few years, she ventured beyond informative writing into poetry, which coincides with expanding her classroom practice to include more poetry—an influence on her teaching connected with her Writing Project experiences. While I was not privy to Tara’s writing, she shared in our first interview about becoming certified as an instructor in the Amherst Writer’s Method, as well as co-sponsoring her high school’s Creative Writing Club. Shortly after his SI, Aaron was enlisted to help create a blog for Writing Project teacher writing at his site, the first NWP site blog in the national network. Since co-directing that year-long institute, he has remained a significant contributor to the blog.

### ***Teacher as Researcher***

A practice of the Summer Institute is to create a presentation to be shared with other teachers as professional development, based on both successful classroom practices as well as research. This stance of teacher as researcher seems to have remained an important practice for all seven participants. In addition to being deeply invested in their own learning, the participants in this study had been at one time or another invested in research, either formally as research participants in another study or informally with inquiry about their own classroom practices.

As a teacher-researcher, Bryan completed multiple graduate programs, and he ultimately became a professor and director of his own NWP site. Tonya completed a master's and had not ruled out a PhD. One of the reasons she gave for participating in this study was because it was during COVID and she had few opportunities for PD. The last we spoke, Tonya had agreed to be part of an initiative with her local university, a two-year collaboration with artists, researchers, and teachers. Stacy's classroom and her teaching had been part of other research from her local university, related to her students' writer's notebooks. Alongside her own inquiries and formidable reading, Danielle worked closely on multiple research projects with her local NWP site director.

A self-proclaimed "professional growth junkie," Monica explained that she accumulates hundreds of PD hours every year and that on her way to Writing Project workshops that are usually two hours away, she listened to audio books focused on teaching. In addition to participating in this study, Monica was deeply engaged with her own reading list and working on multiple action research projects. Tara's research may have been less formal, but like many of the other participants, she held a master's degree, and in our first interview, shared that she was planning to pursue an EdD. Her less formal research included looking into Common Core State Standards, finding resources and ideas with districts who seemed to be holding on to sound practices as they embraced the standards. Aaron's participation in doctoral research did not begin with this study. In 2010 he and one class of student writers took part in another dissertation study. The insight Aaron gained from debriefing conversations after observations morphed into an article Aaron co-wrote with the researcher. Additionally, the Writing Project blog that Aaron continues to facilitate and contribute to seems an informal

inquiry space where teachers are sharing knowledge from what they are learning about their own classroom practices.

### ***Teacher as Leader***

The stance of teacher as leader is one nurtured by local Writing Project sites in how participants are treated as experts with valuable experience, as well as generators of knowledge. When a participant can see themselves as an instructional leader, they are better prepared to contribute to the curriculum and the direction of a school or district or local Writing Project site—not as a passive receiver of hierarchical direction (i.e. following a set curriculum determined by others), but as someone cocreating curriculum, as well as pedagogy. Whether the participants of this study came to their SI experiences with leadership already a stance or they began to take on a leadership identity at their schools or local sites afterwards, all of them have expanded their professional identities to include leadership. And several participants linked their expanding identity in leadership directly to their NWP professional growth.

Bryan, in our first conversation, tied this research to his identity: “Your whole pursuit here is at the core of who I am.” He had been so transformed by the National Writing Project as a classroom teacher, that he later pursued a PhD and is now directing a site of his own. He mentioned this on the initial survey, along with, “Every single item in my writer’s notebook in 2002 has become a major trajectory for my career now.” Bryan literally wrote himself into leadership.

A few years after her SI, Tonya was asked to facilitate the 2015 SI for her Writing Project. She continues to participate in professional growth that allows her to pass on her own expertise. Since our interviews, Stacy has moved from the classroom to being the principal of her school. She noted in our second interview that all but two of the Fellows from her SI cohort

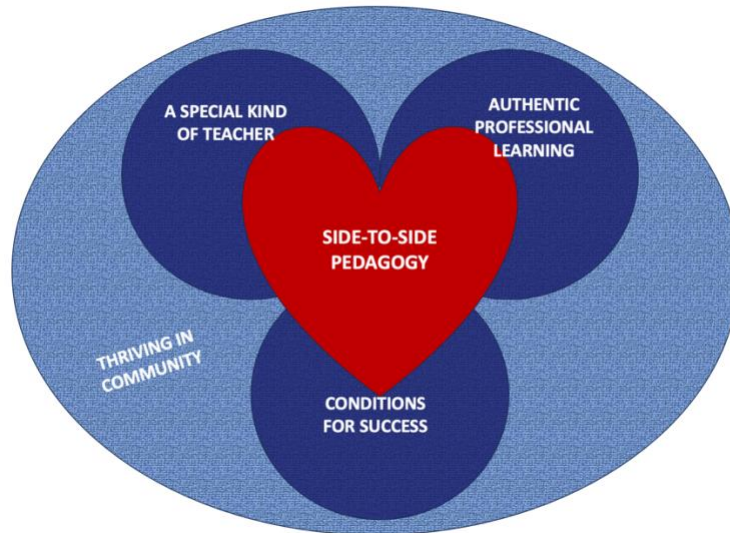
had moved from teaching into leadership roles of some sort—ranging from literacy coach to administration. Danielle became a co-director for her Writing Project site just after completing her SI. Using what she’s learned from the Writing Project model, she became a popular presenter for PD or Staff Colleges in her district. She continues to work with both preservice and in-service teachers in multiple districts through her local NWP site.

Monica has grown her *teacher as leader* stance by supporting colleagues, as well as through her presentations within her school and district, with the Writing Project, and with her local Council of Teachers of English. She also leads by publishing with her state’s English Journal. Tara has taken on leadership with her school district by serving on curriculum committees and with her local Writing Project site by leading an antiracist book study. Aaron expanded his leadership role in working with educators outside of his school, as part of a “core group” with his local Writing Project, which led to a yearlong institute resulting in a teacher blog where Writing Project alumni can share their writing practices and inquiries. Additionally, he has presented at the national level about the creation of this blog.

### **A Special Kind of Teacher, in Summary**

Were the seven participants of this study already “special,” or did they become “a special kind of teacher” through their experiences with their local Writing Projects and the larger network of NWP? It’s a bit like the question: *Which came first, the chicken or the egg?* One trait or stance begets another. Being lifelong learners invested in their own learning, as well as being reflective and collaborative practitioners, are traits that would lead to a sense of autonomy and agency—which, in turn, made these participants excellent candidates for a Summer Institute. Their Writing Project experiences not only affirmed and strengthened these traits but allowed the TCs to expand their professional identities. All of which brings up one

more trait—ardency. All seven participants expressed a warm and enthusiastic commitment to integrating the NWP model into their classroom practices and sharing that model with others.



### **Side-to-Side Pedagogy**

At the heart of these findings and, perhaps, the heart of the National Writing Project, is this second theme of teaching and learning with a Side-to-Side Pedagogy. The *in vivo* code “side-to-side” emerged from my first interview with Bryan, Participant 1. He had been talking about “the model,” using that term repeatedly in reference to the NWP, and I asked him to explain what he meant by “the model.” He replied, “It’s *teachers teaching teachers*. It’s not top down. Right? It’s side to side. And then the best teachers are going to go to *students teaching students* and *students teaching teachers*. Right? It’s listening—it’s processing—it’s growing.” He had been making a point about the great results we, as a collective of the NWP network, have achieved. Since there are no two directors alike and no two teacher consultants who are alike, Bryan concluded that it’s not about the teachers, “It’s not us—it’s *the model*.” The model, or what I am calling Side-to-Side Pedagogy, is a way of tapping into participant experience and expertise to build a shared knowledge within a group of Fellows. All perspectives are of value. and considered an essential part of the growth and learning process. Just as teachers in the Summer Institute are taught how to collaborate and work together as a

community of writers, learners, and leaders, through a carefully crafted curriculum, so too are students when Fellows of the summer institute bring a side-to-side pedagogy into their own classroom practices.

To help my understanding about the model and the idea of a Side-to-Side Pedagogy, I returned to Gray's memoir (2000) as I thought through how each participant demonstrated a side-to-side practice and compared those with the practices Gray described. Gray shared his "main goal—putting classroom teachers at the center of things, preparing them to teach other teachers, tapping and celebrating the knowledge from practice that only they had..." (p. 84). Gray's words brought to mind my own Summer Institute where teacher presentations (i.e. teacher demonstrations) were modeled from the coaches, our co-directors, and TCs from our local site. We were immersed in the model—in a side-to-side pedagogy. Gray wrote about how the facilitators scheduled the Fellow's presentations, reserving the later spaces for those who would benefit with more time, knowing they would likely grow more confident as they learned from their colleagues. Can you sense an ethic of care here and deep respect for wherever Fellows might be in the learning process? The side-to-side practice follows up after each presentation with time for reflecting on the content and methods of the presentation, a practice modeled from the earliest days of the institute. This feedback, detailed and written for the presenter, with some sharing out for the group, is a way to make visible the process of praxis (Freire, 1970).

All of this leads to one of the essential products of a fellowship in the SI: to create and demonstrate your own presentation, one based on research and successful classroom practice, which becomes a possibility for future in-service with a local Writing Project. Along the way, Fellows collaborate with one another in small presentation groups, where they meet with a

coach, a TC, who has been through the process and supports the group in the creation of their presentations. The same thing happens with writing groups. In his focus on centering teachers and helping them develop demonstrations that followed his model, Gray (2000) was surprised by the evaluations at the end of their third institute with responses much like, “I loved every bit of what we did this summer, but it was the writing that will have the most lasting effect on me and on my teaching” (pp. 84-5). The writing groups capitalized on this same model – this side-to-side work – and teachers experienced the spark that comes from discovering and sharing their own voices as they delved into their personal and classroom experiences.

Using insights from Gray’s memoir, my own memories of the SIs I’ve experienced as both a Fellow and a coach, and focusing on the data from the nested cases, I revised the initial subcategories and codes (e.g., “real writing,” “acting like writers,” “scholarship into action”) to help define what happens in a side-to-side pedagogy. Where Gray is focused on the teachers, I include both teachers and students with the term, *learners*.

1. Learners are treated as experts operating with agency and choice.
2. Intentional inquiry is anchored in purpose—*What is it like to think and act like a writer (e.g., historian, scientist)?*
3. Learning happens in community through modeling/demonstrating, time for practice, and coaching.
4. Throughout the process, learners are consistently working toward goals: a) final products (e.g., portfolio, “scholarship into action,” senior project, digital museum, a piece of writing and art to display on a bulletin board, a Ted Talk, a collection of poetry, formal writing analysis), b) skills to create those products.

Evidence from the seven nested cases highlights different aspects of this Side-to-Side Pedagogy and the benefits for a TC’s sustained significant growth. The subsections here will be organized by participant.



## **Participant 1: Bryan**

Bryan's case illustrates at least three perspectives of a side-to-side pedagogy. In working side-to-side with another Fellow, an artist, in his SI, Bryan recognized him as an expert of his own knowing and practices. When this Fellow challenged Bryan with "*Look at all those words*" and asked him, "*Why don't you draw?*" Bryan began to see new possibilities for his writer's notebook. Incorporating visual literacy became a spark of inspiration that manifested in that first journal (and the 149 that followed) and morphed into highly effective classroom practices for his students.

When Bryan worked with high school seniors, he guided them through their senior projects, a year-long inquiry project into a subject that was personally meaningful. A requirement for the end product was to give back to the community in some way. Bryan referred to this as "scholarship into action" where students conducted "a passion project," basically. But they were also required "to do *good* from that research [with] a community project that would give back to the world." Students were treated as the experts on the issues they cared about, utilizing both their own curiosity and the research they would conduct throughout their senior year. One African American student began to ask, "*Why in America, do we jump from slavery to Harlem Renaissance, to the Sixties' Civil Rights to Obama? [...] What's the in-between?*" For her project she proposed that instead of Black History Month, they have a "Black History Year," making daily announcements "of some kind of Black History trivia." Additionally, she wrote letters to local churches and collected funds for "the senior class to go to the Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio." For another student, a young man with Down Syndrome, Bryan and a special education teacher helped guide him into a passion project he cared about. His love for plants and gardens became a project that beautified

the school. They helped him secure shelving for the third-floor space between the parking garage and the entrance to their downtown school, which became a garden for all to enjoy in their comings and goings through the entrance into their school. Both projects grounded in purpose and authentic inquiry included long-term goals like a 10-page research paper and a presentation to the Senior Board, as well as shorter-term goals for learning the skills they would need to complete the project. To achieve those goals, students were given time for practice and coaching in small groups and one-to-one opportunities with the teacher.

When Bryan moved into his role as a site director of the Connecticut Writing Project, Fairfield, he expanded his side-to-side pedagogy on an entirely a new level. His literacy labs became his “way of building community.” Evolving over time, his site’s writing camps transformed into literacy labs with expanded focus and diverse groups. Running alongside the literacy labs is a 5-week Summer Institute for teachers. In their (Crandall et al., 2020) article, Bryan and his cowriters shared a story about how they noticed that during breaks all the other participants kept gravitating to the Ubuntu camp. It dawned on the writing camp facilitators that in separating the group of ELL students from the others, they were missing out on the opportunity for them to learn from one another. They revised their following camps to be more closely aligned with their mission, finding ways to intentionally integrate their diverse groups.

### **Participant 2: Tonya**

Evidence of Tonya’s side-to-side work can be found in her service as one of four facilitators for a Summer Institute seven years after her own, in her work with colleagues, and in her classroom practices. In 2015 Tonya served as one of four facilitators for her local Writing Project. She shared the portfolio she created, a digital slide show with images from the SI, links to two presentations—one where she collaborated with other presenters, links to a blog she

maintained for a short while, and a grateful description about her time as a facilitator, “Learning side-by-side with passionate, independent, smart, thoughtful, prepared, courageous adults was the best!” Tonya’s video for this research revealed her natural ability and joy in collaborating. Her joint project with the literacy coach of creating a digital museum put Tonya’s students and another class into highly effective and engaging side-to-side practices.

In addition to learning with *teachers teaching teachers* and integrating *students teaching students*, Tonya maintained a *students teaching teachers* stance where she remained willing to learn from her students. Being open to their wisdom and expertise as she navigated the new world of teaching with computers (in the early days of Google Classroom), it was from a student suggestion that they utilized Word Cloud as a revision tool to check for overused words. Additionally, she began each new school year asking her English students questions like *What does it mean to revise?* and *What should every 6<sup>th</sup>-grader know about punctuation?* Grounding their learning in such questions led to co-creating with her students both a Word Revision Rubric and an Editing Checklist—offering students a sense of agency as they took the stance of writers and wondered about what writers do and how they work.

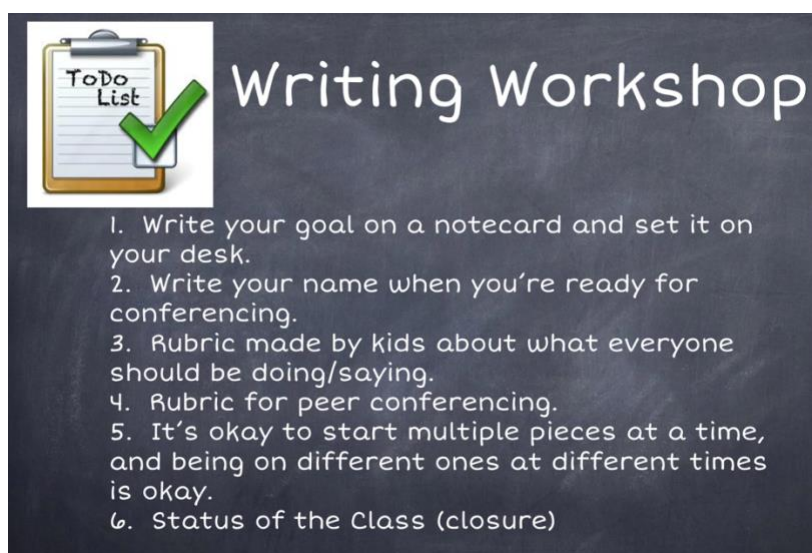


Figure 49: Tonya’s Slide about Writing Workshop

Tonya integrated her own sense of agency and choice into her work with students, making sure they could write about topics meaningful to them or at least providing choice in topic or subtopics and in who they worked with. She anchored student inquiry for the digital museum project with an essential question like, “How can we, as historians, design a virtual museum app, that would showcase the transformative ideas throughout the history of [local city, state].” In her recorded conversation with the instructional coach, Tonya brought up not only using mentor texts, but modeling their own processes for research and inquiry. They planned time for students to practice several elements and coached them as students worked together in collaborative groups. For the Digital Museum Project, their goals included presenting the project to another group of students, along with learning new digital skills and practicing the skills of revision, then final edits.

In our 2022 conversation Tonya shared the frustration of having to “retool other people’s lesson plans” and the constraints of curriculum expectations had moved her away from some of the freedom she had experienced in earlier years. But in her 2015 Writing Project Portfolio, I found glimpses of how side-to-side might look, at least some of the time, with her English students. Looking at Figure 49 (above), it is easy to see all four elements of side-to-side pedagogy at work.

### **Participant 3: Stacy**

Looking through Stacy’s nested case, evidence of her side-to-side practice can be clearly found in her Writing Project presentations, as well as in her classroom. Within her presentations, participants are asked to write, then share that writing with a neighbor or small group. After sharing writing with a small audience, Stacy asked for volunteers to read to the whole group. It’s easy to visualize this as a regular strategy in her teaching practice.

In our first interview Stacy talked about the significant changes in her practice: in addition to intentional and daily writing practices, she prioritized the opportunity for students to read their writing aloud through various strategies that included “turning and reading to a neighbor.” This, Stacy believed, was “more than just community building”—but central to “empowering” her third graders for developing their voices and sharing their valued perspectives. It also seems central to growing their sense of agency.

One of the slides with a weekly writing agenda from her video presentation included how and when Stacy incorporated side-to-side strategies (Fig. 20). Beginning on Monday, Stacy would set the goal for the writing that would be turned in by Friday, introducing a new writing or grammar skill through whole class discussion and modeling the skill in her own writing. Then, in small groups, students would brainstorm ideas for their weekly writing pieces, usually via lists or word webs. After groups had a chance to work on their ideas, Stacy would bring them back to the whole group and ask students to “share out,” a significant piece of instruction, especially “beneficial” to writers who may be struggling with what they could write about. On Tuesday students would focus on the draft, getting their thoughts on the paper. Wednesday and Thursday were slated for small group work, then revising and editing. Stacy conferenced with students either in small groups or one-to-one beginning on Thursday and on Friday, if needed. Learning in Stacy’s classroom was clearly modeled, practiced, and coached.

#### **Participant 4: Danielle**

A side-to-side pedagogy permeates everything Danielle does as an educator, whether working with her own students or with preservice and in-service teachers. Her staff college presentations for her district, whether about literacy or nutrition, were grounded with a mentor text and a position of curiosity. “[B]eginning with a questioning stance” Danielle anchored her

learners within their curiosity and an intentional inquiry. The classroom pedagogy that has evolved from Danielle's own curiosity and the model she learned from the Writing Project begins much the same way. Student agency and choice is a central feature in Danielle's classroom. Both of Danielle's students who participated in this study had positive things to say about choice. Sahna, a student enrolled in Danielle's 2022/2023 ELA class explained how agency and choice helped her improve her learning.

I think that, like the freeness of our ability, [...] to do whatever we want in our class and to explore the material that we want and really engage in [...] our interests and grow in whichever ways we choose to, really helps us to improve in all areas. (Sahna Interview)

Michael, from Danielle's 2021/2022 class, connected having choice over the books he read with his experience in choosing a research topic—in having the time to think more deeply about his choice and eventually revise his topic as he learned more:

As a result of having the overall choice of our book [...] made it easier to pick out what we wanted to research and learn more about. I think it also helped me find out what I wanted my topic to revolve around. It helped me decide on that aspect of it and really changed my mind on some issues. (Michael Interview)

Danielle's students began the year exploring the things they wondered about and sharing those wonderings on a Wonder Wall. At some point parents were invited to share their own wonderings. These wonderings became a resource for Danielle to help guide students as they continued to ask questions and explore aspects of their reading and writing, gradually leading students to settle on a topic that would become part of their final project. Their curiosity, as well as their personal interests, drove the choices they made. They knew they would be creating products and learning the skills needed to produce both authentic writing (e.g., contests, publications) and a Ted Talk as the end of the year project. While they began their side-to-side learning in the community of their classroom, where skills were modeled,

practiced, and coached, second semester extended their community to side-to-side work with classrooms from Bangladesh and Spain.

Additionally, Danielle worked with school districts to share her successful approach to facilitate authentic literacy and communication skills. No doubt that her presentations modeled many of the elements of this side-to-side pedagogy.

### **Participant 5: Monica**

At the time of our interviews, Monica was exploring *Deep Thinking* in conjunction with her MakeSpace action projects and explained both on her survey and in our first interview that she had made less time for collaboration than in the past. The time was replaced with deep engagement in creative work. However, when I watched her video of Monica presenting some of her latest work with her local Writing Project to teachers in her school, a small gathering, she demonstrated some elements of side-to-side practice—even in sharing out as a whole group. I imagine if it were much larger, Monica would have asked participants to share with a neighbor before sharing whole group. For at least three different quickwrites or drawing experiences, Monica modeled the practice and shared student samples, before asking participants to practice. She offered coaching along the way, as needed. Then, afterwards in sharing out, participants experienced opportunities to learn from their colleagues. They were offered autonomy and agency in the choices Monica had given with each prompt, as well as the option of volunteering to share the products of their writing, thinking, and drawing. Framing her presentation in the stance of “Reflection as Stress Reduction,” Monica anchored their activities with intentional purpose and offered an informal inquiry into their own experiences with teaching. Their final products were reflections and discussion, where Monica provided the space while modeling the skills to create and explore.

Monica’s experience with her local Writing Project seems a great illustration of how a side-to-side model sustained and nourished her professional growth in significant ways. In her participation of multiple summer and yearlong institutes, Monica found herself learning from teachers in various stages of their teaching careers and counted those experiences as valuable significant growth. She learned from diverse perspectives and was able to share from her own unique experiences. One of the things, she found most surprising, included learning that as a teacher in a rural area, she held a lot in common with teachers working in urban areas—especially in terms of motivation and challenges with family contexts. In working from a shared space of challenges, facing what seemed like diverse student populations, Monica’s side-to-side learning certainly impacted her side-to-side teaching.

### **Participant 6: Tara**

The side-to-side learning Tara experienced with her Summer Institute led to Tara revising her Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) with intentional writing with both creative expression and personal meaning for her students. In the video Tara shared, along with samples of student work, Tara’s students were working toward a product goal of a personal narrative based with the intentional purpose to teach their “readers something about empathy” (Presentation Slide 5). Tara scaffolded her students into dual skill sets of learning to empathize with a patient’s story and writing a narrative with enough skill to illicit an empathetic response.

Through her ongoing work with the ERWC program, Tara had helped to develop the Unit, “Narrative Medicine,” and throughout the lessons are great examples of side-to-side pedagogy—paired conversations, whole group brainstorming, and goal setting. In addition to the two informative texts—an article and a video of a doctor describing her first day as an



intern—Tara added in a short story example, “The Yellow Wall-paper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1899). Students practiced the skills for empathy through guided reading and discussions of the texts, working together for idea development and individually in the quickwrites and a questionnaire that served as prewriting. It is unclear if students worked together to revise their narratives, but utilizing different protocols, depending on where students are in their writing process, was a specific practice Tara spoke of in our first interview. From the video it was clear that Tara modeled the quickwriting she asked of her students and that they’d been writing to thoughtful prompts, essential practice before beginning the first drafts of their narratives. Additionally, Tara treated her students as expert writers making their own decisions about genre and, in the end, whether or not to keep it a “medical” narrative. Students were given an abundance of choice.

### **Participant 7: Aaron**

Side-to-Side practice likely existed in Aaron’s classroom before his Summer Institute in 2015. He was responsible for bringing to his school the Writing Workshop, a side-to-side practice where students use their class time to practice the craft of writing, generally to topics and often in genres of their own choosing. In our first interview, Aaron shared that his curriculum and approaches did not change immediately. Rather, a significant shift for Aaron was embracing the stance of *a teacher who writes*. This can be seen most clearly through his facilitation and contributions to his local Writing Project’s teacher blog. Here I found numerous posts where Aaron wrote about teaching practices, as well as inquiries into those practices. In the process of this side-to-side sharing and exchange with other teacher leaders from his Writing Project, he revealed how side-to-side has looked in his classroom since his Summer Institute.

Aaron's side-to-side pedagogy was also evident throughout his conversation with his colleague, Elizabeth. He approached Elizabeth as the expert of her classroom while he served as her colleague, albeit one who wears the hat of IB Coordinator. When he had suggestions to make, he formed questions for Elizabeth's consideration. Their conversation remained anchored in a kind of inquiry into her project design and possibilities as she vocally fleshed out the "parameters." Elizabeth's classroom practice seemed just as grounded in a side-to-side pedagogy, where she extended agency to her students through a matrix of choices they would have with the project—from comedy (multiple genres) to memoir or a combination. Her students were working toward an end goal of two final products: a collection of original texts and an analysis of the choices they made as writers. The skills they'd been learning through their teacher's modeling, their own writing practice, and the one-on-one conferencing had been building throughout the school year and would culminate in these final products. In the analysis portion of the project, Elizabeth spoke of choice in written versus audio/video analysis where the students would take the stance of writer to walk through the "stylistic choices" and "audience imperatives" crafted in their humor/memoir writings.

In our second interview, Aaron pointed out a significant professional growth experience that happened around five years before his Summer Institute. He zeroed in on a 2010 article co-written with a colleague who had made one of Aaron's classes part of her dissertation research. The ideas for the article came from their ongoing and side-to-side discussions about her observations. Aaron explained,

But it was having someone observe my class for a couple of months and then immediately talking about it [...] to start a conversation like a genuine inquiry mode. Not like *Did I do good or did I do bad?* But like, *What was happening there? What did you notice? What questions [...] make us think about teaching?* That was fantastic. (Interview 2)

Side-to-side professional development is an effective practice that can be found beyond the NWP. It's not about being graded or judged but somehow sitting beside another educator and assessing what we notice and what we wonder about that has the power to ignite a spark of curiosity, driving "genuine inquiry" which, in turn, improves the craft of teaching.

Fast forward from this experience of side-to-side happening as Aaron participated in a dissertation research project around 2010, past his SI experience in 2015, to the summer of 2020, that first summer of the Pandemic, following the murder of George Floyd. In that second interview, I asked Aaron about a listing under his resumé: "Co-designed a summer program of critical thinking about race to increase inclusiveness of the school community." Between COVID 19, George Floyd, and a transition of leadership with their Head of School, Aaron's school community was going through a great deal. In a series of conversations with the history teacher, another white male, and two community members, both African American women in other stakeholder roles, Aaron and this cohort recognized "a real moment where people in this community could be pressed into conversations about race." They recognized that no one really wanted to have those kinds of conversations, but nonetheless, "blind spots" remained an inherent part of the culture.

As their "conversation evolved," they wondered, "What about a summer community thing where everyone could join on zoom?" The series of four summer meetings, every two weeks, was opened to everyone in the community—"students, teachers, parents, family, friends." Members of the community were invited, and much like Gray's approach to Writing Project professional development, no one was forced to participate (2002). Aaron and his history teacher colleague pushed a framework that took an abstract idea and grounded it historically. Rather than talking about "How do you feel about yourself," they offered videos

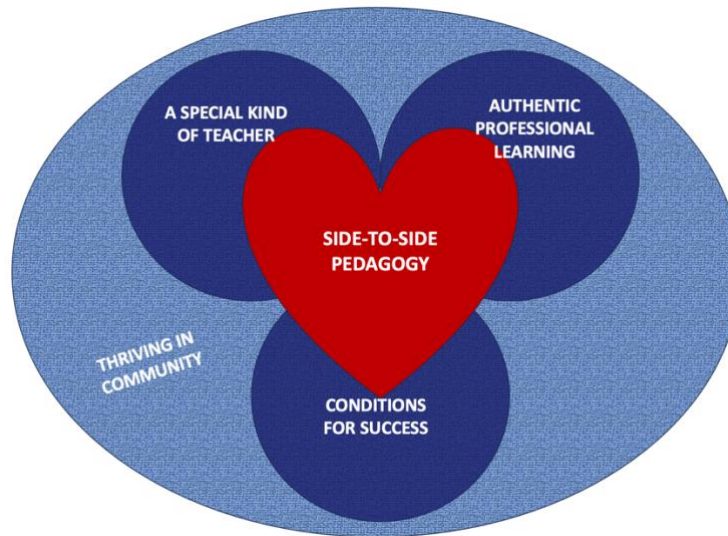
and readings (both before each meeting and during) about the focus concepts and “how it’s played out historically.” The structure of these meetings included consideration of the concept through a teaching, then small breakout sessions, and coming back as a whole group of about “50 to 60 people.” To the extent of how much of this structure was influenced by Aaron’s work with the National Writing Project is difficult to say. But it’s a clear side-to-side pedagogy, a practice that was at least affirmed in Aaron’s work with his local Writing Project.

### Side-to-Side Pedagogy, in Summary

Side-to-Side Pedagogy is a lot like the Writing Project model of *teachers teaching teachers* but includes *students teaching students* and *students teaching teachers*. This side-to-side practice runs counter to a top-down approach. It cannot be mandated. Side-to-side begins with an invitation and is learned in community with others willing to grapple with the complexities of teaching effective communication, as well as learning processes. The National Writing Project focuses on the complexities of teaching writing and learning how to be a better writer—in any subject, because writing is a tool for learning (Blau, 2018; Emig, 1977). In Figure 50, you will see a recap of four elements central to the NWP model and to an effective side-to-side pedagogy.

<p><b>Learners are treated as experts operating with AGENCY and CHOICE.</b></p>	<p><b>Intentional Inquiry is anchored in Purpose:</b> <i>What is it like to think and act like a writer (e.g., scientist, historian)?</i></p>
<p><b>Learning happens in community.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeled</li> <li>• Practiced</li> <li>• Coached</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consistent working toward GOALS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final products</li> <li>• Skills to create those products</li> </ul>

Figure 50: Elements of Side-to-Side Pedagogy



## **Authentic Professional Learning**

When I thought of my own professional learning with the Writing Project, I realized that it not only led me to further growth, but it also connected me with fellow TCs and conversations in a way that I believe has sustained my career as an educator. It was in Aaron’s response to the question about what first comes to mind when he thinks of the Writing Project that I began to understand why. Aaron responded with three phrases: “Good friends. Authentic conversation. And appropriate professional development.” While his phrase “good friends” smacks of community and belonging, the other two phrases connect directly to the NWP model of *teachers teaching teachers*, as a side-to-side pedagogy, where the learner is centered and treated as a valuable expert with self-determination and agency. As we explore this theme, we will first return to the definition for sustained professional growth, adapted from O’Meara and Terosky (2010). Then we will define authentic professional learning and how this helped sustain the professional growth of the seven participants.

## Defining Sustained Professional Growth

In reviewing the literature for this study, my thinking around professional development where teachers are often “acted upon” (Barwashi, 2003) moved this research toward the phrase *professional growth*, one centered on the needs of the learner, as well as the wider context of their work. O’Meara and Terosky’s (2010) use of the word “sustained” helped me think more clearly about the differences between professional development designed to *act upon* me and my colleagues, as if we were problems in need of fixing, and authentic professional learning where I explored the questions arising in my own practices and the needs of my students. In community with other educators, whether from my school or from my Writing Project site, I found agency as I learned to see myself as a valuable expert in my own classroom. So, I added the word, “sustained” to the phrase I wanted to define for this research. In the first interview with each participant, I read aloud the following definition for *sustained professional growth*:

a “continuous process” allowing “professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work.” This growth sustains the professional through “learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,” and “is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined.” (O’Meara and Torosky, 2010, p. 45)

Participants responded to this definition, usually, by pointing out phrases that resonated with them. **Bryan** shared that it resonated with him “100 percent.” The phrase “learning, agency, and professional relationships” not only reminded him of the Writing Project, but of his school in Louisville that was deeply connected with the Critical Friends Group Network (CFG). According to Bryan, a guiding principle of CFG was, “The best PD comes from within.” Between his work with CFG and NWP, Bryan was

constantly looking at student work. *What is this telling us?* Constantly looking at choices I made in my classroom [...]. *What was the result of that?* Constantly in

conversation with other professionals about doing what's best. And so, professional development was effective. (Bryan, Interview 2)

In comparing this experience with what Bryan referred to as “PD from Hell,” he followed up with, “I don't think that's what teachers get.”

When *Tonya* responded to thoughts about professional growth, she seemed to reflect on her current experience with her local site, which hadn't completely dwindled—she was planning to help set up a Writing Project table at an upcoming Technology Institute—but her involvement had waned somewhat. One of the things she wondered about during our first interview was, “...what I'm missing out on. [...] I know there's tons of things being offered. And I don't always do them all.” She felt like she was not having a “continuous process” with her local site, because she was just not as involved lately—not going on a writing marathon or knowing about the opportunities offered. “Perhaps,” she mused, “...it's not what I need right now.” She was also curious about the cohesiveness between the National Writing Project and her own local site, which turned our conversation toward funding. She remembered having her tuition paid for (by her district) and the stipend she received as a participant in the Summer Institute.

Three phrases in the definition resonated with *Stacy*: 1) “professional relationship” because Stacy met and connected with people in the Writing Project she would not have otherwise; 2) “identity roles and work are defined.” She appreciated the “identity portion” because as a group, Stacy believes her Writing Project is “just pretty special.” 3) Stacy related the phrase “diverse knowledge” with the idea of TCs as learners who challenge themselves to “learn more” and “be better” as well as sharing that new knowledge.

After taking a moment to read the definition for “sustained professional growth” *Danielle* explained that her district required participation in PLCs, but without really training

the teachers on how to be part of a Professional Learning Community. For Danielle, it was the National Writing Project that made her “part of a group of people that wanted to be better teachers of writing” and “that always offered opportunities for growth.” With the Writing Project, she felt connected and was even planning on attending an event after our first interview, through the *Write Studio* app on her phone. Danielle’s professional growth has literally been sustained from her connection with the National Writing Project.

Two phrases, “professional relationships” and “socio-economic,” resonated with *Monica*. Both speak to her local Writing Project’s tendency to bring teachers together of varying ages and different stages of their teaching careers. She really enjoys learning from diverse perspectives and was surprised by how much her rural experiences seemed to align with the experiences of some urban teachers she joined for another Writing Project event.

What stood out about the definition of sustained professional growth, for *Tara*, were the phrases: “continuous process,” “agency,” “sense of community and professional relationships,” and “specific socio-cultural needs.” She found the “continuous process” essential to her belief about the need to keep growing. If you quit, “you become obsolete. You cannot stagnate.” Tara explained that professional growth brings that confidence and agency so “you can push back against the powers that be, when they are insisting on things that [...] research shows to be detrimental to student growth.” The phrase “sense of community and professional relationships” reminded Tara of how we began our interview—

“Community. Honestly, these are the teachers I go to first and always.” Explaining why “specific socio-cultural needs” resonated, Tara shared, “most of us teachers are middle-aged, middle-class, white ladies—that’s really more like 80 percent of the teaching profession.” She reiterated the concept of the harm teachers do in their “unknowing” concerning “different



cultures and different classrooms.” Learning through a reflective process could lead a teacher to ask: “What are my blind spots? What are likely to be my areas where I get defensive?” Those defensive moments “most definitely” indicate opportunities for growth and Tara suggested, after putting a metaphorical “ice pack on it,” to come back and do the work of unlearning.

For *Aaron*, two phrases captured his attention: “new and diverse knowledge” and that it’s “driven both by what the individual wants, but also their specific context.” Aaron particularly enjoys learning with people not from his school because it makes him think differently, with questions like, “What do I do? What does my school do differently? And... Why?” Considering the “specific context,” Aaron explained that at his site, especially with the yearlong initiatives and larger workshops, “the tenor of the conversation and the work that we do is always: *Yes, And... How are you going to bring this back to your school? How does this work in your school setting?*” So rather than becoming idealistic about a new initiative or idea, Aaron appreciates the kind of growth that considers the nuances of how a practice or strategy will fit in a particular school or classroom setting—how it might work within a culture, perhaps how it may develop or be further nurtured within your “locus of control.” Rather than being overwhelmed or frustrated by trying something new, this *Yes, And...* approach allows teachers to figure out what step might be taken toward growth.

### **Exploring Authenticity in Professional Learning**

Authentic professional learning sustained the professional growth of Teacher Consultants through a “continuous process” of conversation and inquiry into “new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation” (O’Meara & Terosky, 2010) connected to the real work situated in their lived teaching experiences and in consideration of what they, themselves wanted and needed to learn. In the literature review, I connected the idea of

authentic growth to both Campbell's Hero Journey and Mezirow's Phases of Transformation. Then I argued that, like a real-life adventure, authentic learning happens when we cross a threshold of "existing frameworks and references." As the context of our lives change through personal circumstances or societal and cultural changes, the old ways of doing things must also change.

The word authentic, as defined via Merriam-Webster.com, could mean a number of things. The first two offerings fit well with how authentic is used with this theme: "1) not false or imitation: REAL, ACTUAL, 2) true to one's own personality, spirit, or character." Much of the professional development (PD) that comes to teachers is a requirement from district leaders often a result of state and federal legislation—a top-down approach intended to keep teachers accountable for their professional learning. This standardized approach might seem efficient for those far removed from the everyday experiences of a classroom setting, but very often presentations from this approach do not meet the specific needs of teachers nor their students. In contrast, Bryan, Participant 1, explained how the Writing Project takes an approach of a mutual investment in teachers with supportive resources, promoting the qualities of "focus," "devotion," "reflection," and "dreaming large." Which is quite "different from professional development" where someone outside the community is paid to deliver a presentation. According to Bryan, "99.9 percent of that PD... is ineffective" and commonly referred to as "PD from Hell."

In contrast, Lieberman and Wood (2002) found effective professional learning must move toward a model where "teachers generate, as well as gain, knowledge" (p. 40). In a two-year study of two NWP sites beginning in 1997, they found

Two key features that underlie the national Writing Project's successful approach to teacher development: a distinctive set of *social practices* that motivate teachers, make

learning accessible, and build an ongoing professional community; and *networks* that organize and sustain relationship among these communities and produce new and revitalizing forms of support, commitment, and leadership. (2002, p. 40)

Bryan's use of the word "investment" into teachers as Fellows and TCs fits well with the "social practices" and "networks" organized to sustain "support, commitment, and leadership." Both findings facilitate an ongoing process where teachers begin to see themselves as intellectuals in charge of pursuing their own learning goals, authentic to their classroom inquiries and in service to their students.

This investment into teachers and their bona fide needs, along with a direction for growth that comes from the questions they have about their own classroom practices, is another part of what makes learning with the Writing Project *authentic*. Tonya, Participant 2, explained, "... you can actually go back to your classroom and use it right away." Authenticity further connected Tonya's professional learning with the Writing Project to the stance she took in her classroom.

It made sense to me—like, we're not *just* teaching kids to write, so [they] do an essay and get a grade. That really resonates with me. [...] I want kids to know that anything I ask them to do—I have a reason for it. And it's not necessarily because you're going to need it in high school. (Tonya, Interview 1)

She extended her notion of authenticity to her classroom practice, wanting to ensure that her students understood, "there's a huge difference between learning and school." And that while "learning can happen at school [...], learning happens a lot of other places, almost everywhere else." This sense of authenticity in learning extended into taking on the stance of a writer, an orientation from her Writing Project. Tonya explained, "Okay, we are writers. And these are some things that writers do," which is very different from, "This is your rubric and this is what you need to do to get an A."

Similarly, Danielle’s inquiry into her own classroom practices began when students left her classroom “talking about points on the rubric”—an indelible moment that made her wonder about how to motivate her students into genuine inquiry. She moved her classroom away from “teaching books” to teaching “reading and writing and a skill set to do it in a natural authentic way.” Within her own research, Danielle “found that students needed to make sure that their learning had an impact” (Danielle, Interview 1). Part of what pushed her having her students enter writing contests and toward connecting with other groups of students, whether with the local high school or from other parts of the world like Spain and Bangladesh, was knowing the results of their learning was “going to be shared with others.” Interestingly, it was Danielle’s authentic search to improve her classroom practice that she came to her local Writing Project, where she in turn learned to focus her curriculum on authentic outcomes.

Stacy’s authentic inquiry into improving her students’ ability moved her to try looping up a grade with her 2<sup>nd</sup>-graders, one of her significant growth experiences. That same need to help her students drove her to seek a master’s degree and to her local Writing Project and eventually to Reading Specialist certification. She is a great example of how teachers use their local contexts and the needs of their students to seek out authentic professional learning. However, not all professional development meets those authentic needs. Stacy assured me that nothing compared to her local Writing Project.

Monica’s authentic pursuits with her local Writing Project were two-fold. In addition to learning content she could use in her classroom, she learned to don a *Teacher as Leader* hat, studying not only the presented information, but the ways in which it was presented. She looked to other TCs as models for her own presentations. Whether she presented for her local

Writing Project, her state Council of Teachers of English, or her own high school colleagues, Monica found that the Writing Project helped in those pursuits.

Tara was just as authentic in her pursuits to unlearn as she was to learn the skills she felt her students needed. Moving from instruction as the drama teacher to teaching English put her in the position of depending on other teachers who were mostly depending on the textbook which, for Tara, was terrible in meeting the needs of the students. While she gained great skills in scaffolding students into expository reading and responding to informational texts, it was in her own Summer Institute that Tara realized there was something missing in that curriculum. The result of focusing on the authentic needs of her students moved Tara to incorporating more opportunities for students to write for personal reasons and creatively.

Now that we've explored the authenticity of the participants' experiences in their professional learning with their local Writing Projects, I want to return to the coding and categories that fit underneath this theme. In particular, the following categories seem especially significant: Authentic Professional Learning Includes a *Yes, And...* Approach, Space for Pushing Back, and Transfers Ownership of the Learning over to the Learners.

### **Authentic Professional Learning Includes a *Yes, And...* Approach**

Aaron's description of his local Writing Project's approach for professional learning stood out at the time and became a code in the initial analysis phase of this research. It's a code I've returned to, again and again, as I've been thinking about the findings. In the meantime, I've discovered the ubiquity of the phrase within our current culture. Almost a year ago, I ordered a copy of "*YES, AND...*" (2013, 2019), by Richard Rohr, Franciscan monk, author of numerous books on spirituality, and founder of the Center for Contemplation and Action. Within this book of daily meditations, Rohr's teaching stressed a "way of knowing" that "can

be called contemplation” or “non-dualistic thinking,” among other phrases. In an earlier book (2011) he called this “both-and thinking,” and explained,

You no longer need to divide the field of every moment between up and down, totally right or totally wrong, with me or against me. It just *is*. *This calm allows you to confront what must be confronted with even greater clarity and incisiveness.* (p. 146)

I heard this phrase again on a podcast where Dan Harris (2023) is in conversation with Sharon Salzberg, Buddhist teacher. She used the phrase from a recent book (2023), giving credit to its origin in Improv. According to Salzberg *Yes, And...* thinking is an intentional stance—a “skillful way of sitting in the center of paradox or ambivalence, being there to take it all in, and relating skillfully to whatever presents itself. Even more recently on an NPR Morning Edition piece about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Groundlings Theatre and School of Improv I learned, that the “Yes, And...” conditions for improv actors include two rules: saying “Yes” to the other players “And” then adding to the scene from the perspective of their own character. They are essentially creating fertile ground for a scene to play out. For one player from Groundlings Theatre, this ruled changed how she listened in all her conversations. She learned to “listen to understand versus listening to respond” (Martinez, 2024, Jan. 31). It’s easy to see how practicing psychologists (Phillips, 2021) incorporate this concept as a tool to improve communication with dementia patients and connections in family therapy. Phillips’ article included counselor, Gordon Smith, who used the improv game in his practice and described *Yes, And...* as an effective approach:

“Everything that happens is a gift to be taken ... and built upon versus some sort of threat. It’s just opportunity after opportunity after gift after gift,” Smith says. “And that can be a cognitive shift: The story I’m telling of what others are expecting of me or how they’re judging me ... [changes] to “Well, here’s what they’re giving me.” (n.p.)

If *Yes, And...* thinking is so effective for communication, for making connections, and for integrating new thinking, Aaron's use of the term is spot on. The National Writing Project, as a whole, promotes a *Yes, And...* stance in professional learning. In our first conversation Aaron reminded me of a tension that often exists in learning an approach that works well in a particular setting or simply sounds like a really good idea. Learners often vacillate between embracing a kind of "fantasy world" or rejecting it all together. I'm exactly that way. Recall my response at the end of my own SI, where I sat in tears because I'd seen all these excellent classroom practices. I realize now that I was simply overwhelmed by that tension. Diane Holt-Reynolds reminded me then, as Aaron's insight does now, that I only needed to take "baby steps," to introduce one small change into my practice and see where it might take me and my students. That's the space of *Yes, And...*

I've been so moved by a PD experience that I was ready to scrap everything I'd been doing for a new approach. I've also found myself on the opposite end, ready to reject a PD mandate because it seemed to conflict with what I've come to believe as good practice. A *Yes, And...* stance to PD requires me to let go of my own ideologies about classroom practice and look for the good. It also means an authentic conception of what might be integrated within something already working well.

That tension exists for all participants facing a learning curve. Bryan shared his own examples. I'll describe one here—his first trip to NCTE when he drove all the way to Chicago, entered the conference not knowing anyone there, and was so overwhelmed he walked out without returning and spent the rest of the weekend sightseeing instead. In the beginning of Tonya's tenure as a TC, she found it easy to incorporate new ideas from the Writing Project, as they were part of an approach embraced by her school and team—to keep learning and

applying that learning to the classroom. She felt greater tension as policies and accountability began to impact her curriculum. Her *Yes, And...* approach was in the “retooling of other peoples’ lessons.” Tonya may not have liked it, but in keeping what she knew was best practice for her students, she found a way to make ideas from the district work. She was even one of the first teachers to work with the brand-new Literacy Coach, *Yes, And...*-ing her way through their plans to use part of a PBIS unit to create a Digital Museum specific to the history of their own city.

Stacy is a great example of taking a *Yes, And...* approach to help prepare her students for state assessments. She combined resources like the state standards and assessment rubrics to create a more accessible version for her students. Then she shared her work in presentations for other teachers through her local Writing Project. Danielle’s *Yes, And...* leap may have been a little bigger than most. She abandoned a curriculum she could no longer believe in, not to embrace a single idealistic approach, but to base her work in inquiry, focused on her own questions about her own students. In doing so, she found rich resources that inspired her students to work for their own learning purposes. Furthermore, Danielle used their motivation and authentic sharing to bring in the skills and standards they would need to learn.

Monica experienced *Yes, And...* in nearly every institute she participated in with her Writing Project. While this was likely an effective tool for her from the early days of her career, it is also obvious in the presentation video she shared. In her first year’s work with the Teach from Your Best Self institute, Monica integrated the Deep Learning work and some of her MakeSpace action research into a presentation titled, “Reflection as Stress Reduction.” Similarly, Tara took from her Summer Institute, her work as a sponsor of the Creative Writing Club, and her training with the Amherst Readers and Writers Method, to create a classroom



with more personal writing—integrating it with her existing curriculum and creating protocols for response, based on the kind of writing students would share.

For Aaron, *Yes, And...* fit well with his early thoughts about professional growth (Interview 1). As someone who brought initiatives to his school before his SI, he was no stranger to working with the tension of teachers learning something new. Aaron talked about identifying an area for possible growth and recommended “rather than be frustrated about it, let’s go ahead and start working on anything withing that locus.” A *Yes, And...* approach focuses on a teacher’s locus of control and simply asks, as Aaron suggested, “*How are you going to bring this back to your school? How does this work in your school setting?*”

### **Authentic Professional Learning Creates Space for Pushing Back**

Under an early code, “overcoming challenges,” the idea of participants *pushing back* against those challenges emerged. At first it seemed like each participant was pushing back against something different. Bryan credited the NWP for providing “a family and a community—to help you counter all the negativity, to help you counter all the naysayers,” and “to help you counter bad practice that you see going on in your building.” Tonya mentioned how she faced growing constraints, requiring that she “retool” lessons pushed into her curriculum to better align with best practices for teaching. Stacy tried to share her enthusiasm for her local Writing Project and the changes she was seeing in her students with colleagues. When they did not share her excitement or seemed disinterested, it “hurt [her] heart.” Pushing back for Danielle meant citing the research for curricular choices in her lesson plans, as well as taking the initiative to reach out during the summer with her *Yes, And...* practices she was considering for the following school year. And at some point, it meant making the decision to follow her own curriculum, rather than the one created by her school team.

In a school with high turnover in administration and even teaching colleagues, sometimes pushing back for Monica was to simply keep plugging along. Depending on the principal she was either revered as an expert writing teacher and enlisted as a leader for sharing effective practices or she was completely ignored. The same with the teacher next door—occasionally Monica would find one ready to collaborate, even if that was short lived. In this case, her pushing back likely included her driving two hours to participate in a Writing Project institute or participate with her state Council of Teachers of English or listen to another book by someone with insight into teaching.

Like Monica, Tara sometimes needed to push back against administrators who could be short sighted, unable to see the full value of her work. When one principal demanded, “I expect your curriculum map and it had better look like the district map,” she realized he had not looked at the district website to see her name listed as one of the developers. While Aaron did not need to necessarily push back against administration, he does have a striking example of pushing back against our national culture at a particular time in history. His work that emerged from conversations with three other stakeholders at his school resulted in a community conversation around race. No small feat.

While the participants seemed, at least at first, to be pushing back against different challenges, it was in listening to a Penny Kittle YouTube video (2023, April 13) that I realized what they all had in common. They were all pushing back against the “culture of school.” For three Spring seasons, beginning in 2020, Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher shared via Kittle’s Padlet their conversations about teaching during these times. For many of their viewers, this felt like a lifeline in a time of uncertainty and disruption. They often included other educators in the mix, and on April 13, 2023, Sheridan Blau joined in. Blau had been a longtime Writing

Project Director at UC Santa Barbara, where he remains professor emeritus. He is a past NCTE president, current professor at Columbia, and a formidable figure in the world of English Education. Right away, he jumped into an explanation of why “schools are a terrible place to learn.” Using a metaphor of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, Blau compared consuming the fruit of the tree with taking on knowledge that belongs to somebody else. The way schools value “testable knowledge” perpetuates a myth that knowledge comes from outside yourself and interferes with authentic learning. Blau made clear that he was not disparaging teachers—rather, it’s the system, one that has grown increasingly more authoritarian in expectations for teachers to stick to a curriculum and in many cases to even be on the same page with others teaching the same subject. He explained more,

Knowledge is the enemy of learning [...] You can’t take someone else’s knowledge as your own. The only real knowledge is the knowledge you get from learning. Fighting the false notion of *Now, I know*. It isn’t my knowledge that is of value to students—it’s my capacity to learn. When you don’t have the capacity to learn, you’re dead. (Blau in Kittle 2023 video)

Kittle affirmed this notion of a culture over focused on testable knowledge, “Working against the culture of schools has been the story of my teaching life.”

Danielle, Participant 4, illustrated the influence of this culture of schools when she explained, “I had realized with state tests and the Common Core that I had to teach differently.” This is where her Writing Project had an impact, encouraging her to “cement the research” so she “could be a force against the administration.” The challenge of a culture driven by fear is that there is less time for student choice, less time for students to make their own knowledge. That challenge was ever present, at least in our first interview, so Danielle “loved getting the research and doing” research, so when she writes lesson plans, she is able to communicate clearly: “This is good instructional practice.” Empowered with this space to push back against

her school culture, on the heels of sharing her own inquiry-based research, she's even said, "Please explain to me why you want me to not teach that or this way..." The Writing Project gave her the validation she needed. I believe it did the same for the other participants.

For Bryan, he realized that the culture of school was being unduly influenced by the massive policy changes in his state, "making it impossible to teach kids" because of its fixation on teaching to a test. "We knew what worked. We knew what was best. We knew what was great. And all of a sudden, we had this new stuff coming at us—assessment, assessment, assessment!" His pushback this time would be to fight the system from another angle and pursue his PhD, hoping from the halls of academia he could make a difference.

### **Authentic Professional Learning Encourages Ownership of the Learning**

Part of Lieberman and Wood's (2002) findings from studying two NWP sites included a process for handing over "the ownership of learning to the learners" (p. 41). That process happens in Summer Institutes that begin with directors, coaches, and local TCs modeling teacher presentations when the Fellows of the SI begin sharing the presentations they have been busy creating, with support from their small groups and coach. For the participants, ownership of their own learning is obvious in various ways.

The Writing Project allowed Bryan, "... as a classroom teacher to see that dreams can come true. If you think it and you want to do it, it can happen." His local network of teacher leaders became a family he could rely on. And even as he watched writing instruction "crumble," the National Writing Project helped him transition into a new space where his growth centered on sustaining the professional growth of colleagues, as well as pre- and in-service teachers. Bryan became a director of his own Writing Project site, conducting four to five weeks of literacy labs for students and teachers who come together in community to

deepen their understandings of what it means to be a writer. He explained, “That’s what teachers need [...] to figure out how to build these things in their own communities [...]. That’s my growth and I’m still figuring it out—learning what’s going on outside of school that can be brought inside school.” He’s referencing not only the magic that he witnesses every summer with students and teachers alike, but also what he learned from studying refugees (thesis and dissertation) who wrote freely and abundantly outside of school – substantially more than they did in school or for their classes. Bryan summarized this thinking, “My professional development growth is to figure out how do I help others to grow professionally.”

Tonya’s ownership of her learning likely existed before her SI, but it was in conjunction with her early years at a new district that encouraged teachers to continue their professional learning and working on her master’s degree, taking several Writing Project courses that affirmed that ownership. This can be seen beyond NWP as she worked with “the district office and learn[ed] something,” then returned to her school “and figure[d] out how to share it with others” as well as the ART Teams initiative she began on 2022.

Transferring ownership of learning to Stacy was expanded by her SI experience where she was asked to read *Because Writing Matters* (NWP & Nagin, 2006). While that experience opened [her] eyes to understanding why writing is hard” and why teaching writing is challenging, ownership of her own learning grew beyond writing—into pursuing certification in administration, as well as learning more about the science of reading. When I asked her *What comes to mind when you think of professional growth?* Stacy replied, “Being better. Learning more. Reading more.”

For Danielle, her professional growth is about being a “curious teacher” in “constant reflection” and asking questions like “Is what I’m doing in the classroom effective?” She

recalled “the day kids” walked out of her classroom, “talking about points on the rubric.” She thought then that she wanted her students “walking and talking about learning” instead. Not only did Danielle take ownership over her own professional learning, she passed that torch to her own students. Her entire curriculum is designed with this handover of ownership in mind.

Perhaps it was because of the turning over of ownership that Monica believed the Writing Project best suited her own philosophy. She was able to be in charge of what she learned and the ways she integrated that learning into her classroom. While she had not quite mastered a workshop approach, Monica utilized freewriting with her ever evolving curriculum that included more poetry, deep work, and more creativity.

Tara related her toolbox metaphor to her experiences with the Writing Project. “Because it’s so reflective,” she and her SI Fellows were able to look at what has traditionally been and is still “hammer[ed] into, particularly, English teachers” as the way to teach. Aligned with her local site Tara took on the stance of “it’s first about students,” and she began to examine the ways some practices harm or don’t serve students. She explained the importance of teachers considering rote practice and “the ways in which it limits you and boxes you in and stunts your growth.” Ownership of her own learning began with a process of looking at her own teaching and asking questions like, “Can I do it better?” and “Is the way that I’m doing it the best way?” This insight manifested in Tara’s insight to modify an expository unit to add both literature and multiple opportunities for her students to write creatively and for personal reasons.

While Aaron’s ownership of his learning was evident from the start of his career, professional growth is connected to a willingness to be surprised. When we first talked about professional growth, Aaron defined it as “Thinking about what you do and seeking to improve

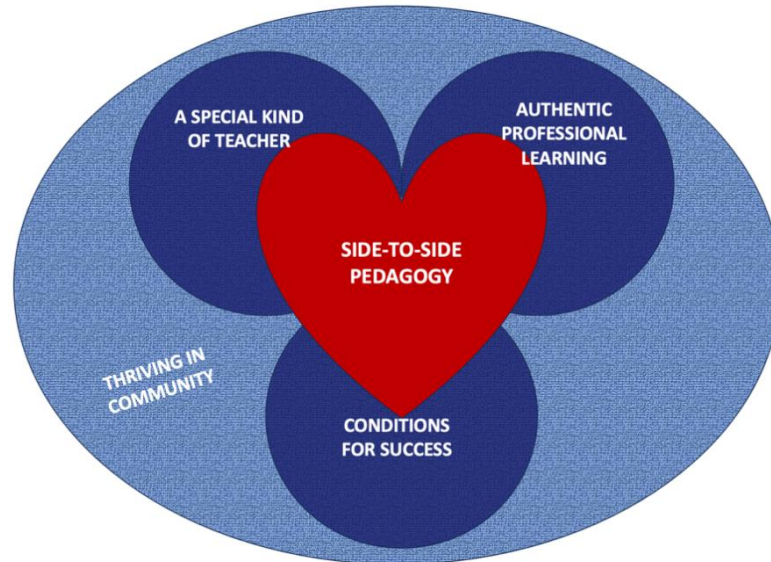
it... But... being surprised by the growth.” Assuming ownership of your professional learning seems linked to an openness to learning from places or in ways you did not expect. He described a shift that teachers were making at his own school toward a criterion-based marking system, and he found many of their responses interesting, especially from teachers who responded with comments like, “This is making me think differently and I hadn’t anticipated some of the ways it was making me think differently.” While Aaron appreciates attending workshops for intentional learning and getting what you expected—a kind of transfer of knowledge—what stands out most for him are those moments where his thinking gets challenged. “Wait... Wait, hold on. I’ve got to think about this, [...] I wasn’t ready for this.” For Aaron, that kind of growth—being surprised by thinking in ways about your classroom practice that you had not considered before—is what happens with his Writing Project experiences and conversations. With this kind of learning, Aaron explained, he doesn’t “change anything immediately, because it [...] leads to [...] deeper growth.” Taking an open stance, allowing your old ideas to be challenged, being surprised by new ways of thinking, and taking your time to let these ideas seep in can be important elements of the process of ownership.

### **Authentic Professional Learning, in Summary**

*“Authentic” professional learning* with the National Writing Project begins with teachers at the center. The term *authentic* in relation to conversation emerged with Aaron’s response to *What first comes to mind when you think about the Writing Project?* “Good friends. Authentic conversation. And appropriate professional development.” Authentic professional learning with the Writing Project captures the importance of learning situated in teachers’ lived experiences and the very real and personal questions they have about their teaching practices,

as well as the process that turns “ownership of learning over to the learners” (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, pg. 41). That process includes taking a *Yes, And...* approach, space for pushing back against the culture of school, and generating new knowledge specific to a teacher’s context and students.





## Conditions for Success

Clearly, these seven participants came to their local Writing Projects with special traits that were then nurtured and developed. Yet, for them to find success with a *side-to-side pedagogy* and *authentic professional learning*, the conditions in which they were teaching also played an important role in their growth. The specific contexts in which each participant taught and continued to grow professionally also played important roles in supporting and sometimes challenging the conditions for their successes. These conditions can be summarized in the following categories: Challenges from the Culture of School, Support in Autonomy, Support in Funding, Support in Colleagues.

Thinking back to that conversation between Kittle, Gallagher, and Blau (see p. 378), Kittle brought up the book *I Won't Learn from You* (Kohl, 1995) and a premise that "This institution [of school] is not designed to do what you believe is valuable." Having worked her entire teaching career "against the culture of schools" moved Kittle to begin each fall semester by telling her students, "I'm going to set up conditions for you to do your best thinking and

reading and writing.” I’ve long agreed with Kittle about setting up conditions for my student’s learning. In 2007 I had the opportunity to speak with my State Board of Education. Introducing the administrators who accompanied me, I began with, “As a classroom teacher it is my job to set the conditions for my students’ success. There are a few people here who have set the conditions for my success.” Indeed, part of this research was to explore the teaching context and conditions that may have played a role in the successes experienced by participants, both as supports for the TCs as they implemented changes in practice and as challenges that moved them into deeper understanding of their pedagogical choices. Original codes of autonomy, funding, support, and challenge eventually merged to form the theme, that *beyond the NWP Summer Institute, there are conditions that influence a TC’s success in implementing a new or evolving pedagogy*. After summarizing the challenges faced by the TCs in this study—namely from working against the culture of schools—we’ll look at the conditions that supported their work to implement changes in their classrooms and schools: funding, autonomy, and support from colleagues.

### **Challenges within the Culture of School**

Armed with a writer’s notebook filled with seeds for projects he was excited to implement, **Bryan** returned from his Summer Institute to a welcoming context where the curriculum was open and ready for the ideas planted that summer. He experienced support from his administration and colleagues, and his students responded well to becoming a community of writers. I imagine class size, along with the mission and educational philosophy of the school, were assets as Bryan grew a bigger vision for the teaching of writing in his classroom, as well as the projects his students would engage with. His 2002 SI had provided

Bryan with time to create and add to his existing curriculum. Bryan had enough autonomy that he could begin to implement those changes.

The challenges Bryan may have faced in the beginning seemed to involve the unexamined teaching of other teachers—recall how Bryan embraced NCLB because all teachers could benefit from the accountability of looking more closely at their instructional choices. He also talked about counting on the work of his Writing Project family to help him “counter bad practice.” For at least five years, Bryan was able to integrate what he’d researched and learned to be best practices. He referred to this time as a mecca for teaching writing, feeling like he’d hit the trifecta by teaching at a school focused on inclusion and diversity, the Louisville Writing Project, and Kentucky’s State Dept. of Ed’s Portfolio Assessment. When federal and state policies moved in a new direction, it was clear an alignment of values was breaking, and the culture of school would follow suit:

The educational system itself was making it impossible to teach kids. [...] we knew what worked. We knew what was best. We knew what was great and, all of a sudden, we had this new stuff coming at us and... assessment, assessment, assessment. [...] Teachers have to teach to the test and [...] it was agonizing for the good teachers. It still is agonizing for the good teachers, because you can’t really be a really good writing instructor by the way the state systems and the Common Core frame it. (Bryan, Transcript 1)

When Bryan could no longer teach writing in ways he knew was best for his students, he would fight the system from a different position in academia. So, from the position of associate professor of literacy, educational studies, and teacher preparation, as well as Director of the Fairfield Writing Project, Bryan has continued the good fight to spread sound pedagogy in professional development. He explained early in our first interview that his growth came from “learning what’s going on outside of school that can be brought inside school.” This is about “reshaping the curriculum to meet the needs of kids” rather than “reshaping kids [to] meet the

needs of the curriculum” by learning about the authentic ways kids are already engaged in literacy and using their passions to grow their skills. “That’s what my growth is, and I’m still figuring it out.”

In a different state under a different timeline, **Tonya** experienced a similar alignment of teaching philosophy and practices that urged her to learn all she could and to bring what she learned back to her school. It was easy, especially in the beginning, to integrate the pedagogical ideas into her own curriculum. Tonya worked with a team of ELA teachers, two who were also Writing Project alumni and two who were very open to new ideas. The challenges she faced would come later, as state policies changed and as curriculum tightened around lesson plans growing from a top-down approach. Having taught writing successfully, Tonya knew what worked and found herself having to “retool other people’s lesson plans.”

She mentioned another “hindrance” that came with losing the writing assessment piece of state testing—there was no longer “a lot of accountability for writing in the curriculum” at least in her state. She described how the writing assessment changed and became a “text dependent analysis” (TDA). The result she noticed was, “...everybody started teaching TDA straight up all the time, every day, so they could pass that.” This shift, very much focused on making sure their students could pass the test, was one my own state made as well. Once the TDA test was removed from Tonya’s state assessment, writing was no longer a huge “focus of curriculum.” Perhaps, losing the focus on writing meant moving their curricular choices to content better suited for state tests. From Tonya’s perspective, if “writing is so important, then more people would be involved” in her local Writing Project.

The challenges **Stacy** faced seemed to her minimal, mostly the disappointment in others not sharing her enthusiasm for the new practices she’d learned, not only for teaching writing

but in using writing as a tool for learning in other subjects. Despite the lack of enthusiasm, Stacy was influential in bringing PD from her local Writing Project to her school and in encouraging a handful of teachers to participate in a Summer Institute.

**Danielle** was able to enjoy at least a partial alignment between the inquiry-based practices she implemented into her own classroom and what her principal recognized as highly effective teaching. Recall that her test scores improved by 50 percent over her peers. Further, the programs she integrated like the Global Reading Project, TED Talks for Students, and connecting with classrooms from Bangladesh and Spain, brought recognition to their school. Even so, Danielle found herself working against a curriculum chosen by her team despite her own successes—an example of “working against the culture of school.”

While **Monica** found no challenges in implementing the practices she’d gained from her Writing Project or elsewhere, it seems her challenges lay mainly in the high turnover in administration and colleagues, and perhaps in the culture of a rural population faced with economic hardship and uncertainty. However, when she explained how her educational philosophy was more in line with the Writing Project, Monica mentioned another challenge for teaching, in general:

I think some of the ways that institutionally we teach, actually, get in the way of student growth, rather than supporting it. And the [...] Writing Project is much more about helping students find themselves through writing. [...] I’m trying to not make school an obstacle where students have to graduate before they can go out and find themselves [...] (Monica, Interview 1)

Because she did not want her learners simply “working their way through the system,” Monica chose inquiry and research focused on “helping students find their potential and their interests.”

**Tara**, like several participants, mentioned educational policies as a challenge to her teaching. When her district became an early proponent of Common Core State Standards, she

found herself frustrated by how her district was handling the transition. She used her *Yes, And...* approach to research what other districts were doing and found valuable resources to guide her curricular choices—and be a voice for those choices as she served on the committee providing the pacing guide. She also talked about the challenge of a particular administrator more focused on making sure teachers were following his expectations than actually understanding the ways in which Tara and her colleagues were contributing to their school and district.

However, before facing the challenge of that particular principal, Tara wrote about the encouragement and support she had “in writing [her] own curriculum and developing it.” She explained further, “Any professional development I wanted to go to—our principal was great about it. And that was the culture of the school.” So even when the founding principal moved on, replaced by another not so “great at certain things” they were “always, always, always supportive of professional development.” When Tara teamed up with a medical science teacher to sponsor a creative writing club, she found support for being trained in the Amherst Writers and Artists Method. The culture of school does not have to always be something good teachers work against.

Because of his position and long-term capital as a highly effective teacher whose students continue to pass the IB Assessments, as well as serving in multiple leadership positions, **Aaron** faced no challenges in implementing the curriculum he chose. There was a clear alignment in vision and values between the IB curriculum and what he learned as a TC with his local Writing Project. Perhaps, in choosing the IB Programme as a foundation for their instructional and assessment practices, Aaron’s school was able to align teaching philosophies and values with best practices that protected their curriculum from the whims of federal and

state policies. Aaron only hinted at challenges when I asked him if he'd noticed differences between his school's teachers who had attended their local Writing Project and the teachers who had not. As the IB Coordinator, Aaron noticed the tendency of a culture where teachers were less open to examining their own teaching practices—a kind of natural human reaction to move toward defense, rather than a willingness to look at intentional practice and results to make informed choices about next steps.

### **The Role of Funding**

Several participants mentioned funding—either as support for their professional growth or as a challenge for professional development in general. State and federal policies generally determine the funding available for professional growth, while districts determine how to allocate those funds. Funds for professional development seems to have waxed and waned over the years.

In our first interview, **Tonya** explained, “I definitely think that money has a huge impact on the professional development of teachers.” From early in her career, Tonya searched for districts supportive of her drive to keep learning, choosing the first district she taught within her home state because of the resources and support. Her first Summer Institute tuition was paid for and supported by her district, as was the tuition for much of her coursework toward her master's degree. So too, Tonya's work toward earning her National Board Certification. When she didn't pass the portfolio for whole class discussion, she found a Socratic Seminar training in New Mexico and asked her principal about the possibility of attending. Her principal responded with a *yes*, and her district paid for the registration fees and traveling expenses to attend professional development that would help her learn more about conducting Socratic Seminars in her own class, as well as help her retake and pass this portion of her NBCT

certification. When it came time to renew her certification a few years later, Tonya was in a district that did not provide financial support or resources for completing that process, so she opted to not renew and sought other professional growth, instead.

Still, she's managed to fund much of the professional development she has chosen to participate in but believes a lot of teachers are not aware they can or how to ask for funding support. She thinks "it's a big reason why people don't keep learning as a teacher [...] They're already putting forth time outside of their normal workday, and then they're supposed to pay for it too!" Tonya argued that other professions "don't have to pay for that [...]—their company pays for it. [...] Nobody wants to talk about it, but it's real."

Funding came up again as Tonya discussed how writing assessment had changed. She had appreciated learning about the original writing assessment where "they used to double score everything—blind double score [...] and if the scores weren't the same" they brought in a third assessor. While that was an investment of time and money into people, Tonya explained that was "also a great training tool" because training in that kind of writing assessment means "you are seeing hundreds of pieces of writing that are not your own students'." When policies drove that kind of assessment, funding existed to support it. When policies changed, so did the funding.

**Danielle** is another participant who brought up funding in the light of professional development. She'd spoken of her own investment of time and resources to research the Global Reading Project, Connecting Students Around the World, TED Ed for students and the books she'd read to improve her practice. In the past, Danielle requested \$700 to attend a three-day workshop in Maine with Kylene Beers and Robert Probst. She was turned down. According to Danielle, that kind of professional growth had to be, "on your own time, on your own money."



Any authentic professional growth she'd pursued had been on her "own dime. Even the National Writing Project, on my own dime—all the time."

Her district offered professional development, but the problem was the lack of authenticity. Most of the PD offered was about "chasing the test" rather than building inquiry from the questions teachers have about their own practices or the real needs of their students. Danielle gave an example of her district purchasing course modules from The Greater Good Science with Berkely (n.d.), at "\$130.00 per person, 600 teachers." The modules focused on Social Emotional Learning—"a big deal for [her] school" where they were given a half-day to work their way through the modules. However, to Danielle's dismay, a great number of teachers had their devices "on remote in the background" and were focused on other things, instead. Danielle shared her observations with her principal, explaining, "*Listen. It's sad for me what's going on—just take a walk around, you know. But listen, no one asked for that. That's what **you** said they need.*" Danielle believes that Jim Gray had it right about the Writing Project and the Summer Institute and "in order to change the culture here, we are going to have to start with what they [teachers] think."

**Bryan** recalls his early years with the National Writing Project and attending the SI, "I had six [graduate] credits. I got paid \$1,000 to earn those six credits." Later, as he provided leadership in the state, he earned more. But as legislation changed, a "monkey wrench was thrown our way" that continues to impact the Writing Project. "When we had federal funding and we had state funding, the systems supported best practice." Now, as a site director, Bryan understands more about how "funding that came from the federal government and state systems" works. He explained, "Those who directed National Writing Project sites had that funding to dream big," allowing them to invest in teachers and authentic learning. "When

Common Core came in, the funding for that kind of work just disappeared completely,” leaving NWP sites challenged to find the funding to continue the work.

### **The Role of Autonomy**

The participants in this study experienced varying degrees of autonomy when applying their professional learning to their classroom practices. With initial coding, I defined autonomy: “Either as a support for professional growth or a trait exercised by participants empowered with agency, autonomy also speaks to the freedom exercised in making choices in the curriculum and with student instruction.” Bryan, for example, had a great deal of say in the curriculum he chose and was able to use his SI time to make plans for the coming school year. The biggest changes he found, in addition to his students’ success as writers, was in the forming of a community of writers within his classroom. Supporting his autonomy, of course, was Bryan’s mecca of alignment—the side-to-side writing pedagogy he learned with the Kentucky Writing Project, the state system of portfolio assessment, and the structures already in place at his high school, a place supported by work with the Critical Friends Group and a mission committed to inclusion and diversity. Perhaps Bryan’s previous education gave him a sense of autonomy in being able to choose where he would attend school, moving from New York to Kentucky because of their portfolio assessment, not to mention the Louisville Writing Project, as well as securing an assistantship later on to pursue a PhD back in Syracuse. Bryan’s autonomy might seem inherent to his nature and way of being in the world, but from our interview I don’t get the sense it was something blindly given or taken.

Similarly, Tonya’s autonomy, along with her love for learning and ability to research, allowed her to travel beyond her home state. She finished her degree teaching in Texas and after three years returned home, to the district of her choice—one that would support her

continued education. Taking the things she learned from her SI and other Writing Project initiatives/courses was easy because at that time, she and her colleagues had a lot of say-so—autonomy—in their lesson planning. While that would eventually be impacted by changes in policy, Tonya recognized what would work and would not work with her learners. She may have not liked it, but she was willing to do the work to *retool* the lesson plans that came from others, an example of exercising her own autonomy.

Stacy's love for learning and pursuit of her own professional growth gave her a kind of teacher capital where she was given great autonomy to try out new pedagogies in her rural classroom. In a similar pursuit of knowledge and learning, Danielle experienced autonomy, as well. But because she was in an economically stable and suburban school, she worked with a team of teachers who chose to follow a different curriculum. Danielle's autonomy existed, not only because of her investment of time into her students and the work they did together, but also because her test scores were higher than her peers.

Monica, teaching in a rural school with a high turnover, experienced autonomy. Researching her long timeline, dense with professional growth experiences, makes me think that because she was so invested in her students' success, she also experienced a great deal of autonomy. While she may not have always been valued by every principal, she seems to have had the freedom to choose her curriculum. Similarly, Tara may have experienced a principal who could not see or value her contribution due to his focus on district policies, but she retained autonomy in the curriculum she chose for her students. Adapting her practices with more writing was never a question. And when funds were available, training in the Amherst Writers and Artists method was approved.

Aaron exudes autonomy. What can we say for the educator who was hired to be Head of School at the same time he was hired for his first teaching gig. He acknowledges his unique position. And it seems to me that he has used that autonomy, not to lord over the educators he works with, but to create an environment of mutual inquiry into instructional practices and student learning—both at his school and with his wider Writing Project Community via their site’s teacher blog.

## **Support from an Expanding Network of Colleagues**

### ***Support from Someone in the Building or District***

Sometimes, participants in this study experienced support for their professional growth from someone in the building. Especially when the supportive colleagues were also Writing Project alumni. For Danielle, the support from the building came from her principal. While she worked to forge relationships and communicate clearly with her supervisor and other colleagues, support for going against the dominant curriculum clearly came from her principal. She worked with a colleague from the high school who taught science, as well. His was the first class of students she was able to team up with during the pandemic, bucking the online plan she’d originally agreed to. This classroom connection helped inspire the connections she eventually made with Bangladesh and Spain.

Other participants found Writing Project alumni in their buildings. In her first district, half of the ELA team were TCs, and when she later moved to another district, Tonya relied on her fellow TCs to help her transition. Soon afterwards, a friend and alumni from her SI joined the faculty and she has been able to continue working with others committed to utilizing writing as a tool for learning. Often, Tara experienced supportive principals, but when she didn’t, she could count on support from Tara TCs with her local Writing Project. In addition

to relying on the network of teachers from her SI, she enjoyed being able to plan with those who were part of her school team, benefitting from a shared understanding of learner-centered practices. Aaron, who loved learning outside of his school community, also had the benefit of working with Writing Project alumni, like Elizabeth, the teacher he collaborated with in his video. Additionally, Aaron noted a distinct difference in working with educators who had been through the SI and those who had not.

### ***Support from their Local Writing Projects***

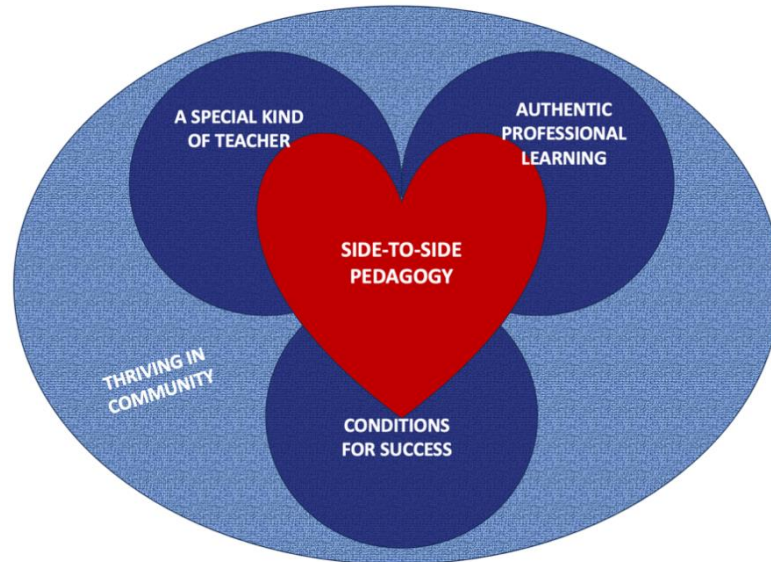
Several participants shared the importance of having support from their local Writing Project communities. Bryan explained,

We rely on one another, you know, at least directors and really strong teacher leaders, to [...] overcome the obstacles that [...] come from teaching. [...] you have a family and a community to go to—to help you counter all the negativity, to help you counter all the naysayers, [...] to help you counter bad practice that you see going on in your building. (Bryan, Interview 1)

Stacy, teaching in a rural district among teachers not as interested in the practices she was learning, truly depended on her local Writing Project. Her ongoing involvement in PD and the friendships she'd made fed her drive for “being better” and “learning more.” Danielle's involvement with her local site helped her stay focused on an inquiry-based practice—in her work with professional development, as well as the writing collaborations with her site director. Monica relied on her ongoing experiences with her local Writing Project, as it was most closely aligned with her own learner-centered philosophy. Tara assured me that her local Writing Project was her “go to” whenever she grappled with writing instruction. And Aaron relied on the professional growth of his Writing Project community—appreciating being able to learn outside of his community with others devoted to inquiry-based based practices.

## **Conditions for Success, in Summary**

The initial leadership institute, historically called the Invitational Summer Institute, has long been responsible for providing and modeling *the conditions for success* in effective writing instruction. Findings from the seven nested case studies indicate that they all faced some degree of challenge through their various experiences with the culture of school. Policies, it seems, can make a difference in the kind of culture participants faced when implementing changes in their teaching practices. Policies likely influenced the roles of funding and of autonomy in the kind of support each participant experienced in the beginning of their professional growth with the Writing Project and over time. Additionally, participants often found support from someone in their schools—sometimes a supportive principal and often other teachers who were also TCs with their local Writing Project. When they did not have support within their schools, participants relied on the support of their Writing Project communities.



## Thriving in Community

The National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of teacher consultants by creating the conditions for them to thrive in community. Their experiences of *side-to-side pedagogy* and *authentic professional learning* nurtured and further developed teachers' traits into highly effective leadership in their own classrooms and beyond. While this final theme of *thriving in community* exists within the other four themes, we benefit from taking a focused look, specifically at the ways that having a sense of community have impacted the participants of this study.

### A Sense of Community with the National Writing Project

As “sense of community” became a code in my early analysis, I paused to define what I was thinking.

Definition: Creating a **Sense of Community** and being part of a community imply a sense of belonging, much like a valued family member. In the NWP SI, Fellows become a **Community of Writers**. This is often emulated in classroom practices as TCs apply what they learned in the SI. In a **Professional Collaboration**, participants work as valued members of a team, helping one another to grow professionally and/or plan instruction and assessment. (Codebook, edited for grammar)

The participants all alluded to or explicitly mentioned *community* throughout our conversations, and often in their responses to the questions, *When you think about the Writing Project, what first comes to mind?* Monica’s first thoughts about her Writing Project provided a succinct description, “A supportive community of [...] educators interested [...] in expanding writing skills and interests with students.”

In addition to stressing the importance of community, Bryan explained that “It’s the people you meet.” It’s also about the connectedness you feel with the people you meet. Bryan expanded on his original thought, “Once a person belongs to a community. Right? They [...] act as the community members. So [...] if you’re in a writing community, you’re going to act like a writer.” Danielle also connected this *sense of community* with being a *community of writers* during the SI, “There’s a piece about being immersed in your writing and getting to know your group and the community that happens.” It’s in the combination of immersing ourselves in our own writing—our experiences, thoughts, and feelings and in grappling with meaning on many levels—then making ourselves vulnerable in sharing our developing voices and personal lives as well as classroom experiences with others on a similar journey that creates a sense of community.

Aaron did not say *community*, specifically, but his first thoughts provided a beautiful description: “Good friends. Authentic conversations...” and “proper professional development.” Nor did Stacy use the actual word *community* to describe her experience with the Writing Project, but she captured some important elements: “It’s an uplifting environment. It’s a learning environment. It’s what we need that’s good for our teaching. But it’s also good for our souls.” When Tara explained why her local Writing Project was where she turned, “first



and always,” she included the elements of “a common language” and “a common value system around writing.” She broke down the common “focus” into the following bulleted.

- Student choice
- Representative materials
- The idea that writing is *first* for you or for the student or for whoever’s doing the writing—and *then* it’s for other people, and sometimes it’s never for other people.
- Compassion for students who have been abused by English instruction.
- Everybody can write.
- Everybody has something to say and has a story.
- All kinds of writing deserve to be out there.
- So, there’s no such thing as the right kind of writing or this is good writing and that is bad writing.
- English instruction is a social justice issue, [...] particularly for our students [...] who, very often, never get to read an author from their own culture. (Tara, Interview 1)

While Tonya found that her Writing Project community extended naturally to her school—the one in the first district where she taught upon returning to her home state—that was largely due to the culture of a school encouraging everyone to keep learning. During that interview I kept thinking her experience was a conglomeration of community between the university, her Writing Project cohort, and the teachers at her school. It was complicated discerning which of Tonya’s courses with her local university were Writing Project experiences and which were simply graduate courses, not to mention the collaborations with her ELA team, as at least two of the team were also TCs engaged in graduate work.

Part of what creates community begins with a writer learning to hear their own story, to make sense of their experiences, and to grapple with meaning. Then a sense of belonging grows from sharing your story with a group of people grappling with their own. What the Writing Project managed for the participants of this study was to expand that sense of belonging from writing community to presentation community, providing protocols for

looking closely at writing, whether personal or academic, and for looking at teacher practices, research, and presentations.

### **Conversations, Collaborations, and Conglomerations**

Bryan knew he “needed a National Writing Project job to be happy” because he loved “the bridgework between K-12 schools and higher ed” as well as “*the community work*” *he could do*. He described it as “the perfect blend of state systems, national systems, local systems trying to do what’s best for kids.” When Bryan took his side-to-side practice to the college level, he continued the work he’d begun with the Louisville Writing Project, but transformed it into a kind of conglomeration of community building. He explained, I run young Adult Literacy labs now, [...] which is my kind of answer to building community. Bryan explained the role Ubuntu played in his work to build community:

Ubuntu, the South African ideology for togetherness, humanity, and community engagement, is often translated as “I am me, because of who we are together.” At its heart, a community is made better when all individuals feel strong membership within the group. (Crandall, 2019, p. 12)

In initially coding the transcript of our first conversation, I noted Bryan’s use of phrases like, “mixing it up,” “bridgework,” and “Robinhood work,” and now I see how well they fit with his work as a NWP Site Director. Bryan, indeed, builds bridges between his university work and the vast community he serves. He mixes up the populations of his literacy labs / writing camps as he uses a kind of Robinhood philosophy to make use of resources so that for every student he accepts who can pay, he can also accept a student on scholarship. He has created collaborations between published authors and schools. And his work to publish everyone, centering the work of both teachers and learners, has created a conglomeration of learning for the community he serves.

Stacy is the TC who explained that the Writing Project is “good for our souls.” As she continued her professional growth, the learning she pursued began a flow of one into another. Interested in helping her students become better readers, she pursued a master’s degree with reading as a specialty. Along the way, the Writing Project helped her integrate writing, not only as an ELA skill, but also as a tool for learning. As a teacher leader she brought the Writing Project as professional learning to her own school. Continuing the leadership begun with her SI cohort, she pursued certification in administration and is now the principal of her school.

The conglomeration of Tonya’s professional learning did not end when she changed schools and districts. She used her connections with her local Writing Project to help her transition into a new culture, still working with a colleague from her original SI. She remains a teacher-leader as evidenced in her video, collaborating with the new instructional coach. And no doubt, she is taking the professional learning from her early work with the Writing Project into the new initiative, the Arts TEAM, she joined in 2022.

While Danielle did not experience an alignment with the curriculum of her ELA team, she did create her own, through a conglomeration of professional learning and practice brought into her classroom. Additionally, her work with preservice teachers, teaching methods courses, and her work with in-service teachers as a TC with her local Writing Project, means shaping the direction of professional learning with what she has learned with the Writing Project.

The shape of Monica’s conglomeration of professional growth began in her early days, teaching summer school and substitute teaching with some involvement with a Writing Project in another state and continued as she wrote curriculum books for teachers with titles like, *Writing Critical Reviews* and *Parent Helpers in the Classroom*. By the time she began learning with her local Writing Project, Monica’s philosophy was in place, and she was able to expand

her practices in alignment with learner-centered instruction. While Monica occasionally planned with a teacher next door, she created her own conglomeration of growth through the teaching mentors she listened to on audio, as well as her experiences with her state Council of Teachers of English and her local Writing Project.

Similarly, Tara managed a conglomeration of professional connections stemming from her theatre experiences, teaching drama, and writing her own curriculum, as well as writing curriculum for the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum program, well before her SI. But Tara's local Writing Project provided a space and language for integrating more writing into her classroom, as well as influencing her pedagogy with important social justice considerations like representation through reading and other materials.

Finally, Aaron's alignment of professional growth began with his experiences beginning a new high school and integrating IB Diploma Programme, putting him in an excellent position to take on the writing practices of his local Writing Project. Merging his leadership and writing skills with a vision for more writing time for his site's Fellows and TCs, Aaron's conglomeration is best seen in the blog he helped create and for which he remains a consistent contributor.

Clearly, the communities from which these seven TCs came before attending their SIs and the communities they've connected with since follow a flow into deeper and richer professional lives. The National Writing Project has helped to create space for that flow.

### **Thriving in Community, in Summary**

The National Writing Project experiences of the seven participants illustrated an ultimate boon of *thriving in community*. Community is an essential line through each of the other findings and the other findings lead to creating space for community. Experiencing a

sense of belonging in the Summer Institute helped the seven participants dive deeply into their own classroom practices and work towards creating a sense of community in their classrooms. The success participants experienced in applying new pedagogy to their classroom practices, in turn, moved them to nurture other professional collaborations within their schools or with other initiatives.

### **Further Discussion**

The National Writing Project model, for the participants of this study, carefully prepped the conditions for Fellows' success through modeling a side-to-side pedagogy, centering teachers in their own authentic professional learning, and providing a community of support for TCs to continue growing their classroom pedagogy, as well as their leadership skills. Salzberg (2023) used a garden metaphor to describe a practice of meditation. I think that metaphor can be applied to the work of the Writing Project, as well. Like patience is required for growing a garden, so too an authentic teaching practice centered on learners. Within a personal professional learning experience and renewed focus on students, TCs are doing the work Salzberg suggests of “cultivating the ground and creating the conditions for what [we] want to emerge” (2023). Bryan referred to the writing, doodles, and curated ideas inside his first journal from his 2002 SI, as the seeds for “humongous life projects.” That’s how, at least for a long time, the garden that is the National Writing Project has worked. Jim Gray, by placing teachers at the center, offered a protocol for tilling the soil of their teacher souls and mindsets. The SI sets up conditions for teacher success: modeling, coaching, collaboration, choice, time—all the elements of what I earlier defined as an Expressive Writing Pedagogy. While some teaching Fellows make bigger leaps or fjord wider gaps in their own classroom practices, all TCs are given an opportunity to join a community of teachers invested in

improving their instructional practices. For Fellows like the seven participants of this study, who used their experience as a springboard into further growth—the National Writing Project has wider implications, particularly when their philosophies and classroom practices find alignment.

## **Alignment**

Bryan, whose SI experience happened in 2002, taught and grew his teaching practice at a time when the stars aligned for the teaching of writing. What he referred to as a trifecta included teaching at a school that was learner centered, with diversity and inclusion as part of its mission. His school, state, and federal systems were aligned, in that assessment and funding supported the pedagogy and philosophy of the National Writing Project. Tonya, whose first SI was in 2008, benefitted from a similar alignment, so much so her professional learning became a conglomeration supported by her school, her district, and even her state and federal systems, whose assessments and funding supported her work to become a better teacher of writing. In 2011, the National Writing Project lost the federal funding that had fueled their growth since 1994. I began this research wondering about other TCs who had experienced a transformation in their teaching and whose classroom practices benefitted from their work with the Writing Project. Had they felt the pressures working against those practices, as changes in policies and funding seemed to have impacted mine? Both Bryan and Tonya affirmed my own frustrations when state and federal systems moved us, first to No Child Left Behind and then to Common Core State Standards. Bryan left teaching in high school because policy changes would interfere with the best practices that benefitted his students. Both Bryan and Tonya talked about passage-based or text-based writing assessments that shaped teaching practices, moving them

away from student choice and personal writing toward academic writing focused on expository or argument kinds of writing.

The other participants of this study experienced their SIs after the 2011 disruption of federal funding for the NWP. While they also experienced various needs to push back against the culture of school, their Writing Projects were able to continue supporting their professional growth, even providing a foundation of research—or perhaps a researcher’s stance—that gave them footing for pushing back. Since beginning this research, however, Writing Project sites across the US have struggled in one way or another to remain viable. When I last checked the website for the Louisville Writing Project, Bryan’s original site, the link no longer worked, and I could find no evidence that they were still a site. In conversation with another site director, who happened to be speaking at my local university, I learned that the National Writing Project had recently lost “national” status for a particular grant requiring specific numbers—thus, his site will be challenged to find funding elsewhere. While there remain a good number of educators dedicated to the work of improving writing instruction in ways that center students and their teachers, the work is no longer aligned with state and national systems.

### **Expressive Writing Pedagogy versus Side-to-Side Pedagogy**

When I began this research, I provided a rationale and definition for Expressive Writing Pedagogy:

... when I use the phrase, *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*, I am referring to a set of practices and philosophies that teachers utilize to invite students into a bigger conversation with their personal worlds, the worlds of school, and the worlds in which they will negotiate their dreams, goals, and future relationships. An Expressive Writing Pedagogy focuses on the needs of the learner/writer, the one attempting to enter a conversation, and may include one or more of the following elements: time, choice, low-stakes/informal writing, modeling, mentor texts, collaborative learning, conferencing, reflective teaching, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to be seen. (Chapters 1 & 2)

Then I delineated 10 elements similar to the list above: time, choice, low-stakes writing, teacher modeling, mentor texts, collaborative learning, conferencing, publishing, portfolios, and reflective teaching. One of the boundaries I set for phase II of this nested case study centered on studying TCs who had incorporated at least one element of those 10 elements. That may have been a low bar, but I was trying to find TCs moving in the direction of sound instructional practices—practices that I believed I had learned from my own experiences with the Writing Project. The seven participants exceeded the low bar I had set and taught me that an Expressive Writing Pedagogy is not exclusive to the Writing Project. For example, while the original Medical Narrative Unit that Tara used did not have enough writing, it included several elements of EWP, like choice, collaboration, and mentor texts.

From this research, however, I've gleaned another pedagogy—side-to-side—not unlike the Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Side-to-side pedagogy is similar to the model of *teachers teaching teachers* but including *students teaching students* and even *students teaching teachers*. This side-to-side practice runs counter to a top-down approach. It cannot be mandated. Side-to-side begins with an invitation and is learned in community with others willing to grapple with the complexities of teaching effective communication, as well as learning processes—in any subject, because writing is a tool for learning (Blau, 2018; Emig, 1977). The four elements I discerned include:

1. Learners are treated as experts operating with agency and choice.
2. Intentional inquiry is anchored in purpose—*What is it like to think and act like a writer (e.g., historian, scientist)?*
3. Learning happens in community through modeling/demonstrating, time for practice, and coaching.
4. Throughout the process, learners are consistently working toward goals: a) final products and b) the skills needed to create those products.



In thinking about both pedagogies, I see how one fits within the other. The 10 elements of EWP could certainly be found within a side-to-side approach and might in some circumstances be considered instructional strategies. The side-to-side movement of centering learners shares part of my original definition for EWP. Each provides an important lens for describing instructional practice grounded in the humanity and needs of those doing the work.

And, perhaps, neither pedagogy is exclusive to the National Writing Project. What I think I'm learning is that these elements seemed to have made their way into a wider swath of education. Perhaps they existed there all along? Perhaps professional growth with the NWP has coincided with the growth of education? Whatever the answers, there remains a gap between what we know about good instruction and what our classrooms are currently experiencing. My hope is for a better alignment between what we know is best for learners and what our state and national systems support.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

While the National Writing Project (NWP) Summer Institute (SI) has impacted the teaching of writing for countless teachers across the US, changes in educational policies like No Child Left Behind, Common Core State Standards, and Race to the Top have contributed to an atmosphere of high stakes accountability, resulting in formidable curriculum constraints and making it difficult to meet the authentic needs of young learners and writers. As a NWP Teacher Consultant (TC), I was curious if other TCs had experienced a similar journey of positive professional growth, then the frustration of top-down directives conflicting with sound and effective classroom practices. The aim of this qualitative nested study was to explore the professional growth experiences of NWP TCs who had negotiated the challenges

of integrating new practices within the larger context of a school that may or may not be supportive of those practices.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?
2. What are the sustained professional growth experiences of National Writing Project Teacher Consultants (TCs) who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?
3. What are the conditions and contexts surrounding the teaching practices of TCs who have developed an Expressive Writing Pedagogy?

### **Review of the Literature**

A Review of the Literature focused on Professional Growth, A Little History of the Teaching of Writing, and Expressive Writing Pedagogy. Borrowing from the work of O'Meara and Terosky (2010), I defined *Sustained Professional Growth* as,

a “continuous process” allowing “professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work.” This growth sustains the professional through “learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,” and “is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined” (p. 45).

A Little History of the Teaching of Writing included a look at the differences between utilitarian writing and expressive/personal writing, while making a case for using Waterman and Archer's (1979) definition for *Expressive Writing*:

Expressive writing may take many forms, including the writing of poetry and fiction and the keeping of a diary or personal journal. The common element in the various forms of expressive writing is the attempt to express, in a concrete verbal form, matters of personal importance and concern. (p. 328)

Additional topics included: The Benefits of Expressive Writing, Writing as a Process, Writing as a Tool for Learning, and The National Writing Project. Finally, I delineated 10 elements for an *Expressive Writing Pedagogy* and provided the following definition:

a set of practices and philosophies that teachers utilize to invite students into a bigger conversation with their personal worlds, the worlds of school, and the worlds in which they will negotiate their dreams, goals, and future relationships. An Expressive Writing Pedagogy focuses on the needs of the learner/writer, the one attempting to enter a conversation, and may include one or more of the following elements: time, choice, low-stakes / informal writing, modeling, mentor texts, collaborative learning, conferencing, reflective teaching, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to be seen. (Chapters 1 and 2)

## Methodology

This in-depth, qualitative case study took place over two years and in two phases. 71 participants completed the initial survey, providing demographic information used for maximum diversity in Phase II, along with percentage responses for the 10 elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy within their classroom practices. In Phase II seven NWP TCs from separate sites and diverse regions of the US provided multiple interviews, videos and other artifacts representing their professional growth with the Writing Project.

### Seven Participants for the Nested Cases

Participant	Region	School Size	Race / Ethnicity	Gender	Yrs Teaching	Subject(s)	Grade Level(s)	Years a TC
1 <b>Bryan</b> 1972 <b>Ubuntu</b>	Other "Zip code Apartheid"	<b>University</b> 6,200	White	Male	26	Literacy Courses, Teacher Institute, Content Area Literacy	<b>K- Grad School</b>	<b>19</b>  2002
2 <b>Tonya</b> 1975 <b>Authentic</b>		<b>Middle School</b> 900 public	White	Female	23	Humanities (English language Arts & Social Studies combined)	<b>6th</b>	<b>6</b>  2008
3 <b>Stacy</b> 1975 <b>Teacher Soul</b>	R	<b>Elementary</b> 800-900 public	White	Female	15	All subjects	<b>3rd</b>	<b>9</b>  2012
4 <b>Danielle</b> 1968 <b>Spark</b>		<b>Middle School</b> 1400 public	White	Female	15	8 <sup>th</sup> Gr English, 8 <sup>th</sup> Gr Literacy Support, Methods of Teaching Assessment	<b>8<sup>th</sup> + College</b>	<b>4</b>  2018
5 <b>Monica</b> 1964	R	<b>High School</b> 220 public	White	Female	31	English Psychology Senior Seminar	<b>7<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>11</b>  2010 / 2015

Professional Growth Junkie											
6 Tara 1969 Learning and Unlearning				U	High School 230 Public / specialized for medical academics	White	Female	14	English 12 Gov/Econ Geography/Ethnic Studies	9 <sup>th</sup> 12 <sup>th</sup>	6  2015
7 Aaron 1973 Already a Leader			O S		High School PreK-12 450 Private	White	Male	25	IB theory of Knowledge (1 <sup>st</sup> time not teaching English in 24 yrs)  Head of School	11-12 <sup>th</sup>	6  2015

Figure 49: Seven Participants for the Nested Cases, Survey Data 2021

## Findings & Discussion

In answer to the overarching question for this research, *“In what ways have experiences with the National Writing Project sustained the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants?”* each theme can be worded as its own ultimate boon:

1. Experiences with the National Writing Project helped to develop and nurture the attributes and personal traits of Teacher Consultants, contributing to the effectiveness of *“a special kind of teacher.”* Whether a Fellow comes to the SI already *a special kind of teacher* or grows into one is an important question to consider.
2. The National Writing Project shares a specific model for instruction and professional development in the teaching of writing and was described by one participant as a *“side-to-side” pedagogy*. This *side-to-side* model begins with “teachers teaching teachers” and includes “students teaching students” and even “students teaching teachers.” At the heart of this pedagogy is the inherent value of every learner, who brings with them important knowledge and expertise.
3. *“Authentic” professional learning* with the National Writing Project begins with teachers at the center. The term *authentic* in relation to professional growth first emerged as I focused on Participant 7, Aaron, who responded to the question *What first comes to mind when you think about the Writing Project?* with, “Good friends. Authentic conversation. And appropriate professional development.” Authentic professional learning with the Writing Project captures the importance of learning situated in their lived experiences and the very real and personal questions teachers have about their teaching practices, as well as the process that turns “ownership of learning over to the learners” (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, pg. 41).

4. The initial leadership institute, historically called the Invitational Summer Institute, has long been responsible for providing and modeling *the conditions for success* in effective writing instruction. However, once Fellows leave the intimate community established during the SI, they must negotiate the conditions of teaching communities outside the influence of their Writing Project. This theme describes some common challenges and explores the resources supporting TCs as they integrate new practices within their classrooms.
5. The National Writing Project experiences of the seven participants illustrated an ultimate boon of *thriving in community*. This theme could easily nestle as a sub-theme underneath any of the other four, but will be treated here on its own, as both backdrop and an essential element for sustaining the professional growth of NWP Teacher Consultants.

## **Implications**

### **For Teachers**

Teaching can be rewarding work. But even in the best of times, the complexities of building relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators present inherent challenges. In the time of a pandemic, political and cultural division, authoritarian leadership, record numbers of teachers leaving the profession, and a rise in anxiety, teaching is exponentially harder. It is important now, more than ever, to surround yourself with support and effective pedagogy. It's more than learning about a side-to-side pedagogy. It's about experiencing the spark that comes from living a side-to-side pedagogy. Like Robert Yagelski described, it's about writing yourself into being (2009) among other teachers dedicated to this beautiful work. And it can have an impact on so much more than your teaching. After 50 years of the National *Writing Project*, much wisdom remains, and finding a Summer Institute could be the first step to tapping into that wisdom and transforming or affirming your classroom practice.

## **For Administrators**

You face challenges that your teachers may never comprehend. While authoritarianism is never a good answer for creating effective conditions for learning, you walk a fine line between gatekeeping and bridge building. As a gatekeeper, you must be on guard for all kinds of dangers and things that could go wrong, including classroom behavior involving both students and teachers, test scores, budgets, and legislation impacting what you know is best for students. The National Writing Project remains a great source of support. Not only did the participants of this study find authentic professional learning with the NWP, but they grew as teacher-leaders in their schools and districts. If you are interested in building a positive environment with your school, one committed to collegial good will and collaboration, consider tapping into the in-service opportunities with your local Writing Project. Better yet, attend a Summer Institute.

## **For Existing and Would-be Site Directors**

You are my heroes. Through the Directors at my own site, I have been offered a bridge from the isolation of teaching in my classrooms toward a plethora of connections. You opened wide so many possibilities with your side-to-side pedagogy and a way into inquiry and bona fide research, helping me build relationships with my students first and foremost, and then with my colleagues and administrators. You reflected back to me my goodness as a teacher and the possibility of who I might become as a teacher-leader. Bryan Ripley Crandall spoke of a South African word, Ubuntu (Crandall et al., 2020). I had heard that word from poet, Chris Abani, who said it meant, “I am because you are.” Teacher Consultants are because Site Directors are. You create a space for “humbled togetherness” (Chandler-Olcott, et al., 2021, p. 8) and set the conditions for the success of TCs, who in turn learn to set the conditions for their students’

success. That is the important work to keep in mind as you search for funding and work for viability. Thank you for the continued transformation *of* how we teach, using writing as a tool for creating community.

### **For Policy Makers**

Writing policies to affect change and deciding which programs are worthy of funding can be no easy task. And as I like to think you have all the power to decide the fate of our nation, I understand that is not exactly true. There are complicated factors in your work that I cannot see—just as there are complexities in the world of school that you cannot know without having been immersed in the work of a classroom full of human beings. Still, our worlds might intersect in positive ways. If you truly want to make a difference in the lives of students—all students—consider the work of the National Writing Project. It has made a difference in the lives of over 95,000 teachers since 1974 (NWP, n.d.). From this research, I’ve learned the best of teaching happens when federal, state, and district systems align to support effective and research-based instruction. Learn more about the work of the National Writing Project—attend a Summer Institute—collaborate to make a difference in authentic learning and instruction in all our schools.

### **For Further Research**

Before studying the National Writing Project, I was focused on expressive writing as presented to me by a number of students who kept returning, long after they left my classroom, to share with me their writing. Diving into the literature, I found a studied history between writing for utilitarian purposes and writing to express one’s personal experiences and imagination. More research in this area is warranted, especially in light of schools’ emphasis on writing that remains disconnected from learners. Additionally, continued research on the

work and impact of the National Writing Project is important to keep our schools' stakeholders informed of sound and effective teaching practices. Most importantly, I began this endeavor into higher education keenly aware of a gap between those generating knowledge at this level of research and those most influential in instruction. Bryan said something in our second interview about the research and writing about instruction, affirming the existence of this gap. It was an offhand comment about the number of people who are actually reading the research, which is mainly other researchers. What if the vast number of teachers who could benefit, not from simply being consumers of the research, but from joining the work, had time, resources, and access to participate? I'd like to study that.

What can we learn from those who experienced an alignment between their own teaching philosophy, their schools, their state and local systems, and what they were learning was best for students? We don't need to turn back time. Going forward, we can use writing to build community among our colleagues, as well as our students.



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## Appendix A – Initial Survey

An initial survey, via Qualtrics, of National Writing Project (NWP) Teachers Consultants was distributed through the NWP app: Write Now Teacher Studio, social media, and emails to the directors of the 175 sites listed on the NWP website (NWP, 2021). Responses were collected between October 4<sup>th</sup> and November 18<sup>th</sup>.

### Current School Context

In this section you will provide responses focused on where you are teaching during the 2021/2022 school year. This data will be used to determine maximum diversity among applicants, as well as researching school descriptors and statistics available through government reports, such as the School Report Card. To protect participant anonymity, the research reporting will use pseudonyms in place of identifiers.

1. From the selection below, which is the most appropriate classification for your school? (Options: Elementary, Middle/Jr. High, High School, Higher Education, Other)
2. Which best describes your school? (Options: Private School, Parochial School, Charter School, Public School, 2-year College, 4-year College, Other)
3. What is the name of your school?
4. About how many students will be enrolled in your school for the 2021/2022 school year? \*
5. Where is your school located? Please list both the city/town and state.
6. What is the name of your school district?
7. Which best describes your school district? \*(Options: Rural, Town, Suburban, Urban, Other)

### Teacher Context

In this section you will answer demographic questions and a few questions about your teaching experience.

8. How do you currently describe your gender identity?
9. What is your date of birth? [Month/Date/Year]
10. Ethnicity & Race. Which categories describe you? Select all that apply:
  - a) AMERICAN INDIAN or ALASKA NATIVE—For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community
  - b) ASIAN—For example Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese
  - c) BLACK or AFRICAN AMERICAN—For example, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian
  - d) HISPANIC, LATINO or SPANISH ORIGIN—For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Columbian
  - e) MIDDLE EASTERN or NORTH AFRICAN—For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian
  - f) NATIVE HAWAIIAN or Other PACIFIC ISLANDER—For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese
  - g) WHITE—For example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French
  - h) Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  - i) I prefer not to answer.
11. How many years (total) have you taught?
12. What subject(s) do you currently teach?
13. What other subjects have you taught?
14. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?
15. What other grade levels have you taught?
16. Are you still in the K-12 classroom? If “no,” please respond to **both** B and C below.
  - a) YES
  - b) No. If “No,” explain the circumstances of leaving the K-12 classroom.
  - c) No. The last year I was in the classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

## NWP Teacher Consultant Context

The following questions focus on your involvement with your local National Writing Project site.

17. What is the name of your local NWP site?
18. In what year did you experience a National Writing Project Summer Institute with your local NWP site?
19. How many years have you taught, since experiencing your Summer Institute?
20. **As a TC, in what capacity have you served or participated with your local NWP site?** Some examples might include presenter, editor for newsletter, SI coach or co-director, website master, social media coordinator. Other examples could include attending continuity events like writing marathons and stakeholder meetings.  
**List below all the ways in which you have supported your local NWP site.**

## Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy

For the purposes of this study, when I use the phrase, **Expressive Writing Pedagogy**, I am referring to a set of practices and philosophies that teachers utilize to invite students into a bigger conversation with their personal worlds, the worlds of school, and the worlds in which they will negotiate their dreams, goals, and future relationships. An Expressive Writing Pedagogy focuses on the personal and academic needs of the learner/writer and includes a variety of strategies. The final questions of this survey focus on strategies you may use to engage students with writing in your classroom.

21. Elements of Expressive Writing Pedagogy: To what degree are each of the following teaching strategies a part of your pedagogical beliefs or teaching practices? Move the slider to indicate how often you utilize each strategy. [Qualtrics slider indicated percentages, 0-100%]
  - a) **Time:** I provide consistent writing opportunities: 3 or more times a week.
  - b) **Student Choice:** I provide opportunities for students to make choices in their writing (eg. topics, genre, modes).
  - c) **Low-stakes / Informal Writing:** I utilize writing as a tool for learning.
  - d) **Modeling:** I write and/or read along with my students and I often share my own processes for learning.
  - e) **Mentor Texts:** I share great examples of compelling writing with my students. This includes both professional writing and excellent student examples.
  - f) **Collaborative Learning:** My students work together in partners and small groups for various purposes.
  - g) **Conferencing:** Students have one-on-one opportunities for feedback about their writing, reading, or other learning.
  - h) **Publishing:** Student work is shared through various forms of publishing. Examples may include author's chair, class blog, writing contests, and exceptional work display.
  - i) **Portfolios:** My students keep a collection of their writing as a history of their learning and the stories they have shared.
  - j) **Reflective Teaching:** I focus on student learning while making adjustments in my teaching that will better meet their needs.

21.2 Optional: If you wish to explain any ratings from Item 21, please use the space below.

22. How else might you describe your teaching of writing and/or your inclusion of writing as a strategy within your classroom practice?

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\*This survey utilized demographic suggestions from:

Hughes, J. L., Camden, A. A., & Yangchen, T. (2016). Rethinking and updating demographic questions: Guidance to improve descriptions of research samples. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 21(3), 138-151.

## Appendix B – Data Collection

### Participant 1: **Bryan Ripley Crandall**

#### *Initial Survey*

- Completed: Oct. 15, 2021

#### *Interview*

- Monday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11:00am Eastern / 10:00am Central
- Thursday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:00pm Eastern / 6:00pm Central

#### *Video of PD via Padlet*

- Shared via link Jan. 3, 2021

#### *Artifacts from Participant*

- Artifact A\_Padlet where video is embedded, includes additional artifacts like class syllabi
- Artifact B\_CV
- Artifact C\_”We Are All Projects: Together We Are Strong” (Crandall et al., 2020)
- Artifact D\_”Who We Are Together... Emphasizing Community in the Work We Do” (Crandall, 2019)
- Artifact E\_”Iterating for Inclusion: A Cross-Case Analysis of Three Summer Writing Programs for Youth” (Chandler-Olcott et al., 2021)
- Artifact F\_”Digital Ubuntu” Chapter 4 “We too are Connecticut: Digital Ubuntu with...” (Crandall et al., 2018)

#### *Artifacts Researched*

- Writing Project of Origin Website:  
<https://louisville.edu/education/centers/nystrand/lwp> – no longer a viable website and Kentucky Writing Project can no longer be found
- Current Writing Project Website:
  - via NWP → <http://www.cwpfairfield.org> (not a working link)
  - via Google search → <http://cwpfairfield.org>
- School: <https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/schools/profiles/brown>
- University: <https://www.fairfield.edu>
- Blog: <https://karalvancrandall.blogspot.com/2022/02/dream-writingproject-team-easms-kjsassi.html>
- Dissertation: [https://surface.syr.edu/rla\\_etd/20/](https://surface.syr.edu/rla_etd/20/)
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#### *Timeline*

- Verified: June 2, 2021

## **Participant 2: Tonya Kistler**

### *Initial Survey*

- Completed: Oct. 19, 2021

### *Interviews*

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview: Jan. 5, 2022
- Inter-conversation: Feb. 4, 2022
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview: July 12, 2022

*Two Videos* (to capture one event. 16:32min + 22:13min = 38:45minutes) Filmed Jan. 10, 2022

- Collaboration w/ colleague, Melissa (pseudonym), GT Coordinator
- Participant loaded into shared folder via OU OneDrive link April 9, 2022

### *Artifacts from Participant*

- A\_NWP Flier, link to Google doc, Feb. 4, 2022
- B\_Curriculum Vita, April 18, 2022
- C\_Word Choice Revision, April 18, 2022
- D\_6<sup>th</sup>-Grade Writing Expectations Check List, April 18, 2022
- E\_Lesson Plan for Editing Check List, July 15, 2022
- F\_2015 SI Portfolio from her experience as an SI facilitator (Feb. 21, 2023)
- G\_Art Teams Article (Feb. 21, 2023)
- H\_Portfolio Slides from SI as a facilitator

### *Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site*

- The [Local Site] Writing Project
- School A website
- School B website
- District B website enrollment

### *Timeline*

- Verified: February 21, 2023

## **Participant 3: Stacy Phillips**

### *Initial Survey*

- Completed: Oct. 12, 2021

### *Interviews*

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview: Jan. 10, 2022
- Inter-conversation: June 8, 2022
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview: Nov. 26, 2022 – but no transcript/video. Something went wrong w/ Zoom. I have folders but an update changed the process for saving recordings and/or I shut my computer before the process was complete. I do have notes / typed up shortly after the interview. I also made notes as we verified on Stacy's timeline.

### *Video*

- Excerpt from Video recorded July 15, 2021: "Get Those Pencils Dancing" (3:38-18:31)
- Link to video

- Screenshots of presentation, recording I'm referencing that provide insightful context about P3 and her teaching context
- Stacy's schedule for school year 2021/2022 was packed with commitments to professional development (presenting and participating) and another research project. She was unable to produce the video or gather artifacts as we originally envisioned in our first interview. When we met via Zoom on June 8, we brainstormed other possibilities and decided on a previously recorded presentation with her local site.

#### *Artifacts from Participant*

- A\_Stacy's resumé, June 8, 2022
- B\_Lesson Plan: Informational Writing, handout for Writing Project presentation, June 8, 2022
- C\_Lesson Plan: Opinion Writing, handout for Writing Project presentation, June 8, 2022
- D\_Writing Across the Curriculum, presentation slides from a recent presentation, June 8, 2022
- E\_Fun Fraction Poetry, presentation slides from Summer Series presentation, June 8, 2022
- F\_Lesson Plan: Infographic / Chisolm Trail Grant, June 14, 2022

#### *Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site*

- Local Writing Project Website

#### *Artifacts Researched Connected to school context*

- School Context #1
- School Context #2

#### *Timeline*

- Verified: Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 8, 2022

### **Participant 4: Danielle Johansen**

#### *Initial Survey*

- Completed: October 26, 2021

#### *Interviews w/ Danielle*

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview: January 26, 2022
- January 29<sup>th</sup>: Danielle needed to "bow out." When I emailed her on February 11<sup>th</sup> to make sure it was okay to use her first interview, she responded that things had calmed down and would be willing to do another interview. If I was looking for "evidence" she might have time in the summer. So, we began again the following August.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview: August 8, 2022
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Conversation for follow-up questions: June 14, 2023

#### *Video*



- Sent by participant on September 20, 2022: a video created by her partner school and advertisement for the CSAW program.

### ***Artifacts from Participant***

- A\_Danielle’s Resumé (August 8, 2022)
- B\_Curriculum Map for Inquiry Year (August 8, 2022)
- C\_Book Outline (August 8, 2022)
- D\_Unpublished Manuscript w/ Site Director, “Abandoning Grades and Inspiring Inquiry” (Participant 4 & Turner, n.d.) Written in November 2021. (August 8, 2022)
- E\_Published Chapter w/ Site Director, “Inquiry Ignites! Pushing Back Against Traditional Literacy Instruction” (August 8, 2022) [Danielle’s revised draft of the published article]
- F\_Presentation Outline “Authentic Writing Sparked by Mentor Texts” (August 8, 2022)
- G\_Growth/Reflection Journal Template 2022: shared 9/20/2022
- H\_The Kind of Human in the Front of the Class Matters ( [infographic](#) “sparked by this year’s Advanced Institute at Drew” ), shared 9/20/2022
- I\_What’s Old Is New Again Draft – draft of article accepted for publication (June 16, 2023)
- J\_Images of the Wonder Board, most of which I cannot use because I lack consent from all but one of the participants. (June 16, 2023)
- K\_Image of Classroom Library and Reading Corner (June 16, 2023)
- L\_One more Canva Poster – consider adding or adding info about (September 13, 2023)

### ***Interviews and Artifacts from Students***

#### **Student 1, Michael**

- Interview: November 23, 2022
- Artifacts: November 23, 2022
  - 1.a\_Bangladesh Class Questions
  - 1.b\_NYT Op/Ed submission, early draft (emailed text)
  - 1.c\_Two unfinished writing prompts from the Sparks and Starts Journal
  - 1.d\_Prompted writing based on pictures (emailed text)
  - 1.e [Growth Reflection Journal](#) Link
  - 1.f\_Edublogs (Bloggng Experiment)
    - 1.f.1 [First Post](#)
    - 1.f.2 [Second Post](#)
    - 1.f.3 [Free Reading Assignment Conclusion](#)
  - 1.g\_ NYT Book Review for *Boys in the Boat*
  - 1.h\_Ted Talk Project
    - 1.h.1 link to his Inquiry Journal
    - 1.h.2 link to Final Ted Talk Script

#### **Student 2, Sahna**

- Interview: November 26, 2022 (transcribed)
- Artifacts – never sent

- 2.a\_Question for the Wonder Wall: “Will we ever learn to break the habit of comparing ourselves with others.” from image shared by Danielle

***Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site***

- Link for local NWP site

***Artifacts Researched Connected to School and Teaching Context***

- Ted Talk Program: [https://ed.ted.com/student\\_talks](https://ed.ted.com/student_talks)
- Ted Talk Guidebook, “Explorations at a Glance”  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YHDznG1uioWkpQCmjoqyK6JoouEo-PwH/view>
- Locale Community websites
- School Website
- [School Name] via GreatSchools.org
- [State] Schools to Watch

***Timeline***

Verified: August 8, 2022

**Participant 5: Monica Harris**

***Initial Survey***

- Completed: October 15, 2021

***Interviews w/ Danielle***

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview (January 27, 2022)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview (July 14, 2022)

***Video from Participant***

- Video 1 – Feb. 11, 2022 Presentation first half
- Video 2 – Feb. 11, 2022 Presentation second half
  - wearing a long navy denim skirt with light blue scarf w/ floral print and a mask – still during Covid in a state caring about its teacher. I’m not bitter.

***Video from Googling Participant Name***

- Video 3 – (January 2020) From her HS’s TV Channel, where a leadership class hosted a weekly live newscast, as well as special programs, like the interviewing Monica about publishing with her local state English Journal.
- Video 4 – (2021) From her district about Monica as Crystal Apple award recipient.

***Artifacts from Participant***

- A\_Monica’s Resumé (1/28/23):
- B\_Link to Slides for Monica’s presentation in the video (1/28/23): [9 Slides, including two more artifacts, see below and saved as pdf in P5’s folder]
- B.1\_Student Poem as Model (slide #6)
- B.2\_Teacher Poem as Model (slice #7)
- C\_Teaching Philosophy for [State] Teacher of the Year application (emailed 7/14/22) copy in OneNote and saved as a word doc in folder.
- D\_Poem published in her local NCTE state organization (emailed images 7/14/22), “Why Poetry – [State] English Journal will send electronic version 8/10/23
- E\_Poem #2 published with [State] English Journal – 8/10/23

- F\_Essay published with [State] English Journal – 8/10/23
- G\_Link about the [State] Writing Festival (\_CTE, 2023):

***Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site***

- Link
- FB Local Writing Project
- G\_Blogpost from P5’s Leadership Institute in 2015 – “[*Monica*]”

***Artifacts Researched Connected to School and Teaching Context***

- [Name] Jr./Sr. High School website
- GreatSchools.org: 182 students, grades 7-12, 73% low income, 68% white, 22% Hispanic, w/ 7% identifying with 2 or more races
- *makeSpace Project*: <https://www.makespaceproject.org/>
- *PBIS*: [https://pbisnetwork.org/resources/introduction-to-swpbis/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw\\_O2lBhCFARIsAB0E8B-rvei0glYoX-eDEL838mCaOCbxo2mo-olf0t2Rfg\\_il\\_XM\\_eHehioaAgn8EALw\\_wcB](https://pbisnetwork.org/resources/introduction-to-swpbis/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw_O2lBhCFARIsAB0E8B-rvei0glYoX-eDEL838mCaOCbxo2mo-olf0t2Rfg_il_XM_eHehioaAgn8EALw_wcB)
- *Character Strong*: <https://characterstrong.com/>
- H.1 and H.2\_Entries for the State Encyclopedia, online
- An online List of 21 of the 31 published curriculum books

***Timeline***

- Verified July 15, 2022 – see file: \_Timeline\_DH\_D2 Revisions.docx

**Participant 6: Tara Connors**

***Initial Survey***

- Completed: October 17, 2021

***Interviews w/ Tara***

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview (January 30, 2022) video + transcript
- In-between Chat (June 4, 2022) video + transcribing
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview (December 18, 2022) video + transcribing

***Video from Participant***

- Video 1 –Teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour (February 23/24, 2022, Uploaded to Share folder June 14, 2022)

***First Artifacts Collected from Participant***

A\_Unit/Lesson Plan: “Narrative Medicine / Developed by Jennifer Fletcher / MODULE: TEACHER VERSION (uploaded to share folder June 14, 2022) Grade 12, 3-week unit.

***Artifacts Collected from Participant in – a Google Folder created by P6 (Dec. 18, 2022):***

B\_Resumé

C\_Syllabus: “Medical English 12 - ERWC Syllabus 2021-22”

D\_ERWC - Medical English 12 – 2021-22 Course Map & Pacing Guide -

E\_Slides for Video of P6 teaching

***Artifacts from Participant Students – from same Google Folder***

- 6.1a\_AA\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.1b\_AA\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.2a\_DM\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.2b\_DM\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.2c\_DM\_Medical Narrative Draft
- 6.3a\_KV\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.3b\_KV\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.3c\_KV\_Medical Narrative Draft
- 6.4a\_KW\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.4b\_KW\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.4c\_KW\_Medical Narrative Draft
- 6.5a\_ML\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.5b\_ML\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.5c\_ML\_Medical Narrative Draft
- 6.6a\_MP\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.6b\_MP\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.6c\_MP\_Medical Narrative Draft
- 6.7a\_NI\_Narrative Medicine Notes & Quickwrite (on Empathy)
- 6.7b\_NI\_Medical Narrative Questionnaire
- 6.7c\_NI\_Medical Narrative Draft

***Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site***

- Local Writing Project Website / Link

***Artifacts Researched Connected to School and Teaching Context***

- Amherst Writers & Artists Protocol—AWA Method: Philosophy & Practices: <https://amherstwriters.org/what-to-expect/philosophy-practices/>
- Schneider, P. (2003). *Writing alone and with others*. Oxford University Press.
- F\_Link to P6 Teacher Page that includes a Welcome back to school message 2020 (where she mentions “Labor Based Grading and explains ERWC to parents/students).
- Google Link to 2017-2018 Tara’s Curriculum Map
- Google Link to 2017-2018 Syllabus for Senior Medical English
- About School 2023/2024
- District School Plan for Achievement
- Great Schools Ratings
- PDF *Labor Based Contracts* Google Link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/19RB40zsqgDSfZfHRohHkpWwNFXDOGXRv/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19RB40zsqgDSfZfHRohHkpWwNFXDOGXRv/view?usp=drive_link)
- 916 Ink
- Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC) Theoretical foundation:
- ERWC Assignment Template
- The Yellow Wall Paper, pdf from the National Library of Medicine: <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>
- “Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*” <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/18-industrial-america/charlotte-perkins-gilman-why-i-wrote-the-yellow-wallpaper-1913/>

### ***Timeline***

- Verified December 18, 2022 and February 27, 2023 – see file

### **Participant 7: Aaron Mann**

#### ***Initial Survey***

- Completed: October 25, 2021

#### ***Interviews w/ Aaron***

- 1<sup>st</sup> Interview (February 4, 2022)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview (December 8, 2022)

#### ***Video from Participant***

- March 6, 2022\_ Planning Meeting with 7<sup>th</sup>-Grade ELA teacher,
- Screenshot A
- Screenshot B

***Artifacts from Participant*** – Aaron uploaded the first three artifacts, all referenced during the Video. He sent two just before our second interview. The two publications and the poster were sent after our second/final interview

- A\_Image of the White Board in C’s classroom (March 6, 2022)
- B\_Handout – Sheet of stylistic choices to help students identify what they notice in the Mentor Texts (March 6, 2022)
- C\_Year One Lang & Lit Grades 5-6 (March 6, 2022) a-d Criteria
- D\_Resumé (December 2, 2022)
- E\_Aaron’s Resumé Timeline December 2, 2022)
- F\_2010\_The 10% Solution\_Publication (December 12, 2022)
- G\_2011\_An Uncommon Read\_Publication – coauthor (December 12, 2022)
- H.p1\_Poster (page 1) Aaron created for his school, Grades 5-12 (December 12, 2022)
- H.p2\_Poster (page 2) Aaron created for his school, Grades K-4 (December 12, 2022)

#### ***Artifacts Researched Connected to original NWP Site***

- [Local] Writing Project
- Link to Blog, provided by P7 on the survey

#### ***Artifacts Researched Connected to School and Teaching Context***

- [Name of] School Website
- International Baccalaureate: <https://www.ibo.org/>
- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)  
<https://www.isacs.org/about-isacs>

### ***Timeline***

- Verified: During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview, December 8, 2022

## Appendix C – Interview Protocols

### INTERVIEW I

#### Introduction

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in my research study. As you know, I am interested in exploring the sustained professional growth of National Writing Project teacher consultants. Before we begin the interview, I need to make sure you understand and have signed the informed consent form focused on your participation.

*[Read Oral Consent Script and provide a copy via email.]*

This interview will take 45 to 60 minutes. The questions I ask are with the intention of helping me understand your experience as a teacher consultant w/ the National Writing Project, as well as the context of your teaching life and classroom practice. If the questions I ask are general and abstract, you may volunteer any detail you wish. you also have the option of declining to answer—passing on—any of the questions.

Before we begin, what are your questions?

#### Interview Questions

[Individual Semi-Structured Interview]

#### *Questions surrounding NWP experience.*

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of your experience with the National Writing Project?
  - a. Can you tell me more about...?
  - b. What about the Summer Institute—does anything stand out for you?
  - c. What was that like for you?
2. When did you officially consider yourself a Writing Project Teacher Consultant?
  - a. Can you tell me more about...?
  - b. What was that like for you?
  - c. How did that make you feel?
3. After your Summer Institute, what changes (if any) did notice or begin to implement in your teaching?
  - a. What do you mean by...?
  - b. Can you tell me more about...?
  - c. In what other ways do you think the Writing Project has influenced your teaching life?
4. According to the survey you completed, you have taught \_\_\_\_ years since your Summer Institute. Can you describe any classroom practices you still use today that began directly or indirectly from your experience with the Writing Project or Summer Institute?
  - a. Can you tell me more about...?

- b. Would you say that is directly or indirectly related?

### ***Questions about Professional Growth***

5. When you hear the phrase, “professional growth,” what comes to mind for you?
  - a. Explain a little more about that.
6. How does what you just described relate to your experiences with the National Writing Project?
  - a. Can you tell me more about...?
7. What other professional growth have you experienced with your teaching career?
  - a. When did these occur? [Think about the timeline.]
8. Let me share with you a definition I am using in this research for the phrase, ***sustained professional growth*** [plan to share digitally, via chat, email, or screenshare]:

*a “continuous process” allowing “professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work.” This growth sustains the professional through “learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,” and “is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined” (O’Meara and Torosky, 2010, p. 45).*

As you think about that definition, what might you add about your experiences with the National Writing Project?

- a. Is there anything else you would like to add?

### ***Questions about Teaching Conditions and Context***

9. As you think about the professional growth you experienced with the National Writing Project, as well as implementing what you learned into your classroom practice in the context of your school, can you describe for me the support you may have experienced?
  - a. From colleagues?
  - b. From your administration?
  - c. From parents?
  - d. Students?
  - e. Can you tell me more about...?
10. What about challenges? What kinds of challenges, if any, did you find as you implemented into your classroom practice, strategies and ideas you learned with the National Writing Project?
  - a. From colleagues?
  - b. From administration?
  - c. From parents?

- d. Students?
  - e. Can you explain what you mean by...?
11. How do the supports or challenges you just described relate to other professional development you have experienced?

***Follow-up Questions from the Initial Survey***

- Confirm/clarify demographic data (time permitting)
- List Questions I have from their survey responses

***House Keeping for Next Steps***

- If time is needed: will confirm demographic data in the next interview
- \*Talk about parental permission, student consent and student assent process
- \*Set a tentative date for the video

***Instructions for teacher:*** The video will focus on you and your teaching, but not on your students. You may wish to video your classroom as part of the video, but you can only show close-ups of student work for the students who have completed the parental permission and assent process. Submitting student work that may support the lesson in the video, be sure the work is only from students who have completed the parental permission and assent process.

**THANK YOU for your time. Do you have any questions before we go?  
Please remember that you can email me your questions and concerns.**

---

**INTERVIEW 2**

**Introduction**

How are you? I want to thank you for your participation [add context by highlighting interesting or fun moments from the video observation].

This interview will take 45 to 60 minutes. Today's questions are follow-ups to our last interview and the observations. Like our first interview, the questions I ask are with the intention of helping me understand your experience as a teacher consultant w/ the National Writing Project, as well as the context of your teaching life and classroom practice. If the



questions I ask are general and abstract, you may volunteer any detail you wish. you also have the option of declining to answer—passing on—any of the questions.

Before we begin, what are your questions?

*Follow up for Interview I:*

*Follow up for Video Observation:*

*Questions about Artifacts:*

***Timeline Verification***

As you can see, I have drafted a beginning timeline of your teaching experiences and professional growth.

1. Can you help me verify the events and dates I have plotted?
2. What else would you add to help capture the significant events in your teaching life and professional growth?
3. Can you help me give each data point a rating based on the degree of positive or negative impact?

**THANK YOU for your time. Do you have any questions before we go?  
Please remember that you can email me your questions and concerns.**

---

**INTERVIEW 3**

[This guide will be fleshed out once data analysis is underway. It will serve as a member check on my descriptions and understandings and give me one last opportunity to ask clarifying questions that may have emerged in my research notes.]

## Appendix D – Video Observation Protocol

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

*[Reminder: Set a timer during your observation, to help locate video time for review and detailed descriptions.]*

**Class Info** (Grade/Hour/Subject): \_\_\_\_\_

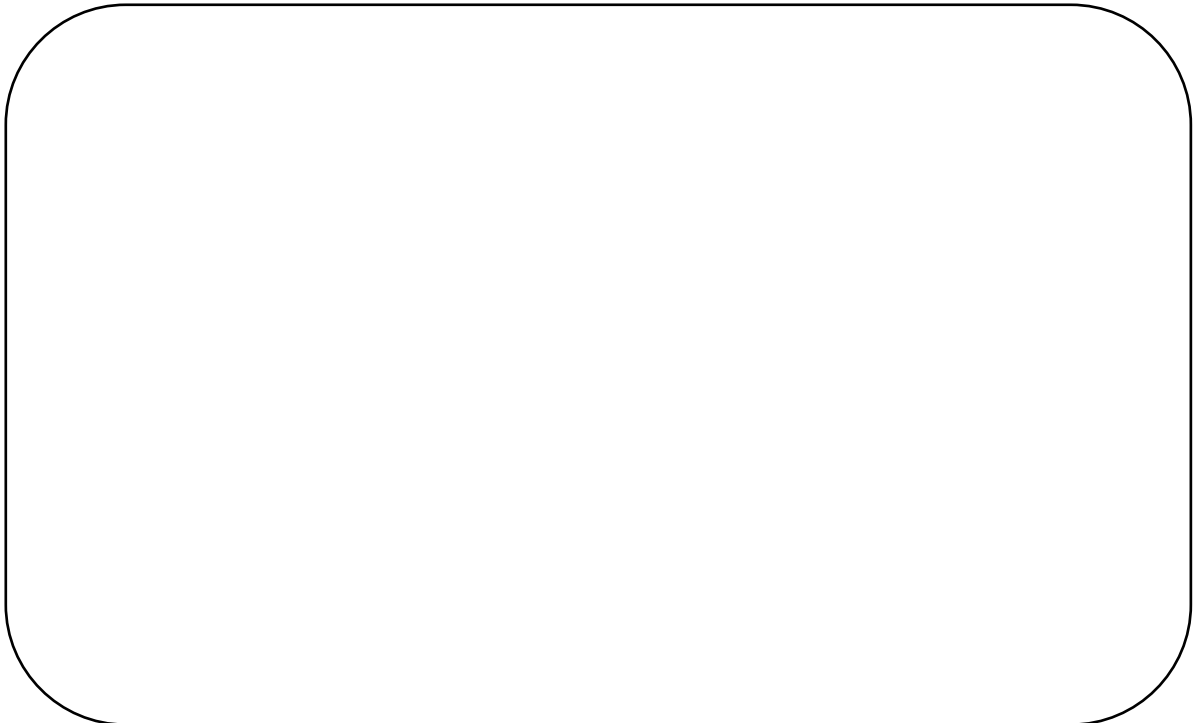
*[If observing a teacher consultant who has retired or moved into another position, I might observe them in action as a teacher consultant in PD. This protocol could be easily adapted.]*

**Instructions for teacher:** The 15-20 minute video is to illustrate an element of your teaching/leadership that you believe has developed in connection with your *sustained professional growth*. The video will focus on you and your teaching, but not on your students or audience. You may wish to video record your classroom without the presence of students as part of the video, but you can only show close-ups of student work for the students who have completed the parental permission and assent process. If submitting student work that may support the lesson in the video, be sure the work is only from students who have completed the parental permission and assent process.

**Lesson Focus** (request lesson plan, as teacher used for self—nothing extra): \_\_\_\_\_

**Physical Features** of the Classroom:

- Arrangement of Students (sketch a rough diagram of seating and note desks/tables and groupings).
- Salient Features of the Classroom
- Create a diagram to help note significant details.



Observational evidence of *Expressive Writing Pedagogy*—A checkmark indicates evidence. Note time and details in the space below—enough

a. Time to Write	f. Collaborative Learning
b. Student Choice	g. Conferencing as Formative Assessment
c. Low-stakes/Informal Writing	h. Publishing
d. Modeling Writing	i. Portfolios
e. Mentor Texts	j. Reflective Teaching

***Questions to consider:***

1. What do I notice about the teacher?
  - Classroom engagement
  - Monitoring for understanding
  - What else?
2. What am I curious about?
3. What student work from this lesson might be helpful for my understanding of context and pedagogy? (Teacher might take a snapshot w/ her phone and share – or scan, as long as the work belongs to students who have gone through the assent/consent/parent permission process.)
4. What other artifacts might be helpful?
5. What affirms my initial perspective of this teacher?
6. What surprises me?
7. What indications of professional growth, as described in our first interview, do I notice?
8. What questions do I want to ask in our next interview?

## Appendix E –Timeline Template

### Timeline of Sustained Professional Growth

Sustained Professional Growth is defined as: a *“continuous process” allowing “professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work.” This growth sustains the professional through “learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments,” and “is driven by what individuals themselves want and need and by the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined”* (O’Meara and Terosky, 2010, p. 45).

\*Significant Professional Growth Experiences: those sustained growth experiences remembered by the participant as significant

Graduated:

Teaching Certificate:

Began Teaching:

Shifts in Teaching Experiences

\*Significant Professional Growth Experiences

NWP Summer Institute with local site - Did the participant indicate this as a significant experience? [include their own words: ]

\*Significant Professional Growth Experiences

Year	Sustaining Professional Growth Experiences
	Bachelor’s Degree

## **Appendix F – Artifact Collection**

Relying on what emerges in the interviews and video observation and dependent on teacher choice, artifacts may include any of the following:

- Teacher writing
- Student writing
- Student artwork
- Other student work such as assessments, worksheets, group work products
- Lesson Plans
- Handouts
- Electronic documents
- Artwork
- Email, text, and social media communications as might occur in the setting up of interviews, observations, and emerging questions
  - Only from those who agree to participate and have agreed that the exchange can be used as an artifact
  - No exchange with collateral participants will be included
  - If there includes any information about a non-participant, the name and info will be redacted from the records

[Data transfer will occur through a One Drive for Business, (Cloud Hosted Office 365). If video files prove too large to email, a link to a shared folder will be used. All data will be stored in a One Drive folder dedicated to this research project.]

## Appendix G – Data Coding Guide for Classroom Work and Other Artifacts

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Artifact name and description:

---

*“A basic tenet of research is careful separation of description from interpretation... description comes first”  
(Patton, 2017, p. 534).*

As participants will have options in the artifacts provided, the following questions will help in describing and coding the artifact:

1. How does this artifact show sustained professional growth for the participant?
2. How is this artifact connected to professional learning through involvement with the National Writing Project?
3. In what ways does this artifact demonstrate any of the following?

a. Time to Write	f. Collaborative Learning
b. Student Choice	g. Conferencing as Formative Assessment
c. Low-stakes/Informal Writing	h. Publishing
d. Modeling Writing	i. Portfolios
e. Mentor Texts	j. Reflective Teaching

4. What other questions emerge as I study this artifact?

## Appendix H – Student Interview Guide

### Introduction

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in my research study. As you know, I am interested in exploring the sustained professional growth of National Writing Project teacher consultants.

This interview will take 15 to 30 minutes. The questions I ask are with the intention of helping me understand your experience as a learner, with your teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ [insert name]. My questions will include a focus on the classwork you and/or your teacher shared. If the questions I ask are general and abstract, you may volunteer any detail you wish. You also have the option of declining to answer or to pass on any of the questions.

Before we begin, what are your questions?

### Interview Questions

[Individual Semi-Structured Interview]

1. As you think about what you are learning or what you have learned from your teacher, \_\_\_\_\_ [insert name], what have been your favorite lessons or experiences?
  - a. Can you explain more about...
  - b. What did you mean by...
2. In what ways have you grown as a writer or a reader?
  - a. Can you explain more about...
  - b. What did you mean by...
3. Let's look at your classwork: [Questions will be determined, once artifacts/classwork has been shared]:
  - a. Can you explain more about...
  - b. What did you mean by...
4. What else would you like me to understand about your teacher, \_\_\_\_\_ [insert name].
  - a. Can you explain more about...
  - b. What did you mean by...

Probing questions may be revised as the interview is underway, to help follow emerging insights.