

TEACHER CONSULTANT TRANSFORMATION IN A LOCAL NATIONAL  
WRITING PROJECT SITE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher professional development is both evidentially and emotively understood to be largely ineffective. Yet the National Writing Project's professional development model has established a long-term record of measurable impact on student writing improvement and profound influence on its participants' ways of thinking and living their teaching and writing lives. For many, the experience is transformative.

This dissertation investigated two questions: First, what are the features of a professional development model that facilitate transformation learning over time? Second, how do participants view the way these features of a transformative professional development model inform their classroom instruction?

This narrative inquiry is informed by the theoretical lens of adult transformational learning and investigated two practicing writing teachers who participated in the National Writing Project Summer Institute at least three years ago. The study found four resonant narrative threads: *structure, risk, audience, and agency*. Participants deeply restructured their classroom writing instruction over time in a way that shared agency with student writers and that posed risk to instructors and students. This occurred frequently through shifting writing audience away from teachers and providing greater authorial voice to student writers, which are practices both participants experienced in a National Writing Project local site.

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Narrative Introduction

I recall a particular professional development offering one winter afternoon in 2009, seated next to my colleague, a biology teacher who later would be dubbed a finalist for the U. S. national teacher of the year award. We both mourned the loss of time we could have devoted to our own classrooms, students, and instruction. This was an early release day, which meant students were sent home shortly after lunch. The time left in the school day was devoted to various professional development endeavors. That day, the entire faculty of our 1800-student high school gathered in the choir room, a scene typical enough to most teachers' experiences. My colleague and I sat on the third-tier riser toward the back of the room, chatting with others around us until one of our assistant principals introduced an educator from the state office. A screen lowered. Lights dimmed. Eyes rolled. We leaned in closer and whispered our fear for what was next, hoping for something good, something we could use in our classrooms. As the presentation started, our hopes sank – a PowerPoint. Words swooped in and were read to us by the educator from the state. I resigned myself to the loss of two hours.

To pass the time, I looked around the room and saw colleagues with stacks of papers, reading, marking, looking down. Both my biology-teaching colleague and I grew increasingly indignant. Not only did we judge the information useless, but the

added insult of a printed, projected slide-after-slide show of text, read nearly verbatim sort of snapped my composure. “Doesn’t this guy know anything about teaching?” I thought. If I had done this to a group of students, whatever point I was trying to transmit would have been dead: death by PowerPoint. I felt offended, captive, and somehow devalued. Yet I acquiesced to the situation because I had experienced it so many times before. It’s important to understand, also, that I love teaching. I love interacting with my colleagues. I love interacting with my students. I love to read their writing (honestly). I love to read our class texts. I swap and check ideas with my colleagues all the time. I am a better teacher now than twenty years ago because I listened, exchanged ideas, and tested methods in my class with an open mind.

The choir room professional development experience narrated above drove a group of us to establish our own professional development, started by that biology teacher, in an effort to advance technology use in the classroom. The group was voluntary, had no appointed leader, agenda, or target other than increasing our knowledge of classroom technology use. That group has been meeting at noon every week all year long since 2007. I still occasionally join in, even though I left the high school two years after that negative professional development session. Students, community members, administrators, college faculty, and high school faculty make up the group. We share innovations in our classrooms, get feedback and visions for other applications of various technologies, and generally gravitate to larger educational issues each week.

These two approaches to professional development served for me as a reminder of what I would like to avoid and what I would like to accomplish in professional development. The second professional development context, which I enjoyed and continually sought out on my own time, allowed a group of teachers to determine the content of the work we did together. We shared what we knew, showed each other tricks and tools, and vetted ideas for new instruction. The first example became a cautionary tale for me. I thought about the particular issues that alienated most teachers: It was mandatory, disconnected from what we did in our classrooms, and there was no interaction between presenter and recipient. As I looked into the literature surrounding professional development, I wondered if my own experiences, both positive and negative, were isolated, or if other teachers had similar experiences and reactions.

Thinking about my positive and negative experiences with professional development led me to the National Writing Project, which had been on my mind for many years – since a colleague of mine from the early 90’s had mentioned it as a superb experience. After fourteen years of secondary instruction and several more years of both graduate course work and higher education instruction, I applied to the Local Writing Project at my university and experienced the work of the National Writing Project directly.

It is difficult to tell what, if any, positive effects professional development has on teacher and student learning. Most evidence suggests that professional development does not help students improve and when it does, those results

quickly fade (Loveless, 2014; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Yet the National Writing Project, established by James Gray in the early 1970s, has a consistent, tested record of success by qualitative and quantitative research measures (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2002). This presents a puzzling dissonance, on which this study focused by examining the state of professional development, looking at the National Writing Project model of professional development in hopes of understanding its merits, and then investigating the teaching lives of two National Writing Project teachers in the contexts of their classrooms. Additionally, I consider these two participant experiences in light of the theoretical lens, Transformation Learning (Mezirow, 1991) . Below, I outline the study context of Adult Transformation Learning, professional development, and the National Writing Project.

### Contextual Background

#### Adult Learning

In 1961, adult education specialist, Eduard Lindeman called for an educational revival: “If learning is to be revived, quickened so as to become once more an adventure, we shall have need of new concepts, new motives, new methods; we shall need to experiment with the qualitative aspects of education” (p. 4). He went on to endorse and describe a kind of educational experience that centers on the adult learner and encourages a climate of collaboration that values the learner’s knowledge when Lindeman (1961) proclaims “Friends educating each

other,' says Yeaxlee...Small groups of aspiring adults...who dig down into the reservoirs of their experience...this constitutes the setting for adult education" (p. 7).

A conspicuous context for adult learning within our education system is teacher professional development. Just say the words, "professional development" to teachers, and you will likely get a strong feeling attached to their response, which brings to mind a series of significant issues and problems in the endeavor to improve teacher knowledge and practice.

### Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development can be problematic (Borko, 2004; Loveless, 2014; Yoon et al., 2007). Yet under the umbrella of teacher professional development, one particular model, the National Writing Project, stands out as an exemplary model of professional development (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). The National Writing Project's professional development model has established a long-term record of measurable impact on student writing improvement and profound influence on its participants' ways of thinking and living their teaching and writing lives (LeMahieu, Fessehaie, Mo, Brown, & Friedrich, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). For many, the experience has been transformative (Whitney, 2008).

### National Writing Project

The National Writing Project has been aimed at reform since its inception in 1974 and is perhaps the most viable, tested model for effective teacher professional development in American schools (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Stokes, 2011). A body of close to 200 professional development sites across the United States in partnership with colleges and universities, the National Writing Project professional development network “...sites focus on the core mission of improving the teaching of writing and improving the use of writing across the disciplines by offering high-quality professional development programs for educators in their service areas, at all grade levels, K-16 and across the curriculum” (“About: The National Writing Project,” 2016). The current program model, established from first days of the Project in the 1970’s, advances three basic endeavors: (1) Develop local teacher leaders from the foundational experience of a four to five-week Summer Institute, who will (2) then be key players in the development and hosting of professional development specifically designed for the contexts in which they are delivered with the invitation for both teacher leaders and participants to (3) continue to build networks of opportunity for further research and sharing (“What Sites Do: The National Writing Project,” 2016).

James Gray founded what would become one of the most acclaimed professional development models for teaching writing as the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974 (Gray, 2000). It came at a time in his teaching career when he had freed up his classroom from the lock-step “three-poems-per-poet approach”

(Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 6). Instead, Gray started to teach reading by investing time and resources into establishing a classroom library, so students could freely choose their reading. Gray built a structure and more autonomous culture in his classroom that supported peer-to-peer discussion of chosen reading, resulting in more student engagement with texts and each other.

In his memoir, *Teachers at the Center*, Gray factors timing into the Bay Area Writing Project's (BAWP) initial success the summer of 1974, as the perception of declining college entrance writing quality was advanced by media outlets from *Time* and *Newsweek* to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He noted that the BAWP's first Summer Institute for writing teachers came at a time when there was a cry for improved writing instruction in American schools. This backdrop of crisis helped to advance the model, as Gray notes that "So numerous were the BAWP stories in newspapers and magazines that J. N. Hook, former executive secretary for the National Council of Teachers of English, once asked me, 'Who's handling your public relations?'" (Gray, 2000, p. 59).

Gray's notion of peer-to-peer engagement in his own English classrooms became the foundation of the first National Writing Project site in the Bay Area. The core principles of the Project were established in its inaugural invitational Summer Institute, which became the core of Writing Project professional development networks. Gray (2000) set out to center the Summer Institute (SI) on three basic endeavors: Teachers share their most successful writing instruction techniques with one another, they write and have their writing heard by others, and they read and

discuss research about teaching writing. Fundamental to the Writing Project is the notion that teachers have significant, valuable experience in classroom instruction that should be shared. Within the larger endeavors of teacher professional development, the National Writing Project stands out as a good model (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Below, I outline this investigation's approach to learning about teacher transformation in the National Writing Project.

### Problem

Teachers have been considered passive consumers of prepackaged knowledge or, at best, become client participants whose role has been to absorb information from the research and reform communities—whether or not it is useful or appropriate. As teachers have known and research has shown, 'Professional development' of teachers has been notoriously unsuccessful...Professional development is most often presented as a series of workshops, with rare provisions for trying out the ideas in one's classroom and working on them long enough to internalize them. (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 3)

Research indicates that teacher professional development often does not have the broad positive impact on student achievement and teacher learning that educators seek (Borko, 2004). The National Writing Project is a professional development model for teaching writing developed in the early 1970's that has measurably *positive* effects on teachers and students (LeMahieu et al., 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). It is loved by many of its participants and admired by those who research it (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Within the National Writing Project (NWP), a number of participants profess a *transformational learning experience*. We know something of this experience within the NWP (Whitney, 2008)

but there is more to be learned. Specifically, Whitney (2008) calls for research into the long-term transformational learning experiences in the lives of NWP participants.

### Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to better understand how and why the National Writing Project professional development model functions well as a transformative experience for teachers over time. Considering the National Writing Project's consistent record of measurable success (Lieberman & Wood, 2003) and transformative influences on teachers who participate in the NWP, this inquiry addresses two research questions: 1) What are the features of a professional development model that facilitate transformation learning over time? 2) How do participants view the way these features of a transformative professional development model inform their classroom instruction?

### Conceptual Lens and Narrative Inquiry

Transformational theory provides a foundation for ideals like Lindeman's by explaining the learning dynamics that are involved when we dig down to the roots of our assumptions and perceptions and, as a result, change the way we construe the meaning of experience. Philosopher Maxine Greene describes meaningful learning as involving a process of disclosure, reconstruction, and generation. She says the learner's central concern is with "ordering his own life-world when dislocations occur," that is, when the learner experiences "moments when the recipes he has inherited for solving problems no longer seem to work (Mezirow, 1991, p. 197).

Transformation Learning provides a helpful theoretical lens to assist in understanding the landscape of professional development. Additionally, it helps illuminate specific endeavors of the National Writing Project because it affords a framework from which adult learning can be understood as a change in perspective. That perspective change allows for learners to adopt new frames of reference from which to construct better solutions to problems associated with teaching and learning (Mezirow, 1991, p. 20).

Jack Mezirow (1991) explains Transformation Learning as a “Transformation [that] refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives” (p. 19). In essence, we learn to tell ourselves different stories or reinterpret existing stories in light of new understandings, which are reflected in new, concrete understandings of the way we view the world and ourselves in it. This kind of restorying our lives fits well with Narrative Inquiry methodology.

### Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narrative Inquiry is suited to learning about experience set in social contexts over time because it helps us tell the stories of participants with a focus on collaboratively constructing descriptions of experiences, according to participant priorities (Clandinin, 2013). In this study, I constructed narratives from the shared stories of participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry helped me preserve the integrity of each participant’s narrative because of the methodological

emphasis on the priority of experience as a way of understanding. Additionally, narrative inquiry research contexts are a negotiated, relational space in the research field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The product of the narrative inquiry were negotiated, collaboratively constructed texts that shed light onto the transformational experiences of two teachers within a local National Writing Project site.

### Findings

Four resonant narrative threads (Clandinin, 2013) emerged from participant narratives: structure, risk, audience, and agency. Resonant narrative threads are themes that work across narratives and participants to illuminate participant understanding of their experiences (Creswell, 2011). Participants shared through their narratives that they responded to National Writing Project experiences by changing classroom structures of instruction and curriculum and that those changes involved some level of risk to both participants and their students. One example of risk a student might experience is when a student wondered how multiple peer readers might react to her writing. Participants also shared consistent and deliberate shifts in writing audiences, from the expected audience of student writing for teacher to the less conventional audience of students writing for each other in community and other audiences outside the classroom. All three of the preceding narrative threads, structure, risk, and audience, serve to enfranchise student writers with an increased sense of agency that allows and encourages them to enact greater

influence over their writing content and writing purposes. Both participants express that students produce markedly better writing in the wake of agentive classroom changes. While narrative inquiry is a good fit for the study, the specific design does carry with it some limitations, which are discussed below.

### Limitations of the Study

I see three limitations in the design and execution of this study: First, the study is limited in its duration. Time is a factor in and around the study. I worked with participants over the course of a summer and an academic year. To follow these participants in their classrooms with these same questions and puzzles for a greater period of time would most likely yield further and better insight into their teaching practices. Second, the nature of narrative inquiry is not intended to reveal conclusions that are generalizable. Wertz (2011) shares that the goal “of narrative research is not to generalize – one cannot offer generalizations based on small samples that are not gathered to be representative. Instead, narrative research offers the possibility of exploring nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience that the reader might apply to better understand other related situations” (p. 228). Specifically, the study is aimed at audiences who want to learn more about writing instruction from other teachers. Each reader is invited to make what meaning he or she will from the experiences chronicled here (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

To find an acceptable and useful balance in an academic context, I offer resonant narrative threads as potential lines of thinking and inquiry. Third, the revelation of the resonant narrative thread “audience” begs investigation, for in these contexts, audience made all the difference. I regret that further investigation into this particular phenomenon was beyond the scope of this study, which underscores limitation one.

### Delimitations

The study is limited to a narrative inquiry describing the experiences of two writing teachers from the population of a Local Writing Project site. I chose narrative inquiry as a methodology in response to the consistent stories of transformation shared with me by a dozen teachers, whom I interviewed during an Advanced Institute of the Local Writing Project. The knowledge and experiences struck me as deeply and personally important to each teacher who shared with me. Clandinin (2013) expresses the strength of narrative inquiry as an “approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding (p. 17). Additionally, I chose the methodology over others because it reflects the theoretical lens of Transformation Learning and its emancipatory roots that honor the experiences of individuals (Mezirow, 1991). Lastly, I chose narrative inquiry because it also reflects the teacher-centered practices of the National Writing Project professional development model (Lieberman & Wood, 2002).

In the next chapter, I explore the body of literature relevant to Transformation Learning, professional development, and the National Writing Project in an effort to argue for further research into the transformative power of the professional development model, the National Writing Project.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to make a case for teacher-centered and teacher actuated school reform, particularly through the reform avenue of teacher professional development. The review begins with an overview of the theoretical lens, Transformation Learning, from the field of adult education (Mezirow, 1991). Additionally, I will use the National Writing Project as an exemplary professional development model that has practiced teacher centered, teacher actuated principles since its inception in 1974 and discuss the research that substantiates the success of the NWP over time. Lastly, the review will frame the study and the fundamental principles of the NWP in light of Transformation Learning Theory.

Section 1: Transformation Learning1.1 Transformation Learning Overview

Transformation refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives...Transformative Learning refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 19–20).

Transformation learning happens when a person critically reflects on basic assumptions, particularly assumptions that, after critical reflection, seem to hamper in some way. Reflection is followed by consideration of any evidence and rationale when currently held assumptions no longer seem valid. Sometimes the transformation is liberating, fulfilling, revealing, affirming – generally positive. But the experience may lead to crisis or at least ideological and personal disquiet, especially in the realm of belief.

In teacher learning, the lens of Transformation Learning is a helpful way to consider the prospect of long-term high quality professional learning because it marks a significant change in teacher perspective that may indicate new understandings and practices. For that, I turn to Jack Mezirow's work. In 1978, Mezirow shared the results of a study of over 300 community college re-entry programs for women across the United States. The central finding was a theoretical stance he called Perspective Transformation (Mezirow, Marsick, & Columbia Univ., 1978). Mezirow was excited by these findings because he directly linked the theoretical framework of Perspective Transformation to works in existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalytic theory, and developmental psychology. The theory is grounded in the work of Thomas Kuhn's notions about the conditions that lead to a shift in paradigms (1970), perspectivism as expressed by Foucault (O'Leary & Falzon, 2010, p. 104), conscientization from Freire's work in cultivation of a socially-just conscience (2000), and Habermas' Communicative Action theory (1984). Mezirow's 1978 study laid the foundation for long-term considerations around adult

learning that eventually became the theoretical lens, Transformation Learning Theory.

For Mezirow (2000), adult learning is about “formulating more dependable beliefs...” that make sense and stand up to reason in light of our own experiences (p. 4). This transformation happens when the learner formulates beliefs about experience, assesses context, seeks informed agreement by asking others about the sense of the matter, and makes decisions based on a new understanding. Bruner (1986) further informs Mezirow’s thinking by way of Bruner’s four modes of making meaning: 1) Intersubjectivity of socially made meaning, 2) relating events, speech, and behavior to the action taken, 3) constructing this into a normative context (personal orthodoxy), and 4) followed by some sort of formalization that results in making propositions.

Transformation Learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (perspectives, habits of mind, and mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide better, more personally satisfying actions. We participate in a “constructive discourse” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7) to compare our understandings with the experience of others to assess and justify those assumptions, followed by action based on new understandings. Often, we work toward our own priorities and understandings instead of those we have accepted from other sources. This is the result of critical reflection and directly connects the theory of Transformation

Learning to critical theories and theorists mentioned above. Next, I outline characteristics that describe this process for adult learning.

### 1.2 The Process of Transformation Learning

The trigger for transformation is often described as a significant personal event, or a major disruption to the pathway of one's life. Mezirow describes this as a disorienting dilemma in his original study (Mezirow et al., 1978). Such a disorienting event could be something like a divorce, an external circumstance that causes both external circumstantial disruption and internal psychological disruption. However, triggering influences can also come of a vacuum where a person searches for something perceived as missing in his/her life (Mezirow, 2000).

To act as a transformed learner, we engage in a critically reflective process that examines belief and understanding, especially beliefs and understandings that have been agreed upon implicitly by groups of people over time. Habermas (1984) calls agreed-upon values and beliefs and the society in which they are found, the lifeworld. Once we have engaged in this critical process and adopt a new stance or outlook, actions follow suit. To this end, there appears to be an examination and realization that one's *lifeworld* has been colonized (Habermas, 1984) by unreliable notions, so the individual critically reflects, rejecting, accepting, or synthesizing colonized understandings with new understandings.

However, while scholars have defined the process of transformation, they are still unsure about long-term effects of Transformation Learning and recommend investigation into transformed learners' lives years after they have experienced

perspective change (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000). Additionally, Transformation Learning faces difficulty in light of relativist notions of knowledge and its application to perspective change (Mezirow, 2000). How can we judge one way of thinking as more valid or reliable than another (Habermas, 1984)?

In *Acts of Meaning*, Bruner defines “open-mindedness to be a willingness to construe knowledge and values from multiple perspectives without loss of commitment to one’s own values” (1990, p. 30) in an effort to combat the danger of relativism in establishing a cultural psychology. Likewise, Mezirow (1991) sidesteps relativism via Kuhn,

The proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. Again, that is not to say that they can see anything they please. Both are looking at the world, and what they look at has not changed (Kuhn, 1970, p. 150).

Mezirow’s consideration of multiple perspectives becomes foundational in his understanding of the negotiations that must take place for an adult to transform perspective. Further, consideration of multiple perspectives validates ways of knowing beyond empirical data. Mezirow articulates this most clearly in his entertainment of the Skeptic notion of epoché, which is a phenomenological bracketing that allows us to block or shelve, parenthetically set aside to what extent we are able, preconceived notions in order for us to examine a phenomenon in and of itself. Solomon (1972) tells us that Husserl coined the term *bracketing* and used the term, *epoché* in Husserl’s discussion of Kant’s discernment of differences between noumena and phenomena – an act in context and the act, itself. While

everyone from Kant to Mezirow accepts the notion that we cannot enter a phenomenological vacuum of pure experience, we can at least progressively unpack the layers surrounding phenomena to get at an improved understanding of that phenomena and its relationship to ourselves. Bracketing becomes an important factor in the process of perspective transformation, as it enables a person to more successfully view current frameworks of understanding for reliability (Mezirow, 1990). Below, the roles of critical reflection and affect are considered within the process of Transformation Learning.

### 1.3 Critical Reflection and Affective Living

Critical reflection of instrumental learning might focus on the given data or mechanism/process as a teacher reflecting on the best, fairest way to distribute value throughout graded items in a class like texts, writing, and participation for example. This critical analysis of the content and process of a class can greatly enhance a teacher's experience because that teacher is analyzing the notion of fair and accurate performance evaluation. But teachers can explore more deeply the issues of grades and evaluation and look at habits of mind critically by examining the premises – preconceived notions – and the underlying fundamental principles of grading, itself. Perhaps the teacher questions the notion of comparative grading and moves toward a different form of evaluation like a body of representative work that is critically evaluated by student and teacher against a set of goals or competencies set previously by that student and teacher, according to the student's context.

While a significant body of research suggests that critical reflection plays a prominent role in transformative learning as Mezirow described (Mezirow, 1990), other studies claim that critical reflection is not as significant as once thought, and that affective (emotive) learning contributes more significantly to transformation learning, so there is room for future investigation in this direction. Several studies reveal this: High School principals, for example, were found by Gehrels in 1984 to have triggered transformation from feelings in response to how they made meaning from their experiences (Taylor, 2000). Both critical reflection and affective learning contribute to transformation. Significant studies, including Mezirow's 1978 study, recognize the two forces, critical reflection and affective learning, but do not explore the interplay. However, Taylor (2000) shows through a 24-month study about transformative learning in a National Extension Leadership Development Program, the relationship between affective learning and critical reflection in that "...feelings and emotions related to experience...expanded the power and scope of critical reflection" (Taylor, 2000, p. 305). Critical reflection often hinged on potent emotive responses to experiences like grief over losing old intellectual frameworks.

Transformation Learning is a theoretical expression within the discipline of adult learning. One of the endeavors of adult learning for educators is to help teachers understand and improve their knowledge of praxis within respective disciplines through teacher learning and professional development. Teacher professional development, as a discipline, has been the source of increased research interests that align with new understandings about how adults learn and increased

pressure for school reform (Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Wei, Darling - Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In the following section, I explore the current status of adult learning within teacher professional development.

## Section 2: Teacher Professional Development

### 2.1 Making the Case for Professional Development Research

Today, professional development for teachers suffers from three significant problems: 1) Current efforts to professionally develop teachers do not seem to have much impact on student achievement, 2) not enough research exists on professional development models that evaluate those models' effects on teachers or their students, and 3) the increase in professional development research over the past two decades does not include a great deal of rigorous review design, particularly the highest standard of clinical trials for discovering causation, Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) (Loveless, 2014).

Despite recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate. Each year, schools, districts, and the federal government spend millions, if not billions – according to Loveless (2014), \$2.3 billion in 2014 – of dollars on in-service seminars and other forms of professional development that are fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what we know about how teachers learn (Borko, 2004, p. 3).

Borko shares how Sykes characterized the inadequacy of conventional professional development as "the most serious unsolved problem for policy and practice in American education today" (2004, p. 3). Originally delivered as the 2004

American Educational Research Association's presidential address, Borko spoke to encourage research in three phases: 1) Initially investigate professional development models by gathering evidence that professional development can support teacher learning, 2) examine if the model can be scaled up and out, and 3) figure out if the model has a positive impact on student learning. In spite of active research along those lines, we still have difficulty identifying what improves teacher learning and student improvement (Borko, 2004; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

Even something as immediately urgent as implementing a new set of national standards – the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – leaves little doubt that we continue to struggle in American public education to provide professional development that improves student performance. Common Core advocates placed great faith in professional development to implement the standards. Over the past few years, millions of teacher-hours have been devoted to CCSS training. While implementation of the CCSS has not been assessed for long, whether the large amount of professional development activity associated with it to date has had a lasting impact is questionable (Loveless, 2015). Randomized control trials have been conducted of two large-scale professional development programs (Yoon et al., 2007). Interestingly, although they pre-date CCSS, both programs attempted to promote the kind of “instructional shifts” championed by CCSS advocates. The studies found that if teacher behaviors change from such training, the changes fade after a year or two (Loveless, 2015).

A recent review of research into professional development models in three content areas, science, language arts, and math, found that the research is not rigorous enough to tell us much about the impact of professional development (PD) models. Further, the limited amount of reliable research shows that when there is a gain in student achievement, which is rare, it disappears after a year (Loveless, 2014). Of 1,300 studies reviewed, only five were randomized controlled trials (RCT), the research standard for learning about causation in scientific inquiry. From those five studies on early reading intervention PD, one showed student growth in achievement and that growth disappeared after one year (Yoon et al., 2007).

Hill, Beisiegel, and Jacob (2013) found that even when a professional development model reflects characteristics recently attributed to success like “...strong content focus, inquiry-oriented...approaches, collaborative participation, and coherence with school curricula and policies” (p. 476) that professional development does not significantly improve student achievement. What professional development researchers and practitioners have come to regard as a consensus of attributes in positive PD models, has been challenged (Hill et al., 2013). These recent findings through rigorous professional development scholarship echo if not amplify Borko’s (2004) call for research.

Borko (2004) calls for three phases of research into professional development models. She names three particular models that have enjoyed noteworthy, substantiated success, including the National Writing Project, and

specifically calls for research that could tell us how this and other successful models might be scaled up without losing the integrity of the original models.

One of the more conspicuous attributes of the National Writing Project is the way it centers on teacher knowledge and experience, which Borko (2004) identifies as a teachers-teaching-teachers model and points out that the three programs have differing types of programmatic integrity.

Evidence that professional development can change teaching practices and improve student learning exists, but our nascent understanding of what works and how it works is just beginning to emerge into research literature (Borko, 2004) and many of the results are contradictory and confounding (Hill et al., 2013; Loveless, 2014; Yoon et al., 2007). Yet, there is substantive research that describes positive attributes of professional development. In what follows, I discuss work in teacher knowledge, practice, and contexts as it relates to positive impacts on professional development.

## 2.2 Centering on Teacher Knowledge, Practices, and Contexts

Wei et al (2009) claim that for professional development to be effective, it must meet criteria that confound what they call “formal” professional development. The authors use the term “formal” to refer to professional development that is “...often provided by external experts while job-embedded learning opportunities often assume that expertise is internally located” (2009, p. 9). This perspective accurately describes one of the central tenets of the National Writing Project –

Teacher knowledge and experience are a critical piece to professional development endeavors (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Stokes, 2011; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013).

Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011) reviewed substantive professional development literature on the nature of effective professional development, which contends five features that will produce positive results:

1. Alignment with school goals, state and district standards and assessments, and other professional learning activities including formative teacher evaluation;
2. Focus on core content and modeling of teaching strategies for the content;
3. Inclusion of opportunities for active learning of new teaching strategies;
4. Provision of opportunities for collaboration among teachers;
5. Inclusion of embedded follow-up and continuous feedback (Archibald et al, 2011, p. 3).

The National Writing Project addresses each of the preceding features and has done so since its inception in 1974 (Gray, 2000). Dewey (2012) describes the fundamental principles of the National Writing Project, contextualized for his specific site, the South Coast Writing Project at UC Santa Barbara, below. Each principle of the Writing Project is related to the descriptions of high quality professional development according to Archibald et al., 2011; Viadero, 2007; Wei et al., 2009: First, the teacher is the most reliable authority over what works in classrooms and consequently should be the leader of and object of professional

development. Dewey offers a clear-headed definition of professional development situated within this first core feature:

The point of professional development is not to simply introduce a new standards-aligned textbook or a research-approved best practice, but to support the teacher as he or she develops greater personal professional capacity to meet the needs of students and schools. Therefore, the best inservice will be those where teachers share their expertise and experience with colleagues in hands-on investigations of practice so that everyone involved learns (Dewey, 2012, p. 6).

Second, teacher knowledge is validated by reflection and research into a teacher's own practices by that teacher. In one of the first activities of the National Writing Project's original Summer Institute, James Gray had participating classroom teachers research areas of pedagogical interest and share their results (Gray, 2000). Third, quality professional development is not a stand-alone, short-term event; rather, it is long-term, ongoing pursuit of continual development of practice through open communication with colleagues and published research. Lieberman and Wood (2002) note one of the enduring qualities of the National Writing Project professional development model is the established connectivity of its teacher networks. Teachers keep in touch with each other through Writing Project activities like Advanced Institutes in the summer for teachers who have been through Summer Institutes. Fourth, high quality professional development crosses the boundaries of grade levels and is inclusive of K-university instruction. The Writing Project includes teachers from multiple disciplines and age groups in its Summer Institutes (Gray, 2000). My own Summer Institute had elementary, middle school, high school and university faculty in it from a variety of disciplines ranging from

computer science, family and consumer science, to language arts. Its signature attribute is collaboration with the opportunity to share teacher expertise like lessons and student work. Fifth, professional development leaders must be teachers.

In 1988, former National Council of Teachers of English president Sheridan Blau suggested that once general professional development encountered the innovative and, by most measures at the time, successful National Writing Project model, there would be nothing short of revolution in teacher professional development. Unfortunately, the literature does not support that prediction. While the National Writing Project continues to help teachers improve writing instruction, there has been no widespread adoption of NWP professional development principles.

### Section 3: The National Writing Project

#### 3.1 National Writing Project Summer Institute

While individual project sites vary in their precise expressions of Writing Project Core Values, sites consistently focus their professional development orientations in three directions.

Orientation One: Centering On Teacher Expertise. The Writing Project recognizes that expertise is a kind of professional authority: Teachers, while encouraged to engage with academic research in the field of writing instruction, do so for their own purposes, according to their own interests and needs framed by

their intimate knowledge of their classroom contexts (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010; Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

Gray (2000) “...understood that teachers are naturally curious about the learning in other classrooms and at other grade levels, and yet they seldom have the chance to find out what’s really going on in any classroom other than their own” (p. 18). Teachers sharing their practices with one another would also confound the usual hierarchy by becoming a “program that recognized – even celebrated – teacher expertise. For academics and teachers alike, the Bay Area Writing Project model managed to reverse the top-down, voice-from-Olympus model of so many past university efforts at school reform” (Gray, 2000, p. 19).

Orientation Two: Teachers Write And Share Their Writing. When teachers write, share writing, and identify as writers, it powerfully impacts the way teachers design writing instruction. A fundamental precept of the writing project is that teachers of writing should be writers (“About: The National Writing Project,” 2016; Gray, 2000; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Embedding the practice of writing into the NWP is a central feature of successful teacher learning and perspective transformation in the Writing Project. The act of identifying as a writer can shift how teachers understand themselves. Further, this new understanding changes how we relate to students in the classroom, particularly when we actively write with students and align our own experiences as writers with the work we ask our students to do (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Whitney, 2008; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013).

Orientation Three: Teachers Research Deeply. Teachers research, share, and analyze scholarship in writing instruction. That work results in teachers looking to scholarly research that supports their classroom practices. Lieberman and Wood (2003) affirm these results when they observe that “permeating the entire NWP culture is the idea that constant questioning and searching are fundamental to good teaching” (p. 30). This cultural propensity encourages teachers to look into research germane to their teaching contexts and on for some, to participate and generate research on classroom practices of writing instruction (Gray, 2000; Whitney, 2009)

Today, close to 200 NWP sites are situated on college campuses. Miles Myers (1995), one of the original participants in the Bay Area Writing Project Summer Institute, later reflected from his vantage point of National Council of Teachers of English executive director that “The Model of the Bay Area Writing Project is not just a way of improving the teaching of writing. It is a staff development model which recognizes both the authority of researchers for research and the authority of teachers for practice” (p. 33).

The National Writing Project’s professional development activities have measurable impact on student performance and teacher learning. Below, I consider the impact of the NWP and the attributes of the orientations previously discussed that generate positive change in teaching and learning.

## Section 4: Impact of the National Writing Project

### 4.1 Students of NWP Teachers Improve Their Writing

Various measures of student writing skills (holistic evaluation like the 6+1 trait writing assessments and criterion-referenced tests such as NAEP testing in grades 4, 8, and 10) show significant differences between National Writing Project participants' classes and all other writing classrooms (Stokes, 2011, p. 3-5). In a summary of sixteen studies implemented over seven states, a National Writing Project research brief describes the positive correlation found between NWP-affiliated writing teachers and student writing achievement gains (National Writing Project, 2010). Specifically, seven measures of writing performance were included in across-state assessments in content, structure (organization of ideas), stance ("success in expressing perspective" or what might also be considered voice), sentence fluency, diction, conventions, and a holistic score. The comparative study pre and post tested over 5000 students in 141 schools in seven states. Of 112 measured contrasts (comparison of NWP classrooms with non-NWP classrooms), NWP cases outperformed non-NWP cases 103 times. Of those, 55% were statistically significant differences (National Writing Project, 2010).

### 4.2 NWP Teachers Change Perspectives And Practices

When Whitney and Friedrich (2013) ask what teachers do to make a difference in the writing classroom, they share Gray's (2000) observation that "the

National Writing Project does not offer teachers prepackaged curricula to take back to their classrooms, it does not endorse any one best way to teach writing” (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013, p. 5). Therefore, to speak discretely about any methodological approaches used by NWP teachers is difficult. Whitney and Friedrich (2013) attempt to resolve the dilemma by identifying and discussing three legacies of the NWP that teachers have adopted in their practices, as well as raising the issue of larger “perspective change” as described by several scholars over time (Blau, 1988, 1993; Mezirow, 1991; Whitney, 2008). Whitney & Friedrich (2013) identified these three legacies by surveying over 1,800 randomly selected NWP participants who completed Summer Institutes from 1974-1994 and then interviewed a sample of those surveyed in 2004. The results of surveys and in-depth interviews are defined as practice-oriented “legacies” drawn from teacher experiences within the National Writing Project and defined below:

Legacy One: Student Priorities and Purposes for Writing. Teachers repositioned student priorities by recognizing that students have reasons to write beyond assessment and evaluation of writing competence. Pursuit of those priorities leads to better student writing.

Legacy Two: Writing Processes. Teachers embraced a process-oriented approach by building support mechanisms into each step of the identified writing process, according to student need (scaffolding) in order to produce finished texts.

Legacy Three: Teacher Identity as Writer. Teachers identified as writers and related to students as fellow writers, immersed with students in the process, sharing from teachers' own experiences as writers whatever support students seemed to need (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013).

#### 4.3 NWP Establishes Professional Networks

Putnam and Borko (2004) help us understand that situated learning of teachers is in stark contrast to the methods and content of a significant portion of today's teacher professional development efforts. Current professional development efforts continue to promote the mistaken notion that learning is "...the manipulation of symbols inside the mind of the individual and...the acquisition of knowledge and skills..." and is a transferable, scalable, discrete endeavor (p. 4). Instead, the National Writing Project participants, especially in the Summer Institute, construct learning communities and a series of social practices that promote a "transformed vision of what it means to be a professional teacher and colleague" (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 13). National Writing Project networks "...can be the bridges between such abstractions as standards and the concrete day-to-day reality of the classroom" (Smith, 1996, p. 691). Thus, the heart of the NWP, the Summer Institute, begets a cadre of professionals who move out into the teaching world to establish long-term networks with the priorities of the NWP honed for particular contexts (Gray, 2000).

While the positive effects of National Writing Project practices on student writing and teacher learning have been documented over time (Lieberman & Wood,

2003; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013), Whitney (2008) recommends further consideration of the long-term relationship between teacher transformation and the NWP.

#### 4.4 Further Questions

In Anne Whitney's 2008 study of teacher transformation in context of the National Writing Project, she notes that her study on teacher transformation does not follow teachers into their classrooms and examine classroom practices after they experience transformation at a National Writing Project Summer Institute. While there is a some work on classroom practices, Whitney calls for more work like her own, which tracks epistemological shifts that precipitate shifts in agency and authority. Further, she hopes that we can avoid the overly simplistic approach of looking for "NWP practices" (p. 179) adopted and implemented in the classroom. Rather, she suggests that we look for what teacher learning and transformational issues influenced new classroom practices.

We must take 'changed my life' claims seriously and work to shed analytical light on the heretofore 'magic' mechanism of change in the NWP Summer Institute, to research this instance of professional development and others in a manner consistent with the view of teachers as thinkers and people rather than as the trainable enactors of others' ideas. (Whitney, 2008, p. 180).

In the following chapter, I outline a research methodology that describes an investigation into the transformation learning of teachers in their classroom contexts years after they initially encountered the National Writing Project Summer Institute.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The predominant concern driving the construction of this study is to learn about the experiences of participants in the Local Writing Project's (LWP) Summer Institute, Advanced Institutes, and other LWP-sponsored work and how those experiences influence the on-going lives and teaching practices of those participants. This concern prompted the following two research questions: First, What are the features of a professional development model that facilitate transformation learning over time? Second, How do participants view the way these features of a transformative professional development model inform their classroom instruction?

Qualitative studies often pose questions that begin with *how* and *what* to learn about experiences of individuals in their contexts (Creswell, 1998). To sort out the experiences of people with any precision is a process fraught with any number of variables. So many factors do not lend themselves to being discretely identified and compared in an experimental study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to examine the socially constructed nature of the research context, consider the interactions and relationships between the researcher and the research context, and describe "*how* social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 13). In this chapter, I will describe

the context, study population, narrative inquiry research design, participants, my relationship to participants and their contexts, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and delimitations.

### Research Design - Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry tells the stories of participants with the singular focus on the integrity of the narrative *according to the participant*. Clandinin (2013) explains, using Dewey's words, that narrative inquiry is situated in a conceptualization of experience where "experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter" (p. 14).

Narrative research in education centers on teacher knowledge and often constructs stories collaboratively in order to gain insight into participants' experiences (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). We connect events the way a narrative unfolds. Narrative is particularly helpful in understanding how a story fits into context like societies, families, and cultures. It helps us understand how people make meaning from their experiences. Narrative inquiry can help us understand what stories people select to share in the intersection of peoples' experiences and the stories they tell of those experiences. Narratives also organize time. They acknowledge the subjectivity of both the researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative research has its roots in hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography, and literary analysis (Gay et al., 2011). While there is a variance between scholars about the precise processes of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005;

Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Gay et al., 2011), Wertz (2011) shares that “what is common to all (narrative methodologies) is approaching the problem of the analysis of lived experience, represented in words rather than numbers, for the benefit of social science understanding” ( p. 225).

The aim of this study is to come to a better understanding of participants’ transformative experiences within the Local Writing Project. A narrative inquiry will preserve the integrity of each participant’s narrative because of the methodological emphasis on the priority of experience as a way of understanding and the emphasis on the research context as a negotiated, relational space in the research field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Several of the National Writing Project’s attributes, such as an emphasis on teacher knowledge and experience, reflect a similar valuing of experience as a fundamental way of knowing in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), further establishing the method as a good fit for the study context. Also, narrative inquiry helps us understand complex, nuanced subjects like transformational learning because the research product is a multi-dimensional narrative that places the story in temporal, locational, and social contexts (Clandinin, 2013; Wertz, 2011, p. 401).

Narrative research is essentially constructivist and understands that meaning is made from individual lived experiences, or as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define it:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a

place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. And inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, conclude in the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social(p. 20).

The practical application of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) definition in this study manifests itself through the telling of teachers' stories. Creswell (2011) states that "researchers report teachers' stories to capture the lives of teachers as professionals and to examine learning in the classrooms" (p. 504). Those stories represent a kind of knowing that, as mentioned above, situates experience as a central ontology in narrative inquiry (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, 2013). Within this framework of knowing, narrative inquiry is at heart a relational endeavor. Cain, et al (2013) note that narrative inquirers are committed to a relational stance that is the vehicle through which both participant and researcher come to understand the "social significance of the research puzzle" (p. 577). In the subsequent sections, I outline the process of narrative inquiry I used to articulate this study.

### Population

Local Writing Project Teacher Consultants who completed the Writing Project Summer Institute were identified as the research population. I selected Teacher Consultants from The Local Writing Project who had completed the Summer Institute at least three years prior to the study. I chose participants who had completed the Summer Institute three or more years ago because extant research about Transformation Learning for Writing Project participants asks about

Transformation Learning's influence on learners' lives *after* a transformative experience (Mezirow, 1991; Whitney, 2008). I did not choose more than three years because the Local Writing Project has been in existence for a relatively short time and has a total of approximately sixty Teacher Consultants who have completed Summer Institutes over its seven-year history.

### Participants

I entered the research space (Clandinin, 2013) of the Local Writing Project as a participant in an Advanced Institute for Writing Project Teacher Consultants who had completed a previous Summer Institute to reconnect and plan for future professional development projects like hosting a writing conference on the university campus the following winter. I set up preliminary interviews of thirty minutes each with a dozen Writing Project teacher consultants who had attended a Summer Institute previous to the Advanced Institute of 2013. These interviews revealed a consistent narrative of transformational experiences across participants fostered by the writing project, which I confirmed were a kind of phenomena research in education had been concerned with before (Mezirow, 2000; Whitney, 2008). I explored experiences of *transformation learning* in participant contexts. (Stake, 1995; Trainor & Graue, 2013).

The following three criteria were developed for participation in this inquiry: First, Local Writing Project participants who have completed a Summer Institute at the LWP site. Second, members of the LWP population who have expressed

language that directly claims a Transformation Learning experience, according to Mezirow (2000). Third, participants completed the Summer Institute at least three years prior. Using these criteria, I identified four of the dozen initial interviewees who had expressed a change in perspective as a result of their association with the National Writing Project and had modified classroom instruction based on their changed perspective (Mezirow, 1991). From these four, I selected two because they were willing to participate in a long-term research project and they represented two different professional contexts – one participant teaches in an elementary school and the other in a high school. In the following sections, I introduce the participants, Peter Braun and Eli Yardley. Participants are identified with pseudonyms and locations have been anonymized.

### Peter Braun

When I first talked to Pete about writing instruction and the Local Writing Project in the summer of 2013, we were both participating in an advanced institute for the Writing Project. We had completed the Summer Institute earlier, Pete by several years and me by one. I had decided to work my dissertation into a project about our Local Writing Project because I had become fascinated with the Writing Project's approach to professional development, and the enthusiasm that its participants shared struck me as rare in the realm of teacher professional development.

I asked Pete to participate in the study because he was teaching (then) in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, which would provide a professional perspective balance to the high school

teacher who agreed to participate in the study. I had learned a little more about Pete as a teacher through our Advanced Institute at the Local Writing Project. I did not know at the time that Pete would eventually switch to the middle school and that my son would end up in his 6<sup>th</sup>-grade class. I chose to keep investigating Pete's teaching life and came back to his classroom for an initial interview and observation after my son had advanced out of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. But having my son in Pete's class was serendipity, as what I was investigating, my son had experienced first hand. Again, our lives intersect many times and in many places through the happenstance of geography.

#### How I Know Pete

I met Pete nearly a decade ago. I wanted my kids to be like his – poised, confident, and accomplished. At least, that was what I thought as I sat through the first few years of violin recitals, Pete's son and daughter are several years older than my own, so part of this admiration is seated in a parent's romantic ideal of our kids becoming older. Everything will be better when our children are older.

The intersections of our lives are many – church pews and music room chairs for violin recitals, mutual friends, the teaching life – the list goes on. We live in a relatively small community – a college town and hub for outdoor tourism and activity – where path crossings are frequent and varied. Cows, violins, skiing, music, church, raft trips, beer brewing – these are just a few of the reasons our paths cross.

I recall a holiday gathering at Pete's where the topic of violins came up. Many of the kids around town played stringed instruments that were essentially passed

around from kid to kid, according to growth and development, at music swaps, through Craigslist, or at holiday parties. I had mentioned that we would probably pick up an additional used violin for my daughter, Olivia, so that she could avoid carting her current violin back and forth to school. Hers was a nice violin, so we were concerned about it getting banged up. Pete reached around the corner into a room where some instruments lived and handed me a dark grey violin case and said, “Why don’t you take this and have Olivia use it? I’m not using it. Haven’t for years. It’d be good to have it played.” I asked if he was sure and he said he was, so we took it on extended loan. It’s a great fiddle, which Olivia still uses today.

I don’t want to bore the reader with my attempts to keep the cost of raising children down, but it is important to know that these study participants, these people – our lives intersect at junctions beyond the professional relationship we have as writing teachers and researchers. These intersections have been immensely pleasurable and helpful in my work. They contribute to an understanding of Pete’s words that I equate with stereo-versus-mono sound quality, which reflects the multi-dimensional quality of this research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### Eli Yardley

Eli was among the dozen Writing Project participants I initially interviewed at the Advanced Institute of the Local Writing Project in the summer of 2013. Eli was the first of two participants I asked to join me in this research endeavor. He met the criteria described above and was a member of the first Writing Project Summer Institute. Eli has continued as an active participant with the Local Writing Project

and sits on the leadership team for the Project. The team plans and leads professional development, Summer Institutes, curriculum consultation with school districts in the state, and Advanced Institutes. Their most recent work is offering a youth writing camp for the summer of 2017. I also sit on the leadership team.

Eli teaches grades ten through twelve at a high school in a neighboring school district about fifteen miles from the Writing Project site. His courses are creative writing and American literature. He also coaches tennis and hosts tennis camps for youth in the summer with the help of his high school players. Several of my English education students have interned in his classroom, which I have visited both in a supervisory role to those students and as a researcher. While our lives cross most frequently in the professional arena of education, we have been on friendly terms since we first met.

### How I Know Eli

I first met Eli Yardley via email when I was asked to take over a secondary English methods course at the University around five years ago. The course had conflicted with his full-time teaching duties, so he decided not to continue teaching it. I remember the immediate supportive response Eli sent back to my query about materials for the methods course. He was completely open in describing the central activities of the course and excited that another high school English teacher would take it over when I explained that I had just left my position as an English language arts teacher at an alternative school to pursue doctoral studies. I have continued several of his course practices to this day.

One central feature of the methods course was peer-to-peer student feedback. Eli established an ethic of support for students during their teaching demonstrations, which I adopted. Teaching, especially for the first time and in front of one's peers, even if it is practice teaching, can be unnerving. So Eli set up an online system of feedback with explicit instructions for students to accentuate the positive, to find what worked, and praise it. My own system of support and review reflects this positivity in an effort to build neighborhoods of trust.

After meeting Eli from our interactions over the English methods course, we crossed paths again at the Local Writing Project when I attended a Summer Institute for the first time in June of 2013. Eli was one of the facilitators and led the mornings frequently with readings and writing prompts from a wealth of resources. Eli brought a tremendous amount of energy and creativity to the Institute, which pumped me up for writing, something I had experienced occasionally over the years but not on a daily basis over time.

Over the past several years, Eli and I have collaborated on facilitating professional development for his school district, helped out with writing workshops for teachers, participated in Writing Project leadership team meetings, and shared a lot of informal moments in conversation about the teaching life, fatherhood, home improvement, and sports. As I mentioned above with Pete, these intersections reflect that "in narrative inquiry we intentionally come into relation with participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23).

## Context

### National Writing Project Site

The National Writing Project (NWP) is comprised of just under 200 sites, all of which are located on college campuses, where K-16 writing teachers gather most summers for initial Summer Institutes and Advanced Institutes, as well as a variety of individually sponsored writing development activities like youth writing camps, themed workshops such as Holocaust remembrance writing workshops, and professional development brought to schools and districts (“About: The National Writing Project,” 2016, “What Sites Do: The National Writing Project,” 2016).

This study focuses on one Writing Project Site located at a public land grant university in the Rocky Mountain West that serves a state in a predominantly rural landscape with significant distances between school districts within the state. For example, at an Advanced Institute in 2014, there were a dozen teacher consultants in attendance. About half were from the local community or adjacent school districts. The balance traveled as from as far as 200 miles away. Many of the school districts that are geographically served by this Writing Project site are significant distances from the next school district. Single-school education districts are not uncommon. The rural landscape of our education community makes networks of educators outside of our home schools valuable. The connections between writing teachers developed through the Writing Project could be the only professional network available to a teacher in a rural setting, as that teacher could be the only writing teacher in the district.

Started in the summer of 2009, the site is staffed by two faculty co-directors who share Writing Project leadership duties that comprise a small percentage of their overall faculty responsibilities at the university. Participants sign up for the Writing Project through an application process for the Summer Institute professional development workshop, which is a four-week experience of approximately seven hours each day affiliated with the National Writing Project. The Local Writing Project hosts no more than one SI per year, which has between nine and eighteen participants. Numbers of participants and Summer Institutes vary widely from site to site, as relative population density plays a significant role. At one time, teachers were given a stipend of approximately \$1000 before federal funding to the greater National Writing Project was cut. But many projects still extend academic credit to participants. The Local Writing Project gives each Summer Institute participant six graduate semester hours for a nominal fee. Project activities of participants fall under three broad categories: professional development Summer Institutes (three to five weeks), Advanced Institutes (one week), and professional development workshops (held variously) hosted by the LWP participants.

### Pete's Classroom

Peter Braun's sixth-grade classroom sits in one of three grade-level wings on the south end of a middle school that houses about 700 students. The building was, constructed twenty years ago and is slated for capacity increase to accommodate the school district's growing enrollment. This school district is situated in a medium-sized

college town of about 35,000 people. The school district has a free and reduced lunch rate of twenty-one percent or about twenty percent below the national and state rate.

Two large, new-looking dry erase boards and one smaller board dominate the front of Pete's room. To the left, from the perspective of being seated at the back right of the classroom, a space on the board has been gridded out with electrical tape for a week's worth of daily activities and homework for Pete's courses in math and English language arts. Each day starts with a brief advisory class period, similar to a homeroom, except there are frequent topical lessons and activities in subjects that interest the teacher and/or the students.

The east (right) cinderblock wall is painted a fresh but muted aqua that runs into large, yellowish brickwork, which outlines the doorway with red brick header. The majority of the three walls are blank, off-white drywall. Counter-height cabinets line about half the south and west walls. The counters and cabinets are new institutional laminate that cause me to jealously reflect on the aged settings where I did much of my secondary teaching. The room feels open and new. Blue green carpet with muting specks of brown gives it brightness without distraction.

Students work at rectangular tables arranged for two students each, seated on green plastic chairs with chrome legs and book racks below the seating surface. The room is ordered into a pod of six desks on each side and three tables in the middle of the room that leave ample room for Pete to get around. He easily walks up to each student during the course of a fifty-minute class period.

Looking north to the center of a dry erase board, students can read Pete's direct advice in neat script, "On average, college graduates now make 100% more money than high school graduates. Not going to college actually costs you \$500,000 over the course of your lifetime. Go to college. Start training now." Pete is polite when he talks to students. He speaks to them as though they are in a place of work that supports respectful, direct communication. There is no condescending tone or diction; instead, students are addressed as colleagues under Pete's leadership who have a stake in the way class works.

### Eli's Classroom

Eli Yardley teaches sophomores, juniors, and seniors in a high school about ten miles away from the Writing Project's university town. The school houses 800 students in a school district adjacent to Pete's district. Eli's school district has a free and reduced lunch rate about ten percent higher than Pete's school district but still well below state and national rates.

Entering Eli's classroom and stepping over a rust colored rug, eyes are drawn to a beat up silver skull with a candle in it sitting on an overhead projector cart. Under the projector cart is a sound system potent enough to be used at school dances. Centered in the front third of the room is a floor-to-ceiling steel light pole – the kind you'd see in the theater or at a dance – with LED strobes the size of large iPads suspended high above the floor. It is close to the projector, which has a pair of swirling light globes attached to it. The audio-visual gear for student council dances is stored in Eli's room, so he uses the equipment when students turn in a completed writing project portfolios at the end of each semester in a celebration of their work.

From the back of the classroom and looking left, a clipped front end of an orange 1970's Toyota pick-up truck hangs above two whiteboards. Posters like The Who, School of Rock, and Pink Floyd cover a good portion of the wall, as do pieces of student work. Pairs of skis hang variously, one of which frames the doorway. The tables around the room seat four or five students with capacity for about twenty-four, which reminds me of my most recent high school classroom at an alternative program. It occurs to me that tables and chairs give a room a different feel than individual student desks, even if the desks are assembled into groups. To the right, a counter along a set of windows looking east houses stacks of novels and anthologies for American and world literature.

Elis' demeanor is upbeat and sincere. He engages with his students in a jovial teacher voice, as he warmly interacts with each student. Students are communicative with one another and with Mr. Yardley in a way that feels positive and energetic.

### Researcher Position

I taught secondary English language arts for thirteen years and fifth grade for one year. The majority of those years were spent on the eastern slope of Colorado's Rockies. About six years ago, I left the secondary classroom to work in higher education and pursue an advanced degree in curriculum and instruction, which led me to a National Writing Project Summer Institute. From that experience, I stayed in association with the Writing Project.

I am a Teacher Consultant within the studied population, which means I have participated in the Writing Project institutes contextualized in this study. I sit on the

leadership team of the Local Writing Project and actively participate in Writing Project functions such as writing conferences and professional development for schools. I know each of the participants personally. Our relationships are professional, social, and personal. For example, one of the participants had my son as a student last academic year, which was after I had identified that participant as a case member. I mention this not only to provide an accurate picture of my relationship to the research context, but also to point out the nature of living and working in a small town.

We all cross paths beyond our professional relationships. I believe this supports my choice of research methodology because narrative inquiry depends on the researcher's ability to establish relationships with participants in the research context (Clandinin, 2013). Creswell cautions against studying in our own backyards (1998). I choose to ignore Creswell's warning because a "...key characteristic of the narrative research design is the development of the relationship between the researcher and the participant more akin to a close friendship..." (Gay et al., 2011). My proximity to the research participant context will give me a unique opportunity to "negotiate ways (I) can be helpful to participants both in and following the research" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51) because we have established rapport and contextual knowledge beyond the immediate research context of the classroom.

### Data Collection – Field Texts

Clandinin (2013) points out the conceptual differences between data and the narrative inquiry term, field texts, as she recalls that:

Michael Connelly and I began to use the term field texts rather than the term data many years ago to signal that the texts we compose in narrative inquiry are experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts. Field texts are co-compositions that are reflective of the experiences of researchers and participants, and they need to be understood as such – that is, as telling and showing those aspects of experience that the *relationship allows* (emphasis added) (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46).

For Clandinin, field texts are what most researchers would consider standard data: field notes, transcripts of interviews, and artifacts, but the co-construction of field texts recognizes the relational qualities of the research endeavors – we work together and must negotiate content of the study (Clandinin, 2007). With this in mind, I assembled field texts with participants through scheduled interviews, observations, impromptu conversations, and artifacts from participant classroom instruction. Initial contact with participants for research began the summer of 2013. The majority of our conversations and observations took place from June of 2015 through November of 2015; although, I met informally and incidentally with participants through spring of 2016.

### Conversation

Conversations in narrative inquiry are a collaborative communication endeavor that can confound the researcher-subject dynamic sometimes present in a structured interview by exchanging roles of questioner, listener, and speaker

between the researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interviews can certainly be similarly unstructured (Patton, 2002), but the narrative inquirer is open to an ongoing dialogue that may take directions outside of the researcher's initial topic of discourse (Clandinin, 2013). There is no hard line between the construct of a conversation and an interview; rather, it is a reminder that both researcher and participant have stories to tell and that we are both in the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Conversations took place in participants' respective homes over the summer of 2015. While I had a topic in mind when I began each conversation that centered on participants' association with the National Writing Project and how that informs their writing classrooms, I did not use an interview protocol (Clandinin, 2013). Interviews are used as ways to construct field texts in narrative inquiry, but conversations are the most common method of communication because "conversations create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). For example, I began a conversation with participants by asking them to share with me memorable experiences from their first encounter with the National Writing Project. From there, I followed the conversation and did not lead it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Over the course of the summer of 2015, I met with Eli four times and Pete three. We generated a total of three hours of recorded conversation for each participant and several more hours each of unrecorded conversation. In both recorded and unrecorded contexts, I kept handwritten notes. Immediately following

each conversation, I wrote reflectively about our conversations, which gave me the opportunity to process thinking and remembering prompted by our time together. This reflective activity reminds me that narrative inquirers are not objective recorders of participant stories because I am frequently reminded of stories from my own experiences, which interact with the story I am hearing. I interpret this to be an experiential example of what Clandinin means when she quotes Okri: “We also live in them” (2013, p. 22). Researchers are also engaged in a lived experience with the participant in the three dimensional research space that includes interactions with people in their contexts through time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The purpose of our conversations was to participate in and record a narrative account about participant classrooms and experiences related to the National Writing Project “in as unobtrusive a manner possible, attending to the context of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee” (Wertz, 2011, p. 228).

I also met with participants for less formal exchanges to check in regarding the construction of each participant’s narrative, sometimes in person and frequently through electronic collaboration to continue accurate construction of narratives, according to the judgment of each participant “and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). For example, I had wondered about a story in Eli’s past about writing after Pete and I had talked about his experiences as a professional journalist. I had met with Eli to update him of my progress and to ask him if my understanding of his story was in line with his own understanding. Through our conversation, I clarified a few details like how old Eli was when he first

remembered writing something he liked. Each time I checked in with Eli or Pete, I came away with yet another story.

### Artifacts

Participants shared sample documents such as class plans and project descriptions that helped me understand the nature of participants' classroom experiences and designs (See Appendices B and C). Artifacts included mentor text, assignment descriptions aimed at student audiences, and instructions for peer review. Each document was created by the participants, so "viewing these documents in the context of a narrative inquiry constitutes something that might be called an archeology of memory and meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). Artifacts became part of the collection of field texts from which we constructed participants' narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2011).

### Observations

To build an understanding of participant teaching contexts, I observed teachers in their classroom writing workshop contexts. Specifically, I volunteered in classrooms and assisted with writing workshops as a participant writer. Observations assisted me to conceptualize the participants' contexts (Patton, 2002, pp. 437–440). While I was present in the classroom, I kept a narrative account of what happened in each class in so far as I was able. When I participated in the writing tasks, I did so in the same notebook, blocking off space by drawing lines, so it was easy for student readers to find when we exchanged writing. I used the same

method I had employed with conversations: After each observation, I left the area and wrote a response to the experience, as well as detailing out notes at times when I was working with students. I found that consistent reflective writing after each classroom encounter helped me understand my own responses to the contexts and experiences of the classroom. This practice reinforced the notion Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight when they remind me that “as narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves” (p. 61). While student behaviors and activities were noted, individual students were not the focus of the observation. Individual students were anonymized where mentioned. The following section will explain the theoretical foundations of interpreting field texts.

#### Field Text Analysis: Theory

We must know the whole play in order to properly act our parts; the conception of totality must never be lost in that of the individual...The reality of the room, for instance, was to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves (Kakuzō Okakura, 1964, pp. 59–60).

Wertz (2011) writes that narrative research is a blended discipline “in the sense of integrating systematic analysis of narrated experience with the literary deconstruction and hermeneutic analysis of meaning” (p. 224). Collecting, deconstructing, and restorying participant narratives is an intellectual surgery, where the researcher has an ethical imperative to preserve, through careful and constant member checking, the integrity of the narrative such that the participant

agrees with the accuracy of how the researcher constructs field texts (data) provided by the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gay et al., 2011; Wertz, 2011). In constructing the narrative, I checked in with participants and was affirmatively encouraged to proceed at each junction.

Interpretation is possible through analysis of the given narratives. After individual narratives have been constructed hermeneutically, a cross-participant analysis revealed thematically common and/or divergent relationships between participants (Patton, 2002, p. 57). Wertz (2011) explains narrative research texts should do something more than find and discuss themes in collected field texts: “Rather than just identifying and describing themes, narrative analysis endeavors to understand the themes in relation to one another as a dynamic whole” (p. 227).

The hermeneutic circle – introduced by Heidegger and advanced by Gadamer – posits meaningful interpretation of text (Solomon, 1972). Neither comes from the whole text nor its parts, independently. Rather, individual parts and whole texts rely on an interdependent cycle of interpretation (Solomon, 1972). For this study, hermeneutic cycling took the form of moving back and forth between participant stories as a whole and the smaller moments in the story, while considering the contexts of participants and where I am in their stories, while recognizing that these components and perspectives, including my own, inform one another (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). These foundational theoretical understandings inform the practical act of interpretation and analysis, which is explained below.

### Field Text Analysis: Process

Analysis of field texts took place over four steps from recorded conversation transcriptions to final research texts reported as results in the fourth chapter of this study. In step one, I edited print conversation transcriptions according to their source digital audio recordings. In step two, I rewrote transcriptions into contiguous narratives, retaining the order in which they were spoken. Additionally, I considered the interaction of artifacts like assignment descriptions and mentor texts on observed experience and shared stories. For example, Eli expressed a change of perception regarding the way he used to write assignment instructions for essays in response to texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* after a Writing Project Summer Institute. He shared a current assignment sheet, which I was able to compare to what he had just described. In step three, I began to work field texts, which is the way narrative inquiry refers to data such as interview transcriptions, into a draft or “interim texts...with attention to temporality, sociality, and place” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). Fourth, interim texts were redrafted into the research texts reported in Chapter Four of this study. The following sections provide descriptions of each step in the field text analysis process.

#### Step One

I recorded five hours of conversations with participants and had the conversations transcribed in full. I used a transcriptions service for about 80% of the raw interview field texts and transcribed the initial 20% because I was anxious

to see the conversations in print immediately after I left the research field.

Administrative duties took the majority of my non-teaching time, as my department entered the final stages of its accreditation phases at the same time I started writing interim texts for this study. This prompted me to engage a transcriptions service.

My process for vetting the transcriptions for accuracy was both simple and illuminating; I listened to the interview recordings at a slowed playback speed that enabled me to edit the transcriptions, which turned out to be greater than 99% accurate, as I tracked word count with the number of corrections. That process was beneficial to me because I was able to notice immediately emerging ideas, themes, and tensions. The process took place over about ten days of four to six hours each. The opportunity to work with transcripts on contiguous days with time to process what I had heard and written was a key method in this process for me, for this is where I learned experientially that “there is no linear unfolding of data gathering to data analysis to publishing research findings” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49). It takes time to inhabit the research space and consider the narratives in light of the three dimension of time, place, and relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When I work with audio recording and transcription in the future, I plan on replicating this method of immersion.

### Step Two

I composed a narrative version of the vetted transcripts from step one that edited the expected content of conversational audio transcriptions– uhms, ahs, and repeated, fragmented thoughts. This was an important junction for me because I

feared changing the intent and meaning of my participants' words if I edited their talk. Searching Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me that "there is no clear path to follow that works in each inquiry...the inquiry is frequently filled with doubt" (p. 134).

While I was cautious with participant narratives, I also affirmed in my mind that I was part of the narrative and negotiated that narrative inquiry space with participants (Creswell, 2011, p. 512). I trusted my presence in conversations would position me as a fit guide to the outside reader of the participants' stories and moved in the direction Chase (2005) describes as "the researcher's interactive voice" (666) in contrast to the notion of an omniscient author. To that end, I made it clear to my participants that they had complete veto power over any and all material in their narratives.

### Step Three

Restorying begins with chronologically ordering events described by participants. Creswell (2011) notes that narrative inquiry is concerned with a participant's past, present, and future. Subjects often tell/retell their accounts out of time order. If the events are chronologically ordered, we can begin to unpack the influences of past stories on present and future stories (Creswell, 2011, p. 508). Participants filled in details as they remembered them, which was frequently out of time order. My job was to first order the narrative chronologically into another iteration of interim text that is somewhere between the finished research text and the raw data, while keeping the integrity of the teller's story. The chronological

order imposed on events does not necessarily stay that way, as the interim texts take on different shapes as they progress, according to the contexts and relationships of the participants and researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I spent the next several weeks working through the first interim text and ordering stories in time. I noticed that several stories were told more than once, as participants looped back to them when other events reminded them of those stories. That became a clue about the significant impact of some events versus others, which prompted me to highlight events and stories that appeared more than once. I established, with participants, not only collaborative agreement over what happened and when but also over the *meaning* these experiences had for the participant. I checked my own understanding by asking the participants to corroborate or modify my interpretation of events for the interim texts and received some clarification on several matters through follow-up conversations with participants.

#### Step Four

Research texts are intended for the readers of the study. From the lengthy interim texts that were essentially cleaned up, time-ordered narratives that closely resembled transcripts, I received valuable input from readers on my committee that encouraged me to focus on emergent themes or narrative threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that were repeated throughout the stories. That advice helped me discover that these narratives centered on issues of structure, audience, risk, and agency. These particular themes stood out to me for three reasons: First, because

similar themes are present in the National Writing Project model (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013), second, they were repeated stories over multiple conversations with both participants, and third, the participants conveyed a sense of significance in the *ways* they expressed themselves in conversations with me through body language, tone of voice, and enthusiasm.

Initial research texts were edited to about thirty percent of their original length and focused on stories that revealed the four themes. I considered the research text finalized when each participant had opportunity to clarify any point in the narrative and endorse the narrative as a whole. The narratives were structured, according to threads and time to see the influence of the past on the present stories of participants. However, from this interim text I began to restructure the narratives in a way that showed a progressive relationship between themes. While time was still a factor, the stories in the new research text were not necessarily in time order. For example, the narrative thread, *structure*, leads to the narrative thread, *audience*, and so forth. Generally, participant stories progress along those threads in time-order, but not absolutely. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that “the writer tries to compose a text that at once looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 140).

### Credibility

The aim of narrative research is not to generalize – one cannot offer generalizations based on small samples that are not gathered to be

representative. Instead, narrative research offers the possibility of exploring nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience that the reader might apply to better understand other related situations (Wertz, 2011, p. 228).

Generalizability of any given component of a narrative inquiry seems like it should happen one reader at a time. For example, a writing teacher who wonders about the effects of a writing workshop on his or her classroom could find reading the stories of these participants helpful, but the intent of the narratives is not to provide a reductionist (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) set of directions by which to construct a writing classroom. It is my aim here to allow the narratives to speak for themselves. Within narrative inquiry, credibility is gained through careful and frequent member checking (Clandinin, 2007; Patton, 2002), which I employed at each subsequent conversation by reviewing particular points in stories to be sure I had recorded them correctly in the eyes of the participants. I also checked in with more developed interim texts by sharing the documents electronically. Finally, I shared research texts in person with one participant and electronically with the other. I refrained from sharing participant narratives until both participants consented.

### Permissions and Ethical Considerations

Compliance with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) of our university has been established through receipt of an IRB "Exemption" (See Appendix A.) and approval of participant informed consent document. Each participant has reviewed and signed a consent document. Each participant has stated in writing that he does

not require anonymity; however, anonymity was maintained throughout the study by use of pseudonyms for participants. Below, Clandinin and Connelly illustrate the complex nature of narrative inquiry, even after formal ethical protocol considerations have been covered:

Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. Ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170)

## CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS

Over a series of approximately five conversations each with Pete and Eli in their respective homes during the summer of 2015, we spoke about their National Writing Project experiences, their classroom experiences as writing teachers, and the intersections between the Writing Project and their classrooms. These conversations inform the two research puzzles of this study:

- What are the features of a professional development model that facilitate transformation learning over time?
- How do participants view the way these features of a transformative professional development model inform their classroom instruction?

Eli teaches high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors in creative writing and American literature courses. He was a member of the Local Writing Project's first Summer Institute class of 2009. Pete teaches sixth grade at a middle school from where he shares his story of enthusiastic writing instruction. He attended the Local Writing Project's Summer institute in 2010.

Through these experiences with Pete and Eli, I found four narrative threads at work, which I named *structure*, *audience*, *risk*, and *agency*. I define each resonant narrative thread as follows:

- *Structure*: The organization of classroom instruction, from its furniture layout to the way assignments are structured.

- *Audience*: To whom a writer writes. In a classroom, this is conventionally the teacher.
- *Risk*: Regard for potential loss, a noun and a verb that connotes awareness of potential negative consequences if one takes a course of action.
- *Agency*: The influence someone has over one's self and others. Power.

In this chapter, each narrative thread is explored through the stories of Eli and Pete. To honor the storytellers, I share the narratives of each participant separately, instead of weaving them together as if in dialogue. Participant voices are represented by blocked, single-spaced, indented text and preceded by a quotation from the story that thematically relates to the narrative thread and attributed to the speaker. For example, "*There was a vacuum.*" –*Pete's Voice* indicates that Pete is speaking. To provide synthesis, each participant's stories are narrated by my voice, indicated by double-spaced text followed by a brief explanatory section. At the conclusion of each thread, I provide additional synthesis looking across the two narratives, in order to offer thick description of the thread itself.

#### Resonant Narrative Thread One: Structure

In the story below, Pete describes his frustration with his school's writing curriculum, which was a systematic program called Step Up To Writing (Auman, 2016). I was trained in the same writing program years ago in Colorado by the author, Maureen Auman. It is an enticing proposition to be handed a notebook of

materials for teaching writing, the implication being that if we follow this method, students will write well. I used it for years and found it to be stifling to creativity, particularly to student voice. I abandoned it, preferring writing instruction that was less generalized and more appropriate to differing rhetorical contexts and purposes.

Pete was immediately suspicious of a writing program that models a universal approach to writing tasks for all students and seeks to discard it for something more productive and flexible. He finds an ally and designs a writing program based on Lucy Calkins' writing workshop model. This dramatic shift in structure coincides with his first exposure to the National Writing Project via his teaching colleague's participation in a Summer Institute, followed by his own. I was reminded of my own writing classroom and my shared discomfort with the same method when Pete spoke of his frustration.

*"There was a vacuum." – Pete's Voice*

I was pretty frustrated with the idea of the Step Up to Writing curriculum and budgeting fifteen minutes for kids to write, with maybe a little bit more on Fridays or whenever. I was choking back most of my opinions, but after two years of trying that stuff with my kids I realized that there had to be something totally different.

After not finding anything, I asked myself what should I do—how much do I think kids ought to get? They need practice. They need time. They need time when I can talk to them about their writing. They need to have time to share their writing with other kids. They need to do this like a music student practices an instrument. They need to have routine time set aside for practice and for feedback from a teacher who knows what he's talking about.

There was a vacuum in the way that our school district was teaching kids to write. From my limited view, the district wasn't doing much writing instruction at all. The anthology mentions writers workshop, but not in any real sense. It has them write a little something – a letter

or something like that. Every few weeks, students spend two or three days writing. This isn't really teaching kids how to write. I tried it. It was just pitiful.

Pete found a colleague who had similar frustrations, and they were both open to approaching writing instruction differently. There was a kind of anticipatory set in Pete's reading the writing workshop ideas of Lucy Calkins the same summer that his colleague, Kelsey Stewart, participated in National Writing Project Summer Institute. Both were excited about the possibilities and the broader implications for the place of writing in both the classrooms and in the broader context of every-day life.

I had been kicking those ideas around with Kelsey Stewart who had the same kind of frustrations in her classroom. She went off to the Local Writing Project (LWP) that summer - the same summer that I picked up Lucy Calkins' books on writing workshops. I started reading Lucy while Kelsey was at the Writing Project. We were both emailing each other back and forth. She said, "You've got to do this next summer. This is exactly what we've been talking about for the last three months - this kind of teaching kids how to write." I said, "You've got to check out Lucy Calkins because this whole writing workshop approach is what we've been talking about all this time."

There's a broadened view of what is acceptable writing from Writing Project people, which is—to use a hackneyed phrase - that writing is a process and that it is an end in itself. I think that's also the Writing Project view; that writing is an end in itself. That it is something that is self-fulfilling for people to do and that it draws them into deeper thinking, not just about what they're writing, but about their lives and about other subjects that they have to learn in school.

The Writing Project bolsters Pete's ideas about the capabilities of his students and contributes to his expanding notions of what it is to teach writing and the time commitment involved with that teaching. Increasing students' writing time is a significant structural change because the instructional day is finite; to increase

one activity's time is to take away from another. Pete is ambivalent about this at first but the change is affirmed in light of better student writing.

That's the problem with a lot of kids – they just don't know what's acceptable and that's been narrowly defined for them in the past. All of that was blown away with more of a writing workshop approach and believing really deeply that kids are capable of much, much more when we give them a blue-sky opportunity. We evolved a lot at that point. The writing that kids attempted and accomplished after around four weeks of every-day practice writing what's important or humorous to them from their own lives – poignant stories of grandparents dying, funny stories about crackups on bikes – were well-crafted over time. That completely readjusted my idea of what is a quality piece of writing for somebody who is ten years old. What I've come to think of as acceptable or quality writing from kids who don't write much or think they can't or just hate it has changed quite a bit. I'm starting to see that it takes considerable time with kids who are reluctant writers for them to develop that sense of trust and confidence in their own voice.

When I began my visits to Pete's classroom, he had just finished a project where students had written restaurant reviews. He reflected on the structural changes he made to the time allowed for writing and adapted an idea from writing workshop scholar, Lucy Calkins, to his own purposes. I noticed that the structural change is aimed at the very model he originally used to supplant previous writing instruction – the writer's workshop. Pete further modifies the changed structure. The change is inspired by Pete's memory of an activity in Frank McCourt's teacher memoir, *Teacher Man* (2005), where he encourages creative responses to text by having his students from Stuyvesant High School read recipes out loud poetically. The activity in McCourt's classroom spirals into days of students playing instruments, sharing food, and generally catching creative fire. Pete shares his own version.

Toward the end of this last year, I was pushing the time limit a little bit. We were trying to do some research-based stuff. Calkins has a really good idea where you get kids interested in people who are activists their age who tackle big issues. They read widely and quickly, learn how to take notes on the texts they read, and then write a standard structured essay, which is supposed to be a jump off into, “Well, did you find an issue that interests you? Why don’t you research that more deeply?” Then come up with a more creative, interesting way to get their point across, instead of an introductory paragraph and so on. We were pushing to increase the writing time and kids were enthusiastic about that, but I thought, wait a minute, what about Frank McCourt? He got his students into writing about food and how much they loved writing about food. As a journalist, I used to research. I would go out and watch, go out and experience, and then report back. That’s a research-based essay. That’s research-based writing. So I said, “Let’s do restaurant reviews.” (See Appendix C, Figure 1)

Pete takes tells of another kind of structural change where he replaces the a “formulaic” approach to writing poetry that had been a part of a structured writing curriculum earlier, to a more collective, improvised method of writing poetry that he felt was more engaging for a greater number of students. He models writing poetry with students on an overhead projector, inviting his whole class to participate, which has a lasting impact on one young man.

Simple stuff about writing poetry I never would have thought to do when I was into formulaic stuff, but one day I started writing on the ELMO projector. It was a fifth grade class. I started writing all these nasty things about cats on the ELMO. Then I started writing some nasty things about dogs. Pretty soon the kids wanted to know if they could write one. Pretty soon we had this poetry slam going.

One of the kids who was most passionate about the I-hate-cats side of things kept coming up with more and more ideas. It was the only time he ever wrote anything that year. Some of it was just really funny.

He’s a senior in high school now. I bumped into his mom last year, and she said, “You wouldn’t believe it, but he’s still writing poetry.” I said,

“Whoa, really?” He’s one of these macho tough guys. Don’t give them a voice; let them have their own voice.

In the next section another teacher, Eli, shares a dramatic shift in perception that precipitates a change in the way he delivers and packages writing assignments to students. His Writing Project experience of collaboratively building research questions for participant teachers to research areas of pedagogical interest informs this change in his classroom structure. There is some grief evident when Eli decides to abandon the way he previously structured writing assignments, but that grief turns to satisfaction with both his structural and content changes.

*“I rewrite them every year.” – Eli’s Voice*

After the Local Writing Project, I went back and I taught full-time the next year, which was hard because I think I had really shifted the way I saw things. The scales came off and the world of the classroom all of a sudden was really unfamiliar. All these little comfortable things that I had developed over the previous six or seven years seemed silly. It was very much a reinvention year. I came back into the classroom after the Writing Project and rewrote every single assignment I’d ever done. I rewrite them every year. I might as well not even save documents anymore. It’s a pain. It’s hard. I’m asking a different set of questions about what I’m doing in the classroom. I remember I used to be so proud of my syllabi. I loved producing a syllabus. After the writing project I looked at my syllabi going into the fall and I thought, “This is kind of dumb. I had a kind of sadness associated with that feeling too, like aw, I really like doing these, and now I don’t see their value.

I’ve structured my classes differently. For me to stand in front of the classroom and deliver information is so incredibly rare anymore because it doesn’t feel authentic or valuable. I can just see them shutting down like instantly. In a creative writing class it’s hilarious – with seniors in particular. By the end of the semester, I can’t. I’ve trained them out of it too. I’ve trained them that that’s not how we do it. If I do have really specific information to give out, I either hand it to them in writing and expect them to read it and understand it with their group, or I’ll move around to the four or five tables in the

classroom and we will have a talk about what's going on. Then I open it up to questions, which works better because there's more of a dialogue.

When I'm standing in front of the classroom, students automatically sort of go back into student mode. They become passive receivers of information. If I sit down with four or five or even arrange the tables so I can sit down with eight or ten kids. While I'm going through something, they can interrupt me. They ask questions. I can ask a question, and it feels more authentic. They don't automatically shut down and think, "This is a classroom question; there's a right answer. Someone's going to say it, and it won't be me." When I'm sitting down in a small group with students writing, talking about writing, talking about something we've read, I'm intensely comfortable and energized and I can do that all day long.

Eli experienced a dramatic shift in perception that caused him to reassess the way he structures writing assignments, particularly the way they are described in his carefully constructed descriptive documents. Specifically, Eli shifted writing tasks to inquiry-based construction of analytical questions for text analysis, which replaced more generalized prompts for students aimed at particular works. For example, in a document-based prompt, Eli had students choose between three writing prompts, respectively focused on conflict, credibility of the writer (ethos), or audience in early American literature. In addition to choosing a prompt, students chose the work or works of literature that would be the subject matter of their inquiry. Eli calls the possible writing prompts, "heuristics" that act as a scaffold to students constructing their own questions. (See Appendix B, Figure 2)

I've tried to really shift to inquiry-based stuff. When we write a paper, I present a heuristic. Here are a set of questions to about what you're reading and what you're talking about. Go find the best place in your text to ask those questions. We do that with any kind of rhetoric study. Here's a paper on how to do rhetorical analysis. Let's read it and figure it out together because it wasn't written for you, it was

written for other professors. We'll be voyeurs today and try to figure out what the hell they're talking about, then translate from that text to our own experiences, academic and non. Next, we do a rhetorical analysis of something that you are reading in light of the ideas we just figured out. Post it to the Wiki so that we can all learn about each other's readings.

Eli also began using an online wiki – a secure website where he could structure assignment-based discussion boards for students to read and interact with one another's writing. It is a significant part of Eli's effort to build a writing community. It also provides all users, including Eli, a structural platform that lends itself to interaction and feedback. This is a change in expected audience. The Writing Project model of professional development is similar to peer review groups in writing. Writers share feedback peer to peer, instead of the feedback coming solely from the teacher. This structural shift in audience is discussed in the next narrative thread.

### Resonant Narrative Thread Two: Audience

National Writing Project experiences taught Pete that writing for peers not only changes the writing, but it changes the experience of writing. It engenders writers to write with a stronger voice and encourages experimentation both with writing and teaching writing. The Writing Project also encourages teachers to share their writing with one another regularly. Many of the participants in Writing Project Summer Institutes find the act of sharing their writing an empowering experience (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). The same desire to share writing with peers becomes integral to Pete's students' writing practices in his

classroom. Next, Pete relates sharing writing with his peers at the Writing Project to setting up a writer's workshop in his classroom that features students sharing writing with other students.

*"I see a real hunger in my own students to share their writing."*—Pete

I think our Writing Project promotes a sense of broad-mindedness, open-mindedness and an approach that really takes people where they are and recognizes that in spite of what a person might say or how shy they may seem or how they may denigrate their own abilities as a writer, that there's a lot more value in each of us than we think. I think that through a writing prompt, and then write and listen to a reading, then listen to one another write about it, those actions break down barriers that stymie genuine collaboration. People are easily shut down, but I think that the LWP does the opposite. It opens people up and reminds them of who they are and what our priorities really are as teachers. It prizes that. Often, the conversation is, "Yeah, but this is what my district is telling me I have to do." You know that they don't see the value in what's being shoved down their throats. It gives them voice. It gives them confidence. It's viral.

We all experience the incredible importance of sharing what you've written during our Summer Institute, whether you feel like what you've written is worthwhile or not. We need to be able to share it, to talk about it, to discuss it, and to take it beyond simply dissecting a piece of writing. Instead, we ask questions like: What's your intent here? What are you trying to get across? Can we help you with that somehow? I see a real hunger in my own students to share their writing.

I learned that Pete had previously written professionally as a journalist and naturalist. Pete reflects on how the writing workshop model is in line with the habits he picked up as a professional writer. Implicit in Pete's experiences are sharing with peers under the leadership of an expert writer. While peers read one another's work or while students are drafting, Pete moves around the room and

conferences with one or a few students about their writing. An individual teacher could not accomplish this with such regularity without peer audiences.

Calkins' workshop approach reflected my own experience as a professional writer. When she would identify an obstacle to coming up with an idea or expressing yourself – this is what a lot of people, professional writers included, seem to have trouble with. I thought, “Absolutely right; that’s exactly it.” I started thinking about all the writing conferences that I’d gone to as a student, as well as a teacher. I thought if you want to find out how professionals learn how to write, go to a pro. Look at that model. A lot of writers exchange work: “Here, can you look at my stuff?” I had participated in conferences and so forth where more illustrious published authors would look at everybody’s work. What struck me there was that in those circumstances where you had really accomplished authors at these conferences, the method was basically always the same: Go write. Don’t be self-conscious about it. Write. Write. Write. Then let’s talk about it. Then have time to write, and have time for me to conference with kids. Then have a chance for them to share with each other. That’s what I’ve really taken from Lucy. That’s what my writing instruction pretty much amounts to these days.

Below, Eli shares that his motivation for changing students’ audience is grounded in the notion that the teacher-as-audience conventional model is not authentic. Authentic audience means an audience that a student might choose outside of school structures that matches the purpose of the writing. Additionally, when Eli shifts the audience from teacher to peer audience, he notices that it builds a supportive classroom community. Eli also points out that writing for a community of peers versus writing for a teacher is risky. But the strong communities that are built through sharing writing balance the risk of writing for a different audience. Eli told me about how he restructures his classroom into writing groups, which effectively changes the audience, but he also talked about how a teacher can make

an attempt to become a different kind of audience that pays attention to the vulnerability of student writers.

*“It’s just so much more real when they write for one another.”* –Eli

Can teachers be authentic audiences? I think the answer is essentially, no. But I think you can get a lot closer to being authentic. I think the Writing Project stuff has really made me aware of risk, vulnerability, but then also the power of sharing writing as a community builder. I had done writers workshops before the Writing Project, but it was still student writing for teacher. I always got the sense—that wasn’t to say I didn’t get good stuff out of a writer’s workshop—but it was like they were writing what they thought I wanted to read, which makes sense because I was really the only audience.

Eli’s classes are structured around online writing communities he established through a class wiki, which is an environment that allows editing and file storage directly from a web browser. Eli controls access, so the groups are open only to students in his classes. Students work in groups both in person and online.

What I like about the Wiki is that you get a little community of genuine readers, readers who really want to learn stuff and learn something about each other. Even in my most academic writing class, Advance Composition, everything gets shared online—on the course Wiki, and I grade them for reading and commenting on each other’s stuff. I force that. Initially, I force that every semester. I think everybody’s a little bit hesitant because they’re just so used to writing for teacher and the consequences that come with that. All of a sudden there’s this total game changer. Even just one genuine reader for a writer in an academic situation, that’s enough motivation to keep you going for a whole semester, somebody who’s really reading your stuff.

At the beginning, students are like, “Whatever.” Then they get it oftentimes by the end and realize, “Oh, I started writing for this person, and I was anxious to see what they thought.” Students realize, “I really needed somebody to acknowledge my work that wasn’t a teacher,” because a teacher has to.

Eli believes that a good audience is attentive and honest. He teaches students how to be an audience by building an expectation – an ethic that students will practice deep listening to their peers’ work. He fosters, even demands that students be an engaged, ‘genuine’ audience for each other. The result is a community of support, which many students appreciate and sometimes acknowledge with strong feeling through a show of gratitude at the end of a semester or year.

At the very end of a class, one of my favorite pieces of writing the entire semester I do is thank-yous on the class Wiki. It’s the last assignment. Students get on the Wiki. They find a space where they can thank the people who’ve read their stuff. I get some thank-yous which is gratifying and feels good, but it’s just as gratifying to hear them thank each other genuinely. A lot of it’s just, “Thank you for reading my stuff every week and encouraging me.” A lot of times they thank their tables. Sometimes it’s gushy, effusive, drippy. It’s drippy rhetoric. Some of it is seniors who are sensing the end, and their lives are going to take turns. They recognize they probably won’t have those little communities anymore.

It’s just so much more real when they write for one another. I mean their writing, you can see them transition because at the beginning they’re still in that sort of writing for teacher mode. By the end of a four or five week session or first quarter of a creative writing class, I become more a part of the background than the primary audience. I still write prompts for their writing. I keep that up throughout the semester or year. The actual writing and reading and sharing and commenting, they don’t need me at all. It’s awesome because they’re very much writing for each other. It takes a while for some kids to get that, but then it becomes such an authentic experience. Usually they’re writing for one or two people at their table. They have their ideal audience.

A common audience for student writing is the classroom teacher. Both Pete and Eli intentionally shifted audience away from the teacher by including substantial peer review in their classes, which changed their students’ writing. Frequent peer review means that students have their writing read by an audience

with much greater frequency than if the teacher is the sole reader. Also, writing for peers instead of or in addition to a teacher changes the quality of the writing for the better. The next resonant narrative thread will consider how changes in structures and audience pose risk to both students and teachers.

### Resonant Narrative Thread Three: Risk

In this section both participants share moments where they consciously take risks and encourage their students to take writing risks in a way that helps unpack what was at risk. I begin with Pete's reflections on the beginning of his writing workshop and how that risky proposition was encouraged by his Writing Project experiences. After Pete and a colleague, Kelsey, had moved their classroom writing instruction to a writing workshop model based on Lucy Calkins' work, Pete expressed the desire to encourage other teachers to risk changing writing structures to workshop models because the benefits to student writing quality were so strong.

*"Starting up a writing workshop is intimidating."* - Pete

Our Writing Project engenders this frame of mind for experimentation and gives us some confidence to take some risks – more organic, wholesome, grassroot-y, independent, give-the-kids-more-choice-and-voice approaches to teaching writing versus formulaic approaches, which is so Writing Project. But starting up a writing workshop is intimidating, especially for middle school people. I think that translation is really hard to make into workshop.

I keep coming back to critical thinking. What I really mean is a willingness to be subversive, a willingness to take risks. When we started doing the writing workshop approach we were subversives at my elementary school. We kept it under our hats until we had good enough pieces of writing where we could say, "How can you argue against this?"

About 2010 I put together two presentations that mirrored the presentations I'd done in the LWP's summer workshop. I was in the school auditorium on one of the two or three days of professional development prior to the school year. We all do a teacher demonstration. I modified that. What I wanted to do was to inspire other teachers to do the workshop model and I thought the best way to do that was to briefly describe what that looks like and talked about Lucy Calkins' carefully structured pieces of advice are for about an hour. Then I shared some of the writing that my kids had done over the course of the year. When it came around to actually reading excerpts from what these ten-year-olds were writing, that's when you could hear the pin drop in that room and they began to realize what potential kids have. One piece in particular brought people to tears.

Pete and Kelsey take their stories to the school district level in a presentation about the merits of the writing workshop instructional concepts to the school board. The risks of "subversive" implementation of writing workshop are mitigated by support and enfranchisement from school district officials. Both school board officials and teachers shared concerns about risks associated with devoting more instructional time and effort to daily writing.

Kelsey and I had given a presentation to the school board and described what we were doing with our writing and why we were going to a workshop method, spending an hour a day on writing and then shared some of the results with them. After the Summer Institute, the district wanted to encourage all the teachers, especially in the elementary areas to move towards a workshop model. That was going to be a nonnegotiable. I was so pleased – I felt vindicated because what Kelsey and I had been doing for years was under the radar. We had felt that if people knew what we were doing, especially in reading and writing, that we would get hammered somehow because we were not giving enough minutes to social studies or science or something like that. Even for elementary school teachers. It's like, "What? You're blocking off a whole hour? How do you justify that?" We had follow up sessions that dealt with questions like that through the winter.

Fortunately, we were given license to do it at our school. I felt overjoyed because I thought this will make a huge difference. If people just try it, they'll like it. They'll get it.

Today, Pete continues to take instructional risks by changing up the more prescriptive recommendations about writing workshop structure. This belies an independence from prescribed instructional methodologies, even if he agrees with them, as Pete wants to fit instruction to his classroom context in a contiguous fashion

Over the years, I've become less dependent on the way Lucy Calkins seems to lay out writing instruction in precise detail, which can make terrific sense to me. But I'm much more willing now to break away from that detail and structure – to realize that what she has really given me is an architecture and a little advice that builds on the day before. What you do one day has got to build on what happened the day before.

When Eli describes risk, he focuses on the risks students take in their writing. Like Pete, Eli refers to the Writing Project as an influential experience that emboldened him at first to take personal risks in writing and to share similar experiences with his students. The risk Eli describes is a product of writing that offers the author more autonomy and fewer restrictions over the writing content, structure, and topic. Freedom to write according to our own priorities can take us to deeply personal places. Self-disclosure brings with it substantial risk and vulnerability. Eli describes his own experience as a writer and participant listener in the Writing Project Summer Institute, which acts as a reference point for how risky writing can work productively within a writing community.

*"Take risks, take risks, take risks."* - Eli

The risk thing, I felt the first frickin' morning, the directors said, "Oh, let's all read," and everyone said, "Phssh. Right." But then within three days, there's people crying – not just readers, but audience members empathizing with the writer. It happened so fast. A tough-guy kind of English teacher – I remember it, and I remember the poem he wrote to my writing prompt—which was a 10-word prompt—was one of the coolest things I'd ever heard. To have him go from the Irish fighter thing to being a totally different—I saw him totally differently by the end. I saw him take risks in ways that really surprised me.

Risk also manifests itself in the way finished student writing products might be judged or evaluated as less "polished" or refined, according to academic writing standards. Eli favors writing that both he and Pete call "real". I understand "real" to mean writing that reflects the writer's priorities and voice, so fitting the writing into an academic mold is less clear, more subjective, and is considered a more important accomplishment by Eli. He describes the difficulty of ranking student work on a grade scale.

"Oh, I'm such a different teacher." I look at my folder of *To Kill a Mockingbird* stuff, and think, "Oh, these were all so fun and so disingenuous." Students enjoyed them because there was no risk. I enjoyed them because it was easy to assess and because I knew what was supposed to happen. I asked myself how I could you create this document with all these procedures, having no idea who's in your room and what they know already and what they ought to learn. So we build class curricula and procedures in the classroom after I've met the students, which was a huge shift. Now I'm asking kids to connect stuff in the novels to their lives. The connections are just a lot shakier. The finished product is not as clean, even going through multiple drafts. It's not as polished, but I think it's real. When I read it, I learn something new. I'm seeing the book in different ways because they're connecting it to things that I wouldn't have necessarily connected it to. Now I have this writing that's a lot more authentic and real. Then the assessment becomes silly. You get somebody who writes something gut wrenching – put a grade on top of that. It's the exact wrong thing to do.

Eli's concern with evaluating student writing, especially when the central feature of the writing is a student's care for that writing, contrasts with the ease of structuring a writing assignment for assessment. Discreet writing assignments, where the teacher provides the questions and the architecture of the paper, result in tidy writing products that lend themselves to assessment. Tension exists between risky, real writing and the difficulty of evaluating it.

Their writing is better, but I think if anybody else were reading it, they wouldn't think so because it's raw. It's not as polished. It doesn't fit some of those formulas that we think of when we think of an academic piece. I look back at—I looked at my *To Kill a Mockingbird* assignment. It was a paper on personal integrity. It was so easy to do well because it was really laid out. Pick a character and three virtues or vices. I did all this pre-teaching on ethics. It was satisfying because I knew it was good stuff and these were cool conversations to have. The papers were really orderly. There were transitions, and you could see that somebody had put it together to be an academic paper.

Yet, Eli continues to structure his writing tasks in ways that encourage risk and openness, which he sees as a long-term investment that pays off over time. He is careful to build a gradual transition from what students usually experience – writing tasks where the structures are not determined by the writer – to the higher-risk, writer-constructed tasks in his classroom.

They may have had to go through peer revision hoops—motions, I guess—before, but this is just real and open and raw. I have 'em do it with fairly lower risk kind of writing first and then ramp that up. I'm never forcing people to take risk, although I'm always encouraging it. If it makes you a little bit uncomfortable to put it up on the Wiki, it's good. That's a good thing. You want that to happen.

I've had people come back to me at the end of semesters where they've clearly made a transition from doing that sort of academic bullshit dishonest kind of writing to writing for real at some point.

They experience that. They say, “I wouldn’t have done this had you not constantly been saying, “Take risks, take risks, take risks.””

Both participants discussed actions that posed risks and were disruptive to accepted writing practices for teachers and students. Pete and Eli challenge existing structures and expectations surrounding how writing is taught in school. These disruptions were multi-faceted shifts in sometimes-conventional ways of teaching writing or doing writing. By taking and encouraging risks, both participants sponsored the agency of their students within school structures that often discourage student choice and student autonomy.

#### Resonant Narrative Thread Four: Agency

Pete recalls getting excited about the prospect of the National Writing Project context, where his own priorities and experiences for teaching are valued and brought into the conversation about improved teaching. Additionally, Pete illustrates a connection between placing teacher priorities for professional development at the center of the table and care for work in his classroom. Pete extends agency and autonomy to students’ writing in a way similar to what he experienced at the Writing Project Summer Institute and finds that some students respond by creating work that resonates with “care” and “passion”.

*“There was nothing that I needed to feel guilty about.” -Pete*

When Kelsey talked about that critical thinking in the Writing Project and that you’re treated like an adult, it was an affirmation of thinking like an adult about something that you really, really care about a lot. She said, “You have to do this next year. I can’t tell you how refreshing it is to be treated as an adult for a solid month concentrating on what

you are most passionate about outside your family.” Kelsey said the Writing Project month was a lot of, “Hey, what actually works? What have you tried? Why does it work? Why doesn’t it? What have you tried that’s failed?” They were trying to find the stuff that really works and arriving at a lot of same conclusions that I’d been learning from Calkins that year, too.

The Writing Project reminded me of why I started writing in the first place. I started writing in high school. I had a teacher who taught creative writing. She gave us time to write and to share about what we were writing. She wasn’t real particular about finished products although she expected some. At first, my reaction to that class was, “Gee, this is really easy.” Then my reaction became, “This is really important to me.” I started writing because I was interested in writing about my own life and my own views and writing those experiences down. In coming to the LWP and then writing every day just whatever the hell I felt like just opened my heart again to writing. This is what I liked doing. How could I deny what I’m feeling now to the kids in my classroom?”

Before Pete came to his current sixth-grade middle school position, he and his colleague implemented the writing workshop in their fifth-grade classrooms and were quickly impressed by the results in student writing. Pete singles out two factors: writing choice and time. One of the first differences in the way Pete and Kelsey instructed writing was to extend agency that offered more control for students over their writing choices.

Six weeks into it, we realized that these kids were writing really moving narratives about their lives because they get to write what they want. They get to practice every day for an hour. The difference that we saw in those kids in the first six weeks of fifth grade, compared to kids we’d sent on to sixth grade the year before, was like night and day.

A few years later, Pete moved to a local middle school within the district and implemented a structure similar to his writing workshop for his reading program. He refers to the dreaded “pile” – the stack of papers writing teachers must contend

with after a writing assignment is submitted. However, he finds reading student writing so much more enjoyable after he has students choose what they read and how to respond to those readings. The responses take the form of a weekly letter to Pete about the books students choose. Students are required to read a minimum of thirty-five books per year. The reader response letters reinforce Pete's acts of extending student autonomy over the content. For Pete, the strength is in the space created for students to express their understandings in their own voices, which he explains below and shares a story about a reluctant reader in his class.

The old school stuff where you just have this deep reluctance to go to the pile changed as a result of an experiment with my students' reading program. I told them you're going to read a lot of books this year, and every week you'll write me a letter about something you're reading. It doesn't matter what you write to me about your reading, as long as it is thoughtful and interesting and not terribly long. I just want a page from you.

The first day I sat down to those, I thought, 'What have I gotten myself into?' but as soon as I started to read them and as soon as I started writing back to them I realized this is fantastic, this is great. I started to feel like I'm elated most of the time to get student writing. To tell you the truth I am drawn to those more than just about anything else because that's when the kids start to drop their pretense. They start to drop that sense of, oh, this is homework, and once they tune into that feeling of a real conversation hdxing about literature, they realize they can write with their own voice, they can say things in a way that's natural to them, and I'm going respect that, and I'm going to probably ask them a few questions about what they're thinking. My only reluctance, my only disappointment now is that there are other things that get between me and sitting down with those reader letters. Because that's what I really want to do; I want to read what these kids are actually saying and I want to sit down with them and help them say that better.

One boy in particular reported reading zero books during summer. I have this requirement that they read thirty-five books during the school year in nine genres, including four volumes of poetry. He got on

to Shel Silverstein about two months into the school year. He would write me okay letters every week, nothing really interesting, just kind of a summary of what he'd written. His narrative was tortured and hard and he hated doing it.

All of a sudden, he's writing me this letter and saying, "I never thought that I would want to read poetry, but I picked up this book by Shel Silverstein, and it's really pretty funny. There's a lot of good rhyming in it. I like the way he plays around with words." He said, "My favorite poem so far is 'The Early Bird,' and it's about this"—he told me what it was about. He said, "The lesson is that if you want to catch the worm, you have to get up early, but if you're the worm you should sleep in late." He said, "I think that's pretty funny, and it really reminds me of elk hunting." I thought, 'Oh, elk hunting? Really?' He says, "Yeah, because if you want to get an elk, you have to get up early, but if you're the elk you should sleep in late." I just thought, 'Wow. Way to go, kid.'

He needed that weekly reinforcement and me writing back and saying, "Hey, thanks for the letter. How're you feeling about this book and have you thought about it maybe this way?" – just that long-range encouragement. His writing really came along that year.

When Pete privileges students with more influence over writing and reading choices, student engagement with writing frequently increases, as a boy who discovered Shel Silverstein illustrates. Pete shared another account of a personal narrative written by a student about her grandfather. It is the writing – its power – that solidifies the commitment Pete has to the writing workshop he has designed for his classes. Specifically, the feature most prominent in the writing is student voice. The story begins with Pete feeling guilty about increasing writing time for students. This guilt gets pushed aside when he reads the work of this student. When Pete told me the story, it helped me see what he meant by "real" writing.

I remember a narrative unit, one of the first ones that I ever taught. I had made the decision that I was going to devote an hour of the kids' day every day, five days a week to writing. I felt guilty about doing

that because in order to do that I needed to draw time from other subjects. A lot of that narrative unit begins with helping kids wrestle with a blank page and come up with a lot of different ideas. I would ask them to write a couple of entries every day – different ideas every day. They would say, “Can I go back to the idea I had yesterday?” and I’d say, “Well, maybe later, but for now let’s get a bunch more.”

At some point in that narrative unit, I asked the kids to write a rough draft. There was a girl who was writing a story about her grandfather’s death. She was in the room when it happened. She opened this by describing a hospital room and a man on a bed under a sheet. Then her second paragraph is something along the lines of, “That was the man who used to snatch me up when I would run by and give me a squeeze. That was the man who would make peanut butter and saltine cracker sandwiches with me. That was the man who always asked me to sing ‘Twinkle, Twinkle’ to him.”

She described people standing around the bed praying and crying and then her mom sneaking up beside her, realizing that her mom is right there and her mom whispering in her ear, “Sing ‘Twinkle’ to him. Would you sing ‘Twinkle’ to him?” This is the thing that really blew me away: Instead of playing the little heroine in her story about this and saying, “I sang ‘Twinkle’ to him,” she didn’t. She wrote about how she didn’t, couldn’t, wouldn’t do it and that she was stubborn about it. Would not.

Here she is using all of these devices that she had seen in the writing in the books and novels that she’d been reading. She was pulling them in and using them in this rough draft. It was three pages from a fifth grade kid. Now she’s really a bright kid and reads tons of books, but still. I thought, ‘How many kids have we been crippling by telling them to write something formulaic when they’re capable of writing something like this?’

Then, she ended it up in this beautiful poetic kind of way where she and the other kids are sent away and she’s driven home—not home, but to a hotel. She describes the sky. There had been a rainstorm and now there was this beautiful rainbow. Her dad had stayed back with her grandfather, and her grandfather died that night. The way she described the rainbow was metaphoric.

It’s a really powerful piece of writing. That was the big epiphany, Nigel, a huge moment and one that has been repeated often with kids, but that was the first time. It made me realize how valuable setting

aside that time was. There was nothing that I needed to feel guilty about. I should be proud of having taken that on, making that time, and giving these kids the opportunity. It made me bolder about demanding that kind of stuff for kids during the day when other projects from administration or whoever might come along. It makes you into an insurgent when you start to see how important this stuff is.

I had her older sister the year before. Because they're very similar, I wonder what her older sister would have written about if she'd had this chance. She was one of those kids that I had shot down with writing. I didn't know what to do with her. Teaching is a guilt-ridden profession. There's no question about it. I think that society really feeds into that and takes advantage of teachers on the basis of that guilt.

There's a guy up at the university who's got a poem about the guillotine of fifth grade and how kids just stop reading and writing in fifth grade. I really feel strongly about these shifts. Those are epiphany moments for me.

Pete's story above is an affirmation of the work he has done in his classroom to provide students with increased authority over their writing. Like Pete, Eli shares a story below that also solidifies his own commitment to providing students with more autonomous writing choices. Agency works through structure in Eli's classes to increase student influence over their writing, which results in writing that Eli also identifies as "real". He shifted the kinds of writing assignments he gave students so that they construct their own questions and select the literature for analytical responses in literature-based courses.

In the story that follows, Eli shares his enthusiasm for an audience that genuinely listens to the writing priorities of the writer at his first encounter with the National Writing Project. He also notes how the agenda was set by the attending teachers for the month-long professional development experience, which surprised

Eli. He had expected to be told what the priorities and activities would be for the Institute. The Summer Institute provides active agency for the teachers in it, as they set their own inquiry paths for research, determine what they will write about, and schedule teaching demonstrations from one another.

*"It takes a lot of trust."* -Eli

I think none of us really knew what to expect. I remember sitting down at the Local Writing Project with the directors, Cal and Linda, and we said, "Okay. Here are these basic things we want to get done: organize into groups, write, submit one piece a week. We'll also read books, but how will we do all of that? How will we spend our time? How will we parse out this stuff?" A lot of people, even more than me, were expecting a class, right? They were going to teach us something. I remember taking seminars in college, but never feeling like I was a part of that sort of curriculum process. They would say here's what you're going to do, and here's what you're going to learn. Instantly, I mean within 15 minutes I knew that these six credits I had signed up for would be radically different than that. We were there to talk about what we knew. Then the summer was just amazing.

Linda brought a reading, and Cal did a writing prompt, and we sat, and we wrote. When has that ever been asked of you before, you know? Then they wanted to genuinely hear what we had written. I tried to bring that back into my classroom. It was a really small room that year. We had, I think, 18 people – it was a lot. After that first reading, where we just sort of read around the table. I think I knew instantly that there were people in that room who had a lot to teach me, and that I probably had something that other people would find valuable.

Eli brought back a different kind of writing process to the classroom from his Summer Institute experience. He changed from a single writing prompt for a single text to an "inquiry-based" model that provided heuristic structures to scaffold an inquiry structured by students. (See Appendix B, Figures 2, 3, and 4 for examples of heuristic structures that guide student inquiry in an American literature course.) This shift changes student writing for the better as a result of students working out

inquiry questions in a direction they choose. He contrasts this with conventional writing tasks and concludes that the “real” thinking of constructing students’ own questions is preferable to a carefully constructed, uniform writing task, even if the writing products are less refined than what they would be under a more discretely directed writing task.

Things have become very inquiry-based for me. I lay out heuristics, which is a hard kind of academic work that helps us read really challenging academic texts. So many of the kids, sophomores in particular, are not primed to ask their own questions. It’s a real challenge. There’s that battle. Once they make that shift to writing their own questions, the writing gets better. It’s not like all of a sudden they’re writing perfectly executed papers, but they’re asking real questions that matter to them. From a teaching perspective when you get stuff that seems to matter to them in their writing, it’s so much more compelling to read it. It’s less painful.

The other option for me, and there are other teachers doing this in my English department, is to get everybody to write exactly the same paper and you work on it for a month to make the exact same 70 versions of that paper technically perfect. You can sit back as a teacher and think, “Damn, look at how good all that writing is.” But they’re all exactly the same. I would prefer, and this doesn’t sit well with everybody, to send kids onto college knowing how to find their own meaning in writing assignments than have them be technically perfect. But for students to have never critically thought about a question, or come up with their own question –That’s satisfying. I feel like the composition instructors and professors I know agree with me on that firmly. It’s an uglier process. You might get a paper that is a polished draft at the end of the assignment that has a lot of gaps and holes, but it’s real thinking.

A student’s strongest expression of agency is what Eli calls “writing for self”.

When students write for their own purposes, the act is not a panacea for good writing. Shifting purposes brings with it complex issues, unpredictable variance,

and sometimes failure. But it can also empower students to accomplish difficult, high-value work.

The other transition is the writing for self. There are a lot of different variations. One student last semester who had all kinds of turmoil in her life – awful stuff – it took her a long time to start writing about the stuff that she needed to write about. It takes a lot of trust. You’re trusting that people won’t reject you for writing like that or make fun of you, and they have to see it week after week after week. By the end, this girl was writing things that were just mind blowing – just the honesty. She was working in metaphor a lot of the time, too. She’d put this in front of me and say, “This is like, intensely personal. Like, do you think I can post this?” I’d look at it and say, “Well, you’re speaking in euphemisms throughout this whole thing. You’ve told me it’s intensely personal so I can see that it is.” To write about abuse and to put that out there for 70 other seniors in high school, it’s nuts; it embraces that cathartic kind of thing. For her I’d say it took 11 of the 15 weeks to make that transition.

Others are super stoked. They’re like, “Sweet. I can write for the self.” I had one girl who loved academic writing, so she basically said, “Screw your creative writing thing, I’m gonna write academic papers every week.” I said, “Sweet. Do it.” I think she wanted more resistance. When I gave her permission, it became a lot less interesting. She got pissed because nobody would ever read her work. She would write some pretty interesting stuff, but they were six-page essays posted weekly, and there would be zero comments besides mine, but she didn’t want me to read it. She didn’t care what I had to say. Then she got frustrated and actually just shut down. It was really weird, the idea of writing just for the self, and the fact that no one else liked it. The feedback was silence, which is the worst thing that a writer can get. I had some others who really were stoked that they can write for their peers and within a week or two, they would write stuff that they knew people would like. But I could see that it was kind of contrived. They’re just writing to please the audience. Then they find a way to also work in real stuff too.

Below, a student takes agency in his own way, rejecting what Eli offered because the student sensed the imposition of school structures in the offering, which the student consistently rejects. Even though Eli shifts his classroom

structures to advantage students by creating space for their priorities, there are still other structures beyond the classroom at work that contend with Eli's shift toward agency on behalf of his students. This reveals tension between Eli's priorities, school priorities, and the students' priorities. Issues like grades, bell schedules, and attendance hang in the background.

Here the student struggles with tensions between personal integrity and the desire to advance within a system that might compromise that integrity.

The spaces Eli provides in his classroom and online provide a middle ground that after some time, the student finds acceptable and useful for his own purposes.

I had a kid last year in sophomore English who turned in one paper all year and failed. It was late in the year, and he just saw straight through any kind of academic bullshit. If it was schoolish, he just wouldn't do it. He was very committed to that, but he didn't want to fail. He wants to go college. He wants a high school diploma. But he would just call bullshit. We would talk about it fairly frequently, and I'd ask, "What isn't working for you about this assignment?" When I would ask him how we might fix it, he said, "I don't want to fix it." But there was one paper – more of an open-ended paper where I said, "You need to incorporate this many outside sources. I want you to get caught up in a conversation and then forward on parts of that to your classmates," because we had already fully shifted the audience. They were writing for each other, so I said, "I want you to learn something and then give us parts of it."

He's a doer, not a thinker, but he knows that about himself. He rides the dunes in St. Antony all the time. One of his buddies had died at the dunes within the last couple years. He basically did a cost-benefit analysis. He even found a heuristic to use and asked was it worth it, which became his inquiry question. He found fifteen sources and put them in his paper. It was in the top five papers out of fifty sophomores. It was fascinating. He concluded that he would keep doing this, even though people around him were dying. I thought this was a classic question.

When Pete and Eli shared their stories of students who acted on agency extended to them in their classroom environments, it was clear to me that both Pete and Eli held the work these students did in high regard. When Pete shared his story about the granddaughter's refusal to sing to her dying grandfather, Pete was visibly moved by the memory and the significance that such a story held for the students in his classroom. Likewise, Eli also expressed considerable admiration for the young man who took of the question of danger and dirt bikes with such eloquence and analytical rigor. These stories helped me understand how each narrative thread worked together in Eli and Pete's classrooms.

#### Synthesis and Observations of Narrative Resonant Threads

I visited each participant's classroom on multiple occasions throughout a complete writing assignment cycle, working with students and participating in their writing experiences. Each writing experience with students reminded me of my own stories and experiences. In the section that follows, I offer two of my own stories from time I spent in Pete and Eli's classrooms, along with two works of synthesis that summarize the findings for each thread, starting with the structures I observed in Pete's classroom.

#### Structure

When I returned to Pete's classroom and participated in his workshop, the room was busy from the moment students entered to their dismissal time. On the

second day I visited, Pete had drawn a map of his neighborhood on the dry erase board and explained that we would draw maps that prompted stories in our minds. Pete drew another map, a map of his father, and went on to have us map whatever we imagined. I drew a map of a creek I explored as a boy. Others drew maps of playgrounds, cabins, rivers, and even a gopher hole.

Once the maps are drawn, we started to write flash drafts, which are drafts that take no more than twenty minutes to complete, beginning to end. Pete spent the next few days having us write five flash drafts. I set to work next to a couple of students at an empty spot on the corner of their six-person table and was immediately absorbed by the work of reconstructing a particular creek walk with my childhood friends, Johnny Jackson and Stephen Flett. The room hummed with students writing for the remaining twenty minutes. When it came time to share my work with the students at my table, I was at one time pleased and tentative to have an audience for my writing. Below, I synthesize the impact of audience on teaching and writing.

### Audience

One significant structural shift reflects the National Writing Projects' professional development model, which asks teachers to share their own effective instructional practices peer to peer. While Eli speaks of this change in audience more frequently, I saw both teachers use peer audiences nearly every time students wrote, so the peer audience is a substantial part of both teachers' writing program. When I participated in both classrooms' writing tasks, we had time nearly every day

to share writing with peers, usually sitting at a table with four to six students. One of the effects of peer audiences is that students have their writing read by someone almost every time they write, which is beyond the reach of what one teacher could accomplish in the course of a class period. Classrooms of over twenty students for multiple periods a day results in hundreds of writing pieces read every time peers interact with writing.

Classroom structures were consistently challenged and changed by both Pete and Eli throughout their stories. Both participants challenged a uniform approach to writing instruction where each student is asked to do the same task, using a similar writing method and/or focused on the same task as all other students. For Eli, this meant rewriting much of his planned assignments at the secondary level and developing online communities for peer interaction. For Pete, this meant introducing more time for writing and a wider variety of writing choices for his elementary and middle school students that included writing in a way that incorporates students' personal contexts. Each considered use of audience in the structural changes Pete and Eli introduce into their teaching stories implies some level of risk. In the following section, I share a story of risk from a time I participated in Eli's class.

### Risk

I recall visiting Eli's room on one occasion toward the end of a semester. He had invited me to witness a classroom tradition he calls "ceremony". The ceremony celebrates the end a major writing project, in this case a final portfolio. The

celebration combines a reflection, performance, and party atmosphere with a tremendous amount of energy generated by Eli and his students. Many of these students were graduating seniors who seemed comfortable sharing some of their writing publicly. Of course, it helps that we brought snacks and drinks to share and that Eli fired up his substantial sound system and colored strobe lights – a benefit of housing the prom committee’s equipment in his classroom.

I returned to Eli’s class to witness another celebration that took place in the fall with a new group of students experiencing Eli’s ceremony for the first time. When I first saw his ceremony, did not realize reading out loud to an entire class was so intimidating for many, especially when compared to the previous group of comfortable veteran seniors. I noticed this time that Eli provided support and affirmation as he walked students through the liturgy of his ceremony. It reminded me of several times I had read my own writing in public. I clearly remembered my hands shaking in my own past reading experiences as students started to nervously thank their peer readers publicly and then eventually relax as they shared excerpts from their writing to a broader audience. Eli shepherded his student readers through the risky proposition of reading their writing out loud. Being there reminded me of the value the National Writing Project places on public reading. As the Local Project leader, Cal put it once during my own Summer Institute experience, “Sometimes we need to read our writing out loud and hear no more response than applause.” The simplicity and power of hearing people clap when I

read gave me the feeling that my writing mattered. Below, I consider agency as a culminating thread that depends on the first three threads.

### Agency

The previous narrative threads of *structure*, *risk*, and *audience* are centered on empowering acts of *agency*. The agency fostered by Pete and Eli encourages writers to determine considerably more about the structure and content of their writing. The Writing Project accomplishes this when it asks teachers to write and research according to their own interests and to share what works well in their own classrooms with other teachers. A notable feature of the National Writing Project is the collaborative nature of its professional development endeavors. This is the foundational professional development act of the National Writing Project that empowers teachers with the assumption that teachers are best equipped to make curricular decisions about their own classrooms.

Both Pete and Eli implied an environment of enfranchisement to the youth in their classrooms that reflects the professional development they experienced at Summer and Advanced Institutes of the National Writing Project. Each thread described above has a direct and a parallel presence in the classrooms of these teachers and the Institutes of the Writing Project. The stories that Pete and Eli shared and the time I spent in their respective classrooms reveal each thread in a way that writes *agency* as a kind of conclusion to their stories. In the next chapter, I will discuss the lessons I learned and the implications those lessons suggest for each resonant narrative thread.

## CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Clandinin and Connelly frame narrative understanding as a retelling of the three-dimensional storied experiences of a person's life grounded in place, people, and time. Within this space, we study the "experience of experience" (2000, p. 189) for the purpose of opening up new possibilities for living and doing. In the previous chapter, I offered two narratives from the lives of two teachers to examine the research puzzles (Clandinin, 2013): What are the features of a professional development model that facilitate transformation learning over time? How do participants view the way these features of a transformative professional development model inform their classroom instruction?

The narratives in chapter four were constructed from the transcribed conversations between myself and the participants over time; however, "one may observe a teacher in a classroom and count the number of...utterances, but the narrative inquirer hardly knows what to make of this without knowing the narrative threads at work" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78). In this chapter, I will discuss four narrative threads that reverberate throughout participants' stories. Within the four sections for each narrative thread, I will discuss lessons learned from participant stories. Additionally, I will discuss the implications for research, theory, and practice.

A resonant narrative thread might be thought of as a type of qualitative analytical “theme” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 275). Clandinin explains unpacking themes or threads within a narrative is accomplished “by...following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual’s narrative account” (2013, p. 132). While there are a number of possible threads that play important roles in the storied lives represented here, I propose to focus on four resonant narrative threads for discussion: risk, audience, structure, and agency. Again, each of these resonant narrative threads emerged from my analysis of data relevant to this study. I define each thread as follows:

- *Structure*: The organization of classroom instruction, from its furniture layout to the way assignments are structured.
- *Audience*: To whom a writer writes. In a classroom, this is conventionally the teacher.
- *Risk*: Regard for potential loss, a noun and a verb that connotes awareness of potential negative consequences if one takes a course of action.
- *Agency*: The influence someone has over one’s self and others. Power.

The threads inform each other but contrast enough to be considered separately. Resonant threads move throughout both participant narratives. These narrative threads are central to participants’ experiences and serve as one source of evidence that points to their lives as transformed learners (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor,

2000). It is important to acknowledge the act of selecting pieces of evidence is in itself an act of interpretation (J. Bruner, 2004, p. 692).

### Resonant Narrative Threads

#### Thread 1: Structure

Classroom structures are implied in part by the way teachers set up schedules, classroom furniture, student seating arrangements, and curricular units throughout the academic year. Eli and Pete shared stories of how they used those structures to increase the quality and quantity of student writing. Those stories reflect their satisfaction with the significant impact a structural change like grouping students can have on student writing. In the discussion that follows, I examine the work they did to alter the classroom structures within their sphere of influence as classroom teachers. I begin with the lessons Pete and Eli offer as a result of those particular structural considerations.

Lessons Learned from Pete and Eli. Pete and Eli showed me that structure matters. I learned about this predominantly through their descriptions of structural change. The most significant structural changes were made to how students are organized into writing groups, the process and duration of completing a writing task, and the content of writing tasks, which all contribute to better writing and writing instruction.

One significant structural change in Pete's writing classroom is increased time on task. Time plays a significant role in the different experiences of student

writers: “They get to practice every day for an hour. The difference that we saw in those kids in the first six weeks of fifth grade, compared to kids we’d sent on to sixth grade the year before, was like night and day” (Pete). A second feature of Pete’s instruction to be modified was his reading program, which he changed by asking students to choose thirty-five texts per year. He had them respond to those books by writing a page-long letter to him each week about their reading. The new reading program replaced a greater number of assigned texts and prescribed reading responses. The change in structure made room for student interests in both reading and writing.

Structures make a difference in Eli’s classes in three ways: the structures of his assignments, the delivery of his content, and the way students work together in small peer writing groups collaboratively, all of which aim at decentralizing structure. He shares the difference in delivery: “I’ve structured my classes differently. For me to stand in front of the classroom and deliver information is so incredibly rare anymore because it doesn’t feel authentic or valuable” (Eli). He also decentralized his writing tasks immediately upon return from the Writing Project Summer Institute, as he proclaimed that the “scales came off” and writing became an inquiry-based endeavor centered on questions that students construct with a heuristic scaffold provided by Eli.

The structure of a writing community, particularly in small peer groups, can contribute to student writing and student engagement. Students “form mini-communities within the larger community” in Eli’s classroom, which become safe

places of trust and support, which is reflected in Eli's last writing project of the class when he has students write thank-yous to one another for the support and attention they have received throughout the course. Students became attached to these communities, as evidenced by the "drippy rhetoric" of appreciation expressed through the thank-yous. Pete's classes work in similar ways to Eli's by offering substantive feedback in groups over time. While Pete's groups collaborate mostly in person, Eli's students work both online and in person. Those communities engender confidence and trust in one another, which increases peer-to-peer interaction over writing and creates more junctions in the writing process where the writing is heard and the student receives feedback.

Implications. Both Pete and Eli dramatically shift the workings of their classrooms by instituting peer writing and reading groups that interact and form communities. This reflects what we know about cognitively situated learning, which produces authentic learning experiences that can be connected more readily to a student's world outside of school (Putnam & Borko, 2000). The structural feature of peer reading and writing groups were implemented over time and repeated to the extent that this becomes a regular classroom practice. Peer writing and reading groups need to become a normative classroom structure, which can happen in person, online, or both.

Each participant employs writing tasks that shift the questioner role from the teacher to the student, which reflects a more inquiry-based approach. Pete and Eli profess the work of getting students to formulate writing pathways and questions

for inquiry is messy and difficult, but those pathways yield more authentic writing, which is inline with constructivist notions of practice (Putnam & Borko, 1997). Additionally, both teachers provide scaffolding to help with the tough work of inquiry, Pete through mentor texts and Eli through heuristic structures that help students narrow and focus their inquiry. The work of inquiry must be carefully, consciously constructed with students in mind.

Inquiry-based classroom instruction in small peer groups is not completely unknown in English language arts education. While the structures used by participants in this study are not the norm, they do exist elsewhere, particularly in science education (“NSTA Position Statement: Scientific Inquiry,” 2004). A fruitful research pathway would start with extant inquiry models and attempt to aggregate what data is available to find out the effects of inquiry-based learning on student achievement within and across disciplines. Also, I recommend a future research pathway that investigates methods of assessment and results of assessment in workshop environments, which would most likely prove fruitful subjects to study if we follow trajectories of “real” and “authentic” writing.

The National Writing Project experiences of both participants precipitate dramatic shifts in classroom structures that include pedagogical structures of content delivery, classroom organization, and the pedagogy of assignment structures. A particular feature of the pedagogical shift in assignment structure in both classrooms centered on allowing students to choose writing directions instead of the teacher determining those writing directions completely. Whitney points out

the positive effects of blending personal and professional purposes and subjects in teacher writing during professional development experiences and recommends that professional development include the “teacher as person in its vision” (Whitney, 2008). Whitney also recommends further research into the effects of blending personal and professional purposes in teacher writing on teacher Transformative Learning. I recommend we include thinking that recognizes the contexts and priorities of our students’ lives in our instructional planning and investigate the effects of blending personal and school (professional) writing not only on student learning, but also on perspective transformation in youth.

Borko and Putnam (1997) reiterate what they observe as the nearly mantra-like characteristics of professional development structures that positively impact teacher learning, one of which is specific to learning structures: “Teachers should be treated as active learners who construct their own understandings” (p. 1225). A few years later, Borko and Putnam repeat and illuminate a similar notion by outlining a major paradigmatic shift in the teaching and learning landscape from a behaviorist perspective to cognitive or a situative perspective, where the physical and social contexts “...become a fundamental part of what is learned...” (2000, p. 4).

Consideration of these contexts in learning and learners produces authentic learning activities, which consider the every-day matters of cultural/social context (Borko, 2004).

Professional development for teacher learning might succeed at a higher rate if instruction takes these cognitively situated contexts into account when

structuring activities for teacher development. Professional development must shift its structures to reflect the contexts in which teachers teach and in a way that enables teachers to construct new understandings from within their situated communities of practice. When that happens, as Eli and Pete's experiences reflect, teachers can change perspective and practice.

### Thread 2: Audience

The expected audience for writing in school is the teacher. Both Pete and Eli intentionally shifted audience from teacher to teacher and peers. This changed students' writing practices and products. Both participants shared their increased satisfaction with student writing and observed increased student engagement with writing. Broadening writing audiences shifted focus to peer communities, which fostered more frequent interactions with writing during the composition process. In Eli's class, this happens both person-to-person and online, where the writing communities established at table groups are extrapolated to a digital environment. In Pete's classroom, the exchanges between peers happen face-to-face in table groups. For both classes, there are multiple contacts between writers about their writing throughout the course of any given writing task. These exchanges effectively create new, multiple audiences for student writers multiple times over a writing period.

Lessons Learned from Pete and Eli. Shifting audiences to peer groups increases the frequency students stop and reflect on their writing during the writing

process because of frequent peer sharing. Adding peers as an audience increases student engagement. When I participated in peer writing groups in both participants' classes, we had time to receive feedback from multiple readers for the same piece of writing. Both Pete and Eli confirmed that this process was an ongoing, regular part of their writing structures.

In addition to the increase in frequency of feedback, engagement with writing increases with peer audiences. This makes sense to Pete because it reminds him of how professional writers practice writing when he remarks, "I thought if you want to find out how professionals learn how to write, go to a pro. Look at that model. A lot of writers exchange work" (Pete). Once this sharing is set in motion by Pete's switch to the workshop model, he notices "...a real hunger in my own students to share their own writing" (Pete).

Eli considers his motivation for changing audience as grounded in the notion that the teacher-as-audience conventional model is problematic: "Can teachers be authentic audiences? I think the answer is essentially, no" (Eli) But that shift is not entirely without resistance. Eli noticed that some students were not enthusiastic or engaged, but they undergo a shift in perspective when he shares that, "oftentimes by the end and realize, 'Oh, I started writing for this person, and I was anxious to see what they thought.' Students realize, 'I really needed somebody to acknowledge my work that wasn't a teacher,' because a teacher has to" (Eli).

Peer audiences improve student writing. Both Pete and Eli observe significant changes in the way students interact with one another and with their

own writing. Their students teach us that the normal construct of teacher as audience is a limiting factor in their writing. When students write for each other, their writing takes on an authentic, “real” quality that both Pete and Eli admire. Such authentic writing motivates Pete to consider broadening his students’ audience when he shares that, “I would love next year to put their restaurant reviews into some kind of anthology and publish it (Pete). At some point in transitioning to peer audiences, the teacher becomes less prominent in the focus of student writing, which Eli notes as he recalls that he “become(s) more a part of the background than the primary audience. It’s just so much more real when they write for one another. They have their ideal audience” (Eli).

Implications. Audience informs writing. Shifting to a peer audience in a way that enables regular peer interaction with writing increases the frequency of feedback before a writing product is finalized, which is an iteration of process writing models sustained and supported by constructs such as a writing workshop. Process writing models increases student achievement in writing (Whitney et al., 2008). Given the physical limitations of the frequency of teacher contact with individual student writing during the process of constructing any given writing task, a peer audience mitigates this physical limitation.

Eli and Pete have shared positive student reactions to peer audiences. I recommend investigation into the effects of peer audiences from the student perspective. Additionally, the writing that students produce in classrooms where peer writing groups are regularly implemented could be compared to writing

generated by assignments that preclude peer interaction. Shifting audience changes student perspectives and student writing. It also changes the perspectives and practical roles of teachers in the classroom as a different kind of audience.

Shifting writing audiences is not uncommon to writing instruction, but modifying *students'* perception of teacher-as-audience seems to have made a noticeable positive difference in these two classrooms. Investigation and experimentation in this direction with particular attention to confounding the teacher-as-sole-audience reality of most classrooms is a difficult pathway, given that the teacher is in most cases the final evaluator and grader of student writing (Elbow, 1973). But these teachers have managed to work around that. Future investigation into audience perception could reveal more about the effects on student writing, student writing quality. Additionally, investigation into audience perception could provide insight into options teachers have for decentering themselves from their role as the primary audience for student writing. A long time ago, Peter Elbow asked introductory level college writing instructors to consider writing's effects on the reader (audience) more carefully (Elbow, 1968). We should continue to ask that question.

Whitney, et al (2008) contend that, while process-oriented writing is well known and reflected commonly in classroom discourse to the extent that it is even anthologized in texts teachers use, the varied conceptualization of what writing process means and looks like in classroom instruction produces equally varied results in student writing. Teachers who experience writing with peer audiences

will likely be more inclined to make that definitive shift in their classroom writing instruction (Whitney et al., 2008; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Professional development for writing instruction should include experiential teacher participation in writing with and for peers over extended periods of time.

When Mezirow (1990) and Whitney (2008) talk about triggering experiences associated with perspective transformation and Transformation Learning, is there evidence here or elsewhere that triggering experiences can be constructed by teachers in their classrooms for students and for themselves by shifting writing audiences via peer constructed groupings? Can a teacher intentionally sponsor Transformation Learning for youth?

### Thread 3: Risk

Both participants assumed and recognized risk when they changed classroom instructional methods to improve student writing. Because their actions disrupted the existing expectations and structures of classroom writing, both Eli and Pete articulated the risks of negative perception about classroom instruction and the subsequent risks a writer must take to participate in the writing workshop model, with features like increased public sharing of writing, increased time investment, and increased personal engagement with writing tasks.

Lessons Learned from Pete and Eli. Teachers must be willing to take risks in shifting writing instruction practices, and teachers can encourage students to take risks to get “real” writing from students. Both Pete and Eli recognized this from their

initial participation in the Writing Project. Tension exists between writing instruction prescribed from outside the classroom versus what teachers can create specifically for their students' contexts. Pete's experience at the Local Writing Project promotes "this frame of mind for experimentation and gives us some confidence to take some risks (like) give-the-kids-more-choice-and-voice approaches to teaching writing versus formulaic approaches, which is so Writing Project" (Pete).

Eli expresses a similar encounter with encouraged risk at the Writing project: "The risk thing, I felt the first frickin' morning, the directors said, 'Oh, let's all read,' and everyone said, 'Phssh. Right.' But then within three days, there's people crying – not just readers, but audience members empathizing with the writer" (Eli). In his classroom, Eli focuses more on the risks of individual writing, which becomes central to his own teaching practices: "I think the Local Writing Project stuff has really made me aware of risk, vulnerability, but then also the power of sharing writing as a community builder" (Eli).

Being willing to advantage children by challenging and changing normative classroom structures is not without risk or worry. Pete expressed concern for resistance to structural changes within his school context: "What I really mean is a willingness to be subversive, a willingness to take risks. When we started doing the writing workshop approach, we were subversives at my elementary school." (Pete)

If the writing environment allows students to risk writing in their voices for their purposes, students are more engaged and writing improves. But Eli expressed

concern that the writing improvement he experienced could be seen as “less structurally sound” or otherwise judged as “more raw”. However, he “would prefer, and this doesn’t sit well with everybody, to send kids onto college knowing how to find their own meaning in writing assignments than have them be technically perfect” (Eli).

The architecture of risk in Eli’s class has an end in mind – confidence enough to share risky, “real” writing in the classroom community. Eli wants to reinforce the priority of writing for the writer’s purposes because “real” writing that expresses those priorities is preferable to the “academic bullshit dishonest kinds of writing” for purposes and audiences contrary to student purposes: “I’ve had people come back to me at the end of semesters where they’ve clearly made a transition...to writing for real at some point. They say, “I wouldn’t have done this had you not constantly been saying, “Take risks, take risks, take risks”” (Eli).

Once Pete had shifted his classroom structures, student writing reinforced his commitment to changing those practices even when such a shift involved risk. In reference to a sophisticated piece of student writing about a young girl’s experience of the loss of her grandfather, Pete noted: “It’s a really powerful piece of writing. It made me bolder about demanding that kind of stuff for kids during the day. It makes you into an insurgent when you start to see how important this stuff is” (Pete).

Implications. Changing classroom instruction is not easy. Bratcher and Stroble (1994) note in their longitudinal study of a National Writing Project site that process-oriented writing instruction can take time and significant practice to

effectively integrate into classroom practice. They cite Appleby, Langer, and Mullis' 1986 investigation into the effectiveness of process-oriented writing instruction and raise questions about its effectiveness, citing a superficial application of the writing process in classrooms as a significant factor in writing process instruction's lack of effects on observed student writing. Bratcher and Stroble (1994) point out that over multiple years, teachers seem to shift from superficial engagement with writing-process instruction to fully integrating process-oriented writing instruction after three years, which positively impacts student writing. Setting up a classroom to teach writing process involves a significant time investment, heightening the risk for the teacher because of the professional demands placed on allotted instructional time. Pete and Eli devoted years to changing their writing instruction, which risks the loss of substantial instructional time and energy if the endeavor fails. Teachers must be willing to risk significant time and energy investment in their writing instruction.

National Writing Project experiences encourage taking risks in modifying classroom approaches to writing instruction (Gray, 2000). Eli's sense of risk comes from the tension between orthodox expectations for writing quality and the quality of the writing he gets from higher-risk writing communities: "Their writing is better, but I think if anybody else were reading it, they wouldn't think so because it's raw. It's not as polished. It doesn't fit some of those formulas that we think of when we think of an academic piece" (Eli). This opens up a potentially productive research pathway in learning about writing that teachers and students consider authentic

and real. What makes writing authentic and real? How does such writing score on measures of writing quality? What are the effects of student engagement on writing over time?

When Eli talks about the role of risk in the transformation of student writing from “...dishonest kinds of writing” to writing that is more “real” and authentic, youth seem to experience a transformative kind of learning of their own. Might that confound previously constructed notions of Transformation Learning Theory that limit transformation to adult learners (Habermas, 1984; Mezirow, 1990)? Can youth transform their perspectives through similar experiences, and what role does risk play?

Sheridan Blau was correct in his prediction that the National Writing Project has a kind of revolutionary power (Blau, 1988). But the scale of that revolution did not meet his expectation that all professional development would be changed by the powerful impact of the National Writing Project on teacher and student learning (Borko, 2004; Loveless, 2014). Is the risk inherent in changing the structures of classrooms a deterrent to changing instructional practices? Further, do the in-place structures in schools, districts, and states also deter teachers from innovating in the classroom?

#### Thread 4: Agency

Providing agency to students has a favorable impact on student writing dramatic enough to have kept both Eli and Pete on their current writing instruction trajectory for years. Both teachers continue to practice writing workshops that

decentralize audiences and enfranchise student voices, which suggests that while they remain conscious of the dissonance between conventional writing expectations and the expectations of their own classrooms, they are confidently pleased with the writing their students produce. Agency was experienced relative to participants' teaching experiences at the Local Writing Project site both during and after Summer Institutes. Both teachers remarked that this was a central and immediate feature of the Writing Project, which they chose to emulate in their classrooms.

In these classrooms, the shift of audience and the encouragement of students to develop their own voice changes the writing to something both teachers identify as more "real" and "authentic". To accomplish this, Pete and Eli use their authority to increase student agency over writing, thereby shifting the classroom structures and the balance of power, which is not always readily accepted by students because the shift bumps up against conventional expectations (hooks, 2008).

Lessons Learned from Pete and Eli. When both Eli and Pete experienced an increased sense of professional agency through participation in the Local Writing Project Summer Institute, they chose to try a similar approach to writing with their students by implementing a writing workshop model that features increased student agency in matters of writing choice. Pete sees writing produced by his students within the workshop model as an affirmation of his decision to diverge from conventional writing curriculum when he remarks that, "It made me bolder about demanding that kind of stuff for kids. It makes you into an insurgent" (Pete). Both personal and student-focused agency over writing structures and tasks has

made for better, more empowered writing from students and more empowered teaching experiences for Pete and Eli.

When Pete and Eli's students are given authorial agency over choices of question, audience, and text, they respond with stronger writing that expresses each student's voice more clearly, which Pete and Eli describe as authentic and real. Student writing is more compelling to read. Pete's reluctance to read student writing dissipates and is replaced with a genuine interest and enthusiasm for reading and interacting with student writing when he notes that "these kids were writing really moving narratives about their lives because they get to write what they want. They realize they can write with their own voice, they can say things in a way that's natural to them, and I'm going respect that" (Pete).

Implications. Whitney's (2008) research recommendation, inquiry into classroom practice changes motivated by agency and authority, is addressed in both narratives. Pete and Eli both narrate a dramatic, long-term change in classroom practices. Both contexts meet with resistance, but each teacher moves ahead to establish classrooms characterized by increased agency of students, shifts in audience away from teachers to peers and self, and a broadening of writing choices in response to specific writing tasks. The result of increased agency in teachers is to share that agency with students.

In Whitney's (2008) work on the transformative power of National Writing Project Summer Institutes on teacher learning, she wonders what happens over time to these transformed teachers' lives after Summer Institutes. Specifically, she

opens three lines of future inquiry: How do issues of stance, authority, and identity within writing activities contribute to teacher transformation? Second, what can we learn about the complex relationship between personal and professional writing, particularly in light of her findings that each teacher participant in her study engaged in both personal and professional types of writing throughout their transformative Summer Institute experiences? Third, how do epistemological shifts that precipitate changes in teacher agency and authority influence the classroom? Altogether, Whitney wonders what transformational issues influence new classroom practices (Whitney, 2008).

The issues Whitney outlines are interdependent and foundationally linked by agency. The first consideration – how stance, identity, and agency within writing contribute to teacher transformation is somewhat complexified by the narratives, as we see in both cases, agency, while clearly taken by both teachers as they restructure their classes in the face of systemic resistance, often comes from *student* writing. Narratives here suggest that teacher transformation is sustained and continued in a context where agency – which I think of as influence over one's situation, in this case writing – is extended and adopted by teachers *and students*. I recommend we explore the interplay between student agency and teacher transformation. For the practical application of theoretical implications to the classroom, I recommend future research into the quantitative effects of shared agency on student writing quality over time, as well as qualitative descriptions

about the nature of student writing in more agentic contexts. Does student writing improve by any measure in more agentic contexts, and what is that writing like?

The narratives here did not address Whitney's second consideration –the interplay between personal and professional writing for teachers; however, a future research pathway should take up the issue of personal and professional writing interplay in light of students and their writing. For example, what happens to the quality of student writing when students are able to personalize an analytical essay question? That happens frequently in Eli's class. And he wonders about the merit of his students' writing from time to time; although, he understands the quality of that work in a holistic sense has improved. Perhaps inquiry would bring to light more precise understandings about "real" and "authentic" writing and more central to Whitney's question, we would learn about the interplay of *student* agency and teacher transformation, the implication being that student agency is related to teacher transformation.

The theoretical framework that coexists with the narrative work in this study – notions of Transformation Learning – provides a contiguous strand of its own that works its way from the National Writing Project experiences of teachers to youth writing with their own voices for their own purposes. I wonder about both Habermas' (1984) and Mezirow's (1991) claim that Communicative Action and Transformative Learning are the purvey of adults. Both narratives reveal motion toward the democratization of communication and transformed perspectives of youth. However, adults directed the youth in this study; even when that direction is

toward emancipatory work, it is still confounded with the authority structures of adults. I recommend investigation into the relationship between agency, youth writing, and Transformation Learning outside adult structures and spaces.

Transformation Learning is at the heart of the National Writing Project experience and network. It is an organized effort to privilege teacher knowledge and provide a tapestry of experiences and encounters that frequently lead to shifts in perspective, identity, and practice (Gray, 2000; Lieberman, 1997; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). The narratives represented here affirm those findings and suppositions. Both teachers express transformative experiences during and after their initial Summer Institutes. These narratives open new territory for Whitney and Mezirow's work in the classroom years after teachers have experienced a transformative learning experience and after they have encountered the National Writing Project Summer Institute.

Eli and Pete offer compelling stories about individual students who responded positively when teachers used their positions to enhance student agency over student writing. Their stories imply two potentially productive courses of action in the writing classroom: First, restructure classes to favor more student influence over the construction of writing tasks, including the texts involved with text-based writing prompts. Second, foster growth of classroom peer reading and process-oriented writing communities over time. Process-oriented writing reflects writing practices associated with improved student performance (Whitney et al.,

2008; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Structures like writing workshops foster such communities (Calkins, 1986; Elbow, 1973).

A primary motivation for investigating teacher Transformation Learning within the context of the National Writing Project is the puzzling weakness of professional development in American education. My own experience, the experiences of many colleagues, and the extant research (Archibald et al, 2011; Lieberman, 1997; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Loveless, 2014) continue to cry out for rethinking and reshaping policy toward teacher professional development and learning. At the same time, we are quantitatively and qualitatively aware that the National Writing Project's model of professional development effectively helps teachers learn how to foster writing improvement with their students (Blau, 1988, 1993; Bratcher & Stroble, 1994; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Smith, 1996).

The experiences of these two teachers and the model of the National Writing Project suggest that we take a look at positionality – the agency of teachers in professional development contexts. Granting of agency to primary actors – teachers and students – in the educational milieu thematically cuts across the Writing Project and into the classrooms of teachers. This narrative and the larger narrative of the National Writing Project run counter to the Grand Narrative “...of the technical teacher education we are encouraged to sponsor” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 36) by reducing teacher education and development to a discrete set of procedures delivered to teachers without much teacher input.

School improvement is related to issues of actor agency. The National Writing Project model suggests that when we position people with some authority over the direction of their lives and livelihood, teacher learning and student improvement follow. This learning is a kind of liberative act (Bandura, 1997; Biko, 1978; Freire, 2000). When I think about professional development and classroom instruction in light of *power*, agency, and influence, this research puzzle begins to make sense. Perhaps resistance to change, both to and from students, teachers, and their surrounding contextual structures is related to how much perceived influence actors wield over their respective professional, academic, and personal lives. While this statement and this study have the benefit of a two-camera perspective – looking in from the reductionist grand narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and looking out from the storied lives of teachers and students, the fact remains that institutional change is difficult. Thus a research puzzle unfolds for future examination from these narratives: when it seems a lack of agency negatively influences learning for both youth (Trites, 2000) and adults (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2000; Whitney, 2009), why do we persist in offering teachers and students centralized, hierarchical models of instruction and professional development?

### Final Implications

Effective teacher professional development models feature decentralized delivery structures, awareness of teacher contexts, and agency for teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Wei et al.,

2009). These same learning conditions and structures work to improve student writing experiences when they were implemented in Pete and Eli's classrooms. Consider the characteristics of effective professional development expressed by Lieberman and Mace in 2008 via an open letter to the next president of the United States in which they state that the "...transformation of teacher in-service as powerful means to education reform" (p. 226) should be hallmarked by collaborative learning communities that evolve over time to scholarly research and the cooperative building of professional practices. The National Writing Project's individual sites do this as a matter of common practice (Gray, 2000; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Pete and Eli's stories taught me that the same methods teachers use to develop their own practices in National Writing Project sites are passed down to their students and practiced in classrooms. These teachers build collaborative communities, privilege student knowledge, experience, and priorities, and encourage students to work toward substantial rigor in understanding their own writing, the writing of their peers, and writing in mentor texts. I entered the worlds of Pete and Eli as a privileged guest. From that privileged place I learned that the most powerful work we do is to share our transformative experiences with our students so that students see themselves in a classroom constructed with and for them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION AND CONSENT

## PERMISSION TO RESEARCH FROM LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

### External Research Request for Access Form

8/18/2015

**Nigel Waterton**

**406-994-3402**

**nigel.waterton@montana.edu**

**Montana State University, Reid Hall**

**Bozeman, MT 59717-2880**

Title of Project (*must match title approved by your IRB*): **Teacher Consultant Transformation in the Local Writing Project (LWP) [NWO60313-EX]**

**Abstract** (Describe in 700 words or less what your project will address; the procedures you will employ; the expected outcome in terms of your hypotheses, objectives and possible benefits your completed project will have for The School District (SD). This abstract must be a synthesized statement. Please do not simply state “see attached” as most protocols will exceed this limit.):

I propose to investigate the influence of the National Writing Project’s local expression –the Yellowstone Writing Project’s influence on the teaching lives of writing instructors over time. A case study of one participant in SD who has experienced the National Writing Project’s professional development model more than three years ago, the investigator seeks to understand the experiences of those instructors in the writing classroom since their engagement with the Project. Simply put, we’d like to know if the LWP has made a difference in teachers’ teaching lives, if that difference has been positive, and to what extent.

Data will be collected via qualitative interview outside of school hours, sharing of classroom documents that show the type of writing work done in the classroom, and brief classroom observations, with the researcher serving as volunteer help/participant in writing workshops.

Data Analysis Methodology and Resultant Report – Narrative Analysis.

**Benefit to SD** (500 words or less):

The writing workshop is one of the principle methods employed by folks who experience the Writing Project for writing instruction. While the National Writing Project and its affiliate sites don’t promote a single writing instruction method, there is a general consensus that the writing workshop model works.

Bozeman schools recently adopted this model across its district. The study participant uses the writing workshop model in for classroom instruction and has done so for quite some time. While the study is not primarily focused on writing workshop methodology, the study should reveal deep, anecdotal insight into its implementation and offer a sort of history of its use in the classroom, which may provide valuable insight to others interested in writing workshop models.

Additionally, the relationship between teachers in the Writing Project (WP) and teachers in SD has existed since the WP's inception. Those teachers go on to provide informal and formal professional development for colleagues within the district and beyond. I have personally participated in such professional development and found it to be well received. Folks in WP professional development workshops were quite positive about the experience.

Finally, the more we learn about how WP effects teachers and teaching, the better we're able to continue to offer highly effective teacher professional development for writing instruction, which in turn supports good writing instruction in SD.

1. Number of students (this should be a number (5) or a range (100-150). If none are required, specify "none"): **None**
2. Estimated total time required of each student (this should be expressed as total hours per student. If none, specify "none"): **None**
3. Number of teachers required: **1**
4. Estimated total time required of each teacher (this should be expressed in total hours per teacher): **I'll be working with the teacher as a volunteer in his classroom, so there's no time required of the teacher away from the normal daily classroom routine. The duration of the collaboration will be one week or five school days.**
5. Number of parents required: **None**
6. Estimated total time required of each parents (this should be expressed in total number of hours): **None**
7. Number of other SD staff required (this may include principals, clerical, or research staff): **None**
8. Estimated total time required of SD staff (this should be expressed in total number of hours): **None**
9. Will material from the cumulative records of students or teachers be required? **No**
- 9a. If yes, what material? Be specific. Ex: specify math grades instead of grades or reading test scores instead of just test scores. **NA**
- 9b. Is this research being done as part of a degree? **Yes**
10. Will subjects be paid? If so, specify payment: **No**  
Please note: SD staff cannot be paid for tasks that occur during the instructional day.
11. At what grade levels is the project to be conducted? **6th**
12. At what school(s) is the project to be conducted? **The Middle School**
13. How long is the project expected to run? Specify the starting and ending months and years, ex: September 2013 to September 2014. **One week, set at the SD teacher's convenience during October. The specific week is pending your approval.**
14. Will a pilot study be necessary? **No**

15. When will a report of the project's results be available? Specify the month and year. **May 2016**
16. How will subject's anonymity be protected? **Pseudonym and Geographic Pseudonym for School and District names/location: ie...a middle school in a Northwestern school district.**
17. How will parent permission be obtained? If parent permission is not required, specify: **N/A**
18. Additional school resources needed (this may include an interview room, table/chairs or other equipment. **None**

Date of first contact with students: **Approximately October 15<sup>th</sup> (To be determined by classroom teacher.)**

Date of last contact with students: **One week after initial contact day.**

Date by which ALL original data forms will be destroyed (e.g., questionnaires, video tapes): **1 year after completion/submission of study, so approximately May 2017.**

19. Name of Principal Investigator. If you are a student, the principal investigator is your faculty advisor or professor, not you. **Dr. Nick Lux**
20. University and Department Affiliation of Principal Investigator: **Department of Education, Montana State University**
21. Are you an employee of the district? **No**

IRB approval, consent forms and instruments (include copies of the following documents in a single PDF file: your abstract, IRB approval, consent forms and instruments you intend to use): Interview protocols are semi-structured, modified for each subsequent interview of a single participant, and used outside of school hours. No formal instrument will be used in the observation/volunteer phase of the project other than simple note taking.

(Please See Attached Abstract and IRB Permissions/Exemptions.)

I thank you kindly for your consideration.

Regards,

-Nigel Waterton



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
**For the Protection of Human Subjects**  
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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Nigel Waterton  
**FROM:** Mark Quinn, Chair *Mark Quinn CJ*  
**DATE:** June 3, 2013  
**RE:** "Teacher Consultant Leadership in the Yellowstone Writing Project (YWP)" [NW060313-EX]

The above research, described in your submission of June 3, 2013, is exempt from the requirement of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

- (b) (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- (b) (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- (b) (3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- (b) (4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- (b) (5) Research and demonstration projects, which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- (b) (6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the FDA, or approved by the EPA, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA.

Although review by the Institutional Review Board is not required for the above research, the Committee will be glad to review it. If you wish a review and committee approval, please submit 3 copies of the usual application form and it will be processed by expedited review.

**IRB MODIFICATION**



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
**For the Protection of Human Subjects**  
**FWA 0000165**

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 406-994-5721  
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**MEMORANDUM**  
 .....

**TO:** Nigel Waterton and Nicholas Lux  
**FROM:** Mark Quinn *Mark Quinn CJ*  
 Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
**DATE:** May 19, 2014  
**SUBJECT:** "Teacher Consultant Leadership in the Yellowstone Writing Project (YWP)"  
 [NW060313-EX]

This is to acknowledge receipt of the request dated January 7, 2014 for a minor modification to the above protocol. The request for the following modification is approved.

- *Added title "Teacher Consultant Transformation in the Yellowstone Writing project (YWP);"*
- *Replaced survey with classroom observation;*
- *Modified consent form to reflect changes.*

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

**SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT MONTANA  
STATE UNIVERSITY**

You are being asked to participate in a project designed to understand how [redacted] Writing Project [redacted] WP) Teacher Consultants experience and participate in professional leadership.

Participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a survey (approximately 20 minutes) and may be asked for an interview (approximately 30 minutes) and to respond to a writing prompt (2-6 pages) about your leadership experiences. The project could be beneficial to you because the overall goal is to understand the nature of leadership after participating in the [redacted] Writing Project and to help build future goals and understandings about the type of leadership fostered by the Writing Project. The project involves no foreseeable risks to participants. There will be no cost or compensation for participation.

Subject Identity: Your identity and location will be protected via pseudonym, should you so choose. Conversely, if you would like your identity known, please indicate so below:

I would like my identity to **remain anonymous** via pseudonym. \_\_\_\_\_ (initial here)

I would like my identity **known**. \_\_\_\_\_ (initial here)

Participant Identity Protection in Collected Data: The researcher will harbor data digitally in a password-encrypted environment with access given only to the researcher. Data and any information associated with participant identification will be destroyed/deleted within one year after completion of the project (approximate projected completion in May 2014).

I have read the above and understand the benefits and risks of this project:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of subject) agree to participate. I understand I may later refuse to participate and that I may withdraw from this project at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject, please contact Mark Quinn, IRB Chair, at 406-994-4707 or [ormquinn@montana.edu](mailto:ormquinn@montana.edu).

Regards,

Nigel Waterton  
212 Reid Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717.  
406-994-5788.  
[nigel.waterton@gmail.com](mailto:nigel.waterton@gmail.com)

APPROVED  
MSU IRB  
06/05/2013  
Date approved

**SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY**

You are being asked to participate in a project designed to understand how [redacted] Writing Project [redacted] WP) Teacher Consultants experience transformation learning.

Participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will be asked for an interview (approximately 30 minutes) with the possibility of a follow-up interview, you will be asked to share artifacts like lesson plans that reflect transformation, and to respond to a writing prompt (2-6 pages) about your transformation experiences associated with the [redacted] WP. The project could be beneficial to you because the overall goal is to understand the nature of transformation associated with participating in the [redacted] Writing Project and to help build future goals and understandings about the type of transformation fostered by the Writing Project. The project involves no foreseeable risks to participants. There will be no cost or compensation for participation.

Subject Identity: Your identity and location will be protected via pseudonym.

Participant Identity Protection in Collected Data: The researcher will harbor data digitally in a password-encrypted environment with access given only to the researcher. Data and any information associated with participant identification will be destroyed/deleted within one year after completion of the project (approximate projected completion in September 2014).

I have read the above and understand the benefits and risks of this project:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of subject) agree to participate. I understand I may later refuse to participate and that I may withdraw from this project at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject, please contact Mark Quinn, IRB Chair, at [406-994-4707](tel:406-994-4707) or [ormquinn@montana.edu](mailto:ormquinn@montana.edu).

Regards,

Nigel Waterton  
212 Reid Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717.  
406-994-5788.  
[nigel.waterton@gmail.com](mailto:nigel.waterton@gmail.com)

APPROVED  
MSU IRB  
05/19/2014  
Date approved

APPENDIX B

ARTIFCATS FROM ELI'S CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

English III: Fall 2015  
**Literature of the Early American Colonies**  
 Major Paper #1

Rationale-Thus far, in this course, we have focused our readings around the literature produced early in the colonial history of the Americas (and before). I've argued that, even in the realm of "literature," everything is an argument, and that all arguments are made for certain audiences in certain contexts. And within these arguments there are claims that require effective evidence to support them that makes the speaker seem like a credible source, and that appeal to an audience's emotions and its reason. We've used these "rhetorical" considerations to read. Now, I ask you to use them to write.

Assignment Description-your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to:

- Choose one of the following paper prompts (the one, ideally, that you've already thought the most about, the one you feel you've got something to say about)-
  - Which reading so far best describes/defines/illustrates the kinds of conflict(s) driving early American literature?
  - How did the writers in the early American colonies establish and build credibility (ethos) in their writing?
  - How did their audiences influence the writers of early American literature?
- Read more on that issue (try Wikipedia to start, then follow Works Cited leads). See what others have said, and listen-critically-to the conversation.
- Pick at least one of our readings to really study. Use it to frame, propel, and support your ideas.
- Then craft an argument to convince-around (and citing) your sources-that is directed to a specific audience (your instructor and your classmates) for a specific purpose (what you want those people to think).
- Revise thoughtfully with help from your peers.
- Polish that argument to an error-free shine so that your credibility gleams.
- Reflect on your process and your product during a paper-turning-in ceremony.

**Constraints:** Make things easier on yourself, and adhere to the following-

- The polished version of your argument may NOT be more than **three pages** in length (not including your Works Cited page).
- Follow **MLA style guidelines** for overall format, the Works Cited page, and in-text citations.
- Be sure your **introduction** does not begin with the phrase, "I will be writing about..." or any version thereof.
- Include at least **three bits of quoted (and cited) material** from your sources.
- **Conclude** in a way that encourages the conversation keep going.
- Use our in-class **process** to improve your paper
  - Bring a hard-copy **down-draft** to class on \_\_\_\_\_
  - Bring a hard-copy **updraft** to class on \_\_\_\_\_  
 editing and proofreading (2+2 points).
  - Prepare a **polished draft** by class-time on \_\_\_\_\_
- **Post** your polished version to the wild no later than \_\_\_\_\_

**Assessment:** your polished draft will receive points for the following-

- Four points for thorough and thoughtful completion of **revising guides**
- Three points for **Content-that** is how clearly you state your claims, how thoroughly and thoughtfully you support those claims, how well you build your ethos, make and develop logical and emotional appeals
- Three points for **Execution-that** is how well you edit and proofread your paper, and how carefully you quote and cite your sources, both in the text and in a Works Cited page.
- One point for reflective writing during the ceremony.

Figure 1. Directions for American literature paper #1. Writing prompts and assessment criteria.

English III  
**Rhetorical Prewriting for a Major  
Paper**  
Fall 2015

**Explore the paper's exigence-**

What topic(s) does your paper need to address?  
Why address these topics? What's compels *you* to speak? Why *now*?  
What do you want your paper to do for its audience?

**Reveal the paper's rhetors-**

What role do you need to play to successfully execute the paper's exigence?  
How will you establish your ethos?  
How will you build ethos throughout the paper?  
Who else does your paper need to give a voice?

**Address the paper's audience-**

Who is the primary audience? What do they already know/think about your topic(s)? And how will you appeal to them?  
Who are the secondary audiences? What do they already know/think about your topic(s)?  
How will you appeal to them?

**Consider other constraints-**

Length/Scope? Level of Diction? Point of View/Stance? Timing?

Figure 2. Prewriting for analytical writing in Eli's classroom. Used as a guide for beginning a paper.

Writer's name \_\_\_\_\_

Date 10/21/15

English III

**Major Paper #1 Revising Guide**

\*\*\*Hopefully your paper has been idle and unread for at least twelve hours. The longer you let a draft sit, the more effective your revising time will be. This sheet will be due with your first draft, second draft and the polished paper. Do not lose it. Do not neglect to do it. I will give you in-class revising time as long as you use it. Please use it.

**Part I: On your own, read your piece silently three times**

- 1) While you read your paper the first time, analyze your essay's **arrangement** by completing the following tasks:
  - a) In the left margin, label each paragraph (Intro, Body Paragraph 1, etc.).
  - b) Identify and label your central claim, whether stated directly or implied (may be more than one sentence) and copy it below (you may simplify it here).
  - c) Identify and label all supporting claims, drawing arrows back to the ideas they support.
- 2) While you read your essay a second time, analyze your **ideas** by completing the following tasks:
  - a) In the right-hand margin, identify and label the work each passage accomplishes—or hopes to. (Does it introduce, narrate, summarize, explore, expand, analyze, question?) Be specific.
  - b) Under each label, answer the following question as thoroughly as space will allow—*how does this chunk support my central claim(s)?*
  - c) \*Star\* all passages that cite outside source material.
- 3) While you read your essay a third time, analyze your **ethos** by completing the following task:
  - circle all words, phrases and passages that establish your credibility, diction and syntax that make the argument (whether explicitly or implicitly) that you are a good person writing well. Really think about this as you read.
- 4) When you finish your third reading, answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly:
  - a) Who is your primary audience for this essay? Secondary audiences? What do you hope this paper does for its audiences?
  - b) Are your central claims directly stated or implied? Either way, what can you do to make your central claim(s) more concise and/or precise?

Writer's name \_\_\_\_\_

Editor's name \_\_\_\_\_

Date 10/21/15

English III

**Major Paper #1 Revising Guide****Part II: With a Partner**

**Directions:** **Find** someone in the room who will be brutally honest with you and will help you write a better paper. **Move** yourselves so that you're sitting next to one another. **Trade** papers and revising guides with this person. **Read** his/her entire revising guide and the five questions at the end; **ask** for clarification if you need it. **Read** the piece aloud to the writer, **mark up** the pages together with your comments and ideas, and then **answer** as completely as possible all questions. When you're both finished, **discuss** each other's papers, using your knowledge of rhetoric and the questions to guide you. **Go home. Don't be afraid to make changes!**

**Partner Responses**

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Figure 3. General revision guide for analytical writing. The guides are used in peer groups during class.

APPENDIX C

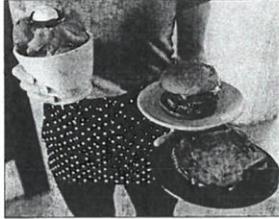
ARTIFACTS FROM PETE'S CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

# LEISURE Food & Drink

## Critics' choice: The summer's hottest dogs and burgers

**Luscher's Red Hots Dallas**  
 "The humble hot dog will never be the same," said Scott Reitz in the *Dallas Observer*. Chef Brian Luscher, already widely credited with creating Texas' best burger, has opened a quirky joint in Deep Ellum with a signature offering that's "nothing short of a masterpiece." The sausage itself packs coarsely ground, "aggressively seasoned" pork and beef in a natural casing, and because Luscher is Chicago-raised, it's served on a soft poppy seed bun with relish, mustard, tomato, onion, a pickle, and a pair of sport peppers. "Don't even think about ruining this paragon of tube meats with ketchup." Do, though, explore the rest of the menu. Luscher, after all, is the guy who gave Dallas the bistro Grape and its award-winning burger. At his new place, he's followed up beautifully with the "Uncle Herky"—"a double-patty monster" obscured by "a mudslide of American cheese and grilled onions." 2633 Commerce St. (214) 434-1006

**Superiority Burger New York City**  
 The most sought-after burger in Manhattan this summer is being produced by a tiny kitchen that serves no meat, said Ryan Suton in *Eater.com*. At Superiority Burger, a humble white-tiled storefront space in the East Village, the headline sandwich features a patty made of grains, beans,



The goods at KronnerBurger

and tofu, but it isn't "an essay on the intrinsic beauty of vegetables," as you might expect. Instead, it has the mouthfeel of real beef, and it "tastes pretty darn great." The patty is the brainchild of the joint's creator, world-class pastry chef and occasional punk-rock drummer Brooks Headley. Headley apparently dreams of pointing the way to a better food future, because he's managed to pack all the "gorgeous sensations" Americans get from their favorite fast-food burgers into a healthy \$6 substitute that requires no livestock farming. No doubt, the burger is unqualifiedly delicious," said Robert Sietsema, also in *Eater.com*. Even so, "the best thing on the menu"—if you don't count Headley's

gelato—might be his veggie version of a Sloppy Joe. 430 E. 9th St. (212) 256-1192

**KronnerBurger Oakland**  
 Two years ago, San Francisco went wild for the burgers that Chris Kronner served at a pop-up in the Mission District. This spring, Kronner opened his first permanent eatery, near his home across the bay, and his eponymous sandwich remains "superior to just about every other burger out there," said Peter Lawrence Kane in *SF Weekly*. "Salty, slathered in pickles, and served quite rare," it inspires an urge to pound your chest with your fists. Indeed, "the best word for a Kronnerburger is 'manly'—even if you opt not to pay \$2 extra for pimento cheese or \$3 to be able to slather the house-made potato bun with bone marrow. Alternatives are offered, including a patty melt made with mixed-milk cheese, hot mustard, and an onion confit. Before you suggest you can name a better burger joint, consider Kronner's delicate onion rings and "objectively fantastic" fries, available as poutine, that Quebecois collision of beef gravy, potato, and cheese curds. "For a burger joint, KronnerBurger offers an impressive wine list too, and their "Creamsicle-like" orange cream soda "might be the most beautiful I've ever seen." 4063 Piedmont Ave., (510) 823-2371

### Beer: 'Sessionable' standouts

On summer afternoons, what you want is a balanced, "wonderfully flavorful" beer that won't knock you out if you call for seconds, said Jim Vorel in *PasteMagazine.com*. That's what session beers are all about. We tasted 90 of them in a variety of styles, all registering under 5 percent ABV. Here are our top three:

**Maine Beer Co. Hop Program Beer II Freeport, Maine** Our runaway winner is a "remarkable" session IPA with "a light caramel backbone" and "gorgeous" tropical aromatics.  
**Urban Chestnut Schnickelritz St. Louis** "If there's a better American-made take on German Hefeweizen out there, we haven't yet found it."  
**21st Amendment Down to Earth San Francisco** "A citrus IPA fan's dream," this crisp brew "screams summertime."



### Recipe of the week

The wedge salad is enjoying a comeback, and no wonder, said David Hagedorn in *The Washington Post*. "As a comfort food," it's "right up there on my list with macaroni and cheese." A true wedge always includes bacon and blue cheese, and because "crunch is crucial," my take adds diced radish, zucchini, and cucumber.

#### Wedge salad with blue cheese dressing, bacon, and vegetables

- 1/2 cup Greek-style yogurt • 7 oz blue cheese, crumbled • 1/4 cup low-fat buttermilk
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper • 1/4 tsp black pepper • 1/4 tsp dried thyme • 1 lb head iceberg lettuce • 1/2 lb length each zucchini and English cucumber • 4 radishes • 1/2 red onion
- 16 grape tomatoes, cut lengthwise • 4 strips thick-cut bacon, cooked and crumbled

- Combine in a blender or food processor 1/4 cup yogurt, 2 1/2 oz blue cheese, buttermilk, cayenne, black pepper, and thyme; puree until smooth. Transfer to a bowl; cover and refrigerate.
- Line a baking sheet double thick with paper towels. Core and rinse lettuce, cut into 6 wedges, and place on towels, cut side down. With more paper towels, blot and cover wedges; refrigerate.
- Cut zucchini and red onion

into 1/4-inch dice. Cut 1/4 inch slices of skin and flesh from cucumber and radishes; discard cores. Cut slices into 1/4-inch dice.



- Whisk together 2 1/2 oz of blue cheese and 1/4 cup yogurt. Spread a thin coating of this mixture between each wedge's bottom 5 to 6 leaves. Divide wedges among salad plates. Coat with seasoned dressing; top with tomatoes, vegetables, bacon, and remaining 2 oz of blue cheese. Serves 6.

Figure 1: Peter Braun's Mentor Text for Restaurant Review. Students found particular words that they noticed helped them imagine what the food tasted like.