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TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE

2016 OKLAHOMA WRITING PROJECT SUMMER INSTITUTE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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By

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TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE
2016 OKLAHOMA WRITING PROJECT SUMMER INSTITUTE


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


BY


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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer

Institute fellows. 13 participants, four coaches, two co-directors, and the director of the

Oklahoma Writing Project welcomed me into their community of practice with open

arms, minds, and hearts. They allowed me to record their stories, listen to their ideas,

observe their actions, and ask many questions. I am grateful for their willingness to

share their experiences.

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So many people in many areas of my life contributed to this dissertation. First, I have to thank my future husband, life partner, and best friend, Rob, for his unwavering support, understanding, and patience throughout this journey. For all of those hours when I was trapped in my office instead of enjoying adventures with you, thank you for your selflessness. My mom - my lifelong, number one supporter - was a constant encourager and always just a phone call away. Aimee Myers, my work sweetheart, inspired and uplifted me from start to finish.

From the onset of my PhD journey, I realized my committee was exemplary. My advisor, Dr. Crag Hill, is a mentor, colleague, and lifelong friend. His advice, encouragement, and feedback allowed me to experience this process as an achievable challenge. Dr. Lawrence Baines and Dr. Neil Houser both helped shape this study, especially in terms of its methodology. Dr. Sandra Tarabochia pushed me to think critically. Dr. Priscilla Griffith provided much insight into the Oklahoma Writing Project and was vital in the write up of my findings. Earning a PhD was realizable thanks, in large part, to my exceptional committee members.

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ABSTRACT

Many classroom teachers often consider professional development to be ineffective and irrelevant, noting little to no benefits for themselves or their students. Research on traditional, top-down professional development approaches offers insight into teachers' lackluster experiences with professional development. However, research also demonstrates how professional development might be effective, both for teachers and other stakeholders, including students. Noting that meaningful professional development might exist through the National Writing Project (NWP), this research attempted to capture the essence of one particular professional development opportunity: the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute (OWP SI). Through a phenomenological research design, the lived experiences of the 13 participants who completed the 2016 OWP SI were portrayed. This research process involved informal and conversational interviews, observations, and the collection of relevant documents and artifacts. Data analysis revealed a connection to communities of practice and key roles which participants assumed during the SI. These interconnected roles included writer, teacher and learner, researcher, and leader. Participants' individual and collective voices painted a picture of what it was like to experience meaningful professional development. The findings of this research add to the literature focusing on the NWP and SIs across the country, offering a richer, more complex look into what it means to experience this particular professional development phenomenon. Individual vignettes and a collective, thematic analysis offer insight into 2016 OWP SI and serve as a snapshot for future research regarding this and other professional development programs.

# PREFACE

# Bracketing My Experiences

The following is an entry from my journal responding to a quick write at the 2015 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute. Toward the conclusion of the three-week Institute, one of the coaches asked our group to respond to the following prompt: "How did you feel on Day One of the Summer Institute?"
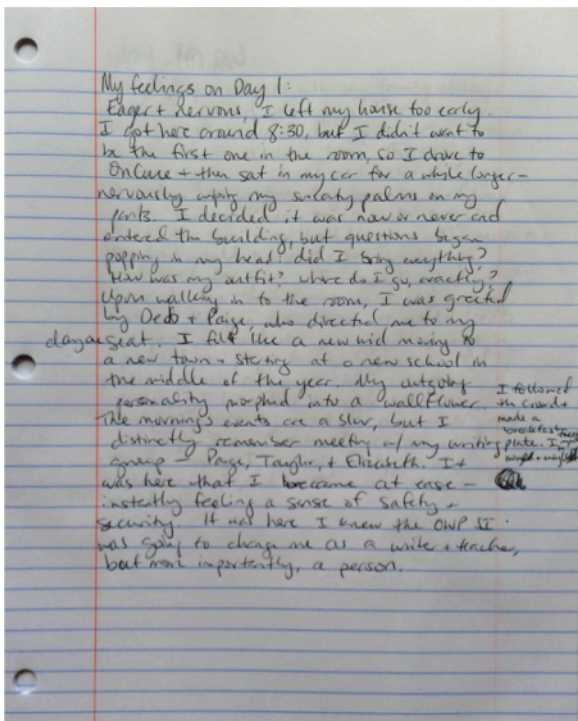


*My feelings on Day 1:*

*Eager and nervous, I left my house too early. I got here around 8:30, but I didn't want to be the first one in the room, so I drove to On Cue and then sat in my car for a while longer - nervously wiping my sweaty palms on my pants. I decided it was now or never and entered the building, but questions began popping in my head: did I bring everything? How was my outfit? Where do I go, exactly? Upon walking into the room, I*

*was greeted by Deb and Paige, who directed me to my day one seat. I felt like a new kid moving to a new town and starting at a new school in the middle of the year. My outgoing personality morphed into a wallflower. I followed the crowd and made a breakfast plate. I forced myself to mix and mingle. The morning's events are a blur, but I distinctly remember meeting my writing group - Paige, Taylor, and Elizabeth. It was here that I became at ease, instantly feeling a sense of safety and security. It was here I knew the OWP SI was going to change me as a writer and teacher, but more importantly, as a person.*

My experience participating in the 2015 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute (OWP SI) is difficult to put into words. So many emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas fill my head when I think about those three weeks - a blur - in June. When I think about the people I met. When I think about what I did and tried and learned. At that point in my career, I had been teaching for six years. I was not a fan of professional development. I saw it as a waste of time. I did not gain anything from it. I tuned out and turned off. I had heard the OWP SI was different, though. Friends, colleagues, and mentors spoke so highly of it. They said it was the best professional development they'd ever done. They said it changed their lives - as teachers and otherwise. They said I would "drink the Kool Aid," too, and become a lifelong member of a community like no other. *How optimistic*, I thought. But, really? Yes, really.

As a writer, teacher, researcher, and leader, I came to know the teaching of writing through the eyes of more than just a teacher, researcher, or leader – I became a writer myself. I was immersed in writing processes, teaching demonstrations, and authors' chairs. I saw (the teaching of) writing in a way I had never before. I did not

know what it meant to be a writer outside of the world of academics. I only knew - or so I thought I knew - what it meant to teach my students how to write. During the SI, I became a student myself. No longer was I an expert; instead, I was a piece of malleable clay, molding into something I never knew existed within me.

I wrote stories about my grandmother, Mama Joye. About my travels around the world. About meeting my fiancé and coming out to my family and feeling accepted for who I am for the first time in my life. About my first grade misadventures. About being chosen to become a teacher. About love and loss and happiness and sadness and celebrations and tragedies. On the whole, I wrote about things that mattered to me. Through writing processes and sharing with my writing group and other fellows, I was able to see, for perhaps the first time, what it was like to be a writer, to give and received meaningful and effective feedback, and to experience trust and support in a safe, comfortable environment. Furthermore, I was able to think about my students and who they are as people and writers and how I could better help them express themselves through text.

I collaborated with the best and brightest teachers in our state. The teachers teaching teachers model of the OWP SI allowed us to share our research-based best practices with one another. Through preparing and presenting my teaching demonstration, I was able to connect my pedagogy to current research regarding writing and the teaching of writing, especially concerning multimodalities – the focus of my presentation. In each teaching demonstration, every participant in our group brought something unique to the table. Who would have thought that I could learn a pedagogical strategy from a Kindergarten teacher? But do not think that I have not successfully

implemented interactive writing with my college students since then. (Thanks, Paige!)

To me, maybe most importantly, the relationships I formed and maintained during and after the SI are what stand out most. Suddenly I was surrounded by those who cared about teaching, education, writing, literacies, thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and many other aspects of learning and doing. We were passionate and wanted to facilitate change within our classrooms and our students. I cannot keep track of how many strategies I walked away with and how many activities I implemented as a result of my peers' teaching demonstrations. But also - and equally, if not more, important - how many stories about my friends that I still hold close to my heart. Stories that taught me about who others are as people first. After all, isn't that what writing can do for our students and for us, as teachers and as individuals in a society where words can have much power, for better or worse?

My experiences during the 2015 OWP SI shaped me as a teacher, writer, researcher, and leader. Unexpectedly, my experiences also shaped me as an individual. My experiences compelled me to find out more about others'. How do others experience this professional development opportunity? What meanings do others make during and after the SI? What can the SI do for others as teachers, writers, researchers, leaders, and, on the whole, people? My own experiences at the 2015 OWP SI brought me to this dissertation. To this deep appreciation and inquisition about this program. To coming back in 2016 and investigating this phenomenon through a new lens, through the eyes and hearts of the 2016 fellows.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Ask any teacher who has been in the classroom for a year or more how he or she views professional development activities and workshops. The reply received might be accompanied with an eye roll, heavy sigh, and overall sense of exasperation. According to Lieberman and Wood (2003), "[A]s teachers have known and research has shown, 'professional development' of teachers has been notoriously unsuccessful," and "there is little knowledge about how, or even if, professional development organized for teachers ever finds its way into classrooms to enlarge teachers' repertoires and enhance student learning" (p. 3). Teachers may not always see the usefulness or effectiveness of professional development because of their own negative experiences as participants being talked *at* about topics they either care little or nothing about or see little or no relevance to their own teaching and/or students.

Even if the content presented is relevant, the presentation style might not allow for participants to collaborate and learn socially, with and from one another. It is all too common for teachers to leave professional development settings without strategies, ideas, or activities to implement in their own classrooms. Hill (2009) discusses how "teachers themselves are lukewarm about their professional development experiences" (p. 472). Lukewarm feelings could leave teachers unsatisfied and unfulfilled in regards to the (lack of) professional development they experience. These lukewarm feelings might stem from outside "experts" presenting professional development to teachers with little knowledge of the teachers' context, needs, and individual and collective strengths and challenges. This traditional notion of professional development involving an

outsider "developing" a group of teachers is often unsuccessful; teachers' experiences during these types of opportunities are likely negative. In accordance, Gray (2000) describes teachers as "cynical of most school staff development efforts" (p. 49). In fact, the negative connotation of professional development can be tangible for school sites as a whole.

The lack of quality in regards to professional development experiences is evident from numerous perspectives, including a range of grade levels and content areas. Garet, Porter, Desmione, Birman, and Yoon (2001) studied over 1,000 mathematics and science teachers' perceptions of characteristics of effective professional development. The researchers note, "many professional development activities do not have features of high quality, whether they are structured as reform or traditional" (p. 935). Due to certain constraints, including time and expenses, high quality professional development is often unrealistic for teachers in a variety of settings. Instead, ineffective professional development is provided to simply check off the requirement.

As a former middle school teacher, I think back to the many 7:30 a.m. professional development meetings and workshops in which I participated. I use the term "participated" lightly – usually I was answering emails, grading papers I should have graded the night before, or working on my lesson plan for the day. I have lost count of the number of hours, days, and maybe even weeks spent in this type of setting that I feel was wasted because it did not impact my educational philosophy or practice. I would rarely learn or do anything during these sessions that I could use in my classroom. So, my colleagues and I often mentally checked out to attend to business that

mattered since the professional development certainly did not. Lieberman and Mace (2008) note that "professional development, though well intentioned, is often perceived by teachers as fragmented, disconnected, and irrelevant to the real problems of classroom practice" (p. 226). Through informal conversations (in reality, venting sessions) with my colleagues, I can attest that I am not alone in these experiences. Even so, I wonder how other teachers have experienced professional development activities.

I imagine that many teachers yearn for professional development that is engaging, effective, and – most of all – extends to the classroom and beyond. Effective professional development has the potential to positively affect teachers' beliefs and practices and, as a result, students' learning (Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Schlager & Fusco, 2003). Little (1993) advocates for the importance of agency in regard to how professional development programs are organized and facilitated: "Professional development must be constructed in ways that deepen the discussion, open up the debates, and enrich the array of possibilities for action" (p. 148). Accordingly, Desimone (2009) argues that "professional development is a key to reforms in teaching and learning" (p. 192). While many argue for the necessity and usefulness of professional development for teachers, the experiences of these teachers are often negative. It is clear that there is a disconnect between the importance of professional development for teachers' beliefs and practices and the implementation of professional development opportunities and activities that positively and effectively resonate with participants, their teaching, and their students.

Although "teachers have grown weary of efforts to 'develop' them" (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 3), I and many other English language arts (ELA) teachers express a

desire for meaningful professional development. In particular, ELA teachers might benefit from effective professional development related to writing and the teaching of writing. Some teachers are accustomed to students entering the classroom with negative attitudes about writing. Some students might not like writing at all, some students might view themselves as bad writers, and other students might be indifferent (Jeter, 2016). As a result, it is significant that writing teachers experience professional development that can influence their writing pedagogy and, in turn, their students' conceptions of writing.

Effective professional development for the teaching of writing should offer rich, meaningful learning experiences for teacher participants – experiences that are relevant to their lives as teachers (and possibly even writers and researchers). Especially in the state of Oklahoma, teachers come to the profession through a variety of routes: traditional teacher preparation programs in colleges of education, as well as alternative and emergency certification options. Many of these teachers likely consider themselves lifelong learners, and they might crave professional development that actually does something for themselves and their students and allows for positive, useful, and relevant experiences within and beyond the professional development setting itself.

Initially, it is important to consider what constitutes effective professional development on a broad level. Desimone (2009) proposes a core conceptual framework for professional development sites and effects.

*Figure 1.1* Desimone's (2009) Professional Development Core Conceptual Framework
(p. 185)



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┌─────────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────┐
│ Core features of│   │  Increased  │   │          │   │          │
│ professional    │   │  teacher    │   │ Change in│   │ Improved │
│ development:    │◄─►│ knowledge and│◄─►│Instruction│◄─►│ student  │
│ ~ Content focus │   │ skills; change│  │          │   │ learning │
│ ~ Active learning│  │ in          │   │          │   │          │
│ ~ Coherence     │   │ attitudes and│  └──────────┘   └──────────┘
│ ~ Duration      │   │ beliefs     │
│ ~ Collective    │   └─────────────┘
│   participation │
└─────────────────┘
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Context such as teacher and student characteristics, curriculum,
school leadership, policy environment
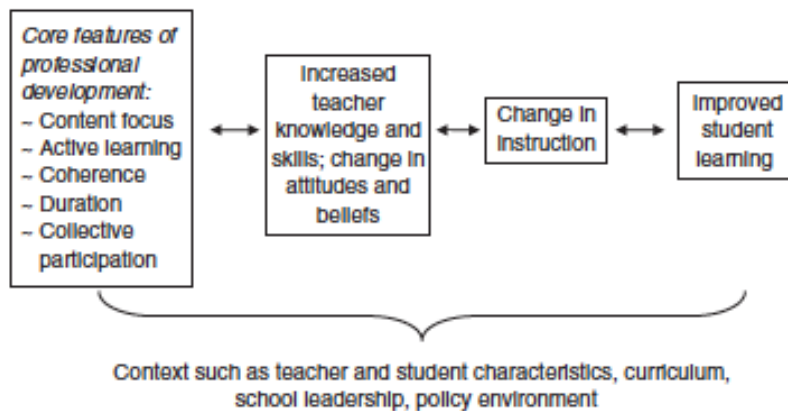
This framework considers features of effective professional development programs, including a focus on content and active learning, a coherent structure, an established duration, and collective participation among members. These features lead to teachers gaining knowledge and skills related to the content presented and learning that occurred during the professional development session(s). The hope is that an increase of knowledge and skills results in a change in instruction and, ideally, improved student learning. Many situational factors play a role in how sites of professional development are successful in terms of positively influencing teachers and students, including roles and characteristics of teachers and students; curriculum (mandated or otherwise); leadership at school sites; and policies governing teachers, classrooms, schools, and districts. Although broad, this conceptual framework can be useful for determining the successfulness of particular professional development programs.

Potentially effective professional development programs related to the teaching of writing that attempt to provide an authentic and meaningful experience for teachers exist. Local sites of the National Writing Project (NWP) offer professional development

for classroom teachers with the goal of validating and refining teacher beliefs and practices concerning writing and the teaching of writing. The writing project aims to transfer this work to classrooms and students in order to improve student achievement in writing and literacy. Borko (2004) offers insight into the effectiveness of NWP professional development opportunities: "Teachers have reported that NWP helped them to develop a valuable professional network, change their philosophies about teaching writing, and increase both the time spent on writing instruction and use of exemplary teaching practices" (p. 11). The benefits of participating in NWP programs involve not just teachers themselves, but also their school sites, colleagues, and students.

While there have been studies focused on the positive effects of teachers' participation in other NWP sites across the nation (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dierking & Fox, 2012; Graham & Perrin, 2007; Kaplan, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Pritchard, 1987; Whitney, 2008; Whyte, Lazatte, Thompson, Ellis, Muse, & Talbot, 2007; Wilson, 1994), little research has focused specifically on teacher participants' lived experiences of these particular professional development opportunities. Email conversations with Dr. Linda Freidrich, Director of Research and Evaluation at the NWP, revealed that more than 90 dissertations, research reports, referred articles, and books have been written about NWP Summer Institute (SI) sites. However, very few of these texts explicitly focus on the experiences of teachers during the SI itself. Instead, many focus on if and how teachers learn and transfer beliefs and practices from the SI to their own work in the field (Desimone's second and third criteria). Moreover, some research focuses mainly on effects on students of teachers who have participated in SIs

(Desimone's fourth criteria).

In sum, research is lacking in consideration of teachers' lived experiences of the a specific professional development opportunity offered by NWP sites: the annual invitational SI and, in consideration of the scope of this research, the Oklahoma Writing Project's (OWP) SI. This three-week intensive professional development workshop allows selected teachers (participants are chosen through an application and interview process) to read current research on writing and the teaching of writing, write and participate in writing groups, and share best practices through teaching demonstrations. As a local NWP site, the OWP SI "encourages teachers to become a community of learners whose main purpose is the nurturing of each other for the purposes of inspiring better writers, teachers, and educational leaders" (Kaplan, 2008, p. 343). Research on OWP SI participants can assist in determining the intricacies of this and other SI sites through teachers' lived experiences before, during, and after this professional development opportunity.

For this particular phenomenological research, it is important to understand that professional development is not "a problem to be solved" but instead "a question of meaning to be inquired into" (van Manen, 1990, p. 24). We need to understand this phenomenon because professional development for teachers can and should be effective and meaningful for teachers and other stakeholders - students included. On a large scale, research should aim to discover meanings gleaned from teachers' experiences in professional development settings. More specifically, we do not know enough about teachers' lived experiences within the phenomenon of NWP SI sites, particularly the OWP SI.

I have heard colleagues often express that the SI is life changing, transformative, and the best professional development they have ever experienced (see also Whitney, 2008). I wonder what causes so many participants to echo these sentiments, if all participants feel this way, or if there are some who do not experience such positive identifications. On the whole, I am curious about teachers' experiences of this professional development program. Blau (1993) echoes my inquiries, as he describes how "we often speak, somewhat diffidently, about how teachers experience a conversion in our Summer Institutes, though we are rarely clear about what the conversion entails" (p. 17). This research can be a step in determining the intricate complexities of teachers' experiences during a particular SI.

## Research Purpose and Questions

This purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of teachers who participated in the 2016 OWP SI. Desimone's (2009) conceptual framework can serve as a foundation, especially in terms of core features of professional development; increased teacher knowledge and skills; and a change in attitudes and beliefs. For this research, it is important that these aspects of Desimone's framework are secondary to teachers' own experiences of the professional development. The focus is on teachers' experiences, not necessarily the professional development program itself. Instead of a program evaluation, this research takes a step back and seeks to explore and discover the experiences of those who participate in the program. Only once we realize what teachers' experiences are can we begin to determine if and how professional development sites are effective (or not). In this study, evidence was gathered from interviews, observations, and pertinent documents. Teachers' voices

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guide the discussion of their experience of professional development opportunity – what it entails, why it might matter, and who might benefit. In addition to professional development sites, preservice teacher preparation programs and educational policy initiatives could find value in this research.

Future research similar to Applebee and Langer (2009), Graham and Perrin (2007), Pritchard (1987), and Whyte et al. (2007) might involve collecting data from students of OWP SI teacher participants in order to potentially substantiate improved student learning. First, however, it is important to start with the participants' experiences of the professional development itself. To build a foundation, one must first understand what teachers' lived experiences are during the OWP SI. Potential research on improved student learning requires understandings of teachers' participation in professional development sites. Therefore, the following overarching research question guides this study:

- *What are teacher participants' lived experiences of a specific professional development opportunity, the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

Additionally, the following secondary research questions informed data collection and analysis procedures and assisted in answering the primary research question:

- *How do participants make meaning of their experiences of the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *What roles do participants assume during the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *How do various roles influence individual and collective experiences of teachers at the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

## Research Approach

As the focus of this research is OWP participants' lived experiences during this particular professional development opportunity, a phenomenological design - "the human scientific study of phenomena," according to van Manen (1990, p. 11) - is most fitting. Through informal and formal interviews during and after the 2016 OWP SI, observations during the SI, and contextual analysis of participants' SI applications and artifacts, including writings and teaching demonstrations, participants' experiences can shed light on the intricacies of the OWP SI – what it is, what occurs during it, and if and how it might represent a particularly effective site of professional development related to the teaching of writing.

This particular qualitative research requires me, the researcher, to enter into the OWP's community of practice. As described in this dissertation's preface, I participated in the 2015 OWP SI; therefore, I am a member of the larger OWP and NWP communities and, although I consider myself a participant observer throughout this project, I am primarily a researcher – I talk, listen, observe, write, and reflect in my role of researcher throughout my research and writing processes. It is significant that I experienced the SI myself the previous summer, but it is equally important that I bracket my experiences in order to focus on the 2016 fellows' lived experiences. The OWP SI's framework is consistent from summer to summer, but different participants, coaches, and directors certainly result in different experiences, too. I aim not to generalize to all OWP SIs, the OWP as a whole, or to other NWP sites. However, this

research can serve as a snapshot of this phenomenon by offering insights into aspects of the OWP SI that could also be found in other SI sites and tenets of the NWP's mission.

## Theoretical Assumptions

The NWP, founded as the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974, currently extends to nearly 200 sites across the nation and seeks to promote learning and writing for students and teachers (History of NWP, 2016). Recognizing its significance, Lieberman and Wood (2003) contend that "the NWP is arguably the most successful educational network in the history of American education" (p. 5). At the center of the NWP, a set of core principles offer a framework for beliefs and practices surrounding writing and the teaching of writing. The core principles support a social theory of teaching and learning framing the organization's goals and ideals.

A core principle of the NWP centers on establishing and maintaining social communities of practice involving writing and the teaching of writing. Since "a reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs" (About NWP, 2016), local NWP sites have autonomy regarding the content and structure of professional development offerings. Under the umbrella of learning communities, Kaplan (2008) cites Dewey (1902) and Vygotsky (1978) as contributing to the NWP's theoretical foundation. Concerning Dewey's progressivism (education as democracy, problem solving and critical thinking skills, active learning, focus on students' experiences, etc.) and Vygotsky's social development theory, the idea that learning occurs within social contexts drives thought processes behind the NWP's SI sites. According to Lieberman and Mace's discussion on social contexts for learning in professional development sites,

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We are coming to understand that learning rather than being a solely individual

(as we have taken it to be) is actually also *social*. It happens through experience

and practices. In plain terms – people learn from and with others in particular

ways. They learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning

(learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being

with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are). (2008, p.

227)

This research assumes that participants engage in experiences that are socially situated –

learning with and from colleagues in a community of practice centered on writing and

the teaching of writing.

Social aspects of SI sites rely on the development of a sustained community of

practice. Communities of practice involve "a locus of engagement in action,

interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises" (Wenger,

1998, p. 85). The NWP and, on a more focused level, invitational SIs, can certainly be

classified as a community of practice (Caswell, 2007; Pearce, 2010; Whitney, 2006).

Wenger (1998) offers concepts grounded in a social theory of learning. Through the

components of meaning, practice, community, and identity, the notion of communities

of practice is made explicit and relevant in many areas of one's life – educational

settings being one of the most noteworthy.

Wenger describes practice as "doing in a historical and social context that gives

structure and meaning to what we do" (1998, p. 47). In a study of the Missouri Literacy

Academy, Dierking and Fox (2013) celebrate teacher participants gaining knowledge

and support from their professional development experiences, resulting in a furthered

sense of confidence and valued voice. This increase in knowledge is attributed to a revived interest in teaching as a result of learning new theories and practices both as individuals and in social contexts. Made explicit is the idea that knowledge alone is not enough to foster meaningful outcomes; instead, knowledge in relation to supportive social communities promotes teacher autonomy in the classroom.

Ideally, professional development should occur in an environment that exemplifies a contextually dependent social nature of learning and allows for the formation of a community of practice. Considering the OWP, specifically, "the social aspects of the Writing Project convey professional norms and purposes, create a sense of belonging, and shape professional identities" (Lieberman, 2002, p. 42-43). In this professional development setting, being involved in a community of practice means experiences centering on the goal of improving teaching and student learning.

## Conclusion

Professional development is a broad concept, and research related to various aspects of professional development are vast. Narrowing from general to specific, this research centers on a particular program, the NWP, and an even more specific professional development opportunity: the OWP SI. The intricacies surrounding determining the effectiveness of professional development programs, too, are wide in scope. The focus for this study is on how teachers experience a shared phenomenon: the 2016 OWP SI. This research is concerned with what occurs at and during a professional development experience. It is a first step in determining if and how particular sites of professional development can be deemed effective beyond the experiences themselves. Therefore, the review of literature in Chapter Two includes relevant information and

research concerning the NWP, OWP, SI sites, and roles teachers assume during their SI experiences, in addition to the concept of communities of practice presented as a theoretical framework.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Review of Professional Literature

Under the overarching topic of professional development, the National Writing Project's (NWP) principles are wide in scope, its reach far and wide; therefore, this literature review narrows on specific aspects of the NWP and the Oklahoma Writing Project (OWP), including the annual invitational Summer Institute (SI). This research study centers on participants' experiences of a particular NWP site and, more specifically, one SI. Therefore, the roles participants assume – specifically as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders – within a particular community of practice and during the NWP professional development model enacted at SI sites frame this review of the literature. These various roles are significant to teachers' participation in SIs and potentially shape the experiences they have individually and collectively, as well as meanings they make and identities they develop during and after this professional development opportunity.

Because of the phenomenological nature of this study, various literature was identified, located, and analyzed prior to collecting data. Attending to recursive research and writing processes, however, I revisited this chapter after I collected data in order to review relevant literature in consideration of my findings. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) note, "in a phenomenological study, the literature is reviewed primarily following data collection so that the information in the literature does not preclude the researcher from being able to 'bracket' or suspend preconceptions" (p. 75). Much like the preface to this dissertation, focusing on the review of literature after collecting data allows me to bracket my own and others' experiences at NWP sites and, specifically, SIs. Before

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focusing on participants' roles, I first discuss the communities of practice framework, classify the NWP as a community of practice, and provide a brief overview of the history of NWP, OWP, and SI.

## Communities of Practice: A Framework

On the whole, communities of practice are ubiquitous on a local, national, and global scale. Whether families, colleagues, or friends, **"communities of practice are an integral part of our daily lives"** (Wenger, 1998, p. 7). Communities of practices exist within a wide range of personal and professional groups and settings. For the purpose of this research, communities of practice in the field of education, professional development, teaching, and learning are significant. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interaction on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) explore three communities of practice in consideration of their common purposes/goals, diverse memberships, participatory frameworks, connections with the larger community, and a reproduction cycle of membership and activities. These tenets assist in classifying particular groups as communities of practice.

For Wenger (1998), "practice is . . .a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful" (p. 51). Practice is grounded in the experience of meaning, and "meaning arises out of a process of negotiation that combines both participation and reification" (p. 135). Participation and reification are considered a duality, with participation involving living in the world, membership, acting, interacting, and mutuality and reification encompassing forms, points of focus,

documents, monuments, instruments, and projection (p. 63). Participation and reification are necessary to successful formation and prolongation of communities of practice in both the individual and the collective sense.

A particularly relevant aspect concerning practice revolves around the three dimensions of communities of practice. These include mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Wenger (1998) relates the three dimensions to learning in practice, arguing how "learning is what gives rise to communities of practice" and describing learning as "a source of social structure" (p. 96). Considering learning in communities of practice as a shared act, the matters of analysis and experience are significant in consideration of social aspects of learning. With these three dimensions in mind, Wenger (1998) describes a community of practice "as a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises" and further notes how "such communities hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effects on people's lives" (p. 85). Communities of practice, therefore, have implications for individual and collective participants.

In regards to individual and collective participation, Wenger (1998) notes how "the concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other" (p. 145). These facets are viewed not as dichotomies but instead as interconnected necessities for the formation of one's identity, as "it is through participation in a community that individuals develop their practices and identities" (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006, p. 650). Further concerning identity, engagement, imagination, and alignment encompass a sense of belonging within a community of practice. One's orientation within a community of practice

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(including one's direction and trajectory) impacts the formation of one's identity. Before providing a brief overview of the NWP and OWP and a review of literature related to participants' identities and roles within these particular communities of practice, I next connect the NWP organization to the previously discussed communities of practice framework.

## The National and Oklahoma Writing Projects

The NWP as a whole can be categorized as a community of practice; on a more local scale, the OWP and the invitational SI are communities of practice, as well. Tenets of a community of practice are evident in the NWP and local sites. Teachers across the nation involved with NWP have proclaimed their passion for writing and the teaching of writing. The NWP establishes common purposes/goals and, today, values and encourages diverse memberships – teachers from a variety of cultural groups, content areas, grade levels, and years of teaching experience. In a seven-year study of participants in NWP SIs, Stokes et al. (2008) report evidence of diversity in NWP institutes. The researchers note an ethnically diverse cadre of teachers, a range of grade levels (from Kindergarten through college), teachers of language arts and other subject areas, and a combination of early career and veteran teachers participating in NWP SI sites across the United States.

Participatory frameworks establish roles teachers assume during a wide variety of NWP activities, and teacher leaders make connections with the larger community at their school sites and beyond. In turn, a reproduction cycle of membership and activities results as teacher leaders present professional development, return to SI sites in leadership roles, and share their learning with others. In addition, the ideas of

participation and reification transfer to NWP SIs as participants engage in meaningful processes and craft related products.

Founded in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley, the NWP began at the Bay Area Writing Project's SI. James Gray, along with 28 friends and colleagues, met together as experts in the field of composition with the common goal of sharing their knowledge regarding writing and the teaching of writing. Gray, in his work supervising student teachers, aimed to provide veteran teachers the platform to share their expertise with others, including those beginning teachers. Too often, these veteran teachers' best practices were hidden behind closed doors. This seminal community of practice would eventually redefine and revitalize professional development for teachers of writing.

In the early years of the NWP, numerous researchers (Thomas, 1979; Thompson, 1979; Donlan, 1982; Stander, 1985; Stroble & Bratcher, 1990; Braswell & Berman, 1993) studied local writing project sites, including their SIs; staff development programs; and effects on teachers, students, and school sites. Gray's memoir *Teachers at the Center* (2000) offers a comprehensive overview of the beginnings of the NWP and sheds light on intricacies of SIs across the nation. Much research has been conducted at and on a plethora of NWP sites, but every site is unique, and teachers (due largely to their diversity, as described previously) might experience aspects of the NWP model differently.

The Oklahoma Writing Project (OWP) – established in 1978  - is one of nearly 200 NWP sites across the country. According to the OWP website (http://owp.ou.edu), "the Oklahoma Writing Project serves as a professional learning community that

identifies, celebrates, and enhances the professional role of successful Oklahoma classroom teachers" (About NWP, 2017). The OWP reports that more than 300 teachers have participated in the OWP SI since its inception. Held for three weeks in June each summer, the OWP SI invites teachers from across the state to write, teach, research, and lead within and beyond the community of practice. The OWP SI, however, is one of just 200 sites across the nation. While each site is different, all SIs follow a consistent framework resulting in coherent roles across sites.

## Roles of Participants at Summer Institutes

At each SI, invited participants gather at university-sponsored sites to engage in professional development in the role of writer, teacher, researcher, and leader. Much literature on the NWP, local sites, and the SI itself centers on the influence of this professional development opportunity on teachers and students once they return to the classroom in an attempt to validate the effectiveness of the SI (see Kaplan, 2008; Milner, Brannon, Brown, Cash, & Pritchard, 2009). In addition, Inverness Research conducted seven annual satisfaction surveys of participants in NWP SIs from 2000-2007. These reports provide a broad overview of participants' perceived benefits of the institutes for their teaching and their students' learning, including student achievement on writing tasks. While these types of studies are important for the broader NWP community of practice, the nature of this study concerns the intricacies of participants' experiences during a particular SI. The review of literature that follows, therefore, examines relevant empirical and practitioner research discussing SI participants as they engage in writing, teaching, researching, and leadership.

**Writing**

Over a three to five week period (the length of SIs differ across sites), teachers spend much time writing for a variety of purposes and audiences during SIs. Because writing activities are situated within particular communities of practice, forms and topics of writing vary based on sites and participants, but, generally, teachers engage in an array of both personal and professional writing throughout the SI. Whitney (2009) notes, ". . .the literature on NWP suggests that writing is a fundamental component of the NWP model's success in professional development" (p. 238; see also Gray, 2000, Lieberman and Wood, 2003, and Whitney, 2006). Participants at SI sites discover the importance of not only teaching writing, but also writing for themselves. In Smith and Wrigley's (2007) narrative inquiry study of four teacher writing groups, the researchers discuss how, during SIs, "teachers write . . .and . . .talk about writing, and about how this relates to teaching. They develop understandings about themselves as writers and teachers of writing, about the process of writing, and about themselves as individuals" (p. 79). Although what and how teachers write during the SI experience connects to their teaching, the act and process of writing – on its own – is a central focus. Writing activities, including quick writes, teaching philosophies, personal narratives, and additional topics and tasks, offer an opportunity for personal and professional expression.

The idea of teachers writing in personal and professional situations might be challenging to merge, initially, but the SI aims to connect what and how teachers write personally to the ways in which they approach the teaching of writing. Whitney's (2009) case study acknowledges the "situated nature of writing in the context of a

professional community" in which participants write in personal and professional genres (p. 253). Because writing at the SI involves participants' personal and professional identities, Whitney argues the tensions present at SI sites between personal and professional writing "are necessary components of the transformative experiences for which NWP summer institutes are known" (2009, p. 240). So, although participants may struggle to find an appropriate balance between their personal and professional lives and writing situations, the connection of the two often results in a better understanding of who they are as both people and as professionals.

Iyengar and Henkin's (2015) qualitative research study drawing on phenomenology and communities of practice focuses on narrative writing crafted by SI participants of the San Antonio Writing Project. 40 personal narratives were collected and analyzed, and the researchers determined that participants felt confident and comfortable to write about personal topics during the SI due to the "safe space" in which they engaged and the time carved out to write and share. Participants "shared personal narratives that might have evoked fear of exposure, ridicule, or stigma in a less supportive environment" (p. 19). Assuming the role of writer in a personal realm, writers require a trusting community in which they feel welcomed and valued.

Since participants are commonly required to write not just for personal purposes, but also in professional genres and modes, ". . .simultaneous writing and reflection on personal and professional concerns can result in powerful learning experiences for the writer that stretch into both personal and professional domains" (Whitney, 2009, p. 255). The role of teachers as writers within the NWP's professional community extends beyond professional identities and bleeds into who participants are as people, too.

Yagelski (2009) discusses the power of writing experiences, especially in the personal realm:

> . . .what we learn through the act of writing is not just the skills of writing; we learn about ourselves as human beings. . . .If we engage genuinely in the practice of writing, . . .we may learn something about living. Writing in this way can transform us . . .The writer writing is a human being living. And the act of writing can give that writer the means to change her life. (p. 21)

Yagelski argues for the power of writing for teachers and students alike, noting how the experience of writing has the potential to transform teachers as people on an individual level but also their identities within a professional community. Similarly, Frank (2001) presents an ethnographic study of an NWP teacher whose personal writing experiences during and after participating in an SI led to the creation of a writing community in her own classroom. The various types of writing in which SI participants engage (individually) and the formation of writing communities (collectively) leads to the SI's emphasis on writing groups writing, sharing, and providing feedback during the SI.

**Writing Groups.** The formation and enactment of writing groups constitutes a key component of NWP SI sites. Lieberman and Wood (2002) discuss participants engaging in small writing groups as a central tenet of invitational institutes. Moreover, Smith (2006) examines the writing aspect of SI sites and reports that most SI participants find the writing groups to be "the most satisfying part of the institute" because they "create deeply felt connections" with one another and their own writing practices (p. 12). Traditionally, writing groups are composed of a group of approximately four participants, in addition to a writing group coach, who meet several

times a week during the SI itself. These members bring a variety of writing pieces to their peers as they share their writing as well as give and receive feedback.

Smith and Wrigley's (2012) narrative inquiry focuses on the potential power of teachers' writing groups. In their study, participants from a variety of teacher writing groups reported writing processes and products facilitating a better understanding of themselves as both writers and teachers. Woodard (2015) describes how an individual's participation in an NWP writing group affected what and how he wrote during the SI but also transferred to writing practices in his classroom. In a sense, writing and teaching practices are both contextual and dependent on time, location, and interest.

A member of the 1974 University of California Summer Institute on the Teaching of Writing – the inservice model that eventually led to the Bay Area Writing Project and a foundation for NWP SI sites across the nation – Healy (1992) promotes the effectiveness of teacher writing groups. In her discussion of writing communities, Healy (1992) acknowledges the importance of engaging in writing and providing "sufficient time for them [teachers] to experience the frustrations and pleasures of writing within a trusting group" (p. 256). In turn, these practices allow teachers to discover "the crucial importance of *doing* writing, not just reading or talking *about* it . . ." (p. 256). The emphasis on engaging in writing themselves leads teachers to better conceptualize what writing is and can be for their students, too.

Drawing on Vygotsky's "theory that explains how the individual and the social are co-constitutive" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 98), Elbow (1968, 1993, 1998a, 1998b) embraces the communal aspect of writing, especially in his vision of the teacherless writing class. Elbow further encourages writers to experience the social

dimension of the writing process: "Give your papers to a friend to read – first for sharing, later for feedback. Get together with a small sharing or feedback group . . .you will feel immediate relief: new perspective, new energy" (1998a, p. 288). This focus on sharing and feedback is a key component of Elbow's writing process theory and his idea of the teacherless writing class and, moreover, a main tenet of the NWP's framework.

This core principle pertinent to Elbow – sharing writing – is present within and beyond writing groups across SI sites. A term particularly useful is "giving" – "the essential human act at the heart of writing" (1998a, p. 20). Writing project SIs, among other professional development opportunities within the organization, offer writing groups as an area designated for sharing one's personal and professional writing. Smith and Wrigley (2012) report that "teachers share stories of their personal and professional lives within the safety of the group who are not only part of a spoken conversation but who respond as listeners and readers to texts read aloud . . ." (p. 80). As previously mentioned, themes of trust and safety abound in consideration of participants' willingness to share a variety of writing pieces with the writing group. Whyte et al.'s (2007) quantitative study of secondary English language arts classrooms characterizes NWP SIs as " . . .a culture of warmth, empathy, and appreciation of individual and social differences" (p. 12). This culture allowed writing group participants to openly share their compositions with their peers.

A participant in Whitney's (2009) case study centered on personal and professional modes of writing during her experiences at an SI "reported a related shift in her perception of her importance and abilities . . .to the community she experienced in the Summer Institute, and to the writing group in particular" (p. 247). Participants'

notions of writing, including their own writing lives, might be affected by their engagement in writing groups. The writing group allows many SI participants to reframe their thoughts and actions about writing and the teaching of writing.

Elbow also devotes much time and attention to the role of an audience in consideration of writing processes, although he does caution against always keeping an audience in mind from the very beginning. For participants in this professional development program, audiences include fellow teachers, colleagues, writing coaches, and the broader public. Connecting feedback and audience, Augsburger (1998) describes her experiences with a writing group:

> My confidence as a writer grows when I seek and receive feedback. With each new perspective I get, I learn to separate myself from my writing and look at it through the eyes of a possible audience. I aim to write and then let go. No matter how intimate the writing, we are not our words. (p. 550)

Teachers' experiences with writing in a variety of genres and settings, and for a range of audiences, can transfer to their work in the classroom. So, too, does the NWP aim to shed light on audience awareness for student writers.

Providing feedback through writing support groups is also aligned with NWP's values. In writing project SIs, teachers do not just write and share their writing with others; they also give and receive various forms of feedback. Smith and Wrigley (2012) suggest that "reading aloud, the response of a known readership and the multi-layered conversations which grow out of writing and response play a crucial part in professional development and the potential for change" (p. 81). By receiving feedback from their peers, participants engage in recursive writing processes including revising and editing,

and the goal is for their students to do the same. Whitney (2008) notes that "in practicing a new skill with support from others, we not only gain confidence through their help and feedback – we also get better at the skill itself by practicing and adapting to their feedback" (p. 174). Feedback is a central component of a social writing environment implemented at SI sites and can have positive impacts on writing – both for teachers and students alike.

      **Teaching and Practicing Writing.** Feedback relates to the collaborative nature of writing processes and products at SI sites: "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" (About NWP, 2017). Hence, the NWP's community of practice values writing for all students, regardless of grade level or subject area. Teachers from a variety of backgrounds and who teach a range of grade levels and a diverse mix of content areas collaborate at Institutes as writing teachers and writers.

      Another tenet of the NWP regards writing as an activity that should be taught and practiced – not simply assigned – at both the elementary and secondary level (About NWP, 2017). During SIs, teachers of writing take on the role of writers and, as a result, spend much time writing, but they also connect those writing practices to writing pedagogy. Cathy Fleischer, co-director of an NWP site, encourages participants of her local SI to consider and reflect on who they are as not just teachers, but also writers: "if we want teachers to think carefully about how they teach writing, we must begin with their own experiences as writers" (2004, p. 26). At SI sites, teachers take on the role of writers and potentially discover their voices through words on a page. Though the act of

writing, teachers are able to connect their own writing to their teaching practices.

Whitney (2009) notes that "for teachers to learn through writing, they need

opportunities to engage in the full range of writing" (p. 256). This range involves a

variety of writing processes, including sharing, revising, editing, and publishing in

writing group settings at SIs. Teachers' learning experiences in writing groups can often

transfer to their work in classrooms with students.

> When individuals write what matters to them, the value of writing is
>
> foregrounded and may well reveal what lessons might best help them improve.
>
> If they are to engage with individual writers, teachers need to be able to draw on
>
> understandings which are grounded in practice and in one's sense of self.
>
> Teachers make changes to practice because of the confidence derived from
>
> writing, being heard and of hearing that stories of others. They draw on the
>
> experience in their classrooms. Teachers' experiences as writers can influence
>
> how they teach writing as well as how they view their students as writers.
>
> (Smith & Wrigley, 2012, p. 82)

For the NWP, writing is not solely about a finished product. Instead, a focus on

writing processes is valued. Pritchard (1987), when discussing the NWP model, argues

"that the process of developing a composition will be emphasized over its product

features" (p. 52). Throughout the SI, teachers engage in various writing processes:

brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, to name a few. On a daily

basis, quick writing serves as a brainstorming and prewriting activity: a prompt is

posed, and participants spend five minutes responding to the prompt without regard for

conventions or correctness. Instead, the goal of a quick write is to get words on a page.

From there, teachers participate in "such activities as brainstorming, topic generating, categorizing, nonstop writing, and peer group response" (Pritchard, 1987, p. 52). Through these processes, it is evident that writing is not simply a natural act, but instead one that is taught and learned.

As previously discussed, teachers spend much time in the role of writer during SIs: "teachers write, read, and respond to one another's writing and talk about their processes and products" (Wilson, 1994, p. 5). Teachers engage in quick writes, write with and for writing groups, take original pieces through writing processes, and publish their work via online and print platforms for a wider audience.

**Recursive Writing Processes.** Although an NWP core principle acknowledges "there is no single right approach to teaching writing," it is made explicit that "some practices prove to be more effective than others" (About NWP, 2016). Writing processes are an effective practice promoted by the NWP. In fact, a process-focused approach to writing and the teaching of writing examined by Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006); Englert, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2006); and Prior (2006) is a key tenet of NWP sites, including the OWP SI. Importantly, this process varies from teacher to teacher and, in turn, student to student. The process emphasized through the NWP is recursive in nature and often dependent on genre and audience. Bratcher and Stroble (1993, 1994) conducted a three-year longitudinal evaluation of an NWP site and concluded that SIs allow teacher participants to better conceptualize the writing process as recursive and non-linear as a result of their own writing and teaching practices in which they engaged during the SI itself.

The focus of NWP SI sites, then, is two-fold: to consider how writing processes

shape teachers of writing as writers themselves but also to consider how students might benefit from bearing in mind and participating in a variety of writing processes. Researchers including Whyte et al. (2007) report how teachers engaging in writing, sharing their writing, providing feedback, and presenting writing practices can benefit not only themselves as writers but their students as well. In this quantitative study, researchers found a significant correlation between NWP teacher consultants, their writing lives, and their students' scores on writing tasks.

Elbow (1993) discusses the "experience during the process of writing, not just . . .the resultant text of product" and goes on to describe how "'process' connotes experience" (p. 57). For teachers and students alike, the NWP values a process-focused approach, albeit recursive and nonlinear, to writing and writing instruction, as it is through those experiences that writers are able to plan, draft, and revise their work as they engage in meaning making. Applebee and Langer's (2009) study on writing instruction notes that "teachers of English language arts . . .respond positively to professional development experiences that help them support their students' reading and writing processes" (pp. 25-26). A way in to supporting students' writing processes is for teachers to actively engage in writing processes themselves.

The NWP's website offers a plethora of resources for teachers of writing, among them a section devoted entirely to the writing process, including prewriting, revision, and publishing. In consideration of these resources, teachers of writing are encouraged to view writing as a process both for themselves as teachers and writers and for their students. A meta-analysis of writing instruction presented by Graham and Perin (2007) discusses "when teachers were involved in professional development to use the process

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writing approach, there was a moderate effect on the quality of students' writing" (p. 461). The researchers go on to validate the NWP's emphasis on the process writing approach to teaching, both in professional development and classroom settings. In sum, although the NWP does not argue for one "correct" way to teach writing, it "has traditionally been associated with a process approach" (Whitney, 2008, p. 150). With this in mind, teachers navigate a variety of processes as they take on the role of writer for a variety of purposes and audiences during their SI experience.

## Teaching and Learning

A feature central to NWP sites involves a teachers teaching teachers model, much different from many other traditional professional development settings. Gray (2000), in his memoir of the early years of the NWP, describes the influences of UC Berkeley's teacher supervision program, in which practicing teachers in the field acted as supervisors of preservice teachers. This theme of teachers teaching teachers transferred to the NWP model of professional development.

Lieberman and Wood (2002) discuss a "dual commitment from teachers" in which they "share what they know" and "learn from what colleagues know" during SIs (p. 41). Positive results from this model are evident as teacher participants develop confidence in themselves as well as build a community of experts in the field. In a study of teacher participants of the Central Connecticut Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute, Valerie (2012) points to the communal aspect of teaching and learning present during the SI. In the role of teacher and learner, participants collaborate to make meaning of writing practices and pedagogy. As they participate in trusting SI communities, teachers might feel more comfortable taking risks as they learn and

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practice strategies related to the teaching of writing in the roles of teacher and learner.

Bratcher and Stroble (1994), in their historical framework preceding their mixed methods study of a particular NWP site, describe how "individual sites of the National Writing Project implement the teachers-teaching-teachers model in ways that are appropriate to their own locales" (p. 67). It is significant that local NWP sites are allowed the autonomy to suitably structure their professional development activities. Individual participants, too, are allowed much freedom in terms of what and how they teach one another.

During the SI, teacher participants' expertise is valued and shared with the greater community. Wood and Lieberman (2000) interviewed numerous SI participants and report how the SI encourages "teachers to author their professional lives" (p. 266). This entails teachers contributing what they know and do in their classrooms as well as collecting useful practices and strategies from their peers. In the role of teacher and learner, SI participants refine and validate their practices through active participation in teaching demonstrations.

**Teaching Demonstrations.** An explicit way in which teachers teach other teachers during SIs involves presentations of teaching demonstrations. Lieberman and Wood (2004) describe teaching demonstrations as participants sharing classroom strategies with their peers. Teachers are able to share best practices with fellow participants, and a variety of strategies are presented and practiced over the course of the SI. Meanwhile, participants engage in learning and writing processes, taking on the role of learners and students.

In his memoir, Gray (2000) acknowledges the many facets of the writing project

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and admits it is difficult to pinpoint the "heart" of the writing project, as there are many different "hearts." However, he argues, "a good case can be made that the teacher demonstrations are a likely Number One Heart" (p. 78). The SI offers a professional development format unlike many others in that teachers themselves are the experts and share their ideas and practices with one another. Moreover, teachers do not just describe their practices but engage participants in the activities in order to promote deeper learning and understanding. Lieberman and Miller (2005) conclude " . . .teachers, like students, need opportunities to engage actively in their own learning, rather than being told what to do" (p. 71). Participants take an active role as learners during their peers' teaching demonstrations. This learning by doing model allows teachers to potentially transfer these practices to their own teaching.

In Lieberman and Wood's (2003) study on UCLA and Oklahoma State Writing Project sites, the researchers discuss "knowledge that teachers have accrued over the years" and describe the NWP's professional development model as "a format that makes it possible for teachers to present that knowledge to one another and construct new knowledge while also engaging theoretical knowledge" (p. 99). Dualities of theory and practice, in addition to teaching and learning, are embraced as teachers teach and learn with and from one another during teaching demonstrations, authors' chairs, and writing groups. Lieberman and Wood (2004) emphasize the knowledge and skills teachers obtain from their own practices. Through experiences, teacher experts plan and present their teaching demonstrations as their peers engage in the activities themselves.

In a particular NWP site studied by Lieberman and Wood (2004), the researchers note that "teachers played the roles of both experts and learners, recognized

and built knowledge from practice, and encouraged one another to continually seek better ways for reaching students" (p. 50). This principle allows teacher participants to take active roles in teaching and learning, as they aim to share and gain knowledge, strategies, and skills within an established community of practice. Another study focusing on teacher learning in professional communities by Lieberman and Wood (2002b), reveals that participants at SI sites engage in the role of teacher when they present their teaching demonstration and provide feedback on presentations and in writing groups but also engage in the role of learner as they engage as audience members during presentations, read their own pieces in author's chair, and discover best practices during book discussions.

## Researching

A focus during annual SIs involves not just the acts of writing and teaching, but, in addition, the research of theoretical orientations and best practices regarding writing and the teaching of writing. Teachers learn, practice, and present not just English language arts content, but also writing and research processes. Nagin (2012) notes that "because writing often involves complex thinking and problem solving, teachers need more than a set of fixed textbook procedures to teach it well and address the diverse needs of student writers" (p. 15). Research processes at SIs allow teacher participants to consider theoretical and practical literature related to writing and the teaching of writing and how it might influence their teaching philosophy and teaching practices.

As students bring with them a variety of prior knowledge and experiences regarding writing, it is significant that teachers make informed decisions about what and how they teach writing. According to Bratcher and Stroble (1994), "the Project is

committed to sharing what is known about the teaching of writing both from research and from effective practice" (p. 67). This bridge between theory and practice allows teachers to not only discover new practices but also validate their existing pedagogies.

Lieberman and Wood (2002b) discuss how "teachers are introduced to a wide variety of reading materials including books to expand their own classroom library. They learn by reading and discussing research on literacy and by being taught by experienced TCs who have become experts in particular areas" (p. 73). Through an assortment of research-based practices, including integrating secondary research into teaching demonstrations, NWP sites aim to promote an understanding and implementation of pedagogical content knowledge related to writing and the teaching of writing.

Grossman (1990) describes four components of pedagogical content knowledge: "knowledge and beliefs about the purposes for teaching a subject," "knowledge of students' understanding, conceptions, and misconceptions of particular topics in a subject matter," "knowledge of curriculum materials available for teaching a particular subject matter," and "knowledge of instructional strategies and representations for teaching particular topics" (pp. 8-9). These facets of pedagogical content knowledge require an understanding of not only diverse students' needs but also research on writing and the teaching of writing; pedagogical content knowledge goes beyond traditional, textbook-based approaches to teaching.

During NWP SIs, teachers of writing obtain new and enhance existing pedagogical content knowledge through "theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing" (About NWP, 2017). A key component of SIs involves

reading recent and relevant research on writing and the teaching of writing. Presentation and writing coaches at SI sites might present practitioner and research-based literature as participants discuss implications for practice. Moreover, teachers take on the roles of writers themselves, allowing for a perspective-shift regarding what it means to teach writing; writing teachers should be writers, too. On the whole, teachers are able to navigate the intricacies of gaining pedagogical content knowledge through the variety of practices grounded in research that are embedded within work occurring at NWP sites.

NWP professional development opportunities, including SIs, "provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers . . .to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically" (About NWP, 2017). Teachers spend much time in the role of researcher during the SI; they participate in research article studies in which they read, analyze, and critique research related to the field of writing instruction. In addition, teachers connect their best practices to current research in the field. Fleischer (2004) describes how this research process often causes teachers to reflect on their practices and consider rationales for their curriculum and pedagogy. Gray (2000) contends "teachers need to immerse themselves in the *why* as well as the *what* of their work" (p. 95). Validating and refining their own practices can serve teachers well as they consider if and how their students can engage in similar literacy processes.

Through the act of creating and presenting a teaching demonstration, teachers locate, evaluate, analyze, and incorporate relevant research to support their own practices. "A summer institute is enough time to investigate research that addresses each teacher's most urgent questions, to create a hunger for more knowledge, and to

establish a community of scholars who will continue to read and study available research as well as become researchers themselves" (Smith, 1996, p. 691). In the role of researchers, participants consider what topics matter most for themselves and their students. Research on these topics leads to support for their own teaching practices and for the identification of research-based practices they might not have considered previously.

Integrating ELA content within writing processes, among other literacy practices, is important when considering a teacher's' pedagogical content knowledge. Griffith et al. (2014) describe staff development presented by an OWP teacher consultant who "wanted to emphasize the importance of the process with content that was applicable to district and state lesson objectives" (p. 522). It is significant that teachers frame writing processes and products within ELA content, including reading, literature, language, and speaking/listening. By weaving these ELA components together, what, how, and why teachers teach can speak to the holistic nature of the field.

Of concern to some is the extent to which participants actually engage in research during and after the SI. Gomez (1988) posits that writing project sites might do better to encourage participants to engage in action research during the SI and in their classrooms in order to support inquiry. Gomez also argues that research is often left in the hands of those at the university, resulting in a disconnect from teachers' practical realities. Gray, founder of the Bay Area Writing Project, and Daniels and Zemelman, co-directors of the Illinois Writing Project, refute Gomez's claims, reporting how the NWP promotes and supports action research, pointing to teacher research written and published by NWP teacher consultants. Now - almost 30 years after Gomez's assertions

- NWP researchers focus on how teachers might engage in both primary and secondary research. For instance, Pella (2011) shares a lesson study of four teachers who participated in SIs and reports how teachers engage in action research during the SI and in their classrooms in an attempt to engage their students in meaningful writing experiences.

Part of this argument involves what counts as research. Does research involve teachers reading and discussing books and articles focused on the teaching of writing? Validating teachers' practices? Implementing research-based strategies learned from their peers? Conducting action research with their students in their classrooms? Research at SI sites involves all of the above; the role of research is multi-faceted. While this research is explored during SIs, it also extends to teachers' realities in the classroom setting.

## Leading

As previously demonstrated, there is much more to NWP SIs than writing. Tedrow (2016) cautions against focusing solely on the "writing" aspect of the NWP and instead argues for a key component of SI sites: leadership. To begin, all SIs are "facilitated by acknowledged leaders," including a site director, SI directors, and coaches (Marsh, Knudsen, & Knudsent, 1987, p. 39). In addition, as participants in NWP sites, teachers take on immediate leadership roles during and after the professional development experience as they implement best practices and share their knowledge with colleagues at their school sites. Research studies present vignettes of SI participants describing how teachers become leaders as a result of their participation and engagement at NWP sites (see Lieberman and Miller's 2005 story of Yvonne

Divans-Hutchinson).

According to the NWP, "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" (About NWP, 2017). When teachers have a theoretical and practical grounding in their practices, they can offer research-based justifications for their pedagogical decisions. These, in turn, can shape what and how teachers of writing teach and do in and out of the classroom. While SI participants assume leadership roles during the SI itself, they also transfer those experiences to the work they do in their classrooms, schools, and communities after the SI. Gray (2000) discusses the ways in which teachers lead beyond the SI through inservice programs, as the NWP provides teachers with opportunities to serve as leaders through local projects.

In their 2007 presentation at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Lieberman and Friedrich (2007) detail vignettes of 10 teacher-leaders. Drawing from their experiences at writing project sites, these teachers report a sense of growth because of their participation at SIs. Lieberman and Friedrich (2007) suggest "participation in the writing project supports teachers in developing the knowledge of how to work with peers and the confidence to do so . . .[and] encourages them . . .to go public with both their successes and their questions" (p. 30). A foundation for leadership is fostered during the SI, and as teachers extend their leadership role beyond the SI itself, others might benefit from their knowledge and skills.

**Teacher Consultants.** Upon completion of the SI, participants become teacher consultants (TCs) and are afforded opportunities to share their knowledge with other teachers in professional development settings. Lieberman and Wood discuss the variety

of ways in which TCs become leaders beyond the SI, as they are

> frequently kept quite busy providing professional development for schools
>
> and districts, . . .get involved in special interest groups on topic of particular
>
> concern, . . .[and] lead or participate in teacher research groups that meet
>
> throughout the year. (2002b, p. 71)

Lieberman and Mace (2008) also emphasize leadership roles of teacher consultants who develop as leaders during SIs and go on to provide professional development for schools and teachers.

In addition, teacher leaders can disseminate their knowledge and understandings gleaned from the SI with a variety of audiences in and out of school settings. In his work detailing the importance of writing in schools, Nagin (2012) describes how "policymakers and school administrators, no less than teachers and parents, can benefit from understanding current trends and issues in the teaching of writing and the vital role it can play in achieving quality and excellence in our classrooms" (p. 5). Especially in consideration of today's educational mandates, NWP teacher participants as leaders and consultants can share their experiences and knowledge with colleagues, administrators, and stakeholders in order to affect change.

In addition, it is important that teachers of writing are informed practitioners, as it is through their knowledge base that teacher confidence and autonomy can be positively affected. Dierking and Fox (2012), as a result of their two year grounded theory study, discovered that, because of their participation in an NWP professional development model, teachers' "sense of power – their ability to act, their strength of self and self-worth, and their authority – seemed to change" (p. 129). With an increase in

confidence, teachers may feel a sense of empowerment to share their knowledge gains with a wider audience. This recognition of leadership potential is described by Lieberman and Wood (2003), who note how "teachers come to understand that they are participating in a program that places their knowledge and expertise at the center" (p. 49). Teachers take on roles requiring individual and collective responsibility due to this newfound understanding.

An increased sense of accountability often permeates SI sites as teachers discover their roles as leaders. Teachers who engage in NWP professional development sites, including SIs, "are encouraged to facilitate learning for their peers, create and lead work groups, do research, share and discuss articles and books, read and write for publication, and so forth" (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 99). With the support of NWP sites and fellow participants, teachers can become leaders in their schools, districts, states, and the nation as a whole. Beyond SI sites,

> teachers create multiple forums to take their work public, such as presentations for parents and professional conferences, demonstrations for and critical conversations with colleagues, articles for professional journals, professional discussions via electronic conference, and contributions to local newsletters and newspapers. (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, p. 41)

Teachers' voices can extend outside of this community of practice, allowing teachers to affect change beyond the SI. Smith (1996) notes how the NWP encourages teachers "to initiate change, to take the lead in improving the profession" (p. 690). She claims the NWP model places teachers in the role of leader, much different from traditional models of professional development. In turn, teacher leaders might have the skills and

confidence to make informed decisions and become change agents in and out of their classrooms.

## Conclusion

Over the past 40 years, thousands of teachers across the nation have been invited to and participated in annual SIs. During these weeks, participants assume a variety of roles, including writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders. These roles often extend beyond the SI itself, as teachers carry newfound writing, teaching, and researching practices with them back to their school sites, colleagues, and communities as a whole. Moreover, participants often become teacher leaders during and after SI as they share their knowledge with their peers and other teachers. This chapter examined research concerning these various roles. Generally, the literature provides a thorough overview of what SIs entail and what teachers practice at SI sites.

A number of quantitative and qualitative research studies (including case studies, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry) have been referenced and discussed to demonstrate roles teachers assume as members of this community of practice. This research, however, extends the existing literature by allowing participants to share their own stories of their lived experiences, providing a more in-depth view of individual teachers and the community of practice as a whole. Therefore, I employed a phenomenological research design focusing on participants' personal and professional voices. Just as the frameworks of the NWP, OWP, and SI sites across the nation value teachers' voices in writing groups and teaching demonstrations, among other roles and activities, so too does this research focus on the first person perspective of the 2016 OWP SI participants. Teachers' voices at the center can serve as a model for this and

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future research on the NWP and particular communities of practice, including local SI

sites. The following chapter details the methodology of this research and outlines the

research and writing processes in which I engaged throughout this study.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Methodology

## Introduction

Because I am interested in participants' lived experiences of a specific professional development opportunity, the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute (OWP SI), a phenomenological qualitative study seems particularly fitting for this research. Many qualitative researchers discuss phenomenology, including Creswell (2013, 2014), Giorgi and Giorgi (2009), Moustakas (1994), Seidman (2013), Vagle (2014), van Manen (1990, 2014), and Yin (2011). Phenomenology's roots, however, stem from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger's philosophical viewpoints (van Manen, 2014 p. 88). On the whole, conducting phenomenological research allows for an in-depth description of participants' individual and collective lived experiences, reflections, and meanings gleaned from a shared phenomenon, in this case, the 2016 OWP SI. Research and writing processes centered on this methodology relate to my primary and secondary research questions:

· *What are teacher participants' lived experiences of a specific professional development opportunity, the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

· *How do participants make meaning of their experiences of the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

· *What roles do participants assume during the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

· *How do various roles influence individual and collective experiences of*

*teachers at the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

Creswell (2014) describes phenomenological research as "a design of inquiry . . .in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants" (p. 14). In this study, participants described their lived experiences of a particular phenomenon in which they engaged: the 2016 OWP SI. This study follows a hermeneutic phenomenological design, drawn to the "*in-ness*" (Vagle, 2014) of participants' experiences of this particular phenomenon. This Heideggerian approach to phenomenology argues that "intended meanings are conceived in being and language" (Vagle, 2014, p. 39). Therefore, throughout the research process, I utilized participants' applications, writing and teaching documents, interviews, and my own field notes and memos as a participant observer in order to thoroughly portray the participants' individual and collective lived experiences of this particular phenomenon.

In consideration of previously discussed theoretical assumptions, it is significant that "phenomena are understood as holistic and complex systems and are viewed within particular social and/or historical contexts" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 38). The phenomenon of the 2016 OWP SI is certainly socially situated, including its geographical location, participant demographics, and research base. Therefore, it is important to consider this phenomenon within its larger social and cultural setting, including the broader NWP organization.

## A Phenomenological Research Design

Hundreds of teachers have participated in the OWP SI since its inception in 1978, and the experiences of each teacher and each summer's group are likely unique.

This phenomenological study explores the distinctive experiences of individual 2016 OWP SI participants as well as their shared experiences as members of one community of practice. As part of this exploration, I attempt to offer an in depth, detailed explanation of my discovery of the underlying structure or essence of participants' experiences. Investigating at an individual level, initially, and then moving toward a collective synthesis, is characteristic of phenomenological research. Finlay (2012) notes that,

> Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts, set down in everyday language and avoiding abstract intellectual generalizations. The researcher proceeds by reflectively analyzing these descriptions, perhaps idiographically first, then by offering a synthesized account, for example, identifying general themes about the essence of the phenomenon. Importantly, the phenomenological researcher aims to go beyond surface expressions or explicit meanings to read between the lines so as to access implicit dimensions and intuitions. (p. 10)

The idiographic approach mentioned by Finlay (2012) centers on unique individuals' subjective experiences. In this research, participants' reflections on their experiences might assist in determining if, how, and why the SI experience was meaningful for them. According to van Manen (1990),

> The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

Absent from much of the research regarding NWP SI sites (and the OWP SI in particular) is individual experiences and reflections of this specific professional development opportunity. Existing research demonstrates much evidence of teachers' lives after the SI, teachers' pedagogy once they return to their classrooms, and the positive effects on students' writing. However, in order to better understand the deeper meaning and significance of this particular phenomenon itself, the 2016 OWP SI, participants' own lived experiences and reflections on those experiences is the focus of this research project.

The field of education is experiencing a taxing time when, as described in Chapter One, professional development on the whole is scrutinized and, in the state of Oklahoma, funding for staff development at state, district, and local levels has been drastically cut. Therefore, allowing participants' voices to come to life as they describe their experiences of specific professional development opportunities is paramount for our profession. Who better to share the intricacies of this professional development opportunity than the participants themselves?

Van Manen (2014) describes phenomenological research in regard to practice, arguing, "the ultimate aim of a phenomenology of practice is . . .to nurture a measure of thoughtfulness and tact in the practice of our professions and in everyday life" (p. 31). The profession of teaching is certainly one that deserves thoughtful and tactful attention. Especially given the negative dispositions toward the profession locally and state and nation wide, this phenomenological study can provide rich perspective and insight into what teachers do and experience as part of their practice. This research can offer teachers a voice to share their experiences during a professional development

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phenomenon, especially since, as previously discussed, teachers' voices are often squelched in traditional professional development settings.

## Setting and Participants

The setting for this research was the 2016 OWP SI, held in Norman, Oklahoma, on the campus of a local technology center near the University of Oklahoma. The SI spanned three weeks in June 2016. Invited teachers gathered from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm (although many lingered much later) from June 6-9; 13-16; and 20-23, 2016. Additionally, participants presented portions of their teaching demonstrations on June 24 at The Power of Teaching Symposium, also held at the local technology center.

In the spring of 2016, potential participants completed an online application for the invitational SI. On April 2, 2016, as part of the application process, the OWP director, co-director, and staff interviewed potential fellows for the 2016 OWP SI. Prior to the SI, all invited teachers attended an orientation on the campus of the University of Oklahoma on Saturday, April 16, from 8:30 am until 4:00 pm.

16 teachers were selected for the 2016 OWP SI; 14 accepted their invitation to the Institute and were subsequently invited to participate in this research. All 14 teachers provided consent to participate in this research, and 13 of the 14 completed the SI. Considering phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) notes that "it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 155). Therefore, a criterion type of sampling best fit this particular study. The number of teachers selected for the 2016 OWP SI and the number of potential participants for this study are noteworthy, as Creswell (2013) cites Polkinghorne (1989) who reports that "interviews with 5 to 25 people" (p. 149) are ideal for a phenomenological study. By

inviting all selected teachers to participate, I aimed to share each of their stories in order

to offer rich, thick descriptions – through interviews, observations, and documents –  of

participants' experiences on an individual and collective level.

In addition, I asked myself throughout the research and writing processes the

important question posed by van Manen (2014) when considering sampling: "How

many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study

in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of this or that phenomenon?" (p.

353). As I considered the phenomenon of the 2016 OWP SI, I felt it was necessary to

include all participants in order to adequately portray this experience and meaning from

both an individual and collective stance. In an attempt to "gather enough experientially

rich accounts that make possible the figuration of powerful experiential examples or

anecdotes that help to make contact with life as it is lived" (van Manen, 2014, p. 353), I

not only invited all teachers who were accepted to the 2016 OWP SI to participate in

my research, but I also included all 13 participants who completed the SI in my study

from start to finish.

On the first day of the SI, teachers were asked to agree to participate in this

research. (Appendix A includes the informed consent form approved by the University

of Oklahoma's IRB for this study, and Appendix B includes the IRB's letter of approval

for this research.) The "good work" described by Seidman (2013) requires the

researcher to "go over the informed consent form with their participant to make sure

they understand and take the document seriously" (p. 140). A verbal recruitment script

assisted with ensuring the informed consent process was ethical. I wanted potential

participants to know the nature of my research, including specific expectations and

responsibilities on both of our parts. All 2016 OWP SI teacher participants who appear in the findings chapters agreed to participate in my research.

## Methods

### Data Collection

Three types of data were collected for this research project: interviews, observations, and documents. As a primary source of data collection, I interviewed each participant multiple times: informal interviews during the SI, a scheduled "long" interview immediately following the SI, and informal email correspondence in the months following the SI. Moustakas (1994) explains how "typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question" (p. 114). As part of the scheduled interview, I asked participants to bring their SI portfolios, which included writing pieces and their teaching demonstration. Participants were asked to think aloud through their writing and teaching processes and products during the scheduled interview. Additionally, I attended the 2016 OWP SI as a participant observer, video recorded all sessions, and crafted field notes and memos along the way. Finally, I collected and examined various documents, including consenting participants' applications for the 2016 OWP SI, written reflections, and online (b)log posts.

**Conversational interviews**. A modified version of the three-part interview proposed by Seidman (2013) was applied as part of this study. One long interview with each participant served as a primary source of data gathering and analysis throughout this research process. Interviews, for van Manen (1990), allow for "a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a source for

developing richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (p. 66). The stories participants told can assist in understanding the OWP SI on a more meaningful level.

Because I am interested in the lived experiences of participants and the stories they have to tell, I agree with Seidman's rationale for interviewing as a method of data collection: "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories," and "stories are a way of knowing" (2013, p. 7). Though many generalizations exist regarding NWP SI sites, SI participants' individual and collective stories of the SI itself are often neglected. Seidman (2013) goes on to discuss the significance of meaning making through interviews and the importance of valuing individuals' stories as part of the data collection process.

Interviews were unstructured due to the phenomenological nature of this research. Van Manen (1990) notes that, particularly with phenomenology, "it is impossible to offer ready-made questions" (p. 67). Moreover, interviewing in phenomenological research "is designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 94). However, the questions outlined in Appendix C served as a guide for each long interview. These questions were only a starting place, as follow-up exploratory questions depended on participants' responses.

Informal interviews occurred sporadically throughout the three-week SI. Long interviews occurred during the last week of June and first week of July, 2016. Follow up interviews were conducted via email correspondence in the fall of 2016. Participants were contacted during and after the OWP SI to set up a mutually convenient time for

the long interview, which occurred at a comfortable, mutually convenient location determined by the researcher and participant, and each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes.

Brief, informal interviews during the SI allowed participants to describe their experiences in the moment. I spoke with each participant multiple times during the SI. Often, I would ask a participant to share her experiences sharing a piece in Author's Chair, presenting her teaching demonstration, or engaging in the writing group. In addition, I asked participants to expand on ideas shared during writing groups and whole-group discussions. These interviews were usually short, yet informative, as I was able to consider how participants were experiencing the SI in real-time.

The long interview immediately following the SI focused on participants' experiences coming to and going through the 2016 OWP SI. Life experiences leading up to their decision to participate in this professional development opportunity as well as their lived experiences during the OWP SI allowed for stories to begin to take shape. To assist with the formation of these stories, I asked participants to bring with them their OWP portfolio and discuss their writings and their teaching demonstration. This allowed for experiences as writers, teachers, and researchers to be a central focus.

The follow up email correspondence centered on reflections of participants' experiences once back at their respective school sites or other professional settings. Participants reflected on meanings gained from the OWP SI and considered if and how those experiences mattered now. As they made and reflected on meanings through their lived experiences during and after the 2016 OWP SI, I attempted to pinpoint what themes emerged for individual participants and collectively for the group as a whole.

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**Close observations.** I acted as a participant observer (Creswell, 2013, pp. 166-177) during the OWP SI orientation on April 16, 2016. Throughout the orientation, I interacted with teachers as they participated in quick writes, share alouds, icebreaker activities, teaching demonstration activities, and, traditional to OWP events, snacks and lunch. I only knew one of the teachers well, but I knew all of the coaches, the co-directors, the in-service director, and director, due to my previous engagement in OWP settings, including the 2015 OWP SI. I recognized a few faces from previous professional development workshops (OWP and otherwise, including the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of English, and K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal), but I also met many new colleagues.

Van Manen notes that a phenomenological researcher should attempt to "enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant study material" and goes on to argue that "the best way to enter a person's lifeworld is to participate in it" (1990, p. 69). In turn, I engaged as a participant observer throughout the entire research process. By attending and participating in the 2016 OWP SI itself, I was able to record field notes, interact with participants on a regular basis, and conduct informal interviews throughout the SI.

In addition to observing the orientation meeting, I observed multiple sessions, days, and times during the SI as well as The Power of Teaching Symposium. During observations, I engaged in and video recorded Author's Chairs, quick writes, teaching demonstrations, and writing and presentation group meetings. Creswell (2013) discusses four types of observers, including participant as observer:

The researcher is participating in the activity at the site. The participant role is

more salient than the research role. This may help the researcher gain insider

views and subjective data. However, it may be distracting for the researcher to

record data when he or she is integrated into the activity. (pp. 166-167)

In order to discover the lived experiences of participants, I wanted to engage in their

processes, activities, and events instead of looking from the outside in. As previously

mentioned, I video recorded many aspects of the SI so as not to be torn between my role

as participant observer and researcher. In the end, I felt as though participants were

more open, honest, and willing to participate in my research – especially during

interviews – due to the fact that I was an active member of their community of practice.

Additionally, I kept field notes observing participants' words, behaviors, and

attitudes. Van Manen (1990) discusses how "close observation involves an attitude of

assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to

situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those

situations" (p. 69). Not only did these observations help me better understand the

activities associated with the SI, but they also served as a foundation for my perceptions

of teachers' experiences during the SI. Moreover, my field notes allowed for talking

points during informal interviews conducted during the SI and the long interview with

each participant immediately following the SI.

**Documents.** Several types of documents were collected as part of this research.

First, the OWP director provided completed 2016 OWP SI applications of all

consenting participants. These applications included demographic information for each

participant: school district/site, subject/grade level currently teaching, formal education,

and teacher experience. Also, open-ended questions regarding the applicant's

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professional and personal life as a writer and teacher were integrated. A copy of the full application is included in Appendix D. Applications assisted in composing vignettes of each participant and also considered participants' experiences with teaching and writing before the 2016 OWP SI.

In addition to the applications, participants were asked to share their portfolio writing pieces as well as their teaching demonstration. Although these artifacts were discussed during the interviews, I consulted the online (b)log (https://owpsi.wordpress.com) for participants' writing and collected each participant's teaching demonstration packet during their presentation.

The online (b)log contained daily logs and writings of participants. Each morning and afternoon, an SI fellow was asked to create the log of events. The next day, the participant presented the log to the group. This was posted online, along with individual writing selections as decided upon by participants. Fellows commented on one another's writing on the blog, providing feedback via the "bless, address, and press" model; writers could ask for peers to bless their writing through positive feedback, address particular issues with their writing, or press them to expand on certain aspects of their writing.  This, in addition to other documents, interviews, and observations, offered further insight into participants' lived experiences both as a writer and as a teacher.

## Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, the first step in data analysis processes for this research involved bracketing my story and personal experiences of the phenomenon. Because I participated in the 2015 OWP SI, I aimed, initially, to "set aside . . .[my]

personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). Data analysis in phenomenological research requires the researcher to "draw out the concrete ways in which phenomena are lived" as qualitative researchers "want research participants to bring us to their experiences of the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2014, p. 58). The end goal of this non-linear data analysis process was to discover essential themes from the synthesis of conversational interviews, close observations, and documents in order to answer the primary research questions detailed at the beginning of this chapter.

This theming process involves close reading and writing activities utilizing the collected data. Van Manen (2014) notes that "'analyzing' thematic meanings of a phenomenon (a lived experience) is a complex and creative process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure" (p. 320). A first step to successful data analysis involves organizing all collected data, including each participant's application, interview transcriptions, writing and teaching demonstration artifacts, and any relevant field notes or memos. This organization allowed for each participant's lived experience to come to life through her words, writings, teachings, and actions.

A final consideration of phenomenological data analysis involves the relation of research to writing. Van Manen argues that "research and writing are seen to be closely related, and practically inseparable pedagogical activities" (1990, p. 4). Data were analyzed during and after research activities as to best capture and describe the essence of participants' lived experiences. Moreover, recursive writing processes were employed throughout this study.

**Conversational interviews.** Transcribing 13 60-90 minute interviews, in addition to brief, informal interviews conducted over a three-week period, is a daunting task in and of itself. Seidman (2013) acknowledges the complexities of recording and transcribing interviews, noting that "interviewers who transcribe their own recordings come to know their interviews better, but the work is so demanding that they can easily tire and lose enthusiasm for interviewing as a research process" (p. 118). Although the transcribing process took much time and effort, I felt better acquainted with each participant as a result of personally transcribing all interviews.

After transcribing audio recordings of all interviews, I employed van Manen's (2014) approaches to reading a text for thematic analysis. These include a holistic, selective, and detailed approach to reading. I searched for themes from broad to narrow, from the text (interview) as a whole to individual sentences, lines, phrases, and words. After exploring potential themes, I engaged in reflective writing, "experimenting with writing a tentative text" (van Manen, 2014, p. 322) that attempted to discover how participants experienced the phenomenon of the 2016 OWP SI. This reflective writing resulted in a "'textual description' of the experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). A goal here was to understand the essential meaning of this phenomenon through reflection guides of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relation (van Manen, 1990, pp. 101-106).

**Close observations.** Observations allowed for my personal experiences and biases to not overshadow participants' lived experiences. For instance, when teachers described an experience in an interview, I referenced observation notes to ascertain what the participant is referring to in order to not rely on my own experiences from the

previous year. This aligns with bracketing procedures as I aimed to set aside preconceptions and work inductively.

Field notes and memos recorded during the orientation meeting, throughout the 2016 OWP SI, and at the Power of Teaching Symposium were analyzed in consideration of participants' words, writings, and teachings. These aspects helped situate participants' experiences within the activities of the SI itself. Specific field notes allowed for contextualizing what participants said, wrote, and did during the SI itself and in interviews. Moreover, I revisited video recordings often throughout the research and writing process so I could better situate the themes and reflect on interviews with a clear context being provided for each participant.

**Documents.** Participants' applications provided demographic data for individual participants. I could determine each participant's school site/location (urban, rural, suburban), subject/grade level they teach, prior education, experience, and individual achievements. This information allowed me to create a vignette for each participant as part of my write up. Moreover, this information served as a foundation for the initial interview when I asked participants to describe their history as a writer/teaching of writing prior to the SI and also decisions that led to them applying for the SI.

Writing and teaching demonstration artifacts served as conversation pieces during the interviews. In each interview, I asked participants to think aloud through the processes and products related to their writing and teaching. I layered sections of interviews with these artifacts as participants described their writing and teaching processes and products. This allowed for rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences as their writing and teaching artifacts supplemented their verbalized

experiences. Table 3.1 summarizes the various data collection and analysis methods employed during this research process. Data analysis methods stem from Creswell's (2013) discussion on data analysis and representation by research approaches.

Table 3.1
*Data Collection and Analysis Methods*

| **Data collection and analysis** | *Type(s) of data collected* | *Time of data collection* | *Security procedures* | *Data analysis* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Conversational interviews*** | Brief, informal interviews during the SI; a "long interview" (60-90 minutes); email correspondence | During the 2016 OWP SI; immediately following the SI; months after the SI | Audio recorded and transcribed; digital files saved on a password protected computer; hard copies stored in a locked file cabinet | Reading texts for thematic analysis; recording marginal notes; referring back to written notes and reflections; developing and grouping significant statements into themes; and engaging in reflective writing |
| ***Close observations*** | Field notes and memos recorded as a participant observer; Video recordings | During the orientation meeting, 2016 OWP SI, and the Power of Teaching Symposium | Digital files saved on a password protected computer; hard copies stored in a locked file cabinet | Field notes, memos, and video recordings serve as ancillary data for contextualizing participants' experiences (in order to not rely on my own experiences) |

| Documents | Participants' applications and writing/teaching demonstration artifacts | Applications provided by the OWP director upon obtaining participants' consent; artifacts provided by participants during the SI and during interviews | Digital files saved on a password protected computer; hard copies stored in a locked file cabinet | Applications serve as ancillary data for participants' vignettes; writing/teaching demonstration artifacts read for thematic analysis, notes recorded in the margins, and reflective writing generated |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Trustworthiness

Complying with IRB regulations, all data collected, including consent forms of participants, video recordings, interview audio files and transcriptions, writing and teaching demonstration artifacts, observation notes, and applications, were securely stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked file cabinet. Email correspondence with participants occurred via a password-protected university email address. Emails were saved as files on a password-protected computer and then deleted.

As previously mentioned, interview sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed. In addition to this process, I sent copies of the transcriptions to each participant. Participants also received drafts of their individual vignettes written in the first person point of view. Through member checking, I asked each participant to verify her respective vignette. 11 of 13 participants responded to email requests to read and verify my findings.

After this sharing, themes continued to be generated from the data. Regarding theming, Creswell (2013) notes how "researchers build detailed descriptions, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature" (p. 184). Themes stemmed from core principles of the NWP, including participants' roles as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders, but, throughout the data analysis processes, I strived to remain open-minded about potentially surprising or novel categories, especially in consideration of the emergent design of phenomenological research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four evaluative criteria for establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Through prolonged engagement and persistent observation within the phenomenon of the 2016 OWP SI, I aimed to establish credibility by immersing myself in the SI, acting as a participant observer as I recorded field notes and memos on site. Thick descriptions of participants, settings, actions, and responses allowed for potential transferability to future research studies involving this phenomenon and others like it, including the broader field of professional development. Although phenomenology does not aim to generalize, this research might serve as a snapshot of this SI in consideration of similar phenomena that spans a variety of times and spaces. During interviews especially, I was conscientious to not lead participants with probing questions and to only record their personal experiences and meanings. Thoughtfully considering my role as a researcher throughout this processes, including bracketing my experiences of the phenomenon, might help establish confirmability.

In consideration of Lincoln and Guba's criteria, it is important to note van

Manen's (2014) argument that "the validity of a phenomenological study has to be sought in the appraisal of the originality of insights and the soundness of interpretive processes demonstrated in the study" (p. 348). Therefore, non-traditional measures were used to validate this study. I focused on asking valid phenomenological questions (see research questions presented in the introduction to this chapter), transcribing interviews and offering descriptive accounts, and avoiding an attempt to legitimize this study "with validation criteria derived from sources that are concerning with other (non-phenomenological) methodologies" (van Manen, 2014, p. 351). Importantly, I strived not toward triangulation with multiple sources of data, but instead for a multilayered portrait of participants, and also readers of this dissertation, experiencing this phenomenon and rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences through their own words, writings, and teachings.

## Role of the Researcher

In terms of my position as a researcher, it is significant that I was a participant in the 2015 OWP SI. Since I experienced the 2015 OWP SI, I know first-hand the beliefs and practices promoted by the professional development experience and have reflected about if and how the SI influenced my own beliefs and practices about writing and the teaching of writing. Without hesitation, my lived experiences during the 2015 OWP SI certainly affected my beliefs and practices in a positive way regarding writing itself and the teaching of writing. Van Manen (2014) explains that "one needs to overcome one's subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations" of a phenomenon in order to understand others lived experiences (p. 224). Therefore, it was imperative to remain open to alternative explanations, feelings, experiences, and beliefs

in my position as researcher.

Thus, I focused not on my own experiences, but on the participants'. This required me as researcher to place my own experiences, beliefs, and expectations aside as I instead allowed the participants to share their own lived experiences during and after the 2016 OWP SI. However, van Manen argues, "forgetting one's preunderstandings is not really possible, and therefore these various assumptions and interests may need to be explicated so as to exorcise them in an attempt to let speak that which wishes to speak" (2014, p. 224). Consequently, the preface to this dissertation acknowledges my participation in the 2015 OWP SI.

Describing my personal experiences through bracketing (epoché) allowed my role as a researcher to be explicitly acknowledged. This "setting aside or bracketing everyday assumptions in order to concentrate on the phenomenology of the experience of the everyday world" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 22) might assist with focusing on participants' experiences instead of relying on my own. That said, I discovered early and often the difficulties of an objective interpretation of participants' individual and collective experiences. Like Geertz (1973), I found that "complete objectivity is impossible" (p. 30).

## Conclusion: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing

After collecting and analyzing data, including interviews, observations, and documents, I discovered the most effective way to present the findings involved two parts. Van Manen (1990) explains that "the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something

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meaningful . . ." (p. 38). Moving from experience to textual expression, the following

two chapters present the findings of this research and offer first a "reflexive re-living"

of individual participant's lived experiences of the phenomenon, followed by a

"reflective appropriation" of the collective community of practice through themes

connected to teachers' roles during the SI.

In Chapter Four, 13 vignettes are written through a first-person lens in an

attempt to "bring experience vividly into presence" (van Manen, 2014, p. 242). Much of

the vignettes are exact utterings from participants during interviews, information they

provided on their application, or quoted directly from their writing and teaching

artifacts. The remainder of each vignette was crafted from my own observations and

field notes. This expressive presentation of participants' experiences leads to the

analytical thematic discussion of the collective experiences of this phenomenon in

Chapter Five.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Presentation of Findings, Part One

### Introduction

Throughout this recursive research process, I collected and analyzed a variety of data on multiple occasions from all 13 participants. Along the way, I was always certain to "pay very careful attention and remain open . . .to the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2014, p. 77). Especially because I participated in the Oklahoma Writing Project's Summer Institute (OWP SI) just one year before, I wanted to be certain that the 2016 OWP SI participants' experiences, voices, actions, and artifacts were the focus of this research. As phenomenological researchers, "we want research participants to bring us to their experiences of the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2014, p. 58). More important than ever was an emphasis on bracketing my personal experiences (see this dissertation's Preface) and instead focusing solely on the individual and collective experience of the 2016 fellows.

In consideration of the phenomenon of the 2016 OWP SI, I observed participants throughout the three-week Institute; crafted field notes based on my observations and informal conversations; interviewed participants immediately after the Institute; and gathered artifacts, including participants' applications, teaching demonstration packet, and writings published in their culminating portfolio and in the 2016 OWP SI Anthology. In addition, I conducted follow-up interviews with each participant via email correspondence during the fall 2016 semester.

Because the purpose of this research was to discover the essence of this particular phenomenon, the overarching primary research question focuses on teacher participants' lived experiences of the 2016 OWP SI:

- *What are teacher participants' lived experiences of a specific professional development opportunity, the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

Secondary questions involve participants making meaning of their experiences in consideration of the various roles they assumed as they experienced this phenomenon:

- *How do participants make meaning of their experiences of the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *What roles do participants assume during the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *How do various roles influence individual and collective experiences of teachers at the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

Throughout data collection and analysis processes, I layered multiple types of data as I blended teacher participants' words, actions, and products in order to craft vignettes of each participant and categorize teachers' experiences through the community of practice in which they participated and the various roles they assumed during in the Institute. These vignettes and themes comprise the findings of this research and are presented in the following two chapters. In order to provide a comprehensive overview of participants' individual lived experiences and a thematic analysis of the collective experience within the community of practice, the findings are broken into two separate, yet connected, chapters.

I first provide a vignette of each participant (all names are pseudonyms) in the form of "reflexive re-livings," a phrase coined by van Manen (1990) as he describes the aim of phenomenological research. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to sharing

the participants' experiences through their own individual perceptions. Each vignette was composed by combining SI applications, participants' exact words during interviews, writings and teaching demonstrations, as well as my own field notes. Moreover, the general structure of each vignette (teaching context; past experiences with writing and teaching writing; application and interview process; initial reactions; writing, teaching, and researching during the SI; looking forward to leadership opportunities after the SI, etc.) was modeled after phenomenological writings presented by van Manen (2002), who provides various examples of phenomenological writing and notes how, through reflective writing, "certain difficulties of inquiry and writing may be overcome" (p. i). I aimed to construct each vignette so that participants' unique voices and stories offer much personal insight into their respective experiences.

To clearly differentiate among the types of data included, I adhered to an intentional coding scheme (see Table 4.1). Direct quotations at the word/phrase level are not denoted, but longer direct quotations from interviews are set off by quotation marks (aside from lengthy block quotations). Information from participants' SI applications and other written reflections are italicized, as these words were composed directly by the participants. Published writing pieces are presented word-for-word from the online b(log), the SI anthology, or documents sent to me directly from participants. Similarly, information from teaching demonstrations is copied directly from teachers' presentation packets.

Table 4.1

*Data Coding Scheme in Participants' Vignettes*

| Data: | Key: |
|---|---|
| Words/phrases from participants' interviews | Woven throughout the vignette; not denoted |
| Longer direct quotes from participants' interviews | "Offset with quotation marks" (aside from lengthy - more than 40 words - block quotations) |
| Information from participants' applications and other written reflections | *Italicized* |
| Participants' published writings (from the (b)log, the SI anthology, or documents sent to me directly from participants) and teaching demonstrations | Copied verbatim and set off with borders |

In Chapter Five, I classify the 2016 SI as a community of practice based on participants' descriptions of their experiences and the phenomenon as a whole. Chapter Five also examines the roles participants assumed during the Institute and provide various themes within each role of participant as writer, teacher, researcher, and leader. Chapter Five, then, serves as a "reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). The re-livings presented in this chapter morph into collective experiences of participants within the community of practice in the next.

Throughout the following two chapters, teacher participants' voices, actions, and products create a distinct picture of the essence of the 2016 OWP SI, the particular phenomenon of concern in this study. The goal of these findings, therefore, is "to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences" (van Manen, 1990, p. 19) from the perspective of the 2016

OWP SI fellows. Each of the 13 participants who completed the Institute (see Table 4.2

for demographic information collected from participants' applications) had distinctive

experiences. Their stories that follow offer much insight into what it meant to

experience this particular phenomenon.

Table 4.2
*2016 OWP SI Participants' Demographic Information*

| Participant's Pseudonym | Grade Level(s)/Subject(s) Teaching/Taught | Years of Teaching Experience | Education |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wendy | $10^{th}/11^{th}$ English II and III | 4 | BA – Journalism/Public Relations |
| Shelly | $7^{th}$ English | 20 | BS - Elementary Education |
| Leslie | $2^{nd}$ | 9 | BS – Reading/Language Arts |
| Bridgette | $4^{th}$ | 5 | BS – Elementary Education MEd – Reading |
| Joyce | K-3 (certified substitute) | 4 (certified substitute) | B – Business Administration |
| Laura | $5^{th}$-$8^{th}$ Technology/Computers $5^{th}$-$6^{th}$ Math $6^{th}$ English $6^{th}$ Language Arts/Literature | 17 | BS – Elementary Education MEd – Education Technology |
| Jessie | $5^{th}$ Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies | 1 | BA – Communication MEd – Adult Education |
| Christy | Pre-K | 1 | BS – Early Childhood Education |
| Carol | $1^{st}$ | 6 | BS – Early Childhood Education |
| Kelly | $1^{st}$ | 5 | BS – Early Childhood Education |
| Lindsey | $8^{th}$ grade Language Arts | 4 | BS – English Education MEd – ILAC |
| Regina | $9^{th}$ Special Education English | 2 | BA – English; minor in French |
| Barbara | $7^{th}/8^{th}$ Pre-AP English/Literature | 19 | BS – Elementary Education |

## Reflexive Re-livings: Teacher Participants' Vignettes

## Wendy

After not being accepted to the 2015 OWP SI, I decided to take my own advice and apply again in 2016. The interview day in 2015 is one I would like to forget. "It was a bad day. I didn't have my stuff together, . . .and it rained, and so I was just not in a good place that day." 2016, however, was different. After mustering the courage to submit my application (again), I was contacted for an interview. This time, I was invited to participate in the SI. I always tell my students in our small, rural high school to never give up, and I am glad I decided to try, try again.

Having just completed my fifth year of teaching, I wanted to participate in the OWP SI in order to better conceptualize the teaching of writing and, in addition, find my own voice as a writer.

> As a writer, I had a lot of ideas and concepts and just things rattling around in
> my head that needed to come out and they just weren't . . .[I] was kind of right
> there in the middle as a teacher . . .[and] needed something to help me figure all
> that mess . . .out.

Although I had many ideas about teaching and writing, I came to the OWP SI eager to refine my beliefs and practices.

In my application, I made sure to explicitly reference my hopes for how the OWP SI could impact my teaching. *I hope that the OWP SI will take my writing pedagogy to the next level. . . .There is so much I can learn as a teacher, and I want to do everything possible to increase my skills so that students will ultimately be more confident, better writers.* My focus entering the OWP SI was primarily on my teaching;

early on, I often referenced my teacher's hat that I, metaphorically, wore regularly while doing all the 'teachery' things. As a result, I felt like I couldn't really focus on the writer.

Looking back, however, my writing life was not completely non-existent. As a matter of fact, I think that being a teacher and being a writer is very connected and have to admit I'm not really one without the other. So, although my teaching was a priority, my writing coexisted alongside that role. With a background as a newspaper reporter, I have had much experience writing, but I acknowledge "back then, even though I had my own voice, even though I could write, I didn't feel like I had anything to say." Although teaching was a particular area of focus for me, I wanted to gain insight into what it means to be a member of a community of writers. "I want that process – being able to take something from an idea, putting it on paper, having somebody else look at it and giving me feedback, and then getting published." This process I craved was something I felt was missing with my prior writing experiences as a reporter and blogger. For me, writing prior to the OWP SI had been a lonely, isolating activity.

My perceptions changed during the OWP SI. Through my writing group and my teaching demonstration, I discovered my students and I have much to say. My writing group was the best. I enjoyed "being able to get thoughts out and get that feedback and having them tell me that what I wrote was powerful and that they really liked what I wrote [and] having the writing responsibility and . . .that writing community." What was once an individual endeavor became a collective one.

During the SI, I crafted "Just Because I'm a Strong Woman" – a poem that started out as a list from a quick write. Writing this piece was a recursive process that

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resulted in this poem being published on the online (b)log and in the anthology:

I didn't get very much written on this. . . .I think it was one of those where she said you could make a list, and apparently I took a really long time to make a really short list. I wrote that out and I had only about three or four stanzas in the beginning, and so I took it back to my writing group and shared it with them and told them I don't want it to be just about my experience. There are other strong women that face other stereotypes. I want to speak or tell their story as well through this, so they talked about their experiences . . .and some other stereotypes and incorporated in all of that, which I think made it much stronger than it was to begin with.

Here, I experienced the recursive nature of the writing process firsthand. I discovered how my writing benefited as a result of sharing and feedback. This process culminated with a piece of which I was proud.

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**Just Because I'm a Strong Woman**

Just because I'm a woman who knows what I want
Doesn't mean I think less of you.
It means I expect you to step up.

Just because I'm a woman who knows what to do
Doesn't mean I'm bossy.
It means I'm a good leader.

Just because I'm a woman who holds back my tears
Doesn't mean ice runs in my veins.
It means I'm fighting a battle *you* will never see.

Just because I'm a woman who listens
Doesn't mean I'm weak or unable to lead.

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It just means building community is more important than building me.

Just because I'm a woman who loves her career
Doesn't mean I don't care about my family.
It means I'm a person created with a purpose that my kids will see.

Just because I'm a woman who is independent
Doesn't mean I hate men.
It just means I need someone willing to be vulnerable.

Just because I am a woman without children
Doesn't mean I'm washed up or useless.
It just means I have room in my heart for the motherless.

Just because I'm a woman who is strong
Doesn't mean I don't want you to hold the door.
It just means I need someone to be strong enough to hold my heart.

Just because I'm a woman who is quiet
Doesn't mean I'm not powerful.
It means I'm choosing my words wisely.

I composed additional pieces throughout the SI and consistently made connections between my writing and my teaching.

I wanted to write stuff that was meaningful and impactful and that maybe I could even take back into my classroom and show my kids – this is the kind of writing you can do. You can write about real things, and you are going through real things.

Because I was able to write about real things, I felt empowered to share with my students that they can do the same. In the past I did not realize the stories I could tell, but, as a result of my writing during the SI, I recognized both why and how writing can

be meaningful for me and my students. I now realize "writing should be personal; it should be about telling your story, and everybody has a story, and that's what I want my kids to know."

To reiterate, my initial thoughts and conceptions prior to the SI centered primarily on my teaching. All of the teaching demonstrations in which I participated provided tools I can take back to my classroom to help unlock my students' stories and their voices. I hoped what I learned at the SI about the teaching of writing would transfer to my pedagogy and, ultimately, to my students' writing.

In addition, I presented my own teaching demonstration titled "Including FAT in Your Essays: Figurative Language, Appositives, and Transitions." I was admittedly nervous as I prepared my teaching demonstration – especially the morning of my presentation. I felt like a cat on a hot tin roof that morning. However, my experience was really fun, and I "really enjoyed getting up there and being able to share what I was thinking and getting feedback from the audience."

As part of my teaching demonstration, I conducted secondary research focused on students' voices in their writing. The research aspect of the SI was particularly meaningful for me; I felt that the research would "back up what I'm doing in my classroom, what I'm going to do in my classroom, and what I may do a better job of doing in my classroom." I hope this research can serve as evidence for my teaching practices. I am even in the process of composing an article for a statewide academic journal focused on my research and teaching.

My writing, teaching, and research during the SI can be compared to correcting my blurry vision:

I feel like before OWP I was kind of headed in the right direction but maybe I had some blinders on, or maybe I was looking through goggles or a mask or something. I had my hands over my eyes, and I'm kind of thinking this is the way I need to go. Or me with no glasses before I had LASIK surgery. You know, it's blurry. I know I'm headed in the right way, but I keep bumping the walls every once in awhile. OWP helped clear up my vision so I can see where I'm headed and why I'm headed there.

The communal composition of the other SI participants was important for me, too. It was significant that I was constantly "able to talk about writing with people who get it. People who understand. Being able to talk about teaching writing with people who get it. People who understand." Being a member of this community made this experience worthwhile for many reasons:

That's one of the great benefits of OWP because not only do you have the research, not only do you have the personal experience, but you also have that social validation. You have teachers from Pre-K all the way up to college who are right there with you saying the same things.

This validation allowed my teaching and writing to grow.

I've heard people say that OWP is career-changing, that it's life-changing, and it absolutely is, and that is exactly what I wanted. I wanted to have my eyes opened and to have a clearer vision for where I want to go with my teaching practice and with my writing.

I came to the SI with a voice and vision, albeit a blurry one. What I left with was a reason to write and teach writing and, as a writer and teacher of writing, a newfound

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understanding of how I can help my students find their own voices through writing.

**Shelly**

Having taught elementary school for 20 years, I consider myself a teacher leader in my school and district. Several years ago, I decided a change was necessary and began teaching middle school English language arts. "I thought I needed to beef up my writing skills," so I decided to apply for the 2016 OWP SI. I had recently begun teaching only the English/writing portion of my middle school ELA classes, so I thought, "I have to do this for me and for my students."

I entered the SI with much experience as a teacher. As a writer, however, I would describe my prior experiences and voice as strictly academic. A National Board Certified Teacher, I had written for academic purposes in the past. "I could write non-fiction, but even non-fiction is supposed to have your voice in it. But, I just never really thought I could write anything else." Throughout the three weeks at the SI, I made it a point to take risks as a writer by writing everything I could outside of nonfiction. Perhaps what helped me engage in this risk-taking was the collegiality of the community in which I participated. Thinking of my SI colleagues, "We are all saying the same thing. We're all insecure. . . .None of us felt like writers. We felt like, who are we to be here?" Because I was not the only individual to experience these feelings, a rapport began to form among the group.

Although it was often a struggle, I reflect positively on my writing experiences during the SI: "By experiencing that struggle first hand I think I will be better equipped to help my students through their journey through that struggle." I feel as though I now have a better understanding of how my students feel and can relate to them better. Not

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only do I acknowledge growth as a writer, but I also connect my writing experiences to my teaching and my students.

The combination of struggle and success might have been most evident in my decision to write in uncharted genres. "I've always said I couldn't write poetry, and I wrote two pieces of poems." Connecting that to my teaching, I realize "it's time for me to open up more of my thinking and be vulnerable and share some of my writing" with others, including my students. Sharing my writing – not only my published pieces, but also my processes – with my writing group demonstrated how it could benefit me and my students to share our writing and writing processes with one another, too. My writing group "would talk about 'this is what led me to this' or 'I struggled with this' and our companion pieces, our reflection." Transferring this to my teaching and students, I now understand that "it builds relationships when you share your writing."

Although I learned much about myself as a writer and connected my learning to my teaching, I admit my writing group experienced barriers, initially, to provide appropriate and useful feedback for one another: "I think we could've focused and got more out, just pull down into depths more, deeper into our writing to get things out rather than just surface things, which I think we kind of concentrated on." In the beginning, a member of our group caused frustration due to a lack of focus and respect for our community. "I know writing groups can be powerful, but another person and I were getting quite frustrated." I was worried this frustration would constrain our writing, sharing, and feedback.

These difficulties were soon alleviated due to a particular feedback strategy presented to our community by the OWP SI directors and coaches: "It was better once

they told us about address, press, and bless. . . .I feel like we got a little bit deeper into what the person maybe was trying to get out." Once our writing group implemented this feedback protocol, we were able to provide more useful, productive feedback for one another. As a result of this shift, I experienced a transformation in my writing life. "I see myself as a writer now – not just academic, but I also know that feedback from others is invaluable, and I'm more willing to put myself out there to people I trust." Several of my colleagues from the SI planned to continue meeting as a writing group after the SI. I looked forward to this because "if we have a writing group, that's going to hold me accountable to do what I say I want to do – continue writing." The journey I took as a writer from the beginning of the SI to the end allowed me to struggle, experience success, and hopefully continue writing for a variety of purposes and in a variety of genres. Moreover, my personal experiences allowed me to feel more comfortable sharing my writing, not only with my peers, but also with my students.

My writing life was not all that was influenced by my participation in the SI. The teaching and research aspect of the SI also provided me with validation and confidence. I compiled and presented a teaching demonstration focused on students showing instead of telling in their writing. Part of this process involved locating research to back up my teaching practices. Initially, "the research in the Institute made me a little nervous because it was like trying to find and dig," but I know finding research that supports my practices is important. Locating and integrating that research was helpful because "it gives me the confidence that I know that what I'm doing is what I should be doing, and if people question me, I've got the research to back it up." Integrating research into my teaching demonstration provided me with the assurance I

needed as a teacher.

In addition to my teaching demonstration, I found value in participating in my peers' demonstrations, too. All of my colleagues – even those who teach different grade levels – provided me with tools and ideas I think I will be able to use in my classroom with my students:

> That's one of the things I love about OWP: something may be geared toward elementary, but . . .they have thought about, "How can this be modified or adapted for a high school lesson?" I teach middle school, and we had presentations from Pre-K to a high school lesson, and there still wasn't one presentation that I didn't come away with something I could use in my classroom.

Thinking about professional development on a larger scale, "if we had more professional development like that, I think it would lose its bad rap." The fact that other presentations allowed for flexibility in terms of transferring these ideas to a variety of grade levels helped me find value in each.

Beyond writing, research, and teaching activities during the SI, I have thought more about leadership as a result of my participation in the SI. Even before the SI, I acknowledged that "I've always wanted to be able to go and teach other teachers. . . .Although my heart lies with my students, that's where my heart lies, too, is preparing other teachers and just remind teachers of good practices." Going through the OWP SI only further enhanced my desire to be a teacher leader:

> Going to the OWP Summer Institute and presenting with other high quality teachers that have their information grounded and research . . .gave me the

confidence that I needed that I can go out and do this more and recruit others, too.

The SI resulted in confidence building for others and myself; this confidence allowed me to see myself as a leader outside of my own school setting. I know many OWP fellows present professional development workshops at OWP events and in particular school settings. I am excited about opportunities to share my teaching demonstration with others in different contexts:

I hope I can present places and get somebody else excited about what they're already doing in the classroom and maybe give them another idea that they could do to help pull that inner writer out of each of those kids.

Since I discovered how the OWP SI could help me and my students, I want to provide other teachers with these ideas so that they and their students, too, might reap the benefits. Thinking of my professional goals, *I would like to write a resource book for educators, teach at a university, and travel making writing presentations.* The SI certainly moved my leadership goals forward.

When speaking to others about the OWP SI, I would issue the following statement: "If you want to do something that's going to transform you and also has the ability to transform your students as writers, you need to go through this." As an SI fellow and teacher consultant, I plan to encourage my colleagues to attend in the future, and I even want to apply to be a coach at next summer's Institute so I can continue to learn, grow, and share with others. I think many would agree that the work of the SI does not end just because it is over.

## Leslie

As I apprehensively completed the OWP SI application in the spring of 2016, I hesitated when I came to a question asking me to describe myself as a writer. One particular experience in college instantly entered my mind:

> *I always thought I was a decent writer. I enjoyed writing and loved the creative process. During an extremely miserable college course, my confidence was shaken, and I never really regained it. I still like writing, but I am not as eager to share it as I once was.*

"It's amazing what power a person can have," I must admit. This experience during college halted my writing life for years.

An English education major, I was taking an upper-level, advanced theory of composition course. From day one, the professor "completely took every bit of confidence that I ever had about writing away." He told the class early on that no one would make above a D on the first writing assignment. He was vague in his teaching and expectations and had no qualms with failing students and harshly critiquing their writing. Although I used to love to write and felt I was good at it, this experience in college caused me to become a non-confident writer and, eventually, a hesitant teacher of writing. As a matter of fact, I did not like to write anymore, largely as a result of this negative experience. As a fifth grade teacher in a small, rural school, I now connect this experience to my teaching and my students:

> I don't want my students to feel like that. I want them to write, but kids are scared to write because they don't know what you want. They want to please you. . . .Sometimes I was scared to even critique them very much because I

didn't want them to ever feel the way I felt in that situation.

The idea of sharing and feedback was difficult for me because of harsh critiques from my former professor. I struggled with setting expectations for my students and providing appropriate feedback in a way that would not stifle my students' writing as that professor had stifled mine.

Although I admit to not knowing what I was getting myself into, I came to the SI eager to get more ideas about writing and the teaching of writing. I acknowledge that, prior to the SI, I wanted that growth and wanted to be a better teacher. This desire to grow led me to apply for the SI, accept the invitation to interview, and take the challenge head-on.

I entered the SI apprehensive, especially about the amount of writing I was required to complete and also the fact that I would be sharing this writing with people who, at least early on, were complete strangers:

> At the very beginning, it was a little intimidating to have to do so much writing and then so much sharing. The sharing part was scary for me. You know, that's putting yourself out there. You're vulnerable to what people may think.

These initial feelings of intimidation and vulnerability were quickly relieved thanks, in much part, to my writing group. "My writing group was great," and I would describe it it as intimate because all group members gave me support and encouragement and were able to validate and confirm I have something important to say and to share. This experience was much different than my experience in college years ago. Here, I found my voice and felt safe and comfortable sharing with the writing group. I also learned that it is not only acceptable but sometimes appropriate to write for myself. In the past,

my audience was always my teachers or professors. I discovered that in many cases I might need to write with no audience in mind in order to tell my stories.

In fact, I felt confident enough to craft and share "Should Have" – a piece about my father, a man who abandoned me when I was a young child. Surprisingly, "it was a piece that was really easy to write." I first took a rough draft of this poem to my writing group who encouraged me to share these words during Author's Chair with the larger group. Initially, I hesitated at this suggestion. While I felt like my writing group was small and intimate, I was nervous about sharing something so personal with the group as a whole. "It was a little more difficult. . . .You get really close with that writing group, and you get close to everybody, but there's a different bond with the people who have shared personal experiences with you as well." After thinking it over, and with plenty of encouragement from others, I decided to take my writing group's advice and read my work in Author's Chair.

> I bawled like a baby when I was reading it, and that really struck me because in my group I didn't really. It was more anger, but then when I got up in front of everybody, I think it was just nerves, . . .but I got great feedback from everyone after I shared.

All of my peers were encouraging after I shared this personal writing. In fact, one of my colleagues disclosed that this was a piece she needed to write for herself, too, and she thanked me for giving her the courage to write her own story. This fellow participant slipped me a note after I read in Author's Chair. It stated: *"You wrote the piece that I've been unable to write. Thank you. It was brave."*

**Should Have**

You should've helped me blow out my first year candle and dotted my nose with
frosting.
You should've clapped at my first steps.
You should've heard the first words I spoke.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've sang the ABC's with me and laughed when I said "elomenopee".
You should've chased away the boogie man.
You should've walked me into Kindergarten.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've let me dance on top of your feet in the kitchen before bed.
You should've taught me how to ride a bike.
You should've helped me choose a puppy.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've taught me how to bait a hook and how to cast a line.
You should've given me piggyback rides.
You should've been my little league coach or at least a cheering voice in the stands.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've taught me how to drive a stick and fix a flat tire.
You should've shown me how a lady deserves to be treated.
You should've waited up for me after my dates.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've applauded as I received my diploma… top honors you know.
You should've shed a tear as my car headed toward college.
You should've been proud of your daughter.
YOU SHOULD'VE HELD MY GROWING HAND

You should've granted your blessing to my beau and gave a hearty handshake to this
fine man.
You should've walked me down the aisle.
You should've been called Grandpa.
YOU MISSED OUT ON HOLDING MY HAND

In addition to sharing this piece during Author's Chair, I posted it to the online

(b)log. I was surprising myself. Now, not only was I sharing with the larger SI group,

but I was also publishing my writing online for anyone to read. I attached the following note on my blog post:

> *This piece is very personal. I'm not sure I can handle anything but blessings on it… Just want to make sure that it conveys the choice that my dad made. He could've been a part of the picture but chose not to be.*

Because this piece was so personal, I preferred only positive feedback. While I was ready to share with others, I was not ready to hear any critical feedback. I received eight responses to my post, with my peers describing my writing as *beautiful, heartbreaking, powerful, fantastic,* and *emotional*.

Connecting writing to teaching, my experiences as writer during the SI helped me see writing through the eyes of my students. The writing aspect of the SI was a good reminder what it's like to be a student again, what my kids probably feel. Furthermore, "There's a lot to be said for having mutual experiences where you can relate to your kids." Engaging in writing benefited not only me on a personal level, but it also promised to benefit me as a teacher and, in turn, my students.

While I gained confidence as a writer, I also gained confidence as a teacher of writing. Prior to the SI, I would describe teaching writing as a chore, but through my research and teaching demonstration, as well as participating in my peers' presentations, I discovered innovative ways to integrate writing instruction with my fifth graders. In my presentation titled "Motivating Writers Using Mentor Texts," I was able to connect research to what and how I taught. I admit I struggled with the research because I felt it was a little bit backwards. I came to the SI with ideas about teaching writing, but I did not have any backing to support my practices.

Throughout the SI, I asked myself questions such as, "Why am I doing what I'm doing? Does my stuff really match the research? Am I using best practices? Is this going to hold up?" Through searching online and print sources, I was able to locate research that supported my ideas, but "I think if I could go research first then design lessons that go with that research, I'd feel a lot better." Even so, locating and integrating research about the benefits of using mentor texts in writing validated that I have done good things in my room and verified that I was on the right track. This sense of validation helped me realize that teaching writing was not, in fact, a chore. Instead, teaching writing was meaningful, necessary, and useful – to my students and me.

Though I found researching useful, I was initially apprehensive about presenting my teaching demonstration to the group. Finding the research was one matter, but sharing my findings and my teaching practices with the group was nerve-wracking:

> I wasn't comfortable having to get up and talk. I was dreading that part. . . .I
> don't have a lot of confidence. . . .Getting up in front of a group of people I feel
> like are the best of the best in that room was intimidating.

However, as the SI progressed, I realized that "they are all there for the reasons that I'm there: they want to grow as an educator." I found out "it was fun to be in a room with people where everybody in there wanted to be there, [and] it was fun to be around positive people." With the recognition that my audience members were like-minded, supportive, and positive, I felt confident with my presentation, especially because "it's easy to tell somebody about something you're passionate about."

> I thought, "How in the world am I going to do 90 minutes?" It was so quick. I
> didn't have enough time. I could've done more. All of it is out of your comfort

zone a little, or it was for me. I had to step out a little of my box of what I'm used to doing, but I enjoyed it, too. It was an enjoyable experience. Although the preparation for the presentation was daunting, I felt confident with my teaching demonstration and am glad I stepped out of my comfort zone and shared research-based best practices with my peers.

Participating in others' teaching demonstrations was equally beneficial. I attribute this to time and space for discussions during each presentation about how certain activities could be adapted for different students and different grade levels. Also, collaboration throughout the presentations allowed for posing questions and sharing ideas. Perhaps most important was the interactive nature of each presentation; we did it ourselves, and doing it was a big key. Because I engaged in many activities in the role of student, I was able to take away practices I felt I could modify for my students and implement in my classroom.

My newfound confidence as a writer, researcher, and teacher prompted me to consider how I could share what I learned with others outside of the SI. I think about my fellow teachers at my rural school site. "I really hope to get some excitement back there, and I hope to help other people with teaching writing. . . .It's not as scary as you might think it is. It can be a lot of fun." I want to promote action, too, and "I've talked to my principal a little bit about presenting some of the ideas" with my colleagues. In addition to sharing with teachers in my school, I surprised myself by submitting a proposal to share my ideas at a statewide conference for teachers of English language arts. Although unsure about stepping even further out of my comfort zone, "I want to give back to it because I think it's important for people to know about." Because I

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recognize what I gained from the SI, I am eager to share my excitement with others, even in an arena in which I am unfamiliar.

As if sharing with my colleagues at my school and around the state was not enough, since the SI I have been thinking about my plans for the future:

I'm thinking about going home and going back to school in the fall. I'm just like, "This is crazy! I don't have time for this!" But I want to be that example for my kids, my students, [and] teachers that I work with.

I am not hesitant to attribute my growth mindset and actions to the OWP SI, an experience I describe as life changing.

## Bridgette

As an elementary teacher of five years transitioning into my role as a reading specialist, I thought early and often about how the OWP SI might impact my work with teachers and students in my new position. I am most "excited to take some of the things from Oklahoma Writing Project and bring those in" as well as take ideas back and share with teachers in my building. Because I will be working primarily with fourth and fifth grade reading teachers during the upcoming school year, this opportunity was perfect to know more about writing, especially in consideration of the requirement that fifth graders take a state-mandated writing test at the end of the year.

In the past, my focus in and out of the classroom had been on reading, not writing. I must admit that "writing has not been . . .my strong suit, [and] I never was a writer I didn't feel like." My primary goal for the SI, then, was to gain knowledge and experience involving the teaching of writing in order to assist teachers and students with whom I will work. My focus coming into the SI was predominantly on how I could

improve as a teacher and leader. I do feel I have strengths with informational writing, but I admitted on my application that I was *a weak narrative writer*, noting that *I struggle with narrative writing because it overwhelms me on a personal level and doesn't relate to my work.* Early on, my intentions were to invest time and effort toward my teaching life. My writing life, at least on a personal level, was not an emphasis initially.

Interestingly, even with my lack of experience with writing and teaching writing, the writing aspect of the SI was the most meaningful and relevant:

> My favorite, favorite, favorite part was actually my writing group and the personal writing, which is ridiculous because up until the summer, I just refused to personal write. It was really interesting to focus on voice this summer, . . .to write about things that were mine and not somebody else's.

Even though I felt confident with informational writing prior to the SI, I discovered that, through personal writing, I was able to find my voice as a writer. This revelation transferred to the teaching of writing, too. "I feel like I will be a much better writing teacher now because I kind of think that forced me to think about the purposes of writing." Although I will be assuming the role of reading specialist instead of classroom teacher, "I think I would structure my writing activities much differently" as a result of my engagement with writing throughout the SI. Furthermore, because I grew as a writer myself, "it kind of framed what writing could do for my students if I let it." This connection between writing and teaching resulted in growth in both my personal and professional life.

I recall a particular breakthrough in my writing life during the SI: I composed

"One Moment," a narrative about the death of my high school boyfriend. Because

several other members of my writing group had experienced similar tragedy in their

lives, I felt like composing and sharing this piece was a connecting experience. This

was a recursive process from beginning to end; it started after one of my writing group

members shared about losing her high school sweetheart:

> I went home that night and I just kind of word vomited the story to try to get it
>
> on paper. It took me all night. I had to brain dump what happened, step away for
>
> awhile, come back and put details, step away for awhile, come back and put in
>
> emotions, so it took me all night because I couldn't do it all at once. I brought it
>
> in and shared it, and I felt like my writing group was really supportive.

Because of the ongoing support, I felt confident and comfortable enough to share "One

Moment" with my writing group and with the larger group of SI participants as a whole

during my Author's Chair. "To have that kind of support from people in and out of my

writing group that I didn't really know . . .was a very good experience." Similar positive

experiences resulted as I shared and received feedback from my writing group

throughout the SI. By establishing a sense of safety and trust with my peers, I was able

to write for myself and share with others in ways that I had not before the SI.

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**One Moment**

    Has anyone ever told you that one split second can change your life forever? This is a story about one of those moments – one that changed my life, irrevocably. But it is also a story about bravery. Not the kind you see in superhero movies, where flying avengers save burning cities. It is about a quiet kind of courage – one you don't know is there until you are forced to use it. This is dedicated to my best friend – the bravest person I know. I am incredibly proud of how you lived your life, and stayed true to yourself until the very end. My life is better because you were a part of it. I am stronger because you are a part of me.

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<center>*     *     *</center>

"Bryson! Stop! Just come back. I'll drive you home."

I was exhausted with the boys' drama. I watched Bryson as he marched down the driveway, like a soldier off to battle. You could see the anger radiating off his face, but it wasn't his expression that told me that Tillman had pushed him too far this time. It was his shoulders. Whenever he got truly livid, he carried it in his shoulders. His muscles would seize up, and his shoulders would make a line perfectly parallel to the group, rather than sloping gently down his body. It would cause him to carry his arms just a little too far out from his sides. His fists would clench in toward his waist, causing his arms to bend like a wooden board, right before it snaps. The overall effect made him look like a well-dressed caveman, which honestly wasn't too far from the truth when he got this mad. With each second that passed, his anger seemed to grow, ready to engulf anyone who got in his path.

The entire evening had truly been a perfect storm. I blame Kevin. He was the one who brought the bottle of Jack Daniels, called Tillman's ex-girlfriend and invited her to the party, *and* then encouraged Tillman to drink half the bottle when he saw how upset he was about the ex-girlfriend being invited to the party. Tillman had, of course, gotten out of control, had a screaming match with Bryson, and then swerved down the driveway toward home. Just another typical night.

I didn't hear most of Bryson and Tillman's fight because I had been dealing with Kevin, who had passed out in the back field – GOD, I HATE HIM! – but from what I could gather, Bryson was trying to keep Tillman from driving home. It was amazing how he had these moments of responsibility, where he would age into a mature, reasonable adult just long enough to keep you from doing something stupid. But Tillman was past helping at this point. As he was driving off, Bryson swore under his breath because Tillman was his ride home for the evening, and he had to work early the next day. After calling and having an *ugly* conversation with his friend, he took off down the road for home.

I, of course, went after him. At nineteen, I was constant in very few things, but when it came to that boy, I was as dependable as the Bible. In all honesty, I didn't care whether he got in the car with me or not, I just wanted a few moments alone with him. He was my first great love. I had never believed in "fate" or "soul mates," but I believed in him, and I wholly believed he was the rock that my existence was built upon.

Looking back, that walk down the long, dusty driveway seemed to last a lifetime. I was yelling at him to come back, my frustration building the longer he ignored me. *Why did these boys have to act this way? We were practically adults, for God's sake.*

Because I was grumbling to myself, I didn't notice the moment he reached the end of the driveway and walked into the middle of the road. He began waving his arms over his head. I couldn't figure out what he was doing. Even then, the reality was too awful to comprehend.

I picked up my face to reach him. As I was about to step onto the bumpy, asphalt road, Tillman's headlights caught my eye. He had come back for Bryson. I turned, and watched in absolute disbelief as a truck sprinted toward us.

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Time stopped.

I could see dust motes floating through the orange hazy glow of the streetlights as I turned to look at Bryson. My eyes were able to reach his face before the truck reached him. In that eternity, I saw his beautiful eyes – the perfect color of a grassy field at dawn, with a blanket of mist covering it. I saw the emotions that passed through them.

Shock.

Anger.

Fear.

Then finally, Acceptance.

When he was younger, he had grown his hair out for Locks of Love. Right before it had been time to cut it off, we joked that he looked like a lion with his flowing reddish-gold mane. In that second, he was a lion. A young man who was faced with the impossible, and chose to handle it with a regality, with an unshakable bravery.

He knew he wasn't going to make it out of that road.

He didn't cower. He didn't try to run. That may seem silly considering the circumstances, but he was not going to leave this world running away.

I knew his thoughts. He was a part of me. He was my heart.

He lifted his chin, squared his shoulders, and allowed the truck to come.

TICK. TICK. TICK. TICK.

The next morning, the sun still rose. It had no idea that he was gone.

Being immersed in writing was like a relief. "There were just all of these things I feel like I have to hold inside all of the time." Writing narratives and poetry and finding my unique voice in other genres allowed me to feel like a real person again. Coming to the SI without much experience writing for myself, I discovered the power of writing – what it can do for me not just professionally, but also, and maybe even more so, personally.

While the writing aspect of the SI was quite transformative, both personally and professionally, the teaching demonstration was not that big of a deal. I was a little nervous before presenting my teaching demonstration, but I had a lot of fun putting it together. Since I recently completed my Masters degree, the idea and process of pulling

together ideas, research, and practices related to my teaching was mostly stress-free. With an expertise in reading, I connected what and how students read to writing. "Assessing Comprehension Authentically Through Writing," my teaching demonstration, offered ways in which reading and writing are related and provided audience members with benefits for themselves and their students when reading and writing are taught interactively and simultaneously.

As an upper-elementary teacher, I was conscious of my audience and wanted to make sure what I shared could be applicable to all teachers. "That was a goal I had – to make sure every activity that I shared could be used by someone very young and much older." I made it a priority to integrate opportunities for teachers of all grade levels to adapt and modify activities for their particular students. After my presentation, a high school teacher "wrote me and said that she could use every single activity in her class, and I felt like I had accomplished what I wanted to accomplish." Since a high school teacher was able to take away all of my ideas, I was reassured that my teaching demonstration could be beneficial for a wider audience.

Intertwined with the teaching demonstration was locating and connecting research to the practices I presented. "I got to go back and read my old research from my Masters program," and this part of the experience was enjoyable because "I love reading research. . . .I wave it in people's faces." Researching was an opportunity to let others know that my practices were viable and effective. "I knew all of the things that I wanted to say were true," so my research processes involved locating articles through databases, skimming through *Reading Research Quarterly* magazines, and perusing a stack of books. This research and presentation process helped me better understand why

my practices were valid.

Perhaps even more influential on my experience than my own teaching demonstration was my engagement with my peers' presentations. I found "hearing other people showcase activities through presentations and . . .go home and reflect and then come back the next day and have a conversation about those things" to be meaningful and effective for my own teaching practices. Through informal conversations during and after presentations, I gleaned multiple ideas and activities that I could implement in my unique situation.

Considering my writing, teaching, and research, I reflect on the OWP SI as a professional development opportunity that went beyond the professional aspect: "I think anytime you get that personal with a professional development group, you make connections with people . . ." These connections provided opportunities to continue growing as a teacher, writer, and person, on the whole, even after the SI. "There are people that I feel like I will keep in contact with and be friends with forever that will be great personal connections and professional connections." Entering the SI as solely a professional – a teacher, reading specialist, holder of a Masters degree – my thinking was opened to how professional development could be personal development, too. While writing played a major role in this revelation, so too did the people with whom I experienced this opportunity.

## Joyce

A certified substitute teacher of four years, I knew early on I could offer a novel take on what it was like to experience the OWP SI. I worked in the corporate world for years before losing my job. On a whim, I decided to become a substitute teacher in an

elementary school setting. Initially, I decided to apply for the Institute in order to earn mandatory professional development hours. During the previous school year, I participated in several OWP workshops provided by my large school district. While I enjoyed those professional development opportunities, I did not realize the exact nature of the SI itself.

I felt anxious, intimidated, and overwhelmed during the Pre-Institute day in April. When asked what teaching techniques or strengths I would share with other SI participants, I had to admit that I felt "inadequate to be able to teach anything to experienced teachers." My identity as a substitute teacher resulted in feelings of nervousness leading up to the SI. "There's no way I can do this. There's no way I can do a 90-minute presentation. There's no way I can do that. I haven't done anything like that since college, and that was 19 years ago." Tasks including a 90-minute teaching demonstration, writing on a daily basis, and presenting best practices at a post-SI symposium and a conference at the end of the summer paralyzed me. It was clear that I – a substitute – was not what the OWP SI wanted. I could not do what they asked of me, and I was ready to walk out before the Institute even began.

In the beginning, I felt like a guinea pig as the first substitute to ever participate in the SI because "I've always thought of myself as just a sub." Through the support of my peers, however, I persevered. "It's just the constant encouragement, [and] it's not how I ended up feeling. I felt like one of the group. I really did. I felt like a teacher." Because my fellow participants were encouraging and complimentary, I was able to not only survive, but thrive during the Institute. By the end, I could honestly say that, "I am no longer just a substitute!" Through writing, teaching, and researching, I discovered a

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different identity as a teacher.

In my application for the 2016 OWP SI, I admitted honestly that *I have a lot to learn* when it comes to writing. In fact, *until I attended several OWP workshops, writing was not something that interested me.* Before the SI, I had no writing life; I was not a writer. "There was no writing life. I didn't write. I did not even like to write. It was not even anywhere near my thinking at all . . ." With little to no prior experiences with writing, I came to the SI feeling apprehensive and skeptical. Writing had always been scary for me. However, as writing became a routine during the SI, a realization occurred. "I didn't know how, or I didn't think I knew how, and it turns out I probably know more than I thought I did." Writing routinely provided me with confidence and affirmation that I had more prior knowledge and experience with writing than I initially realized.

Though I still struggled after the SI to acknowledge myself as a writer, my writing group and the consistent writing activities helped me realize that I can, in fact, write.

> I can do it, yes. I can be a writer. I don't know that I am a writer, but I can write, so if that makes me a writer, then ok, I'm a writer, but I still don't see myself that way.

After only three weeks, my perception of writing shifted, even if my beliefs about being labeled a writer did not. I largely attribute this to my supportive writing group. "The support and encouragement that they gave me was amazing." I know we all said this, but I "definitely . . .had the best writing group."

In my writing group, through active learning and doing, I was able to better

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understand the recursive nature of the writing process:

> With my writing that I did, it was very obvious that it was not a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 step process. . . .I would write it, then I'd bring it to the writing group and publish it, and then there would be little notations made: go back, revisit it again, not necessarily pre writing, but writing again. There were times I'd bring it to the group a couple of times and say, "Ok, now what do you think?" before it was finally turned in. That's not something that I would've ever done in the past.

Engaging in the writing process during the SI allowed me to conceptualize that writing is not always linear. Instead, through my own writing practices, I recognized how writing can be recursive.

Another component of writing during the SI involved sharing – not only with my writing group but also with the whole group during my Author's Chair. This was intimidating, especially after hearing others share their pieces. However, I received much encouragement from my peers, and people liked what I read. Encouragement from others helped me to overcome my anxiety about sharing my writing. I received a thoughtful note from a colleague early on during the Institute: "This one just made my day. It was early on. That was probably like the second, maybe the third day. *'I love your pieces.'* She is a great encourager."

Writing was not the only area in which I experienced a change of heart. Considering my initial reaction to discovering I would be required to present a 90 minute teaching demonstration, it was surprising that "it wasn't as difficult a process as I thought." Since I had formed relationships with my peers and felt safe in the environment of the SI, I found the teaching demonstration not only doable, but also fun:

I was just standing up there talking to friends and family. It was like we were

just carrying on a conversation, and that made it go that much faster. I thought

I'd never be able to get through 90 minutes, but that 90 minutes went pretty

quick.

Presenting my teaching demonstration felt comfortable, and the process of

"putting the presentation together itself was not terribly difficult." It was as if my initial

fears from the Pre-Institute day had subsided and, in their place, feelings of confidence

and self worth took over. My teaching demonstration, titled "Your Guide to Surviving a

Sub," was well received not only by my peers at the Institute, but also by teachers at the

post-SI symposium and conference.

With that said, "finding research . . .was the hard part for me." Considering how

many years I was removed from college, there were many challenges associated with

locating research pertinent to my teaching demonstration. However, during this process,

I located a dissertation and "started at the back of the paper and read the last chapter."

As I read, I "agreed with everything that he said in there about substitutes wanting

professional development." Locating this dissertation affirmed my attitudes about

substitute teaching and validated the practices I included as part of my presentation.

In addition to presenting my own teaching demonstration, there were positive

aspects of participating in many other presentations, too. Other teaching demonstrations

were wonderful, and I "loved hearing everybody's else's perspective." I had many

conversations with my peers about using their ideas in long-term substitute positions I

was taking on in the fall.

Since the SI concluded, I have been promoting it to others: "It is amazing. I have

talked to several people about it already. It was something everybody should do, and I'll push it as hard as I can." With a completely opposite perspective and attitude from the Pre-Institute day, I am eager and willing to share my experiences as a teacher, not a substitute, and encourage others to participate in this opportunity.

**Laura**

"I've not been a writer, didn't like writing, [and] didn't like teaching writing." My experiences in and out of the classroom prior to participating in the Institute were lackluster, at best. Regarding writing, I "hated it . . .especially creative writing." In years past, I began to notice how my negative relationship to writing transferred to my teaching and my students, as well. Because I was not personally interested in writing, I realized that I was not interesting my students in writing, either.

In the year leading up to the SI, I collaborated with a teacher in my building who had participated in the 2015 OWP SI. I noted the beginnings of change during this time, especially in consideration of how I taught writing. "I did have some success this year with some things I tried in the classroom, and that made me feel like I'm doing something right." In addition to my feelings, evidence showed that my students were experiencing some success with writing. Four of my students were winners in an OWP-sponsored writing contest. While this was initially shocking, it also validated that the new practices I was implementing were working. Because of these positive results, I decided to apply for the 2016 OWP SI in hopes of getting even more ideas about the teaching of writing. One of my colleagues was applying, too, so I knew I was not in it alone.

I was initially apprehensive as I completed the application. "I kind of laughed

when it said tell us some of your best practices for teaching writing. I don't have any. I wouldn't be coming to Summer Institute if I had some." On my application, I noted that *I wouldn't consider myself an expert at writing.* Reflecting back, however, I realized that I already had best practices I had been implementing over the past year, even if I didn't realize it. This realization validated that I was doing something right regarding teaching writing in my classroom.

With some prior exposure to the OWP, I entered the SI enthusiastic to learn how to be a more confident, knowledgeable writing teacher. The process of creating and presenting my teaching demonstration and gaining insight into best practices from others' presentations were highlights of my experience. Because I was so eager, I volunteered to be the first fellow to present. "At the time it was horrible, but I was glad to get it over with." Being the first to present, I had to consider how to compile activities into a coherent presentation in just a few days. The process of determining which activities I planned to use in my teaching demonstration was strategic:

> I tried to think of something that would be easy to shorten and then something
> that my kids loved. I thought if they loved it, other kids would learn to like it,
> too. Two activities I had 100% turn in rate, so that's always a plus. Those two
> were the ones they won the writing contest with, so I thought that was a plus,
> too. We have several ELL students in our school, and I just wanted to see how
> far some of them would come with these activities.

I tried to be intentional in how I integrated activities related to students finding their voices through mentor texts and multimodal technology.

With time as a constraint, "finding research was something I struggled with . .

.finding it that quickly, within a couple of days." I did revisit my presentation and revise and edit, especially in terms of support from research. "I have found some [research] since [the SI] that I think I'll add to it. I needed more. I've found different journals and things, different sources." I continued to work on and add to my presentation, especially since I went so early on without much knowledge or examples from my peers. I discovered the importance of integrating research into my presentation. "This is why I'm doing this - because it's research based." Additionally, my fellow participants provided "affirmation about my presentation – what I did well and what they would use," and they also exclaimed, "Thanks for going first!"

Once I presented my teaching demonstration, which I decided to title "Finding Your Voice!" I was able to relax and enjoy the other presentations. I felt a sense of relief that I presented early, and I collected multiple ideas from others' teaching demonstrations, both in terms of activities I could implement and also how I could better my own presentation:

> It was nice to kind of reflect . . .as I was watching everybody's presentations. I liked doing the feedback. It was nice because I kind of knew what to look for after that. There were some really good presentations and I thought, "Ok, I'm going to do that in mine" or "I should have done this." That was the best part of it.

I gained much from others' teaching demonstrations in multiple ways. The presentations provided so many ideas to take back to my classroom that my peers showed me how to do. All the while, I was reflecting on my own presentation and recognizing ways in which I could improve my teaching demonstration prior to the

post-SI symposium and drive in conference in August.

Prior to the SI, my emphasis was solely on the teaching of writing. Once the SI began, however, I quickly realized there was more to this professional development opportunity than pedagogical practices. In the end, I surprised myself by engaging in and enjoying writing myself. Some of the pieces in my portfolio I wasn't even required to write. There were days when "I just went home and I started writing. I thought, 'What is wrong with me? What are you doing?' It's just crazy." I neglected and even hated writing prior to the SI, so it was fascinating to discover my newfound passion for writing, even beyond the requirements.

My writing group played a major role in my writing experiences. They made good suggestions that helped me edit and revise my work, especially in consideration of my writing topics and processes throughout the SI. Initially, I experienced anxiety when reading and listening to others' pieces. When others would read their quick writes aloud, I would wonder, "'How do you even think of those things? How does that even come to you?' I would love it if I had that in me, but I don't think I do." In addition, "some people were just amazing to me, and that was intimidating. They're awfully good already. What am I doing? I shouldn't be here because I don't write as well as they do." In terms of the types of writing I completed, I would rather write poetry because narrative is just not my thing. Poetry allowed me to express feelings and share memories through a genre in which something short was acceptable.

Considering the community of teachers with whom I shared this experience, I attribute much of my learning and growth to my peers: "I love the fact that there were so many teachers willing to do that [participate in the three week Institute]. . . .We have

a little love fest going on now." I connected with my fellow participants during the SI because they all wanted to get better. This commonality allowed for a safe environment for us all to collaborate, discuss, and share our writing and best practices. I would call my fellow participants friends, and "I've told everybody that they need to do it. It is the best thing I've done." In stark contrast to prior experiences in other professional development settings, I saw relevance in many aspects of the SI.

**Jessie**

From talking with my peers, I was unlike many of the other 2016 OWP SI participants. I recall positive writing experiences in my past; writing was an outlet for me as a child. "I just knew writing helped me growing up." Writing allowed me to get my feelings out on paper, but I must confess I wasn't doing it over the past 15 or so years. During adulthood, I experienced tragic events; I could not (or, admittedly, did not want to) cope with these instances and, therefore, tried to ignore the pain. "If you just don't want to deal with personal things, you don't write them down." For years, my writing life was non-existent because it brought up memories and experiences I was hoping to forget. As a result, I described on my application that *I struggle to call myself a writer, and that's part of why I so badly want to do this. I believe I am, but I need work.* I was eager to put in the work.

As an elementary teacher in an urban school district, I constantly reflect back on my experiences in elementary school: writing was helpful, offered me hope, and served as an emotional outlet. My own practices as a young writer sparked me to weave writing into my curriculum. I hoped that, since writing helped me in the past, it could also help my students.

There were many discipline problems at my school. From bullying to physical fighting to students' with complicated families and home lives, I knew I had to find an outlet for my students to express themselves and their feelings, if often negative ones. That outlet was personal writing in a journal, an activity that allowed students to cope with their lives and the world around them. I decided to bring these ideas to the SI and share my experiences helping my students with my fellow participants.

While I learned and shared as a teacher, it was during the SI that I also rediscovered the power of writing – not only for my students, but also for myself. I craved constructive feedback from my peers; everyone else in my life had always praised any writing I shared. "Every time I wrote something, people would tell me, 'Oh, it's great. I love it,'" I did not want to only hear that my writing was great or that my readers loved it. I wanted feedback from other people who had credibility. My fellow participants at the Institute became those people; they pressed me to dig deeper, to revise, and to write more. Ultimately, they helped me realize that, like my students, writing my thoughts and feelings down as an adult was an appropriate and safe coping mechanism.

My writing experiences at the SI were not completely transformative, however. There were times I feel like I held back. I know I have more stories to tell, and many emotions and experiences still need to find their way onto paper. I do hope to continue with writing, though, and think that in the future I can write what I need and want to. "There's still huge things in my life I haven't written about, and that's coming." My writing group was composed of women who all witnessed an individual die: "When you have that, that's a very lonely feeling," but I found myself "all of a sudden in a group of

three other women who saw the same thing in totally different circumstances." While my writing group members wrote about and shared these experiences, I never told my story, but I promise I am working on it. In just three weeks, a spark ignited my writing in ways that I had never experienced as an adult.

These small victories toward putting my experiences, even if painful, on paper were because of my writing group. I can not help but smile when I think about the women with whom I wrote and shared: "I don't trust easily, and so it was an exercise in trusting the people in your group, and it completely changed how I approach who to trust and how to trust them." This was my first time participating in a writing group, and I had only positive experiences during the three weeks. Willing to deliver what I wanted and needed concerning feedback, my writing group constructively critiqued my writing. I appreciated this, and "I took almost every suggestion my writing group gave me." I was thankful that "they didn't try to change my writing voice" but instead "actually helped me understand what it was." I believe my writing group was so helpful and so connected because of our similar life experiences. "There were so many similar things that had happened for four different women, [and] it is nice when there's a universal feeling, and you no longer feel alone in some sort of tragedy." What was initially a chance combination of four individuals quickly morphed into a sisterhood.

While I felt safe and comfortable sharing my experiences with my writing group, I was hesitant to bring that same vulnerability to the whole group. Early on the Institute, I was scheduled to read a piece in Author's Chair. Because it was during the first week, I admit "I picked the least emotional thing I could on purpose so I wouldn't cry in front of everyone." As a result, "I didn't read my best work." I attribute this to

reading in Author's Chair early on. "Had I done it in the third week, I think I might've chosen something [different]." In hindsight, I regret playing it safe and wish I would have opened up more to the group as a whole.

In the end, "I still feel a little bit uncomfortable saying I'm a writer," but do admit that now I will call myself a writer as a result of three weeks of writing practice, sharing, and feedback. In both giving and receiving feedback, I learned how to make my voice as a writer be even stronger. My peers spoke of my writing as powerful and strong, which felt good. I continued to write after the SI because those three weeks formed a habit. Because I just skimmed the surface of composing my stories and experiences, I wanted to keep going: "I just want to write for myself and then see what happens, and if it's good enough for a wider audience, they'll tell me." After the SI, I realized that writing could be just for me, that I do not always have to share, and that words on a page can offer relief.

Although the aspect of writing was most important to me, the SI helped me as a teacher, too. In addition to my aforementioned teaching demonstration focusing on students' writing to cope with their emotions, I applaud my peers; I took away so many useful ideas from their presentations. "The lesson plans I got from other people – that's just invaluable." I would describe the teaching demonstration aspect of the SI as "a mini conference of how to teach writing." My vision of the writing process was altered due to the presentations' descriptions and practices of the recursive nature of the writing process. In consideration of my students as writers, I predict that allowing writing to be nonlinear might reduce their stress level on writing. The activities and best practices serve as countless things that I want to implement. My peers basically lesson planned

my entire first nine weeks, and I believe I am going to look like a much better teacher as a result of these strategies.

In terms of presenting my own teaching demonstration, getting up and talking in front of the group was no big deal. Although I felt nervous initially, "when I got into my stuff I felt fine because to me then it's just a conversation about what I know." Part of my teaching demonstration, titled "Silence the Violence: Teaching Children to Express Feelings Through Writing," involved showcasing research that supports my writing pedagogy. Because of my experiences in the classroom, I knew I wanted to present on how writing allows students to work through emotions, stresses, and confusion that comes with childhood. My goal was to help my students understand empathy and reduce disciplinary issues in the classroom. When I began planning my presentation, I admit I "did not have any research behind it. It was merely anecdotal and just seemed like a good idea." These practices had worked in my classroom, but I was not sure why. "I knew they need to write to increase literacy," and I found writing built trust among my students. The process of locating and integrating research was affirming:

> The research just validated the fact that I'm not some free loving hippie who
> thinks art fixes everything. . . .I do think that . . .creative outlets can solve a lot
> of problems. To have actual science behind it, it was like, see it's not just me
> throwing up a peace sign. This is the way we're supposed to do it. It does make
> sense. It does put the brakes on your emotional response if you can write it
> down.

With research backing up my practices, I was able to provide a rationale for my emphasis on daily journal writing. I hoped this research would be a "why" that could

serve as justification if I was ever questioned by students, parents, or administration. Though I felt that before the SI I was winging it, I am now more intentional and confident in my teaching practices.

I would describe the Institute as "personal development of you as a teacher and you as a writer." Time was carved out to practice my own writing and "get countless other ideas from other teachers on how to incorporate writing . . .no matter what grade you teach." The SI demonstrated how teachers should be writers too: "If you can't model being a writer, your kids aren't going to buy it. They're not going to think they're writers if their teacher isn't." Though I did a poor job of modeling in the past, I attribute my newfound focus on writing and teaching writing to the positive people, ideas, and experiences I encountered during the SI. In fact, in the days after the SI I have been texting friends and colleagues from my school encouraging them to apply for next year.

## Christy

*I love teaching writing . . .because children this age are naturally excited to write.* Prior to participating in the 2016 OWP SI, I made explicit my professional goals as a Pre-K teacher in a large suburban school district:

> *As an early childhood professional, I believe I need to help children gain equal footing in all aspects of learning. I want to provide opportunities for . . .children to love learning. To do this, I want to have all the tools to provide meaningful and engaging learning opportunities, . . .[and] I am always searching for ways to improve my teaching.*

Unlike many participants at the 2016 OWP SI, I am a novice teacher. At the time of the SI, I had just completed my first year teaching. I even discussed this in my OWP SI

application, admitting *I am a first year teacher, so I do not pretend to think that I know everything.* The fact that I am an early career teacher contributed to many nerves I experienced early on during the SI, especially during the Pre-institute day in April.

I had participated in a writing group as a journalism major in college, but it was not fun. In this class, I was forced to edit and revise according to my professor's vague feedback. I felt isolated in my writing group; on rare occasions when my classmates shared, conversation and feedback was superficial. At the SI, however, I "loved the writing group . . .because I was so fed up with writing before, once I started and people enjoyed my writing, it made me feel better." Through the positive feedback I received from my writing group members, I began to feel comfortable writing about important memories in my life. "It felt good to get those memories out on paper."

One memory I focused on during the SI centered on my two grandfathers, who both died when I was in elementary school. This poem went through much revision from the time it was drafted during a quick write to when I shared it during Author's Chair, posted it to the (b)log, and published it in the anthology. Originally, I brought this piece to my writing group as a letter. While my group loved the content, they wondered if it might be better as a personal narrative or poem. Hesitantly, I decided to try poetry even though I was scared of poems. I have to admit it was much better after this genre modification. I surprised myself with my willingness to revise and try new forms of writing, but I attribute this to my writing group offering positive feedback as well as suggestions. Taking this piece through a recursive writing process, my final product was something of which I was proud.

**Two Grandfathers Gone**

Little girl, little girl
In the next few years you will feel sadness
Two cornerstones of your family will be gone forever

The gentle guidance,
And the even gentler hugs,

The sound of laughter after a game of Skip Bo,
And the harmonies of a barber shop quartet,

The gentle push on the tire swing,
And the earth between your fingers in the garden,

The smell of Cornhusker Lotion,
And the taste of mint chocolate chip ice cream on a Tuesday,

Endless games of Old Maid (He'll cheat to help you win),
And smiles dripping through exaggerated frowns after the defeat,

Listening and learning from a German lesson,
And closing your eyes to the beauty of the harmonica,

Painting clouds and bushes on his masterpieces,
And traveling to the cabin in the snowy winter,

The memories will linger in your heart and mind
But it's not enough.
Because pictures and memories are not enough.

Love them and let them love you
Because they won't be here forever.

Sharing this piece with my writing group was easy since I felt comfortable with

them. Because my group had all shared personal writing, I felt as though I could, too.

Making the decision to read this poem in Author's Chair in front of the whole group was a different story. "I was more nervous for Author's Chair than I was for my presentation . . .because it's personal." Sharing this piece was hard. "Because I was so nervous, I didn't have air in my lungs." Through the nerves, I read aloud my emotional memories of my grandfathers and received much positive feedback. "It was a good experience. I'm glad I got to do it. I got a lot of notes thanking me." Although initially intimidating, sharing with a wider audience validated me as a writer because of the sheer amount of positive feedback and gratitude I received after sharing such a personal piece of writing.

Even after the SI I have continued writing. I wrote a piece during the SI about one of my grandmothers baking bread. I felt it was necessary, then, after the SI to write a piece for my other grandmother. I title this piece "Knots," as it detailed my grandma brushing the knots out of my tangled hair after a day of swimming. Since the SI, I bought a journal and continue to write things down I don't want to say out loud. Writing, both during and after the SI, served as an outlet to share memories and express feelings. "I really want to do a writing group. . . .I'm really hoping that people want to write with me because that will help me personally." The three weeks of the SI were only the beginning of my focus on writing for myself and sharing and giving and receiving feedback in a writing group setting.

Considering my role as a Pre-K teacher, I was initially nervous for the teaching demonstration because I worried my ideas would not be applicable for other teachers. In addition, I was concerned that I might not be able to take away strategies and activities from middle and upper grade teachers: "I was actually kind of scared because I figured

there wouldn't be any other Pre-K people. I was kind of afraid that I may not get as much out of it as others just because I was separated." As my peers began presenting, however, I quickly realized I could modify and adapt strategies and ideas from all participants, regardless of their grade level or expertise: "I was surprised I was taking things from high school presentations." Instead of feeling separated from upper elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, I felt connected to them because the presentations allowed for collaborative conversations about how particular activities could work in other settings and grade levels.

Presenting my teaching demonstration – "Extra! Extra! Write All About It!" – gave me more confidence to share ideas with colleagues outside of the SI. I "want to do that back at our school, just kind of share ideas and best practices." Not only was I focused on learning and improving my own teaching practices, but I also want to share my understandings with colleagues in my building. Taking this one step further, I look forward to potential opportunities to present my teaching demonstration at other schools: "I really would consider actually going out and consulting. . . .I think it would be really cool talking with other people." The idea of presenting to a wider audience of teachers, although intimidating, is something I find appealing because I, too, learned much about teaching and learning through the conversations participants had during my presentation. Although a novice teacher, the SI provided me with confidence and affirmation that I could teach others and learn from others. I believe I will be a better teacher as a result of these experiences.

My teaching demonstration centered on interactive and shared writing in the early childhood classroom. I discovered, through research, that my practices are

research-based. I know I do not need to prove to my four year olds that research articles back up my practices, but I enjoy research and making sure my practices work. Both the research process and putting together the presentation were made more doable thanks to my presentation group. "I wanted ideas on how to share my presentation and branch out to older grades," and as I collaborated with my presentation group, teachers from a variety of grade levels encouraged me to share my ideas. "I can bring in something I'm doing that maybe other people aren't. That kind of made me feel innovative." Once I recognized that my ideas were unique and research-based, I felt confident throughout the preparation process.

Presenting the teaching demonstration during the SI forced me to step out of my comfort zone. I felt anxious and unsure in the moments leading up to my presentation. "I thought I was going to be super nervous," but once I started sharing my ideas and practices, I felt good because OWP feels like a family. Since I was presenting to a group of people with whom I felt safe and comfortable, I was able to relax and be myself. My supportive colleagues allowed me to share my ideas without fear of rejection. "Even being the youngest person there, the youngest grade there, I felt part of the group. Even though there were veteran teachers, I still felt like an equal to them." I attribute the success of my teaching demonstration to the positive atmosphere of the OWP SI community.

On the last morning of the SI one of the coaches asked us to reflect on what we learned throughout the SI, reciting the quote by Albert Einstein: **"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."** In response to this, I wrote about changes I could make in my classroom

as a result of my experiences in the SI:

>*Because of SI I have become more confident and excited. I'm confident because I know that my best practices are research-based. I'm excited because as I reflect on my practices, I thought of great extensions for what I'm already doing. Change usually requires help or assistance so I'm really excited that I now have so many people on my side ready to cheer me on and challenge me – both as a teacher and a writer. These relationships I've built are so valuable to me. Not only are these people great professionals but also my friends.*

The OWP SI was a renewal for me; through reflection and growth, I am excited about looking forward to how this experience might help not only myself as a writer, but also as a teacher of writing. In turn, I hope my students might reap the rewards of my participation.

## Carol

As a first grade teacher in an urban school district, I was completing my sixth year of teaching in the spring of 2016. Admittedly, I was tired, beat down, and overwhelmed with pessimism from colleagues and administration at my school site. "Before the Summer Institute, I was dealing with a lot of negativity at work [and] felt really negative towards my job." This environment caused me to question my beliefs, practices, and even career: "I didn't really know if I was doing the right things in the classroom. . . .I just felt . . .like I wasn't really doing what I was supposed to be doing." Wanting to change my teaching and, hopefully, the culture of my school as a whole, I, after conversing with a friend who was an OWP fellow, decided to apply for the 2016 SI. With a glimmer of hope, I was open to whatever OWP had to offer.

I was super nervous during the application and interview process. Although it was nerve wracking, on the interview day I immediately felt at home after meeting potential peers and colleagues during my interview. "You have to go into OWP with the mindset that they're not there to judge you. They're there to push you to be a better person and a better teacher." The welcoming nature of the director and coaches put my anxiety at ease. A few weeks after interviewing, I received the email that I had been accepted to the 2016 OWP SI. "When I finally found out I was in, I didn't know what this entailed, but I was excited."

I attended the pre-Institute day in April and realized this was going to be a lot of work. As I learned of the writing and teaching demonstration obligations, among others, I began to feel nervous and intimidated all over again. "Oh my gosh – a 90 minute presentation. How am I going to do that?" Enter again the affirming members of the OWP community, who encouraged me along the way. I realized "I need to push myself outside of my comfort zone. I was up for it. You have to be open minded when you start the process." Even though the work leading up to the SI was intimidating, I was up for the challenge.

One challenge I faced early on was feeling comfortable enough to not only write but also take that a step further and share my writing with others. Before the SI, "I had some deep, dark things going on that I just didn't know how to get out. I've always loved writing, [but] I didn't do enough of it." In the past, writing was basically non-existent for me personally, but I did enjoy the little writing in which I engaged. As an adolescent in school, my "favorite thing to do was write . . .stories, poems, stuff like that." I enjoyed writing about myself and my experiences, but I detested informational

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and argumentative writing. My passion for personal writing was further ignited at the SI. The sheer amount of writing I was asked to complete was initially intimidating, but once I got started, it was like I couldn't stop. I got so caught up in my writing; I stayed up late each night during the SI and got small chunks of sleep because writing was such a priority.

One of my first writing tasks was to compose a personal narrative. I started writing about my childhood, but I quickly discovered this was not the piece I intended to craft. Instead, I decided to write a piece about my mom, who passed away when I was 15 years old. My decision to switch topics, although emotionally demanding, benefitted me as a writer and person in the long run.

> One of the very first long pieces I wrote was about my mom, and when I did it was like a huge weight was lifted. That plays a big part in the way I am today. It was about the days leading up to the night she passed away. I could finally say goodbye in a way that I hadn't before.

The process of composing this piece was therapeutic. Experiencing firsthand the recursive nature of the writing process, I was able to prewrite, draft, share, edit, revise, share again, and so on until I finally felt ready to share my writing with the whole group and, ultimately, in the anthology published at the conclusion of the SI.

I attribute the success of this piece and others to my writing group, who encouraged me along the way. I loved my writing group. Early on the SI, my writing group was timid, but then we all started opening up thanks to encouragement from the coaches. My writing group was a mesh of different personalities: "You've got the support, the encouragement, someone who's like you who gets you, and then somebody

who will critique you." Our writing group was comparable to puzzle pieces that all fit together. In fact, it was the encouragement and affirmation from my writing group that allowed me to feel comfortable and confident enough to share my personal narrative about my mom with the larger group as a whole. Although in the beginning it started out slow, our writing group, through continuous sharing and modeling from our coach, became capable of providing useful feedback for one another.

During the last week of the SI, I was scheduled to read during Author's Chair one morning. Although I wrote the piece about my mom early on during the SI, my writing group told me, "You have to read that in Author's Chair." I was very emotional as I read the draft of this piece to my writing group, and I was nervous and vulnerable to share with the group as a whole. I approached the front of the room with a box of tissues in hand. "I'm going to cry," I thought, "but I guess because I'd already read it, and I was already healing a wound that I had opened, it was ok." Opening up to the whole group, I heard blessings from other people. All of my peers thanked me for being brave enough to share such a personal piece, and I received the affirmation I desired. Positive feedback from my peers was definitely building my confidence. I have carried this newfound confidence beyond the three week SI, too. "Now I write every night. Now it's just a part of who I am." Writing and sharing – with my husband and friends – have become a habit thanks, in large part, to my positive experiences during the SI.

Although writing and sharing were almost instantaneously comforting and fulfilling, I recall feelings of anxiety and was nervous as I began planning my teaching demonstration. "I was very intimidated. How am I going to do this? What am I going to do?" Although I had many questions and no answers, I always liked teaching writing

and enjoyed doing writing projects with my students. This enthusiasm for integrating writing into my curriculum spurred an initial interest in choosing a teaching demonstration topic. With the help of my presentation coach, I decided to focus on writing across the curriculum for my presentation, which I titled "Sticking to the Standards while Writing Across the Curriculum."

Remember I am not one of those people who likes to write about research, so I initially hated digging for research. In fact, the aspect of research was near paralyzing, threatening to stall all of my efforts toward completing and presenting my teaching demonstration. I was very nervous about the research aspect, but I wanted to have that research to back up my practices. "I spent a lot of time on the research," and because I had only been teaching for six years, it was difficult to locate and integrate research. The colleagues surrounding me, however, supplied resources and texts that served as a starting place. "I would just go pull a book for that day and go through and read it, or I would get on the Internet and research writing across the curriculum." A breakthrough occurred when I located the section on writing across the curriculum on the National Writing Project's website. "That was one of the things I knew was proven. If the National Writing Project's talking about it, it's research proven." This discovery shifted my perception of research: "It's a piece of cake!"

I left the SI with a sense of excitement for the upcoming school year. I immediately wanted to share what I had learned with colleagues at my school site, but I did not receive the hearty reception for which I had hoped. I sent numerous text messages to my coworkers, eager to fill them in on what I had done over the past three weeks. They, however, were on summer break. They did not want to listen. I knew I

had to take a different approach, so I invited a particularly open minded colleague for coffee at Starbucks:

> I sat down with one of my friends, and I physically took my bag full of OWP stuff. It's got all of my presentation handouts; it's got my quick writes in it. I pulled it out and I said, "Can you just listen to me for a few minutes? I have to tell you about this before I explode. It's so fresh on my mind, and I'm excited about it."

I then proceeded to recount my experiences at the SI. I described how it changed my perceptions of writing and teaching. I wanted to bring these ideas back to my school in order to "change people's perspective on writing and hopefully get them more excited to come back and maybe go through the Summer Institute themselves." It was not enough for me to have experienced the SI; I wanted to enact change through my experiences. I wanted to spread the good news and share this opportunity with others.

Most importantly, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of my students and colleagues since the SI had certainly made a difference in mine. If nothing else, I wanted others to see how SI changed me through my students. By embracing writing for myself, I hoped, too, that I could encourage and promote the power of writing for my students. As we walked out of Starbucks, my coworker and I shook hands in agreement: I would apply to be a coach at next summer's SI, and she would submit an application to attend. I had convinced one, but I was only getting started.

## Kelly

"I wanted to be better. I didn't know how to teach writing. I didn't know what I was doing." Prior to participating in the SI, I would describe myself as a struggling

writer and teacher of writing. I taught preschool and Kindergarten for years, but I recently transitioned to first grade. Interested in becoming better professionally, I "needed to know how to take it a step further." I was searching for effective professional development, but financial constraints and lackluster prior experiences halted my efforts. "I wanted it from real teachers. I want to see how somebody does that in their room." One of my coworkers in our small, rural elementary school was a participant in the 2015 OWP SI and encouraged me to apply in 2016. Because I had heard positive things about the Institute, I agreed.

During my interview, I expressed to the directors and coaches my desire to be and do better in the classroom. Once accepted, I attended the pre-Institute day in April and, like several of my peers, immediately questioned myself and my decision to participate in the OWP SI: "I was so intimidated. . . .I thought these people are way further along than I am because I really just didn't know how to approach writing with young children." With feelings of inadequacy looming, I was overwhelmed. "I didn't know that I would even be asked to do a presentation. It's kind of like I went into this blind." While I wanted to be better, I did not feel capable of helping others do the same:

> I never saw myself getting up and doing anything like that. I really didn't want to. I just wanted to learn from everyone and take something really good and go back and give it to my kids. I was very intimidated that I didn't have anything to say for 90 minutes.

Veteran teachers in my cohort experienced similar feelings of intimidation; this realization allowed me to feel better showing them what works for me. I was relieved to discover I was not alone in my apprehension. I found myself a member of a group of

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like-minded people and agreed to persevere. "It's probably the first time I've gotten to be in a culture with that many people in one room who were all completely positive. We were all geared toward the same thing: becoming better." This affirmative culture allowed my negative thoughts and feelings to subside.

Once the SI started, I began to understand that the teaching of writing was only one facet in which I would engage. Similar to my experience at the Pre-Institute day, the writing was intimidating. I asked myself, "How am I supposed to write all of this?" On the first day, I joined my writing group comprised of only two others. "We were able to really discuss our writing . . .because there we just three of us, [and] we got really comfortable with each other." Because our group was intimate, I was capable of writing and sharing personal pieces, including a poem about my mother. I struggled initially with writing about painful memories and experiences, but I attribute my willingness to "being in a safe place and hearing other people share things." When I would hear a peer share about an uncomfortable event, I felt my own voice and courage strengthen.

Within a few days, I realized that writing about memories and experiences – even those I would rather not relive – was important to my progress and growth. "I've got to write these things to get them out of my system." Getting these thoughts and feelings out on paper helped me write about other topics, too:

> That's probably why I've never written in the past because I didn't want to write about that, but it is kind of things we just need to put on paper and be done with it. I was actually able to share what I wrote with those people and feel comfortable doing it.

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Writing and sharing, something I had little experience with, became a mechanism for expression. Not only did I share with my writing group, but I also shared with the group as a whole in Author's Chair. In these situations, I received positive feedback in a very safe environment after I shared, my peers appreciating what I had written. Affirmation from the small and large groups resulted in a newfound sense of the power of writing, both for myself and for my teaching and students.

I understand now how "the writing project is to help us with our students." During the SI, I experienced how writing, sharing, and feedback affected me, but I wanted to know how this could translate to the work I do with first graders, too. Even after one day at the pre-Institute, I discovered how quick writes could impact my teaching and my students' learning. "I left even in April going, 'Ok, I'm going to go try that. That can work.'" I started implementing quick writes in my class toward the end of the school year and noticed my students enjoying writing. In April, I recognized how important it is to write with your students. I realize "you need to be writing with them, so I started writing with them, and they loved to hear what I wrote." Even before the SI began, I was already witnessing how this experience might transform my teaching and my students.

Researching, an aspect of the teaching demonstration process, resonated most with me:

Whenever I started listening to the research that people put in their presentations and reading the stuff that I had been trying to find, it gave me the – that's why I was doing that. Intuitively, I knew that was the best way for my students to learn, but that was the support for me. I got other ideas from the research. I

didn't use it all just to justify myself but it was like, ok that's why we're doing

that. That's a real thing, not just because it's the way I feel comfortable.

Learning about research-based teaching practices and then integrating the research into

my own teaching demonstration helped validate my pedagogy. However, as I watched

my peers present their teaching demonstration, I became nervous. "It was hard. You sit

there and question every little thing. Should I add this? Should I put more? Should I

take that out?" While I was learning much about the teaching of writing from my

colleagues, I was silently second-guessing my teaching demonstration and myself, as

well.

As the SI progressed, I witnessed time after time the positive feedback and

words of affirmation for all of the presenters. As a result, I began to feel more

comfortable with the idea of presenting my own ideas and practices. In the end, my

presentation "was good. It went by really fast." Presenting was comfortable thanks to

the culture of people who all want to be there. The process of putting together and

presenting my teaching demonstration, including locating and integrating research,

"made me more aware of what I'm doing and mindful of why I'm doing the things."

Through my own presentation and participating in others' teaching demonstrations, I

was able to thoughtfully reflect on my practices and consider how I could better

integrate writing into my classroom and curriculum.

When reflecting on the SI as a whole, I have no regrets and am glad I decided to

participate, even with the initial feelings of intimidation and apprehension.

It's the hardest thing I've ever done, but it was the best thing I've ever done. I really

think in a year or two I'm going to look at this and go, "This was the pivot point in my

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teaching career. This is when it went from me just showing up in my classroom and trying to do the best that I can to actually making a difference." The amount of work and dedication I put into the process was well worth the outcome. Writing and teaching writing took on new meaning, and my experiences in the role of learner - instead of just teacher - helped reveal what I can do better for my students.

## Lindsey

As an eighth grade Language Arts teacher, I think highly of my practices and the successes my students have had with writing in recent years. Teaching writing has become routine and comfortable. I allow my students to express themselves through "things like concrete poetry, using graphic novels in the classroom, [and] supplementing prose with visuals." My students and I connect to multimodal writing: "I just really latched on because I saw kids who had been unengaged my first year really come alive." The visual writing practices I implemented in my classroom gave my students a voice.

While my students were writing openly and freely, I, however, was not. "I thought I was a writer because I taught writing." When I think about it, though, "I never wrote for myself." I was encouraging my students to write for themselves, to express their ideas through nontraditional media. What I was not doing was practicing what I preached. "I don't feel like I have the confidence in myself as a writer. I didn't have the confidence to share, and I don't think I was asking them [my students] to do something I feel like I would do." I expected my students to write often and share openly and freely, but as a writer myself, I felt apprehensive.

This disconnect between teaching writing and the act of writing led me to apply

for the 2016 OWP SI. Colleagues at my middle school site spoke highly of the SI. "It was just always held in such high regard. It was almost like legendary, and the teachers that I knew who had been through it are just powerful teachers." Because I had a glimpse of what the SI did for my peers, I decided to apply in hopes that it could do something for my students and me too. Admittedly, I was a little scared during the application process, especially when I confessed on my application and during the interview that I was *not a writer. I feel fairly confident when it comes to more formal writing, like education research, but struggle with personal and creative writing.* It was the first time I had been honest with myself and others about my lack of personal writing. I revealed that what I asked of my students I did not require of myself.

While feeling confident and at ease describing my teaching practices, I was nervous to reveal to the directors and coaches that I did not engage in much writing on my own. However, "it felt good to be really honest and say I don't ever write for myself," and I was relieved when my interviewers admitted that they had been the same before their experience with the SI, too. During the interview, I shared that "I wasn't growing as a writer in my writing classroom." Since I "wasn't going in with any kind of confidence at all [and] didn't have the tools to be the writer" I wanted to be, I brought with me the willingness to change and the willingness to grow. I wanted to grow and learn as much as I could during the SI about what it means to be both a teacher of writing and a writer myself. When I was accepted to the SI, I immediately phoned one of my mentors and shared my excitement. She was equally excited and predicted that I would experience the change and growth I desired.

Once the SI began, my writing group was an initial catalyst for change. "I had a

unique writing group because at the end there were only two of us with our coach." My

writing group made me comfortable when it came to sharing my writing – a new

concept and practice for me, personally:

> We were three people coming from three totally different areas, so that was nice
>
> to talk about our classrooms and ourselves as writers and just our lives as
>
> strangers, but it never felt like strangers. I loved my writing group, and I loved
>
> sharing what I was writing.

Although our writing group was supportive and encouraging, a fear that I was not doing

this right began to overwhelm me. Many in my writing group and in the larger group as

a whole wrote about very intimate or tragic moments, something I was not ready to do.

"It wasn't what I wanted to do. It didn't feel like what I needed to do, either." While

others around me shared deep, personal stories, I tried and failed to write and share

something so personal. Although the SI did not explicitly advocate for a particular

theme or type of writing - at least across all of our pieces - it seemed like many in our

community were focusing on personal and often tragic moments. Early on in the SI, I

questioned myself and my abilities as a writer and member of a writing group. I feared I

was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

With questions like, "Am I not doing this right?" "Am I not going there?" and

"Am I not pushing myself?" filling my thoughts, I sought advice from others who had

been through this experience before. After conversations with my writing group coach

and the SI directors, I discovered that just because I was writing about different topics

and using a different voice did not mean that I was doing something wrong. Moreover, I

realized that deep, personal stories can be about joy, pain, transformation, tragedy, and a

slew of other emotions, experiences, and topics.  "I want to write things that make me laugh," I told my mentors.

By the end of the SI, I realized that writing looks different for each individual. "I think that as a writer you write what you love, and there isn't a right or wrong." My early fears about writing what was right subsided thanks to encouragement from my peers. As I wrote and shared humorous, and even fictional, pieces, my colleagues praised my writing, my voice, and my creativity. My vision of what it means to write and be a writer is still evolving, even after the SI. "That's something I'll have to continue working on."

Once I began to feel more comfortable with my unique style, I composed and posted a fictional piece to our online (b)log.

> ***Address:*** *After talking with my writing group about composing fiction, I decided to give this a try!  This piece is campy, just for fun, and makes me laugh- definitely not a personal piece.  Please address if the plot flows well, and if the ending has adequate suspense and a "choose your own adventure" type of closure, or if it's too vague and you find yourself lost!  *I've written about the Brady Bunch more in these two weeks than ever in my life, ha!  Thank you for reading!*

---

**Adios Johnny Bravo**

"Look at what it's done to this place!  It doesn't belong."

"Carol, honey, let's be-"

"Be what?  Reasonable?  Is that what you were going to say?  Oh, Mike, I hope you aren't suggesting that I'm being *unreasonable*."

---

"No, Carol.  What I was going to say, dear, was that we should be grateful.  Grateful, honey!  Grateful for this oppor-"  Mike's voice cut off sharply.  Glancing quickly across the driveway, left then right to assure no one else was around, he continued in a whisper, "for this opportunity he's given us."

In the front yard of the house, the grass was green and cut perfectly.  Besides the stray bike- Bobby's- turned on its side near the back gate, the home with its sleek hedges and brown trim was an idyllic scene.  As if seeing him for the first time, Carol stood, mouth agape and brows furrowed as if trying to piece together something horrid in front of her that didn't fit.  She slowly nodded her small head, crowned with a thick fringe of ashy-blonde hair.  "Grateful…" she mused, "grateful for this…oh, Mike."

Turning on her stacked heel, she walked slowly, strangely, up the drive to the house.  It was a beautiful home- everyone said so- and it had been designed by Mike.  "What a wonderful man," Carol used to believe, although she had never thought him much of an architect; two bedrooms with one bathroom between to service their six children always seemed like a plan that lacked foresight.  Lacked common sense…lacked an understanding of the needs of others.  And now, walking up the drive to this beautiful house, Mike Brady did not seem like a wonderful man. *Grateful…*

_____

Two mornings ago, in the midst of yet another fight about it (she refused to call that *thing* "him" like Mike did), she felt as if both of their true colors were showing- and they weren't groovy oranges and greens, but rather murky blacks and white hot whites.  Total opposites.

"Do you think all of this is *free*, Carol?" Mike had shouted, arms spread out like a permed vulture's wings. "That all of this is just *free*?" As he stammered "We *owe* him…we *owe* him Carol…" she had started away, away from him.  They were in the kitchen, and she remembered picking out the orange laminate for the countertops- "It's just the *most*" the saleswoman had oozed- and she shook her head.  Neither she nor Mike spent much time in the kitchen unless it was to eat the casseroles and meatloaves prepared by the housekeeper.  Suddenly she felt like a stranger, cold in the warm room which belonged more to Alice than to her.  Standing at the center island, she absent mindedly touched a stack of papers that had been carelessly left behind for someone else to keep track of.  *"Jan,"* she thought with a familiar disdain for her middle daughter.

Carol felt Mike behind her before she heard him speak.  He leaned in, gently took her

hand, and she whipped around to face him- eyes quickly scanning his face for any trace of what first drew her to the dashing father of three. When she saw nothing, she lowered her eyes, not in disappointment but in something resembling resignation, settling her gaze on his long pointed lapel.  His grip on her tightened.

"None of this is *free*…the bellbottoms we *both* love, the surgery for Marcia's nose, none of it is free."

"Yes, Mike, none of this is free- and because of…of…*him*," Carol spat out this last word, instantly feeling dread and lowering her voice, "because of him, neither are we."

Wrenching from his grasp, she had marched steadily and quickly out of the kitchen and into the living room- the best room in the house.  With walls of dark wood paneling, complemented by the rich olive green trim (her suggestion that Mike had loved), the living room had always been her favorite space in the house.  It was a gorgeous space- everyone said so- and now it felt like a nothing.  Like it belonged to a stranger.  It didn't belong here, and as she briskly passed all the things that filled the space, that had made the house feel like home, she resented it.  Resented what it had done to her family, to her husband- to the bunch.

Mike had not followed her and she didn't care.  The man who had constructed the beautifully sleek staircase (the envy of her friends who had married grocers or doctors instead of architects)  at which she was now paused felt like a stranger too.  And it had all happened so quickly.  It couldn't have been over a week since he- *it*– had arrived and Mike had begun his desperate campaign to convince her of the "opportunity".

Carol, taking a deep breath and smoothing the front pleats of her slacks (bellbottoms which, by the way, she did *not* need to be reminded weren't free), took the first step that would lead to the second level of the house.  She paused again, and her resentment grew.  *Grateful…opportunity…* With a fierce resolve, Carol moved firmly and deliberately up the smooth, flat steps, her head held high and shoulders back.  When she had reached the top step, she quickly rounded the corner and moved down the hall to the right past the girls' room, with its door painted pink, then to the boys' room, its door a pale, filmy blue.

She had raised her hand to the knob, her will to turn it growing weaker as her resentment and resolve fell again to resignation and fear.  Small hand on the knob

now, she turned it- slowly at first- then with strength that pushed the door to her boys' room wide open. She gasped in a quiet, broken whimper, had taken two steps back, then continued to move backwards down the hall, past the framed portrait of the smiling bunch of eight framed and hung on the hallway wall.

*Look at what it's done to this place…it doesn't belong…*

Once I recognized I could write what and how I wanted, I began to feel comfortable enough to share with my peers. "You just feel safe. I just think numbers and time had everything to do with it." Because my writing group was small and met on a daily basis, I shared openly. "You just knew you were ok to talk about these things." There was mutual respect within my writing group, and this collegiality allowed me to take my writing one step further and share the words I put on a page, even if they were of a different tone and mood from others.

With my journey as a writer taking much time and energy, I was excited and even relieved to present my teaching demonstration, "Exploring Identity: Writing about Self to Reflect on Self," to my peers. "I was passionate about it, [and] I went over my presentation time because I could've just gone on forever." I do admit to being nervous to get up and present, but I had fun once I got started. Eager to share my teaching practices, I was equally excited to watch and learn from my peers as they presented their teaching demonstrations. Watching others, however, resulted in anxious feelings:

> I was nervous because I wanted how passionate I was about it to come through. I
> feel like I wanted to make everyone proud because everyone else had just kept
> getting better and better, and I was just so impressed with everyone's

presentations. I wanted them to see what it was like in my classroom because I had gotten a sense of that from everyone else.

Once I began my presentation, I relaxed. "Taking them through those exercises that I do in my classroom reaffirmed that's what I'm really passionate about." I was able to confidently share my practices and ideas with my peers, who were all very receptive to my presentation.

Transitioning from teaching middle school to returning to graduate school full time, I admit that "after seeing everyone's presentation and even doing mine, I wanted to be back in the classroom so badly." I will have to chance to share many of these practices and ideas with future teachers, as I am scheduled to teach an integrating arts class for elementary education majors in the fall. I got so many tips and tricks from my peers at the SI that I will pass on to my college students.

Participating in others' teaching demonstrations was both affirming and enlightening for me as a teacher. "I had just a million and one light bulb moments during those three weeks." Surprised to absorb so much from teachers of all grade levels and various school sites, this learning was really transformative, and as a teacher of elementary education majors it's going to transform my class this year. Even though I will no longer be a middle school English language arts teacher, I plan to use and share many of the ideas in a way that might benefit even more students for years to come.

At the conclusion of the SI, I decided OWP doesn't just focus on yourself as a writer but also focuses on yourself as a teacher. On a daily basis, there was an equal balance of teaching and writing. I feel I am better able to answer the questions "Who

am I as a writer?" and "Who am I as a teacher?" after three weeks of the SI. In the end, I didn't feel like it was over. My writing life is new, and as a teacher, I am ready to share what I learned with others. Although the SI itself ended, my writing and teaching transformation is only starting.

## Regina

I have taught ninth grade Special Education English at a suburban high school for the past two years. A novice teacher, I came to the OWP SI hoping for "the opportunity to teach writing more efficiently and to integrate it better into each of [my] lesson plans." I have to admit that early on in my career "as a writing teacher I was much more prescriptive in the way I taught writing." I had a lot of rules, so thinking about my teaching practices, I hoped the writing project would give me a little bit more freedom and independence with my students. I wanted my students to think about their ideas more and the content of their writing, rather than solely the structure and correctness.

I had some experience writing poetry in the past, but I didn't really think of myself as a writer. I shared these thoughts with a fellow teacher during an IEP meeting in addition to fussing about how hard it is to teach writing. I told my colleague, "It's like I don't know what I'm doing. I'm trying to teach them how I was taught to teach writing." Completing my second year in the classroom, I was quickly discovering that my students did or could not learn to write the same way I had. My colleague, an OWP fellow, recommended I apply for the SI and forwarded me the application email. I was apprehensive because it was only my second year of teaching, but after much peer pressure from my co worker, I decided to apply and hope for the best.

After an application that was rushed through and an interview that was subpar, I was surprised to discover that I was asked to join to the 2016 OWP SI. "I don't have things I feel like people could use. I'm not a good teacher yet, [and] I don't write, and they want writers," I nervously confessed to my husband after my interview. What I did not realize at the time is that many of my peers felt the same way I did; I was not alone in feeling apprehensive and self-doubting.

Once I was accepted and the SI began, I struggled with being a member of a writing group. I remember a whole group meeting in which the directors "gave a little speech about how in writing groups we need to build each other up and not be critical. I'm pretty sure that was directed toward me." Having only experience with editing others' work in the past, I did not know any different. "I'm just telling people what I thought. I would make a sandwich. I would say the nice thing, then the critical thing, then another nice thing - sometimes." Similar to my students not learning writing how I was taught, my peers were not accepting of criticism in the same way I was. "We didn't know each other well enough for me to do that. I was kind of insensitive. I feel badly now." Looking back, I realize that I was often being too critical, especially early on. After reflecting on my initial approach to my writing group, I pledged to make a change: "I'm going to go in and be positive." This decision benefited my peers and our writing group:

> I was more positive, and they really started to like me maybe a little. We really got close and had a good group . . .after I started being more positive. I feel like writing group just kind of ended, and we had just started being able to open up to each other and be truthful about our writing . . .and getting better at it, and

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then it just stopped.

Due to my shift in approach, our writing group began to thrive. We shared personal narratives with one another and got to know each other better. Although each individual wrote differently and about differently topics, we began to realize that each individual had her own voice, that what we wrote about was just as important as how we wrote. Through our various personal writing and sharing, we bonded.

Similar to sharing early on, providing feedback for one another was, at least initially, a struggle. "I felt like nobody wanted to give feedback very often. I feel like they didn't really want to give a lot of feedback to me. Maybe they thought they'd hurt my feelings." I think our group was confused as to how to give feedback and what kinds of feedback to give. However, after a while we became a little more comfortable with giving and receiving feedback, especially once the directors and coaches provided the bless, address, press strategy. Toward the end of the SI, two of my writing group members brought in poetry and asked me, specifically, to look at their pieces and provide feedback. "That was kind of nice. That made me feel good." With time came feelings of comfort. "It was kind of like they knew what to expect from me, and they expected this type of feedback, and that's what they wanted." As our group members got to know one another better, the challenge of providing effective feedback subsided.

Alongside my journey as a writer and writing group member, I was also struggling with preparing and presenting a teaching demonstration. "We had talked about best practices, and I realized I didn't have a lot of things to share. I kind of freaked out about what I was going to do." As I watched and participated in my peers' teaching demonstrations, I was certainly gaining much insight and ideas into the

teaching of writing. I was introduced to the six traits of writing and then "read a lot of things about word choice." "Everyone was like, 'All teachers know about the traits!' and I was like, 'I don't.'"

Through some research on the six traits of writing, I discovered that voice and word choice are interconnected so much, so I "decided to do those two things because they seemed like the most interesting activities I had." Although the research was difficult, I was able to pull several ideas I had implemented in my classroom and connect them to research on the importance of voice and word choice. Through this process, I discovered that research is really important because it served as support for my teaching practices.

Once I got in the flow of my teaching demonstration, it was kind of fun. "Once I got into it and had my presentation up there and had my packets and everything, it kind of felt like this isn't as bad as I thought it would be." I attribute these feelings to my peers who presented before me and reassured me and also to the amount of time and effort I put into researching voice and word choice in writing. "They're showing you their lesson plans and their ideas. You're showing them your lesson plans and your ideas." This mutual sharing of best practices resulted in growth for me as a teacher of writing.

I "really enjoyed being a part of that community and getting to know new people and new teachers." Teachers of all grades impacted my learning and teaching. "It felt so good to be around people that loved their job and really put effort into their job, and it really gave me a boost." Becoming a member of this community helped me become a better teacher. Reflecting on the experience, it was a lot of fun, and I really enjoyed it. I

even wish I could experience the SI again next summer in order to learn a little bit more from other people. Because, in the end, my experiences were positive, I will recommend it to everyone. Just like my colleague at my school site pushed me to participate, so too will I push a co worker next year.

## Barbara

In contrast to many of my fellow participants, I have nearly twenty years of teaching experience under my belt. I have taught seventh and eighth grade on-level and advanced English language arts in a rural middle school my entire teaching career, and I came to the OWP SI eager to be a better writing teacher. My intentions applying for and participating in the SI were solely to improve. On my application, I noted that *I want to become more comfortable teaching writing. The more I learn, the more my kids learn.* I needed to become a better writing teacher, and I was not interested in much else, especially concerning engaging in writing processes for myself. I admit *I'm an impatient writer.*

Before the SI, I composed a teaching philosophy as part of my writing obligations. "The main thing I found stressful prior to the actual Summer Institute was doing my teacher philosophy." It took a ton of time, and I struggled with finding the research which backed up what I already believed. Writing my teaching philosophy was a stressful experience, and I was disappointed that my philosophy was not published; it did not appear in the anthology, and I wonder if it was ever even read. "I feel like that was the most difficult and probably disappointing things" about the SI.

What was not difficult for me early on was the idea of presenting my teaching demonstration. While many of my peers were experiencing stress and anxiety at the

thought of a 90 minute presentation, I found it comical that others could be so anxious. Others felt it was over their heads, but I kept assuring them that it was not. My idea that my peers could do it was proven true, and I "enjoyed seeing other people present their lessons because it gave me more ideas of good lesson that can be impactful for my kids." Although I felt that some presentations were better than others, I was able to walk away from the SI with a plethora of ideas, strategies, and practices I felt I could easily implement in my classroom, even those coming from early childhood teachers.

Presenting my own teaching demonstration was a positive experience overall. "I did my presentation over different levels of questioning and thinking and going from tangible things that we can touch to more abstract, thematic life lesson type questions," This process was easy because it's what I do in my classroom all year long. I would describe delivering my presentation as natural, but I struggled with a few comments I received from my peers on the teaching demonstration feedback forms. Reflecting on what I deemed criticism, I didn't take that very well. "That was hard for me to read. . . .That was hard for me to hear." I shared my feedback forms with my husband the night after I presented, and he attempted to point out all of the positive comments, but I could only focus on the negative. "It takes how many positive statements to negate a negative statement?" Because I was so focused on and passionate about teaching, it bothered me that others provided me with negative feedback.

I must admit that keeping a positive attitude and an open mind was often difficult during the SI.

There were many times throughout the process I had to check my attitude. We have to be open to making ourselves learn and become better people and

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teachers. There's no reason to even go to the Summer Institute with a closed

mind. We have to challenge ourselves.

With negative prior experiences at a variety of professional development sites, I made it

a priority to keep an open mind and remain receptive for what the SI could do for me as

a teacher.

Concerning my writing, however, I recall somewhat unfavorable experiences.

"Some of it was to get off a checklist." My writing group members encouraged me to

take pieces further and deeper, but I didn't want to because then it becomes some

blubbering, crying mess. Because I admittedly held back with writing, I "didn't reach

any deep part of myself that I hadn't already thought about or didn't know was there."

With that said, "it was neat to get it on paper because then it's something to hold that

you always have." I wrote a piece about my son, who had recently moved out of our

home as he prepared to attend college. I found this experience new and hurtful, so I

chose not to elaborate on it.

As a member of our writing group, giving and receiving feedback was

comfortable and relaxed. Once my writing group members understood that I had no

intentions of treating the writing group as therapy, they were better able to tailor their

feedback to my wants and needs. In turn, I did the same for them. "It helped me in my

peer review and things that we can suggest to people, like different phrases or pragmatic

things." Though the feedback was often surface level, it was beneficial for me and my

writing, especially because I didn't have as much invested as a writer. Once again, my

goal was strictly to grow as a teacher. While I acknowledge that teaching and writing go

hand in hand, I maintain that "I'm not going to write. I don't care about that. That's not

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that big of a deal to me." Instead, the biggest thing to me is impacting my kids. Being a teacher was what mattered most for me:

> I'm sure I grew as a writer, but it just really wasn't my focus. I guess a writing teacher is supposed to really care about it in order to be a better teacher, but I just feel like I was there for my students, not really for myself.

This mindset played a major part in shaping my experiences throughout the SI.

Emphasizing the theme of growth and learning as a teacher, I would classify my experience at the SI as a struggle. "I learned, [and] the learning is in the struggle. . . .It's absolutely true." As I put the finishing touches on my portfolio containing my writings and teaching demonstration, I decided to title it "Learning Comes through the Struggle." Even as a veteran teacher, I experienced many growing pains during the three week SI. "It was time consuming and draining. It was all consuming. I knew it was growing pains that I was going through, and I knew the dividends would pay off later." Looking back, I am certain that the struggle was worth it. I am also certain that, in line with my main goal all along, I became a better teacher as a result of my participation in the 2016 OWP SI.

## Conclusion

Evident in the 13 vignettes, each participant shared unique experiences with me. During the SI itself, in our follow-up interview, and via back and forth emails, participants were open and honest about what it was like to experience the 2016 OWP SI. They recalled challenges and successes, tears and laughter, distress and pride. They spoke candidly of their lives as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders before, during, and after the SI. They looked forward to how the SI might affect them once they

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returned to their homes and classrooms. With each individual story, I learned something important about this phenomenon.

Every participant's distinctive story has been told through her eyes, words, actions, and products. However, their commonalities and shared experiences are an equally important piece of the puzzle. Themes involving writing, teaching, learning, researching, and leading were evident across individual vignettes. In the next chapter, and in consideration of these common thematic elements, I examine the participants' experiences as a collective whole in the continuous search for the meaning and essence of the 2016 OWP SI.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Presentation of Findings, Part Two

## Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine participants'
individual and collective experiences of a phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon
centered on a particular professional development site: the 2016 Oklahoma Writing
Project Summer Institute (OWP SI). Participants' individual vignettes presented in
Chapter Four offered much insight into how each individual personally experienced
various aspects the 2016 OWP SI. Those findings alone, however, do not wholly
represent how the participants experienced the OWP SI as a member of a larger
community of practice (Buysse et al., 2003; Handley et al., 2006; Pearce, 2010;
Schlager & Fusco, 2003; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et. al, 2001). Throughout the research
process - especially during interviews - participants frequently mentioned the idea of the
SI as a community of teachers in which members were engaged, collaborative, and
respectful. Field notes, video recordings, and artifacts affirm the communal aspect of
the SI.

This research used phenomenological inquiry to collect qualitative data through
observations, field notes, artifacts, and in-depth conversational interviews. Participants
in this study included the 13 teachers who participated in the 2016 OWP SI. I initially
examined data by individual participant and presented findings through distinctive
vignettes in Chapter Four. Next, data across participants, including interview
transcriptions, video recordings, observational field notes, and writing and teaching

artifacts, were coded, analyzed, and organized around roles in which participants engaged at the SI. Themes center on four major roles participants assumed throughout the Institute (writing, teaching, researching, and leading) and align with participants' roles at Summer Institutes reviewed in the professional literature in Chapter Two (see Applebee & Langer, 2009; Dierking & Fox, 2012; Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007; Lieberman & Wood, 2002b, 2003; Nagin, 2012; Smith & Wrigley, 2007; Whitney, 2006, 2009).

Before detailing the central themes gleaned from the data, I aim to classify the 2016 OWP SI as a sustained community of practice. Reflective appropriations focus on roles participants assumed throughout the SI to provide the effect of the universal, whole, and totality described by van Manen (1990, p. 36). Participants as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders encompass the various roles within the 2016 OWP SI (see Table 5.1).

As writers, sub-themes include participants' identities as writers, recursive writing processes, writing groups, sharing and feedback, and trust and safety. Concerning participants as teachers, sub-themes focus on participants as presenters of teaching demonstrations, including initial trepidation, teaching coming naturally, and feedback and revision. Teachers also engaged as participants and learners in others' teaching demonstrations, and sub-themes include learning strategies, ideas, and tools; learning across grade levels; and learning by doing. As researchers, sub-themes center on the demanding, complex nature of research processes as well as the validation it provides. Finally, leadership involves sub-themes of teacher consultants, professional organizations, and teacher education.

Table 5.1

*Roles and Resulting Themes of 2016 OWP SI Participants' Experiences*

| Role: | Themes: |
|---|---|
| Participant as Writer | - Writing identities<br>- Recursive writing processes<br>- Writing groups<br>- Sharing and feedback<br>- Trust and safety |
| Participant as Teacher | - Presenting teaching demonstrations<br>   - Initial trepidation<br>   - Teaching comes naturally<br>   - Feedback and revision<br>- Participating in others' teaching demonstrations<br>   - Learning strategies, ideas, and tools<br>   - Learning across grade levels<br>   - Learning by doing |
| Participant as Researcher | - Demanding and complex research processes<br>- Validation |
| Participant as Leader | - Becoming teacher consultants<br>- Involvement in professional organizations<br>- Connections to teacher education |

To conclude this chapter, themes of looking forward detail how the participants' experiences might extend beyond the SI. Practical implications and participants sharing their experiences with others encompass the theme of looking forward. In turn, this chapter extends the previous chapter as findings are now presented thematically, beginning with the OWP as a community of practice.

## The Oklahoma Writing Project as a Community of Practice

Thus far, the findings of this research have focused on how individual participants experienced a phenomenon: the 2016 OWP SI. However, it is equally important to consider how the SI class of 2016 experienced this phenomenon as a collective whole. Before exploring roles and themes relevant to the shared experience, I first aim to characterize the group who experienced this phenomenon together as a community of practice. Several participants explicitly referred to the SI as a collaborative, collegial community of teachers and writers:

*Wendy: Having the writing responsibilities and just having that writing community getting to hear from the other writers' groups and hearing what those other people wrote.*

*Lindsey: You aren't in competition. You aren't trying to get ahead. It was just for you. I was excited about that community.*

*Regina: I really enjoyed being a part of that community and getting to know new people and new teachers.*

Wenger (1998) argues that communities of practice are "created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (p. 45). Though the OWP SI occurred over a short, three week period, this shared enterprise was evident when participants mentioned how "we were there for the same reasons" (Wendy), acknowledged that "everybody respected each other" (Shelly), and exclaimed that "it was fun to be in a room with people where everybody in there wanted to be there" (Leslie). Kelly added, "It's the culture. It's the people who want to be there" when describing the OWP SI community.

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In only three weeks, the participants in this study indicated a community of practice had formed as a result of "sustained mutual relationships," "shared ways of engaging in doing things together," and "the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 125). Laura spoke of this community engaging her as a learner and how this could transfer to her classroom: "I felt like it was a community, and I wanted to learn. I feel like I am the ultimate learner, and I want my kids to see that whenever I'm in the classroom." In accord, Lindsey added, "It was nice to have that mutual respect with each other."

Individuals who came to the SI feeling lonely and isolated soon discovered that this community offered a sociable and accessible experience. Moreover, participants like Kelly described her colleagues in the SI as "a culture . . .in one room who were all completely positive," and noted that all participants were "geared toward the same thing: becoming better." Upbeat attitudes and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008) permeated the group dynamics of the SI participants. Wendy concurred as she discussed the importance of shared social experiences and

> being able to talk about writing with people who get it. People who understand. Being able to talk about teaching writing with people who get it. People who understand. That's one of the great benefits of OWP because not only do you have the research, not only do you have the personal experience, but you also have that social validation. You have teachers from Pre-K all the way up to college who are right there with you saying the same things.

Relationships were formed through writing groups, presentation groups, teaching demonstrations, Authors' Chairs, sharing of quick writes, informal conversations, and

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through an abundance of food – an OWP SI staple. Participants collaborated throughout the SI as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders. In these roles, life stories and best practices were shared, examined, revised, and published. As a result, individual vignettes became one collective story via the roles in which participants engaged throughout the three-week Institute.

## Reflective Appropriations:

## Participants' Roles During the Summer Institute

During the data analysis process, four common themes - consistent with themes discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two - emerged in relation to the roles participants assumed during the SI: 1) participant as writer, 2) participant as teacher, 3) participant as researcher, and 4) participant as leader. Participants did not describe each role as being equally important to their experience. Writing and teaching were discussed in most detail, with researching and leadership often receiving less attention. Not every participant discussed each role, but across interviews, all four roles appeared numerous times.

As I analyzed data, I discovered these roles were often interconnected; for example, participants frequently described personal writing and teaching going hand in hand. This connection might be best exemplified by Wendy's statement during an interview:

> It wasn't until I became a teacher that I realized I had my own story to tell, and my story is my experiences trying help my students. And so, for me, being a teacher and being a writer is very connected. I'm not really one without the other at this point.

Lindsey added, "OWP doesn't just focus on yourself as a writer. It's equal to yourself as a teacher. All day there's an equal balance of teaching and writing." Lindsey's comment emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the OWP SI. Participants do not solely focus on their teaching practices or their individual, personal writing. Instead, time and space are carved out for a variety of teaching and writing (among other) activities. The teaching/writing association was evident as participants consistently connected their own writing practices to their classrooms, pedagogy, and students.

In addition, the research process was embedded in participants' teaching demonstrations. As participants considered best practices to present to their peers, they located, evaluated, and integrated relevant research to support their ideas. This offered participants a sense of validation and confidence that their best practices were effective. Many participants spoke of the research process as challenging, yet effective. So, although these themes are presented separately, it is understood that the boundaries are fluid and permeable. Figure 5.1 offers a visual representation of how participants perceived their roles during the SI. The following four themes, as well as sub-themes that emerged within each role, are presented in order of significance based on participants' interviews and artifacts, as well as my observations and field notes.

*Figure 5.1* Interconnected Roles of Participants at the 2016 OWP SI
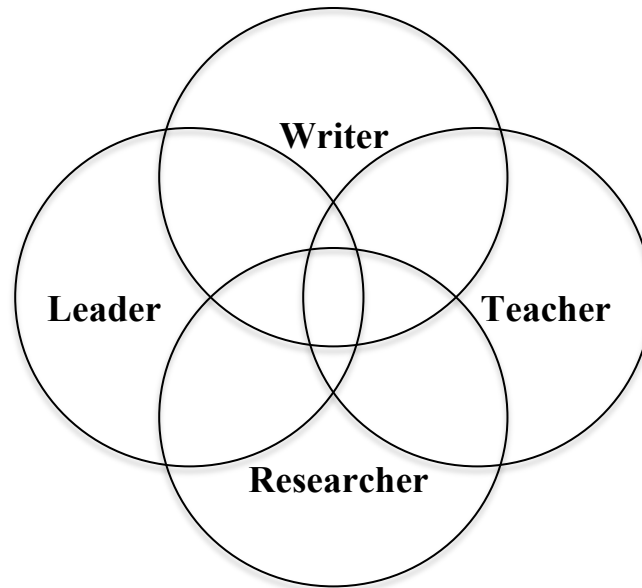


## Role One: Participant as Writer

In the informational binder participants received during the Pre-Institute day in April 2016, one page outlined the expectations set forth by the directors, coaches, and the legacy of the Institute itself. Mentioned first was that participants would use the OWP SI to grow as writers through being a member of a writing group (p. 4). Additionally, the SI hoped to offer participants a fresh encounter with themselves as writers (p. 4). It was quite fitting, then, that every participant spoke of her involvement with writing during the SI. Moreover, many participants emphasized the role of writer above all others. According to Bridgette, "That was the best part for me – the writing part because I feel like it kind of framed what writing could do for my students if I let it." Many other participants claimed the writing aspect of the SI was most influential for

them as writers and teachers, affirming the interrelated nature of these two roles.

**A writer's identity.** A number of participants described their lives as writers before the SI as nonexistent, lacking, or limited to solely academic and informational situations. However, being immersed in a variety of writing situations on a consistent basis over a three week period allowed many participants to re-envision who they were as writers. Several felt as though the SI helped them become writers and to recognize that they could identify as writers.

*Wendy: I feel like I learned how to be a writer. [I engaged in] a lot of reflection and a lot of thinking about who I am as a writer and who I was as a writer.*

*Shelly: I see myself as a writer now. I'm building my confidence as a writer. It's getting to know myself more as a writer [and] as a person.*

*Leslie: I think the biggest thing with OWP is that you find that you write for yourself, not necessarily writing for someone else, you know? Yeah, you're sharing it, but it's for you.*

*Jessie: I never would've called myself a writer before this. Other people would say it, and I'd say I'm not a writer; I just like to write. So now I will. I still feel a little bit uncomfortable saying I'm a writer because I'm not really paid to write. I don't know why for me that was the thing you have to be paid to be a writer, and I don't feel like that anymore. That's the number one thing I got out of it.*

The transition from non-writer to writer was not as palpable for every participant, however. Joyce shared her thoughts on her identity as a writer: "I can be a writer. I don't know that I am a writer, but I can write. So if that makes me a writer, then ok, I'm a writer. But I still don't see myself that way." Entering the SI as a

certified substitute, Joyce doubted her worth in many aspects of the Institute, including herself as a writer. Even so, in only three weeks' time, she acknowledged that she could now write (even if she would or could not identify as a writer), where before the act of writing was not part of her identity whatsoever.

On the other hand, another participant, Barbara, admitted her focus was not on writing as she entered the Institute, so she did not experience an identity shift in the role of writer:

I'm sure I grew as a writer, but it just really wasn't my focus. I guess a writing teacher is supposed to really care about it in order to be a better teacher, but I just feel like I was there for my students, not really for myself.

Because Barbara's focus was on her teaching and her students, the writing aspect of the SI was not as transformative for her as it was for other participants. Whereas for some teaching and writing were directly related, Barbara separated the two and, as a result, experienced little change in her identity as a writer.

**Recursive writing processes.** Engaging in a variety of writing situations during the SI resulted in perception changes about writing processes. Participants were encouraged to explore their "own and others' disciplined use of the writing process" (p. 4) during the SI. Prior to the SI, many participants spoke of writing as a linear, step-by-step process. However, as participants assumed the role of writer and took their pieces through a recursive process, many discovered their view of writing changed as a result of their experiences. Joyce discussed at length how her writing processes changed throughout the SI due to her taking on an active and engaged role as writer:

With my writing that I did, it was very obvious that it was not a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 step

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process because I would write it, then I'd bring it to the writing group and publish it, and then there would be little notations made – go back, revisit it again, not necessarily pre writing but writing again, and there's times I'd bring it to the group a couple of times and say, "Ok, now what do you think?" before it was finally turned in. That's not something that I would've ever done in the past.

Other participants noted how this shift in thinking could transfer to their writing pedagogy. This key Writing Project tenet, evident not only in this research but also in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, focuses on participants connecting their own writing to their teaching and their students' writing (see Bratcher & Stroble, 1993; Kaplan, 2008; Smith, 1996; Whitney, 2008; Wilson, 1994).

*Jessie: I knew the writing process, and I knew that I spent like 90% on prewriting myself and then edit and publish. I'm not quite utilizing it. I also thought it was pretty linear for students. I thought that's how we needed to teach it. I had no idea that it could be all over the place like that. That completely changed the way I think.*

*Carol: I was prewriting, drafting, then sharing, then go back and fix it, edit it, revise it, then I'd bring it to writing group. It was a constant recursive process. I'm going to teach my kids that word even though they're first graders. I'm going to teach them what recursive means because they're going to know how to do that writing process. It's not a step-by-step process like we think it is or that your poster says it is.*

*Regina: Whenever we talked about the recursive nature of writing, a lot of the time I felt like that was something that was very helpful because I think that a lot of times my students are going forward but then they run out of things to write about. Instead of saying, this is the way that we do things, having them sort of looking at a pie*

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*chart almost, like there are no steps, there's just a process. I think it really made me*

*think that they need a little bit more independence in there because if they keep just*

*going with that one track step-by-step thing, they're going to get overwhelmed.*

In consideration of the aforementioned writing/teaching connection, taking an active role in writing allowed many participants to better conceptualize what writing might look like not only for them, but also for their students. As a result, many participants discovered the recursive nature of the writing process for themselves and also considered how it might benefit their students' writing in the future.

**Writing groups.** Many participants spoke directly to their experiences as a member of a writing group. The SI expectations outline that participants would be a member of a writing group that functioned well (p. 4). This expectation requires writing group members to engage in cooperative speaking, listening, and writing activities. Moreover, by the end of the SI, participants would have "noticed and valued what you've learned as a member of a writing group" (p. 4). Some had never been involved with a writing group before, while others had prior (if often negative) experiences with writing groups in other settings. Several participants described their participation in a writing group as the most important and influential aspect of the SI.

*Wendy: Being able to meet in the smaller writer's groups - the writer's group and the presentation groups were both the most significant parts I would say.*

*Bridgette: My favorite, favorite part was actually my writing group. My writing group was really influential . . .they really helped develop my voice in my writing.*

*Jessie: I would say the writing group was my favorite part of the entire process. I love giving presentations, and I got tons of lesson plan ideas from the other*

*presentations. I don't want to take away from that, but I really at one point thought*

*somebody is Jedi mind tricking us and put us together on purpose because of some of*

*the things we wrote about. I make new friends easily, but not in an unguarded way, and*

*I did with them. Because you're sharing very personal things . . .that was absolutely my*

*favorite part. I hate reading anything out loud. I struggle with that; that's why I*

*memorize most things, especially if it's emotional and I'm going to cry. But in my*

*writing group I didn't have a problem with it because it was so small, and I got to know*

*them so well.*

In addition, many participants described the unique composition of their writing groups and how comfortable and intimate their writing groups became over time.

**Wendy:** *It was a diverse group, and yet we were there for the same reasons - to write and to get feedback, and I feel like we just had the best writer's group. (Everyone says that, but we did!) It was the best one for us.*

**Christy:** *They became a little family and people to lean on.*

**Kelly:** *The writing groups were good. I think because there were just three of us, we got really comfortable with each other.*

**Carol:** *I loved my writing group. From the get-go we were all kind of timid, but then we all started opening up. You've got a mesh of all of us. You've got the support, the encouragement, someone who's like you who gets you, and then somebody who will critique you. It was like the puzzle pieces all fit because we each needed that in our writing when we talked about it. It just worked for me.*

On the whole, participants spoke often of writing groups providing support and encouragement throughout the SI and providing personal and professional connections

beyond the SI.

> *Joyce: The support and encouragement that they gave me was amazing.*

> *Bridgette: There are people that I feel like I will keep in contact with and be friends with forever that will be great personal connections and professional connections that had a I met at a day institute or even something where I wasn't writing and sharing personal things, I don't know that I would've ever made a connection with.*

> *Laura: I love the writing group because we got to help each other and talk about things and have different ideas and bring new perspectives to it.*

**Sharing and feedback.** Themes of sharing writing and giving and receiving feedback to and from their writing group members resonated across interviews. Feedback at the SI involved group members' orally discussing one another's writing, reading one another's pieces and offering local and global written comments, and replying to each other's posts on the (b)log. As part of this feedback process, participants were required to share their writing with their writing group members and, on occasion, the group as a whole (p. 4). Leslie, who had adverse prior experiences with sharing her writing, was initially intimidated to share her writing: "At the very beginning, it was a little intimidating to have to do so much writing and then so much sharing. The sharing part was scary for me. You know, that's putting yourself out there. You're vulnerable to what people may think." Other participants, like Christy, felt at ease from the beginning: "Sharing with my writing group was pretty easy because I felt really comfortable with them. They had all shared pretty personal things."

Several participants described experiences sharing their writing as "freeing" which allowed many to "open up" about personal experiences, a newfound practice for

many of the participants. This sharing occurred not only in writing groups, but also in the whole group, including during quick write activities.

*Carol: When I read it to my writing group it was like that opened me up to being more open about my life and the things that I've gone through, but also it made me feel like I needed to take the next step. Once I shared that, I needed to share a little bit more about myself to the whole group. I needed to open up about that part of my life.*

*Christy: It felt kind of freeing to have that time set aside to write and then turning and sharing with someone and them being very receptive and positive about your writing.*

*Lindsey: I loved my writing group and I loved sharing what I was writing. I just loved everything that everyone was sharing, and it felt so personal. I feel like so many times throughout the three weeks someone would say, "I'm just going to share this [even though] I wouldn't ordinarily."*

As part of the writing group, participants in the SI were involved in eliciting feedback from their writing group and revising based on feedback (p. 4). Though the OWP SI does not provide explicit or required guidelines regarding feedback, resources are provided in participants' materials. These include generic feedback forms, potential questions to ask/answer, and strategies such as Bless, Press, Address, in which writers can ask readers for particular types of feedback in consideration of a particular writing situation. Shelly claimed that "feedback from others is invaluable," and other participants often spoke of the benefits receiving feedback from their writing group members, including strengthening their writing. Positive, yet constructive, feedback was a theme across many participants' experiences. Bridgette described writing groups as "a

chance for you to meet with a smaller group of people and share your writing to get positive and constructive feedback." Several of her colleagues echoed those sentiments.

*Wendy: Just being able to get those thoughts out and getting that feedback and having them tell me that what I wrote was powerful and that they really liked what I wrote, giving me feedback on ways to make my writing even better.*

*Jessie: This is good. This is real feedback. It was all positive feedback. I loved it.*

*Carol: We would share and get good feedback – it was more to make us better in that piece. How could we make this even more of what we were picturing it to be?*

*Kelly: It was feedback in a very safe environment. . . .They were there to just make it better. They were there to appreciate what I had written.*

*Barbara: I really like the feedback I got from my writing group peers. It wasn't uncomfortable at all.*

Some participants noted that sharing and feedback required time; getting to know one another was imperative. Regina described how her group initially struggled with the aspect of giving feedback but noted that once her group became more comfortable as a unit, providing meaningful and appropriate feedback became easier:

I felt like nobody wanted to give feedback very often. I feel like they didn't really want to give a lot of feedback to me. After a while, just getting comfortable with everyone, it was kind of like they knew what to expect from me, and they expected this type of feedback, and that's what they wanted.

Writers receiving feedback from their peers was only one aspect of this process; participants were also expected to provide feedback for their fellow writing group

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members. While participants like Barbara noted how "it was good for me to give feedback on those pieces," some, such as Lindsey, struggled to provide useful and effective feedback for her writing group members:

> It was hard for me to feel helpful, I guess, in writing group because I just loved everything that everyone was sharing, and it felt so personal that I still even at the end struggled with giving any kind of suggestions. I don't know if I grew as a writing partner. That's something that moving forward I definitely need to practice.

With that said, Lindsey did acknowledge progression in terms of providing feedback for others' writing: "I felt like I grew a lot from [writing group] because [initially] I didn't know to do it. I didn't know how to give feedback to other people's writing." By engaging with her writing group on a daily basis, Lindsey made strides toward feeling confident in providing feedback for others. In addition, writing group coaches, the co-directors of the 2016 OWP SI, and the director of the OWP discussed and modeled useful and effective feedback strategies, which participants found promoted the quantity and quality of feedback.

  ***Trust and safety.*** A commonality across participants' experiences involved feelings of trust and safety being present in writing groups; those feelings were necessary to many participants' successes with sharing often personal pieces of writing with their peers. Trust and safety, for participants, involved the amount of time spent together and the intimate nature of the SI. For many, trusting one another involved feeling as if writing topics and genres were uninhibited. Trust among group members allowed several participants to share their personal writing as well as graciously receive

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constructive feedback. Moreover, as a result of the communal nature of writing groups, participants felt comfortable with taking risks in their own writing (see Healy, 1992).

**Bridgette:** *I really had to trust my writing group to share and to hear their feedback.*

**Shelly:** *I'm more willing to put myself out there to people that I trust.*

**Jessie:** *I could read anything to my writing group. I don't trust easily and so it was an exercise in trusting the people in your group, and it completely changed how I approach who to trust and how to trust them.*

One participant, Leslie, who felt uneasy about sharing early on in the Institute, described how her perceptions changed as a result of feeling safe in her writing group. She went on to connect her experience to her teaching and her students, as well:

> I didn't feel judged; that's the main thing. It felt safe. I shared a really personal writing about my biological dad that I knew I couldn't handle somebody critiquing it, so it was safe to be able to just [say], "Hey I just want you to bless this, it's personal." Everybody just wanted to support each other, so it was a safe environment. I want my kids to feel safe like that with writing groups. That's hard for 10 year olds, but you can really have them buy into it. It's very beneficial to feel like you could share whatever, and I never dreamed I would share something so personal. Very surface is what I figured it would be, and it wasn't.

Other participants acknowledged feeling safe in the writing group setting as an important aspect of being able and willing to share with others, too.

**Christy:** *It's a safe environment for everyone to share and learn.*

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*Lindsey: You just feel safe. I just think numbers and time had everything to do with it. There were things I shared that didn't really have anything to do with the writing that we had brought, but we were having conversations.*

Trust and safety were necessary for participants to feel comfortable writing in and sharing with their writing group members. With these facets in place, many participants were able to write and share pieces that were often personal and serious in nature. Although some writing groups required time to build trust and safety, in the end most participants described their writing groups as a space and group of peers with whom they could openly and freely write, share, praise, and critique.

## Role Two: Participant as Teacher

2016 OWP SI participants were encouraged to "increase your repertoire of writing strategies to use in your classroom by seeing models, taking notes during every presentation, [and] practicing a variety of writing activities in your role as 'student' in this class" (p. 4). "Teachers Teaching Teachers" is a central motto of the OWP SI and, on a larger scale, the NWP. In fact, Lindsey admitted that "the teachers teaching teachers motto is just in me now" after experiencing the SI.

All participants discussed their experiences creating and presenting a teaching demonstration as well as participating in their peers' teaching demonstrations. The latter allowed teachers to learn and practice research-based activities they could potentially implement in their own classrooms with their students. Therefore, teachers' roles as both presenters and participants encompassed their experiences as teachers of writing.

**Role of presenter.** Each participant was required to create and present a 90-minute teaching demonstration during the SI. (Table 5.1 details each participant's

teaching demonstration title and description.) OWP teacher consultants and 2016 SI coaches presented demonstrations during the first week of the SI. This allowed participants to engage in model presentations while also providing time to craft their own teaching demonstrations. In addition, participants presented a portion of their demonstration during The Power of Teaching Symposium at the conclusion of the SI. Finally, participants presented their entire, revised teaching demonstration at the Write to Learn Back-to-School Conference held in mid August.

Sub-themes emerged from the data concerning participants as presenters. As part of this role, participants discussed feelings of initial trepidation, reported that the teaching demonstration felt natural, and spoke to useful feedback and revision processes of their teaching demonstration and packet.

Table 5.2
*2016 OWP SI Participants' Teaching Demonstration Titles and Descriptions*

| Participant | Title | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Wendy | Including FAT in Your Essays: Figurative Language, Appositive Phrases, and Transitions | This workshop will provide detailed lessons for teachers to empower student writers with concrete tools to help them improve word choice and voice in their writing. Through these lessons, students will learn how to harness proven writing techniques discovered in mentor texts during the drafting and revision stages of the writing process. |
| Shelly | Liven Up Your Writing: Show Don't Tell with Slow Motion and Pause | This presentation will provide students with ideas to help them show instead of tell ideas and when to speed up or slow down ideas in their writing. Participants will engage in multimodal activities and take away strategies to engage students and encourage more |

| | | detailed writing. |
|---|---|---|
| Leslie | Motivating Writers Using Mentor Texts | This presentation will highlight mentor texts used to encourage writers in multi-genre writing. The strategies presented incorporate the new Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts. |
| Bridgette | Assessing Comprehension Authentically through Writing | With the implementation of the new Oklahoma Academic Standards, we as teachers have the opportunity to reassess how we teach reading and writing in the classroom In this presentation, participants will examine the relationships between reading and writing instruction, and discover the benefits for teachers and students when both subjects are taught interactively. |
| Joyce | Your Guide to Surviving a Sub | A substitute teacher is supposed to be an extension of you. To ease your mind, we will discuss a few writing techniques that can be appropriate for a sub to teach. |
| Laura | Finding Your Voice! | This presentation encourages and demonstrates the use of mentor texts and multimodal technology to help struggling and reluctant writers gain confidence in their writing skills and find their inner writer's voice by learning to "read like writers" and writing from the perspective of others. |
| Jessie | Silence the Violence: Teaching Children to Express Feelings through Writing | Writing benefits students by increasing literacy and provides an artistic outlet for them to work through the emotions, stresses, and confusion that comes with childhood. In this presentation, you will learn ways to incorporate creative writing while helping your students understand empathy, therefore reducing disciplinary issues in the classroom. |
| Christy | Extra! Extra! Write | This presentation encourages the use of |

| | All About It! | interactive and shared writing in the early childhood classroom. Participants will explore writing activities to use in the classroom that include using mentor texts, videos, and child interest. Participants will also discover the purposes of interactive and shared writing. |
|---|---|---|
| Carol | Sticking to the Standards while Writing Across the Curriculum | Having trouble "sticking" to the standards while incorporating writing? This presentation will get you equipped and excited for new ways to incorporate writing across the curriculum while sticking to the standards. |
| Kelly | Engaging the Reluctant Writer | In this presentation we will engage in activities that give teachers tools to help their students overcome reluctances within writing. Our end goal as teachers is to always equip students so that they come independent writers. |
| Lindsey | Exploring Identity: Writing about Self to Reflect on Self | This presentation offers strategies to help students embrace their unique self by exploring and writing about identity. Using these strategies, we will learn the significance of and how to utilize the writing process and Oklahoma Academic Standards to guide students to tell their story. |
| Regina | Teaching the Traits *Word Choice* and *Voice* in Personal Narrative in Beyond | This presentation will give you the tools to help your students find their voice by teaching the traits word choice and voice. It will also help you expose students to complex material in small, digestible bites. These lesson plans were designed for the special education classroom but can be adapted to fit any classroom. |
| Barbara | Using Mentor Texts to Teach Grammar in Context with Writing, Rhetorical | This presentation demonstrates the use of mentor texts for analysis and composition. Participants will gain ready to use strategies to help students improve reading, writing, and |

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| | Analysis, and Critical Thinking | critical thinking skills by using rhetorical strategies, analysis, and the three levels of thinking. |
|---|---|---|

*Initial trepidation.* Nearly all participants admitted the idea of presenting a 90-minute teaching demonstration was, at least initially, intimidating. Many novice and veteran teachers alike acknowledged that the process seemed daunting at first glance, and that the idea of presenting to the whole group resulted in feelings of nervousness. Some discussed anxiety upon discovering during the Pre-Institute day in April that they would be required to create and present a teaching demonstration to their peers:

*Leslie: I wasn't very comfortable having to get up and talk – I was dreading that part like none other. I don't have a lot of confidence. I can talk to my kids all day long, but getting up in front of a group of people I feel like are the best of the best in that room was intimidating. It pushed me out of my box, definitely. I'm not someone that would normally volunteer to get up in front of a group of people and talk.*

*Joyce: There's no way I can do this. There's no way I can do a 90-minute presentation. [It was] very overwhelming. When they told me about that in the interview process, I looked at them and said, "You want me to give a 90 minute presentation? I don't think you understand. I don't give 90-minute presentations."*

*Carol: Oh my gosh, a 90-minute presentation? How am I going to do that? I was very intimidated. How am I going to do this? It brought anxiety to me. What am I going to do?*

*Kelly: I was overwhelmed. I didn't know that I would even be asked to do a presentation. It's kind of like I went into this blind. I never saw myself getting up and*

*doing anything like that. I really didn't want to. I just wanted to learn from everyone and take something really good and go back and give it to my kids. I was very intimidated that I didn't have anything to say for 90 minutes.*

*Regina: I didn't realize we were bringing our own lesson plans. I was like, "I have to do my own lesson plans? But I'm not a good teacher yet." I didn't want to bring my own stuff. I just kind of got a little overwhelmed and thought, "I don't have things I feel like people could use." I kind of freaked out about what I was going to do.*

Participants also described the moments leading up to their presentation; nervous feelings were apparent the day of each presentation, and many participants described their anxious feelings as they began presenting:

*Wendy: I was nervous and trying to think about what all I maybe was missing*

*Shelly: At first it was nerve wracking.*

*Bridgette: I got a little nervous before.*

*Jessie: When I gave my presentation and was doing the OWP and NWP stuff, I felt nervous.*

*Christy: During the quick write, I was writing, 'Please God, give me the right words to say.' . . .That was my quick write.*

*Lindsey: I was really nervous to do my presentation . . .because I wanted how passionate I was about it to come through.*

Laura and Carol shared unique experiences, being the first and last participant to present, respectively. "I was the first. At the time it was horrible," stated Laura. Carol felt similarly: "I shouldn't have waited until last because these are amazing, and now I'm going to do terrible." Both were apprehensive about their presentations due to the

timing and placement. However, most participants - including Laura and Carol - realized that these nervous feelings eventually subsided.

**_Teaching comes naturally._** Although nearly every participant described feelings of intimidation and apprehension leading up to the presentation, most also discussed how they felt at ease as their teaching demonstration progressed.

**_Wendy:_** _I knew that once I got in there and got started, I would settle down. I'd be ok. Those teaching instincts would kick in, and it would be fine. I just needed to get there._

Many participants described how the beginning of their presentation was most nerve wracking. All participants were required to share information regarding the National Writing Project, Oklahoma Writing Project, and newly implemented Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts. Furthermore, presenters shared information about the writing process. Several participants noted how, once they arrived at their respective practices and activities, the presentation became much more comfortable.

**_Shelly:_** _The hardest part is the beginning of your presentation. But once you get past your slides talking about the National Writing Project and the Oklahoma Writing Project, your teacher instincts kick in because the rest is what you know. The rest is not nerve wracking at all._

**_Leslie:_** _The hard part for me was the presentation. Just getting prepared for it. Once I got up there it wasn't as bad as I'd thought it would be. After I shared a snippet about OWP and the writing process, when I got into the stuff that was mine, I felt like it was my stuff. It was just like talking one on one with somebody. It was like back in the_

*classroom situation; you're just leading everybody in the learning.*

*Joyce: The 90 minutes after the first five minutes or so after you have to talk about OWP and the standards and the writing process, once you get to the meat of it, it's a lot easier. You have to make sure you get all of this other stuff in first, which is not that big of a deal; it's just doing it.*

*Jessie: When I got into my stuff, I felt fine because to me then it's just a conversation about what I know.*

*Christy: I thought I was going to be super nervous, and I wasn't. After the quick write, I felt pretty good . . .because it's stuff you've already done. You know it works.*

*Regina: Once you get kind of in the flow, it was kind of fun. Once I got into it and had my presentation up there and had my packets and everything, it kind of felt like this isn't as bad as I thought it would be. I was pretty freaked out, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.*

*Barbara: Once I got through the logistics, the information that I needed about OWP, it was just very natural for me because I've taught it.*

In addition, participants discussed explicitly how presenting best practices about which they were passionate assisted with their sense of comfort during their teaching demonstration.

*Leslie: Once you get into teaching them your lessons, things that you have had success with, it's yours, and that ownership is there, so it's just easy to tell somebody about something you're passionate about or about something that really does work or that you use all the time.*

*Carol: I'm sharing what I do in my classroom. What I'm sharing, I'm*

*passionate about. Once I did it, it made me feel confident as a person.*

  **Kelly:** *Once we broke it down . . .I started to see maybe I can do this. Maybe my activities are worthy of actually talking about in front of somebody. I picked the activities I liked best because I chose engaging the reluctant writer, so the ones that turned out best for my students. It went by really fast. It was good.*

  **Lindsey:** *I think just talking them through those exercises that I do in my classroom reaffirmed that's what I'm really passionate about.*

  While the level of knowledge and expertise of the teachers in the audience initially intimidated some participants, others, like Joyce, attributed her feelings of ease and comfort to her welcoming and supportive peers:

    Getting up and talking in front of everybody, it seemed like I was just standing up there talking to friends, family. It was like we were just carrying on a conversation, and that made it go that much faster. I thought I'd never be able to get through 90 minutes, but that 90 minutes went pretty quick.

Though many participants experienced nervous emotions prior to and at the outset of their teaching demonstrations, most described how natural teaching instincts and a supportive community assisted in alleviating their apprehension.

  **Feedback and revision.** After each teaching demonstration, audience members completed feedback forms for the presenter. Several participants appreciated the positive feedback they received from their peers.

  **Wendy:** *I still have some work to do based on the feedback that I received. I know that as I present that or continue to present it and refine it, then that will get a lot better, and I'll have better instincts about it, but I really enjoyed getting up there and*

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*being able to share what I was thinking, share the presentation, and getting feedback from the audience.*

*Shelly: Being responsible for putting something together and standing up in front of your peers that are doing the same thing and are grounding themselves in research . . .I think people were very honest on their feedback for the presentations because it was there to improve the presentations, and so I'm not scared now. I'm a perfectionist and I wanted it to be perfect, and I really only received out of all the feedback two comments, and they were valid, and you have to get over the hurt feelings. I appreciate that [the feedback] because it did make it better when I went in and made those changes, and I think it is stronger with taking those into consideration.*

*Joyce: I picked up my computer and started working on my presentation because I needed to be doing something besides the laundry. Working on the presentation was a lot more fun than doing laundry. I am revising some of it.*

*Laura: Affirmation about my presentation – what I did well and what they would use, and thanks for going first. There's so many things I'll do differently when I do it in August.*

*Christy: With my presentation, the evaluation sheets were super helpful, giving me ideas to expand or just being positive, which I'm not someone that gets positive recognition. It makes me want to be better so I get even more positive words.*

*Carol: It was exactly the feedback and words of affirmation I needed to hear.*

In addition to positive feedback, many participants spoke of constructive feedback feedback as useful, noting how their teaching demonstrations could be made better by taking others' opinions into consideration. Discussions of revising presentations based

*on feedback received were consistent across several participants.*

A particular participant, Barbara, shared how she struggled with receiving

negative feedback about her teaching demonstration from her peers:

> Getting the feedback from all the people, I did mine way late, so I don't think
>
> they had any problem with giving criticism, and I didn't take that very well.
>
> That was hard for me to read. That was hard to hear. I didn't handle the criticism
>
> as well as I thought I would. People are kind of vicious. I think there's always
>
> ways of improvement, but I think people could've been a little kinder and
>
> gentler. I don't want to look at it anymore.

Barbara discussed how, as the teaching demonstrations progressed, participants were

encouraged to not just compliment presentations, and she felt as though that resulted in

her peers being more critical than they were complimentary. She admitted to sharing the

feedback she received with her husband, who pointed out all of the positive comments

from her colleagues. However, because Barbara identified as a perfectionist, she

focused primarily on the negative feedback.

**Role of participant.** Each OWP SI participant engaged in the role of student as

she participated in all teaching demonstrations. Many participants shared how helpful,

useful, and influential information – including strategies, ideas, and tools – in the

presentations were for their own teaching practices.

***Learning strategies, ideas, and tools.*** Most participants described the volume of

useful strategies, ideas, and tools regarding the teaching of writing they could

implement in their classrooms. On the whole, participants appreciated the sheer amount

of relevant information they were presented and felt that their learning could have a

practical affect on their teaching and their students' learning once back in the classroom.

*Wendy: All the presentations . . .have provided tools that I can take back to my classroom to help unlock my students' stories and their voices.*

*Bridgette: You're getting a lot of modeling of ideas, a lot of modeling of writing. Hearing other people showcase activities through presentations and to be able to go home and reflect and then come back the next day and have a conversation about those things. I think it was being able to come back and hearing something that I really liked in a presentation and then think about it and come up with questions and go back the next day and have that person there to be able to say, "Hey, what do you think about this? Tell me more about this. How would this work in your experience?"*

*Joyce: It was wonderful. I loved hearing everybody else's perspective. I've even already asked some of the girls, "Can I use this?" I'm working on getting my bag of tricks ready.*

*Laura: Just imagine leaving professional development with so many ideas and demonstrations. If nothing else, if you don't get anything else out of it, you have all of these ideas to take back to your classroom because you've had 14-15 different demonstrations*

*Jessie: I got tons of lesson plan ideas from the other presentations. The lesson plans I got from other people – that's just invaluable. Countless things that I want to do. Countless things I can do. They basically lesson planned my entire first nine weeks. I'm going to look like a much better teacher.*

*Christy: Professionally, holy cow, how many strategies I've learned. I have tons*

*of ideas and things from the Institute.*

      *Kelly: I was able to look at what other people were doing and see how I was going to do those things.*

      *Lindsey: I had just a million and one light bulb moments during those three weeks, and everyone else was too. I loved seeing people going like, "Oh my gosh. That's so good," and writing stuff down and jotting down notes. It made me feel like I'm not the only one that didn't know this.*

      ***Learning across grade levels.*** Teachers from a wide range of grade levels participated in the 2016 OWP SI. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers comprised the group, and participants' experience spanned Pre-K to high school. Additionally, participants' years of teaching ranged from first year teachers to veteran teachers with up to 20 years of experience. (Table 5.2 details grade levels participants were currently teaching at the time of the 2016 OWP SI and participants' years of teaching experience.) Regardless of these differences, many participants discussed how they could potentially adapt and implement activities from a variety of teaching demonstrations with their students.

Table 5.3
*Grade Levels Currently Teaching at the Time of the 2016 OWP SI and Years of Teaching Experience*

| Participant | Grade Level(s) Currently Teaching at the Time of the 2016 OWP SI | Years of Teaching Experience |
|---|---|---|
| Wendy | $9^{th}$-$11^{th}$ | 4 |
| Shelly | $7^{th}$ | 20 |
| Leslie | $2^{nd}$ | 9 |

| Bridgette | 4th | 5 |
|---|---|---|
| Joyce | Kindegarten-3rd | 4 (certified substitute) |
| Laura | 5th-8th | 17 |
| Jessie | 5th | 1 |
| Christy | Pre-Kindergarten | 1 |
| Carol | 1st | 6 |
| Kelly | 1st | 5 |
| Lindsey | 8th | 4 |
| Regina | 9th | 2 |
| Barbara | 7th and 8th | 19 |

**Shelly:** *One of the things I love about OWP is something may be geared toward elementary, but you don't know who your audience is going to be, so they have thought about how can this be modified or adapted for a high school lesson? I teach middle school and we had presentations from Pre-K to a high school lesson, and there still wasn't one presentation that I didn't come away with something I could use in my classroom.*

**Leslie:** *Even if it was a high school level and they teach a completely different socioeconomic system or whatever, I can tweak something and make it work for me. We had discussions about how would it work and so it's always good to collaborate and have other ideas to bounce off, and it may trigger something for you to be able to go, "Oh, I could do that in my room this way." No matter what level it was, you could plug in from Pre-K all the way to Senior English. I may have to modify that, but I could do parts of it.*

*Joyce: The conversations that we would have back and forth were, "Well, what do you think about this?" or "Is this something you could use?" or "How do you think we could change this?" and just different conversations around the room for different age levels. It just felt like family throwing out suggestions back and forth to each other and giving people ideas on what they could use.*

*Jessie: You get countless ideas from other teachers on how to incorporate writing cross curricular into your classroom no matter what grade you teach.*

*Christy: I was actually kind of scared because I figured there wouldn't be any other Pre-K people. So I was just kind of afraid that I might not get as much out of it as others just because I was separated, but I was surprised I was taking things from high school presentations.*

*Kelly: Even when I'm watching some of the high school, upper elementary, middle school teachers do theirs, I can see the beginning of that with my first and second graders. Because I was able to see how they implemented it, it made me think about how I could modify that for a first or second grade class. They showed me a really cool way to start it, and I was sitting there writing down all the ways I was going to keep doing that or use it for 1ˢᵗ grade. That was the part that was good for me.*

*Lindsey: Seeing the younger grade presentations, I saw so many kids' books that aren't even kids' books; they're just a book. I saw so many different texts that I want to use in my classroom.*

*Barbara: Even the people who were early childhood, I could learn from that. I'm secondary and I learned from many people that were early childhood. There are different takeaways to see how people use the same things that I use but a little bit*

*differently.*

Although participants were initially unsure about if and how they could implement strategies and activities presented from a variety of grade levels, most discovered that, regardless of grade level, there was much room for adapting practices to fit their students' needs. Due to the conversational nature of each presentation, participants were able to consider ways in which they could modify an activity in order to use it in their own classrooms. The practical nature of each teaching demonstration resulted in participants collecting a plethora of strategies, ideas, and tools from one another.

***Learning by doing.*** Several participants discussed the significance of being continuously engaged during teaching demonstrations. Some claimed they were able to better conceptualize activities because they took an active role as a learner during the teaching demonstrations. Instead of presenters simply explaining activities, participants were encouraged to actively participate and engage in the activities. This active engagement helped participants better understand how the activities work from both a teacher and student perspective.

**Leslie:** *We did it ourselves. Absolutely doing it was a big key.*

**Bridgette:** *I think that anytime you put yourself in the position of a student, it makes you a better teacher.*

**Christy:** *The presentations are very interactive. Having us do the activities gets you more involved in it.*

**Kelly:** *We've done them, and even for most of them not only did we do the hands on and got to do it and got to work in teams with those good people, but those student*

*samples . . .that's the proof in the pudding. You're actually going to see what that looks like and how that's doable. Not just somebody saying you should do this because it's really great, but they show you how it's done and what it looks like.*

    **Barbara:** *It's always good to put myself in the students' shoes.*

By actively engaging in the best practices presented, participants were able to better grasp how activities could be implemented in their own classrooms.

## Role Three: Participant as Researcher

    Another role participants assumed during the SI was that of teacher researcher. Participants were required to locate, evaluate, analyze, and integrate relevant research in consideration of their teaching demonstration topics and activities. The SI expectations required that participants would "envision yourself as a teacher researcher because you've encountered a reasonable, practical definition of teacher research, heard others share their teacher research, [and] included teacher research in your presentation" (p. 4).

    Many participants spoke of the research process as daunting and challenging from the outset.

    **Shelly:** *The research in the Institute made me a little nervous because it was like trying to find and dig, because I don't do research for every one of my lessons at school, you know. You've read all of this so just trying to go back and find it, but I think teachers need to be reminded about that research.*

    **Leslie:** *I struggled with the research part of it because, to me, I felt it was a little bit backwards.*

    **Joyce:** *That was the hard part for me, finding research as a sub.*

    **Laura:** *Finding research was something I struggled with just because finding it*

*that quickly, within a couple of days. I have found some since that I think I'll add to it. It was kind of like the same things, so I needed more. I've found different journals and things, different sources.*

   *Bridgette: It was not as easy as I thought it was going to be because I know all of the research kind of synthesized it all together. It's been 2 1/2 years since I graduated - I don't remember where it all came from.*

   *Carol: That was something that I was very nervous about because I wanted to have that research to back what I was saying. I hate digging for research. I'm not one of those people that likes to write about it like I said before. How in the world am I going to find this research? I don't have a lot of books. Again, I've only been teaching six years. I don't have a lot of teacher books that I have read or that I have in my library.*

   *Kelly: It was intimidating . . .the research part of it. I have not done that since college.*

   *Regina: I think that the research was really the hardest part because most of the things that I read for school are about special education just because it's constantly changing and it's constantly getting new things so I had to read this book about co-teaching because they're changing the style of co-teaching and I had to read this about what to do on IEPs for the students or things like that, and that's all I read professionally, unfortunately. I think that was probably the hardest part of the presentation, just finding the research to back up what I was saying, and hopefully what I'm saying is scholarly*

   *Barbara: The most difficult thing for me . . .was finding the research which*

*backed up what I already believed because I just had to look for it.*

Because of the time-consuming nature of locating, reading, and integrating research, many participants found it demanding. Participants confessed that research is not something they do on a regular basis when planning and implementing lessons, so this added a layer of complexity to their teaching demonstration.

Although the research process was demanding, many participants discovered that once they located relevant research, their ideas about teaching writing and teaching practices were validated. At that point, participants began to realize how research could potentially serve as evidence and support for their ideas and activities.

**Wendy:** *This is the research that's gonna back up what I'm doing in my classroom, what I'm going to do in my classroom, [and] what I may do a better job of doing in my classroom.*

**Shelly:** *I'm reading this research, and I feel pretty confident my teaching is grounded in research. I think we do need to challenge our co-workers – why are they doing what they're doing? Is it just the beloved unit that you've taught for 20 years? Or is there really something backing you up, a reason you should be doing this? I still want to make sure what I'm doing because research changes. Am I still doing what the current research says is valuable? It gives me the confidence that I know that what I'm doing is what I should be doing, and if people question me, I've got the research to back it up.*

**Leslie:** *I was able to connect research to what I had done. I think if I could go research first, then design lessons that go with that research, I'd feel a lot better.*

**Bridgette:** *I love reading research because I'm a loser and it just makes me*

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*really happy. I wave it in people's faces. That may get me in trouble sometimes, but that's a whole other story.*

*Jessie: I didn't know there was research behind it until I did the presentation. I just wanted to know if there was research behind it. The research just validated the fact that I'm not some free loving hippie who thinks art fixes everything. I don't feel like I am, but I do think that artistic things and creative outlets can solve a lot of problems. To have actual science behind it, it was like, see it's not just me throwing up a peace sign. This is the way we're supposed to do it. It does make sense. For me it was just a validation, and not for the sake of my administration, although I guess if I ever have to justify it I could, but for me it was just an idea that I had, and . . .it worked and here's why. That was really, really nice – it was just validation that I wasn't just winging it. It's a great feeling.*

*Christy: You're using your practices and making sure that they are research-based. It was kind of cool to be like, "Oh! My stuff that I do is actually research-based." It felt backwards, but it actually worked really well. I enjoy research, making sure that it works.*

*Carol: In order to have people believe what you're trying to sell them – believe what you're doing in your classroom – you need to have the research to back it up.*

*Kelly: I finally realized I have been doing research; I just didn't call it research. I was reading books and trying to do better, so that was my research. Whenever I started listening to the research that people put in their presentations and reading the stuff that I had been trying to find and pull, it gave me the - that's why I was doing that. We know we do these things but we need to have real research that backs it up and*

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*makes it legitimate.*

> **Regina:** *Research is really important. It backs up . . .we're not just pulling things out of our head.*

Many participants realized that research-based practices affirmed their ideas and pedagogy, especially in relation to their own and others' teaching demonstrations. Moreover, some discovered that research could provide an effective rationale for stakeholders if ever approached about their teaching practices.

## Role Four: Participant as Leader

A final goal of the 2016 OWP SI was for each participant to "envision yourself as a teacher leader within OWP and in your home school" (p. 4). Within OWP, several participants described their eagerness toward sharing their newfound knowledge with peers and also presenting to other teachers at various school sites in the role of teacher consultant.

> **Shelly:** *I hope I can present places and get somebody else excited about what they're already doing in the classroom and maybe give them another idea that they could do to help pull that inner write out of each of those kids.*

> **Leslie:** *I really hope to get some excitement back in there, and I hope to help other people with teaching writing. It's not as scary as you might think it is; it can be a lot of fun. I have a pretty good rapport with most of the teachers on staff, so I wouldn't mind doing some stuff with them and showing them. I've talked to my principal a little bit about presenting some of the ideas.*

> **Bridgette:** *I'm excited to take some of the things from Oklahoma Writing Project and bring those in . . .also, take ideas back and share them with my staff. While they*

*have not got to go through Oklahoma Writing Project, I can share the ideas and*

*information. I'm excited to see what we can do in terms of curriculum. Short of having*

*everyone go through it and experience this, the next best thing is to have people that*

*can take this information, have the experience, and then go back and recreate as close*

*as possible the things that we did to reach those teachers that can't go. They're exposed*

*to it; they're affected by it. It's a ripple effect.*

**Christy:** *It gave me more confidence to share things and ideas. I really would*

*consider actually going out and consulting.*

Two participants shared their plans to present at conferences and submit articles

for publication as a result of their experiences at the 2016 OWP SI. Portions of their

teaching demonstrations were worthy of sharing with others in statewide professional

organizations.

**Wendy:** *I'm planning on submitting it to the Oklahoma English Journal. I'm*

*hoping it gets published, and if it does I'm going to take a copy of that and say, "Look!"*

**Leslie:** *I did send in a proposal for the OCTE [Oklahoma Council of Teachers*

*of English] conference in October . . .I want to give back to it [the Oklahoma Writing*

*Project] because I think it's important for people to know about.*

Shelly, a veteran teacher with much experience in the role of teacher leader,

shared her desire to be a teacher educator. As she spoke of her passions, she provided

much insight into how the OWP SI influenced her views of leadership, as well as how

she might encourage others in the OWP community and at her school site to embrace

leadership roles:

I've always wanted to be able to go and teach other teachers, and if I had the

money to get my Masters and Doctorate I'd be at a University right now

teaching in the teacher prep program, which is really, although my heart lies

with my students, that's where my heart lies, too, is preparing other teachers and

just reminding teachers of good practices. I've led professional development at

our district, but of course it's always kind of presentation towards the people

you know. But, by doing to the OWP Summer Institute and presenting with

other high quality teachers that have their information grounded in research and,

again, it just gave me the confidence that I needed that I can go out and do this

more and recruit others, too. I think we have more people that could be leaders,

and they just don't see themselves as leaders, and I think that's one of the things

the SI did. I think it gave us the confidence to become leaders.

Themes of a newfound sense of confidence were evident across interviews; some

participants began to feel more comfortable taking an active role as a teacher leader,

including sharing ideas with colleagues, becoming members of and contributing to

professional organizations, and encouraging colleagues to become teacher leaders.

## Conclusion: Looking Forward

This chapter thematically portrayed the collective experiences of participants at

the 2016 OWP SI. These findings reveal the communal aspects of the SI as well as

various roles in which participants engaged during the Institute, including writing,

teaching, researching, and leading. A commonality across teacher participants' vignettes

presented in Chapter Four was the emphasis not only on the SI itself, but also on how

teachers' recalled their experiences before participating in the SI as well as looking

forward to how the SI might influence them and their students in the future. In addition

to focusing on participants' roles during the SI, data analysis revealed that, on the whole, participants were also concerned with how their experiences at the SI might shape what and how they write, teach, research, and lead beyond the three-week Institute.

## Practical Implications

In many conversations, participants shared ways in which their experiences at the SI could transfer to their teaching and their students. As writers and teachers of writing, participants looked forward to implementing ideas, practices, and activities into their pedagogy. Leslie, like many other participants, noted how she "want[s] so much for so many things to transfer in" to her classroom. Other participants discussed ways in which their experiences could shape their teaching, especially.

*Wendy: I wanted to write stuff that was meaningful and impactful and that maybe I could even take back into my classroom and show my kids – this is the kind of writing that you can do.*

*Shelly: I'm always excited to be back in the classroom, but I'm super excited about teaching writing. I think my kids will be such better writers this year than they've ever been.*

*Christy: I've got ideas for the whole year now. It's just so re-energizing. It's kind of like a renewal. You're reflecting, which I think is a big part of renewal, but also you're growing and you're looking forward. I'm excited . . .because I have some new strategies, and I have some confidence now and the energy to do it.*

Bridgette described a particular aspect of the SI that she planned to implement in the upcoming school year: "I'm going to do writing groups in my collegiate class. . . .To

have that extra time to meet and have somebody listen to your ideas and give suggestions and praise I think will be really beneficial for them." Her experiences as a member of an effective writing group transferred to her ideas about teaching college students and the influence writing groups might have on them.

## Spreading the Good News

Aside from taking away practical ideas and strategies to use in the classroom setting, many participants discussed sharing insights from the OWP SI with peers and colleagues, including recruiting others to participate in the future and also suggesting they might revisit the SI in a leadership role.

*Shelly: I'm really thinking about applying to be a coach next year. I'd like to come back and share what I've got out of it with others and help others.*

*Joyce: It is amazing. I have talked to several people about it already. In fact, one of them didn't have any idea what it was at all. It was something everybody should do, and I'll push it as hard as I can.*

*Laura: I've told everybody that they need to do it. I said it is a summer sucker, but it's the best thing I've done. I mean, it really is.*

*Jessie: I just keep sending text messages to friends saying, "You need to do this. You need to jump in. This is pretty great."*

*Carol: I'm going to apply to be a coach. I've already recruited people. I already have two friends who are totally doing it next summer. I tell them that they are going to be intimidated at first by some of the things they're asked to do, but I promise them it's worth it. I want to go back and change people's perspective on writing and hopefully get them more excited to come back and maybe go through the Summer Institute.*

*Regina: It was a great experience, and I'm going to recommend it literally to everyone.*

Participants' experiences at the 2016 OWP SI did not necessarily end at the conclusion of the Institute. Many were excited to use the information and knowledge they gained in future writing and teaching situations; many found research that supported their current and future practices; and many looked forward to becoming and recruiting teacher leaders at their respective school sites.

As participants engaged as writers, teachers, researchers, and leaders, their individual experiences became a significant part of the whole. These puzzle pieces fit together to form a community of practice in which much writing, teaching, learning, researching, and leading occurred. Importantly, these collective experiences did not paint a perfectly picturesque scene. Participants struggled and were challenged throughout the SI, but through many trying encounters, useful and relevant learning was often a result. Moreover, although these experiences primarily occurred over a three-week period, they certainly extended to beyond the Institute itself. Participants' experiences before, during, and after this particular phenomenon offered insight into if and how professional development can be meaningful and effective for teachers (and, eventually, students) in both the short and long term. Moving forward, the next chapter discusses the previously presented findings, offers implications for various stakeholders, and suggests particular moves toward future research stemming from this project.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Discussion and Implications

## Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of the 13 teachers who participated in and completed the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute (OWP SI) and determine the essence of these experiences and the phenomenon as a whole. My research addressed the phenomenon of professional development on a large scale, but, more narrowly focused, a specific professional development opportunity: the 2016 OWP SI. Research questions included the following:

- *What are teacher participants' lived experiences of a specific professional development opportunity, the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *How do participants make meaning of their experiences of the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *What roles do participants assume during the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

- *How do various roles influence individual and collective experiences of teachers at the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute?*

To answer these questions, I engaged in phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2009; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990, 2002, 2014; Yin, 2011) through interviewing,

observing, and collecting various documents and artifacts. In consideration of the phenomenological research questions framing this study, findings from individual and collective perspectives were presented in Chapters Four and Five. These findings offered a sense of how the participants in the 2016 OWP SI experienced this phenomenon and the various meanings made as a result of these experiences. Moreover, the essence of this phenomenon took shape as participants' individual and collective stories were shared. In consideration of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, this chapter discusses the findings in relation to communities of practice and the various roles teachers assumed during the SI. Additionally, I consider implications for various stakeholders - the National and Oklahoma Writing Projects and the construct of professional development as a whole - and offer recommendations for future research extending from this study.

## Communities of Practice

To begin, my work contributes to the theoretical and practical aspects of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Engler, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2006) emphasize "the establishment of communities of practice that emphasize knowledge construction and knowledge dissemination" (p. 214). The NWP - and on a smaller scale the OWP SI - meet both of these criteria, as participants construct their own knowledge and understanding as a result of writing, teaching, and researching and then share their knowledge with peers in and out of the SI through various leadership roles.

Participants in this study mentioned the community (Wendy, Laura, and Regina), rapport (Shelly), support (Leslie), a group of friends (Carol), a positive culture (Kelly), and wanting to grow (Lindsey). These and other phrases emphasized the

community of practice establish during the 2016 OWP SI. Moreover, these sentiments are promising in consideration of extending the community beyond the three-week Institute itself: the 2016 OWP SI planted "the seeds of a network" (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, p. 70). Schlanger and Fusco (2003) describe "participation in communities of practice as an integral factor in achieving effective, sustainable professional development systems" (p. 206). Though this research centers on one particular professional development opportunity, the community of practice established during this phenomenon extends beyond the SI into the larger OWP and National Writing Project (NWP) network, and even into various school sites across the state of Oklahoma.

## Roles of Teachers at Summer Institutes

In addition, this research extends the literature regarding various roles NWP teachers assume at SIs across the country, both during and after SI experiences. Roles of writing, teaching, researching, and leading were evident in this research as well as in the larger field (see Brooks, 2007; Gray, 2000; Frank, 2001; Kaplan, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Manzo, 2008; Reid, 2009; Whitney, 2008, 2009; Whyte et al, 2012). Longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of NWP SIs (see Stokes et al., 2008) have much to offer on a broad scale. However, the completion of a five question survey on the last day of the SI might not offer much insight into the actual experiences of the individual participants and the group as a whole.

Instead, this research attempted to discover the essence of this phenomenon by exploring participants' lived experiences of the SI. Through the analysis of interviews, observations, and documents, individual stories took shape. The vignettes presented in

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Chapter Four demonstrate the complexities of individual stories; while a common structure was evident across participants, each participant experienced this phenomenon uniquely. Additionally, common roles across participants aided in discovering what teachers actually do during this professional development experience and what meanings they make as a result of their experiences. Importantly, the various roles in which participants engaged did not receive equal attention. For most participants, writing and teaching were particular focus points, and many described these two as interwoven. Even so, each role discussed in Chapter Two was present for the participants as a collective whole. Stemming from both data collection and analysis and a review of relevant literature, themes of writing, teaching, learning, researching, and leading focused the collective findings of this research.

## Writers

All participants discussed their writing experiences during the SI. Many described the writing aspect as most significant to their growth, change, and transformation. Recent studies (see Iyengar & Henkin, 2015) focus on the importance and usefulness of the writing component of the SI. During their experiences at the San Antonio Writing Project, "teachers at all levels share common experiences about life and welcomed a space to express their insights" (Iyengar & Henkin, 2015, p. 19). These findings are confirmed in this study as many participants discussed and wrote about personal and often emotional experiences. Significantly, participants in this research spoke not only of their writing products, but also the processes in which they engaged in writing groups. Yagelski (2009) claims "writing can become a vehicle to a deeper, more nuanced sense of ourselves as being in the world" (p. 15). The findings of this research

emphasize not only on what participants produced as writers but also on how they experienced writing and writing processes individually and collectively.

Writing groups were safe and brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for participants to write and share openly and honestly. Though the focus of the SI was not explicitly centered on diversity and social justice themes, many pieces crafted by participants contained instances of these topics, in some shape or form. Participants used the words "safe" and "brave" often when describing their writing groups and their willingness to share their writing with others. Future research could further explore the complexities of safe versus brave spaces and how these intricacies influence participants' writing and sharing at SIs.

Prior (2006) contends that "writing is a phenomenon that seems ever more connected to who we are and who we will become" (p. 64). Many participants in this study described the act of writing and sharing with their peers - in writing groups, particularly - as personally meaningful. It is important to note, however, that not all participants engaged in the same writing processes or produced similar products. Lindsay, for instance, struggled initially because her writing was not fitting the presumed mold of others. She felt as though her writing style was different - fiction was a favorite and emotional pieces were difficult to craft. What she discovered later, through conversations with SI coaches and co-directors, was that writing is individualistic in nature. The focus was not on what and how she was writing, but that she was writing. As a result, she felt comfortable and confident to craft and share fanfiction pieces such as "Adios Johnny Bravo" presented in Chapter Four.

Moreover, not every participant valued the writing aspect of the SI. Barbara

spoke candidly about her emphasis on teaching - becoming and being a better teacher as a result of her participation. "I didn't join the Institute or apply for it in order to become a better writer, personally," Barbara expressed. Moreover, she claimed that "becoming a better writer and revising and writing something new every night . . .wasn't as important to me as it seemed like it was to our leaders." Since she de-emphasized the writing component of the SI, her writing experiences did not amount to much significance. This contradicts Augsburger's assertion that "teachers have no way of knowing just how powerful the pain and joys of writing can be for their students unless they themselves write regularly" (1998, p. 551). On the other hand, Brooks (2007) studied four elementary reading and writing teachers and found little to no explicit connection between the participants' individual writing experiences and their effectiveness teaching writing, just at Barbara did not connect her writing to her teaching. Similar to this study, Brooks's data involved primarily conversational interviews, so his conclusions, like my own, are based on teachers' own words, ideas, and experiences.

Entering the debate concerning whether writing teachers should be writers themselves (or not), Gillespie (1991) urged teachers to "sharpen your pencil, uncap your pen, let your computer hum" because "writing and teaching are seamless work" (p. 6). The other 12 participants, in accord, connected their writing practices to their pedagogy. As Cremin and Baker (2010) note, teachers' "identities as teacher-writers and writer-teachers constantly shift and are emotional, relational and conflictual, a complex and interwoven mix of jostling interpersonal, institutional and intrapersonal influences" (p. 26). This connects back to the visual representation of participants' interconnected roles

presented in Chapter Five. Conceptualizing a permeable boundary between and across roles allows for these often implicit connections to take shape.

Although many participants did not explicitly refer to their teaching philosophy or teacher lore pieces, many published these writings in the anthology. For participants at the 2016 OWP SI, the personal nature of writing (personal narrative, poetry, fiction) dominated other professional genres. Whitney (2009) argues "value should be placed on relationships between personal writing, professional writing, and professional growth" (p. 255). In this study, professional writing was often lacking, as many teachers' discovered, for perhaps the first time, their voices as writers outside the professional realm.

## Teachers and Learners

As demonstrated through individual vignettes of participants and common experiences across the community of practice, the 2016 OWP SI allowed participants to share and learn with and from one another authentic and effective practices related to the teaching of writing. Reid (2009) believes that "if we are brave enough to argue that there are better and worse ways to teach writing, generally, then we need to be equally courageous in exploring and recommending better pedagogies for educating writing teachers" (p. 217). Participants in this study exhibited courage in the role of teacher as they shared research-based best practices via a teaching demonstration. The teacher teaching teachers model of the NWP and OWP allowed participants to become experts in the field of writing pedagogy while also participating in numerous presentations.

Many participants discussed the interactive nature of participating in teaching demonstrations. Unlike other, traditional professional development models, SIs allow

teachers to take an active role as they engage in literacy activities. Another connection can be made between writing, teaching, and learning here. Pella's (2011) research demonstrates how "the synthesis and integration of various instructional approaches, specifically those that engage students in multimodal and collaborative activities, may hold greater promise for engaging all students in meaningful writing experiences" (p. 123). Considering the teaching demonstration topics of the 2016 OWP SI participants, it is significant that all referenced the newly implemented Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts and many focused intently on multimodal literacies, an overarching theme inherent in the standards.

In the role of teacher and learner, many participants discussed the influences their participation in the 2016 OWP SI might have on their teaching and their students' learning. Gallagher, Woodworth, and Arshan (2015) discuss how teachers' learning through a particular NWP College-Ready Writers Program (CRWP) positively affected students' argument writing. More recently, the authors focused on rural districts, specifically, as they investigated if and how this NWP professional development might support college and career readiness standards centered on source-based argument writing (Gallagher, Arshan, & Woodworth, 2017). While many participants in this study spoke of how the writing, teaching, and learning in which they engaged during the SI could benefit their students, a focus on particular modes of writing (especially informative and argument) was not as evident, although participants did make explicit connections to Oklahoma's English Language Arts academic standards and tied their practices and activities to a variety of reading and writing standards. More research on various modes of writing explored and promoted at SIs could shed light on transferrable

components of the SI to classroom settings.

The types of teaching and learning activities in which participants engaged at the 2016 OWP SI could lead to Yagelski's (2009) vision of the teaching of writing: "Imagine if we taught writing in a way that focused on this power to help us understand and transform ourselves - individually and together. Imagine if we taught writing as a way to make a better world" (p. 21). Through presenting and participating in teaching demonstrations, participants at the 2016 OWP SI recognized ways in which teaching writing processes could result in those positive outcomes in their classrooms. Implementing activities and practices with students could take writing beyond the words on the page.

## Researchers

As the overarching concept of research is broad and multifaceted, it was difficult to pinpoint the types of research in which participants engaged during this phenomenon. The findings suggest that, on the whole, participants conducted secondary research using a variety of books, articles, and websites to support their best practices. Some discussed the "backward" nature of this approach - how they "dug" for research having already planned practices and activities which they would integrate into their teaching demonstrations. Others noted the validation locating, evaluating, and integrating research brought to their teaching practices and self-efficacy as teachers of writing.

What was not a focus for many participants were other aspects of research, including primary research and action research. Although literature centered on researching within the NWP and SI communities advocates for action research during and after participation during SIs, participants in this study did not consider if and how

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action research might influence their practices. This is partly due to the requirements of the OWP SI itself - participants are required to integrate research into their teaching demonstration but not to conduct their own research regarding their best practices. On the other hand, participants did include and showcase student samples of products connected to their teaching demonstration practices and activities. What was often missing, however, was an emphasis on the processes in which students engaged during these authentic activities. If teachers could focus more not only on how their students experienced these activities but also move from the SI to their classrooms with a mindset involving action research, their experiences within the realm of research might not feel "backward" or as difficult as described by many.

## Leaders

According to the NWP's description of local sites' efforts, one goal for all sites involves "developing a leadership cadre of local teachers who have participated in invitational summer institutes in the teaching of writing" ("What Sites Do," 2017). Bridgette mentioned how the SI allows participants "to become a teacher leader that goes out and shares with teachers who don't have the opportunity or haven't had the opportunity."

In Lieberman and Friedrich's presentation to the 2007 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in Chicago, IL, the researchers discuss writing project teachers carrying out leadership roles:

. . .participation in the writing project supports teachers in developing the knowledge of how to work with peers and the confidence to do so. Writing project participation encourages them to work collaboratively and to go public

with both their successes and their questions. These teacher-consultants adopt a

stance as both leaders and learners. (2007a, p. 30)

Additionally, Lieberman and Wood (2004) celebrate the fact that "a substantial

leadership cadre develops in each site" of the NWP (p. 56). Importantly, "teacher

leaders are not appointed, nor do they apply for the job - but they are encouraged to

become teacher consultants through their attendance in the summer institute and/or their

participation in network activities" (p. 61). Many participants in this study spoke to

their aspirations to share their newfound ideas with colleagues in and out of their school

sites.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a theme common across interviews

involved looking forward to what the SI could do for themselves, their students, their

peers, and their schools in the upcoming year. Their experiences during the SI allowed

participants to "learn to lead in communities of practice that promote colleagueship and

support risk-taking and experimentation" (Lieberman and Miller, 2005, p. 161). In

writing and presentation groups, and in the larger group as a whole, participants felt safe

and comfortable in taking risks in their writing, teaching, and researching, all of which

impacted their thoughts and actions regarding leadership.

## Implications

## National and Oklahoma Writing Projects

The findings of this research will be of interest to the NWP and OWP, including

those in leadership positions, directors of local NWP sites, teacher consultants, and

teachers curious about or interested in participating in future SIs. As previously

discussed, much research has been conducted on the NWP since its inception in 1974.

Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) praise the effectiveness of the NWP:

> There is no doubt that the NWP has been a major force in accentuating the role of writing in learning, in reinvigorating teacher enthusiasm, in garnering respect for what teachers of writing accomplish in their classrooms, and in professionalizing the teacher as leader, teacher consultant (TC), and researcher. (p. 283).

The phenomenological nature of this research offers a unique take on a particular aspect of the NWP and OWP. While many research studies in the past have focused on the effects of SIs using quantitative and qualitative data and studying teachers, administrators, and students, this study allows SI participants' voices to come to life in consideration of the experience of the SI itself - not solely what comes after it. Documented perceptions of teachers **during** a professional development opportunity like the SI are lacking. While reflections and post-SI data are useful and important, the starting place for exploring this phenomenon and the OWP/NWP on a larger scale is the experience of the SI itself. This lens allows lived experiences during the phenomenon to frame future studies involving this and other OWP and NWP sites and programs.

Van Manen (2002) notes, ". . .phenomenological inquiry has formative consequences for professional practitioners by increasing their perceptiveness and tactfulness" (pp. 8-9). Teachers, including those who participated in this study, can benefit from this research by exploring others' lived experiences and deciding if and how this professional development might also affect them in a way similar to the 13 participants whose stories were told here.

## Professional Development

In addition to the NWP organization, this research concerns the concept of professional development and has implications for administrators, teacher leaders, and classroom teachers. Little (1993) argues that "professional development must be constructed in ways that deepen the discussion, open up debates, and enrich the array of possibilities for action" (p. 148). Focusing on the NWP, Wood and Lieberman (2000) propose that "The Writing Project, in taking principles of good writing and translating them to principles of good teacher, offers a powerful model for professional development" (p. 271). Returning to the initial discussion in Chapter One of traditional professional development, the findings of this research are in stark contrast to many teachers' perceptions and experiences of other professional development activities. Borko (2004) admits "the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate" (p. 3). After surveying ELA teachers, Applebee and Langer (2009) discuss participants' positive responses to ideas of professional development experiences that emphasize writing processes for their students. However, these experiences were not made available to the teachers surveyed. The researchers go on to acknowledge that "the text and usefulness of the experiences that were provided in unclear" (p. 26). As discussed in Chapter One, even current moves toward effective professional development implementation - especially in the state of Oklahoma - experience time and resource constraints.

Although the findings of this research have important consequences for the broader domain of professional development and might extend and enhance teachers' experiences with professional development, they alone do not navigate the intricacy of

professional development being unavailable for all teachers. Importantly, this phenomenon involves an extended and intensive three-week commitment from teachers. Participants in this study applied for the SI and navigated an intricate interview and orientation process. Unlike some traditional professional development programs, participants made a conscious decision to attend the SI; they committed to the time and effort required to successfully complete the Institute.

Many participants in this study made explicit the demanding nature of this professional development program. Noting the time commitment during the SI and work (writing, researching, etc.) outside of the required hours, participants all commented on their own efforts in terms of the effectiveness and usefulness of this professional development experience. It is important to consider the nature of this particular phenomenon - one unlike many traditional professional development endeavors. Additional constraints, including (and especially in Oklahoma) financial burdens, might limit some teachers from being able to engage in these types of experiences. Challenges such as cost (Garet et al., 2001) often pose barriers for teachers who otherwise would be interested in attending engaging and meaningful professional development experiences. The OWP as a whole, moving from a five-week to a three-week Institute, must navigate the complexities of funding and resources.

Even so, the findings of this research could transfer to other professional development programs and settings, especially when considering the roles participants assume. Nagin (2012) advocates for school sites to offer professional development centered on the teaching of writing for all teachers, regardless of grade level or content area. While it is unrealistic to expect or assume that every teacher within a school

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building will attend an NWP SI and experience what those in this study did, professional development programs within school sites could model their structure and activities after the Institute. Perhaps aspects such as teachers teaching teachers, being involved in collaborative groups, applying research to one's teaching, and taking on leadership roles during after the professional development opportunity could shift teachers' attitudes about if and how professional development might be meaningful for themselves and their students.

In accord with Cremin (2006), the work of this research "has the potential to re-vitalise practice and enhance teachers' development as writers" (p. 19). Additionally, Valerie (2012) mandates "the need to continue to find more effective, creative, and efficient methods of training teachers in ways that will ensure their ability to translate knowledge into practice" (p. 40). Professional development within and beyond school sites might benefit by borrowing ideas, structures, and moves promoted by the NWP.

## Recommendations for Future Research

First, I reiterate that this research is only a snapshot of a larger community of practice. In addition, the aim of this research was not to solve a problem, but instead inquire into the lived experiences of participants, both individually and collectively. Admittedly, there are limitations to this phenomenological research study, and as a reflexive researcher and writer, I acknowledge that my own experiences, even if bracketed, were a constant companion during this research. This research centered on only one particular group's (of only 13 participants) experiences at a local SI. With hundreds of other SIs across the nation and an ever-growing number of professional development models, programs, and opportunities, this research cannot and should not

generalize in hopes of "solving" the problem of inadequate and ineffective professional development for teachers.

As a result of my study, future research into professional development sites - NWP and otherwise - might be conducted in order to further investigate participants' experiences with professional development and the resulting effectiveness of those experiences. The findings of this research offer much promise for follow-up studies of participants and future OWP (and perhaps other NWP) SIs. As Bridgette described the personal and professional connections she formed during her experience, future research could explore if and how those connections extended beyond the SI, as most participants return to separate school sites. Additionally, follow up studies on participants like Lindsey who struggled with providing useful feedback for her writing group peers could shed light on how those practices during the SI might extend beyond the three-week Institute itself.

The outreach of the NWP extends far beyond local SIs across the nation. Future research might focus on SI participants' experiences once they return to their classrooms. Considering this study, more light could be shed on the effectiveness of this professional development program if follow-up observations and interviews were conducted in the school year following the teacher's' participation on the SI. This could further extend into a longitudinal study, exploring factors such as grade level/subject area changes, moves from school sites, and years removed from the SI experience. Research similar to Bratcher and Stroble (1994) and Smith (2006) could examine if and how SI participants transfer beliefs and practices gleaned from their SI experiences to their teaching and classrooms.

Professional development should certainly extend beyond the experience itself, and while participants' lived experiences during the SI are of the utmost importance, this is certainly not a final destination. With that said, it is important to consider the notion that it takes much time, focus, attention, and space for what teachers do during their SI experience to transfer to their pedagogy (Blau, 1993). Just as it is not sufficient to only focus on participants' lived experiences during one SI, researchers should follow up with participants years after their participation. Phenomenological research can investigate participants' experiences beyond the SI, including the meanings they make of this professional development opportunity after they have been back in their classrooms for extended time periods.

Phenomenological research might be appropriate for other components of the NWP, as well. Teachers' experiences at in-service workshops, conferences, and writing retreats could offer a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the NWP. Moreover, students of NWP teachers might have important stories to tell about their experiences with learning and writing and could offer additional layers of information significant to this topic. Because most research centered on students of NWP teachers involves assessing writing or determining student achievement in writing (see Graham & Perrin, 2007, Milner et al., 2009, and Whyte et al., 2012), a phenomenological design could dig deeper into if and how students of NWP-associated teachers benefit in various ways.

## Conclusion

Personal and communal experiences matter. They are what we live and breathe, day in and day out. When experiencing in a particular phenomenon, what people say,

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do, and think; how they act; and meanings they make determine how individuals and the larger community experience a phenomenon individually and collectively. Especially in the larger field of education, now more than ever do teachers' voices deserve to be heard loudly and clearly. Bruner (1996) advocates for the importance of narratives:

> I see the challenge of narrative as a means to bring together the study of society, of human nature, of history, of literature and drama, even of law, in the interest not so much of out-competing our trade rivals as of overcoming our own shortsightedness. (p. 99)

The sharing of experiences and the crafting of narratives (see Chapter Four), while not poised to solely solve problems, can offer much depth and insight toward discussions of relevant phenomena in the realm of teaching and learning.

In order to learn more about the OWP SI, a specific professional development program contained within the NWP, 13 participants of one summer's Institute shared their stories, their emotions, their feelings, and their personal and professional lives. Experiencing this phenomenon shaped these participants in various ways. Sharing these experiences can spread ideas to others about this phenomenon: what the OWP SI is like and how it might be useful for a variety of teachers.

More importantly, these stories offered insight into the life-worlds of 13 unique individuals, all who had similar, yet distinct, experiences. These participants' voices matter. These stories deserve to be told. If we want professional development for teachers to be meaningful and effective, we have to find out what makes it so. One way to do just that is to experience, through phenomenological research, the phenomenon

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alongside the participants. While our experiences are not identical, what we do together can benefit us, our students, and other stakeholders. This research, a snapshot of one group's lived experiences at an SI site, marks only an initial step, and many participants' stories are yet to be told.

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## Signed Consent to Participate in Research

**Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?**

I am Gage Jeter from the department of Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum, and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Lived Experiences: Teacher Perceptions Within and Beyond the Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute. This research is being conducted at The University of Oklahoma and the Moore Norman Technology Center. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

<u>Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.</u>

**What is the purpose of this research?** The purpose of this research is to examine the essence of lived experiences of teachers during the 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute in order to gain insight into this professional development from teachers' perspectives.

**How many participants will be in this research?** Approximately 16 people will take part in this research.

**What will I be asked to do?** If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to participate in an initial unstructured interview immediately following the Summer Institute and a follow-up unstructured interview at a later date for clarification and member checking. During interviews, you will be asked to provide writing(s) completed during the Summer Institute and think aloud through your experiences as a writer/teacher of writing. Interviews will occur at a comfortable, mutually convenient location as agreed upon by the participant and researcher.

**How long will this take?** Your participation will take approximately one hour for each interview (two hours total).

**What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate?** There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

**Will I be compensated for participating?** You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

**Who will see my information?** In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you directly without your permission; however, because of the small number of participants and the demographic information that will be reported, others may be able to figure out that you participated in this study if you do not give permission to be directly identified. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institution Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

**Do I have to participate?** No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Revised 03/01/15
Page 1 of 2

IRB NUMBER: 6756
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/11/201(
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/31/20

**Will my identity be anonymous or confidential?** Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. The data you provide will be retained in anonymous form unless you specifically agree for data retention or retention of contact information at the end of the research. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree to being quoted directly.                              ___Yes ___ No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material.    ___Yes ___ No

I agree for the researcher to use my data in future studies.    ___Yes ___ No

**Audio Recording of Research Activities** To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording.                    ___Yes        ___ No

**Video Recording of Research Activities** To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on a video recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to video recording.                    ___ Yes        ___ No

**Photographing of Research Participants/Activities** In order to preserve an image related to the research, photographs may be taken of participants. You have the right to refuse to allow photographs to be taken without penalty. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to photographs.                         ___ Yes        ___ No

**Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?** If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at gagerjeter@ou.edu or 405-595-7068. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Crag Hill, at crag.a.hill@ou.edu or 405-325-1498.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

*You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.*

| Participant Signature | Print Name | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent | Print Name | Date |

**The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA**

**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects**

**Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date:** April 11, 2016 | **IRB#:** 6756 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Principal Investigator:** Gage Ryan Jeter | **Approval Date:** 04/11/2016<br>**Expiration Date:** 03/31/2017 |

**Study Title:** Lived Experiences: Teacher Perceptions Within and Beyond the Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute

**Expedited Category:** 6 & 7

**Collection/Use of PHI:** No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:
- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Fred Beard, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

Potential Interview Guide

*Interview 1 (Life History and Contemporary Experience):*

·   What is your history as a teacher and writer prior to the 2016 OWP SI?

·   How and why did you decide to apply for the 2016 OWP SI?

·   Could you tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience during

the SI?

·   Ask participants to tell a story about their experience of the SI.

·   Reconstruct, not remember: What happened? What was your experience at the OWP

SI like?

·   Ask for concrete details of the participant's lived experience before exploring

attitudes and opinions about it.

*Interview 2 (Reflection on Meaning):*

·   What does it mean for you to have experienced the SI?

·   Given what you said in the first interview, how do make sense of your experiences

during the SI?

·   How do your make sense of your present life as a teacher and writer in the context of

your experiences during the SI?

# 2016 Oklahoma Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute Fellow Application

The Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute will be held full days, June 6-9; 13-16; and 20-23 at the Moore Norman Technology Center-Norman campus 9:00 am-4:00 pm. There will be one Friday Session on June 24 8:00 am-Noon at MNTC with a fellowship lunch following at a local restaurant.

2016 OWP Invitational Summer Institute will be held at the
Moore-Norman Technology Center
4701 12th Avenue NW  Norman, OK 73069

Application Deadline March 21, 2016. Applicants invited to interview will receive an appointment sign-up email by March 25.

Summer Institute Interviews will be held Saturday, April 2 beginning at 8:30 am in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, Collings Hall. Interviews are a required part of the application process.

2016 OWP Summer Institute Orientation held on the OU Campus in Norman (Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, Collings Hall) on Saturday, April 16 from 8:30 am-4:00 pm. It is mandatory accepted applicants attend this day.

IMPORTANT: Start saving your student writing samples now. You will need student samples for your interview and during the Summer Institute. Be sure and save high/low ability examples from your writing lessons. Originals are great but copies are fine.
At the interview, you will bring your professional vita and some of your student writing samples.

\* Required

**First and Last Name** \*

**Home Address** \*
Complete with City, State and Zip Code

**Best Contact Phone Number** \*
Please List Home and Cell (H)XXX-XXX-XXXX (C) XXX-XXX-XXXX

[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]

**Home Email Address** *

[                                                              ]

**School Email Address** *

[                                                              ]

**School Name** *

[                                                              ]

**School Address** *
Complete with City, State and Zip Code

[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]

**School District** *

[                                                              ]

**Subject/Grade Level Currently Teaching** *

[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]
[                                                              ]

**Formal Education:** *
List university or college attended, dates, degrees earned
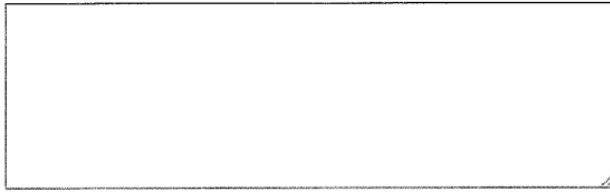
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**Teacher Experience** *
Give name and location of school, subject taught, and dates of employment

[ ]

**Achievements:** *
Please list any honors, grants, publications, or other achievements you have earned as an educator

[ ]

**What are some of the special ways you teach composition or incorporate writing in the teaching of your subject area?** *

[ ]

**How have you demonstrated your interest or expertise in writing?** *
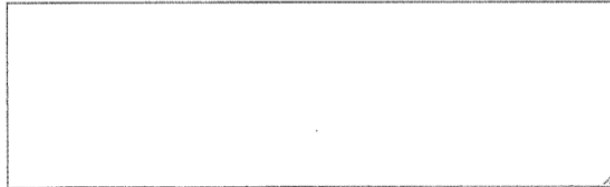
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[ ]

**What books or other influences have shaped your teaching of writing or use of writing in your content teaching? ***
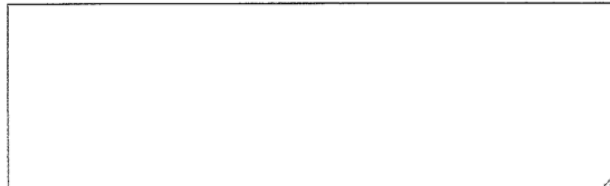
[ ]

**What are your professional goals? ***

[ ]

**How do you hope OWP SI will impact your classroom? ***

[ ]

**How would you describe yourself as a writer? ***

[ ]

**What teaching techniques or strengths would you share with other Summer Institute participants?** *

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**If you are selected to participate in the Invitational Summer Institute, you will be responsible for the following:** *

Please place a check by each one acknowledging you are aware of this requirement.

☐ Develop and present a writing presentation at your own expense

☐ Participate in teacher research and writing

☐ Reflect on your role as a teacher and writer

☐ Become an advocate for the Oklahoma Writing Project

**Would you be needing a housing scholarship?** *

You live more than 2 hours away from Moore Norman Technology Center

○ Yes

○ No

○ Other: [_____]

**Have you ever attended an OWP sponsored activity? If so, please name.** *

[_____]

**Please indicate how you learned about this application:** *

☐ OWP Workshop/Conference

☐ Principal's Recommendation

☐ Internet/Website

☐ OWP Teacher Consultant

☐ Oklahoma State Department of Education

☐ Other: [_____]

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.