

CLASSROOM PARAMETERS: HOW ONE STUDENT LEARNS TO TAKE OWNERSHIP AS A WRITER

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Introduction

Jody (the professor)

January. I am elated: I have finally been granted the opportunity to teach the writing class in my university's education department, where I am an assistant professor. I have eagerly planned the entire semester over winter break. The students are practicing or future teachers, who know how important it is to teach students to write. I cannot wait to help them refine their own craft – I have multiple lists of mini-lessons to teach, genres to try, and ideas they can implement in their own classrooms or future classrooms.

The first night of class, I appraise my students and excitedly ask, "Why do you write?" Easy question. Their answers are predictable: they write school assignments, complete work-related tasks, and correspond via email. They look expectantly at me for a more challenging question.

I clarify: "Okay, but when and what do you write, outside of your job or school? For fun?" I ask, somewhat impatiently. Silence. I struggle with my wait time, willing myself not to answer my own question. Simon tentatively asks, "Does Facebook count?" The rest of the group nods their heads. My students update their statuses, comment on friends' posts, and write on each other's "walls." Twitter, text messages, and informal emails round out the group's responses. While these obviously "count," I want to know when they write for pleasure and what forms of writing they enjoy most. They stare at me blankly.

I force myself not to panic, as my plans for a smooth class come to a halt. I change tactics. "Think for a few minutes, and then write a short

reflection about how you perceive yourself as a writer.” I encourage the students to address any experiences that have shaped them as writers. I want them to assess their self-confidence and self-competence. As we meet this first night of the semester, I assure myself they are tired; all students are overwhelmed by the start of new courses. I am certain once they start their reflection, they’ll realize how often they write, how much they enjoy writing, and how skilled they are at the craft. I am in for quite a surprise.

Lindsey (the student)

It is the second year of my doctoral program and my advisor suggests I take a writing course with Jody because she will be on my dissertation committee. One would think I would be a confident writer, ecstatic to take a writing class; I am a former elementary school teacher, a seasoned student, and I’m planning a career in higher education – a job that depends largely on publishing. But I am not enthusiastic, and I am embarrassed I will be the only doctoral student in a Master’s-level class. But, I register anyway. I don’t have a choice.

Jody has a deep interest in “who we are as writers.” Ugh. She begins the first class by asking what we write and why we write. She encourages us to think beyond academic purposes. I decide to be truthful:

I have many reasons why I write. I write for every single class. I write articles my advisor wants me to submit for publication. I write constantly to demonstrate what I am learning in my doctoral program. I do not write outside of school. Ever. All I do is write and have it constantly critiqued. While I am a mechanically sound writer, my confidence and identity as a writer is worse now than when I was an undergraduate. I have lost my voice, I struggle to write, and I am defeated. I cannot take an entire semester of criticism...

We share our responses in small groups. Some students begin discussing Facebook and Twitter, but I have limited familiarity with either - just one more reminder of how I am not even a writer outside the world of academia. I am in for a long semester. (Excerpt from Lindsey’s reflection, January)

Purpose of Study

Allison Skerrett and Randy Bomer, who study the cultural and sociocultural influence of teaching and learning, find that young people may struggle to develop competent academic identities (1256). They report that students may feel rejected and disconnected from literacy work that is not related to their interests, cultural identities, and goals for literacy use. This is often observed when students are required to write on topics which may not interest them and when they receive traditional decontextualized grammar instruction. As we reflect on educational writing experiences, we find it essential to examine how teachers are being prepared to teach writing. However, through studying pre-service teachers, researchers Belinda Zimmerman, Denise Morgan, Melanie Kidder-Brown, and Katherine Batchelor find, “there is a paucity of research related to how pre-service teachers (PSTs) are taught to teach writing” (145).

Many educational researchers have identified writers’ workshop as an effective, authentic, and engaging way to facilitate the writing development in K-12 classrooms (Graves; Calkins; Hansen). While the workshop approach is commonly taught in teacher education programs, many college students have had negative writing experiences in schools (Bomer, Bogard, Lawrence and Steen; Mahurt; Norman and Spencer). In this study, we examine how three parameters within our writers’ workshop enabled Lindsey to shift from a writer who writes out of necessity and based primarily on others’ feedback, to one who takes ownership of her work and makes purposeful decisions about what she wants and needs as a writer. Within each parameter, we describe how Jody positioned herself as a fellow writer, rather than an authority, to encourage Lindsey’s transformation. Our hope is for all teachers of adult writers to consider the parameters they establish in their own classroom, and the role the teacher plays in helping students develop a sense of ownership of their writing.

Jody

I listen to students' conversations and later, read their reflections. I am defeated, disappointed, and uncertain. The majority of my 20 students are practicing teachers who teach writing in their own classrooms. Yet, almost all can identify some negative experience that discouraged them from writing or from identifying themselves as writers:

- *"I am a terrible writer and my papers were always marked up with suggestions from the teacher. They weren't really suggestions though – I just had to change my paper to include the teacher's remarks to earn the grade. It never felt like my work anymore."*
- *"Peer conferences were the worst. I hated giving a classmate my paper to fix; sometimes, they wrote all over my paper, but it was wrong. I never make my 4th graders use peer conferences."*
- *"I remember my professor photocopying my paper for everyone in the class to critique. We'd spend an entire class period 'workshopping' it. It was the worst class because I always felt so stupid."*

As practicing teachers and graduate students, they need to enjoy writing; they need to perceive themselves as competent and confident writers. I decide to take a different approach.

I redesign the class with one focus in mind: to get my students to enjoy writing. I strive to undo the years of distress they've learned to associate with writing; the red pen markings, the grammar lessons, the stressful and oft-embarrassing sharing sessions where they "workshopped" their papers with peers to improve their work. My students need more than dull assignments; they need an authentic purpose for their writing, and they need someone to help them realize they are already writers. And while each student has a story about the baggage she brings as a writer, I am drawn to Lindsey, and focus primarily on what I learn about her. But first, I begin by establishing a writers' workshop and adopting a new assignment: the multi-genre life storybook.

Writers' Workshop

Writers' workshop is one approach to teaching writing. In a workshop model, writers spend the bulk of their time learning how to write through practice. Much as an apprentice carpenter or artist learns from his or her mentors, writers look to other writers and texts to refine their skill and craft of writing (Gallagher). Within a working environment, the writer—like the carpenter or artist—writes, rewrites, collaborates, shares, and tries again. The process is recursive and unending, and writers depend largely on their peers for feedback, inspiration, and commiseration (Graves).

Writers' workshop includes three parts: a mini-lesson (5-10 minutes), ample time for writing (40-45 minutes), and brief sharing (5-10 minutes). Because writers improve their craft through practice, proponents of a workshop model provide liberal time for writers to talk about their learning and discover what writing processes work for them (Calkins).

The effectiveness of a workshop depends largely on the relationship among the participants. Without a safe community where writers are willing to take risks and use one another as resources, writing reverts back to a solo pursuit, where the writer both struggles and celebrates alone. Katie Greene and Karen Mitcham, who study the classroom community at the secondary level, state, "When students feel valued and respected, they gain the confidence that they need to share their own experiences, to engage in authentic opportunities for learning, and to work in spaces that might be challenging or unfamiliar" (14).

Ralph Fletcher, a writer and educational consultant, learns that within a safe environment, authors then make deliberate decisions about audience, purpose, and genre. A skilled writer chooses personally significant topics and tailors writing to fit the purpose. The multi-genre life storybook served as the culminating assignment for students to learn about themselves as writers.

The Multi-Genre Life Story Book

Teacher education professors Brian Kissel, Katie Wood, and K. Kiser developed the multi-genre life storybook loosely based on Tom Romano's multi-genre reports and Katie Ray's "study-driven" framework of inquiry for their own college class. The purpose is for each writer to examine her own writing process and attempt multiple genres of writing through the exploration and emulation of mentor texts. The genres or "types of writing" were selected to address the curricular expectations for practicing public school teachers. Common core standards guide teachers to focus on five types of writing: narrative, informational, persuasion and opinion, functional and procedural, and poetry (Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman 103). Most importantly, though, students must choose an authentic topic and audience; the only requirement for the assignment is to include a minimum of six different genres and for students to evaluate each piece of writing based on the genre's textual features. They write for a real audience (e.g., family member, friend, colleague) and choose their tone, topic(s), and aesthetic presentation based on the recipient of their book.

Research Methodology

We used a descriptive, qualitative case study approach to examine the context of Jody's graduate-level writing class as a bounded case (Merriam). As a new professor, Jody sought to answer the following research question: How can I encourage students to take ownership of their writing? For a deeper analysis and exploration of this research question, Lindsey became a subcase embedded within the larger context of the class.

According to educational researcher Ken Zeichner, self-study research is "probably the single most important development ever in the field of teacher research" (8). Yet, the vision of the lone researcher in qualitative research poses potential problems; one assumption is the researcher finds or discovers results as opposed to constructing them (Hafernik, Messerschmidt, and Vandrick; Quantz). The single-voiced, single-lens approach may complicate

the relationship between the research and the researchers (Ellsworth). Thus, we chose to use a multi-voiced process of interpretation and reporting to address these qualitative concerns.

Using field notes, writing samples, formal and informal interviewing, we met weekly to analyze our data using F. Erickson's interpretivist paradigm. Using focused coding (Dyson and Genishi) we identified three parameters that facilitated ownership among writers in the classroom:

- 1) The presence of a supportive environment where sharing is self-directed and the author is the authority.
- 2) The use of inquiry-based exploration to examine and emulate mentor texts.
- 3) The encouragement of a professor who pushes students to engage in metacognition, choose their own processes, and write for authentic purposes.

Findings

I. Lindsey takes ownership of her writing when she is part of a supportive environment where sharing is self-directed and she is the authority.

Jody

It is the second night of class and students spend the first 30 minutes writing. They have the freedom to write about whatever they want, to whomever they want, in any genre. I tell the students not to worry about spelling or grammar – that I wouldn't be collecting their work or grading it. I purposefully did not tell them they would be sharing their writing tonight for fear they would self-censor or pick superficial topics.

After the allotted writing time I announce, "You will now spend the next 30 minutes, in groups of four, sharing your writing." I note the horror on their faces and I continue before anyone panics. "Before you get upset, let me explain the ground rules for sharing. Each of you will share

your writing tonight and then ask your listeners for specific, yet open-ended feedback such as, 'What did you learn?' They can't tell you what they liked, or ask a question, or even make a personal connection. I am strict about this. No deviating from the solicited feedback.

There is a second rule. You may not make any self-deprecating comments. For instance, do not preface your sharing with comments such as, 'mine is not that good,' or 'I am terrible with tenses.' Just read your work, own it, and do not disparage yourself in any way."

Lindsey

When Jody tells us we will be sharing our writing, I am shocked. My writing is not finished or even remotely ready to share with others. Even after she explains the "rules" of sharing, I am still anxious and annoyed. I wish I would have known in advance because I would have selected a different topic and would have been editing while I was writing.

However, once Gretchen shares the beginning of her memoir about her husband's heart attack, I worry instead, for her. Her topic is so personal and I shudder at how vulnerable she must feel sharing her writing. I listen as classmates share what part moved them the most, per Gretchen's request. No one oversteps his boundaries by asking questions and no one comments about her unfinished, unpolished draft. What matters is the meaning in her writing. She listens to our reactions, considers our comments and then it is another writer's turn.

I sense the support of the group. I'm struck by the rapidly growing sense of intimacy in this small group. I recognize how writing has always been an isolating experience for me. I have never received feedback until I had a final draft and I certainly never directed the kind of response I wanted.

Over the next several weeks, I slowly grow accustomed to sharing my writing and soliciting feedback throughout my process. I come to value the ongoing response; it is most valuable during the process because it shapes my writing throughout as opposed to after the writing is completed - which can feel overwhelming and frustrating, since I'm finished. Each week, I look forward to hearing the writing of my teammates and appreciate the guidelines for giving feedback. I feel more connected to others, and more poised to help my classmates, because I know exactly what to listen for - something I've never felt as a writer. I don't feel the need to give

suggestions about their grammar or mechanics, nor do I feel inclined to give compliments, which often feel insincere or shallow.

I slowly build my courage, and during the fifth week of class, share this personal letter I will include in my multi-genre life storybook to my future niece (see Figure 1). I direct my classmates' response and ask them to make a personal connection to my writing. The responses vary — some listeners relate to the content in some way; others relate to the voice or some other stylistic element in my writing. I've shared a bit of myself and in turn, connect with other writers on a more personal level. We are a community of writers working through this together.

We are all so excited for you to be born...I am writing this book in anticipation of your arrival with the hope of sharing past memories, creating new traditions, and beginning to document the adventures of three generations of Moses women. I will never forget the phone call when your mother told me she was pregnant with you...

About a year before the phone call, I found out I was sick and I wouldn't be able to have children. My heart sank, as I had always wanted to have a little girl. As I struggled with this realization, your mother provided endless support and helped me through a very sad time. She, too, had been told that it would be very unlikely that she would be able to get pregnant and have a baby. So, you can imagine our surprise when we found out about you! Your mom was crying with happiness when she called to tell me she was pregnant, and my tears of joy quickly followed. Your addition to the family will be just what we have all been hoping for. We can't wait to meet you!

*Love,
Aunt Lindsey*

Figure 1: First piece of personal writing Lindsey shared

Safe Environment

Writers take risks when they share their work. Writing is an expression of oneself, and since the writer cannot separate herself

from the writing, sharing is a vulnerable act. But, sharing writing is necessary. Through communicating, writers build community, refine their craft, and build camaraderie in an otherwise solo endeavor. Writers use one another to get “unstuck,” to share the beauty of the perfectly constructed sentence and to commiserate or celebrate the fickle nature of the craft. In order to create this environment, Jody set two ground rules to help students succeed in building a safe community to share: 1) the writer solicits specific feedback (without including any self-deprecating comments), and 2) the author is always the authority.

Solicited Sharing

Writer, professor, and teacher researcher Jane Hansen describes an author’s chair as a common venue for writers to share their work. In many classrooms students share writing only when their work is complete, oftentimes as a reward for finishing a piece. Some teachers set vague parameters for sharing, which may include asking listeners/peers to share a compliment, ask a question, and/or provide a suggestion they have for the writer. These parameters for sharing, while well intended, are usually too vague; peers provide either a nonspecific comment (e.g., “I liked your writing”), an unwelcome suggestion (e.g., “You should change”), or perhaps, even ask a question the writer is uncomfortable answering (e.g., “Why can’t you have kids?). Other times, the listener, in an innocuous attempt to connect with the writer, makes a personal connection, thus drawing the focus off the writer (which is okay, if the writer chooses to connect with others, rather than receive direct feedback). These responses are often ineffective and the writer may be dissatisfied with the feedback, defensive, or confused. In an attempt to make sharing productive and safe, we set boundaries.

Solicited sharing became a central element in our classroom, and the expectation with each piece of writing positively impacted both the writer and the listeners. As listeners, students were able to focus specifically on what the writer wanted (e.g., “Where can I move the second paragraph of my writing so it is clearer for the

reader?”). A precise intention allowed peers to provide one another with targeted, highly specific feedback without overstepping their role as critics. It helped listeners hone in on what each writer determined she needed, so they could propel the writer forward through thoughtful, carefully constructed responses.

For the writer, there were two benefits. First, each writer felt validated because her peers engaged in active listening. Hearing the reader’s response to the writing not only confirmed the meaning in the writing (by hearing the reader’s interpretation), but also helped the writer revise or reshape the piece to make the meaning more clear. The safety of this environment allowed writers to think about their process and needs on any given day, take pride in and ownership of their writing, and direct their peers to focus on what they wanted.

Because the writer determined how her peers should respond—rather than Jody dictating a generic one-size-fits-all way to give feedback—each writer built metacognition about her particular piece of writing as well as what she needed each day. For example, writers could choose the purpose of the response, such as to solicit help (“I’m feeling stuck/frustrated/insecure and need help”), praise (“I’m feeling accomplished today as a writer and want to celebrate”), or reader questions (“Tell me questions you have so I can see when my reader will be confused”). Every member in the classroom (including Jody) adhered to these guidelines, and soon, Lindsey and her classmates abandoned the old format where the writer writes, presents completed work for unsolicited feedback, and then changes the writing according to the listeners’ vast and sometimes contrasting suggestions. Also Jody’s comments held no more weight than any other feedback from students—and Jody had no authority over the writer. Now, Lindsey took ownership of her writing, determined what she needed help with, and then picked and chose what feedback to discount or incorporate.

Lindsey

I always do what teachers ask me to do, and even if I disagree, I revise my work according to their suggested revisions. Jody reminds us that as authors we have authority and can disregard advice from her and other writers. I start to view feedback differently – I consider it more carefully, am more mindful of what I include, and no longer heed all advice without careful consideration. On one occasion, I decide to ignore a suggestion. I write a poem for my niece to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” (see Figure 2). When I solicit suggestions from my peers, Jody thinks I should write an additional verse to match the mentor text of the original lyrics. I hope the song will become a bedtime routine, so I don’t want the song to be long or complicated. I worry about disregarding her suggestion, unaccustomed to standing my ground, particularly when I’m discounting the advice of an authority figure. But, I want the song to be easy to remember and I fear my sister won’t sing it with my niece if it is too long. I keep it as one verse. Contrary to my fears, Jody celebrates my reasoning and author-as-authority stance; she seems unfazed by my dismissal of her idea. I feel an unexpected swell of pride – and ownership. This really is my piece of writing.

*Little baby small and new
Do you know that I love you?
It is time to say goodnight
I’ll kiss you and I’ll hug you tight
Little baby small and new
Do you know that I love you?*

Figure 2: Lindsey’s song

Author = Authority

There was another significant element to sharing. While students respected and acknowledged the role of solicited feedback, the author also understood one very important detail: feedback was mere suggestion. The writer’s role was to solicit feedback, listen to the response, but ultimately, to decide what advice to take, and what to throw away. This was new to many

students who were accustomed to teachers expecting students to incorporate any and all suggested changes into their writing, particularly suggestions made by the instructor. In multiple cases, the author chose not to incorporate Jody's feedback. The power to discount peers' and professors' suggestions enabled students to become more cognizant of the direction they wanted to take their piece. This self-reliance forced writers to think more critically about their writing, become more confident in themselves, and stop relying on the teacher for direction and approval. They began to trust their own judgment, think critically about the decisions they made for each draft, and develop a bigger picture of themselves as writers.

II. Lindsey develops a positive writer identity when she uses inquiry to explore mentor texts.

Jody

We are about one month into the semester, and students are accustomed to writing, sharing, and soliciting specific feedback. Students have mostly written personal narratives in class with limited writing in other genres. Some students still seem a bit wary of the apparent freedom I have given them – Lindsey among them. They ask questions (again!) about how they will be graded for the semester, what topics are considered “acceptable” for the multi-genre life storybook, and how many entries they will need to include. Tonight we begin studying our first genre, procedural text, so we can practice writing how-to pieces. I model how inquiry in the classroom will work, through the use of mentor texts.

Before students arrive, I lay out mentor texts on their tables—instruction manuals, “how-to” books, recipes, pamphlets (e.g., how to renew your drivers’ license), printouts from procedural websites (e.g., www.about.com), magazine articles (e.g., “How to Lose 10 Lbs. in 10 days”), etc. As they wait for class to begin, they thumb through the samples. My directions are simple, “Take 20 minutes, explore the mentor texts, and figure out—with the help of your group members—what procedural text is.” I smile and circulate, listening to their conversations. At each table, I’m beckoned and asked questions like, “Is a procedural text

always written in list format?” I turn the question around on them, “What do you think? What do you notice?” I am not trying to be cryptic. I am trying to get them to stop thinking of me as an expert, since my experience writing “how-to” text is limited. Although I have a sense of what a procedural text entails, it’s limited only to my own inquiry and brief research for facilitating tonight’s exploration. The authors of the mentor texts are the experts—we will learn from them. After the 20 minutes has expired, we record what we’ve noticed on chart paper (e.g., sequential; second-person; direct and specific language; varies in length).

Lindsey

I’m anxious to start this project, so I can start checking off genres to add to my book. It will be insightful to hear a writing professor explain the different genres. When I arrive, I amuse myself by reading magazine articles and recipes on the table. Jody asks us to begin exploring the materials. I’m tired and was hoping she’d just tell us what a procedural text is – perhaps give us a graphic organizer of sorts to fill out as a pre-writing activity, so we could spend class time completing a procedural text and checking the genre off the list. My three classmates and I explore and jot notes. We share ideas and debate whether a procedural text can include opinion-based pieces (e.g., how to dress for your body type is not exactly factual). We summon Jody to our table, but rather than clear up the discussion, she redirects us to look at the other mentor texts and decide how we would define the genre. I’m puzzled. Does she not know the answer? Is she making us jump through hoops for no reason? I’m frustrated.

Over the weeks that follow, we study a different genre each week. I am shocked to reflect on the amount I learn about a genre through exploration of mentor texts. Instead of reading a definition and explanation of categories of genres, we immerse ourselves in various texts and analyze them for common features. It takes effort, but I realize the exploration provides a deeper understanding of the genre. I am surprised by how much variation there is within one form of writing and how everyone uses the genre slightly differently. In addition to understanding, it provides me with a framework to begin thinking about writing in genres outside my comfort zone. I was certain I would not be using poetry as a genre in my life storybook, but as we study all of the different types of poems and are

asked to draft poetry throughout the week, I recognize the song lyrics I write are poetry. I enjoy learning from authentic sources and find myself reading and rereading mentor texts – I read a number of haikus and since I haven't written one since elementary school, decide to try it. I'm excited to share my simple haiku (Figure 3) and anxious to hear how others interpreted the genre of poetry. Our take on each genre differs – in content, topic, and form. Here is my haiku, and two other students' poems (Figures 4 and 5).

*Baby girl is born
Fills our hearts with joy and love
New generation*

Figure 3: Lindsey's haiku

Your Role
*I used to know you
You held my hand when I was young
Patched up my broken skin when I fell
Tried to teach me about the world
In some ways, I think I learned the hard way.*

*You started disappearing
I was old enough to be bursting with independence
Young enough not to notice
Fragile enough to let it hurt me
You said you wouldn't let things change
But I saw it for what it would be
And I knew*

*It was a convenient lie
Your figure changed, your skin grew soft
You made the transition in life that I had completed only years
earlier
But people called yours unnatural
Because you were born a different breed.*

*And people were afraid that you were testing the boundaries of the
roles they had made.*

*I was proud of you.
But so terribly scared
You found femininity
But lost your joy.
I wish you would find that again
Like when I was a child
I didn't care if you were a man
Or a woman
Or somewhere in between
I care about humans.
I care about Dad.*

*Sometimes I look upon the face I used to know so well
And wonder when you became a stranger.*

Figure 4: Carrie's poem to her transgendered father

A Ballad

*There once was a girl from a small Midwest town
With a small group of friends with whom she hung around
In those innocent days of cruising and fun
Little did she know a bad habit had begun*

*Her boyfriend's big brother provided the brew
She learned how to chug them but just drank a few
She had her first drink when she turned sixteen
That wasn't unique. That was part of the scene*

*In college, deep friendship and drama occurred
The culture was floating on booze, take my word
From mixers to socials to bards, dorms, and dives
Drinking, laughing, and crying were part of our lives*

My best friends "came out" over Long Island Ice Tea

*Afraid of her confession would totally shock me
No way. Those were the super cool disco 70's
We all toasted to her newfound discovery!*

*After college was done, the real world kicked in
Exciting. Demanding. A new life to begin.
After work: Happy Hour, Ladies Nights came my way
Relax and unwind from the stress of the day*

Figure 5: Melissa's poem about her alcoholism

Mentor Text: Reading like Writers

Writers refine their craft not only through writing but also through reading. When students read “like writers” (Hansen), they pay attention to the ways that writers play with language and deliberately choose strategies to portray meaning, tone, and mood. Reading like a writer entails purposefully noticing elements of writing and emulating techniques in one's own writing. Mentor texts can be used as a way for students to construct knowledge about a particular genre; through inquiry and exploration, students scrutinize textual features, identify commonalities and differences, and attempt to determine what characteristics define each genre (Ray).

Many teachers believe they must be experts in all genres of writing in order to teach students how to write. While it is important for teachers to consider themselves writers and have a general grasp of the content, it is more important for teachers to know how to direct students to use the mentor texts. Peter Johnston, Gay Ivey, and Amy Faulkner focus on the interactions between teacher and students and know the most effective teacher doesn't direct students how to write, but instead, provides ample opportunities for discovery through mentor texts. They state, “We might possibly teach writing by telling but we can't teach writers without treating them as writers who do things just like other writers, which includes reading other writers and thinking about how and why they do the things they do” (233). Jody was not the authority or the expert on each genre, despite her role as

writing professor. Instead, she served as a guide, helping students learn from the mentor texts, admitting when she didn't know an answer, and learning alongside her students.

In our college classroom, Jody sought to accomplish two things: 1) she wanted students to consider how inquiry helped writers learn about the genre (without her direction), and 2) she wanted us to see the huge variety of writing that fell under each genre (without Jody providing an artificial graphic organizer to mandate what each genre must look like). Exploring the diversity of mentor texts allowed each writer to connect to what form of writing inspired her, and what format provided the most effective way to communicate the intended meaning. Lindsey's enjoyment of the song lyric mentor texts she explored led her to write her own lyrics. Her revisiting of haiku poetry counted as well; she no longer viewed herself as a writer who didn't write poetry. Her perception of herself changed.

III. Lindsey took ownership for her writing when she chose her own processes and wrote for authentic reasons.

Jody

"I tried something new," I announce to my students tonight. "You know how I've been struggling with finding my focus in that long article I'm writing? Well, I was thinking how Michelle said she could never write a paper without outlining all of her main points first so she stays on topic. I have tried outlining my points before writing, but it stunts my flow. So, I drafted first – just got all my ideas, thoughts, and sentences on paper before I lost my momentum. Then, I reread the paper and wrote in the margin next to each paragraph: "The one thing I'm saying in this paragraph is..." I'd never used this strategy before, but it helped me get clear about the one thing I was trying to say. It's been a lot of work, but my article is definitely getting more cohesive. Maybe it will appeal to some of you, who have trouble determining the one thing you are trying to say.

Lindsey

I know what processes work for me – I follow the same routine when I write. I jot ideas, select one, and then create an outline of headings and subheadings I need to address in my writing. Then, I write for long, uninterrupted periods of time to “plug in the narrative according to my carefully scripted outline.” I simultaneously edit while I type because I hate seeing the red squiggle of spell check. I often cut and paste paragraphs or sections as I work on my draft to make it more cohesive. I typically complete a draft and revisit it once or twice just to edit with a fresh pair of eyes before turning it in to a professor or submitting it for publication. I always write with my audience in mind. Is this for a professor who is a stickler for grammar, or one who possesses a critical, feminist perspective? Am I submitting to a research-heavy journal or a journal for practitioners? I am thoughtful about who will be assessing my work, write accordingly, and follow a careful, linear process every time.

This process of outlining and writing works well for me and in many cases, it still does. Yet, during the semester, I experiment with new processes that are presented by my peers (and Jody, who feels more like a fellow writer by mid-semester). I learn to let go of some of my neuroses – so what if there is a red line indicating a spelling mistake? So what if I go off on a tangent because I am drafting furiously? I now know I can come back and fix it later. It can be a messy process.

Oftentimes, our sharing sessions focus more on each writer’s process than on the product. I am intrigued by many exercises my fellow writers use, yet not all of the processes appeal to me (e.g., when Alison admits she always writes the ending of her papers before the rest of it, my linear brain recoils in horror). But, I push myself to try new things, to consider exercises and ways I’ve never tried before, like Jody’s suggestions for enhancing flow by eliminating the constant editing and revising while drafting fluidly.

I grow as a writer because I try new strategies and because I have a repertoire of techniques beyond my go-to outline. For the first time since I was a child, I write with purpose and am invested in my writing during the creation of my multi-genre life storybook. Yes, I still considered my audience- I am creating the book for my soon-to-be-born niece – however, I realize my stamina as a writer grows as well – perhaps because I am

invested in my book and give myself the permission to play with new writing practices.

The assignment required a minimum of six entries, but mine includes 10, with blank pages to complete once the semester ends. I am more thoughtful with the book; I read, revise, edit, add new items, focus on the aesthetic representation, get feedback from peers, and immerse myself in new genres and ways to improve my writing. There is a shift in purpose and in my stamina; I am no longer writing to avoid the red pen or deduction of points, but writing to create a draft that reflects what I really mean to say. It feels different. It feels beyond school. It feels like it matters (Figure 6).

Making Pizza

Some of my fondest memories as a child were spending time with family. I loved playing, and Grandma and Grandpa Lazetich's house was always filled with plenty of activity and exercise. I vividly remember running laps around the house and playing that silly game where we would throw the ball up on the roof, watch it roll down, and then try to catch it. While these were always fond memories, my favorite memory was the pizza.

I remember Grandma boiling water to give the house a little more humidity as the dough was being prepared. We couldn't open the windows or doors because the temperature and humidity had to be just right. I remember waiting anxiously as you put the sheet over the large kitchen table and sprinkled it with flour. Then the fun began. All of the women gathered around the table, slowly pulling the ball of dough apart until it was as thin as tissue paper and draped over the table. Everyone moved together, stretched the dough with care, and created this beautifully delicate pastry. The butter, eggs, cottage cheese, and sugar was spread with abundance all over the top of the table and dough. Then, we all moved to the side of the table, grabbed the sheet from the bottom, and began to lift the sheet to roll as long as the table. Then Grandma would pick up the pastry and wind it around like a maze inside a large pan and put it in the oven.

Back to the games and playing... Finally, it came out of the oven and it was time. The women all drank coffee as we snacked on our delicious cheese pita. I love the way the pita tastes cold in the

morning, but there is something unforgettable about sitting with my mom, my aunts, and grandma enjoying the Yugoslavian dessert after working together to make it with love!

Figure 6: Another entry from Lindsey's book

Discussion and Implications

Writers need to identify an authentic purpose for their writing beyond the scope of the classroom. Ideal school systems promote students' genuine enthusiasm and motivation for learning (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan), and the implementation of Common Core Standards places an increased focus on writing across all disciplines (Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman). Like ideal school systems, writing communities encourage authentic writing experiences, which are guided by choice and motivation. Motivation among students is enhanced when they are given choice, and Lindsey took greater ownership and demonstrated deeper reflection regarding her writing when she was given the opportunity to choose her own processes and write for genuine purposes.

Writers make decisions about topic, genre, and audience when they work. Metacognitive writers recognize their own writing processes and know how to adapt to meet the need for each piece of writing. Researchers Winne and Perry define metacognition as "the awareness that learners have about their general academic strengths and weaknesses and of the cognitive resources they can apply to meet the demands of particular tasks and, second, to their knowledge and skill about how to regulate engagement in tasks to optimize learning processes and outcomes" (qtd. in Annevirta and Vauras, 198). In literacy research, scholars emphasize the importance and benefits of metacognition for supporting students in their literacy development by creating an awareness of their thinking, knowledge, processes and useful strategies (Pearson and Fielding; Paris, Lipson and Wixson). Developing an understanding of their strengths and challenges as writers enables students to identify supports that assist in their development and success as a

writer. Michael Martinez argues, “Metacognition is the monitoring and control of thought” (696). Through this monitoring, learners require less support when they encounter problems because they are able to reflect and use processes that work for their individual learning styles. The development of metacognition among students is an essential skill across disciplines and content areas. However, it becomes particularly important in the individualized trajectories and transformations inherent in writers’ processes.

Over time, writers, even when they write to an assignment, can be reflective about that writing. In our classroom, it was important for students to focus not only on choosing a personally significant topic and audience, but also on experimenting and reflecting on the processes that aided them as writers.

Creating Ownership through Feedback

Through carefully constructed, specific feedback, and the intentional decisions Jody made, Lindsey was able to take ownership of her writing and become a writer who is more metacognitive. It is crucial for all teachers of writing to recognize the difficulty of separating the writer from the writing; even the most well-educated, adult learners are not necessarily confident writers and all writers are vulnerable when sharing. Yet, as teachers, it is necessary to model how and why writers solicit feedback and how writers decide whether to incorporate these suggestions in their revisions. This stance is often new for teachers, who innocently strive to help propel the writer forward through unsolicited feedback and/or their conventional role as an authority.

The role of author-as-authority is also new for students, who are accustomed to the teacher’s feedback carrying more weight than their own opinions. Perhaps this is the root of the self-deprecating comments writers make when sharing writing that has not yet been “approved” by the teacher. However, for writers to take ownership of their writing and believe they are competent, they need space to make decisions for themselves as authors.

When Lindsey recognized the work as her own, she transformed from a writer who wrote for others, to a writer with a positive self-identity.

Writers Develop Ownership through Inquiry of Mentor Texts

In teacher-centered writing classrooms, the teacher might directly tell students how to improve their writing, rather than rely on mentor texts. Although the direction is well intentioned and supposed to minimize student frustration or make learning more efficient, when a student learns a writing strategy from a teacher, rather than a mentor text, it lacks authenticity. Students need to recognize the myriad of real-life mentor texts that exist to help them improve their writing, so they can identify how the genre works for them (Culham). Students are also able to take ownership of their writing when they recognize they are not completing a task for the teacher. When teachers direct learning, rather than fostering inquiry through exploration, students feel compelled to “correct” an element of writing per the teacher’s request, making the writing more the teacher’s and less the student’s. In addition, they miss the opportunity to connect their own writing to authentic examples and to recognize the variety of writing within each genre to choose what resonates with them.

It is a paradigm shift for many teachers to acknowledge that students may learn best from mentor texts. When we provide students with a diverse range of quality mentor texts, we enable students to take ownership of their writing and become metacognitive about themselves as authors. Students recognize the existence and diversity of a genre in the “real” world, and model their writing based on what style fits best for them. Writers are propelled to improve and tailor the genre to their own needs through the use of mentor texts, and they are motivated to write for authentic purposes.

If teachers want students to emulate published authors, they have to allow them the opportunity to explore and reflect on writing practices that work for them and encourage them to write

about topics of interest and personal importance. While the traditional educational approach to writing includes something resembling the following process: planning, drafting revising, editing, and publishing, this is not the typical writing process for all writers. Many pieces of writing never make it to the publishing stage, and some pieces receive multiple revisions and edits only to return to the drafting stage. Writers are unique and their writing processes vary depending on their knowledge of the topic, genre, purpose, and audience. Teachers need to encourage and support the wide range of writing processes our students will use during their writing journey, without imposing their own preferences on their learners.

Limitations

This study was limited by its small sample size, and more specifically, one in-depth examination of a single subcase study. An additional limitation is the participant selection—Lindsey—who was a doctoral candidate and highly motivated student. While the results are not generalizable, the analysis and description of the instructional method can potentially benefit students regardless of their ability and initial motivation. Future research with larger and more diverse sample sizes is warranted.

Conclusion

Jody

May. It is the final day of class and we are celebrating the work we put into the semester. We set up the books in a gallery-style walk, and students are engrossed reading each other's projects. The range of writing is impressive – the variety of topics, the ways writers played with genres, etc. I am simply amazed. I have asked students to turn in a written reflection (in any genre) of the change(s) they've made over the semester. I am curious about the ways in which the three parameters – ways of sharing, inquiry, and individual process – have shaped them as writers. Their responses are overwhelmingly positive; they see themselves as writers.

Lindsey

I write the following snippet as part of my reflection paper, "I came into this course as a resistant, yet mechanically competent writer who hated writing. Over the course of the semester I have realized I love writing when given the opportunity to write in authentic contexts in a safe community. I will take this amazing experience with me as a writer, but more importantly, I will change how I teach others to write." While I was a relatively motivated student when I began the course, I lacked voice, engagement and purpose for writing. This experience and method of writing instruction allowed me to move from a discouraged and resistant writer to an optimistically aspiring writer and teacher of writing. Similarly, the majority of my classmates did not view themselves as writers and were reluctant to write and share at the start of the semester. However, the transition to a collaborative community of writers that took place during our writing workshop changed the way we all viewed writing and teaching writing.

One year later, I was hired as an assistant professor and asked to teach an undergraduate version of this course. I have had the pleasure to teach pre-service and practicing teachers about writing and have used this assignment many times over the last three years. I, like Jody, faced the challenge of helping many resistant and discouraged writers participate in a writing community where they began to take ownership for their writing. I hope to continue to build the confidence of my students so they too, can be more effective teachers of writing, who inspire their students to take ownership and build metacognition through authentic writing experiences.

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