INVENTING TEACHER-WRITERS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education

2011

ABSTRACT

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K-12 teachers are often encouraged to develop their own writing projects and practices,

in order to enrich their writing pedagogy and share knowledge with other educators. Yet, in

pursuing their own writing, teachers face a number of constraints, not the least of which is

limited time. These constraints may be particularly salient for beginning teachers who seek to

develop writing lives amidst the day-to-day complexities of learning to teach. This dissertation

follows a group of beginning teachers as they worked with me, their former university

instructor, in an online writing group, seeking ways to work within and against constraints in

pursuing personally meaningful writing projects. I explore ways that we writing group

members created and sustained opportunities for our own writing, supported by each other

but not officially endorsed by any institution or organization. I situate this project first within

existing literature on teachers-as-writers, and then within a theoretical framework that

emphasizes invention, in order to frame an inquiry into what writing group members create,

including multiple ways of being teacher-writers. The following questions guide this project:

(1) How do teacher-writers use participation in a writing group to invent ways to work within

and against constraints in order to initiate and develop personal writing projects? (2) What

else, besides written texts, is invented by teacher-writers during writing group meetings? (3)

How do the various "outcomes" of invention shape teacher-writers' experiences and future

inventive acts in writing group meetings?

Using methods associated with ethnographic and narrative inquiry, I explore the talk and written texts shared across thirteen months of biweekly writing group meetings. Members' written texts, as well as narrative accounts of writing group meetings, provide evidence of teacher-writers using a combination of writing and talk to invent ways into writing, ways of being, and ways of intervening in rhetorical situations. I demonstrate that teacher-writers extend these strategies to support their writing of professional and academic texts as well as personal and creative texts. In these ways, this project contributes a complex, nuanced view of teacher-writers developing writing projects across contexts. This dissertation contributes a line of inquiry into teachers' writing on its own terms, beyond looking at the publishable quality of their written texts or the classroom benefits that may come out of their writing. Ultimately, this project aims to help teachers, teacher educators, and education and writing researchers re-imagine teacher-writers, attending to the ways teacher-writers invent and are invented across writing group meetings, even amidst significant time constraints.

For Becca,
May you always find space in your life for writing,
and may your life be filled with teachers who are as
thoughtful and creative as those featured in this book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elrod Whitney, Leah Zuidema, and Jim Fredricksen, each of whom helped me talk through this project on numerous occasions, and whose questions and insights have made this work stronger.

Finally, my family and friends have been my most constant support system, beginning well before my doctoral program. My parents, John and Eileen, and my brother Mark, through their example and love, opened doors to literacy and helped me embrace a life of learning. Thank you for always believing in me. My husband Eric and daughter Becca were my constant companions throughout this doctoral journey. Thank you for helping me keep things in perspective and for giving me the time to write this dissertation. I simply could not have done this without you. Thank you for always making me smile, and thank you to Becca for reminding me how magical it is to be an author.

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"The main reason I joined, to be honest, was because I wanted to talk with you all,"

Karen admits. She pauses briefly before she continues. "But another reason would be, like, I

was so used to doing academic writing, and I had never really tried writing for myself. Well, not

never, but I didn't frequently write for myself, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to

do that."

We are gathered together at 5:30 on a Thursday evening in November, each of us at our

own computer in our own homes, spread across several states.   Over a year before, we had

begun an online writing group for ourselves, five teacher-writers, and we have gathered this

evening to reflect on our work together and prepare to share our experiences at a national

conference presentation. How had we created this writing group, an opportunity every two

weeks to gather and *talk* with each other about our writing and our writing lives? What have

we each gotten out of the experience? And why are we still going strong? Our conversation via

Skype is lively and personal, as we revisit moments and realizations from the past year. In

many ways this is a celebration of our inventions: texts we are proud of, a writing group that

we enjoy, relationships we have developed across distance and teaching contexts, and ways of

being writers amidst the busy work of teaching.

"I remember the first time I came," Jenna reminisces. "I thought I was, I kind of was

thinking I had to have almost a finished piece." She laughs briefly at the memory.   "And I only

had a little section, and I was like, 'okay, here's a poem I think?' And I felt kind of, you know,

self-conscious. That I didn't have this *great* grand piece. But um, just the fact that, you know, I got support from the group and feedback of what they liked, you know what *you* liked about it, and direction I could take it. I mean that was *huge*."

Chloe and I agree with her, and then Karen interjects her own recollection. "In the beginning of our writing group I wrote mostly about like classroom experiences," she recalls. "But it was like writing to like *sort through* what was happening. And it was nice … and I *know* I wouldn't have written if I wasn't in this group. For sure."

"Right," agrees Chloe thoughtfully.

"I would've just come home and had a bottle of wine," Karen adds, laughing, and I quickly join in. "But instead, I came home and had a bottle of wine and wrote, and I think it was more healthy." Now we are all laughing, and Karen has to wait a moment before she can continue. "But, um, but then I also shifted and I was like, 'Well, I still should be writing cause I'm in a writing group, but I'm sick of thinking about school, and I, you know, started to write about, um, like my study abroad trip. Things like that. And I think that was, you know, I wouldn't have written that either. And I think it was like also a nice chance to shift and think about myself as a writer, but to also think about myself as like, you know, a more complicated human being than just a teacher. That helped me do that."

"Right," agrees Chloe, and I enthusiastically say, "Yeah!"

"I think," contemplates Chloe, "and this kind of bridges over to the experience and effect that the group had on our teaching lives, but even though as first-year teachers, carving out this extra time to be a part of the group could initially seem daunting, I think it was a really healthy move for us. It gave us each a way to connect with each other, it gave us a way to talk

to each other at critical moments. And like you said Karen, it helped you to affirm that you are more than a teacher."

"Yeah," Nell agrees.

"And it's … we're, we're buying what we're selling." Jenna sums up, laughing.

"Right," says Nell.

"Exactly! Yeah," agrees Chloe.

"Yeah, it's hard to, when you are teaching about writing, if it's not something that you do in your everyday life," Jenna continues. "It's like 'the purpose of you writing is to get a good grade in school.' No! Because *we* have this experience where writing really was—*is* important to us, and we are able to express ourselves in writing. And, so to be able to share that with our students, that we are *still* growing as writers and we are still carving out that time."

In many ways, this book is a creation story. Or, perhaps more appropriately, it is a series of related creation stories. It is a story of a group of teacher-writers, four first-year language arts teachers and myself, an English teacher educator and educational researcher, as we create a writing group to support each other and help us "carve out that time" for writing. It is a story of us each creating texts that matter to us, texts that allow us to explore our lives both beyond and in relation to our teaching, through collaboration and talk and writing. It is a story of us creating ways of being writers, amidst the constraints and challenges associated with being teachers, and respecting that we are each "a more complicated human being than just a teacher." It is also a story of us learning from each other, as writers with different strengths

and experiences. No one person led the group meetings; there were no assignments or requirements. We just gathered together, every other week, to talk about our writing.

This book also seeks to be a bridge, in much the same ways the writing group is, between worlds of teaching writing, English teacher education, and educational and writing research.   Our membership bridges these worlds, as we grow together as teacher-writers. This collaboration is particularly appropriate for a discussion of teacher-writers, for the literature in this area is authored by teachers, writers, teacher educators, and researchers, and by many who identify as mixtures of all four. While it can be easy for teachers to gravitate to teacher-authored work and for researchers to gravitate to researcher-authored work, in telling this story, or these related stories, I seek to write a text that can speak across contexts. My audience encompasses teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, honoring our connection and shared interest in teachers-as-writers. Therefore I have made an effort to connect literature on teachers-as-writers, as well as to present this work as both research and as story, to honor both the experience of writing group members and our varied inventions. In what follows I tell this story and invite you, the reader, into the conversations about teachers-as-writers, and then into our writing group meetings.

CHAPTER 1: INVENTING TEACHER-WRITERS

"The most convincing technique, however, is for you to write with the student.

The writing teacher cannot afford to hide behind the myth of his own good

writing. He should do assignments with the students and have his own papers

dittoed and criticized by the class."

Donald Murray, <u>A Writer Teaches Writing</u>, 1968 (21)

"I believe that the only way I'm going to be able to teach writing tomorrow is

because I did it today. In fact, I believe that reading this book is a waste of your

time if you aren't going to write as well: Important things will not change in your

classroom until you do. I believe you can't tell kids how to write; you have to

show them what writers do. I believe you have to be a writer, no matter how

stumbling and unformed that process is for you; it's essential to your work as a

teacher of writing."

Penny Kittle, <u>Write beside Them</u>, 2008 (8)

It has become almost commonplace advice to writing teachers: in order to teach

writing, you must *be* a writer yourself. As the above words of Donald Murray and Penny Kittle

reveal, for over 40 years K-12 teachers have been encouraged to engage in their own writing

projects and develop their own writing practices as a means to enrich and inform pedagogy and

establish authority as writing teachers.   Teachers also are being encouraged to write about

their teaching, to make their teaching practices public in order to participate in shaping national conversations on teaching. (Check "Reflection and Reform" 103; McEntee; Whitney et al.) Indeed it was some of these very messages that led me to begin to explore my own writing when I was a high school English teacher, and I have drawn on writers like Murray and Kittle as I have designed and taught my teacher education classes.

Yet there are many ways to be a "teacher-writer," and teachers' ways of engaging in writing differ quite a bit (Brooks; Robbins "It's Not That Simple"; Robbins "Teachers as Writers"). Some ways of being teacher-writers are more heavily promoted and researched than others. For example, there are many accounts of experienced teachers who are writers (cf. Kittle <u>Write Beside Them;</u> Murray), often focusing on many of the same benefits noted above, and there are many accounts exploring teacher-writers' experiences through established professional development programs, such as the National Writing Project. There is comparably little written, however, on teachers pursuing writing lives on their own, outside of these preexisting supports and programs. Additionally, very little is written about first-year teachers who are attempting to begin leading writing lives at the same time that they are beginning to lead teaching lives.

Additionally, engaging in writing outside the professional writing teachers do for their jobs everyday (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum documents, student handouts, etc.) may sometimes be experienced as an added burden, one more demand on teachers' time and energy ("*English Journal* Rebuttal"; "The Round Table"; Jost "Rebuttal"; Jost "Revisited"). While these constraints show up in the literature from time to time, they are not always fully acknowledged. Early career teachers may experience especially strong constraints, particularly

if they seek to develop their writing lives at the same time that they are entering their first classrooms. For these beginning teachers, self-initiated writing projects easily can be overwhelmed by the day-to-day complexities of learning to teach and "surviving" the time demands of the first year, where school-related tasks crowd out personal writing projects. As a writing teacher, as a teacher educator, and as an English education researcher, I have grappled with these same challenges, seeking ways to support beginning teachers (and myself) in pursuing personally meaningful writing. Often I have been painfully aware of limitations of time and support in these endeavors. Thus, even though there are strong messages to beginning teachers to engage in their own writing lives, and even though beginning teachers' writing may be understood as an important aspect of their induction into the profession, the constraints against them too easily can push their own writing into the background.

This is a project that looks specifically at a group of first-year teachers as they worked with me, their former university instructor, in an online writing group, seeking ways to work within and against constraints in pursuing personally meaningful writing projects. This project seeks to explore ways that we writing group members managed to create and sustain opportunities for our own writing, supported by each other but not officially endorsed by any institution or organization. I situate this project first within existing literature on teachers-as-writers, and then within a theoretical framework that emphasizes invention, in order to frame an inquiry into what writing group members are able to create, not the least of which are ways of being teacher-writers.

Why Writing Teachers Should Write: An Overview from the Literature

In her book *Write Beside Them,* experienced English teacher, literacy coach, and published author Penny Kittle proclaims, "I now believe you really can't teach writing well unless you write yourself" (7). This statement is consistent with her quote that opens this chapter, as well as with the words of Donald Murray, one of her inspirations and a fellow writer and teacher of writing. In her book, Kittle goes on to highlight the importance of teachers using their own writing to *show* or demonstrate for students how to write, to literally "write beside them," rather than merely *telling* students what to do. In fact, she tells teachers, "You are the most important writer in the room" (8). Kittle's claims highlight a primary area of interest for writing researchers and English teacher educators: the pedagogical benefits and possibilities afforded when teachers are writers.   She also points to writing as a key part of what feeds her as a teacher and a person, of what makes her love teaching. Kittle's account points to linked areas in research and literature on teachers as writers: ways writing can enrich teachers' lives and pedagogical practices. There is also growing interest in teachers writing (and publishing) about their teaching practices, as Kittle has done in her book, thus using their writing to participate in broader conversations about teaching and learning.   These are the claims that are most commonly made to encourage teachers to "be" writers, yet how teachers actually *do* this writing, amidst the other demands of teaching, merits further exploration.

Kittle's book is also an illustrative example of the overlapping roles of teachers, researchers, and writers in contributing to knowledge and conversations about teachers-as-writers. A review of the literature reveals the lines between *writer, teacher*, and *researcher* blur in the authoring of many of these books and articles, just as they overlap for me in the

authoring of this text. Authors like Ralph Fletcher, Georgia Heard, and Donald Murray, who

clearly identify themselves as *writers,* also write directly from experience as *teachers* as they

describe how their writing lives informed their teaching. These authors also give many

examples of their classroom work with students (dare we say teacher research?) to illustrate

their concepts to readers (Fletcher <u>What a Writer Needs;</u> Heard <u>For the Good of the Earth and</u>

<u>Sun;</u> Murray). Authors like Penny Kittle, Tim Gillespie, or Nancie Atwell, who seem to identify

primarily as *teachers*, also bring rich experiences as *writers* to their classrooms, and reference

what also can be considered *teacher research* in their writing, again as they provide examples

to support the claims they make about writing instruction (Atwell; Gillespie "Becoming Your

Own Expert"; Kittle <u>Write Beside Them</u>). Then there are numerous university faculty, such as

Katie Wood Ray, Lucy Calkins, Donald Graves, and Tom Romano, who draw on their experience

as *researchers* and *teacher educators* while often writing as *teachers* or even as *writers* in their

texts on writing pedagogy and teachers-as-writers (Calkins; Graves; Ray <u>Wondrous Words;</u>

Romano). Comparatively, there are relatively few texts whose authors write explicitly as

researchers in this area, studying (sometimes from the outside) the effects of teachers' writing

on their pedagogy and authority (Brooks; Robbins et al.; Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person";

Whitney et al.). Indeed, work that explores the value of teachers as writers most commonly

involves authors crisscrossing between roles of teacher, writer, and researcher, drawing on

multiple sources of evidence to make their claims.   This study is true to this tradition, as my

writing is informed by my own overlapping roles of researcher, English teacher educator,

writer, and teacher.

Perhaps as a direct result of the blended perspectives of the authors, many books and articles about the benefits of teachers as writers explicitly include an audience of *teachers*, with evidence based on combinations of classroom and university research.   This focal audience affects genre of the text, as many take a first-person narrative approach to making arguments and sharing evidence. This audience also affects publication avenues, with practitioner journals and practitioner publishing houses (e.g., Heinemann) publishing much of the writing on this topic. This attention to the teacher as audience is in line with the commitments espoused by many of the authors, an apparent interest in influencing teachers and shaping classrooms as directly as possible. Indeed, the authors seem intent on supporting teachers in developing pedagogy and practices informed at least in part by their own writing, and so they seem to write and publish in ways that are accessible to broad audiences, including their target audience of teachers.

On an organizational level, the National Writing Project (NWP), a national network of over 200 local writing project sites, is one of the most influential advocates of teachers being writers. The NWP advocates teachers not only engaging in personal writing but also writing (and publishing) about their practice. Teachers who participate in NWP invitational summer institutes write daily throughout the month-long program, engaging in both personal and professional writing projects with other institute colleagues. In an article commemorating the NWP's 25th anniversary in 1999, Sheridan Blau wrote that the writing project positions experienced teachers and, by connection, their knowledge, as "the best resource available to the educational community for solving the academic problems that trouble us." This commitment to experienced, successful teachers as resources and educational change agents is

consistent with the NWP's emphasis on teachers publishing about their writing and teaching practices, contributing to the knowledge in the field. Many articles on teachers' experiences as writers and as writing teachers can be found in the pages of the NWP journals, likewise adding to the literature on this subject. NWP local sites further enact this valuing of teachers' knowledge, for summer institutes are co-run by university faculty and K-12 teachers, thereby placing teacher knowledge and expertise in direct conversation with university knowledge, as it seems to be throughout the literature on teachers-as-writers (Nagin and National Writing Project).

In what follows, I explore this literature on teachers-as-writers, looking across articles and books written by those who identify as writers, teachers, and researchers (and often by those who identify as combinations of these). I begin by exploring the literature on the three primary reasons K-12 English Language Arts teachers are encouraged to write: to enrich and inform their teaching of writing, to participate in and shape public discussions about teaching, and to enrich their own lives. Looking across these three reasons, I observe patterns in what "writing" tends to mean in discussions of teachers-as-writers, noting that some teacher writing seems to be valued more than others. I also observe the expectations that are placed on teachers, as well as the challenges and constraints teachers report in pursuing their own writing. I end with an exploration of ways teachers report working through these constraints and pursuing their own writing, with a particular focus on teacher writing groups.

Writing Teachers Should Write to Enrich and Inform Their Teaching of Writing

The strongest argument in the literature on teachers-as-writers is that in pursuing their own writing lives, teachers will inform and enhance their writing pedagogy. There are many books and articles targeted to teachers and teacher educators, claiming that teachers who write gain writing and teaching strategies, ability to empathize with student writers, and valuable understandings about writing (Atwell; Calkins; Dahl; Gillespie "Becoming Your Own Expert"; Kittle Write Beside Them; Murray). This body of literature emphasizes the importance of teaching writing "from the inside"(Blau), informed by one's own writing experiences, enabling the teacher to join "the classroom community of writers" (Gillespie "Becoming Your Own Expert"; Kittle "Writing Giants"). Much of this literature on teacher-writers emphasizes pedagogical methods through which teachers can make use of their own writing processes, experiences, and products in the classroom. What remains to be explored, however, is how teachers can begin to build non-classroom writing into their lives, perhaps especially during their beginning years in the classroom.

Before proceeding, I want to point out that when teachers are encouraged to write in order to shape their writing pedagogy, the literature seems to privilege those genres and ways of writing that are considered most in line with teaching writing. While, as both researchers and teachers note, teachers routinely engage in a wide variety of writing, including lesson plans, notes, lists, handouts, and emails (Brooks; Robbins "Teachers as Writers"; Jost "Rebuttal"), this job-related writing does not seem to be the focus of most studies on "teachers as writers." Rather, personal, self-initiated writing projects are emphasized, such as essays, poems, personal narratives, letters, short stories, journal entries, editorials, or any number of

other genres, perhaps mirroring the types of genres that teachers may assign their own students (Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person"). There also is an emphasis on how teachers actually engage in those writing projects, with interest in teachers having experiences with recursive enterprises of gathering ideas, drafting, getting feedback on, and revising writing (Gillespie "Becoming Your Own Expert"; Kittle Write Beside Them; McEntee; Murray; Whitney "Teacher Transformation"). The motivation in the literature seems to be for teachers to have experiences with writing that will support their teaching similar writing processes (and even genres) to their students.   I explore these patterns in more detail below.

This particular consideration of the teacher-as-writer is consistent with rhetorically based, process-oriented writing instruction (Hairston), such as the writing workshop (Atwell; Calkins; Ray and Laminack), which shifts the teacher's role from being dominantly the assigner and assessor of writing (often with little emphasis on the instruction of writing itself), as in so-called "traditional" or product-focused writing instruction, to one in which the teacher not only teaches processes associated with writing, but also intervenes in purposeful ways in students' writing processes (Hairston). As process-oriented writing instruction has evolved over the past several decades, and especially with the advent of "post-process" or "structured process" approaches to writing instruction, teachers' roles have become increasingly important (Applebee; Hillocks; Smagorinsky et al.). Teachers in such a writing workshop teach students strategies for generating content, for determining their writing purpose and desired effect on an audience, for considering questions of form and genre, for conferring with other writers about their writing, and for revising their writing based on feedback (Atwell; Calkins; Dawson; Hillocks; Ray Study Driven; Ray and Laminack). Essentially the teacher is responsible for leading

students' inquiry into writing practices and processes (Hillocks; Ray Study Driven). It follows that to take on these increasingly complex and specific roles in writing instruction, teachers need deeper knowledge about writing than with "traditional" or product-oriented instruction. The expectations on what it takes to be an effective writing teacher have therefore grown, increasing demands on teachers' knowledge base for teaching writing.

Teachers, teacher educators, and researchers interested in teachers-as-writers look to teachers' own writing experiences to provide some of this knowledge, expecting that as teachers engage in their own writing they will gain understandings beyond what is possible from reading research and theory alone (Fletcher What a Writer Needs; Gillespie "Becoming Your Own Expert"; Gillespie "Joining the Debate"; Kittle Write Beside Them; Murray). The National Writing Project states, among its core principles, "Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically" (National Writing Project "NWP Core Principles"). This principle underlies the value of teachers engaging in their own writing, and it places a priority on teachers *writing* in professional development activities, to have experiences as writers in addition to (or perhaps as a lens through which to interpret) theory, research and practice (Nagin and National Writing Project). These experiences with writing are thought to help teachers gain knowledge about writing from the inside, thereby allowing them to better understand student writers' experiences and to generate writing strategies that can inform instruction.

I want to emphasize, however, that writing alone is not depicted as a magic bullet for improving teachers' writing pedagogy. Rather, teachers are encouraged to also make sense of these writing experiences, to unpack them and put them in conversation with theory and practice, and then to draw on them to purposefully teach students (Kittle Write Beside Them; National Writing Project "NWP Core Principles"). Blau explains this in the context of the NWP, explaining how writing project teachers are encouraged to be model learners for their students and for their colleagues:

> As model learners, writing project teachers commit themselves in summer institutes first to function as writers, producing and responding to each other's work in progress and taking some pieces from incubation to publication. In this context, teachers examine the writing process and the perils and challenges of writing from the inside, with themselves as experimental subjects, interrogating in the experiment their own assumptions about writing and learning to write, and exploring the most useful ways to respond to writing.

Thus it is not enough for teachers to just "do" writing on their own, but Blau points to the importance of teacher-writers treating their writing experiences as "experiments" through which they analyze their assumptions and experiences. Kittle then points to the importance of using this new knowledge to purposefully organize instruction for students (Kittle Write Beside Them). Here teachers' writing strategies and experiences are seen as desirable products or outcomes of their writing lives, which can then be analyzed and translated into these pedagogical opportunities. Again, this places an expectation that teachers of writing need to both pursue their own writing projects and then to analyze those projects and experiences in order to make them most useful to student learning. In many ways, literature on teacher-writers encourages teachers to write largely in service of student learning, a worthy purpose to

be sure, with comparatively little focus on the constraints teachers might experience or on the ways teachers' writing might affect them outside their professional roles.

One specific way that teachers are encouraged to use their own writing experience (or the realizations they gain from their experiences as writers) in the classroom is by modeling writing strategies or processes for their students. Rather than relying on models from students or professional writers, a teacher-writer is encouraged to use his or her own writing to demonstrate overcoming a writing hurdle, trying out a specific technique, or revising a piece of writing (Perry; Ray and Laminack). In a writing workshop, teachers are encouraged to use their own writing to help students extend their vision for a genre and explore writing processes. Gillespie observes that teacher modeling is also consistent with "a norm of demonstration that establish[es] educational professionalism" (Gillespie "Joining the Debate" 6). Gillespie references demonstrations common to violin teachers, shop teachers, and pottery teachers, who show their students how to hold an instrument, work a tool, or shape a clay pot. "When we writing teachers write and share our work with students," Gillespie writes, "we are asserting ourselves as equally professional"(6). Gillespie adds that this type of demonstration allows teachers to perform their knowledge about writing to their students, to show that they can do that which they teach. Rosemary Perry agrees, claiming that modeling is one of the most effective methods she has found for teaching the writing process and for demonstrating the ways she uses writing in her life outside teaching. Yet while teachers using their own writing as models in a writing workshop can be a particularly effective pedagogical technique, it can be seen to raise the expectation on the teacher-writer even further. In addition to writing and analyzing their writing, teacher-writers are thereby encouraged to make their writing public

with their students, or to at least make aspects of their writing process public. This can feel

risky, perhaps especially for teachers new to the profession or who are working to establish

themselves as teachers in their first classrooms. It is unclear how new teachers can find the

time to pursue their own non-classroom writing and develop comfort in sharing that with their

students, especially outside the support of an opportunity like the National Writing Project.

The literature thus far uniformly extols the benefits to students when teachers are

writers. Additionally, a number of studies supported by the National Writing Project claim

benefits to students when their teachers participate in the NWP (National Writing Project

"Research Brief"). Presumably, these NWP teachers' experiences as writers during and after

the invitational summer institutes are factors in that student achievement. Outside of the

NWP, a few research studies have sought to explore whether teacher-writers actually teach

differently, or how teachers' writing practices affect what they do with students. These studies

are limited and typically focus on experienced and effective teachers, rather than teachers just

beginning their careers. At first glance these studies may seem to challenge the effect of

teachers engaging in their own writing. Upon closer examination, however, these studies also

may be read to further confirm the picture that has been developing above: a teacher's writing

life is only one factor among many that shapes the pedagogy or effectiveness of his/her writing

instruction. In other words, teacher-writers are a diverse group.

For example, in a study of seven "experienced" secondary English teachers, selected as

representing a range of teacher-as-writer and non-writer (where teacher-writers were defined

simply as "teachers who write outside of class time, whether for themselves or others")

researchers did not find a necessary correlation between the teachers' writing lives and

teaching styles (Gleeson and Prain 42). Indeed, they assessed all teachers in their study as

"effective," and concluded that teaching writing draws on a broad range of skills, with

effectiveness more complex than simply whether the teacher writes outside of class or not.

Similarly, in a study of 12 English teachers in one high school, Robbins noted, "The mere fact

that teachers write does not tell much about the relationship between their writing and their

teaching" ("Teachers as Writers" 125). He observed, "no matter how engaged some may

become in their writing, their writing experience alone may not have much influence on their

teaching, or may influence teaching in unexpected ways" ("Teachers as Writers" 127).

Robbins' study indicated that teachers' beliefs about writing and learning processes, as well as

their beliefs about what counts as "writing," seemed to affect their instruction in more

significant ways than merely whether they did or did not write outside of class.

Similarly, in a more recent study of four 4th grade teachers, all of whom were selected

as "exemplary" reading and writing teachers, Brooks used interviews to explore the teachers'

self-descriptions of themselves as readers and writers, what they found "influential" in their

teaching, and any relationships they could see between their personal reading and writing and

their instruction. Brooks found that even though all four teachers considered themselves

strong writers, they pursued different kinds of writing and for different purposes, and they

made use of these (or not) in different ways in the classroom. Taken together, these three

studies suggest the need to complexify discussions of teacher-writers, looking beyond a mere

binary of writer/non-writer to explore the teacher's beliefs and ways of engaging in writing and

teaching. These studies also may be read to confirm the significance of teachers going beyond

simply *writing* and actually interrogating their experiences as writers and explicitly putting

these in conversation with their pedagogy. Overall, however, these studies are not surprising

when read against the above literature on teachers as writers. That literature, like the NWP's

core principles, emphasizes more than just whether teachers write on their own outside of

class, but looks to how these writing experiences inform teachers' knowledge about writing.

These studies, when read with this other literature on teachers as writers, indicate a need for

greater inquiry into how teachers make sense of their writing experiences and how they make

these understandings public to their students and other teachers.

This literature on the pedagogical benefits available to teacher-writers does not claim

that teacher-writers will automatically excel (or even do consistent things) in their writing

instruction. Rather, the more common claim seems to be that when teachers engage in their

own writing projects, they develop insights and opportunities for their teaching that would be

otherwise unavailable to them. Teachers' own writing texts and writing strategies are

considered as desirable outcomes of their writing, which can then be brought into the

classroom to support students who are learning to write. Translating these insights and

outcomes into classroom practice seems to involve extra steps, whereby the teacher endeavors

to reflect on his/her writing experiences in connection to his/her writing pedagogy and to share

writing and writing experiences with students. Thus, it is not enough for teachers to simply

write, but the literature seems to say they also need to inquire into that writing and endeavor

to make it public with their students.   However, the question remains how can teachers,

especially those at the beginning of their careers, find the time and support to do this writing

and inquiry into their writing, in addition to all the other demands of teaching? How can

writing not become just one more thing teachers are expected to do, in addition to all the other

ways they seek to support student learning? These questions in many ways brought me to

suggest the writing group at the center of this project, as I sought to explore ways that

beginning teachers and their more experienced colleagues can pursue (and, dare I suggest,

enjoy) their own writing, even amidst constraints.

Writing Teachers Should Write to Participate in Discussions about Teaching

In addition to the pedagogical benefits teachers may derive from pursuing their own

writing projects (and perhaps to support teachers in fully realizing these pedagogical benefits),

teachers also are encouraged to write specifically about their teaching practice, and through

that writing to reflect on and make their practice public. Indeed this writing about teaching is

portrayed as one way teachers might reflect on and translate their own writing experiences

into pedagogical strategies for their classrooms.   In his article on the NWP, Sheridan Blau noted

that a central part of the National Writing Project experience is for teachers to reflect on and

write about (and make public in other ways, such as presentations) their professional

knowledge. He highlighted two benefits of this process: for teachers to "clarify and articulate

their instructional goals both to themselves and to their colleagues" and to help teachers be

"principal contributors to the professional learning of their colleagues." Here, Blau is

connecting teachers' writing about their professional practice to both refining their own

practice and contributing to the professional learning of colleagues.

In the coming paragraphs I explore literature on these two related areas: writing to

"clarify and articulate" practice, and writing to contribute "to the professional learning of their

colleagues." Overall, the literature dealing with the former seems to emphasize genres related

to writing-to-learn (e.g., reflective journaling, essays), and literature dealing with the latter

emphasizes genres related to sharing professional practice (e.g., journal articles, book chapters,

and conference presentations). Like the personal writing teachers may do to inform their

practice, however, this professional writing is still portrayed as writing beyond the day-to-day

writing teachers do as part of their jobs.

Literature advocating that teachers write to reflect on their practice, for their own

purposes, is related to work on teacher research. For example, Vivian Gussin Paley noted that

her practice of writing down what happened in her class was a critical part of her making sense

of and learning from those experiences ("Must Teachers Also Be Writers?"). Similarly, Robbins

et al. provided accounts of groups of teachers in multiple writing groups, all begun through

NWP summer institutes, as they wrote about and discussed their teaching practice (Robbins et

al.). In that study, the authors emphasized the role of writing to learn, seeking to see what

happened when teachers engaged in writing about their teaching as a means to make sense of

those practices. The Robbins et al. study also connected teachers writing about their practice

with teachers making their teaching public and contributing to knowledge in the field. Within

the writing groups, as teachers shared and discussed their writing, they were making a first

move to make their teaching practices public. While that study did not start out to explicitly

focus on writing for publication, many teachers who participated eventually published essays in

the book edited by the research team.

In an article in the NWP publication *The Quarterly*, Grace McEntee likens writing for

publication about practice to diving with whales, noting how commonly schools and teaching

are studied from the outside (outside the metaphorical water), whereas teachers are uniquely

suited to write from the inside. Says McEntee, writing about practice allows teachers to "see

students, colleagues, parents, the school in new ways," with writing groups (such as those in

the Robbins text) as "vehicles for probing more deeply." McEntee offers five reasons for

teachers to write about practice, not just for their own learning, but for publication: "to reflect

upon practice; to discover who we are and what we think; to change school culture; to model

for students; [and] to inform and interact with the public" (21). Thus McEntee connects what

others have said, noting that teachers writing about practice benefits them through the

reflection they engage in with writing, through the opportunity to share their experiences with

publication with students, and through the opportunity to change school culture and shape

public opinion. Along these same lines, Joe Check, also with the National Writing Project, links

teachers writing about practice, especially reflective writing, to school reform. McEntee and

Check recast teachers writing for publication as advocacy, an opportunity to be change agents

in education. Still, outside of the supports such as those provided in the National Writing

Project, it is unclear how teachers pursue and gain support for this type of writing.

Writing for publication, while attractive and beneficial in many ways, may also be

experienced as a challenging genre. Several authors have noted that teachers may experience

the genre conventions of professional articles as barriers, particularly in the tendency for such

articles to be less narrative in style and more "objective" (or, written in third person) (Check "I

Teach, (I Feel), I Write"; Fecho).   Additionally, some teachers, perhaps especially early career

teachers, may feel they lack the expertise from which to write for publication. Zuidema

described preservice teachers' anxiety over writing for publication about teaching, noting that

many were concerned that they lacked the authority or experience to contribute to knowledge

about teaching. Ironically, Whitney et al. noted that teachers who published in professional, practitioner journals reported an increased sense of authority related to the content or pedagogical practices they wrote about, yet the authors note that additional research is needed on how to support teachers writing for publication. Thus, professional writing, especially for publication, may be a type of writing where teachers benefit from additional support (Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person"), and the NWP has run several professional writing retreats for this purpose (O'Shaughnessy). I share this interest in supporting teachers to write for a variety of purposes, which may include publication, and exploring what that support may look like is a central feature of this inquiry.

Additionally, this project seeks to contribute to research on the relationship between teachers' personal and professional writing. While personal writing is emphasized alongside professional writing in NWP summer institutes, there have been debates on whether professional writing should become the sole focus of teacher writing in the summer institutes (Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person"). Yet Whitney argues, drawing on data from a case study of a teacher-writer during a summer institute, that teachers' personal and professional writing is often linked, with one informing the other. Says Whitney, "[NWP] site directors (and those providing inservice in almost any setting where writing is appropriate) would do better to continue inviting teachers to try both [personal and professional writing] , then devote attention to helping teachers and their writing groups explore the purposes each might serve and the connections between then" (255). Additionally, Whitney points to the importance of teachers being encouraged to *inquire* into professional concerns through both personal and professional genres, commenting that when teachers are only encouraged to inquire into their

teaching using "academic prose," they may not find that type of writing as conducive to the types of reflections and insights that may fuel future writing for publication. "For teachers to learn through writing," says Whitney, "they need opportunities to engage in the full range of writing" (256). As Kathleen O'Shaughnessy, who has organized professional writing retreats for the National Writing Project, says, "The blend of the personal and the professional goes on all the time in our classrooms, so what better stance to take for writing about our practices here?" The NWP has a commitment to teachers developing leadership and, in turn, teaching other teachers in the field, and teachers writing about teaching is a natural component of this. I explore this very blend of personal and professional writing further in this study, which shows teacher-writers writing about our teaching in multiple contexts and through multiple genres.

Looking across the literature discussed thus far, there are a number of clear connections between literature advocating for teachers to write to explore their teaching and literature advocating for teachers to write to contribute to the field. For example, there seems to be an agreement that, in order to truly inform their writing pedagogy, teachers should both engage in personally initiated projects and reflect on these projects (possibly through writing). Whitney's work suggests that this inquiry into teaching can benefit from not being restricted to academic prose, with teachers potentially gaining more from the process when encouraged to use a wider range of writing styles and genres. Teachers are encouraged, moreover, to then make this writing-about-practice public, not only in their classrooms but in wider education conversations in an effort to be change agents in their profession. Yet, as beneficial as teachers' writing about teaching may be (to the teacher, to the students, to the field), it continues to be important to recognize that all of these types of writing go beyond the writing

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and work teachers do daily in their jobs. Rarely are lesson plans, handouts, student

recommendation letters, or other written artifacts of teaching highlighted in these

conversations about teacher writing. Additionally, many teachers may find making their writing

public among other teachers a particular challenge. I suggest that these challenges may be

particularly salient for beginning teachers, and the field needs additional exploration of their

efforts to write both about their practice and for publication. This project seeks to address this

need.

Writing Teachers Should Write to Enrich Their Own Lives

In spite of the additional expectations that pursuing their own writing may place on

teachers, the pages of NWP journals in particular are full of testimonials and articles by

teachers, detailing their experiences as writers and the personal benefits they experience. As

Kittle noted in her book, teachers who embark on the journey to pursue their own writing

report that having a writing life, and even sharing that writing life with their students, enhances

their lives in ways beyond their teaching (Grosskopf; Kittle Write Beside Them; Yagelski).

These personal benefits to teachers are rarely the direct focus of the literature on

teacher-writers. Rather, the literature seems to focus most intently on the benefits to students

and to the field, as teachers share their writing experience and texts with their classes,

colleagues, and wider education community. The enjoyment and enrichment teachers may

experience personally is often treated as an added benefit in arguments for teachers to be

writers, the cherry on top of the sundae. Indeed, in an article detailing numerous reasons for

teachers to write, Tim Gillespie ends with a paraphrase of Donald Graves, asking, "Why should

the kids have all the fun?" ("Revisited Article"). Unlike the other arguments in Gillespie's

article, this last comment is unelaborated, left to stand on its own merits.

Whereas teachers' enjoyment or personal satisfaction from writing is rarely the focus of

articles on teachers-as-writers, there are some exceptions. For example, in a 2004 essay,

teacher David Grosskopf describes writing as a part of what allows him to feel "fully awake,"

observing a "link between writing and the wide-awake consciousness I have always sought in

myself, between composing a poem and composing a life." Grosskopf notes, "It is writing that

has led me to feel most alive. Yet he clarifies, "It's not merely the production of writing—even

good writing, and the satisfaction that brings—that has powered my sense of vitality; it is the

act of writing itself." This clarification sets Grosskopf's essay apart from much of the other

literature on teachers as writers, for it separates the act of writing from the outcomes or the

products of that writing. Whereas much of the literature in this area seems to encourage

teachers to write largely to produce texts and strategies that may be shared in their classroom

and in the field, Grosskopf calls attention to his experience while writing. When Grosskopf

writes of his experience in a NWP summer institute, he describes an awakening of sorts, noting

how his actual ways of writing during the institute changed. He says when he wrote at the

beginning of the institute, he wrote to finish texts during the allotted writing time, but over the

course of the institute he observed himself gradually extending his writing beyond those writing

periods, gathering ideas and finding time to write at other points of the day.

While some writers do call attention to their experience while writing, this topic rarely

works its way into literature on teachers as writers. One additional notable exception is a

recent essay by Bob Yagelski, in which he advocates for the significance of the experience one

has while writing. Yagelski suggests that as English educators and as English teachers, we have become overly consumed with writing as the production of texts. While textual production is important and certainly a feature of writing, Yagelski suggests that attention to the experience while writing is also important. He advocates shifting attention to the *writer writing* as opposed to merely the *writer's writing* (9). Says Yagelski, the experience while writing itself can be transformative and lead to realizations and change in a person's life. Thus, Yagelski joins Grosskopf in calling attention to writing as significant beyond the ways it helps teachers learn about, teach about, or write about teaching.

Yagelski's and Grosskopf's essays foreground what is backgrounded (or often not mentioned at all) in other literature on teachers-as-writers: teachers' experiences as people, and how their writing shapes their lives as whole people, not just as teachers. While the experiences teachers have with writing are discussed throughout this literature, they are often used as evidence in support of benefits to students or to the field, or benefits teachers can derive professionally from their writing. Yet if writing is to become a part of teachers' lives, it stands to reason that it might benefit them in significant ways, outside and beyond their classroom walls. In this project, I am interested in ways that teachers' writing is meaningful to them, especially ways that are not directly tied to what they do in the classroom or in their profession. In other words, I inquire into what teachers get out of writing experiences, beyond the texts or writing strategies which they can leverage in the classroom.

Should Writing Teachers Write? Constraints and Challenges to Teacher-Writers

In the midst of these messages from researchers, teacher educators, and teachers that teachers' writing can transform their writing pedagogy, increase their participation in educational conversations, and bring personal enjoyment, there has been some pushback from teachers who perceive the message "writing teachers should write" as an added burden, as one more thing expected of already over-extended English teachers. In many ways this view is not surprising, given the literature reviewed above that so strongly encourages teachers to engage in writing beyond what they already do for teaching, to reflect on and analyze those writing experiences, and then to make them public in a variety of ways. Supporting teachers in pursuing these kinds of writing calls for respect and exploration of the constraints and challenges teacher-writers face.

In the early 1990's, in a heated essay published in the National Council of Teachers of English publication *English Journal*, high school English teacher Karen Jost became a voice for teachers frustrated by messages that they should write in addition to all the other work they do for their jobs. Jost took the controversial stand that "[*h*]*igh-school writing teachers should not write*" ("Rebuttal" 65), stating that they do not have teaching loads or school support to engage in "serious writing," and that she is tired of what she perceived as efforts to make her feel guilty for not doing so. Jost strongly criticized the "dictum" that "writing teachers should write," which she claimed college professors and researchers passed "from the mountain heights of academia…all the way down to those of us in the trenches—high-school English teachers" ("Rebuttal" 65). Jost claimed these academics were just adding one more thing onto the already heavy job descriptions of secondary English teachers, and she observed that, while

some teachers seemed to jump on board with this "dictum" at first, "very few of my colleagues ever actually began serious writing" ("Rebuttal" 65).   Overall, Jost claimed that, "For the full-time high school English teacher, writing is neither a realistic nor a professionally advantageous avocation" ("Rebuttal" 66).

Jost's essay calls attention to several constraints for teachers pursuing writing outside the classroom: lack of time, lack of support, overloaded job descriptions, and different understandings of what teacher writing entails. Jost also points out the way the encouragement for teachers to write can be experienced as either a "dictum" or a guilt trip, either way implying that this writing is a part of being a "good" teacher, and passing implicit judgment on those who choose not to pursue this additional writing.

Ironically, Jost is an effective writer (as evidenced by her essay and its publication in the *English Journal)*, and presumably has enough experience to write with authority about what English teachers as a group should or should not do. Yet her use of the term "serious writing" implies that the type of writing she understands that teachers are encouraged to write does not include the many genres and uses of writing in which she and her colleagues engage, perhaps even including her *English Journal* essay. Rather, she seems to imply "serious writing" is what a professional novelist or poet might do, or writing for publication. This understanding of what teacher writing might entail can be read as a constraint in and of itself, as Jost seems to have the impression that valued writing is literary in quality, not a dabbling effort but a commitment to art, perhaps. Beyond Jost's understanding of what type of writing is valued, she highlights significant obstacles for teachers engaging in any sort of extracurricular writing. As she observes, teachers are often overwhelmed with what they must do for their jobs, may not have

support from their schools, and may simply not feel they have the time to do anything else in the service of their jobs. While Jost presents these constraints in an argumentative essay, it does not change the fact that many teachers struggle with these same difficulties, no matter what their intentions may be about pursuing their own writing. Additionally, it would follow that for beginning teachers just learning to balance the demands of new teaching positions, these constraints and concerns may be particularly relevant.

Not surprisingly, Jost's essay spurred what the *English Journal's* editor later termed "the nearest thing to an avalanche that we at the *English Journal* have experienced" (Nelms "The Round Table" 78), noting they received more reader responses in two weeks than they usually received over seven months (Nelms "Rebuttal"). In response, the *English Journal* ran a forum in the September 1990 issue, including five pages of responses to Jost, ranging from other English teachers who congratulated her for speaking up, to teachers who considered their writing to be a cornerstone of their pedagogy, to university faculty who questioned Jost's portrayal of academia ("*English Journal* Rebuttal"; Christenbury). That same September 1990 issue also contained a second essay by Jost, in which she reiterated "…high school writing teachers should not, should not be obligated to, should not feel guilty if they don't write…" ("Revisited" 32). Then again in March 1991, the *English Journal* ran an additional 21 letters as the debate continued ("The Round Table").   Read together, these various essays and letters shed light on what some teachers value about leading writing lives and on what other teachers view as added burdens or increased expectations on them as teachers. For teachers like Karen Jost (and the others who wrote in support of her position), leading a writing life is one more thing, in addition to all the reading and writing that is associated with teaching, and they do not feel it

is supported by or necessary to their work as writing teachers. This view indicates a particular interpretation of what counts as writing (recall Jost's term "serious writing") and real concern about how this fits into an already over-packed schedule as a teacher. Indeed, this debate seemed to circle back to the same issues discussed in the aforementioned research: that effective writing instruction is more complex than simply being (or not being) a teacher-writer; that there is a need to complicate the ways researchers, teacher-educators, and teachers think about what counts as teacher writing; that teachers' beliefs about writing and writing instruction matter greatly; and that constraints on teachers pursuing their own writing are potentially daunting and restrictive. Additionally, Jost's essays and the many responses from other teachers indicated the significance of how teachers think of themselves as writers (or not) in the way they read and interpret professional literature. For example, despite Jost's clear ability as a writer, she took obvious offense at the message that teachers should write or "be" writers.

While this debate began in the pages of the National Council of Teachers of English publication *English Journal*, one of the most comprehensive responses was printed in the National Writing Project's publication *The Quarterly*. There Gillespie somewhat reframed the debate, shifting away from questions of whether a teacher has to be a certain kind of writer to be effective or whether academics should tell teachers what to do ("Joining the Debate"). Instead, Gillespie focused on issues of authority and professionalism, encouraging teachers to write for three reasons, which are consistent with those discussed in the beginning of this chapter. First, he claimed that "when teachers write, we establish our own authority"(4), pointing to writing as a tool K-12 teachers can use to participate in professional conversations

and in making knowledge, positioning teachers as authorities in writing instruction rather than passive recipients of university or public ways of knowing. Secondly, Gillespie stated writing allows teachers to "expand our repertoire of useful responses to students" (5). Here, he suggested that the reasons Jost gave for not sharing her writing with her students (she claimed that sharing her writing with students limited her choice of subject and bounded the risks she felt comfortable taking as a writer) might allow her to better understand her students' willingness or unwillingness to share their writing. Finally Gillespie stated that writing teachers should write in order to assert themselves as professionals. He explained, "The idea is not that we need to publish…We just need to be able to demonstrate to our pupils, to their parents, and to the tax-paying citizenry that we can do what we ask our students to do, and that our advice and instruction is therefore not just second-hand" (6). In these ways Gillespie placed Karen Jost's essay in conversation with two of the primary reasons teachers are encouraged to write: to shape pedagogy and gain knowledge about writing. He also began to clarify what he considers the core importance of teachers writing: not to publish or pursue careers as writers (alluding to the "serious" writing Jost claimed she and her colleagues avoided), but to engage in the kinds of writing that their students might do. He emphasized the importance of writing teachers representing themselves as professionals to the public, wondering what message it sends for teachers to claim they "shouldn't write" (for, as he says, if a high school English teacher doesn't need to write, then who does?).

While Gillespie's response aptly responded to Jost's concerns in some ways, to some degree reframing the debate and clearly articulating benefits of teachers writing (and from the perspective of a teacher, not a university faculty member), it did not necessarily speak to the

heart of what Jost wrote. Even if Gillespie had been able to convince Jost that teacher writing is

a worthy endeavor, her concerns about lack of time, lack of support, and overloaded job

descriptions are still relevant. Messages that teachers "should" write still easily can come

across, however well-meaning, as either a dictum or a guilt trip, a means of separating out

"good" or "dedicated" teachers from the rest. These are very real concerns for those

interested in supporting teachers-as-writers. Four years after his response to Jost was first

published, Gillespie's article was reprinted in *The Quarterly,* along with an addendum. In that

revisited article, Gillespie noted he was in the midst of beginning a new teaching job, complete

with new students and new course preparations. From this busy teaching context, he reflected,

> So, as I look back on the article I wrote in 1991, I am still sympathetic to Karen Jost's lament. No doubt about it. If we aspire to be good teachers and people, we're working mighty hard, and no one who's working hard particularly enjoys hearing something that might sound like a tongueclucking version of, "You ought to be doing *more*, you know."
> I keep this in mind when I revisit the question, "Should high school English teachers write?" I don't like the loaded prescriptive word *should*, so I'll rephrase it: Is the investment of time in writing worth the return for us as time-pressed teachers? I still have to say, emphatically, *yes.* If and when we can manage it, writing offers us many benefits. ("Revisited Article" 41)

In this reflection, Gillespie provides a sympathetic view into Karen Jost's position, and he

recognizes the way encouragement to pursue writing can feel like an added expectation.

Gillespie also rephrases the prescriptive (and potentially judgmental) statement that writing

teachers "should" write, observing that even in light of all the time demands on teachers, he

still believes "the investment of time in writing [is] worth the return." Here his comment "if

and when we can manage it" is telling, for it points to a need to better understand what that

"if" and "when" hinge upon. How and when can teachers manage this additional writing, so

they can experience the benefits?

Others beyond Karen Jost have observed the obstacles to teachers pursuing writing lives. Blau observes that schools often do not have existing ways to support communities of teachers, which results in some teachers seeking to create their own support systems after returning from an NWP summer institute. Anne Ruggles Gere noted similar challenges when NWP teachers returned to school after the summer, observing, "Their confidence and idealism are tested by staggering class loads, and their reflective thinking is shattered by committee meetings, attendance lists, and hall duty" (2). Gere writes that as time commitments mount, one of the first things to go is often teachers' own writing as they prioritize the writing and work they do for their job. Gere notes that, as a result, many teacher-writers become "former writers" as the school year progresses. Here Blau and Gere are writing about teachers who have already been turned on to writing through their participation in an NWP summer institute, teachers who have some connection to an outside support network. Even for these teachers, however, constraints against pursuing their own writing are strong. Again, this raises the question of how teachers who do not have this external support, perhaps new teachers especially, may create ways to pursue writing amidst the constraints and challenges in a new teaching job. Perhaps just as important, how can teachers create ways to pursue writing that sustains them, so they do not feel like their writing is an added burden or something they do in response to a dictum or implied guilt trip? Again, these questions were central to my interest in this project, and they propel us into the final section of this review of the literature on teachers-as-writers.

Writing Even amidst Constraints: Teachers' Writing Groups

While some writing teachers may enter the profession because they identify as "writers" and actively pursue writing for their own purposes, many others begin exploring their own writing while they are teachers. As I have noted above, teachers who want to pursue their own writing often face constraints of time, support, and potentially even limited views of what "writing" means and how to pursue it. Indeed, even without the time demands teachers experience in their professional lives, leading a writing life can be challenging, as one seeks to dedicate time, develop discipline, sustain motivation, and grow as a writer (Schneider). Thus, teachers who seek to incorporate writing into their lives, be it personal or professional or some combination thereof, have challenges to overcome.

Different teachers and writers suggest different ways of overcoming and working within these challenges. Simone acknowledges these constraints teacher-writers face and advises teachers to create a schedule and find motivation in the actual "doing" of writing, that the act of writing will motivate them to continue. She suggests that teacher-writers find a time of day that is best for their writing and dedicate that time for writing, not to be taken over by other activities. She also suggests teachers seek the support of others in a writing group. The importance of social support for writing is echoed by others as well, who observe that having a community within which to share writing is critical to their writing lives (Bridgford; Rosenthal; Simone).

Indeed for many of the authors who write in support of teachers being writers, such a support network was key to overcoming constraints and pursuing writing lives. Gillespie and countless others have found that support in the National Writing Project. As Whitney observed

in her study of participants from a NWP summer institute, many participants describe their

experience as "transformative," crediting the writing they did and the support they experienced

as significant to these experiences (Whitney "Teacher Transformation"). Burroughs echoes

these findings, claiming, "Writing groups may well be the most memorable experience of

Writing Project Summer Institutes," providing teachers a means to get help with their writing

across different stages of a piece of writing (3). Burroughs observed that his NWP writing group

supported him by encouraging and validating him at the early stages of a piece of writing, then

helping him shape a piece as it developed, and ultimately offering reactions (and likely

additional validation) with finished pieces.   Thus, for both Burroughs and for Whitney's

participants, writing groups played a significant role in their experience during NWP summer

writing institutes.

Yet the writing groups teachers have during a NWP summer institute often do not

continue outside that context, prompting Ann Dobie to suggest that NWP teacher consultants

begin their own writing groups after summer institutes end. Dobie notes that writing groups

benefit writers by providing "encouragement to keep going, learning from each other, and

deepening connections with one another and with one's writing". Other teacher-writers also

point to participation in a writing group as significant, noting such groups provided a sense of

audience, accountability, incentive, and support that helped them pursue their own writing

projects (Durst; Elrod; Flythe; Lawrence; Morris and Haight; Robbins et al.; Williams). Williams

highlights the way participation in a writing group can remind teachers of what it is like to be

student writer, showing how complicated it can be to respond to writing. Durst echoes this

sentiment, considering participation in a writing group as a useful place to learn about revision

and how to provide feedback on writing.   Not surprisingly, perhaps, both Williams and Durst

point to benefits of writing group to their writing and to their teaching. Indeed, writing groups

emerge as a commonly suggested support for teachers seeking to overcome constraints and

engage in their own writing.

Just as approaches to writing can differ between writers, however, approaches to

writing groups can vary as well. In her book *Writing Alone, Writing Together: A Guide for

Writers and Writing Groups,* Judy Reeves describes three primary types of writing groups: read

and critique, writing practice, and writing workshop. While there is considerable variance

within each type of group, Reeves explains that "read and critique" groups typically focus on

group members sharing a text (either read orally or provided through print copies), with

feedback focused on suggestions for improving that text. Members in a "writing practice"

writing group, by contrast, gather to actually write together, often in response to a prompt,

with volunteers sharing their writing orally. Unlike a read and critique group, Reeves says

writing practice groups understand the shared writing to be raw, so there is little if any

feedback. Therefore, whereas a read and critique group may focus on helping a writer develop

a given text through group feedback and suggestions, a writing practice group supports writers

by creating time and a sense of community to write together. Finally, Reeves describes her

version of a "writing workshop" meeting as more similar to a class setting, where a leader

actually instructs the group and designs writing exercises to help writers develop their craft in

certain ways, and where members may still participate in read and critique sessions. Each of

these writing group experiences can offer support to teacher-writers, whether by providing

audience and incentive to develop texts, providing a shared experience of writing together, or

by providing an opportunity to immerse oneself in a particular aspect of writing craft. Of course, as Reeves points out in her book, many writing groups take practices from different "types" of groups as well (Reeves).

Reeves' book, which is not written specifically for teacher-writers, supports reports of teacher writing groups: writing groups can offer support for writers overcoming a variety of challenges and constraints, and the structure of writing groups can shape what kind of support is offered. What seems most important is for writing group members to share expectations for what they want to accomplish, and for the style of the writing group to fit the needs and interests of its members. For example, accounts of faculty writing groups that support members writing for publication (although not necessarily publication about teaching) (Flythe; Morris and Haight) differ from writing groups that have an explicit focus on writing about teaching (Robbins et al.). Other writing groups may leave questions of genre, content, or publication interest more open, allowing members to set their own agendas (Elrod).

Looking across this literature, teachers seem to form and participate in writing groups as one way of working within and against the constraints they experience as teachers seeking to lead writing lives. Some form groups to help them carve out the time to write, giving them accountability to each other (Elrod; Morris and Haight), whereas others targeted specific types of writing (Robbins et al.), and others focused more explicitly on writing for publication (Flythe). Much of the literature on teacher writing groups seems to cluster around what Reeves would call read and critique groups, where the focus of group meetings is to provide feedback on texts, either in writing or orally. What remains to be explored, however, is how creating and participating in a writing group can shape teachers' writing practices and ways of overcoming

challenges to their writing. Additionally, there is almost no research into teacher writing groups involving beginning teachers or writing groups that are not supported by some institutional connection (such as a school district, university, or the NWP).

Overall, while the literature on teachers-as-writers is full of reasons for teachers to pursue their own writing, citing benefits to teachers, students, and the profession, there are also many accounts of the constraints and challenges teachers experience in pursuing writing lives. Karen Jost's objections that English teachers have limited time, excessive grading, and other obligations highlight real difficulties for teachers seeking to build their own writing projects, and one can only suppose that these obstacles are particularly daunting for beginning teachers who have much less experience juggling the demands of teaching. There is a clear need for inquiry that explores how teachers create ways to work within and against constraints to pursue their own writing projects, as well as how they make sense of themselves as writers in this process. There also is a need for greater complexity in what "counts" as teacher writing, and investigation of other outcomes of that writing, besides teaching strategies and texts. This project is a response to these gaps in the literature.

Teachers Inventing Ways to Be Writers within the Context of Constraints: Theoretical Frames

The literature on teachers as writers highlights not only the benefits teachers may experience from pursuing their own writing, but also the constraints of limited time, support, and ways of thinking about writing that they often need to overcome. Creating teacher writing groups has helped some teachers overcome these challenges in order to write despite the

demands associated with teaching. In this project I explore one such teacher writing group,

created and shaped by its members in order to support them as they engage in their own

writing. This is a study of the creativity that teacher-writers display as they work within and

against constraints to initiate and pursue writing that matters to them. My interest in this

study is therefore focused on the teacher-writers themselves, across texts and writing contexts,

as they *do* "being a writer" or "being a teacher who writes," even amidst the challenges they

experience.

In framing this study, I have certain theoretical commitments which have enabled my

role in shaping the writing group as well as my inquiry into our experiences. These theoretical

commitments include a sociocultural perspective on writing and literacy, a rhetorically-based

view of writing as involving processes and practices, and the use of invention as a lens through

which to interpret our experiences in the writing group. In what follows, I make these

commitments more clear.

Overarching Frame: Context and Process Matter (Sociocultural and Process Perspectives on
Writing and Literacy)

Since this study emerges out of an interest in teachers as writers, as well as a

recognition of the constraints that teachers often report in pursuing their own writing, it begins

with a respect for the role both writing and context play in the participants' lives.

Consequently, it is logical to situate this study within sociocultural understandings of writing

and literacy. Lewis, Enciso, and Moje observe that "although there are many strands of

sociocultural theory…all of these strands share a view of human action as mediated by language

and other symbol systems within particular cultural context" (5). In this way, a sociocultural framework emphasizes both the significance of language (written and oral) and context in exploring the experiences of writing group members.

Specifically, a sociocultural perspective calls for considering language (written and spoken) as social and communicative, emphasizing the significance of purpose, setting, context, and listener (Hymes). In this way, this study will consider the writing and talk of the writing group members not merely as utilization of discrete skills, but as ways that participants socially interact, shaped by the purposes, values, and beliefs of those involved in the interaction (Heath Ways with Words; Heath "Protean Shapes"; Street). Thus, this study considers the thinking and actions related to participants' writing as shaped by these factors, situated by time, place, and other features of context. A sociocultural perspective is particularly appropriate in this study, for it respects the ways group members' writing practices and participation in the writing group are bound up in the overlapping contexts of their teaching, life experiences, writing situations, and writing group relationships.

A sociocultural perspective also situates this study within a particular understanding of writing processes and practices, which is suggested by the literature on teachers-as-writers. While the term "process writing" has been used in wide and varied ways (Pritchard and Honeycutt), here I am referring to a particular way of understanding process writing that is rhetorical in nature (Hairston). Specifically I am conceptualizing writing processes within this overarching sociocultural frame, attending to the ways writers consider their purpose, their audience, and the context of their writing as they engage in a writing project. Viewing the processes, or the activities associated with writing in these ways involves attending to both

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what a writer does on her own and what she does as she participates in a writing group

meeting, recognizing that these individual and collaborative actions are a part of her writing

process for a particular work.   Paul Prior explains:

> Writing moves forward (and backward) in fits and starts, with pauses and
> flurries, discontinuities and conflicts. Situated acts of composing/inscription are
> themselves complex composites. Writers are not only inscribing text. They are
> also repeatedly rereading text that they've written, revising text as they write as
> well, going back later to revise, pausing to read other texts (their own notes,
> texts they have written, source materials, inspirations), pausing to think and
> plan. (172)

Here, Prior's description of the complexities involved in specific acts associated with writing

helps highlight the ways writing, in this case the writing of group members, can involve both

individual and social processes, as a teacher-writer moves between reading and writing her

work and reading and thinking about texts by other writers (including group members).

Additionally, writing is seen as contextual and rhetorical in this process, whereby a writer

considers issues of audience, purpose, and desired effect in composing a given text. Thus, in

my interest in exploring teacher-writers' ways of being writers, amidst the contextual

constraints associated with teaching and other factors, I am considering both their writing

processes and the texts they create and share in writing group meetings.

Focusing Frame: Invention in Our Teacher Writing Group

My interest in exploring ways teachers create writing and ways of being writers,

especially within the demands associated with teaching, led me to use invention as a

theoretical frame in this study. One of the five rhetorical canons (invention, arrangement,

style, memory, delivery), invention is often associated with creativity and discovery, and it is

often associated with the formulation of the exigency of a rhetorical situation (Aristotle; Bitzer).

Theorizing a study of teachers-as-writers in terms of invention is useful, for this study explores

ways teachers are inventing texts and ways of being teacher-writers, working within and

against constraints they experience throughout this process. To situate my use of invention in

this study, however, I want to explore when and how invention might occur. I do not consider

invention happening only in initial bursts, for example at the initiation of a project, as may be

implied by some understandings of invention. Rather, I explore group members' involvement

in inventing texts and ways of being writers throughout group meetings, as they react in-the-

moment to overcome constraints and to discuss their own and each others' writing.

This understanding of invention looks beyond a teacher-writer expressing what is

"inside" her or discovering what is "out there," as invention may sometimes be interpreted.

Debra Hawhee suggests an understanding of invention as "invention-in-the-middle," which

moves away from a focus on beginnings, such as initiating a piece of writing with a specific end

in sight, and "toward notions of discursive *movements*, the in-betweenness of rhetoric" (18).

Hawhee notes that a conception of invention-in-the-middle relates to "an action that happens

in the thick of things," where invention "is not a beginning…but a middle, an in-between, a

simultaneously interruptive and connective hooking-in to circulating discourses" (24). This view

of invention is consistent with understandings of writing processes as recursive and

overlapping, and as individual and collaborative. For example, looking across the moments in a

writer's process that Prior described above (e.g., across the forward and backward movement

in composing a text, across the rereading and revising, across the interaction with others and

with the writer's own thoughts), one can see multiple moments when invention occurs, some small and some more significant. An exploration of these inventions frames this study.

Some of these inventional acts are a part of a teacher-writer's process in composing a given text, whereas others extend beyond any given text and support the writing group member composing ways of being as a teacher-writer. Indeed, viewing invention as happening in the moment can be seen to shift the relationship between invention and the other canons: "Rather than the five-step program ('invention, then style, then arrangement...'), the canons would cluster around 'ands,' held in tension, and enacted only through the movements—or turns—of discourse" (Hawhee 32). In this way, Hawhee links invention to responsive, collaborative moves, and highlights the way invention can occur throughout a rhetorical situation, as opposed to just at the beginning. This is relevant to my interest in looking at the ways teacher-writers invent throughout our writing group meetings.

In the coming sections I further situate understandings of invention that inform this study. I begin by drawing attention to a writer's experience while inventing as a means of exploring not only the outcomes of invention but also the experience writing group members may have while inventing. Second, I turn attention to how invention happens, arguing that invention (even invention related to writing) happens in talk as well as in writing. Third, I explore invention as a social act, an interpretation of invention consistent with the sociocultural frame of this study as well as with Hawhee's invention-in-the-middle. This is, after all, a study of a writing group, a context in which social interaction plays a significant role. I end this theoretical framing with a look toward what, beyond texts, may be invented in these experiences. These various considerations of invention support my inquiry into what teacher-

writers are inventing in this writing group, looking beyond texts to also include ways of writing, responses to constraints they experience, and ways of being teacher-writers.

Invention is an Experience Significant in Itself

Whether the writer is inventing written words or ways of being teacher-writers, it can be tempting to focus solely on the products of that invention, be they texts or strategies. This study, however, also focuses attention on invention as an experience, which is significant in itself, in addition to any products that result from that experience.

This distinction is particularly important when studying writing, where the production of texts is often the focus of research and pedagogy. As noted earlier in this chapter, Bob Yagelski highlights the problem with this focus on the text-as-product, and he draws attention to the significance of the writer's experience while writing a text in addition to the text that comes out of that experience. Yagelski emphasizes "what happens *as a writer writes,"* observing that a focus only on the products of that writing "tends to neglect the effect of the *act of writing* on the writer's sense of being in the moment and over time. Whatever happens to a text *after* it is written does not affect what is happening to (or *in*) the writer *as she or he is writing that text*" (17). In this current study, I am adapting Yagelski's interest in the experience of writing to highlight the experience of invention, calling attention to the ways this experience may matter beyond whatever texts or strategies may come out of it. Considering writing group members' experiences while inventing invites me to consider both the products of the invention that are tangible (such as texts) and the ways the experiences of inventing are also significant to the participants. As Yagelski suggests when describing a student's writing about her mother, an

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essay he describes as "about making sense of a crucial experience that continues to shape her

life…about *being* in a challenging world*,"* the actual written text may be "irrelevant in view of

what the experience of writing it might have meant to her" (19). I share this commitment to

looking beyond the written texts or other products of invention in this study, to consider "what

the experience of [inventing them] might have meant" to writing group members.

This exploration of the experience of invention is particularly important for this study, in

that I look not only at the texts that members invent and share during meetings, but also at the

experiences related to those inventions. In some cases, and perhaps in many cases, as Yagelski

would note, the experience of the invention may outweigh the actual text itself in significance

to the author. In other words, just as in Yagelski's student example, a teacher-writer's

experience while inventing may matter more to her than the product of that invention, such as

a text that may be tucked away and even forgotten.

Invention Happens in Talk as Well as in Writing

Although this is a study of a writing group, I maintain that invention of texts happens

both in talk and in writing. As group members write, they are certainly engaged in acts of both

discovery and creation regarding their text. In writing group meetings, as members talk about

writing and about their individual texts, they are likewise engaging in acts of invention.

The ways invention happens in talk and writing is evident in the relationship between

oral and written language during our writing group meetings. To be certain, not all teacher

writing groups emphasize the role of talk about writing to the extent we do. As will be

elaborated in the next chapter, during writing group meetings a member of our group may

introduce her text orally, and then other group members read the written text silently to

themselves. When discussion of the text commences, it is an oral discussion, with members

both responding to oral comments and to the written text itself. Thus the written text and the

oral comments are essentially in conversation with each other in our writing group meetings,

conversational turns in an ongoing communicative chain that develops throughout a group

meeting (and across multiple group meetings over time) (Bakhtin). I argue that the invention of

the text, therefore, especially one that is discussed thoroughly in a group meeting, happens

through both the author's writing and through these intermingling oral and written

conversational turns.

Considering talk as part of the invention of a written text is not new to discussions of

writing processes. For example, Paul Prior notes,

> tracing the writing process also means tracing the inner thoughts, perceptions,
> feelings, and motives of the writer(s) as well as tracing exchanges (spoken or
> written) between people, exchanges in which the content and purposes of a text
> may be imagined and planned, in which specific language may even be 'drafted'
> out in talk… (167-168)

This description seems particularly pertinent to the study of our writing group, where

participants engage in spoken exchanges about their writing, and where these spoken (and

sometimes written) exchanges both reveal and shape the participants' invention of a text. For

this reason, I have interest in the role of talk in the writing group meetings as it relates to

invention, shaping not only members' invention of texts but also their invention of ways of

being writers.

Invention Is a Social Act

Attending to the ways invention happens in talk as well as in writing, especially in the context of writing group meetings, is also consistent with viewing invention as a social act. In classical rhetoric, invention was historically viewed as an individual act. According to that view, invention included those acts of introspection and expression, whereby an individual had an idea and then expressed it to the outside world. In this study, however, I draw on Karen LeFevre's work to theorize rhetorical invention as a *social* rather than individual act, whereby,

> an individual who is at the same time a social being interacts in a distinctive way with society and culture to create something. Viewed in this way, rhetorical invention becomes an act that may involve speaking and writing, and that at times involves more than one person; it is furthermore initiated by writers and completed by readers, extending over time through a series of transactions and texts (1).

Considering invention as a social act is consistent with Prior's discussion of writing processes, which emphasized the ways an individual interacts with readers and other texts while writing. It also is consistent with recognizing the role of talk in rehearsing, planning, and thinking about writing (both as these actions relate to a particular text and to ways of being writers in different contexts). Viewing invention as a social act recognizes the impossibility of isolating the writer/inventor from the social context of the invention. Thus, for a study of a writing group, which involves members routinely discussing and giving feedback on their writing, this study calls for recognition that invention itself is social.

LeFevre notes that "invention becomes explicitly social when writers involve other people as collaborators, or as reviewers whose comments aid invention, or as 'resonators' who nourish the development of ideas" (2). This description is an accurate portrayal of what happens in our writing group meetings, where members serve as collaborators in brainstorming

ideas, reviewers for texts-in-progress, and resonators who support the further development of texts. One element of these social acts of invention deals with the overlapping of conversational turns, also referenced above. As Bakhtin observed, each conversational turn, be it written or oral, is in response to past conversational turns and in anticipation of future ones. Thus, writing group members, in writing a piece that they intend to share at a writing group meeting, are potentially anticipating the response of fellow group members at moments throughout their invention of that piece. Then, after we discuss a piece as a group, if the writer returns to that piece to revise, it is also logical that the conversation during the group meeting plays a role in shaping that text, as the writer chooses whether (or how) to respond to group members' comments. This is not to say that ownership of the text becomes plural, or that the author of that text ceases to be the author. Rather, viewing invention as a social act recognizes the social elements of invention, in this case situating a written piece within a particular conversation or audience, and the role this social process plays in the acts of invention related to that text.

Thus, considering invention as a social act is a necessary part of theorizing this study, in which the focus is on teacher-writers as they share and interact around their writing in group meetings. This emphasis on the social invites exploration of group members' collaborative involvement in inventing texts and ways of being writers within the context of writing group meetings.

The Relationship between the Inventor and the Outcome(s) of Invention

As I explore the members of this writing group inventing texts and ways of being writers, I am interested in multiple outcomes of invention. As noted previously, discussions of teachers-as-writers are most commonly interested in products of teachers' writing, perhaps texts or experiences that may be shared with students or with the field. While these texts and experiences certainly are significant, they are not the only outcomes.

The view of invention that I have presented invites an exploration of how the written text, for example, in turn may play a role in an emerging discourse, such as those in our writing group meetings. Hawhee notes that the concept "I invent," when considered in terms of invention-in-the-middle "becomes 'I invent and am invented by myself and others' (in each encounter)," adding, "In the middle, one invents and is invented, one writes and is written, constitutes and is constituted" (17-18). This observation highlights the way invention not only shapes a text, but also the inventor herself (in this case, the teacher-writer). Here Hawhee is drawing attention to invention as collaborative, as well as the way inventive acts and their outcomes shape both the inventor and future inventive acts. This brings us back to the elements of this theoretical frame already presented: that invention occurs in talk as well as in writing, that invention is a social act, and that the experience while inventing matters (sometimes perhaps even more than the text that is produced).

This final aspect of invention is essential to the way I am framing this project, in that it calls attention to the way members in the writing group are not only inventing but are being invented, by themselves and others, within the context of writing group meetings. As they compose texts, as they collaborate to overcome constraints limiting their writing lives, and as

they seek ways to be teacher-writers, writing group members write texts and are themselves "written" by their involvement in the group.

My Inquiry

I began my discussion of my theoretical framework by situating this study of teacher-writers within sociocultural studies on writing, which respect the context in which these teacher-writers are composing. This frame also is consistent with a rhetorically-based exploration of writing processes and practices. These commitments informed the way I sought to develop and shape this writing group, both in suggesting it and in developing it alongside group members. Within this overall sociocultural frame, my interest in teachers creating ways to write within and even against constraints led me to a focus on *invention* as a specific theoretical lens. In this study I am considering invention that happens throughout writing group meetings and throughout a writer's work with a text. I deliberately explore invention that happens in talk as well as in writing, recognizing invention as a social act. I also emphasize the significance of the experience of invention to the teacher-writer, in addition to any other tangible texts or strategies that may emerge. Finally, I explore the way acts of invention not only shape texts and practices, but also teacher-writers' ways of being writers. In doing so, I attend to the ways teacher-writers invent and are invented across writing group meetings. Informed by these perspectives, the following questions guide this project:

1. How do teacher-writers use participation in a writing group to invent ways to work within and against constraints in order to initiate and develop their own writing projects?

2. What else, besides written texts, is invented by teacher-writers during writing group meetings?

3. How do the various "outcomes" of their invention shape group members' experiences and future inventive acts in writing group meetings?

Chapter Plan

In the remaining chapters in this book I explore different strategies for and outcomes of invention. In Chapter 2, I explore our invention of the writing group itself, and I introduce the writing group members and our core commitments. I also tell the story of how we started our writing group, how we organize our meetings, and how we use technology to assist us in meeting online.

In Chapters 3 through 6, I draw on evidence from the talk and texts we share during writing group meetings to explore four different types of teacher-writers' invention. Chapter 3 begins this exploration by showing one writing group meeting from start to finish, exploring the various strategies writing group members use to invent ways into writing, even amidst the many constraints we experience as teachers. Chapter 4 then focuses on three of the texts discussed in Chapter 3, following them as group members revise and then share them in the next writing group meeting. Rather than focusing on the invention of those texts, however, Chapter 4 considers what, besides those texts, is being invented as I explore strategies group members use to invent ways of being.

In Chapter 5 I take a look at how the strategies for invention from Chapters 3 and 4 are mobilized as writing group members invent ways of intervening in challenging rhetorical

situations. Each of the examples in Chapter 5 involves a writing group member facing a

challenging in-person rhetorical situation, which she recasts as a writing problem through her

writing and her participation in our group meetings. Finally, Chapter 6 looks across one full

year of our work together as a writing group, considering our inventions of ways of *doing*

writing, across contexts. Chapter 6 explores how group members invent ways to "find" and act

on ideas for writing, ways to grow ideas over time, and even ways to respond to externally-

initiated writing tasks.

In Chapter 7 I then look across all the preceding pages to provide an overview of the

invention teacher-writers demonstrate through participation in this writing group. I summarize

and look across contributions of each of the preceding chapters, and I articulate what this study

sought out to do, and what it is leaving to future work. Finally, I end this book with an

appendix, in which I discuss my inquiry into our writing group. Drawing on work in

ethnographic and narrative inquiry, I describe how I gathered and made sense of the talk and

texts shared during the first thirteen months of our writing group meetings.

CHAPTER 2: INVENTING A TEACHER WRITING GROUP

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
. . . .

So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

Judy Sorum Brown, excerpts from "Fire" (Intrator and Scribner 88)

Beginnings: Toward Creating Space in which to Build Our Writing Lives

It was early April 2008. The university campus grounds were coming back to life with

spring, after a long, grey Midwestern winter. The sun was shining again and the air felt lighter,

new growth rustling in the spring breezes. Inside the education building, the students of my

graduate-level English teacher education class were also starting to feel a lightening, as they

began to gradually pull back from their responsibilities in their full-time year-long internship in

secondary classrooms. They were within weeks of completing the five-year university program

in teacher education, looking forward to the end-of-term and the awarding of their teaching

certifications thereafter. These were the final weeks of their university pre-service teacher

education, and they scrambled to finalize course projects while sending out resumes and cover

letters for teaching positions, all while completing the emotional and intensive work of student teaching.

We had been together as a fairly consistent cohort for the past two years, this group of 23 pre-service teachers and I, so this also was a time of making plans for the future, contemplating how we would keep in touch as members of our classroom community scattered nationwide into their first teaching positions. Over the past two years, we had shared many experiences, hours of class time, and a lot of writing. Indeed, writing and the teaching of writing had been particular focal points for me in designing and teaching these English methods classes. We had talked about the various roles teachers' writing lives can play in a classroom, from modeling different writing techniques to allowing empathy for student writing experiences. Class members had written poetry, lesson plans, essays, inquiries into their teaching, and reflections on their commitments and experiences as beginning teachers. I had on many occasions written alongside them, sharing my poetry with the class and opening up my own lesson plans and reflections on teaching as examples in our discussions. Now, as cohort members prepared to take teaching jobs across the country, I wondered what would happen to those budding writing practices, those teaching-writing connections that had started to develop during our two years together.

I was aware of how easily the time demands of first-year teaching could overwhelm teachers' own writing. I had witnessed the flurry of activity many of the teacher candidates had experienced during their student teaching, and I had heard the conversations in class about too-little sleep, working round-the-clock to design lesson plans, and feeling cut off from friends and social lives. Not surprisingly, I, too, had experience with these very constraints, as I sought

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to balance my own teaching and writing with my doctoral studies and family life. I knew from personal experience how easily personal writing, writing that we initiate ourselves, can be pushed aside by the demands of teaching and learning. I also knew how easily the prospect of leading a writing life, of building regular writing time into one's schedule, could feel like an added expectation in an already busy life. Using Judy Sorum Brown's fire image from the poem that opens this chapter, I knew how easily teachers' writing could feel like another well-intentioned log laid onto an already too-packed fire.

Thus, wanting to create space in my own life for writing, and wanting to support my soon-to-be-former students in doing the same, I pitched the idea of a writing group to my class. I offered the idea up during our final two class meetings that April, asking if anyone would be interested in continuing to write together after graduation. It would be a writing group where we could pursue our own writing projects and interests, I told them, and I would be a fellow member in the group, no longer their instructor. I followed up my announcement with an email to the class, where I wrote:

> [During class] I shared that I am interested in forming a writing group for teachers next year - not a space focused on instruction or lesson plans, but a space where we would write for our own purposes and audiences and give each other feedback. Email me if you are interested, and then when we know who we are we can organize a bit.

Four women responded to my invitation: Chloe, Nell, Jenna, and Karen.[1] Nell and Karen had been with me and the cohort for the past four semesters, and they were also good friends. Jenna and Chloe had each been with me for only three of those four semesters. We

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[1] All names used throughout this text are pseudonyms. Additionally, other identifying features have either been removed or given pseudonyms as well.

made only the most general of plans that spring, with me suggesting that I would get in touch in the fall, after at least the first month of school had passed, and we would make plans for the writing group at that point.

A Broader Context: Our Shared Writing Experiences before the Writing Group

In many ways, our writing group was shaped, at least initially, by relationships and experiences the five of us had shared prior to beginning the group. Indeed, my approach to designing and teaching those English methods courses was shaped by my own experiences as a teacher and a writer. Prior to teaching university methods classes, I had taught secondary English classes for over ten years, and during that time I had been staggered by how my growth and thinking as a writer was related to my growth as a writing teacher. I had noticed from my own experiences that once I began to explore opportunities to develop my own writing craft, to attend to my development as a writer as well as a teacher, my teaching of writing had transformed. In the years before I began teaching at the university, as I engaged in writing retreats and workshops for myself, the teacher in me squirreled away lesson ideas and sample texts, while the writer in me began to explore my own voice and interests. These experiences, as well as my reading of literature on teachers as writers (Atwell; Calkins; Fletcher What a Writer Needs; Heard Writing toward Home; Murray; Ray Wondrous Words), had led me to purposefully include multiple opportunities for the pre-service teachers in my classes to focus on their development as writers and to discuss their writing with me and with each other. While these experiences happened before our writing group was even formed, they

represented conversations and writing we had shared together, and which is therefore a part of our story as we created our writing group.

One of the most significant writing experiences we had shared was a poetry unit I had taught during our second semester together. As I designed that poetry workshop, I wanted my teacher candidates to participate in a writing workshop, to experience from "the inside" some of the practices they would later try to teach their students (Blau). During that poetry unit I created opportunities for us to read and discuss a wide variety of poetry, and we used these poems to discuss what different poets did to create certain effects in their writing. We wrote together, in the company of each other, in response to varied invitational prompts that I shared. We shared writing with each other, even at early stages, practicing both giving voice to our writing and providing specific feedback on writing. We chose poems to revise, engaging in full-class and small group revision conversations. I used a rough draft of my own poem to model this process, leading the class through discussing strengths, asking me about my goals for the writing, and making suggestions for future revision. I also shared pages from one of my own writing notebooks, showing how I had worked with ideas on those pages and had experimented with strategies. We also reflected on our writing experiences, and we each orally shared a finished poem with the whole class.

This poetry unit proved to be one of the most memorable units we shared as a cohort. Indeed, when I surveyed my students just before their convocation, a year after the poetry unit, over half of them who had been with me for the poetry unit listed it as one of the most useful or educative experiences of our two years together. Among our writing group members, only Chloe was not a member our class during the semester I taught that unit. Because our class

discussed the poetry unit many times over the next two semesters (when Chloe had rejoined

our class), I provided Chloe with all the materials to help her better understand those

conversations. Consequently, the poetry unit still provided a set of shared experiences with

writing, experiences which became part of our shared memory when Chloe, Jenna, Nell, Karen

and I later formed our group.

In the months after that poetry unit, I led the class (and often participated myself) in

many other writing lessons. I continued to emphasize our roles as teachers *and* writers, and I

continued to build in opportunities for class members to talk with each other about their

writing, across contexts and purposes. In some cases we wrote together as a class, but more

often we wrote on our own and brought drafts to class meetings to discuss. I also sought to

connect our discussions of writing across genres, encouraging the pre-service teachers to

discuss unit plans, lesson plans, student assignments, and student handouts in writing

workshop settings. Then, in our final weeks as a class, I led the class in several writing

invitations aimed to help them make sense of their experiences in teacher education and their

developing identities as teachers. During this final "mini-unit" I also wrote alongside my

students, finding pleasure in the opportunity to write "for myself" in this way and share

creative, personal writing with other writers. These were the pieces of writing we were

working on as a class in those final weeks of April when I suggested the idea of a writing group.

Members of Our Writing Group: Jenna, Chloe, Nell, Karen, and Christine

As I noted above, four women responded to my several invitations to form a writing

group: Jenna, Chloe, Nell, and Karen. With me as the fifth member, I felt like we had a good

number for a writing group: enough people to have a good discussion, but not so many that we would be hard-pressed to give each person an opportunity to share her writing.

With the exception of me, all four of the other members were beginning their first year of teaching as our writing group commenced meeting. Jenna and Karen had accepted jobs teaching English Language Arts (ELA), with Jenna teaching 6th grade in an elementary school and Karen teaching 8th grade in a middle school. Nell and Chloe took positions teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), with Nell teaching high school and Chloe teaching middle and high school. Group members' first jobs were geographically dispersed; although Jenna and Chloe remained within an hour of the university campus, Nell and Karen moved much farther away. Table 1 summarizes the teaching contexts of each of the writing group members.

Table 1. Writing Group Members and Teaching Contexts

Member	Location	Teaching context	Grade Level
Nell	Rural	Private, English as Second Language (ESL)	High school
Jenna	Suburban	Public, English Language Arts (ELA)	Grade 6
Chloe	Urban	Public, English as Second Language (ESL)	Middle/High school
Karen	Urban	Public, English Language Arts (ELA)	Grade 8
Christine	Suburban	English Teacher Education	University

Our teaching contexts were only one facet of who we were and what we brought to the writing group.   Our writing and our conversations during group meetings soon showed how multi-faceted our lives were.

Jenna

Jenna's story of the bedtime dancing game she plays with her two-year-old and four-year-old sons, one of the first pieces of writing she shared with our writing group, paints a vivid

picture of her laughing with her boys and her unselfconscious dancing moves. She writes,

"Won't you take me to…Fun-ky Toooown? Won't you take me to…Fun-ky Tooowwn…[My] boys

and I have just formed a circle. We're dancing our final round, and it's a gooood one. I'm

pursing my lips and pumping my head back and forth as I "do the Egyptian" around the room."

Jenna's writing gives us, her fellow writing group members, a glimpse into her boys'

personalities, as well as her relationship with them: "Jacob's blonde hair flopping, swirling,

swaying, bouncing as his feet move at the speed of light… Bryan, with his toothy grin lighting

up his face, his elbows down by his sides, his hands waving in the air as his crinkly diaper butt

pops from side-to-side, occasionally on beat with the music." Her description of herself in that

same piece creates a similarly fun image: "Now I'm waving my arms in circles over my head

and jumping around in abandon…a woman in ratty sweats and a green T-Shirt that boasts

BROCCOLI IS DA BOMB. [My] hair thrown up in a messy ponytail with random pieces escaping

the ponytail holder, [my] face flushed with exertion…I turn back to my boys, showing them the

full glory of my dance moves. Their giggles are music to my ears."

Jenna's boys are often present in our writing group meetings, whether through Jenna's

writing or as their small voices spill into our Skype conversations, asking for a snack or arguing

over a game. The rest of us have commented on numerous occasions how patient Jenna is with

them, always teaching, always seeming in control. Part of this is because Jenna seems to excel

at multi-tasking, somehow able to focus on discussing writing as she prepares dinner or attends

to her sons, and part because she is, as another group member described her, "warm, patient,

creative."   Jenna's oldest son is the same age as my daughter, and from the moment we

discovered this connection we have enjoyed sharing stories of our adventures in parenthood, from potty training escapades to daycare dilemmas to birthday party planning.

In our writing group meetings, Jenna also has given us glimpses of her classroom and her teaching. A little over one month into Jenna's first year of teaching, she emailed us to fill us in on "the happy haps with Jenna," writing, "I'm teaching 6th grade ELA, reading, and newspaper [journalism], and I'm enjoying it (except for newspaper. The first marking period was a disaster!)." Here again, Jenna's humor comes through, as she invited us to commiserate with her on first semester troubles teaching journalism.   Jenna's teaching job is in a suburban district, close enough to her home so that her family did not have to move. As a teacher, she has had to work around her children's needs and schedules, and she was lucky enough to find childcare close to her school as well. Living close to school also made it possible for Jenna to volunteer as a coach for Girls on the Run, an after-school character development and running program for elementary aged girls that culminates in a 5K run.

Jenna wrote and shared several pieces of writing with our group during our first year together, beginning with "The Dancing Game" excerpted above (see Appendix A for all pieces group members shared during our first year together). In addition to "The Dancing Game," which Jenna worked on for several months, she also wrote an article for her school newsletter on her experience with Girls on the Run, and she began writing fiction, sharing character sketches and story ideas in our meetings. As a fellow group member, Jenna moves easily between providing thoughtful feedback, often speaking slowly and deliberately as she reflects on our writing and on her own. She is also quick to add a note of levity to our conversations, laughing over an experience in her classroom or with her boys, and she is always able to

commiserate or empathize with other members of the group. All of these traits fit with the reasons she said she wanted to participate in the writing group – to have fun, to enjoy writing again, and to explore her personal writing.

Chloe

Like Jenna (and me), Chloe is married, and she took a job in a city relatively close to her home, allowing her to avoid moving in preparation for her first year of teaching. Rather than teaching English Language Arts, however, Chloe teaches English as a Second Language in an urban school. When Chloe emailed the group at the beginning of the school year, she wrote enthusiastically, "It's so exciting to hear where people are at and what everyone is doing this year! It's certainly something we couldn't have imagined a year ago." She added, "I'm teaching at a K-12 charter school. I'm the ESL Coordinator for the whole school, but I teach 6-12 specifically." She noted that her school had not met AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress), so that raised the concern that her job may not be completely secure if improvements were not made. But she added, " I love being able to work with students at all of the grade levels--the little ones keep me sane when the middle schoolers are being snotty and the middle schoolers do the same when the high schoolers are having their moments."   Indeed, this job draws on Chloe's strengths: her flexibility, efficiency, organization, and ability to juggle demanding situations. To add another layer of complexity to Chloe's schedule, she also worked some evenings at a restaurant throughout college and her first year of teaching.

Even as an undergraduate, Chloe had a strong professional presence as a teacher. She spoke with quiet authority in class discussions, often adeptly reframing or redirecting peer

comments. Her teaching job, as well as her busy schedule, placed intense demands on her, however, and in one memorable piece she shared with our writing group she wrote, "I am afraid I am being consumed to the point where my former identity is being displaced by a new one. One I'm not quite sure I want to adopt." She went on to describe sacrifices she was making, of the way relationships and personal joys like writing and reading and cooking were being pushed aside by "long hours spent on reports and curriculum design" and other "duties of a job." Chloe's willingness and ability to voice this conflict, as well as her exploration of her own goals professionally and personally, suggest her courage as a writer and her dedication as a teacher. Another group member described her as "always learning" and "an expert in so much," describing Chloe's voice in our group meetings as "smooth and sure and always questioning." While Chloe is sometimes quieter and more reserved than other group members, perhaps less apt to crack a joke, she is quick to laugh in response to someone else's antics. Observant and trustworthy, Chloe is also generous with her time and thoughtful feedback.

As we were beginning our writing group, Chloe described her goals as "Giving myself permission to make personal writing a priority in the midst of a busy schedule filled with other very important priorities; developing my craft as a short story writer, and using stories, as Tim O'Brien said, 'for joining the past to the future'--in order to examine and make sense out of my memories and experiences." Indeed, over the course of our first year of writing together, Chloe did just that. She wrote several poems, vignettes, and multi-genre pieces in which she reflected on her teaching experiences, her interactions with English language learners, and her own professional goals and interests. She also shared several professional pieces, such as a newsletter she wrote and a professional presentation. She was, indeed, making sense out of

life through writing. Chloe also worked writing into her life in meaningful ways, creating her

own blog as a place to store her writing. Indeed, our group drew on Chloe's creativity and

knowledge of technology on many occasions.

Karen

Like Chloe, Karen also took a job in an urban school, although she taught middle school

English Language Arts. Unlike Chloe and Jenna, however, Karen moved a long distance from

home to take her first teaching job. In fact, out of our group she moved the farthest from

home, taking a job in an urban middle school over six hundred miles from where she grew up.

She had had three study abroad experiences during college, which seemed to have had a big

impact on her and perhaps made her more willing to take the risk and move far from home to a

new city. Thus, as a single woman living in a new city, Karen began teaching while also

beginning a new life in a new home. In an email to us in early fall, she wrote, "I teach eighth

grade Language Arts and one section of Newspaper (grades 6, 7 and 8)--which is also pretty

much a disaster so it will be changing to Mass Media or something like that. I live and teach in

[a city]. I love the city, but it's also sort of weird being here without family. I am meeting

friends in the neighborhood and the staff at my school is awesome :)" Karen's teaching job

proved to have many challenges that first year, especially as she sought to create a respectful

classroom climate amidst great instability in the school as a whole (including numerous

teachers leaving the school mid-year). Karen's ultimate success in this teaching situation is a

testament to her determination, as well as her deep caring for her students. As one group

member observed, Karen's "pieces of writing always convey how invested she is in her profession."

Karen's resilience is likely also due, at least in part, to her outgoing personality and quick sense of humor. One group member described her as "hilarious, unexpected, [and] passionate," and another described her "infectious laughter" and the way Karen often had some funny story to tell during group meetings. Indeed, Karen began our first meeting proclaiming that she had her glass of wine in hand, and her laugh and funny stories were standards in our meetings. Compassionate and caring, Karen often shared stories of her interactions with particular students.

One group member also observed the way Karen's "writing shows how she is navigating the multiple pieces of her identity—her past and present." Indeed, Karen is willing to be vulnerable in her writing, sharing open, honest, and sometimes raw pieces with the group. During our first year in the writing group, Karen shared several pieces about her teaching, pieces through which she sought to both make sense of and preserve her experiences. As she set a writing goal for herself in our first semester together, Karen wrote that she wanted "to do some writing in a new book that I bought over the summer," and then added, "If you are reading this right now, you should text me at some point to say 'Write Karen!'" Indeed, Karen told us in our first meeting that she hoped the group would help provide her a sense of accountability or incentive to write.

Nell

In some ways, Nell's teaching context and living situation differ the most from other members of the group. A single woman like Karen, Nell also took a teaching job away from home, so the fall brought both a new teaching job and a new home for her as well. But unlike other members of our group, Nell's job was teaching at a private school in a somewhat rural area. As Nell wrote us early that year, "I teach ESL at [a private school]. My classes are divided by English ability, not by grade, so in any given class I have a mix of 9th through 12th graders." She added that because her school is private, it has a different schedule than other group members' schools, so she often taught on Saturdays or would have tutorials at night. Nell's new home was in a rural area, and she wrote, "Squirrels keep nibbling at the jack-o-lanterns I have on my front stoops. I've trapped and killed my 7th mouse recently, and I keep finding bees crawling around in my carpet, getting caught in my lamps, or stinging me in the foot in my bathroom." Nell's humorous description of her living situation in many ways reminded me of my own first years of teaching, when I lived in a rural community and had similar experiences with "wildlife" in my home.

A lot of Nell's poetry early on focused on her experiences as a single woman and making a home for herself in a new community. As a writer, Nell is introspective and thoughtful, often using her writing to ponder her relationships, her life, and her students' lives. In one poem, titled "A Comfortable Hell," Nell described her bedroom in her new home and the way she had "dress[ed] it in bright paintings or photos" and created "a jungle in lime greens, tangerines, reds, yellows" with "inexplicably happy monkeys hanging from trees." She wrote of how, even as she congratulated herself "on creating such a great 'space'" and "finally becoming an adult"

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with a "real job," she still often felt alone. This is a challenge many new teachers report as they

immerse themselves in a new job and a new home simultaneously, and Nell's willingness to

explore this through her writing explains why another group member described her as "brave in

her writing," observing that she "explores a variety of experiences, emotions, and genres."

After our first writing group meeting, Nell wrote to the group about "how nice it is to

talk to people that I've known for a few years," articulating a sentiment that would be echoed

by other group members many times. There are many sides to Nell, from her love for Harry

Potter (an obsession I share with her), to her musical talent (she plays trombone in a local

community college band), to her enjoyment of camping and the arts. Reflective and thoughtful,

with a wry sense of humor that often dissolves our group to laughter, Nell is, as a fellow group

member described her, a "Renaissance woman." In joining the group, Nell wrote, "I'd like to

make writing an integral part of my life, like working or flossing. I'd like to experiment with

different genres, especially humor writing!" Throughout her involvement in our writing group,

Nell seems to have done just that, bringing a wide variety of writing to share, from poetry to a

wedding toast to professional texts like a student recommendation letter and a research

project. She is curious and open to feedback, and her playful sense of humor keeps meetings

lively and fun.

Christine (me)

As I have mentioned, I came to know my fellow group members first when they were

students in my English teacher education classes. I was working on my doctorate in teacher

education at the time. Prior to entering the doctoral program, I had spent twelve years as an

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educator. Ten of those years were as a secondary English teacher, where I worked in three

different states and had taught both middle school and high school. Like Nell and Karen, my

first teaching job was not close to my home, requiring me to move to a new state and find a

new home as I began teaching. I had taught in two relatively rural sites and one suburban

district. I also had spent time working as a literacy coach in New York City. While teaching, I

also had sought out experiences that allowed me to pursue my own writing, and I had become

involved in professional development, from mentoring/coaching teachers to leading

professional development seminars and workshops.

In the fall of 2008, I wrote to the group that my goals were "to carve out more time in

my weeks to write for my own purposes (where I am primary audience); to use writing to help

me cherish some of my experiences and to help me process and make sense of others; to

gather some great models of other people's writing to help inspire me." Indeed, these goals

were largely what led me to suggest the writing group in the first place. As a doctoral student

and teacher educator, I had found my own writing life was too often squeezed out, and I hoped

that the writing group would help me change that. I had also genuinely enjoyed working with

the students in my methods courses, and I hoped this group would help us stay in touch in a

meaningful way.

My role in the group was complex from the start. I was a fellow writer, and I identified

as a teacher-writer as I sought to develop a writing life while teaching, just as the other

members were. I also had a history with the other group members, having been their

instructor in a series of university teacher education courses. Finally, I was interested in

studying our writing group as a researcher. For me, navigating these roles became a matter of

consistently foregrounding my role as a writer, while also being open and explicit about my

other roles in the group. My primary interest was in writing with the other members of the

group, so I made every effort to ensure that my research interests did not interfere with any of

our experiences as writers in the group. I go into much more detail about my role in the group,

as well as my inquiry into our work together, in Appendix B.

Central Commitments in Developing the Writing Group

Judy Sorum Brown's poem "Fire," which opens this chapter, can be read as a metaphor

for the relationship between teachers and writing. As I noted throughout Chapter 1, teachers

are often encouraged to write, beyond what they do for their teaching, as a ways of being a

"better" writing teacher or a fuller participant in the field. Within this frame, however, many

teachers perceive writing as another they must place on their fires, perhaps in the interest of

feeding the fire, but actually in danger of putting it out (Jost "Rebuttal"). In collaboratively

inventing this writing group, however, I was seeking to explore ways to consider framing writing

as the space that we build into our lives between the logs, space that helps the fire grow

brighter. To this end, as I planned for our first meeting, I had several key commitments in mind.

These commitments were informed by my read of the literature on teachers-as-writers, and

they developed over time in collaboration with group members as we invented our ways of

participating in the writing group. Essentially these were commitments to pursuing our writing

together in ways that respected the constraints we experienced and which allowed us to

support each other, building the space to initiate and pursue writing together.

The first commitment was that the group would be **flexible** and **responsive** to group members' interests and needs. From my own work with new teachers and from research in the field, I knew that the first year of teaching can be a stressful, overwhelming experience for many people. It can be a time when many teachers feel pulled between ideas of what they should be doing in their classrooms, as they seek to establish new curricula, relationships with students, acclimate to the school culture, and manage their classrooms (Ingersoll; Kauffman et al.; Stanulis, Campbell and Hicks; Veenman; Worthy). The first year of teaching, and perhaps especially the beginning of it, is often marked by long work hours and stress. I did not want the writing group to add to that stress, either by becoming one more commitment on already full schedules for these women, or by becoming a source of guilt or added stress in preparing for meetings (Jost "Rebuttal"). Thus, from the beginning, I emphasized that what we did in the group could and would change, depending on what worked for us individually and as a group. I wanted us to decide as a group how often we met, as well as what we did in preparation for those meetings. I also wanted everyone to know that these choices could always be revised, depending on what we wanted and what worked for us. As I wrote in my first email to the group at the beginning of October, "I really envision this being a fun group, where we chat and laugh and share together, and where our participation helps us as writers and also helps us continue our friendships with each other." I wanted the group to be enjoyable for all the members, something we could look forward to attending, and in my view that required the group be responsive and flexible to what different members wanted or needed.

A second commitment, also evident in the above email excerpt, was that the writing group would be a place for us to continue and grow our friendships with each other. It would

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be based in **personal relationships**. This was a priority for me for several reasons. First, I felt

that these relationships, begun over the past two years at the university, would be important

during my fellow group members' induction years. Teaching can be isolating in the best of

times, and most especially so during the first year of teaching (Feiman-Nemser; Veenman;

Worthy). While this writing group was not designed to be a new teacher support group, I knew

that it could still provide a great deal of support through nurturing relationships that had

started at the university, providing a consistent opportunity to gather and talk. I hoped that the

development of these personal relationships and support would also be an added incentive to

come to group meetings, especially after a long day of teaching. Additionally, I felt that

developing our relationships with each other also would help us as we shared our writing. It

takes courage and trust to share writing with other people, even when that writing is not

particularly personal in nature (Dawson; Gillespie "Joining the Debate"). I wanted the writing

group to be a place where we could all feel comfortable sharing writing with each other, where

we would be able to trust that other group members would not judge our efforts or us, and

where we could get support as writers and as individuals. I hoped that this would be a group

that, through open sharing and talk about writing, would support our social invention of texts

and other outcomes. For this to happen, I believed that we needed to build time into our

meetings just to talk, to continue to get to know each other and build the relationships that

would then support us as we shared our writing.

My third commitment to **talk-based meetings** also relates to relationship-building.

Because I had a real interest in invention happening in talk as well as in writing, I wanted our

writing group to be a place where we would meet to talk about writing, rather than just

responding to each other's work with written comments. Building talk about writing had been

a focus of my instruction throughout the methods courses I had taught, and I believed in the

importance of those oral conversations in helping an author develop ideas for writing, clarify

purpose and desired effect, and make sense of writing choices and possibilities for revision

(Dawson). I felt that through talk, we could best explore and follow the author's intentions in

her text. I also felt that being able to talk about our writing invited invention beyond the text,

where we could more explicitly discuss invention related to ways of being writers and ways of

being writing group members.

My fourth commitment was that we would be able to **pursue writing that we initiated**

through participation in the meetings. I knew all five of us wrote daily, most often writing for

courses we took or as a part of our jobs as teachers. We wrote lesson plans, student handouts,

feedback to students, course papers, emails, and notes. The vast majority of the texts we

wrote, especially those that we really took time to compose and revise, were either academic

or professional in nature, initiated by other people. I wanted this writing group to be a place

where we could explore writing that we initiated, writing Janet Emig would call "self-sponsored

writing" (Emig), where we could experiment with genre, topic, style, and techniques. As I wrote

to the group in preparation for our first meeting, I told them I envisioned "a writing group

where the focus was on writing things based on our own interests and writing goals. So, a

writing group that would support all members as we pursue writing pieces that matter

personally to each of us... where each writer would follow her individual intentions, with the

support of the group to discuss, provide feedback, offer support, and help us clarify our

vision/effect/etc of our writing." I hoped that the support and interaction from group members

would help each of us discover and create (and, in turn be shaped by) writing that was personally meaningful to us, encouraging us to try new types of writing and explore possibilities as writers.

My fifth commitment, that we would have **choice as writers** about what to bring to meetings, was linked both to my interest in us initiating our own writing and being flexible as a group. I wanted each of us as writing group members not to feel guilty if we only had time to begin a piece of writing, but rather to bring that beginning to a meeting and see if, through the talk in the meeting, we could develop it into something we wanted to pursue. Indeed, choice is a central feature of many writing pedagogies, ranging from students having choice over what to write (Atwell; Fletcher What a Writer Needs) to students having choice of how to respond to an assignment (Hillocks). I wanted to look beyond choice of what to write to also build in choice on how to participate in writing group meetings. I wanted us to feel comfortable coming to meetings even on weeks when we had no writing to share. I did not want anyone to feel obligated to apologize for not bringing writing on those weeks, but to feel welcome to share even brainstorming for future writing or just participate in conversations about other members' texts. I also wanted us to all feel comfortable bringing whatever piece of writing we chose to a meeting, even if it was not something we initiated. I hoped that the writing group would become a resource for us to talk about writing across genres and purposes, and to develop as writers across contexts.

At our first meeting and as meetings progressed, other group members voiced many of these same hopes and commitments, especially expressing an interest in pursuing our own writing and in continuing to develop relationships begun at the university. At our first meeting,

other group members also mentioned their interest in the writing group as a source of incentive or accountability, to prompt them to make time for their own writing, especially in the midst of the busy work of teaching. Indeed, this is a common reason for forming writing groups, and something that the literature shows to be a potential benefit from participating in one (Elrod; Flythe; Reeves; Robbins et al.; Rosenthal; Schneider; Simone; Williams). This interest echoed a final commitment of mine, to **support each other in making time to write**, as often as we could. As noted above, I did not want the group to be a source of guilt or stress, as I knew we would all experience times when we had to miss meetings or when we would not have writing to share. But, like the other group members, I hoped our group meetings would be an incentive to write, even just ten minutes before a meeting, knowing that we would have an audience ready to discuss whatever we brought.

We also spent considerable time at our first meeting discussing what we each wanted to get out of the group, and these conversations clarified the core commitments mentioned earlier. Members talked about wanting the group to be fun and laid back, and to help them, as Jenna said, "enjoy writing again." Nell added that she wanted to make writing a part of her lifestyle. Several group members mentioned hoping that the group meetings and conversations would be an incentive to follow through on their writing, and Chloe added her interest in feeling like she was making progress every two weeks. We discussed types of writing we thought we would like to try, as well as our interest in staying connected with each other across so much physical distance.

Getting Started: Building Our Online Writing Group

When I had originally pitched the idea of a writing group, I envisioned a group like some I had read or heard about, perhaps meeting at a coffee shop or restaurant close to campus, where we might find a regular table or corner at which to share food, discuss writing, and catch up with each other. This vision had to change, however, when Nell and Karen each took teaching jobs far from campus and from other members of the writing group. As I communicated informally with the women that summer and heard these updates, I realized that our meetings would have to move online.

Thus, when I finally did email the group at the beginning of October, I proposed that we meet strictly online, to enable all of us to meet together. I had deliberately waited until October to begin the writing group, recognizing that each of the participants would be starting her first year of teaching that fall. I hoped that by waiting until October, a month into the school year, group members would have begun to establish routines in their new jobs, the knowledge of which would help us schedule and make time for meetings.

How We Talked about Writing Online

Even with an online meeting, I still wanted us to be able to talk about our writing. While there are a number of accounts of online writing groups, many of these groups focused on written response to writing, with members sending texts electronically and then responding to each other in writing (Elrod; Lawrence; Rosenthal). Although that approach can work quite well, particularly for writing groups whose primary goal is to provide feedback on texts, such an approach would not be consistent with some of my commitments and hopes for our group. In

particular, I was committed to us being able to talk about writing and our writing lives, not just

respond to texts, so I sought a way for us to have real-time, talk-based meetings online. Skype,

a free, online phone program, was the answer to that need. Once all of us had downloaded

Skype onto our computers (I emailed group members directions in preparation for our first

meeting), we had a way to hold a five-way conference call using computer microphones and

speakers. Skype had the added benefit of being free to use, so no member was paying long-

distance telephone fees.

For most meetings, I would begin the Skype call at the agreed upon time, and I would

add group members to our call as each person came online. On those meetings where I ran

late or was unable to attend, someone else started the call. We quickly learned that using

earbuds or headphones was necessary to eliminate feedback, and we also learned that

updating Skype frequently helped with the quality of our call. Even with these realizations, we

still had plenty of challenges in the first few months, as calls were dropped completely,

individuals were dropped out of calls, or feedback or loss of sound interfered with hearing each

other. On some occasions individual group members had difficulty with Internet access (for

example, Karen lost Internet access for several weeks in her apartment), which also was a

limitation. We tried to be creative when such problems occurred, even resorting to using a cell

phone on speaker mode to "patch" a group member in on occasion. Over time, we got better

and better at troubleshooting our technological problems, and Skype improved their program

significantly, so that the frequency and resultant disruption of these issues diminished as our

meetings continued.

Because Skype could not support a five-way video call at that time, we were limited to only being able to hear each other, which presented another challenge early in our group meetings. Most of us uploaded pictures of ourselves as our Skype picture, which helped give some visual cue during our meetings. At our first meetings, when the online forum was most new to us, there was more nervous giggling, covering up discomfort over not having the visual cues we were used to in a group conversation. There was no way of knowing, for example, who would speak next, and sometimes we inadvertently spoke over each other. Gradually we began to develop oral cues to replace the visual ones we were used to in our in-person interactions. As we gained experience in our online meetings, we also became less worried about seeming rude when we spoke over each other, since it was relatively impossible to tell who would speak next. Thus, when comments did overlap, group members would quickly defer to each other, saying "you go ahead," and the conversation would continue with little interruption.

To further help us acclimate to our online forum, I also suggested a face-to-face meeting in late December, when everyone was home for winter break. By that point we had been meeting for about two months, but we had not been together in-person since the previous spring, over seven months before. I hoped that seeing each other in person would further help us reconnect, and it would re-establish an in-person tie as a group. On that one occasion, we met in a real-life coffee shop, settling in with warm drinks and snacks to catch up and discuss our writing. Only Chloe was unable to attend, due to a last-minute car problem.

How We Shared Our Writing Online

Being able to talk in real-time online only solved one of our logistical problems as a group. We also needed a secure way to share our writing with each other. Because I hoped we would be able to trust each other with personal writing, as well as with writing that was raw and unformed, I knew we needed a private way to post and share writing. While we used email extensively to plan meetings, I worried that email would be less secure in sharing writing (especially for members using school email addresses), and I also worried that it would be difficult to keep our writing organized via email exchanges (it would be hard, for example, to reference back to previous versions of a piece of writing). I ended up proposing a private wiki to solve this problem. A wiki is a collaborative website that can be edited (adding links and pages, uploading content) by any authorized user. I had used a wiki for another writing group I was in, and I also had created a wiki for the teacher education cohort, as a place to share their teaching materials into their first years of teaching. As a result, each of us in the group had at least some limited experience with working with a wiki. For our writing group I paid to upgrade our wiki to make it private, password-protected, giving only the five of us access to the wiki and to the writing posted there.

I set up a fairly simple wiki, with pages for each member to post her writing.[2] In preparation for meetings (and sometimes during the meeting itself), we would each upload our writing to our personal page, which the other members could then access. After a few months, Chloe decided that she preferred using her blog to share her writing, so she posted a link to her

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[2] My thanks to Ann Lawrence, who provided a very useful model for organizing this wiki.

blog on her wiki page instead. While Chloe's blog is technically public, in other words accessible

to more than just the members of our group, she did elect to password-protect certain entries,

sharing the password with us during writing group meetings.

While our group continues to meet even as I write this, well into our third year together,

I am focusing this particular book on our first year of meetings, spanning from October 2008

through November 2009. I focus on this particular year of our group's work together to capture

meetings for at least one calendar year, and to be able to look across experiences associated

with the other group members' first year of teaching. Our first year together captures many

instances of invention, from the collaborative invention of our writing group itself, to invention

of texts and ways of being teacher-writers.

How We Organized Our Meetings Online

Once we had settled on how to talk about and share our writing during online meetings,

our next task as a group was to decide on the timing and structure of our meetings. Because I

felt that we had to decide these elements together, I emailed other group members before our

first meeting, asking them for their input, suggesting we give ourselves enough "time to write in

between meetings, without it feeling stressful" while making sure "we are meeting regularly

enough that we feel some level of continuity." In a series of long email strings, we gradually

pieced together a plan to meet every other week, beginning at the end of October 2008. Group

members were unanimous in suggesting every other week, which as Jenna wrote in her email

response, "sounds like it'd give me enough time to write in between meetings, so it wouldn't

put added pressure on me, but also would be often enough to keep things moving along."

Once that was decided, we began another fairly long string of emails to find a day and time that would work for these meetings, ultimately deciding to meet for two hours after school on alternate Thursday afternoons.

In our first meeting, and over the next several weeks, we began to iron out some of the logistics for what we would do during and in preparation for our meetings. It took us several meetings to really get started, as we talked through a schedule for the rest of the semester and as we experimented with various online technologies. We discussed and experimented with whether we would write together during meetings, perhaps in response to a shared invitational prompt as in a "writing practice group" (Reeves), or if we would rather bring our writing to meetings for discussion. We brainstormed what topics we might write about as we sought to initiate our own projects. I invited group members to share strategies they had tried with their writing, and I introduced several writing exercises. I also suggested we agree up front to not apologize if we were too busy to write between meetings. We ended those beginning meetings by posting goals, in an effort to motivate ourselves and each other to write.

How We Participated in Writing Group Meetings Online

After those initial meetings, which were more structured and exploratory in nature, we settled into a rhythm and a predictable structure for our meetings. One of the features of this structure was our practice of beginning each meeting with what we came to later call our "reconnecting time," a time when we literally reconnected with each other online (sometimes multiple times when technology did not cooperate) and when we caught each other up on what was happening in our lives. Depending on what was happening in our lives, and

depending on whether group members were running on time or not, this reconnecting time

could last anywhere from 15-40 minutes, and probably averaged about 25 minutes in length.

After each person had updated the group on what was happening in her life, someone would

ask who had brought writing that week, and we would begin sharing, which would continue for

the rest of the two hour meeting. As we spent more time working together, this transition into

our writing became more and more fluid, with any group member initiating the transition: "So,

does anyone have writing to share?" Each of us would then tell what we brought, if anything,

to that meeting. Then either someone would volunteer to share, or someone would suggest a

particular member go first, and we would begin.

When we shared our writing, we followed a fairly regular routine to talk about our texts,

beginning with a group member introducing the piece of writing she had posted on the wiki.

These introductions ranged in time and complexity, largely depending on the author's needs

and interests. Sometimes a simple introduction sufficed, with the author quickly explaining the

genre and focus of what she had posted. Other times, the author would provide a more

elaborate context for her posted text, perhaps explaining what inspired her to write it, or how

she was feeling about it. Then the author would tell us what help she needed on her writing, or

someone might ask the author what she wanted us to look for as we read. Then we would read

the text silently to ourselves, saying "I'm done" when finished to cue other members.

After everyone had finished reading the posted text, our discussion would begin. Our

discussion came to follow the general pattern that we had used in writing workshops in the

teacher education courses I taught (Dawson). We usually started with pointing out what we

thought worked well with the text, complimenting the author on what stood out as strengths.

These positive comments ranged from general compliments about the overall content, effect, or genre of the piece, to specific comments on words, phrases, images, or techniques we thought were particularly effective or moving. All of these comments were informal, with members chiming in as they thought of things to add. Then, depending on the piece shared, the author and other group members would ask each other questions about the text, make suggestions for future writing or revisions, or otherwise discuss the author's needs with proceeding. The author always had an active role in the conversation. Conversations about texts could last a varying amount of time, but in general were around 25 minutes including reading time. A lot depended on how many people brought writing in a given week, and on how much help the author needed on a given piece of writing.

Our meetings would end when everyone had shared. For the most part, we were able to keep our meetings to two hours in length, although there were often occasions where different members had to arrive late or leave early due to other schedule conflicts (carpool, school responsibilities, childcare, etc.). In this way, we sought to help each other work around the scheduling problems that otherwise might constrain writing or talking about that writing.

Studying Our Writing Group

From our first meeting, I began gathering the talk and texts from our meetings as part of my inquiry into our writing group. I took fieldnotes, and I audiotaped our meetings after we had become comfortable with the online technology (approximately three months into meeting). I also gathered all written texts that group members shared during meetings. These

written texts, fieldnotes, and audiotapes are the primary sources that I draw on for evidence in the coming chapters. I go into much more detail on my research moves in Appendix B.

The invention of this writing group is ongoing, and was ongoing throughout the focal year represented in this book. As we embarked on creating a writing group that would help us build space for writing in our lives, we built on conversations that we had begun during our work together at the university. Our collaboration as writing group members soon went far beyond those classroom writing workshops, however, as we discussed our writing goals and as we experimented with how we wanted to share our writing. The writing group we collaboratively invented has stayed true to my initial commitments that it be flexible and responsive to our needs, help us develop our personal relationships, allow us to talk about our writing, support us in pursuing writing we initiate, allow us to choose what to write and how to participate, and support us in carving out time to write. Our use of Skype, which allowed us to talk in real-time about our writing, and a private, password-protected wiki, which allowed us to securely share our writing with each other, allowed us to remain true to these commitments while meeting online. These technologies also supported the two regular features of our writing group meetings: our reconnecting time, in which we caught up with each other's lives, and our sharing of writing, in which we discussed whatever texts group members had chosen to post and share in a given meeting. The following chapters now take a closer look at what we invented during those meetings.

CHAPTER 3: "WHAT AM I DOING? WHAT AM I HOPING TO GET OUT OF LIFE?" INVENTING WAYS INTO WRITING

I write for a couple of hours every morning. But it's what I do during the other twenty-two hours that allows me to do that writing.

Donald Murray (as quoted in Fletcher <u>How Writers Work</u> 21)

It is coming up on 4:30 Thursday afternoon in mid-February 2009, and I am tucked away in a basement conference room at the university, alone with my computer. I continue writing, having finally scheduled myself for some "personal writing time," albeit right before our writing group meeting this afternoon. I scan the letter I am drafting, not quite sure what I want it to say or how I want it to say it. I am glad to have the writing group to share it with soon, when I might get some clarity.

We have been meeting as a writing group for about four months now, and over the past two months we finally began to regularly share writing with each other. It is nice to be past the early formative stage as a group, and we are now less focused on logistics and technology issues. We have begun to settle into our routine, beginning with "reconnecting time," when we bring each other up to speed on what is happening in our lives, and then moving into sharing and discussing our writing.

I know from our emails this week that everyone is planning on attending today's meeting, working around, of course, work and childcare and carpool obligations. We have had

to be a flexible group, trusting that between 4:30 and 6:30 on meeting days others will be online, perhaps already in conversation, and eagerly awaiting each new arrival. When I had originally pitched the idea of a writing group, I had imagined us gathering in person, perhaps at a coffee shop or diner, sharing writing over coffee or dinner. But when we found ourselves spread across (and even outside) the state, that in-person coffee shop table had to change into a virtual one. Rather than walking through a door, hearing a bell ring and seeing group members smile expectantly to welcome each new arrival, we each log onto Skype, letting our online status change announce our presence to the rest of the group. I imagine others smile as I do though, when each new person enters our virtual meeting place.

Even though I miss seeing everyone in person, meeting online has had surprising benefits. On this particular day I owe my personal writing time to being able to end one meeting and then find my basement hideaway, instead of hopping in a car and fighting traffic to make it to writing group on time. Immersed as they are in the first year of teaching, the other four group members do not have to factor extra drive-time into their Thursdays or search for a parking place to rush to meetings. Rather, we each gather in our own places, perhaps a home or school office or a classroom. Life from our individual places often spills into our meetings, as students or after-school announcements or colleagues or our own children's voices suddenly pop up, reminders that our virtual meeting space actually connects multiple physical places.

This chapter begins my exploration into ways group members, myself included, invent writing and writing opportunities amidst the constraints and time demands associated with

teaching and with our daily lives. Each of us has a busy life, full of teaching, lesson planning,

grading, meetings, and other responsibilities. We have personal lives as well, although we each

note times when these get squeezed by our professional responsibilities. We observe as well

that our professional and personal lives overlap in places, where we find ourselves having

deeply personal reactions to what happens with our students and classrooms, and where our

personal life experiences color our energy and ways of being teachers. Time often feels already

too limited, and yet we meet, every other week, to talk about writing.

Whereas other work has explored ways that teachers may seek the support of a writing

group for reasons of incentive and accountability (Elrod; Flythe; Morris and Haight), helping

them carve writing time out of busy schedules, this chapter extends those conversations to take

up the question, *how do teachers invent ways into writing, in collaboration with other writing*

group members? This question is relevant to the literature on teachers-as-writers, which extols

the benefits of teachers writing. Indeed, all of those benefits hinge on whether teachers are

able to create ways to integrate writing into their lives, even in the midst of constraints. To

respond to this inquiry, I explore the strategies that writing group members use to create ways

into their written texts and ways into writing practices in general.

In this chapter, I focus attention on how different moments in group meetings, from our

"reconnecting time" at the beginning of meetings to our discussion of our writing that follows,

show group members inventing ways into writing. Whereas other work has acknowledged that

invention happens in both talk and in writing, much of the work on teachers-as-writers

emphasizes the role of talk in responding to writing, exploring how talk may shape the

invention of a text. This chapter, however, looks not only at the talk that is in response to

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written texts, but also at the talk that is not explicitly about any specific text. In other words, in this chapter I explore the ways that talk that both is and is not about texts may be involved in the invention of those texts. Through this exploration, I consider ways that teacher-writers use these different types of talk, in conjunction with the writing itself, to invent ways into writing.

Because I call attention to the writer's experience during invention, and because I recognize the ways that invention happens throughout the course of a meeting, I write this chapter as a narrative, to show the events of one meeting, as they unfold, in the order in which we, as writing group members, experienced them. Here and throughout this book, I draw on the actual texts and talk shared during meetings, captured through fieldnotes and audiotape (unless otherwise noted). Thus while this is a story of one meeting of our writing group, it is also a story of group members coming to writing, in varied ways. This story begins with the beginning of the meeting, and it ends at the end of the meeting, in an effort to show the rhythm and experience of the meeting itself. As with any good story, there are conflicts in the form of the constraints and limitations we group members experience and share, as they relate to our personal lives, our teaching lives, and our writing. Our various inventions of ways into writing, through texts and talk, provide a glimpse into some of the strategies we employ as we respond to these conflicts.   In many ways, this chapter sets the stage for future chapters, which look more closely at moments within meetings and across meetings.

"Reconnecting" Time: Inventing Ways into Writing without Talking about Texts

At 4:30 I log onto Skype and open our group's wiki. I wonder if I will eventually post things in advance here, or if the minutes just before writing group will continue to be precious writing time for me. Once again, I tell myself I really should start blogging like Chloe. Then my writing would be all together, already there for the group to see. Time, as always, seems to constrain me. When I sit down to write, I too often have given myself too little time already, and I hate to share that time with figuring out how to set up a blog.

Nell logs on next, her Skype account suddenly showing "online," the familiar green check mark lighting next to her name. Nell is in her home, located near the campus of the private boarding school where she teaches. Chloe soon joins us as well, Skyping in from her urban, public school classroom.   As we begin to catch up, talk of lives and school and writing merge and overlap, reconnecting us to each other and laying a foundation of talk on which to later share our writing.

 "It's frustrating that I can't decide on like a medium [for writing]," Nell laments, early in our conversation. We have been talking about our ways of writing, with Chloe saying she composes as she types, especially now that she is using her blog so extensively as a place to keep and share her writing with us. Nell says she usually writes by hand when she composes, but these handwritten texts are harder to share with us, since we post digital texts to our wiki.

"Yeah," I agree, "I feel like I'm right in between you guys, where I type faster than I handwrite. But sometimes I like the kind of scattering of a handwritten piece, you know like being able to use space differently is easier for me."

"Do you edit and revise when you type it in?" Chloe asks Nell.

"Yeah, I do change it a little," Nell replies, adding, "when I do a draft, you know, the way that I can, you know, jot, if there is other, you know, phrasings I want or other words I want to work in, I can put them in in different ways than I can when I'm typing it." She continues, "so, I make those decisions, I make more of those decisions like when I am going through it to type it in."

Chloe and I brainstorm ways that Nell might share her handwriting with us, such as scanning or taking a digital picture of her written texts and posting these. Yet Nell's search for a "medium" for her writing seems to extend beyond just how to share her writing with us, as she explores how to actually enter that writing in the first place. Through this informal "reconnecting" talk time, Nell has begun to articulate the complexity of her frustration, and how even the choice between handwriting and typing shapes her experience while writing. Handwriting allows her to "jot" ideas "in different ways" than when she is typing, and typing from her handwritten draft allows her a later chance to begin revision. These jottings and in-typing revisions are inventive moves Nell is making as she writes, and yet, despite the ways handwriting seems to be working for her, she still finds herself searching for a "medium" for her writing. This search seems to be initiated at least in part through her participation in the group, where a handwritten text is more difficult to share than a typed piece. In this way, Nell seems to be considering altering her way of entering writing or order to facilitate sharing with us, a change that would likely alter her experience while writing. Even these small moves are evidence of Nell's invention in the face of constraints of time and technology. I also wonder if making this change from handwriting to typing a draft may shape Nell's awareness of audience,

where in typing up a draft she may be consciously preparing it to share with the other members of our group.

Nell then changes the subject, excitedly sharing that, unlike normal weeks when she teaches classes on Saturday, she has this coming Saturday off, giving her a three-day weekend. "I was so excited about it, especially because I get to finish the week on a Friday, like a normal person! And maybe I can like go to a happy hour or something!" Nell laughs happily at the thought.

"You could!" Chloe responds. "How exciting is that!"

"I always forget you work on Saturdays," I say.

"Yeah, I don't forget. It's horrible." Nell's morose tone reduces us to laughter.   "Yeah, but let me see," she continues, and then adds, "Christine, I don't know if I told you last week, but I kind of started dating someone here." Someone, she tells us, who appeared in her poem about dating and loneliness titled "A Comfortable Hell," which she had shared the previous month at a meeting. "So that may be why I'm having trouble tapping into the poem because, like I'm not as lonely anymore." Nell adds, "Except still, kind, I mean, this is kind of a surface …I think like what I'm dealing with is deeper… I think I still have to resolve it. But he's the one who poked my ribs with the ice scraper [in the poem]."

"Right…I remember that line," Chloe says.

"So, so we're going to a…so the point is, um, this weekend we're going to [the city] to see a [hockey] game on Sunday. And do some shopping and stuff since you can't buy anything here, unless you order it online."

We begin laughing again, as we joke about what someone could buy in Nell's small town, and how she managed her Christmas shopping that year. Then I return to Nell's observation about not feeling as lonely anymore, and that shaping what she wants to do with her earlier poem. "It's funny how I think life can…kind of call you to write certain things and also block you from writing certain things," I comment.

"Yeah!" Nell agrees. "So now I'm like, shoot! So now I'm not so upset," Nell laughs, and Chloe laughs with her. "But it's still…I don't know… I think it's still there kind of."

"Yeah, well, like you said, if it's like deeper," Chloe says. "I've been thinking about that because the one piece that I started back in the beginning, about my mother, I really haven't approached it, I kind of don't want to, because, you know it means dealing with all of the things associated with it."

 "I know," Nell agrees. "Who wants to examine that stuff really?"

"Yeah!" Chloe agrees.

Here our talk of writing and personal lives has blended even more so than in our earlier conversation. Indeed, Nell describes her new dating interest by referencing a poem she shared in an earlier meeting, a poem where she described her bedroom as a "strange, comfortable hell" in which she lay awake at 3:27 in the morning feeling sad and mentally flipping through past relationships. In that poem she congratulated herself

> on creating such a great "space,"
> on finally becoming an adult,
> my first real job,
> my first time being independent
> responsible.

And yet, despite the ways her room felt welcoming, Nell's poem depicts some nights as lonely and colored by sad thoughts. The man Nell has just started dating showed up at the end of that poem, as someone of interest, and dating him now seems to alleviate the loneliness that drew her to write the poem a month ago. Now, without that drive, she finds herself avoiding the poem, a feeling that both Chloe and I can relate to as we think of other pieces we each have written that either called to us or that we avoided entering, based on what else was happening in our lives. Nell jokingly says "Shoot! So now I'm not so upset," observing the way her new relationship has seemed to block her from writing this poem, even though she thinks the core conflict is "still there, kind of." This is an interesting sort of constraint to writing that we discuss, that sometimes the very topic of writing cuts close to experiences or emotions we do not want to enter at that point. Thus, as we invent as writers, both new texts and ways of shaping existing ones, we may be limited by the topic itself, or by where the text may need to go next in its development. These become familiar themes – entering writing to work through life experiences and emotions, and finding some writing easier to enter than others.

As we continue our conversation, Chloe asks if Nell's relationship is "at that kind of point" to do something for the upcoming Valentine's Day, and Nell replies, "I guess, yeah." She adds, "I don't know if we are doing anything special on Saturday," but then realizes they have reservations for dinner in an area near where Chloe works. As she asks Chloe for recommendations for a place to go hear music after dinner, Nell contemplates whether her relationship is really that "serious" or not.

"Well, that's alright," Chloe replies. "Sometimes that happens. You enjoy each other's company."

"Okay," Nell laughs, perhaps a little relieved.

"I agree," I add. "You don't have to…you know…"

"Marry the guy," Chloe finishes for me.

"Everyone here marries each other," Nell responds in a comic stage whisper, and we all laugh. "It's a very incestuous place!" she adds, laughing again. "So I'm trying to be really aware. Of each new stage. Because it could be the last!" We laugh again, and then continue talking about our Valentine's plans as we wait for Jenna and Karen to arrive.

This conversation about dating and personal plans, while not directly about writing, is a meaningful part of our meeting nonetheless. It highlights what else is going on in Nell's life, beyond teaching and writing, and it connects Chloe and me to these events. Chloe and I are both married, so we have not dated in a while, but we each seem to be able to recall the discomfort of not knowing what "stage" a relationship is at, or whether it is that serious. Our conversation is lighthearted and filled with laughter and joking, yet we all seem aware that we are talking about an important topic, something that each of us has experienced. Additionally, these personal topics often resurface later, in the context of shared writing. This may not be surprising, since we each come to the meeting with pieces of writing to share. While those written texts have not yet entered the conversational stream in our meeting, we are each aware of what we have posted as we participate in this informal reconnecting talk, perhaps in some way anticipating the conversation that will happen later as we do share those texts (Bakhtin). In this case, Nell's story of how "everyone here gets married" does link to the piece

of writing she has posted for this meeting, a poem in which she wonders at the dating practices of some of her colleagues.

Shifting the conversation to another topic, Chloe then asks, "Nell, are you dealing with any of the Title III junk?"

"Oh! Didn't you email me about something?" Nell responds.

"I had actually called you…and I got it sorted out…I was, I really just needed to bitch, that's all. I was just like '*Ahhh!!!*'" Chloe's remembered frustration comes through in her groaning exclamation. "I ended up getting a hold of another teacher…and she was able to help me out." Chloe goes on to explain that Title III has to do with federal funding for English as Second Language (ESL) programs. As the K-12 coordinator for ESL in her district, Chloe had just finished writing a big report with her Title III advisor, this being the first year schools are tasked with evaluating themselves. "And of course, this is the first year of our program, so it is kind of interesting to go through it and to see, 'Oh, this is where we need to improve, and this is where we're doing alright so far.'" She adds, "It's not one of those things where they are going to slap you on the wrist if you are missing something. It is just so they can help you kind of develop your program I guess."

"Right." Nell sighs, but then observes, "Yeah. Well. Some, I don't know, the slapping on the wrist sometimes comes in hidden places I think, too." Astute observation, I think to myself.

Then, later as we comment on how economics are forcing everyone to watch dollars more closely, Chloe notes, "They are! We haven't gotten our funding. Actually, nobody in the state has gotten their federal funding they are supposed to get for their ESL program."

Chloe's discussion of her Title III work also may at first seem to take us away from a discussion of writing, focusing more explicitly on some work Chloe has had to do recently as the ESL coordinator of her district. Yet this talk is simply centered on writing a different sort of text, for a different purpose and audience. Here Chloe shares her frustration and concern as she, a first-year teacher, is called upon to write a report evaluating their brand-new program in ESL as part of Title III funding requirements. She had reached out to Nell in desperation earlier, alone in her role and without prior experience to draw on for writing this report. When she could not reach Nell, she was able to find another teacher with experience in the matter, who had helped her write what must have felt like a high-stakes text, regardless of her belief that it wouldn't result in a "slap on the wrist." Nell's comment that such a slap on the wrist can come in "hidden places" is an astute assessment of the complexities of such a professional writing task. Additionally, just as Nell's comments about dating linked to the text she had posted, Chloe's discussion of her Title III work provide a useful context for what she shares later this meeting.

Throughout this reconnecting time, our talk has functioned primarily to share our personal lives, as we update each other on what has happened since the last time we visited. We do not explicitly talk about anyone's text, and yet our talk is still full of reference to our writing.   This reconnecting talk is also an important strategy we all use as we invent ways into writing. Rather than coming to writing group and immediately diving into a response or critique of a text, which may feel similar to conversations we hold as writing teachers, our first talk is just about our lives. This foregrounds our relationships with each other, on which we will build our talk of writing later. This reconnecting time also may be a way in for participating in

the group on days when we have no writing to share, since our first conversations require no preparation for the meeting. In a way, starting with significant time to share our lives *before* we share our writing enacts our commitments that we are flexible, that we can choose how to participate in the group (including whether to discuss writing or not), and that just coming to our group meeting is creating space in our lives for writing, even if it is just talk about our friends' writing.

This reconnecting time also provides a context for the writing that we will share later in the meeting. We each come to the meeting knowing what writing we will discuss, and the stories we tell at the beginning of the meeting often relate to those texts in some way. This is not to say that we make conscious choices to bring up topics that relate to our writing. Rather, it is more likely that we have our writing on our minds, perhaps already anticipating talking about it, and this anticipation shapes our conversations at the beginning of meetings. It also is likely that whatever exigency we experienced that brought us to write our text in the first place may be related to the stories we tell at the beginning of meetings. Either way, this talk is another way into writing, as we share stories of our lives that sometimes (although perhaps unintentionally) set the stage for discussing our writing.

Finally, our reconnecting time is a time when we talk through some of the conflicts we are experiencing as writers, as teachers, and as people. Nell's search for ways to "do" writing that will meet her needs as a writer and allow her to share texts with our group show her working through a potential constraint. In sharing her frustration over finding a medium for writing, Nell is collaborating with us to explore this challenge in her writing life. Similarly, Nell's observation that the happenings in her personal life seem to call out for certain writing and

resist others allows us all to reflect on ways that the topic or focus of a text can limit what we do with it at a given time. Chloe's Title III experience of feeling isolated and called upon to write a high-stakes report gives a glimpse into a recent writing challenge she faced in the context of her job, as well as how easily that writing and stress could restrict Chloe's time and energy for her more personal writing.   Chloe reached out to Nell and another teacher in her Title III work, seeking input from people who might be familiar with the content and purpose of the report she had to write. As a group, talking through these constraints organically, as they occur to us (and not necessarily foregrounding writing in the conversations) is a strategy we use to work within and against these constraints and still find ways into writing, whether that writing is self-initiated or not.

Discussing Our Writing: Inventing Ways into Writing as We Talk about Texts

At this point we are well over 30 minutes into our meeting, and already our talk has woven in and out of discussions of writing, personal relationships, and professional obligations, laying down complex layers of conversation on which to later share our writing. Still working out a routine in our meetings, we finally decide to start talking about writing, even though Karen and Jenna are still not online. We begin with the text I have posted on the wiki for that meeting.

"Dear Angela": Christine's Letter to an Estranged Friend

"The piece I have is kind of random," I begin, almost laughing. "Well, not completely random, but a different kind of piece than I have shared." In what feels like a lengthy backstory, I tell about how a friend and I had become estranged, and I describe the central misunderstanding that had gone unaddressed for too long and had only recently been brought to my attention. I tell Nell and Chloe that I feel compelled to try writing a letter now to begin healing that relationship. "I feel like I *really need* to write this piece," I tell them, "but I don't quite know how to go about doing it." I tell them I want to write something simple to show my friend Angela "that I am aware this [misunderstanding] happened, but I [want] us to get beyond [it]." I ask Chloe and Nell, as they read what I posted, to help me figure out how much background I need to go into in the letter. And then they read, silently to themselves.

What they read is a hybrid of outline and almost-poem, a rough plan of how I might write an actual letter to this friend. My text begins with a list of questions, as I wonder on paper about my purpose for writing the letter in the first place:

> My purposes:
> To explain? My mindset? My reasons for commenting?
> To apologize? For hurt/embarrassment/disappointment? For ending on this note?
> To patch things up? To create a space to patch things up and recover?
> To be angry? To rise above?

Directly below these questions, I write a beginning layer of my letter:

> Dear Angela,
>
> Thinking about you
>   Since last year?
>   Since November?

> Talked to [a mutual friend] in November
> Confirmed my gut feeling—that I had upset you/angered you/embarrassed you
> And that explained why you had distanced yourself from me
>
> That was never my intention
> I am sorry for any hurt I may have caused you

My text does not end here, but goes on to elaborate and try a number of different approaches to this letter, as I experiment with what I might want to communicate to my friend. It does not take long for Chloe and Nell to read it. Chloe asks Nell if she is ready to start discussing, Nell says yes, and we begin to talk again.

Chloe begins the conversation by observing, "a lot of times when I'm apologizing for something or I'm upset or hurt about something I end up writing letters. It's just an easier way for me dealing with those feelings." She then asks, "So I guess I was wondering if you had any particular inclination as to what you thought, out of all of those [questions you wrote at the top], what your purpose was, and also where you hope your relationship [would] end up – like what are you hoping happens at the end of her reading this letter?"

"That's a good question," I reply, "not just my purpose, but what is the outcome I really want? I think what I would love is for this to lead to a conversation." I continue to think through this aloud, observing that my ideal would be that we would both apologize to each other: "That I wasn't more sensitive and didn't think about her feelings in this mix, and that she [didn't] let it fester for a year and a half and stopped talking to me." But more than anything, I say I hope this would lead to a conversation, especially since it has begun to put a strain on a mutual friend. "It isn't acceptable to me to lose a friend over a misunderstanding," I say.

As we talk, Chloe and Nell return several times to my purpose in writing, especially as they help me talk through how much to "rehash" in the letter, and what to leave for a possible

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future conversation. Just before we move on to the next person's writing, Chloe suggests

"because of all the CDs [she'd] listened to on relationships" that I begin and end the letter with

how I value our friendship. "Oh, that's a good idea!" I proclaim, "Because it gives me a place to

start. Because I was having a hard time with where to start."

A fuller account of my letter and our discussion features prominently in Chapter 5, but

even this glimpse into our conversation reveals strategies that I am using to invent ways into

writing. My draft writing itself is one such strategy, as I did not let genre or content constrain

me, instead allowing myself to write any possibilities down on paper. Chloe observed that she

has written letters for similar reasons, using writing to work through feelings. I also chose to

bring my letter to the group at a very early stage. I came to the meeting needing a lot of help in

figuring out the content and the structure of the letter, and talking through these before I

wrote too much helped me begin to plan and orally compose future versions. My telling of the

story of my conflict with my friend was an important strategy I used here as well, not only to

help Chloe and Nell understand the purpose of the letter, but also to consider again, with their

help, the underlying conflict. In these ways, my initial writing of my letter, our group talk that is

directly tied to my letter, and as our discussion of the background situation, all figured into my

invention of ways around challenges and into this piece of writing.

"The Dancing Game": Jenna's Vignettes about Dance, Body Image, and Motherhood

"Who wants to go next?" I ask when we finish discussing my letter. Jenna had arrived

while I was sharing my writing, delayed by a staff meeting at school but now Skyping from her

home. She tells us she has to leave early in order to pick up her children from daycare, a time

constraint I can identify with, so we invite her to go next. She tells us that she just has some

questions on "The Dancing Game," a series of vignettes she has been working on for about two

months now. At our last meeting Nell and I had provided feedback, and Jenna tells us that

while she has not made any revisions since then, she wants to clarify some of our suggestions.

Because Jenna had not made any revisions, we did not take our usual time to read her writing;

it is a piece we are all familiar with since we had read several versions over the past few weeks.

We each open Jenna's text from where she had last posted it on the wiki.

Unlike the rest of us, who had moved in and out of several different pieces by this time

in our history together, Jenna really had invested in and developed one core piece of writing,

which she titled "The Dancing Game." This text began as a timeline of her pregnancy, which

grew out of a writing exercise we had tried during one of our first meetings as a writing group.

When we had discussed Jenna's pregnancy timeline, we had encouraged her not to feel

obligated to tell the whole story of her becoming-a-mother experience, but rather to dive into

one moment that really felt like it was calling her. The moment she dove into was a dancing

game she plays with her sons, and she begins her text with a description of that game:

> I press the button and music pumps out of the stereo, filling the room with an almost tangible push to dance.   My eyes sweep around the room, taking in the pale sea blue walls and the carpet that pads our feet. Windows provide a clear barrier between the cold darkness outside and our cozy haven, bathed in lamplight. The boys and I are dressed for bed, each of them in their footy pajamas—Bumblebee Transformer for Jacob, and Superman for Bryan. My two super heroes and I are playing "The Dancing Game" in our living room. We shake our booties to the music until I press "pause". The sudden silence is our cue to collapse on the floor. The first person to fall wins braggin' rights.
>
> *I see your dirty face hide behind your collar,* the musical stylings of Kevin Rudolf and Lil' Wayne get us moving. It's a mix of techno/hip hop/ poppy beats that never fail to get Mama movin'. With our arms pumping, legs moving, and hips shaking, the grins split our faces and our breath comes out in gusty puffs. I get

into the rhythm, and my shoulders shrug up and down to the beat…*Because when I arrive, I- I bring the fire make you come alive, I can take you higher...* I bring my arms up in the air and start jumping up and down, pumping my hands in the air to the beat. *..Let it rock, let it rock, let it rock…* I am letting it *rock* , man.

I look down at Jacob who watches me as he lifts his arms in the air in adorable imitation of my enthusiastic jumping fit. His slender body stretches up and down, and each movement shoots his cornsilk hair in different swirling directions. Bryan squats down to prepare for his toddler jump. I can see the coppery curls on the back of his head as he looks at the floor, his fists clenched, his bold blue eyes on the floor. He pops up in the air, and lands on heavy feet. He takes a few stumbling steps before steadying himself. His eyes find mine, and a giggle spills out of his slobbery little mouth. He bends his knees again for another jump.

From that moment of exuberant dancing with her sons, Jenna shifts to another vignette, this time of her thirteen-year-old self warming up before a ballet class, her "chubbifying body shoved into a leotard, standing in the corner of a long room with barres around three of the walls, and a mirror covering the wall in front of me." As this second vignette develops, Jenna compares herself to what seem to be beautiful, graceful other girls in her class, climaxing at a moment just before class starts:

> I wobble as I clomp on my toes, trying to be as graceful as they are. My ankle wobbles and the tip of my shoe shoots out from under me. I take three heavy, stumbling steps and heat shoots up my neck. I hear a muffled snort behind me, and look in the mirror to see who let it escape. Two of Them, blond and brunette, both equally graceful and equally confident, link arms and exchange laughing whispers as they walk away.

Then Jenna changes scene again, moving from that ballet class to a dance club and her nineteen-year-old self, as she dances with a group of friends:

> I'm swaying my hips back and forth in time to the music, hoping the image I create matches the one I have in my head. I "nonchalantly" glance around the room, trying to see if any male eyes are fixed on my derriere. I glance back at

Shelly, and she's moving with abandon—her hands rippling in the air, then moving down her body to trace her curves. I think the guy behind her actually wipes drool away from the corner of his mouth. I place my own hands in the air, in self-conscious mimicking movement. As I trace my own, more ample curves, my eyes float around the room, searching for my own hair-gelled, cologne-dousing self-esteem booster to ape over me. I fear that no one will notice me at all.

From this club scene, Jenna brings us back to the dancing game with her sons that began the piece, now allowing her readers to see her more fully in this final scene:

Now I'm waving my arms in circles over my head and jumping around in abandon. I catch a reflection in the dark window of a woman in ratty sweats and a green T-Shirt that boasts BROCCOLI IS DA BOMB. Her strawberry hair thrown up in a messy ponytail with random pieces escaping the ponytail holder, her face flushed with exertion, her lips pursed in an *I'm awesome and you know it* expression. I flex my arms out in front of me in preparation for a new move. She mimics me. I make my legs bow like I just got off a horse for the first time in twelve hours, stand on my tip-toes, and bob back and forth in an indescribably dorky way. She's doing the same thing. Our eyes meet in the reflection, and we burst out laughing. I turn back to my boys, showing them the full glory of my dance moves. Their giggles are music to my ears, and they simultaneously copy my movements; making us three very goofy dancers to see. As I watch their faces, lit up with the joy of moving to the music, I know that this is where I want to be.

Jenna's writing has consistently been met with excitement and interest as she shared each new revision over the past two months. Her contrast of her insecure, youthful dance experiences with the ease and happiness she now feels as a mom dancing with her children make this a favorite of our group. Before we discuss the clarifying questions Jenna has, which are primarily about a minor revision I had suggested during our previous meeting, I ask Jenna if she has thought about sharing this piece with an audience beyond our group. "I'm thinking about how that [other audience] might even shape the next level of revisions beyond the current one." I suggest that this piece might make a great magazine article, and I suggest to

other group members, "So, if you guys run across any magazines or things that you think might

even be …keep your eyes open."

"Not sure what you are thinking, Jenna, but I see things like this in *Woman's Day*,"

suggests Chloe.

"That's what I'm thinking," I agree. "Yeah."

Jenna is contemplative when she responds, *"*Yeah, I guess it's kind of weird thinking of

myself as being in that group, because I'm not a woman yet or something." We laugh together

at this thought.

"That's a whole other essay, right?" I laugh.

"Yeah!" Jenna responds. "But I guess it's, I mean if that, I don't know. It's a weird

thought for me to think about writing for that audience because I feel like, I don't know…"

"Oh I get it," Chloe replies.

"Just weird to be a part of that audience," Jenna finishes. "But, yeah."

*"*Well you could put it in Cosmo, if you want," Chloe laughs.

"No, not Cosmo either," Jenna easily joins in with Chloe's laughter.

I begin this exchange by encouraging Jenna to consider an audience outside our group,

but this proves more challenging than I had imagined. While Chloe and I can easily see Jenna's

piece in a magazine like *Woman's Day*, Jenna has an immediate reaction against the suggestion,

finding it "weird" to think of herself "in that group." She laughs that this may be because she's

"not a woman yet or something," bringing a great deal of laughter from the rest of us as well.

But her discomfort with calling herself a woman is reminiscent in a way of Nell's earlier poem

"A Comfortable Hell," which Nell had referenced during our reconnecting time, in which she had congratulated herself on "finally becoming an adult" and being "independent" through her "first real job." Jenna's text itself celebrates Jenna's new way of seeing herself, no longer consumed with the critical body image she had experienced when dancing as a child or young adult, as she tells us she's now "perfectly thrilled with the fact that I look like a huge dork but I'm really happy that's me in the window." These textual and oral comments are reminders that this first year of teaching is complicated by much more than learning to teach, as these women describe this as a time when they sometimes feel and sometimes do not feel adult, as a time when they are building images of themselves as women as well as teachers and writers. Jenna's discomfort with seeking publication in *Woman's Day* also is significant here, since it highlights the way Jenna sees herself in relation to possible audiences for this piece. Sharing with us, who have known her for several years, is different than putting this piece into a publication geared to "women" in general (and perhaps geared to women readers with whom Jenna does not as readily identify). Still, as Jenna and Chloe laugh about at the end, the magazine *Cosmo* does not seem like a good fit either.

Jenna's reaction also causes me to wonder about what has drawn her to writing this piece, to investing so much time in it. I had originally thought that, with so much time invested and with such consistent positive feedback from our group, Jenna would be interested and feel affirmed to have us suggest publication. When she does not embrace our publication suggestions, for whatever reason, it suggests that something else might be driving her. This is an example of when the experience Jenna has while writing this text is perhaps at least as important as the text itself (Yagelski). In writing this piece, she has accomplished something

that seems valuable in and of itself, regardless if anyone besides our group members ever sees the text.

The strategies that Jenna used in entering this piece of writing are also worth exploring. Her first layer of this piece came out of a writing exercise I had introduced in November, when I had suggested that writing a timeline of events related to a specific topic can help generate ideas for writing, especially as certain events trigger others in our minds. Jenna had made a notation of the dancing game on the timeline she wrote, but initially she had felt obligated to tell the "whole story" of the timeline. When she shared her discomfort at that early meeting, she was employing a strategy for entering and sustaining herself in a piece of writing. She was discussing what was not working, in a way, which allowed us as group members to encourage her to leave the timeline behind as she continued with her writing. In following what felt interesting to her in her writing, Jenna employed another strategy, which led her to not write a story of motherhood so much as a series of connected stories of herself and dancing. Now, Jenna's text "The Dancing Game" has become a model of some of these strategies, since as a group we have shared so many discussions about the text.

Just as Jenna is about to leave to get her children, Karen arrives. Like Jenna, Karen is Skyping in from her home. When I ask who would like to share next, Nell suggests Karen.

"An (Outline for an) Essay on Failure": Karen's Journaling about Teaching

This is only the second time Karen has shared writing with our group, so I am excited to hear what she has brought. Indeed the only other time she brought writing to share was at our in-person meeting over winter break, a month and a half ago. She introduces her writing with

some of her trademark humor, part self-deprecation and part playful joking. "Mine is like mostly just journal entries," she laughs, "and so that is like the biggest thing that, my biggest goal is to find a genre today. Um, or the next couple of days." Her voice is hoarse with a cold, which we joke sounds seductive, and she sounds tired. "And I think I want to write fiction, because I don't want to write nonfiction anymore," she adds, declaring, "and I do what I feel like!" She laughs again, and the rest of us join in.

Nell asks Karen which of the two pieces she posted we should look at first. Karen checks what she has posted on the wiki before replying. "Are you hoping to find a strand of one of these pieces to fictionalize?" Chloe asks while we wait.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Karen responds. "I just posted what I wrote this last two weeks, because I haven't been really that good at writing. I mean, when I write it's always just, um, lame writing." Her laugh again punctuates this comment, softening her self-deprecating statement. Karen's tone is somewhat subdued at this point in the conversation, further muted by her hoarse voice from her cold.

From a recent conversation with Karen, I knew that she had been nominated by her school for a First Year Teacher of the Year award, and I invite her to "share her news" with the rest of the group before we read her writing, especially since she missed our reconnecting time.

Karen replies, somewhat unexpectedly, "Oh, that I cried in the copy room today?" She laughs at her initial misunderstanding of what "news" I wanted her to share. She continues, "Because kids were all fighting and being crazy out in the car rider lot and I didn't know what to do and then they ran away from me. Um…"

"Yeah, that's a freaky experience," I respond.

"Yeah," Karen continues, "and I was like out in the car rider lot with like 70 kids by myself."

"That's scary," I say.

"And they were all like punching each other, and I was like, what the hell are you doing? Stop punching each other, and then they were like rolling around on the grass punching each other. And then I was like chasing after them." Karen laughs here, as if to mark the craziness of the experience.

"Oh!" Chloe exclaims.

"And then they like ran away from me," Karen finishes, a little quieter.[3]

We talk a little more about what an upsetting experience this must have been for Karen, and then she does share the news of her award nomination. She was nominated by her principal, she tells us, and she has an interview for the award next week. I observe that this is a huge honor and something to be celebrated in itself. Then Karen adds that her first period class, which has given her so much difficulty behavior-wise this year, has been going well this week. Things seem to be looking up, we observe, in spite of her adventures that afternoon with the fight at school. At this point, we turn to Karen's journal pieces, reading silently to ourselves.

In one piece, titled "Internet, Basketball, and Jolly Ranchers," Karen writes,

> My internet doesn't work. I wonder why I can't bring it in, and then I remember I haven't left school before six in two weeks. I haven't been able to make it to the bank because I leave work after it closes ... I feel okay, but I'm starting to get

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[3] It is at this point in the meeting that my audiorecorder stops capturing our conversation on tape. The remaining data from this meeting is derived from my fieldnotes without the support of an audio file.

slightly nervous about the bill collectors calling me. I want to say "Jesus, I'm trying to get to the bank. Give a woman a break." They don't understand.

Every time I turn on my computer I pray "Please God, let my internet work. Please. This time. Please." It doesn't, and I really wish I could check my school mail. It helps me sleep. I feel ok. Some may call it obsessive, but I feel ok.

Tonight at the basketball game I talked to about ten parents. I know them all. I like that. Except I really wish I didn't know the woman who cussed me out. She scares me. I don't tell her the half of what her daughter pulls in my room because I just want things to be okay. Same with another parent. Her son works her so bad. We talk about his grade and not his behavior. He is capable of so much more, if he only put in more effort...(and stopped disrupting my class for one minute).

This piece goes on to describe another interaction Karen has with a parent at the game, a mother whose daughter Tanya "has had a lying problem this year." This mother reaches out to Karen for help, but Karen, who genuinely likes the student, doesn't know how to fix the problem. She tells the mother that Tanya has been doing better. "I want to cry," Karen writes, "I honestly love this girl."   Karen then speaks to the girl herself, trying to help her build on her recent success in Karen's class. Karen ends this piece with thoughts of her next morning at school:

I have to go to bed. Tomorrow Officer Mitchell, the school police officer, is coming to my home base. They say a student threatened to shoot them in another class. "Revenge will be his." Officer Mitchell thinks they are drama-hungry, manipulative, bullying liars. We are struggling as a class. My two home base cheerleaders were kicked out of the game tonight. That should be a good story to complement the officer story tomorrow morning while Tanya explains her birthday situation and I try to teach elements of fiction.

Because Karen has invited us to read both her pieces and discuss them together, we move from this text directly into Karen's second text, titled "An (Outline for an) Essay about Failure."

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I really don't do failure. By that, I mean to say, if I'm not going to succeed, I simply don't try. Some may say that that in and of itself is failure. Those people are silly. Example: In elementary school I was a basketball rock star on my island (a.k.a. my neighborhood). I tackled whoever stood in my way. When tackling suddenly became "against the rules" in middle school I never played basketball again. Did I fail? No. Case in point.

That's why I'm thinking about quitting this teaching bullshit. Because when a kid tells me the funniest thing he's ever seen is a teacher being punched in the face…to my face…I think, "Damn, I have failed him." I think, "Damnit Juan. I think you are an alright kid. Why are you a pain in my ass?" And then I open another bottle of wine.

And then I think of the people. The two people who have told me that I can't. And I think, you may be on to something.

And then I open an email. An email that says, "Congratulations, Karen. The administrators have met to decide that you are our nominee for first year teacher of the year award."

And then I think about my stomach ache. No dinner… because I only felt like pizza. And then I drink some more and wait for Nell to call.

And then I drink again. To being overdramatic. And extremely emotional. And pissed off too.

Karen's writing this week enters our group conversation in a powerful way. Her voice is strong and honest and raw in these journals. Her trademark humor, such as when she tells us before sharing "I do what I want" and she describes herself as opening "another bottle of wine," seems to help her claim control and find humor in what can only be seen as a challenging situation, a situation that has left her at times feeling depressed, exhausted, and cut off. As we begin talking about Karen's writing, we first talk of the experiences that Karen has shared in these pieces. I then ask her why she said she wants to write fiction, why she wants to try a new genre.

"I feel self-absorbed in my life right now," she replies. "I don't want to write just about this anymore." Karen tells us she wants an escape, she wants to think about other things. She describes this writing as "therapeutic," but she says, "I don't feel like I have a life sometimes," observing that she is always lesson planning, staying at school until six o'clock each day. Then she returns home to lesson plan again, email parents, and grade. "And I'm writing about kids, too." She wants to write about something else, she tells us.

I share that, for me, writing often comes out of strong feelings or experiences, so it makes sense that she is writing about school. This connects back to the conversation Nell and Chloe and I had during our reconnecting time, as we considered what writing called to us and what writing we avoided. I suggest that perhaps Karen might find that doing something new, carving some small non-school experience into her week, might spur new writing. I also suggest that perhaps she may want to return to these journals and look for a found poem among them, a type of poetry where you take words and phrases and images from an existing text and arrange them into a poem, perhaps consistent with the original text and perhaps not. We had written found poetry during the teacher education classes I had taught, so it was a familiar style.

"I'm really bad at revision," Karen says, sharing that she writes something and then doesn't want to work with it again. She tells us she often says, "I'm not feeling it. I'm done with that," after writing a piece. But she says that she might try the found poem idea: "I could do that."

Through our discussion of Karen's writing, we get a view of some of the challenges Karen is facing in her teaching life, challenges that could easily constrain her writing life as well.

Karen was late to our meeting because she cannot access personal email or Skype through her school computer, and so she had to drive home in order to begin our meeting. Then, just before leaving school, she had this deeply unsettling experience of being alone in a school parking lot as a fight broke out. As the member of our group who moved farthest from home for her first teaching job, Karen is more geographically disconnected from us, and her Internet difficulties caused her to miss our last meeting when she could not get online. Additionally, Karen's urban teaching job has caused her to face multiple classroom and school-wide student behavior/management issues. These have been the stories Karen has shared orally in previous meetings, stories of students challenging her in her classroom, of students making inappropriate comments to her in front of other students, and of watching other teachers in her school quit and leave. This is part of why I wanted us to celebrate Karen's nomination for the teaching award, for which her principal had nominated her to the district. In spite of the significant challenges Karen faces, her principal considers her an excellent teacher.

Additionally, just as in earlier conversations today, the theme of being adult and managing one's own life independently from parents arises, as Karen grapples with how to meet the demands of her job while also paying her bills on time and reconnecting her Internet service. Just as she has moved out of her house, no longer living with her own parents, Karen suddenly finds herself in situations where her students' parents turn to her for advice, viewing her as an ally and expert in ways that she is just becoming. In her writing she describes herself as someone who does not "do failure," which may enter into the way she is interpreting her experiences in this school and with teaching. She seems to think these experiences must be read as either failure or success, but they do not fall clearly in either category. What impresses

me is that Karen does keep trying, in spite of the intense challenges she faces. This makes me wonder at her assessment of herself as someone who "simply [doesn't] try" when faced with failure. She clearly is trying, which is likely why she is working such long hours at school, spending more time working at home, and devoting her free time to talking to parents and students at basketball games.

Indeed, in many ways Karen is inventing ways into writing just by showing up today, after such a difficult experience after school, and in the midst of all of the challenges she has faced this year. Her head-cold, her long hours at school, the after-school fight, and the piles of work that she likely still has waiting for her could each be a perfectly understandable reason to not show up for our meeting. Not only does she show up, however, but she also brings writing to share, writing that makes a first stab at exploring some of the experiences and challenges she is facing. Somehow Karen has found the time to write, and then dedicated the time to come to share that writing in our meeting. It seems that one strategy Karen has used to enter this writing is by choosing a journal as her genre. This is an informal genre, and not one that is usually revised. As such, it seems to have the flexibility for Karen to do some writing, and it fits with the way she sees herself as a writer who is not "good" at revision. In suggesting the found poem idea, I try to suggest a strategy for re-entering a piece of writing, a low-stakes way of using something she has already written to invent something new.

Another strategy Karen is using to find a way into writing is writing from strong experiences. This resonates with the conversation Nell and Chloe and I had at the beginning of the meeting, where I had observed, "life can…kind of call you to write certain things and also block you from writing certain things." When Karen then tells us she does not want to write

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about "this" anymore, I suggest the possibility of her finding even a small bit of time for things

she likes to do, besides teaching. In the context of all Karen is trying to juggle, I am a little

surprised she does not laugh out loud at my suggestion. The more useful strategy is one Karen

herself suggests, to try writing in a different genre. Karen says she wants to write fiction, saying

she wants an escape, a chance to think about other things. This can be a strategy for inventing

a very useful way into writing, to write in a new genre and use writing to escape rather than

express.   While some of these strategies for invention happen as we talk directly about Karen's

text, many of them surface as we move beyond the text, and as we imagine her next writing

projects.

We next turn to Chloe to share her writing, which she has posted on her blog for us to

read.

"Identity Crisis": Chloe's Solitary Battle in Her New Job

Chloe's experience teaching is similar in some ways to Karen's. They both work in urban

settings, putting in long hours. Like Karen, Chloe has described students who have moved her

and students who have pushed her away, as well as the frustration and pain she felt when she

encountered student anger directed at her. Unlike Karen and Jenna, Chloe is teaching ESL

rather than English or ELA classes. Additionally, Chloe works a second job several evenings a

week at a restaurant and coordinates the ESL program for her district, requiring her to engage

in high-stakes writing and interactions with administration.

Chloe gives relatively little introduction to the piece she has posted, a text she has titled

"Identity Crisis" that begins in poetry (seeming almost to invoke epic poetry) and then shifts

genre into a personal narrative/journal. Chloe directs us to where to find her writing on her

blog, and we begin to read:

> Mouth stretched open, ivory teeth bared,
> A dark shadow moves over me,
> A known creature hovering,
> Salivating at the scent of youth, of passion, of naivety.
> The warm, sickeningly sweet breath is at once repulsive and attractive.
> Though I know my vulnerability, the danger of being consumed,
> My fire extinguished,
> I am immovable, determined to be triumphant, victorious, successful.

> This is the image I have of my current place of employment. Strange, yes. But all too true. I am in a position where I recognize the overwhelming nature of my job, and the precarious position I am in as a first-year teacher. Statistically, one-third of [new] teachers leave the profession within the first three years, and up to half leave after the first five years. While I know myself well enough to believe that I will not be a part of this statistic, I also am perceptive enough to recognize how this can happen–especially to teachers in an urban setting, where staff and resources are at the bare minimum, requiring teachers to take on the jobs of 1 1/2 people and to make do with 1/2 the resources. It's a near impossible feat.

> I am afraid I am being consumed to the point where my former identity is being displaced by a new one. One I'm not quite sure I want to adopt. One that sacrifices relationships held near and dear for far too long for long hours spent on reports and curriculum design, one that replaces personal joys like writing and reading with grading and lessons, one that settles for delivered pizza and Hamburger Helper in place of homecooked, heart-filled cuisine in order to save time for the duties of a job.

> Consumed.

> For the past five years, I have told myself that I was working for a certificate that said I was a professional. I was willing to endure financial hardships, hours of lost sleep, and a steadfast focus on engaging in the craft of teaching–for the sake of having a career. And now that I'm there, I don't feel like I'm quite there.

> Where I am instead is a disorganized, unfocused organization starving for new, young, devoted blood to consume, to fill the long-empty crevices and crags of a misrun bureaucracy. And I'm all too willing to be that sacrifice. But why? Is it for the organization? In hopes of attaining higher test scores, of meeting AYP after being in Phase 2, of avoiding being shut down? Is it for the students?

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Young adults and children whose needs sometimes seem to surpass the resources of the school? Or is it for myself, for my desire to succeed and my fear of failure? My desire to propel myself into the next stage of my career. Even while my efforts appear to be motivated by the intent to enable my students to succeed, is that desire free of my own selfish gain?

Perhaps I am the creature. Perhaps, I am being swallowed by my career, by my ambition.

At the bottom of Chloe's text she has added a note: "As I'm writing this, I am listening to Glen Hansard on imeem [online]. And one of the songs I just listened to seems so fitting." She then posts the lyrics to the Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova song "Drown Out," lyrics which begin with the following stanza:

Drown out, the voice that breaks the silence
And talks the joy out of everything
You were found out and had to walk
in darkness without the only thing you care about

There is silence, as Nell and Karen and I read this piece, broken only by small comments of appreciation. I find myself tearing up as I read Chloe's words, especially when I reach the point where she wrote, "I am afraid I am being consumed…" When we finish reading, our first observances are of the strong images Chloe had created, both of teaching and of the struggles she was feeling.   I share that I felt an emotional reaction as I read, and Karen immediately chimes in "Yes!" adding she hadn't wanted to mention this at first, but once I did, she wished she had just said it. As she read Chloe's writing, Karen tells us she thought to herself, "I'm not alone! I feel alone, but I'm not!"

What is palpable in our discussion and throughout Chloe's writing is the sense of precariousness she is feeling, of vulnerability. But although Chloe's poem depicts this as a

potentially physical threat, from a "creature" with "mouth stretched open, ivory teeth bared" that salivates at Chloe's youthful scent, her prose allows us to interpret this as a powerful image of the vulnerability she feels as a first-year teacher, especially as an under-resourced and over-stretched teacher in an urban setting. The danger she faces, her true fear, is of "being consumed" and having her identity displaced by a new one she is not sure she likes. It is no surprise that this is the part of the text where Karen and I both felt tearful.   When Chloe's piece is read directly after Karen's piece, it is clear that indeed Karen is "not alone."

Chloe writes of the "overwhelming nature of my job, and the precarious position I am in as a first-year teacher," observing the statistics that one-third of teachers leave the profession in the first three years. This may provide a partial definition of failure, and possibly one face of the monster Chloe is fighting: that fear that the realities of the job will force people like Chloe (and Karen) to leave teaching altogether. Chloe adds that while she has faith that she will not be one of the teachers that leaves, she can see too easily how this can happen to teachers like her. Surely this resonates with Karen, who had just faced a student fight in a parking lot alone, and who wrote of a first-period class that would involve a visit from a police officer and tales of why two of her students were kicked out of the basketball game, all while Karen tries "to teach elements of fiction." It must feel like, as Chloe says, a "near impossible feat," and it is no mystery why Karen says "I feel alone, but I'm not!" after reading Chloe's work. In a different genre, in a different voice, Chloe articulates some of the same challenges Karen faces.

Nell, who has not yet shared her writing this week, comments that Chloe's piece also resonates with her own questions for herself: "What am I doing? What am I hoping to get out of life?" These questions seem central to Karen's and Chloe's experiences and the texts they

have shared already, and they certainly will connect to the text that Nell has posted for this week.

In our discussion, after sharing our reaction to Chloe's writing, we begin to explore the identity of the creature, asking Chloe what she thinks the creature is. She tells us she is still figuring this out, and indeed we will return to this conversation when Chloe shares more of this piece in future meetings.   Chloe still is actively inventing this piece of writing, and it is evident from our conversation that she will continue to add to it, rather than simply revise what she has already. We observe that we like the mixed-genre approach she has begun, and we suggest that she continues on with her writing. After our meeting, Chloe posts her notes to her blog, which allow a view into her primary take-aways from our conversation that afternoon. In that post she notes, "Emotional reaction. There was a point where it almost made me want to cry because the writing spoke to me in such a personal way," paraphrasing what Karen and I had shared after our reading. Then she writes about our advice to her, noting, "Free myself to set the issue of genre aside and let it come out the way it comes out." This phrasing, written by Chloe to capture the gist of what we had discussed during our meeting, shows her envisioning her next phase of inventing this text as almost a release of ideas on paper, in which she postpones deliberate choices of genre and focuses on inventing the content first.   After writing these notes, Chloe writes, "Notes from self: Maybe what I can do is continue to go back and forth between the poem, the journal, and even the song. Resolution?" Here she creates a possible writing plan, a way of moving between genres as she seeks to let the content "come out." She also wonders about providing a resolution to her piece.

Chloe's writing and our group discussion again highlight the constraints she and other group members face as writers. With so much that matters to Chloe at risk of being consumed, and often standing alone (whether to fight the creature or to write a report for Title III funding), it is a wonder that Chloe not only writes, but also writes so powerfully about her experience. Her text is evidence not only of her invention through writing, of her ways of moving her feelings and thoughts into poetry and prose, but also of her invention of ways to pursue writing in the first place, amidst the challenges and strains of teaching.

One of the strategies Chloe uses to invent ways into writing is blogging. Her blog is public, but she can password-protect any piece she wants to keep private. This strategy allows her to be able to access her writing from any computer at any time. Chloe also uses this blog as a place to keep notes for her writing, so that she can keep revision ideas right with her text, again readily accessible. Her notes to herself after this meeting show another strategy for inventing ways into writing: to free herself from genre, to initially just let her writing "come out," and to move back and forth between her journal and poem and song as she continues to write. Chloe's text also shows her listening to music online as she writes, and allowing that music to connect with and inspire her writing. Each of these strategies Chloe is using and discussing helps her come to writing, even in the midst of her busy professional life.

"Older Single Women": Nell's Poem about Relationships

At this point in our meeting, we are running out of time. Still relatively new as a group, we spent a lot of time talking at the beginning as we waited for people to arrive, and now we

do not have as much time as we would like to spend on Nell's piece, the final text we will share.

We all agree to stay a bit late to give her feedback.

The piece Nell has posted actually has a direct link to her previous poem, "A

Comfortable Hell," which she mentioned in our beginning discussion. Like her earlier poem,

this one deals with the discomfort of being alone. Nell tells us that she copied a portion of her

journaling from that previous poem and built off that piece to write this new poem, titled

"Older Single Women." Before we begin reading, Nell tells us she wants her poetry to be more

vivid, and she wants to work with sound and imagery.   She asks for us to think about these

areas in particular as we read. We begin to read, for the final time that evening, moving from

Nell's journaling directly into the poem it inspired for her.

> But it's SO uncomfortable to be alone. I don't know why. Why is that? The
> world's full of lonely people. I heard a snippet on CNN this morning about how in
> times of economic distress, dating and relationship services seem to flourish
> because people want SOMEONE to snuggle up with when everything else is
> going to shit. This is a crazy phenomenon. I'm around these older single women
> who seem NUTS. Crazy. Seriously crazy. They do crazy, irrational things, and I'm
> afraid it's just because they've been alone for so long that they're really starting
> to panic. I feel like I look at them and see myself 10 years from now. Every time I
> see them, I think, "God, I hope I don't make it there." I don't want to be bitter
> and vindictive and purposely try to trap others just to make myself feel needed.
> And yet.... I don't think I'm any better than they are.
>
> It's dark but I
> see her eyes take their
> jagged journey around
> the room. She squints in
> the smoke,
> stops,
> still staring, and nudges me.
> "The tall one, at the bar. Green shirt."
>
> I, too, squint above the heads of my friends,
> through blue smoke that burns
> my eyeliner. I can't

see him. "Yeah!
You should go up there.
Maybe he'll buy you a drink."
She takes a sip and leaves
her IPA at our table.
I shake my head apologetically
at our friends. Guys.
When she and I are
alone, it's martinis.
When we're with the guys,
it's India Pale Ale.
She can hang.

Our feedback time for this poem is too short, and we just have time to tell Nell how

much we like it, and to encourage her to continue working on it. Chloe tells Nell this piece

made her think of jazz, like Langston Hughes and Harlem Renaissance poems. This seems to

speak to Nell's interest in sound and imagery, and to help her see how much she is doing

already. We also suggest Nell clarify the ending of the poem. We wonder, we tell her, who are

these other guys at their table. But mainly, as with Karen and Chloe's pieces this week, our

feedback is for Nell to keep going, to build on what she is doing. We tell her this is good and

deserves to be developed. We decide we will start with her work at our next meeting.

Entering the meeting at the end, after many overlapping conversations and after

discussing four other written texts, this poem and journal play an interesting role in several

developing themes. While Nell's poem and journaling is not explicitly about teaching or some

of the fears of failure and challenges Karen and Chloe mention, it is very much about building

an identity as an adult, as a professional. And it is very much about being alone and not liking

it.

Nell's poem focuses on some coworkers who Nell describes as "seriously crazy," people

who do things Nell sees as "crazy, irrational things." In a way, this poem can be seen as an

attempt to make sense of and wonder at these women's behavior. But what seems to draw Nell into this topic, and what captured our attention as a group, was how Nell looks at these women and fears she sees herself in ten years. Nell writes, "every time I see them, I think, God, I hope I don't make it there." And yet, she says, she doesn't feel superior to them. This fear of becoming crazy reminds me of Chloe's writing, where she fears she is being consumed, and Karen's writing where she fears she is failing. In all cases, a loss of self is at stake. Indeed, Nell's journaling that she has recopied above her poem ties in with some of the themes from earlier in this meeting, and certainly with her comments that Chloe's piece resonated with her own questions of "What am I doing? What am I hoping to get out of life?" I also wonder how Nell's poem relates to her earlier comments during our reconnecting time, when she joked that "everyone here marries each other." In that conversation, too, she seemed intent on observing how relationships and people can change over time.

Like each member of the writing group, Nell is faced with challenges in her life. For Nell, who lives in a relatively isolated area, loneliness and dating are challenges. Yet like each member of the group tonight, she has invented ways into writing, rather than allowing herself to be constrained. For example, Nell uses journaling to find a way into her poetry. This is a strategy she has used for two poems now ("A Comfortable Hell" and "Older Single Women"), both of which started with this particular journal entry she wrote. Like Karen, Nell has used this low-stakes writing to make sense of feelings and experiences, but in Nell's case she also uses it to inspire poems that focus in on one part of the journal. Another strategy that Nell seems to be using is connecting her writing and her search for meaning with other texts. She does this in the way she connects this poem with her earlier poem and journal writing. But she also seems

to do this as she connects her questions "What am I doing? What am I hoping to get out of life?" with Chloe's text for this week. Even as Nell is responding to Chloe's work, she seems to be also thinking about her own questions, which fuel her own writing. In this way, Nell can be seen inventing ways into her own writing through conversations that are not about her text at all.

Strategies for Inventing Ways into Writing amidst Constraints: Looking across Talk and Texts

Within this single, two-hour meeting, five texts are shared and numerous conversations about writing, self-image, teaching, relationships, and balancing life weave and interact. We discuss challenges and limitations we experience as adults, as teachers, and as writers. And yet, in the midst of all of these constraints, we each have found time to write and to share that writing in our group. Our strategies for inventing these ways into writing are varied, and they can be found throughout the meeting, including in talk that is not even directly about writing or texts. These strategies are significant to our group members, as they enable us to invent ways of entering writing, and they are significant to the wider conversations on teachers-as-writers in suggesting ways to support teacher-writers in overcoming constraints and engaging in writing.

Constraints on Teacher-Writers

Our talk during this meeting reinforces many of the constraints noted in the literature, which teachers report facing when pursuing writing on their own time ("*English Journal* Rebuttal"; "The Round Table"; Gere; Jost "Rebuttal"; Jost "Revisited"). Each of us mentions

being overly busy or struggling to make time for what is important for us. These concerns come through most clearly in Karen's journaling, which shows her not even having time to get to the bank or fix her Internet, and in Chloe's text, which shows her fear of being consumed by her job, as she has already watched it consume many things that matter to her. Even Jenna's participation in our meeting today shows her time constraints, as she comes late and then must leave early in order to get to her children's daycare in time. We are busy people. Additionally, other circumstances could easily be additional constraints, such as Karen being sick.

Some of the constraints we discuss are specifically connected to our writing. Both Nell and I are thinking about the way we "do" writing, from handwriting to typing to blogging, and how this has an impact on our time and experience writing. For example, if Nell chooses to begin composing on the computer, in order to save time and facilitate sharing with our group, it will likely change her experience while writing. Similarly, our ways of seeing ourselves and our writing also potentially shape and limit our ways of being writers, another observation borne out in the literature. Just as Jost, in her *English Journal* essay, can be read as constrained by her idea of what "serious writing" might entail, members of our group may be constrained by how we see ourselves as writers. Karen, in her description of herself as someone who is "bad" at revision may self-limit herself with her revision efforts, and Jenna, in saying she has trouble seeing herself as one of the readers of *Woman's Day* might limit herself on a potential publication opportunity.

The literature on teacher-writers notes many teachers have sought writing groups to support them as writers. Yet much of this literature, particularly as it applies to teacher-writers, focuses on how writing groups support development of texts-in-progress (Flythe) or

how the meetings may provide a sense of accountability and incentive to write (Elrod). Some of

this literature also notes how the best-laid schedules and timetables easily fall by the wayside

when teachers become busy and miss meetings or miss sharing and responding to each other's

writing (Elrod). The experiences of this writing group meeting extend this existing literature,

attending specifically to ways that teacher-writers invent ways into writing, in the midst of

multiple constraints, both independently and through collaboration with other writing group

members. Additionally, this chapter specifically attends to the significance of the talk that is

not even text-centered has on these inventive processes.

Strategies for Inventing of Ways into Writing

This one meeting reveals many strategies group members use as we invent ways to

begin or continue writing. These strategies include our choice to include reconnecting time in

our meetings, our attending to our experience while writing, our ways of selecting what to

write about, our use of genre to expand and motivate our writing, our various ways of getting

and giving feedback on written texts, and the connections we draw between our varied

experiences and texts. While some of these strategies focus on the texts we share in this

meeting, some equally important strategies are developed in talk that does not focus on any

given written text.

Strategies That Are Developed Primarily Outside the Context of Sharing Texts

One strategy, developed outside the context of discussing written texts, is the way we

begin our meetings with reconnecting time. This open talk, which can take as much as 25% of

our meeting time, functions primarily to fill each other in on our lives and to bring us into

meetings. Instead of diving right into talking about our writing, we spend time beyond the

writing first. This reconnecting time allows us in some ways to enter the writing group meeting

first as people, then as writers, and then as authors of specific texts, foregrounding us as whole

people and as friends before we dig into writing. Our catching up time also helps us further

develop our relationships with each other, building trust which supports us to share a wider

variety of texts. For example, in this meeting Chloe, Karen, Nell, and I each share new and fairly

personal texts with each other, yet there is no indication of discomfort with this personal

sharing. I attribute this trust level in part to the significant time we spend talking beyond our

writing in each meeting.

A related strategy for invention that is evident during this reconnecting time is

storytelling. While storytelling certainly is a feature of our discussion of texts, as we orally

expand the content and context for our writing, some of the stories we tell are not represented

in the texts at all. For example, in our reconnecting talk Nell discusses dating in her town,

observing "everyone here marries each other!" While this story is not at all referenced in her

poem, it seems to connect to her thinking about what is at risk in that poem, relating to her fear

that she might one day imitate her colleagues' behavior. Similarly, in our reconnecting talk

Chloe shares the work she has recently done with writing a report for Title III, a relatively high-

stakes professional writing situation. In that writing task, as in her epic poem, Chloe seems to

be standing alone against what Chloe later describes as features of "the overwhelming nature

of my job." Thus, while Chloe does not reference her Title III report in her epic poem or

accompanying journal, her oral story of writing this report seems implicated in the long hours

she spends on her job and the way she portrays herself as a lone fighter. Finally, when Karen

first comes to our meeting, she shares a story of the fight that broke out in the parking lot after

school. While Karen had written her journals before this fight occurred, her story of the fight

still seems to intersect with the text she wrote, providing perhaps one more example of why

she fears failure and feels somewhat beaten by her job. When Nell, Chloe, and Karen share

each of these stories, they are not talking about their texts, and yet it is likely that their stories

do connect to those texts in some way. Perhaps these women tell these stories in part because

they are anticipating sharing their texts, an anticipation which may call related stories to their

minds. Or perhaps they tell these stories because, like their texts, the stories represent strong

experiences that just happen to be related. Either way, the telling of these stories can be seen

as intersecting with their texts, elaborating on themes and experiences that are discussed in

other ways in writing.

Finally, we also discuss our experience while writing. Part of this strategy is talking

about and respecting the way we feel about writing. Nell raises this issue in our reconnecting

time, sharing how her new relationship has resulted in her not wanting to revise her earlier

poem on loneliness, and Chloe comments how she also has not wanted to return to a piece on

her mother. Later, Karen tells us she wants to write about something other than teaching for a

change. This strategy of respecting our feelings about writing means that when we do not want

to re-enter a piece or a topic, we choose not to. Rather than writing becoming about finishing a

piece to create a product, therefore, we sometimes choose to leave a very promising piece

behind, sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently. Another aspect of attending to

the experience of writing deals with our ways of actually "doing" writing. Nell's discussion of

her handwriting practices can be seen as her utilizing this strategy, as she calls attention to the ways her experience while writing is shaped by the way she writes. Talking this through with us, outside the context of any particular text, may be seen to support Nell's invention of ways into writing, in this case her ways of either putting pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard.

Strategies That Are Developed Primarily in the Context of Discussing Texts

Many of the strategies for inventing ways into writing come out in the context of us discussing our texts as well. We each can be seen developing strategies for what to write about and how to write it. For example, each of us begins with low-stakes writing (Elbow), in which we write relatively freely without worrying about detail, form, or arrangement. Karen and Nell journal, I outline possibilities for a letter, Jenna began her "Dancing Game" piece by writing a timeline, and Chloe blogs. In some cases we use this low-stakes writing as our writing to share in a given week, as Karen and I do in this meeting (and as Jenna did when she originally wrote her timeline). For us, this low-stakes writing is a way into writing, allowing us to spend just a few minutes but still have something to share during a meeting. For others, like Nell (and Jenna when she moved away from her timeline), this initial writing is a move towards writing a longer or more developed text, a text that perhaps follows a spark of interest. This is, therefore, a related strategy for inventing ways into writing: following interest generated in one piece of writing into another. Another related strategy is writing from strong experiences or feelings, which Karen, Nell, and Chloe do with their writing for this meeting.

Additionally, we develop some strategies of using genre to find ways of entering or re-entering a text. For example, when Karen expresses her interest in using writing to escape from

her reality for a while, she tells us she wants to pursue fiction. This discussion does not actually relate to the texts she has posted for our meeting, as she does not seem inclined to fictionalize either of them. Rather, this is an example of Karen inventing a way into writing that takes advantage of her wanting a change, as she explores the possibility of writing in a completely new genre to provide that new experience. Similarly, Chloe turns to a mixed-genre approach for the piece she shares this week. While she certainly could have written her "Identity Crisis" piece all as a journal, she includes an epic poem portion which explores her feelings from an entirely new dimension, expanding her ways of entering this project.

As in other writing groups depicted in the literature, we also develop strategies for getting feedback to help us either re-enter a shared text or enter a new text. One such strategy is eliciting talk that affirms and helps us imagine future versions of a text. In our discussions of each text featured in this chapter, group members affirm what the author is sharing and help discuss possibilities for future revisions. We use varied questioning techniques to help support each other. For example, Chloe and Nell ask me about my purpose and desired effect when discussing my letter to Angela, we ask Chloe about the identity of the creature in her poem, Chloe asks Karen about whether she wants to fictionalize her journals, and we ask Nell about the identity and significance of some of the people in her poem. It is important to point out that these questions are all authentic (Nystrand), as the one asking genuinely does not know and is curious about the answer. The responses to these questions often dramatically shape the conversation that follows, particularly if the line of questioning resonates with the author's interests for that text.

A final strategy we develop to find ways into writing is discussing connections between texts and talk, across the meeting. Sometimes these connections happen as we discuss a given text, such as when Karen says, "I'm not alone!" after reading Chloe's text, or when Nell says Chloe's text resonates with her own questions of what she wants to get out of life. In both cases, group members' comments connect their own oral stories and written texts with Chloe's text. These connections can be seen in one way as a shared inquiry, through talk and writing, into questions and experiences that matter to several group members at once. This inquiry can be considered a way into writing, as it contributes to both our sense of shared community as teacher-writers, and as it may help each woman further articulate and explore ways to write her own experiences. For example, both Chloe and Karen are writing explicitly about their experiences as first-year teachers, but in very different genres and styles. These texts, and the conversations that surround them, may well support invention of future ways into writing for each woman, perhaps helping her elaborate or articulate content consider alternative genres. In addition, sometimes these textual connections happen with texts that are not shared in our meeting at all. For example, Chloe references CDs on relationships, which only she has listened to, as she gives me advice on how to begin and end my letter. Chloe also draws on the lyrics of a song she is listening to as she composes her "Identity Crisis" text. In both cases, Chloe's comments place these external texts in conversation with texts that are shared in the meeting, potentially supporting future revisions and ways into those writings.

As group members are inventing ways of being writers in the midst of constraints, we are doing so in writing, in talk that is about texts, and in talk that is not about texts. Whereas most of the literature on teacher writing groups assumes that this invention happens primarily

in writing and in talk about those texts, this chapter reveals important ways that teacher-writers are inventing ways of being writers even when we are not discussing a given text. This suggests that in seeking to support teacher-writers as they pursue writing, perhaps especially when they do so amidst limitations of time and energy, it is important to foreground not only the writing, but the whole teacher. Rather than being seen as tangential or off-topic, talk that is not explicitly about writing plays a vital role in composing ways of being writers, as it foregrounds the whole person rather than the written text alone.

CHAPTER 4: "I'M IN THERE WITH THE CRAZIES!": INVENTING WAYS OF BEING

We are a species that needs and wants to understand who we are. Sheep lice do

not seem to share this longing, which is one reason why they write so very little.

Annie Lamott, <u>Bird by Bird</u>, 1995 (3)

When thinking about a writing group, especially a writing group of teachers, it can be

easy to focus on the tangible outcomes of the writing group experience: the texts, perhaps the

writing strategies, those things that seem transportable or even concrete. Indeed, the

literature on teachers-as-writers emphasizes these products, extolling the benefits of teachers

sharing model texts or writing strategies with students, as well as the benefits of teachers using

writing to reflect on and shape teaching practice and conversations in the field.

Yet a focus only on these tangible products of texts, strategies, and realizations about

writing and teaching falls short of recognizing the full scope of what teacher-writers invent,

through their writing and talk. A focus on texts does not account for the actual experience

while writing, which Bob Yagelski highlights as potentially transformative, or the ways writing

can enable the "wide-awake consciousness" that David Grosskopf describes, the connection he

draws between "composing a poem and composing a life." These writers suggest that more

than texts are invented as we write together, that the experience while inventing is significant

to the writers, and that sometimes the most significant products of those inventions are not

tangible or easily defined. Sometimes, for example, alongside texts and writing strategies,

writers invent a way of being. Certainly teacher-writers are inventing ways of being writers.

But this chapter looks at other ways of being that they are also inventing ways of being adults, women, teachers, and writing group members.

In Chapter 3, I provided a glimpse into one writing group meeting in mid-February 2009, exploring the ways our writing group members invented ways into writing, through talk and writing. In that chapter I considered how writing group members invented these ways in, as writers, amidst many constraints, creating strategies that drew on writing and a combination of talk that was and was not about written texts. Our writing group meetings were complex and nuanced, ranging far beyond the read-and-critique of writing that is common in many writing groups. This current chapter follows three of the texts initially discussed in Chapter 3 into our next writing group meeting at the end of February (two weeks later): Nell's poem "Older Single Women," Karen's journaling about teaching, and Chloe's mixed-genre epic poem/personal narrative "Identity Crisis." This chapter explores not only the ongoing invention (and re-invention) of these texts, but perhaps more importantly it seeks to answer the question *what, besides these texts, is being invented in talk and writing*? In responding to this question, I explore in particular the different ways of being that writing group members are inventing, alongside their texts.

Nell's Poem "Older Single Women": Inventing Ways of Being a Single Woman

For Nell, this first year of teaching brought more change than simply a new teaching job. Whereas Jenna and Chloe are married (and Jenna has children) and did not move to pursue a teaching job, Nell and Karen are both single and relocated some distance from their families and friends. For Nell, this relocation took her several hours from home for a job in a private

school. Nell lives near the campus of that boarding school, so she walks to school to teach but must drive to get off campus and into town. Many of her friends are her colleagues, and, as she has suggested before, many dating relationships begin among faculty. Nell's first year of teaching therefore involves these other complexities, beyond learning to teach and manage classrooms and curricula, as she also seeks to make friends and build relationships and make a home in her new setting.   These themes play an important role in Nell's poetry, including her poem "Older Single Women."

In her "Older Single Women" poem, Nell seems to attempt to make sense of some of the behavior of her colleagues, especially the dating behavior of "older single women" with whom she is friends. One such woman is a visiting teacher at Nell's school, only there for a semester's appointment, and is someone with whom Nell hangs out on weekends and after hours.

When Nell introduces her revised poem, she gives us a quick summary of how she has changed the poem since our previous meeting, as well as how her thinking is developing and where she would like feedback. Nell tells us she "made a couple of changes based on what you guys were saying," especially trying to clarify the identities of the other people in the poem in response to our questions from the previous meeting. Nell also says she tried to provide "a little bit of background information" to make the context more clear. She tells us she is "having trouble jumping between the two different scenes…like one being in the bar and one being at school." These comments help us consider her revisions thus far, as well as what kind of feedback she is seeking.

Then Nell adds that while she was working on the third stanza, she "started talking about her [the other teacher's] name tag, like the plaque on her door" and she noticed "that nametag just like, um changes out," since this is a temporary appointment and the office is likely used by any temporary instructor at the school. Here Nell surmises that this woman is aware of this, and Nell herself "noticed that there's this connection between being this older single woman, and I feel like for her, like what I'm trying to capture is like she's afraid of being interchangeable, like she wants to be special in some way." Nell tells us she wants to be able to draw this connection out more, saying she feels "a little bit of heat there." Nell's introductory comments frame our reading, as we then turn to her revised poem. Like her original version, this poem begins with the excerpt of her journaling (which she did not revise) and then moves into the poem itself.

But it's SO uncomfortable to be alone. I don't know why. Why is that? The world's full of lonely people. I heard a snippet on CNN this morning about how in times of economic distress, dating and relationship services seem to flourish because people want SOMEONE to snuggle up with when everything else is going to shit. This is a crazy phenomenon. I'm around these older single women who seem NUTS. Crazy. Seriously crazy. They do crazy, irrational things, and I'm afraid it's just because they've been alone for so long that they're really starting to panic. I feel like I look at them and see myself 10 years from now. Every time I see them, I think, "God, I hope I don't make it there." I don't want to be bitter and vindictive and purposely try to trap others just to make myself feel needed. And yet.... I don't think I'm any better than they are.

It's dark but I
see her eyes take their
jagged journey around
the room. She squints in
the smoke,
stops,
still staring,
and elbows my abdomen.
"The tall one, at the bar. Green shirt."

I squint across our table,
above the heads of our friends,
through blue smoke
that makes my eyeliner burn.
I can't see him. "Yeah!
You should go up there.
Maybe he'll buy you a drink."
When she and I are
alone, it's martinis.
When we're with the guys,
it's India Pale Ale.
I shake my head apologetically
at our friends.
They're men, too,
but not tall, and not bald.
She likes them bald.
She takes a sip and leaves
her IPA at our table.

At school, her office plaque
is stamped with
"Instructor."
You can switch out the name card
if you shove it out of the track,
shove in another name
at the new semester.

I sip my drink and wonder
how she thinks love works.
Does she think she'll meet someone
in a bar,
stay up all night forging a connection
that will survive three time zones?
Is she willing to move back to [this state]?
At 37 and in Los Angeles,
she'd only be leaving a rental home
and a freelance writing job.
A wine and dinner club.
A handful of ex-boyfriends
and recently divorced maybes.

When we finish reading, we are unanimous in liking Nell's revisions. In particular, we

loved the line "She likes them bald." Chloe and I also say we like the way Nell shows herself

sipping her drink and wondering how this woman "thinks love works." I then observe a shift in

focus from Nell's initial draft, where the focus was on the craziness, to this one where the focus

seems to be more on impermanence. I tell Nell I ended up wondering about the woman:

"What does she kind of want out of it? Like what is she going for here? Is she going for love, is

she going for permanence, or is she going for maybe the exact opposite? And maybe that's

why she chooses to be in a bar, prowling for men." This is an interesting development in the

poem, as Nell seems to be linking the underlying "crazy" behavior she witnesses to a fear of

impermanence, of being replaceable.

We also discuss Nell's role as a character in this poem, wondering about how that

relates to what she wants to accomplish with the writing. I tell Nell, "The other thing that's

really interesting in this is you … Like are you there just to observe her, or do you want … some

of the reasons you are observing her to come out?" Chloe and Karen quickly chime in, Karen

saying she had wondered the same thing, and Chloe observing that the journaling at the

beginning of the poem seems to beg this question. Chloe explains that without the journaling,

Nell makes sense as just an observer, but if Nell keeps the journaling in the text then Chloe says

as a reader she is "definitely gonna want to know whether you come to some sort of resolution

in your head…or any conclusion in your thinking of the situation after observing her."

These questions about Nell's implication or role in her own poem open up an entirely

new section of our conversation, where we seem to get away from the written text more and

begin to talk about events and meaning that are not even present in this version of the text.

Nell laughs as she responds to our questions, saying she hopes to come across as "a more rational, more detached observer," in the poem, adding, "I'm in there with the crazies!" She then returns to the theme from her journaling, saying, "I look at them and see myself ten years from now." After marveling about what they are doing, Nell says her next thought is, "Oh my God! Like it only takes time, maybe?" Nell's joking and laughter soon has us all laughing. "So the whole time I'm like watching and trying to say, 'no, I couldn't do that!' and then you know, so it's kind of this weird melding of observation…and also fear of myself of what I'm capable of doing or incapable of doing." This fear of herself and her own future, of becoming like her colleagues and beginning to act in ways that are not true to the way she sees herself, is not even present in the poem itself. Indeed, this topic is only present in the journaling, which Nell tells us she had not intended to keep with the poem. This leads me to think that this poem as a text is only part of what Nell is inventing here, and that perhaps it is not the most important part.

Additionally, some of the real "craziness" Nell has observed among these coworkers is not present in this text either. When I ask Nell to tell us some of the crazy things these women do, to better understand the fear she describes, Nell begins telling animated stories. This storytelling is invention in-the-moment, with Nell seeming to respond to our laughter and enjoyment as she picks stories to tell and as she relays them. We frequently punctuate Nell's storytelling with laughing commands to "write that down!" especially as she relays the story of a coworker who "always bites people when she gets drunk" or a coworker who seems to always gravitate to married, out-of-state men. At some point Chloe begins taking notes as Nell talks, later posting her notes for Nell to use in future writing.

Reviewing our discussion of Nell's poem reveals that much more is being invented than just her text. To be certain, we spend a good deal of time discussing Nell's poem, including the revisions she made, our reactions to the poem, and questions related to what Nell has written. Our questions and comments may have inspired additional revisions Nell may have pursued with this text. But we only spent a portion of our discussion on Nell's actual text, soon moving to discussions of Nell's role in the poem and about what else, besides what is written, makes her think of these women as "crazy." It is in this part of our discussion that Nell may be considered to be inventing ways of being that go beyond her poetry. She describes her fear of becoming like this woman (and the others whom she describes), fears that the longer she stays at that school the greater the possibility that she might begin to display similar behavior. As Nell writes about the impermanence she wonders about for these women, and as she tells stories of what they do in their dating lives, she may be seen giving voice to her own worries, trying to figure out how she might be different from them. In this way, she can be seen to be inventing ways of being a single woman. She uses her poetry and journaling as one strategy for this invention ("I sip my drink and wonder/how she thinks love works"). She also uses her questioning of us, her oral storytelling about these women's actions, her humorous comments distancing herself from them ("I'm in there with the crazies!"), and her oral self-descriptions (as a "more rational, more detached observer"). This combination of strategies supports Nell in her ongoing invention of ways of being single, at whatever age, in her new home.

Karen's Multigenre "Reflections of a First-Year Teacher": Inventing Ways of Being a Writer and an Urban Teacher

Like Nell, Karen is a single woman who moved far from home to pursue her first teaching job. Karen teaches 8th grade English Language Arts in an urban school, a challenging teaching position that has been marked by frequent student management issues and administrative pressures. These are themes that were evident in the journaling Karen had shared the previous week (discussed in Chapter 3), and they play into the writing she shares at this meeting.

During our reconnecting time, Karen shares that more teachers from her school have resigned. "I just found out that I'm getting seven new students because a language arts teacher is leaving us," she tells us, adding that these new students will join her classes within the week and there may be even more students coming after that. "Teachers in my school are dropping like flies," she says; "last week two more teachers quit." Karen attributes this attrition in part to the power students in her school seem to feel over teachers, observing that students even "made" a male teacher cry recently. In all, Karen guesses that eight teachers have quit already this year (a little over halfway into the year), observing the lack of consistency this creates for students. She says her students even thought she had quit when she did not show up for school on the day that she had her teacher-of-the-year interview.

In addition to gaining new students in her own classes, Karen also has to cover other classes during her prep period. "That's a pain in the butt," she says, "because I'm a substitute teacher," without compensation. As Chloe and I comment on how hard this must be to not have a prep period, Karen responds, "we don't really have prep periods anyway," because her

free period was already taken up each day with required meetings. "So basically," she says, "I'm just giving up my meeting time." It now makes even more sense why Karen is at school past six o'clock each evening. Even in the midst of sharing these challenges, however, Karen is cracking jokes and making light of her situation. When she remembers that I am recording our meeting, Karen exclaims, "I can't believe this is being taped! Christine, you have my life in your hands!" I offer to turn off the recorder, but Karen laughs and tells me I should "send it in" to her school, almost daring someone to reprimand her. She is well aware that having made it this far, she has outlasted a number of her former colleagues.

When I ask who wants to share writing, I am delighted to hear Karen volunteer with new writing. Our previous meeting had been only the second time she had shared her writing, and she had ended that meeting telling us she no longer wanted to write about school. "I just came up with a new idea for my writing today during school," she tells us, laughing, "and I think what I'm going to be working on now, cause I never stay with something for very long is, um, a multi-genre piece about my first year teaching." She says she is "really excited about it" and worked on it just a bit today, while her students took a test. She then directs us to her post on our group wiki, a series of faux emails she has written to parody communications from various administrators to the teachers in her school.

INBOX

To: Staff
From: Ms. Jambon

Staff,

1. Please remember to be on duty at all times. If you stay in your room to speak with a student for even a minute while we are being audited, we LOSE points. Last time we lost several points. Let's not let that happen again.

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2. How are your data notebooks coming? How is data driving instruction? Can you show evidence if someone asks to see your data notebook?

3. PEPs. We will be audited very soon.

4. IEPs, also expecting an audit in the near future.

5. Lesson plans MUST be submitted by Friday for the following week. Refer to the format sent in an earlier email. KEEP THESE ON THE CORNER OF YOUR DESK.

6. Please arrive to meetings ON TIME. Teams meet with Ms. J. on Mondays. Tuesday and Wednesday meeting with parents. Thursday meet with department. Friday meet with team and counselor. Cover student concerns.

7. You should be contacting parents of children with Ds and Fs on a regular basis.

8. Tardy policy. We will correct our tardy problem if we stick to the policy. NOTIFY parents when children are tardy. Send home tardy letters.

9. Please remember our staff meeting this Wednesday after school. We will have a data specialist here to discuss our numbers.

10. Submit a list of students who are struggling to me and grade-level counselor by Friday at 3.

Please remember, if your kids are not learning, you are not teaching.

* *

INBOX

To: Language Arts Staff
From: Department Chair

Hi LA folks,

I recently met with Ms. J to discuss Language Arts business. She is noticing a few things with the LA department. Please review the list below.

1. How are you reaching all of your students? Differentiation. Please keep a note card next to your lesson plans at all times explaining how you differentiate so if someone from downtown comes it is very obvious. Also include in your plan.

2. What are you doing to give your students below grade level additional support? Read 180? Individualized instruction? Re-looping? After school help? Academy of Reading?

3. The Big Read will take place on Friday, February 19, 2009.

4. Focus on your gifted students. What additional instruction/materials are you giving your talented students. They should NOT be bored in your class. EVER.

5. Writing portfolios – Expect audit soon.

6. GRADE level testing is Thursday and Friday of this week

7. Next week: school pictures through LA (check schedule); high school scheduling (through LA classes – Ms. P sent schedule)

Keep up the good work.

Janet

After we read, but before we begin discussing her work, Karen tells us how she is starting to envision other possibilities for this piece.   She tells us she envisions this will have several genres, such as "text boxes [with] things that I write on the board," narrative, poetry, and writing about or by her students. "But so far, all I have are emails…because I was getting sick of emails, so mostly my emails are just venting." She describes the emails she has written as "just long lists that are not going to be interesting to anybody else," adding, "so I'm going to have to find a way to make them interesting." Yet what she has written, especially when read in the context of her earlier comments about her school, seems to be a promising start and an intriguing genre shift from her earlier journaling about teaching.

As we continue talking, Karen begins to orally invent additional parts of her text, beyond what she has written. Karen tells us she is thinking about adding little "in-between pieces" to her multi-genre work, "like tracking all the teachers who quit." Laughing, she imagines herself interspersing a series of goodbyes to these departing teachers between other sections of her text: "like, Goodbye Johnson! Bye O'Donald! Peace out, Ms. Anderson!" Each "goodbye" Karen announces is punctuated by laughs from us as we listen to her.   Just as when Nell shared stories about her colleagues while discussing her "Older Single Women" poem, Karen seems to almost perform her stories orally, playing to her audience and taking in our laughter as she suggests each new "goodbye," and the joke builds with each new layer. Indeed, in writing and

imagining this text, Karen seems to deliberately use humor to highlight and deal with the challenges she is facing at her school. Chloe observes, "I think this is going to be a really funny piece," going on to suggest ways to exaggerate moments to make the text even more funny. As we imagine future possibilities for this piece, it is with recognition that comedy punctuates the serious, and that even the humor is masking some difficult moments for Karen.

Karen continues to invent future layers of her text, envisioning adding text boxes to show what she has written on her board at different points in the year, "because today I was thinking about how my board has changed over the course of the year." I laugh, imagining where this idea is going. "In the beginning it was all rainbow-colored," Karen says, beginning to laugh as well, "because I had all these new expo markers I'd bought." She adds, "Over the course of the year all of my things have gotten stolen," and notes, "what I say on the board [now] is very different." The tone of the discussion is humorous, building on the laughter we have shared thus far. Karen gives us an example of how she has changed her board: "Like, 'Remember, today's a new day! Let's make this one great!' That would be like the middle of the year maybe." I laugh again. "Now I'm like, 'raise your … hand!" Karen jokes, assuming a stern but humorous tone.

"If you want to say something, raise your hand!" I echo, having fun with the comedic contrast she is setting up.

"Yeah! I think as you intersperse these… oh my gosh type of emails, with your changing attitude with your board and the changing color of the pens," Chloe begins.

Nell jumps in, overlapping Chloe, "And I think also, like, that humor, cause it is so over the top, even though it is so closely tied to real life, I mean that is kind of crazy." She and Chloe

seem to have no problem imagining the potential of Karen's text and satirical approach. "And uh, I know people who bite people!" Nell laughs, connecting the "crazy" in her life to the "crazy" Karen describes. I laugh in response, and Nell continues, "Like the humor is great, but also the way it works is that then those really hard parts, if you even want to include them, then they can be more poignant in that way."

I agree with Nell, observing that the contrast between the funny and the frustrating could work very well, and Chloe asks Karen how she might "go about putting the serious, like aspects in there?" Chloe wonders aloud what genre Karen might use for that purpose. Karen says she might use poetry or a narrative blurb, "cause I already have some things that I would like to put in there. But I don't want it to only, just like you guys were saying, I don't want it to only be funny. I want the parts that are crazy, like these emails, to maybe be funny, because they are so ridiculous. But like I just mostly want it to be…I just want to remember this year." Karen is contemplative as she continues, "Because I want it to be over, but then I wanna…just remember it…So." She pauses a moment, thoughtful, and then continues, more upbeat, "I don't know, I'm sort of excited about this!"

Our conversation here has moved between Karen's posted text and her invention of (and even our collaborative invention of) future parts of that text. Much of our conversation has been humorous as we laugh about Karen's changing class boards (we each may be able to see our own past idealism in those descriptions) and her joking "goodbyes" to the teachers who have quit. But Nell points out, amidst the laughter, that there are really hard parts to Karen's experience as well, suggesting that the humor might have this extra function, of making those difficult moments even more "poignant." This clearly resonates with Karen, and she ties these

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comments to her reasons for writing this piece. As much as she wants the year to be over, she

says she wants to remember it, and writing this text seems to play a role in inventing ways of

remembering. For the first time since we've started meeting, Karen describes herself as

"excited" about returning to her writing.

As the meeting continues, Nell asks Karen if she wants to include parts from students'

perspectives as well, or if she wants it to just focus on her own perspective. Karen likes the

idea, and Nell suggests, "as I was trying to think of … different genres you would include … like I

thought like student notes," adding, "I don't know if you ever confiscate notes." When Karen

says she has not confiscated notes, Nell suggests she could make them up, based on what

students say. This conversation reminds Karen of "a funny comment" which she immediately

says, "I need to write down." She goes on to tell us the story of an interaction she had with her

students, when she was telling them how much she cared about them:

> I was telling this story about how these basketball players from like another
> team were like pushing my kids all over. And I was like, "I care about you guys so
> much…like when Mike Smith was pushing you all over, like people had to hold
> me back! And to not go talk to those boys!" And one of my boys was like, "What
> was you gonna do Ms. M? Shoot 'em with rainbows and smiles?"

Karen's retelling of this story is a performance of the moment, complete with reenacting her

own teacher voice and her students' voices, and as her "audience" we are laughing out loud

and telling her "yeah, that needs to go in there!" Our reaction leads Karen right into another

story. "But they basically say everything to my face," she tells us, returning to her comment

that she has not confiscated notes from students. "Like today this one girl says to me, 'I just

don't like you. I'm not ever going to like you. I just don't like you.' And I was like, 'that's fine,

but you need to still like be respectful in my class.'" Karen laughs a little as she ends this recounting.

"Good for you," I say.

Karen repeats again, "I'm like 'okay! I get it!'" This time her laugh is stronger, and Nell joins in. "So I don't even need to find notes, because they basically say everything to my face."

"What an incredible role model you showed her," I respond. "That 'no you don't have to like everybody, and it's okay if you don't like me.' I mean she is so immersed in being an 8th grader… where they really do want everybody to like them, or to actively hate them. Like those are the two places of power."

"Yeah," Karen agrees. "I think she was really confused, because I was like, I was like I don't care if you don't like me, I still like you. So, you're here to stay! But I think that, I mean she is just sort of mean, but I think she really does want me to just care about her."

"Yup," I agree.

"And I do," Karen concludes. She then goes on to tell us that she even offered the student the option to move to another teacher if she really thought that she could not learn in her room. But she told the student, "I really want you to be here. I really want you in my class. I enjoy having you." Karen tells how the student did not speak, but kept shaking her head that she did not want to move classes. When Karen finishes this story, I suggest that a dialogue or script of that exchange with her student could also be something she includes in her multi-genre piece. "Yeah, I could do that," she responds, "That would be cool."

This is already the most elaborated piece that Karen has brought to our group meetings, and certainly the first piece she is actively excited about revisiting. Whereas in our previous

meeting, Karen had been resistant to writing nonfiction anymore, and she had described herself as "bad at revision," saying that when she writes something she then doesn't want to re-enter it again, today she describes herself as "excited" to continue. Indeed, most of our conversation today extends beyond the text Karen has posted, as she invents (and as we collaborate around) future parts of this multi-genre text. In many ways, Karen can be seen inventing ways of being a writer here, as she begins to create and gain energy for that creation. One strategy she uses for this invention is her oral storytelling. Like Nell, Karen is an entertaining storyteller, with a natural sense of timing and humor. She easily has us laughing at all the right moments, as she parodies her administrators' emails and as she pokes fun at her own initial idealism, observing how that has changed over the past several months. Another strategy she uses is her conversation with us as a group, as she brainstorms new ideas for her text based on our conversation, and as she uses our comments to springboard into additional storytelling. Like Nell, she hears potential writing in this storytelling, saying she needs to "write down" certain stories so she can add them to this developing text.

In addition to inventing her text and ways of being a writer, Karen also can be seen inventing ways of being a teacher and ways of remembering. A major strategy she uses for inventing ways of being a teacher is her humor, which she uses, like Nell, to highlight some of the "craziness" of her teaching context. For example, when teachers quit mid-year, there is a heavy cost for those who remain, as Karen observes the lack of consistency for her students (who are questioning if even she will quit), as she watches colleagues break down, as she inherits more students in her own classes, and as she is asked to become a substitute teacher without compensation. Yet Karen imagines including humorous "good-byes" to these teachers

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in her text, almost a salute to those who could not make it, while she, although perhaps

changed, is still there teaching. She can be seen inventing a way of being a teacher who

survives, who does not get pushed around as much and who knows how to respond to

students. She is inventing this teacher-self who can joke with her students, and who students

genuinely want to care for them. Thus, as much as Karen wants to just get through this year,

she is inventing a way of remembering this change, this incredible year, through her writing and

talk.

Chloe's Poem-Narrative "Identity Crisis Revisited": Inventing Ways of Being an Urban

Teacher

Like Karen, Chloe is a teacher in an urban district and in a school that is being watched

closely as it tries to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Chloe's teaching assignment is significantly

different, however, as she teaches secondary English as a Secondary Language (ESL). She is also

the district coordinator of the ESL program, which led to the Title III involvement she described

at our last meeting. As her "Identity Crisis" piece from that meeting indicated, Chloe has

struggled to find time for herself and her own life amidst the many demands of teaching. These

themes continue to surface in the extended version of "Identity Crisis" she shares in this

meeting.

During our reconnecting time, Chloe leads off with an animated story of being called

down to the media center to claim some boxes, which turned out to be the textbooks she had

ordered for her students. "It was a huge victory!" she exclaims, going on to tell us that the

following day, after not being able to log into or record grades or attendance on her school's

computer program since December, she finally got that fixed. "And then Wednesday," she continues, "we got my high school students' schedules fixed, so they are actually in my class now, five weeks into the semester." When I congratulate her and comment that obstacles seem to be falling away, Chloe agrees, saying, "They are little victories, but they feel huge for me. Because it is like, 'Really, I have to worry about getting my kids scheduled in here properly? That is something that I as a teacher need to worry about?'" Chloe's stories of her "small victories" point out how each positive experience represents hours of work and frustration for her, things that she "as a teacher" has indeed had to worry about. It seems no wonder that she had written herself as a solitary heroine in her epic poem, facing the challenges associated with teaching in her urban school.

When it is Chloe's turn to share her writing, she tells us she's proud to have been not only writing more often on her blog, but also to have figured out how to import her past blog entries and her undergraduate journal onto her current blog. "So now I have this complete collection of what I have been writing over the past five years." She soon directs us to look at her blog, where she had continued the piece "Identity Crisis." When she left off last time, her character in the epic poem was standing alone, determined and immovable, facing a shadowy creature that salivates "at the scent of youth, of passion, of naivety." Her character was vulnerable, and her journaling that followed the poem revealed that she felt in danger of being consumed by the demands of her job. She wondered why she felt so willing to be a sacrifice, and thought that perhaps her own ambition was the creature she was fighting. Today Chloe directs us to skip past what we read last time and begin with what she has added. In today's installment, Chloe finally engages the creature in battle, and she draws first blood:

I raise my sword to my adversary,
Meeting those dark red eyes with my own,
Hoping to convey stalwartness and determination
And to hide my doubts and fears behind my blade.
The creature lunges towards me–the battle has begun–
Its warm breath fills my nostrils as I leap away,
It is strong and vigorous, bemused by my facade.
The tremendous head quivers from side to side,
Toying with me as I leap back and forth,
Seeming to smirk at my hesitation.
Enraged, I leapt forward, driving my weapon forward.
The metal slices through dark matted hair and leathery skin.
[NOTE: something about raw...meat...]
As I wrench my weapon out,
I am torn by my first taste of victory
And the consuming fear of failure.

_____

Small victories. That's what keeps me going through the day to day hoops that I have to jump through. Case in point: Monday morning was like Christmas–a highly unusual feeling for any teacher, let alone a first-year teacher who is plagued by the constant worry that she is behind. I was in the copy room, hoping that I had enough paper to make handouts for the first half of the day, cursing the administration under my breath for failing to sign the purchase order last week to ensure that we had the proper materials to produce handouts and readings for class. Yes, we went a whole week without paper. And had to start the next week without supplies. Time to break out the stone and chisel…

As I pleaded with the copier to miraculously produce a sufficient amount of handouts, a fellow teacher walked in, announcing, "Hey, you have a bunch of boxes in the media center."

Boxes? I wonder what it could be.

Grabbing my copies, I nearly ran down through our labyrinth of a school, down three sets of stairs and two hallways into the other building where the media center is housed. Flinging open the door, my hands went to my face in amazement. *My books!*

This small victory was the result of months of developing my curriculum, researching a variety of textbooks, writing a proposal and presenting my work to the school board. Six months into the school year and I now had textbooks to teach with, a large step to legitimizing my classroom and what I was teaching on a daily basis. No longer did I have to make every single handout or illegally copy lengthy sections of sample textbooks for my class. My students had *books*.

In writing this new layer of her piece, Chloe has shifted from being threatened by the creature to actually confronting it in battle. Not surprisingly, the "small victories" Chloe had shared at the beginning of our meeting, outside the context of her writing, figure prominently in this next layer of her piece.   Additionally, in the context of her discussion, we see how very much "like Christmas" this must have felt for her – receiving her books meant no more copying and worrying about paper shortage or copier malfunction. Indeed, Chloe's victory is almost epic in proportion, appropriate for the "epic poem" genre she has envisioned for this poem. She travels through a "labyrinth" of the school to find the boxes when they were delivered, after "months of developing my curriculum, researching a variety of textbooks, writing a proposal and presenting my work to the school board." All in the first months of teaching. It had been an epic battle, and Chloe had emerged victorious.

Perhaps it is this sense of victory, or this accumulation of small victories Chloe describes in her talk to us, that shifts the standoff between her and the creature. In this current installment, Chloe is armed with a sword, which she raises to her adversary. She meets the "dark red eyes" of the creature and the creature lunges toward her, beginning the battle. Chloe depicts herself as leaping back and forth, just out of the creature's reach, until she is enraged and ultimately drives her sword through the creature's "dark matted hair and leathery skin." She describes her "first taste of victory," these triumphs in her professional life representing "a large step to legitimizing my classroom and what I was teaching on a daily basis."

And yet, in the face of this victory, it is clear Chloe does not feel like she has reached the resolution of this conflict, either in the writing or in the living. She depicts herself as

constructing a deliberate façade of "stalwartness and determination" in order to hide her fears from the creature. Her adversary is strong and seems to be able to see her doubts. She describes it as toying with her, smirking. While it is this smirk that ultimately enrages her into action, she ends this section of the poem with her "consuming fear of failure." In spite of getting her books and finally gaining access to her grading program, in spite of having successfully proposed and defended materials for the school board, Chloe still feels in jeopardy.

As we finish reading, our conversation picks up on a strand from our previous meeting, and we talk about what the creature might represent. "Now, the creature, the creature is the fear?" I ask.

"I still haven't decided what the creature is," Chloe replies. "That was something that I was kind of playing with before. I was actually talking to [my husband] about that the other day. I haven't decided if the creature is going to be like you're saying, my fear or my fear of failure, or…so the creature ends up being myself, or if the creature is going to be the school, which is originally how I imagined it." She goes on, "One of the things I'm toying with, with not just like this piece of writing, but also in general with my life, with what I'm doing with the rest of my life and so on and so forth, is sort of, um….forget what I'm saying." She laughs a little uncomfortably. "I haven't clarified it enough in my head to even say it to you."

"Well sometimes, that's where it like…try to talk about…just try to talk about it just around the edges of it then," I suggest.

"So, basically what I'm getting at," Chloe begins, "the things I'm dealing with in my writing, and that I'm sort of working through *through* my writing, is this idea of…you know, what am I really planning on doing. The question has come up because I'm trying to figure out

what things are going to look like for me next year. I have the opportunity to potentially move to a different school district." She trails off a bit as she says this.

"Oh," I reply.

"Um, but what that means for me in my head is do I move to a different school … and then my life would end up being easier. I wouldn't have quite so many obstacles at the district I would be at. Um, or do I want to sort of continue to work through what I'm doing here. And so in that sense that is what I mean by like is the creature…is the creature the school or is the creature myself because I am the one sort of self-imposing…" Again, Chloe's volume trails off as she finishes.

"Yeah, that makes a lot of sense," I reply, and then add, "what I'm hearing, too, is kind of like this sense of…like, you ask this…I don't remember if you ask it specifically, but why are you in it?"

"Mmm hmm," Chloe replies.

"You know?" I continue. "Which makes you start to think about, well, what is it? What is …what's the target? What's the thing I'm thinking about here? … Is it making a change in a school? Is that it? That is going to push me forward? To what extent does that feed me? You know, is it…so that is sort of like a programmatic change. Is it staying on in the lives of certain kids? You know, um, is it sustaining and growing as a teacher? With the expectation that there are lots of different kids that you will come in contact with over your career? Um, and how to, how to figure out a way to sustain yourself, so that, um, you know, you live to fight another day." I laugh here a bit at the metaphor, which matches Chloe's text.

"Right," Chloe responds. "You are exactly getting at what I'm struggling with here."

"Yeah, that's part of what I think can be really tricky… is starting to figure out what… my guess is that quite possibly this creature is all of these things," I say.

"Mmmmm," says Chloe. "Yeah. I would agree with that."

Here, even though we begin talking about Chloe's text, we are simultaneously talking beyond the text as we explore the identity of the creature. The creature is a significant part of the epic poem, and its identity remains shadowy for good reason, because Chloe is still figuring out what it represents. Indeed, when we first talk about the creature, Chloe struggles to articulate herself, finally saying, "forget what I'm saying. I haven't clarified it enough in my head to even say it to you." Here Chloe is at first bound by more traditional thoughts of invention, where she seeks to clarify an idea within herself and then share it. When I suggest that she "try to talk about it just around the edges," just to see what she can share, Chloe moves well beyond what she has written in the text itself and shares the possibility that she may move to a different school district. Here she is explicit in trying to work through this decision by writing about it. It is equally significant that she chooses not to write about it in what might be a conventional genre, such as a reflective journal. Rather, Chloe writes herself in an epic battle, the outcome of which she is unsure of, but which seems tied to whether she will stay at her school or seek another job.

Later in the meeting, Nell again returns to the topic of the creature's identity as well as Chloe's impending decision. "I really love the images in this metaphor," she comments, "but I think, and I guess I'm not exactly sure if this is what Christine was saying, but the idea that, well, as you were saying, you're not sure what this…creature should be." She continues, her broken phrases and frequent pauses making her sound uncertain, as she tries to work out what she

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wants to communicate. Yet as Nell continues talking, these hedges fall away and her voice

become louder, faster, and is filled with increased inflection.

> Um. I think that part of the beauty is that it's indefinable in some ways, because
> when we struggle…I think this is similar to what Christine said. I think maybe it
> doesn't necessarily have to be defined necessarily because, um. I don't know. I
> guess sometimes in writing it has …we do need to know what it is…but I think
> the nature of this, like fear, like when you have fear, or when you are doing
> something new or struggling with some issue... We rarely have all the pieces
> there, and you still have to make your decision anyway, whether to fight or to
> run or whatever. And so, I think part of the beauty is, for me, right now, is that
> it's, it is kind of ambiguous, because that's almost, in a way it's almost
> inconsequential.

Here Nell is trying to articulate something slippery, an awareness that Chloe hinted at earlier.

While this is a piece of writing that we are discussing, the content of the writing is not formed

or even completely known to the writer. Chloe is not writing an academic essay, in which she is

defending a particular argument, and she is not writing a simple personal narrative of an

experience from her past, both of which she has written for past college classes. Rather, she is

moving between genres here as she seeks to define something that seems to still elude her.

And Nell is encouraging her to allow herself to do that, to not feel compelled just because this is

writing to define the creature or to seek a neat resolution. "I don't know," Nell adds, "it could

be many things all rolled into one." Chloe agrees, "I think it is many things."

As we finish talking about Chloe's piece, I ask Karen if she has anything to add. Karen

has been quiet through much of this discussion. She responds, "No, not at this time," laughing,

"I really am enjoying it though, and I think it's a great metaphor for, I don't know. I feel really

selfish when I read your things, Chloe, because I'm always like, 'oh my gosh, I feel the same

thing!'" She adds later, again laughing, "I'm not very intelligent right now, though. So I don't

have anything to say besides that. I just can't get past my reader response lens!" This prompts the rest of us to laugh as well.

As we talk about Chloe's text, and as we read what she has written, there is much evidence of her invention. Unlike Nell's revision of her poem, where she reworked parts of her original text, Chloe has kept her initial text intact and has added a whole new "chapter" of sorts, a next installment of her story. In this newest section, Chloe actually engages the creature in battle, and she tells the story of her own real-life epic accomplishment s at her school. As with Nell and Karen, however, Chloe's text is only one part of what she invents in talk and writing. Like Karen, Chloe is inventing ways of being as a teacher, particularly a teacher under enormous pressure and working in difficult circumstances. Chloe certainly uses her writing as a strategy in this invention. By telling her story as an epic battle, Chloe is inventing a way of making sense of her experience, and, like Karen, exploring what it means to survive as a beginning teacher. Chloe's epic poem is serious, however, as she casts herself as a solitary heroine fighting for her life.   In inventing this character, Chloe is also inventing a way of being a survivor and sort of warrior as a first-year teacher.

Additionally, in this discussion Chloe reveals that she is also inventing ways of making a decision, as she tells us that she is considering seeking a new job. This writing and talk about writing is a part of that process, a strategy Chloe is employing as she gives her unease a figure in the form of the creature in her poem. In our discussion Nell helps hone this strategy, as she observes that as much as we might discuss the identity of the creature, in life we can't always have "all the pieces" and yet we must act anyway. Nell reframes this ambiguity as part of the beauty of Chloe's text, saying in some ways the creature's identity is "inconsequential," that

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Chloe will still have to make a decision even if she does not know what the creature represents. This reframing becomes a part of the invention of ways of making decisions, perhaps giving Chloe permission to not know all the answers, to not know what causes her discomfort exactly, but to see that she can still make a decision anyway.

Strategies for Inventing Ways of Being Teachers and Women

This chapter shows Nell, Karen, and Chloe inventing, through writing and collaborative talk in group meetings, texts that are significant to them. As teacher-writers, these women are writing amidst the challenges associated with teaching. They have little time, spending long hours at school and finding their personal time often consumed with professional responsibilities. Karen and Nell are isolated in many ways from friends and family, immersed in the challenges of relocating and making a new town into a home. Yet, amidst these difficulties, they make time to write and to share that writing with our writing group. In sharing their writing, they also invent much more than written texts. They are inventing ways of being.

Writing Oneself as a Certain Kind of Person in a Text

One of the strategies group members use to invent ways of being is to actually write themselves into their texts in certain ways. For example, Nell, in her isolated teaching context, is inventing ways of being a single woman, particularly a single woman in a relatively isolated community. She writes herself into her poem as a rational observer, and then uses her oral storytelling in our meeting to highlight the humor and her discomfort with what she sees as

craziness in other women's dating behaviors. Using talk and writing, Nell invents ways of

distinguishing herself from these other women, both in real life and in her poem, thereby

creating a possible way of being a single woman. Similarly, Chloe can be seen inventing ways of

being a teacher. Like Nell, Chloe casts herself as a character in her text when she writes herself

into her epic poem, in combat with a creature that might represent a lot of the challenges she

faces as a first-year teacher. In writing herself in this way, Chloe invents a way of being a

teacher that is defined by surviving and by her awareness of her own vulnerability.

Using Humor to Invent Ways of Being

Like Chloe, Karen also can be seen inventing ways of being a teacher through her

writing. Karen uses humor as a strategy to retell difficult or frustrating teaching experiences in

a funny way. In writing and talking about her ideas for her text, Karen depicts herself as a

survivor, one of the teachers who is making it and can therefore almost laugh at the craziness

of the challenges she has faced. Nell also uses humor as a strategy in inventing her ways of

being a single woman. As she tells us the stories of her colleagues' "crazy" behavior, Nell has us

laughing at the antics she describes. Nell's use of humor emphasizes the difference between

her and these women, and contributes to her defining herself as that rational observer.

Strategies for Inventing Ways of Being Writers and Writing Group Members

In our discussion during this meeting, Karen also can be seen inventing ways of being a

writer. Unlike the other members of our group, Karen has not regularly shared writing, and yet

today she expresses excitement for her writing and tells us she wrote during school, while her students were taking a test. Karen uses oral storytelling, as well as interactions with our group members, as she orally invents new layers of her text in our group meeting, which seems to help her envision herself writing future versions of this text.

Additionally, in looking across these three texts and related conversations, we are all involved in inventing ways of being writing group members. We offer different support to different people, depending on what a given text and conversation seems to need. But throughout this meeting, we are developing strategies to support each other as writers and as inventors of all these different ways of being. We ask questions, we relate ideas to our own experiences, we laugh at funny stories, and we tell each other to "write that down!" when we hear something that seems like it belongs in the text. We help each other elaborate stories, we ponder possibilities, and we appreciate progress. We witness the inventions of each other's texts. We focus on those texts, and sometimes we look beyond the texts for what is not yet written.

These various inventions and strategies for invention are significant to the literature on teachers as writers. Whereas the literature on teacher-writers does focus on the text and ways of being writers that teachers create, this chapter looks beyond those to consider the many other significant things these teacher-writers are inventing. While it is certainly significant that group members are writing meaningful texts and sharing them with group members, this chapter shows that their invention of ways of being teachers, women, and writing group members, as well as their invention of ways of remembering and making decisions are just as

important. I argue that these other outcomes, and the strategies that the teachers are

developing for inventing them, are just as important as the shared texts.

CHAPTER 5: "I JUST DON'T KNOW THE RIGHT THINGS TO DO": INVENTING WAYS OF INTERVENING

"I *think what I would love is for this to lead to a conversation. Because there is so much time that has gone by. I mean my ideal is that we would both say sorry to each other.*"

> Christine, discussing her letter to an estranged friend

"*My sister's getting married in like two weeks. And I'm really nervous about... like I just don't know the right things to do.*"

> Nell, discussing her wedding toast for her sister

"*I have a meeting with, ah, the superintendent and some principals, to kind of update them on Title III regulations, and also to make some proposals for next year.*"

> Chloe, discussing her meeting with district administration

A misunderstanding among friends, a wedding toast, and a high-stakes meeting with administrators. At first glance, one might assume that the above comments were uttered during our "reconnecting time," the beginning of writing group meetings when we catch up on each other's lives before we begin discussing our writing. But each of these comments actually introduces a text, which the author brought to the meeting for feedback during our writing conversations. Each of these texts also represents a different sort of text than the author (and other group members) had previously brought to writing group meetings. Whereas we usually shared writing we initiated for our own enjoyment and purposes, in these cases we were

writing a text to do specific work, to intervene in a challenging in-person rhetorical situation. Our resulting conversations, therefore, actually targeted two "texts" of sorts: one a written text, and the other an in-person interaction that would be shaped in certain ways by the introduction of the written text.

This chapter extends the discussion from Chapters 3 and 4, attending to other ways that writing group members invented through writing and talk during group meetings. Chapter 3 explored strategies we developed for inventing ways into writing, for creating opportunity and energy to write amidst the constraints we experienced as teachers and as women. In doing so, Chapter 3 attended to the ways that talk that was not even about texts, such as the storytelling we associated with our "reconnecting time," played an important role in those inventions. Chapter 4 extended this conversation, exploring what, beyond written texts, we were inventing through this combination of writing and talk. In doing so, Chapter 4 attended to the ways of being that were being invented, from ways of being writers and writing group members to ways of being teachers and women. Now, this chapter continues to explore our invention through talk and writing, to explore ways writing group members invented *ways of intervening*, through writing and talk, in challenging in-person rhetorical situations. The texts in this chapter can be seen doing different work than texts in other chapters, as the writers seek ways, through writing, to frame their in-person interactions in certain ways and to make those interactions feel less awkward and more comfortable for the author. In bringing a draft text to the writing group, the authors are defining these in-person interactions as in part writing problems, which can then be approached using many of the strategies and social invention processes familiar to the group.

Essentially, a rhetorical situation may be understood as a set of circumstances in which at least one person perceives a sense of exigency, which may be addressed by intervening through the use of some form of communication, in order to affect or change an audience's perspective (Bitzer). This chapter considers three writers as they experience exigency in a damaged friendship, a request to give a wedding toast, and a request to deliver a presentation for district administrators. Each situation feels complex to the writer, especially as she considers the needs and expectations of her audience. Consequently, each group member seeks ways to use writing as a way into these situations, as a way of purposely intervening in the actual in-person rhetorical situation. These texts therefore represent less common writing for each author, and for other members of the writing group, as they question the relationship between the author's and the audience's purpose and attitudes. Whereas much of the writing that we share in group meetings is initiated by the author, with the primary audience often being the author and fellow group members, the texts in this chapter have an explicit external audience who may have quite specific expectations that differ from the author's (and even from other group members).

Thus, the texts in this chapter come from three separate meetings during the course of the year and represent departures in some way for each of the writers. In each instance, a group member was not writing to explore or create a text for herself or for fellow group members; rather, she was seeking to create a text that would have an external audience. These are texts that were created to do specific *work* with those external audiences; they are texts that the authors crafted as means of *intervening* in a potentially challenging or awkward in-person situation.

Whereas the literature on teachers-as-writers is full of accounts of teachers sharing their writing with external audiences, ranging from students to the field at large, this chapter looks at something a little different. While much of the literature on teacher-writers emphasizes teachers making their writing public in their classroom, perhaps as models (Gillespie "Becoming Your Own Expert"; Kittle Write Beside Them; Perry), that writing is often still very much in the control of the teacher, with the teacher-writer easily able to say whether she shares that text or not as a model. Additionally, while there is literature encouraging teachers to write for publication, essentially as a way of purposefully entering a professional conversation (Check "Reflection and Reform"; McEntee; Whitney et al.), these accounts are often not time-bound and are intended for print publications. The texts in this chapter, however, are not only written expressly to be shared with an outside audience, but these are also written in order to help the author manage a challenging in-person interaction. When the teacher-writers bring these texts to the writing group and discuss them during their writing time, I argue that they are intentionally recasting these challenging in-person interactions as writing problems, which they can then approach using their strategies for invention as writers. In this way, each example in this chapter can be read as an account of the invention of two linked texts: one a written text, and the other an in-person interaction for which the written text is expressly created as an intervention.

I begin by returning to the story of my letter to Angela, which I introduced in Chapter 3, and which I wrote in hopes of framing a later in-person reconciliation. In the second example, Nell shares her realization that she will have to deliver a wedding toast for her sister, in spite of the two women's uneasy relationship. In the final example, Chloe must prepare a presentation

for her superintendent and several principals, in which she must discuss budget limitations and make suggestions for the coming year. Each of us experience these later in-person rhetorical situations as potentially challenging, based on our relationships with our audiences, and we each can be seen inventing ways of intervening in those situations through writing and talk about that writing.

My Letter to Angela: Inventing Ways of Intervening in a Damaged Friendship

As I discussed in Chapter 3, when I shared my draft letter to Angela it represented a departure, in both genre and purpose, from anything I had shared with the group previously. Up until that point in our group's history, we had shared poetry, narrative, and journaling, and in many ways we as authors and group members were our primary audiences. Thus, while we talked about our reaction as an audience to a particular piece of writing, and as we talked about our purposes as writers for a given text, there was often an implicit assumption that the author and audience were going to read the text in similar ways.

With my letter to Angela, however, this relationship between author and audience changed. No longer was I or a fellow group member the target audience. This time my audience for writing was outside our group, and I had worries that Angela would have a very different way of reading the letter than I did. It is likely this is why I was having so much difficulty writing the letter, as I tell the group, "I feel like I *really need* to write this piece, but I don't quite know how to go about doing it."

I explain to my fellow group members that for many months, I had suspected that a longtime friend of mine had become distant, and recently a mutual friend had confirmed my

suspicions that I had inadvertently hurt her feelings over a year ago. Upon hearing this news, I felt both saddened to realize that my suspicions were correct, and frustrated that she had allowed what could have been a minor misunderstanding to fester in this way. As I was muddling through this situation in my personal life, which was complicated by me now living over 500 miles away from this friend, I decided that I wanted to confront the problem and (hopefully) begin to rebuild my friendship. While I would have preferred an in-person conversation, I decided that writing a letter would be a better first move on my part, hopefully providing grounds on which to share a later discussion. In this way, while I actually was most interested in inventing a way to mend my damaged friendship, I was drafting this letter as a way of intervening in that overall process.

My decision to bring this letter to the writing group was purposeful, as a writer and as a group member. As a writer, I knew I needed help sorting out what I wanted to say in this letter and how I wanted to approach the writing. It was an uncomfortable letter to write, and I was really having trouble with it.   I believed that this was important writing I was doing, and it was writing I was actively thinking about and struggling with. What better to bring to a writing group meeting? I also wanted our group to be a place where members would think of texts like these as *writing* and recognize that we could bring any kind of text to the group for help and feedback, from personal narratives and poetry to letters and texts we were composing for other audiences. Thus, while providing the background and context for my writing felt a bit uncomfortable, especially as I sought to provide enough context for my group members to make sense of and help me with this letter without belaboring what felt like an already overcomplicated story, I sought their advice with this text.

As I introduced my writing that week, I began by explaining some background on my friendship with Angela, details of the situation that led to our misunderstanding, and how our interactions had changed since that time. I then asked them, "how much background, how much story needs to go into this?" I added, "I'm kind of looking for feedback on like, you know, kind of, almost genre of the letter. And whether you guys think a note is the right way to go. That kind of thing." As I noted in Chapter 3, my posted text was part outline and part almost-poem, beginning with a list of questions as I brainstormed my purpose for writing the letter in the first place:

> My purposes:
> To explain? My mindset? My reasons for commenting?
> To apologize? For hurt/embarrassment/disappointment? For ending on this note?
> To patch things up? To create a space to patch things up and recover?
> To be angry? To rise above?

This is a very early layer of my letter, and it needed substantial work before I could consider sending it to Angela, particularly if I wanted it to intervene meaningfully in our damaged friendship.

We begin our discussion with these preliminary questions, and Chloe focuses immediately on the significance of clarifying my purpose before we continue. This line of questioning represented a departure to some degree from where we typically began our discussions. Usually we would begin by discussing strengths and sharing our reactions to texts, often reacting as the intended audience for a group member's poem or narrative. In this discussion, Chloe foregrounds my purpose, not just in writing the letter, but in what I hope will come as a result of Angela reading it. She does not respond as my intended audience, but

rather calls me to explore the ways that my purposes and interests may not be aligned with Angela's. Chloe asks me, "What are you hoping happens at the end of her reading this letter?" Her question helps me to articulate that I hope this letter will lead to an in-person conversation.

"With that being said, if the *purpose* is to convince your *audience* to have a conversation and/or to apologize," Chloe replies, laughing as she takes on an almost pedagogical tone, emphasizing purpose and audience, "I think that sometimes there are a lot of things that you can put in writing but they don't always come out as clear in a situation." In this comment, Chloe is highlighting the difference between my letter and the later in-person interaction, implying that in writing we have a little more control on how things "come out." Chloe then adds, "I guess my opinion is maybe keep it semi-short where you apologize…and really ground it in the fact that you value the friendship, and you can get at all the reasons in the conversation." With this second comment, Chloe continues to separate my letter from the in-person interaction, both of which we are now in the process of explicitly inventing and coordinating. In this way, our talk about writing is looking both at the written text itself and at how that written text prepares to intervene in my overall relationship with Angela by framing a later in-person conversation.

It is during this conversation that Jenna joins the meeting, having been delayed by a staff meeting at her school. As we continue discussing my letter, Jenna and Chloe and Nell help me try to determine how much of the misunderstanding itself, of the original situation where I hurt Angela's feelings, I should put in my letter. This had been a central question I had brought to the group: to what extent should I "rehash" the circumstances of our misunderstanding in the letter, and to what extent should that happen (if at all) in our later conversation?

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"Whenever I have something like this," Nell begins, "particularly when it's

uncomfortable or when there is tension or I'm trying to choose my words carefully but I've also

been hurt so I also have a small agenda too... I don't want to suck it up." Here, by relating to

me as the writer, Nell begins to tease out my own conflicted feelings as I write this letter, torn

between apologizing and also feeling hurt that my friend had allowed what might have been a

simple misunderstanding to fester. Nell's comment also highlights some of the reasons I find

this overall rhetorical situation challenging. She continues, "I can't think very well on the spot,

especially if it's really tense and I'm trying to really choose my words carefully. It takes some

time for me to choose my words carefully, which is why, if you have the rehashing in the letter

would make sense, just cause you can choose how you phrase that, and the way you phrase it.

When she [Angela] reads it, it will prime her in a certain way, like, yeah, like a certain reaction.

So when you have your conversation [later], if you are able to have your conversation, then she

may be looking at it more like the way you – she may be coming from a place that is more

conducive to a conversation, whereas if you, like you said you don't want the conversation to

be about rehashing it."

Nell's feedback here does three things for me: she empathizes with me as the writer of

this text, supporting how I am feeling as I write this; she helps me think about what material I

should include in the letter, calling attention to the way writing allows me to choose my words

carefully; and she suggests ways what I put in the letter might "prime" Angela to understand

how I experienced our disagreement, laying the groundwork for a later conversation. When

Nell finishes talking, I clarify that she's suggesting I use the letter as a way to frame that future

conversation, so Angela will not be anticipating that I will want to rehash past issues in the conversation itself.

Then Jenna interjects, "For me, if I were to get a letter like this, it would be good to know where you are coming from." She adds, however, "Also at the same time, if I heard someone else's side of the story I would want to get the chance to say my side too. So, just as long as – I would think about that. Definitely say your side, because you both had good points about framing the conversation. But also leave it open for her [Angela] to feel like she can do the same. Because if it were me I would want the chance to say something."

Jenna thus complicates Nell's suggestion, as she empathizes not only with me (as Nell did) but with my friend, considering what she would like to know if she was receiving a letter like this. By observing that "if it were me I would want the chance to say something," Jenna is helping further develop what I should put in the letter and what should go in the conversation. Whereas Nell was helping me consider my purpose and attitude as an author, Jenna is also helping me consider Angela's possible purpose and attitude as a reader. This feedback highlights my/our invention of both the letter and of the future conversation, and the way that the content and purpose of the written letter have the potential to shape the content and direction of the later conversation.

Later, as we move towards closing this conversation, I summarize some of what has been said so far. Just as we are about to move to a new writer, Chloe interjects, "one last thing," laughing, "because of all the CDs [she has] listened to on relationships." Directing our attention to how I should start my letter, Chloe suggests "possibly foregrounding the importance of your friendship at the beginning and also closing with that." Once again, this

specific feedback on how to craft my written letter is directed at the underlying purpose of that letter, which is to help create the conditions for a constructive in-person conversation later.

While sharing this letter felt strange in a way to me, it was a piece of writing I did not know how to adequately approach alone. It was exactly the kind of writing problem I wanted our group to be able to support: a text with a specific audience and purpose that mattered in my life outside the group. Indeed, my focus was not so much on building my craft as a writer as it was on composing a letter that would help me navigate a particularly challenging in-person interaction. In that way, more so than with the poems I had written and shared in previous meetings, I had a sense of urgency about this letter, and I worried about how to phrase things not just to appeal to me but to do specific work when Angela read the letter. I needed an outside audience who I could trust to give me feedback. The discussion of my letter helped me do some of this important work, especially as group members helped me develop strategies to consider ways that my interests and attitude may differ from Angela's, as well as ways that I might strategically choose what to put in my letter in order to best frame our later conversation. In this way, we were collaboratively inventing ways of using writing to intervene in my damaged friendship with Angela.

Nell's Wedding Toast: Inventing Ways of Intervening in a Relationship with a Sister

"My sister's getting married in like two weeks," Nell begins, during our meeting in late April. "And I'm really nervous about… like I just don't know the right things to do. And it's my sister, so if anyone's going to do any things it's supposed to be me." Nell pauses briefly,

seeming to try to put words to what she is thinking. "But I don't know what to do, so I probably

have to do the toast since I'm the maid of honor or whatever."

"Yup," replies Chloe with a knowing laugh.

"And so," Nell continues, "I'm kind of nervous about it, because my sister and I have a

…charged relationship over the years, and um, so I tried to do some journaling." She laughs.

"And it turned into this like bitch-fest!" Nell laughs again, and I join in. "But I did it anyway

because that's what I had. But I've done more thinking since then and I…so I was just…I don't

know."

Nell's discomfort with her writing this week is immediately apparent as she begins

sharing with Chloe and me (Karen and Jenna are both absent from this meeting). Unlike other

writing she has shared this year, which has been poetry written primarily for Nell herself and

for our group to read, today Nell has brought a piece of writing that has a necessary outside

audience. Her sister is getting married, and as the maid of honor, she knows she will have to

deliver a toast at the wedding. While delivering a wedding toast can be a challenge under any

circumstances, as it combines not only composing a toast but also delivering it publicly in front

of an often large group of people, Nell's "charged relationship" with her sister makes this an

even greater challenge. As she says later, "I feel like every wedding I've been to, like, the

person's best friend is crying and talking about all their favorite moments with the person, and

I'm like, 'well, probably not going to be doing that.' So," she adds, sounding deflated and

quieter, "I don't know."

Nell seems to have certain expectations for the norms of this rhetorical situation, as she

describes what she has seen at other weddings (a best friend crying, the sharing of favorite

memories). Feeling unable to do that with her own toast, and sad and uncomfortable about that reality, Nell is struggling to invent this wedding toast. In the journaling she mentioned, which she has posted for Chloe and me to read, Nell provides some background on the tension she feels with her sister, ranging from ways they have been compared to each other to ways they each sometimes disapprove of each other. Nell sums up many of these details when she writes, "She really doesn't understand me at all." This lack of understanding, combined with a distinct feeling of being judged by her sister (and being aware that her sister thinks Nell has judged her as well), make it particularly hard for Nell to imagine how to deliver a conventional wedding toast. The rhetorical situation of the wedding toast seems to highlight the differences between Nell and her sister Eve, as well as the fact that Nell and Eve do not share the "best friend" relationship that Nell imagines is the norm for such a situation.

Nell could have approached this challenging rhetorical and personal situation as a personal writing problem, as a public speaking problem, or as a relationship problem. But instead, as with my letter to Angela, she approaches it as a collaborative writing problem and an opportunity where our invention strategies for writing can support her in composing and delivering this speech.

Nell brings her past writing experiences to this project, drawing on strategies and written texts she has composed in the past to help her imagine a written and performed text for this more challenging situation. After explaining that she began with journaling, Nell continues, "So then I thought, well, the only poems I ever write are these 'someone who' poems, which I just think are really, they're kind of fun, because I like to think about the people I like and describe them in a poem. So then I thought well maybe during her, during my toast I

could just like, you know deliver a short poem. I don't want it to get really long or anything, but just deliver a short poem that I wrote for her." Chloe and I quickly respond, "Oh, cool!" to this idea, and Nell continues, "Cause I wrote a poem like this for my great-aunt when she died? And my dad loved it. My dad and my sister both wanted copies of it, so I thought maybe they'd appreciate it even though there is like one genre of poetry I know how to do." She laughs, and Chloe and I join in her laughter.

"That's okay!" I reply, knowing full well Nell has written many other types of poems this year alone.

"So I thought I'd throw it out there," Nell finishes. "Um, I...I made a timeline, like I tried to reach for those ideas that we talked about at the beginning of the year. So I made kind of like a timeline of my relationship with my sister? And some good stuff came out of that, so I tried to fit it into this poem. And then when I went back and looked at the journaling...some of it was also in the poem anyway."

In this conversation, Nell deliberately uses strategies which she has shared with our group members across the past two years (even preceding the forming of this writing group). She references writing a timeline, a strategy we had each tried back in October (and which Jenna used to develop her text "The Dancing Game"), as well as journaling, which we have discussed throughout our existence as a group. She also references a poem she wrote for her great-aunt, a poem based on a model poem "Abuelito Who" by Sandra Cisneros. I had introduced that poem two years earlier during a poetry unit when I taught Nell, Jenna, and Karen in a university class, and then we each had written a poem based on the model. Nell jokingly says that these "someone who" poems are "the one genre of poetry I know how to

do," even though her poems "A Comfortable Hell" and "Older Single Women" do not fit in this category at all. Perhaps in part she self-assesses this way because she has shared that poem for her great-aunt with an audience beyond our group. She recalls how much her father and sister had liked the poem she wrote about her great-aunt, and how they both had requested copies of it. She describes the "someone who" poems as "fun, because I like to think about the people I like and describe them in a poem." It is from this recognition of and use of strategies, from journaling to creating a timeline to drafting a poem based on a familiar model, that Nell is ultimately able to invent a way into this project and begin drafting her toast. Through this draft poem Nell is beginning to invent a way of intervening in the challenging rhetorical situation of delivering a wedding toast for her sister, with whom she shares a sometimes uncomfortable relationship.

Nell has posted a draft of this poem for our group to read and discuss. She also seems to seek affirmation that reinventing a wedding toast as a fun poem will work and be appropriate for the occasion (not unlike the way I sought affirmation for writing a letter to Angela). Perhaps she also seeks affirmation that this poem will help intervene in the "charged relationship" with her sister in a way that will allow her to publicly deliver a meaningful toast. As she introduces her poem to us, she tells us "the poem is more what I'm going to go with," but then adds, "or I could just take some of the information from the poem and just put it into a…I don't know!" Chloe and I then read her poem.

> *Daron – you've decided to spend the rest of your life with Eve, but I thought it might be helpful for you to get a picture of her early life, from well before she ever heard of [your university] or the fact that one can get a track scholarship to attend it. To aid you in understanding Eve's past, I've written a poem about some of the highlights I remember.*

Eve, who imitated my every motion –
placed a small hand on her hip and tossed
her short, dark curls,
who woke up at 6am just to eat
breakfast with our dad,
their only conversation the crunching
of the Cocoa Puffs she ate with her
Minnie Mouse spoon,
who wore purple corduroy
pants to school (when she didn't
accidentally wear her pajamas),
who started wearing make up
and listening to booty music *way*
before I did,
who was fiercely defiant, yet
utterly fragile,
who started out adorably round-faced
and pudgy, like a semi-Asian Betty Boop
or Shirley Temple, but grew into a tall, beautiful,
snowboarding/golfing/hiking/weight-lifting/
sales engineering/Daron-loving extraordinaire.

All the best, blah blah, I love you, blah blah.

Drink champagne.

As Chloe and I start to respond to Nell's poem-toast, we begin by affirming her choice in

genre and approach. "You know what?" begins Chloe. "I mean, just um, I understand that

awkwardness. I feel like you've taken a really unique approach to it, and I think it's something

that, I don't know, if I were your sister I'd be like 'wow, she really thought about this.' Some of

the details you put in here, um which I'm guessing kind of came through when you did the

timeline, I don't know, it's really touching. I think I'd be touched if I were your sister."

"I think so too," I agree.

"And I think that's who this is for, ultimately," Chloe adds.

"Yeah," agrees Nell. "I wanted some things that are kind of…like you need something that's kind of like accessible I guess to the other guests." Her voice rises slightly at the end of this statement, almost as if she's asking if we agree.

"Mmm hmm," I say.

"But, it's mostly for her," says Nell. "But I don't want everybody to be bored out of their mind."

In this exchange, Chloe begins by affirming Nell's attitude about the toast itself, saying she understands how awkward it feels. She then affirms Nell's approach in writing this text, saying that, in spite of Nell's concerns and the background of her relationship with her sister, the poem is "really touching" and that she'd be touched if she were Nell's sister. In this way, Chloe is placing herself in the role of Nell's sister, saying how she would respond if someone wrote such a poem for her. Chloe helps clarify the overall rhetorical situation, by defining the audience as Nell's sister. In some ways, Chloe's comments here may be seen as helping Nell clarify her audience, and therefore her purpose in writing the toast, implying that it need not delve into the difficult territory of the sisters' overall relationship. Thus, Chloe also is hinting at the audience's purpose in a wedding toast, for the toast to be meaningful for the bride. Nell agrees, but expands the intended audience to include the other guests, saying she wants to make sure it is accessible to everyone listening. Still, Nell does agree that it is "mostly for" her sister.

As we read through the poem again, Nell asks us "do you think this is, well an appropriate thing to do for the, for the wedding? Do you think it will be accessible? Like is it interesting enough like for people who don't know her as well? And would it be, do you think

the length would be appropriate?" These questions reveal Nell's awareness of her dual

audience, and her interest in being appropriate not only for her sister, but for other guests as

well. She also is asking again about the genre and length of her toast, perhaps pushing beyond

what Chloe has said to ask if the genre works for this wider audience in addition to her sister.

One thing that continues to stand out across this conversation is the way Nell

(individually and with Chloe and me) is defining this challenging in-person performance as a

writing situation, mobilizing her strategies for invention in writing to help her navigate both her

relationship with her sister and the public performance of delivering a wedding toast. As she

writes her poem and brings it to us for feedback, she also is moving it from a challenging genre

(personal speech) and into a genre that she finds fun and accessible (poem). Nell primarily has

written poems this year in the writing group, so she is also drawing deliberately on her writing

strengths, reinventing this challenging rhetorical situation as a poetry writing task. As Chloe

and I begin to interact with Nell's oral comments about her text and with the written text itself,

our shared conversations help to affirm Nell's choice of genre and also further situate this *as*

writing, where Nell can draw deliberately on multiple strategies to help her invent a text that

will intervene in certain ways in her in-person wedding toast experience. Chloe and Nell define

the audience as Nell's sister and the other guests, which allows Nell's questions about

appropriateness, accessibility, and interest to be more specifically and easily answered as we

considered these specific listeners.[4]

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[4] At this point in the meeting, the audiorecorder stopped recording. For the rest of the
discussion of Nell's poem, I use fieldnotes without the support of an audiofile.

Nell's written text reveals how successful she has been blending the "someone who" poem model into the genre of a wedding toast. By addressing the toast to Daron, Eve's fiancé, Nell targeted a specific audience when she drafted her poem, inventing a reason for this poem to be all about Eve's childhood and growing up. Because Daron was not brought up throughout our discussion of audience, I wonder if Nell addressed the poem to Daron as a way of justifying her approach to this poem, which is about her sister's childhood, perhaps a way of legitimizing her content by targeting it to a specific member of the audience. Using Daron as an audience also allows Nell to keep the poem in the third person like her model poem ("Eve, who") rather than the second person ("Eve, you"). Indeed, by using this poetic form Nell has found a way to bring tender memories into her toast and to avoid those memories and themes that feel most emotionally charged.

As Chloe and I respond to Nell's poem, we comment about how personal the beginning of the poem is, packed with images and memories and observations. We notice that from there it jumps to the present, and we suggest that Nell could develop the middle transition section a bit more. This missing "middle part" likely aligns with the part of Nell and Eve's relationship that has become more challenging, but we say her emphasis on the early days allows her to get by with adding only a few more details, just to connect childhood to the present time period.

As we continue discussing Nell's poem, we also talk more about other expectations of a wedding toast, specifically expectations that have less to do with the genre of the toast and more to do with conventions of the rhetorical situation. We observe that wedding toasts are commonly funny and nice, with the intended purpose to make the person being toasted feel

happy at his/her wedding. This conversation seems to address Nell's concerns about whether her toast is appropriate. By moving away from the expected written genre of a toast-as-speech, to discuss the purpose of the toast (showing Nell how her purpose and her sister's purpose can both be aligned), our conversation emphasizes ways that Nell's text is achieving the shared goal of being funny and nice and is quite appropriate for the situation.

Throughout her writing and our conversation, Nell not only is using strategies to invent a way into a challenging piece of writing, but she also is inventing a way of intervening, through that written text, in a challenging in-person rhetorical situation. The conversations that emerged as we discussed the rhetorical situation of Nell's toast and her written text itself served to clarify the purposes (hers and her sister's) and audiences (her sister, other guests) of her toast and to determine ways to assess if it is effective (Is it funny? Is it nice?). These clarifications seem to help Nell work through the hesitation and discomfort that marked her introduction of this piece of writing, so that she can hear us say that we did find her text moving, personal, funny, and very thoughtful.

It is not until the following month that we are able to hear how the toast went. At that time, Nell brings her toast to our meeting, telling us "it turned out okay," and observing that she "would still like to print it out and give it to her [sister]" as a gift. She says she is considering ways that she might still improve her toast for that purpose. Unfortunately, that meeting is marked by significant technological difficulties, which ultimately result in our meeting ending early, so we do not have a chance to discuss Nell's poem-toast. Still, because she had posted it in preparation for our meeting, other group members are able to read it, providing a view into the revisions she made before orally presenting it at her sister's wedding:

My little sister, Eve,
who is the child in our family with
the Caucasian eyes and nose,
who used to imitate my every motion –
who would place a small
hand on her hip and toss
her short, dark curls,
who, as a child, woke up at 6am just to have
a silent breakfast with our dad,
their only conversation the crunching
of Cocoa Puffs as she ate with her
Minnie Mouse spoon, who wore
purple corduroy pants
to school when she didn't accidentally wear
her pajamas.

My little sister, Eve,
who pulled me aside before her 3rd grade Spring Concert
to ask for advice on how to clap "the cool way",
who would play games with me
when we should have been in bed,
who, when our mom checked on us,
could fake a deep sleep well enough
to win an Academy Award,
who, when she was scared
that the tiny frogs under her bed were trying
to bite her toes, used to ask
me to crawl into bed with her,
who loved Koosh Balls and Gak,
Ducktales and *Anne of Green Gables*,
who started wearing make-up and listening
to Will Smith and Lauren Hill
way before I did,
who, when I would go to her for help
with my hair before a date or dance,
would roll her eyes, hold up a lock of my hair,
and sigh, "That's because you need to
use *product*, Nell,"
who released her teenaged anger by
slamming
her bedroom door so often that
our parents removed her door completely,

whom I still call when I need serious advice.

My little sister, Eve,
who started out adorably
round-faced and pudgy,
like a semi-Asian
Shirley Temple,
but has grown into a tall,
beautiful, organized,
snowboarding/weightlifting/
volleyball-spiking/golfing/hiking/
sales-engineering/Daron-loving
extraordinaire.

This version that Nell delivered at her sister's wedding shows how well she made use of

our writing group conversation, as well as how she took advantage of her audiences'

expectations and purpose of the wedding toast. In this performed version, Nell has changed

from the third person "Eve, who" to the first person "My little sister, Eve," and she has dropped

the introduction addressing it to Daron. In this way, Nell has targeted her sister as her primary

audience, making the poem personal and about their shared relationship. Nell's performed

version of this poem is personal and funny, and it provides tender images of her sister and her

at different points in their childhood and young adult lives. There are moments when Nell does

compare her sister and herself, showing how different they are (her sister wearing makeup and

"product" in her hair, for example), but even these comparisons fit the expectations of friendly

humor, designed to make her sister and others laugh. When Nell ends the poem, she ends it

with a toast-worthy list of her sister's strengths and accomplishments and references her

sister's love for her new husband.   Nell has used these purposeful writing choices to craft a text

that intervenes in what, for her, felt like an especially challenging in-person rhetorical situation.

In many ways this text seems to enable Nell to not only deliver a toast she is comfortable with,

but also to *be* in that rhetorical situation in ways that feel comfortable to her. Even though she may not feel like she and her sister shares the close friendship that she may desire, or that delivering a toast may seem to imply, Nell has written a poem-toast that defines their relationship in ways that are tender and humorous, allowing her to be the toast-giving maid of honor in her sister's wedding.

Chloe's Title III Presentation: Inventing Ways of Intervening in a Professional Meeting

"It's not the most exciting read," Chloe begins, almost tentatively, as Nell and I wait to hear what she had posted on an afternoon in late May. "I have a meeting with, ah, the superintendent and some principals, to kind of update them on Title III regulations, and also to make some proposals for next year." As Chloe introduces her posted text to us, she observes, "I really needed to hammer, to get these thoughts down into some form that makes sense, and I'm probably going to have to change the form. Um, because I don't think they are going to want to read [all of this]."

In addition to being a first-year ESL teacher, Chloe is also the ESL coordinator for her district, and she is preparing to make a solo presentation to her superintendent and several other area administrators on changes in Title III legislation. She has posted a three-and-a-half page (single-spaced) draft of what she thinks she needs to present at the meeting, including, among other things, explanation of how Title III funds may be used, explanation of what the Lau v. Nichols (1974) U.S. Supreme Court ruling relating to English language learners requires of school districts, and suggested implications for her particular school district (including recommendations to supplant some secondary ELA courses with ESL courses, hire additional

staff, and establish an alternate graduation plan). In addition to informing the administration

about Title III changes and making recommendations for their school, Chloe tells us she has the

additional awkward responsibility of informing the administration that "basically what this says

is that they have to start paying me out of general funds, they can't pay me out of Title III." She

adds, "At the same time, they can't cut ESL support. They'd be in big trouble if they did that.

Um, so, this is all to kind of convince them that since they have to pay me out of, er, because it

has to come out of general funds, they might as well make it just ELA classes for the kids."

Chloe's introduction demonstrates just how complex and high-stakes this meeting is for

her and her program. To begin with, it is highly unusual for a first-year teacher to be meeting

alone with the superintendent and several building principals. Chloe's role at that meeting is

therefore complex, as her status as a first-year teacher places her "below" these administrators

both in terms of experience and decision-making power, yet she is present in the meeting to

inform or teach them about developments in Title III legislation and to make recommendations

for the ESL program in their district. That complexity alone would make this a highly

challenging rhetorical situation, in which Chloe would have to tread carefully as she navigated

these inter-personal and professional roles, but Chloe must also inform these administrators

from which funds they need to pay her salary.

As we begin discussing Chloe's writing and this situation, I draw attention to the

problematic nature of this situation. "This is an awkward position for you to have to be in," I

observe. "To kind of…to have to clarify…"

"I know!" Chloe interjects, laughing uncomfortably.

"Why is this coming to you?" I ask. "Why is not somebody else doing this?"

"Um, because…because I'm the coordinator, basically," she responds. "Um, technically Nancy Perkins, who is our director of…she was originally the Academic Services Director, I don't know what they changed her title to, um… Title III is kind of her baby. I mean all of the titles she has to deal with. Um, so originally she was going to the Title III meetings, but the last two she wasn't able to go to, so she was like 'well, you know, this actually pertains more to you than me, so how about you just go. And then you can update us and that sort of thing.'"

"Ugh," I reply.

"Unfortunately, it's not completely uncommon for the…I think if I was just a teacher in a school district and there was an ESL director other than me, then it would be the coordinator's position, but since I'm the coordinator, that's why it's on my lap." As Chloe clarifies that this task comes to her because she is the ESL coordinator, she also explains how Nancy Perkins, a district administrator, described this task to her as an "update" for the administration on what Chloe has learned at the Title III meetings. This explanation helps to narrow the scope and purpose of Chloe's presentation to the administration, and it clarifies what they, as her audience, might be expecting from her.

As I talk with Chloe about this situation and her writing, I comment immediately about Chloe's involvement in the meeting being "inappropriate" or "awkward." I observe that while it is not uncommon for teachers to have to advocate for their students, having to also inform her administrators from which funds to draw her paycheck feels like it is beyond what she should have to do. My comments create space for us to orally acknowledge the awkwardness of this meeting Chloe is preparing for, affirming some of her discomfort in navigating the challenging rhetorical situation. It is no wonder, in other writing group meetings, that Chloe has portrayed

her job as overwhelming and threatening to consume her. What is also evident, however, is how focused Chloe is on carrying out this task. As she says, "since I'm the coordinator" the task falls to her. Chloe is the one who steers our conversation away from the difficulty of the task as a whole to a discussion of the *writing* she has posted and how she should revise or reframe her *written text* in preparation for this meeting. In doing so, Chloe is in part reframing this challenging professional situation as a challenging *writing* situation, one to which she can bring different inventive strategies and resources she has as a writer. In this way, Chloe can be seen inventing a way of intervening in this complex rhetorical situation through her writing.

Chloe first asks Nell and me for help with the form her text should take. "Part of me would love for them to just read through some of it, because I put in some of the legislation, um, but I don't think that's going to happen," she acknowledges. "So I was debating doing a PowerPoint and taking the key points and putting it in that way." Here Chloe considers her audience's attention level for reading a dense text like the one she has posted for our group. Whereas up until this point our discussion of her audience has focused on who they are (upper level administrators) and how they are related to Chloe (as her supervisors), here Chloe is also thinking of them as readers and, in a way, as learners. This is a strategy she uses to connect to her strength as a teacher as she considers what form best communicates new material to an audience, and it seems appropriate and effective when we consider her clarified purpose in this meeting of "updating" the attendees on what she has learned from the Title III meetings she has attended. As Chloe continues to discuss the possibility of using a PowerPoint, she notes that it will be somewhat of a small meeting ("only about five or six of us") and she expresses concern that a PowerPoint would "seem kind of strange" with such a small group. In this way

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Chloe is further clarifying the relationship between her text, her audience, and the context of the meeting, considering whether a PowerPoint presentation may seem "strange" with such a small group. In this way, she also is wondering at her comfort and her audience's comfort with a PowerPoint presentation.

As Nell and I look at Chloe's text, Chloe asks us to focus on the clarity and persuasiveness of the text, asking, "Does the Title III part make sense? I think I'm maybe a little repetitive in there, but I was just really trying to hammer it home." She says when she had explained this to her supervisor in the past, her supervisor had suggested that they could "wiggle it around" and call Chloe a reading specialist, which Chloe is trying to show is not an option. So, in this document Chloe says she "was just really trying to make that clear-cut." She then asks if the recommendations she is making are convincing.[5] Here again, I see Chloe attending to the rhetorical situation into which her text will enter. In these comments, she is focusing on her purpose as the author, and wondering how her audience might make sense of her content and main points. She is aware that at least one member of her audience may be interpreting the Title III legislation differently than Chloe is, seeing "wiggle" room where Chloe does not. So Chloe is trying to write this text so that it might intervene in the rhetorical situation by reducing confusion and clearly communicating her priorities.

As I begin to respond to Chloe's questions, I pause to "take this in chunks," or to talk through what needs to be decided. I observe that Chloe has "a couple of different things that

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[5] Unfortunately, by this point in the meeting, technical difficulties have caused Nell to be dropped from our call. From this point on, only Chloe and I are still involved in the oral conversation about her text and meeting plans.

are at issue," such as, "how you are going to present this to the people" and "how much you

are going to present…and really the purpose of the presentation." Chloe agrees with this

assessment ("Right, exactly"), which helps us then separate out what we need to discuss. This

clarification also brings us to more familiar territory for writing group meetings as we begin to

discuss the purpose for her text, her intended effect on her audience, and how her choice of

genre and mode of presentation both will shape and reflect that purpose and effect. Chloe and

I then begin to orally compose the texts she will bring to her meeting, considering ways that

these texts will help position her and the other participants in the meeting.

At this point in our conversation, we are using a familiar strategy from our meetings,

where I essentially say back to Chloe what I am hearing her say about her purpose and desired

effect: "Again if this is a small meeting, and you're being asked to come to specifically talk

about the funding and the changes in this legislation, um, it sounds like your core purposes are

something along the lines of… to inform them of the changes, um, to inform them of or to

provide them information or clarification might be a better way, to clarify how the funds might

be used." Chloe agrees with me, and I continue, "And then to kind of clarify what that means in

terms of what will need to change…or to clarify like how that impacts everyone there. Right?"

Chloe agrees again, saying "Right. Yup, absolutely. Absolutely." In this exchange, my function

is essentially to summarize and restate what Chloe has already said about the rhetorical

situation and her planned intervention, both to make sure I understand and to help Chloe use

this summary to begin planning a future version of her text. In my summary, I draw attention

to Chloe's audience (a small meeting of administrators), their purpose or expectation for her

presentation (to inform them about funding and legislative changes), and her own goals for the

meeting.

Chloe tells me she will likely have an hour for her presentation, and she then uses my

summary to further clarify what she wants to accomplish at the meeting, elaborating beyond

what we had discussed so far:

> Well, the thing is that, well the purpose of our meeting, they know that certain changes have been made to Title III and they want to know what those are and what this is going to look like for us. And then *technically*, according to the ESL handbook, at the end of the school year our Title III advisory council, which we don't technically have yet, um is supposed to get together to determine what changes need to be made for the program for next year. So I'm *kind* of using this to achieve both purposes. So… this is going to be the first time I'm actually going to be able to sit down with all the administration and say, "Look, this is all of the stuff that I've done this year, this is what our program looks like, so these are my recommendations for next year, but I need your backup here."

Here again, Chloe is deliberately thinking about her audience, assessing what the

administrators know already (that changes have been made) and what they want to know

(what those changes are and what they will mean for them). In giving this new, extended

summary of her purpose, Chloe also adds a whole new layer to what she wants to accomplish

at this meeting. When she references the expectation that the district is "technically" supposed

to convene an advisory council annually to discuss program changes for the coming year, Chloe

begins to move from what her audience wants out of this meeting to what she wants out of it.

In this way, she is acting on her own agency, recognizing that she can use the meeting to meet

both the administrators' and her own purposes. In this way, she is taking advantage of an

opportunity to meet with administrators to share what she has done with the program that

year and to explain and seek support for her recommendations for the following year.

In these comments to me, Chloe not only seeks to compose the written text(s) she will bring to the meeting, but she also is purposefully inventing ways that her writing can intervene in the outcome of the meeting itself. In expanding the administrators' original goals for the meeting, she is revising the purpose for her presentation to include her own goals. As Chloe and I continue talking, we begin to compose what that meeting might look like, discussing the meeting room and available technology, as well as what texts Chloe might prepare. I propose that she creates a PowerPoint presentation and a handout, and I then begin orally composing possibilities for how Chloe might organize her presentation. Here I am drawing on another strategy we had used in previous writing group meetings, where the author of a text and other members of the group orally invent or try out possible language for future versions of a text. For example, I suggest Chloe might think of beginning her presentation by making her agenda points clear to her audience, and that she might possibly say to the administrators, "Here are the main things I want to discuss today…First of all, these changes…what that means for the district or for the school, and um then possibly additional limitations or additional parameters within which we have to operate." As I orally compose possibilities for this text, I essentially move between talking to Chloe as a writer and trying out possible language for her to include in her presentation. When I am orally rehearsing this language for her presentation, I assume Chloe's persona in that presentation, using first person to articulate something Chloe herself might say later. As I speak, Chloe interjects and overlaps with me frequently to agree to what I'm saying, which I interpret as validation to keep going. The following dialogue illustrates how this happens, with the parts where I am assuming Chloe's presentation persona in quotations to indicate that these might be said by Chloe.

Christine:	You know, moving them through, "Okay, here's the way things are right now. Currently." And I don't know if you want to go into that, but, "Currently this is where, you know, I'm paid, and this how these courses are set up, just in a nutshell."
Chloe:	Right.
Christine:	You know, and then moving from that into something where you'd say, "All right, with that in mind, here are the changes, um, and here is why the changes have an impact on us."
Chloe:	Right.
Christine:	"Because these changes are going to make it so that it is no longer *okay*, you know we would be in violation to continue some of these practices."
Chloe:	Right.
Christine:	Um, and so, and so now what you are doing, is you are kind of generating a problem that needs mutual solving. You know?
Chloe:	Right! Definitely.
Christine:	It's not like a problem that you've created, but it's basically like, "Here's how the way things are, here's some of this change." And just keep, I would keep it in real lay-person's terms for the PowerPoint.
Chloe:	Yeah.
Christine:	And you can provide the *law* in a handout if you want to. But probably still bullet form-
Chloe:	-Okay-
Christine:	-for the handout.

In my talk at this point in the meeting, in addition to trying out possible language for the presentation, I am attempting to orally invent an organizational structure for Chloe's presentation, seeking a way for Chloe to meet her purposes effectively through her role as a coordinator who is also a first-year teacher. By beginning with an observation of how things are, and then introducing the changes in the law, I am trying to imagine a way to introduce the problem as one that Chloe is joining the administrators to solve, rather than initiating. I am hoping these moves will help make her upcoming conversations feel more natural and more appropriate for a teacher in her position. I then suggest, "then, if you have any proposed solutions, then that's where you would go right into proposed solutions," in an effort to frame

Chloe's recommendations as informed solutions to the administration's problems. Chloe

responds that she definitely does have some solutions in mind.

As we continue our conversation, I return us to Chloe's second goal for her

presentation, to bring the administration up to speed on what is happening in her department

and to make additional recommendations for next year. I suggest that she might approach this

by telling the administrators that she has two things she will do in her discussion with them, to

talk about changes in Title III legislation and to bring the administration up to speed on the

progress and plans of her department. I then ask Chloe if she thinks this makes sense to

separate these elements in her talk. When she responds, Chloe begins orally rehearsing her

presentation language, using the same strategy I had used earlier as she moves between

speaking to me and assuming a persona of herself in the presentation: "Sort of like, 'this is

where we're at, these are the changes in the regulations, and their implications for us, and

these are the proposals for what this will look like, or what this could look like.'" Chloe's voice

rises at the end of her statement, lending a tentative tone to her rehearsal, but she has

articulated a clear organizational structure for her presentation. Then when I ask if she has

additional information to share about her program's progress and other recommendations,

Chloe takes on a more authoritative tone, saying, "I think I can probably weave the

three…because I'm only making three recommendations, and then they're pretty big

recommendations." She adds, "but I can tie them in too, because I talk about what the federal

government has mandated in terms of the kind of support we provide, and so um one of those

things is making sure that we are providing adequate and appropriate instruction and support.

So, I think I can tie them in there." Here Chloe has figured out a way to tie her own content and

purposes into the content the administrators are expecting, rather than separating it out into a separate section of her presentation. This again shows her attention to her audience and their purposes for this presentation, as well as her clear sense of purpose for what she wants to include. Additionally, Chloe is drawing support for her recommendations from the language of the legislation itself, again showing her ability to merge her own goals for this meeting into the administrators' reasons for calling the meeting. She essentially is drawing on the administrators' interest in the federal legislation changes to lend support for her recommendations for her department.

Up until this point, we primarily have been composing the presentation, focusing on the organization of the PowerPoint Chloe will write. When she makes this move to weave her recommendations into the meeting in this way, I suggest that these recommendations become the focus of the handout, with her providing a rationale for each recommendation. I then rehearse connecting the texts of the presentation and the handout:

> so that your presentation would kind of take them along, so that "here's the changes, we have some problem areas, um we have some additional information and expectations, some of which we're meeting, some of which we could do a better job meeting, um, and as a result of this there's three specific recommendations that I have. Um. And here they are, one two and three, and here is how this other information supports these three recommendations."

Chloe responds, "Yeah. Definitely. Definitely. I think that would be a good way to weave it together." By this time, we have talked through (and orally invented parts of) two texts Chloe will craft out of the material in the original text she posted. While we have talked extensively about the overall content and organization of those future texts, even going so far as to try out possible language for them, we have not stayed very close to the written text Chloe initially shared. Rather, our conversation served to orally rehearse how to shift the genre and the

mode of her written text, to split it from one dense handout into a PowerPoint that will guide her presentation and a handout with her recommendations and rationale. Our talk also has served to invent and imagine the oral part of Chloe's presentation, rehearsing ways that Chloe can use her PowerPoint and handout to help her manage the challenging in-person aspects of this meeting. As we reach this point in the meeting, I mention that as a result of this approach and use of texts "it feels more like an appropriate conversation for you to be having." Chloe laughs as she agrees, observing that this is "kind of an awkward place to be in," an awkwardness we joke about as we move to conclude our discussion.

I may seem to have a heavy hand in this collaborative composing work. In part I think this is a holdover from my previous relationship with Chloe as her university instructor, whereas in class we often had talked through challenging professional situations, and during which I had drawn on my prior experiences working with administrators and new teachers. I have a definite agenda in making this a safe and appropriate interaction for Chloe, especially since I am somewhat alarmed by the rhetorical situation she first describes. It is Chloe, however, who brings this to the group as a writing problem for our feedback. She does not introduce this situation during our reconnecting time, when we often share challenges that do not directly relate to our writing. Rather, she posts this extensive draft of her handout and notes for discussion as her *written text* that week. Additionally, she is the one who draws the conversation away from the awkwardness of the rhetorical situation to request specific feedback for inventing a text that will intervene and make her feel more comfortable and confident. It is Chloe who determines a way to fold her own goals and need of support from

these administrators into this meeting they have called, making this meeting fit her needs professionally.

As we talk about Chloe's writing, we also draw on strategies we have used in other writing group meetings. We orally summarize each other's comments, and we orally rehearse possible language for future versions of the text. We also discuss Chloe's audience, her relationship with that audience, her purposes, and the outcomes she seeks from her presentation. While we have used all of these strategies in other writing group meetings, in this conversation we call attention to ways that Chloe and her audience may have different interests and understandings going into the meeting, and we explore ways for Chloe to shift her audience from their interests and purposes to her own. While we are focused on the presentation as an in-person interaction, we also are collaboratively inventing two written texts (the PowerPoint and the handout) that will intervene in that in-person interaction and help Chloe meet her goals and better manage the potentially awkward in-person meeting with her administration.

Strategies for Inventing Ways of Intervening through Writing

This chapter looks across the invention of three very different texts: a letter to an estranged friend, a wedding toast, and a professional presentation. The authors invent each text with a specific audience (external to writing group members) and a specific rhetorical situation in mind. Across all three texts, writers and writing group members can be seen creating ways of intervening, through their writing, in these charged in-person rhetorical situations. The writers have used some of these inventive strategies in other contexts, as we

find ways into writing, as we reshape writing, and as we invent ways of being through writing. We also develop and use other strategies that are more specific to the task of intervening in rhetorical situations, such as considering in greater complexity the role of audience, purpose, and context as we craft our texts.

Mobilizing Familiar Strategies for Invention

Across the texts in this chapter, which we are inventing in order to intervene in specific rhetorical situations, we still draw on some familiar strategies that we have used in other writing. In some ways, our choices to invent texts to intervene in a disagreement with a friend, a wedding toast, and a professional presentation allow us to redefine these in-person interactions *as* writing problems, thereby allowing us to mobilize familiar inventive strategies. One such group of strategies deals with our invention of ways into these writing problems, such as those described in Chapter 3. For example, Nell and I each use low-stakes writing to enter our writing, as I write a quick brainstorming-type outline for my letter and as Nell writes a journal entry and a timeline to get ideas for her speech. Nell also uses another such strategy, writing from a model text (Sandra Cisneros' poem "Abuelito Who"), a model text that she has used successfully in her writing before and one that she enjoys. These strategies, which we have each used in writing other texts, help us find ways to begin the writing of my letter and Nell's toast.

We also mobilize familiar strategies for invention when we seek and make use of peer feedback during group meetings. For example, in the discussions of each of the texts in this chapter, group members can be seen affirming writers' choices. With my letter, group

members affirm my choice to write a letter as an intervening text, and with Nell's toast we affirm her use of genre. With Chloe, our affirmation is more related to the content of what she will present, as well as of the genres she envisions for her presentation. We also use questioning to help each other elaborate considerations of content, purpose, and audience. Finally, in the discussion of Chloe's texts, she and I use strategies of orally summarizing each other's comments as we build clarity about her text, and we orally invent language for future versions of her text. We have used each of these strategies with other types of writing across many writing group meetings. In a way, defining these challenging rhetorical situations as writing problems allows us to mobilize these familiar inventive strategies.

Finally, we also draw on familiar strategies related to invention of ways of being, such as those described in Chapter 4. Through purposefully crafting a text that will intervene in a challenging in-person rhetorical situation, we also are involved in inventing ways of being for each of us in those situations. For example, as I consider how to frame my letter and what content to include, I also can be seen inventing a way of being a friend, even in the midst of a long-standing misunderstanding. As we discuss Nell's wedding toast, and as she considers how to frame her poem and what to include, she also can be seen inventing a way of being a sister. Finally, as we orally invent Chloe's PowerPoint and handout, and as she considers what content to include and how to connect her goals with her administrators, she can be seen inventing a way of being a professional and an ESL coordinator.

Altering Strategies for Invention in Order to Intervene

Just as we are able to mobilize many familiar strategies, we also develop some strategies that seem specific to these particular writing situations, especially as we attend in new ways to issues of audience, purpose, and context for our texts and the rhetorical situations in which they are to intervene. To begin with, we foreground context in our discussions of these texts. Nell's toast, my letter, and Chloe's presentation all require a fair amount of explanation prior to sharing them, just to allow other group members to understand the context of the overall rhetorical situation. Writing each of our texts requires an understanding of my disagreement with Angela, Nell's charged relationship with her sister, and Chloe's professional role in her district.

Additionally, while we have consistently discussed our purposes as authors, we foreground the author's attitude and purpose in different ways in these conversations. This is in part because we each want our texts to intervene in certain ways in specific rhetorical situations. For instance, Nell and I are each having difficulty with our writing in part because of our attitudes toward our audiences. Unpacking these feelings plays an important part in figuring out our purposes for writing our texts. So, with my letter to Angela, Chloe helps me articulate that one of my purposes is to set the stage for a later conversation. Similarly, unpacking our purposes as authors helps differentiate our purposes from our audience's purpose. With Chloe's presentation, although her administrators wanted an update on Title III changes, Chloe recognizes that she has purposes in addition to those of her audience.

Indeed, identifying a specific audience is an important strategy in and of itself. For both Chloe and me, our audiences are immediately apparent. But for Nell, clarifying her audience is

an important step in her writing process. When she first drafts her poem-toast, she is considering a broader primary audience, to include everyone at the wedding. Indeed she first addresses her toast to the groom. When she then identifies her sister as her primary audience, it helps Nell clarify her writing situation, especially as it clarifies her sister's expectations for a toast. When we agree that the purpose of the wedding toast is to be funny and nice, something to make the bride feel good, it seems to help Nell decide on her content for that text. Similarly, when Chloe identifies her administrators' purpose for attending her presentation, she is able to then invent a way to fold in her own purposes as responses to her administrators' needs. Thus, while we have attended to context, purpose, and audience in our past conversations about writing, we do so in different ways as we discuss these texts. In this way, we are creating strategies that are in some ways specific to our invention of ways of intervening.

As group members invent ways of intervening, through writing, in challenging in-person rhetorical situations, we can be seen inventing writing amidst significant constraints. Whereas in other chapters the constraints we experienced were largely due to our limited time and busy schedules, which tended to limit our time for writing, in this chapter we face constraints associated with the writing tasks themselves. Here our audience's attitude and purposes, as well as the context of the rhetorical situation itself, limit our choices as writers. Yet, the writing and conversations in this chapter reveal teacher-writers inventing not only within those constraints, but actually inventing ways to alter the constraints.

This chapter also provides a different way of thinking about teachers' writing. Whereas much of the literature on teachers-as-writers emphasizes the written texts as products that may be transportable across context, moving from a teacher writing group to a classroom lesson, this chapter looks at teacher writing that is highly contextualized. Indeed, the highly specific ways that we talked about audience, purpose, and context in the discussion of these texts demonstrate this fact. Additionally, whereas some of the literature on teachers-as-writers advocates for teachers to write in order to participate in discussions in the field, ideally having a voice in shaping conversations about education (Check "Reflection and Reform"; McEntee; Whitney et al.), that literature is not as specific in how teachers may use writing to intervene in complex and specific rhetorical situations. For example, the literature on teachers-as-writers does not overtly explore how teachers first may seek to understand a rhetorical situation and then purposefully invent writing to intervene in specific ways in that situation. Overall, this chapter extends the literature on teachers-as-writers by focusing on ways that teachers are intervening in rhetorical situations outside their classroom, and even outside their normal work as teachers.

CHAPTER 6: INVENTING WAYS OF FINDING WRITING

So I'll tell you a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.
. . . .

Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

Naomi Shihab Nye, excerpts from "A Valentine for Ernest Mann"
(Red Suitcase 70)

When we gathered for our first writing group meeting, back at the end of October 2008,

we started by discussing what each of us wanted to get out of the group. I had originally

pitched the idea of the writing group as a way of supporting each other to write pieces that

personally mattered to us, and where we could continue to grow our relationships with each

other. In that first meeting, we also discussed wanting to get back into writing for fun, to enjoy

writing again, to write for ourselves, and to make writing a part of our lifestyles. We added

other goals for ourselves, mentioning things like "accountability" and "incentive to write" and a

desire to "make progress." We were a group of teacher-writers, well aware of how easy it is for

personal writing projects to get snowed under when the demands of teaching mount. It

seemed that we wanted to enjoy writing, we wanted to initiate our own writing projects

(instead of only writing in response to school assignments or teaching responsibilities), and we

thought that being in a writing group might give us each the extra push we needed to actually write.

Over the coming months, as we meet and share our writing, we invent many ways to enter writing, even amidst the constraints of our teaching and personal lives. Chapter 3 explores the strategies we develop for finding ways into writing. As we write, we also invent more than just texts. We invent ways of being teachers and women and writers and writing group members, as Chapter 4 explores. We also begin to explore other uses of our writing, beginning to invent ways of intervening through writing in challenging in-person rhetorical situations, as Chapter 5 discusses. Across all of these shared conversations and texts, across all of these meetings, we are inventing ways of finding writing and writing opportunities throughout our lives, from a wedding toast to a poem about teaching to a letter to a friend. We are inventing ways of being in the world, in which we recognize the writing we do across contexts and purposes. This current chapter focuses on this final type of invention, as I explore strategies we use to find writing in our lives and then pursue that writing individually and in collaboration with our group members.

Whereas other literature on teachers-as-writers has explored teacher writing in specific contexts, such as in a National Writing Project Summer Institute (Blau; Whitney "Teacher Transformation"; Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person"), or in pursuit of specific goals, such as seeking publication in a teaching journal (Check "Reflection and Reform"; Fecho; McEntee; Whitney et al.), this study has the benefit of exploring teachers' writing across an entire year, and across many different writing projects and contexts. This chapter seeks to look across that year as a whole, to consider how group members come to re-invent ways of being writers, as

we develop strategies for finding writing in our everyday lives, for paying attention to ideas that percolate in us over time, and for creatively engaging in writing even when other people initiate it. In exploring these strategies, this chapter considers group members' invention of ways of finding writing, as we create connectivity between our different ways of being writers.   In the words of Naomi Shihab Nye, "poems hide… What we have to do is live in a way that lets us find them" (Red Suitcase 70). This chapter looks at how we invent ways of living so that we can find the writing, in whatever the form, which is "hiding" in our lives.

Looking across a Year of Shared Writing

Before diving into this chapter, I want to pause briefly to consider all the writing we shared in our first year as a writing group, for various purposes and audiences (not the least of which were us as writers and fellow writing group members). In Table 2, I note all the texts and genres that were shared in the focal year of this study, and I observe which were initiated by the writer and which were initiated by someone else.

Table 2. Self-Initiated and Externally-Initiated Texts Shared in Writing Group Meetings
[Note: Texts that the writer initiated are noted in *italics,* and texts that were initiated by someone else are <u>underlined</u>.]

Date	Me	Chloe	Nell	Jenna	Karen
12/4/08	*Poem on fantasy books*	*Mother timeline*		*Pregnancy timeline*	
12/11/08	*Poem on fantasy books*	*School poem*			
12/27/08	*Christmas reflections poem*			*"Dancing Game" narrative*	*Rant poem*
1/15/09		*"Foreign" (school poem)*	*"Comfortable Hell" poem*	*"Dancing Game"*	

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Date	Me	Chloe	Nell	Jenna	Karen
1/29/09	*Poem on fantasy books*			*"Dancing Game"*	
2/12/09	*Letter to Angela*	*"Identity Crisis" poem/narrative*	*"Older Single Women" poem*	*"Dancing Game"*	*Teaching journals*
2/26/09	<u>Teaching award essay</u>	*"Identity crisis" poem/narrative*	*"Older Single Women"*		*Multigenre on teaching*
3/26/09				*Writing from student note*	*Multigenre on teaching*
4/30/09	*Journal ideas for writing about moving*	*"The Battle" (formerly "Identity Crisis")*	<u>Wedding toast for sister (poem)</u>		
5/28/09	<u>Home information sheet</u>	<u>Presentation notes for Title III meeting</u>	<u>Wedding toast poem [didn't get to share it]</u>	<u>Girls on the Run article</u>	
6/25/09	*Journal writing about home/moving*		<u>Research assignment for grad class</u>		*"The Luckiest" poem*
8/6/09	*List of found language from aunt's emails*	*"Barriers" vignettes*	*Found poem on lost text messages*		
8/27/09	*Gardening and doctoral program essay*		*Life lessons essay*	*Jo's rant – character sketch*	
9/10/09	*Ideas for writing about place (oral)*			*Brainstorming for fiction (oral)*	
9/24/09		<u>School newsletter</u>			
10/22/09	*Found poem for Aunt Judy*	<u>Introduction for grandmother's cookbook</u>	<u>Student recommendation letter</u>		

As this table shows, the majority of the texts we shared were ones we initiated. We wrote about interests (my poem about fantasy books), family relationships (my Christmas reflections poem, Jenna's pregnancy timeline and "Dancing Game" narrative, Chloe's timeline about her mother, and Karen's rant poem), dating and relationships (Nell's "Comfortable Hell"

and "Older Single Women" poems) and about experiences with teaching (Karen's journals about school and Chloe's poem "Foreign" and mixed genre "Identity Crisis"). We wrote to make sense of experiences and relationships, and, as noted in earlier chapters, these texts did important work for us. These texts also indicate that our participation in the group did help us initiate writing for ourselves, based on our own interests or desires. No one assigned us to write a poem or a narrative, and no one required everyone to share a text at any meeting. We were beginning to initiate our own writing projects, finding writing projects in our own lives.

Yet there were also many times that we shared texts initiated by someone else during group meetings. Two such texts are discussed in Chapter 5 (Nell's wedding toast and Chloe's Title III presentation). These texts, too, played an important role in our writing group meetings, as they often had audiences beyond our writing group members. Writing these externally-initiated texts sometimes stretched our comfort level with genre and content as we responded to the expectations of those outside audiences.

In the sections that follow, I look more closely at how we invent writing as a way of being, across contexts. I begin by exploring strategies we use to find writing in our everyday lives, sometimes in the smallest or most unusual places. These are stories of writing group members re-inventing everyday things into writing, and then sharing that writing in a group meeting. I then turn to a different sort of finding writing, where group members pay attention to ideas that take root slowly over time, using discussions in writing group meetings to nurture and grow those ideas.   Finally, I turn to writing that we share but do not initiate ourselves. While this may seem to be a strange way to end this chapter, I look at these as examples of us exerting our creativity as writers even with externally-initiated texts, thereby asserting

ourselves as writers who can invent even amidst constraints of assignments or other

limitations.

Inventing Ways to Find Writing That Hides in Everyday Places

Most of us began by sharing poetry and personal narrative in group meetings, with our

ideas for writing often coming from our own life experiences. As I discuss in Chapter 3, this

writing from strong experiences or emotions is a useful strategy for finding our way to writing.

We are experts, after all, on our own life experiences, so generating content is not a problem.

Over the coming months, however, group members begin sharing writing that reflects

additional strategies for invention, as they find inspiration for writing amidst some of the

smallest moments in everyday life.   Some of these later pieces are playful, where a writer has

an idea for writing and tries it out quickly, perhaps in preparation for a writing group meeting.

Other times the writer makes note of the idea in the moment, and then returns to it later when

she has time to write.

Inventing from a Student's Note: Jenna "Finding" Writing in Her Classroom

At a meeting at the end of March, Jenna is the only one who brings writing to share.

She tells us the story of one of her students giving her a letter earlier that week, which she had

placed in her pocket and forgotten about. It was not until the girl asked her if she had read the

letter that Jenna went back to find it. Jenna tells us she had a wide range of responses to the

note, but that ultimately it marked a change in the way she looked at her teaching and her

students. She says reading the letter made her think more about the "hidden lives" of her students, a lesson she had internalized during her teacher preparation work but that had gotten "overshadowed" in the rush of grading, lesson planning, and classroom management.

The piece Jenna had posted was her student's letter, retyped by Jenna and interspersed with Jenna's italicized inner thoughts after each paragraph. It begins with her student complaining about a friend lying to her, to which Jenna shows herself internally responding, *"Oh, for the love of Pete. I'm so tired of this girl crap. There's always some sort of drama that is going on, and everything takes on importance of gigantic proportions, and I don't understand why I'm chosen to sort everything out. I don't have time for this."* Then in the next paragraph, when her student confesses she does not want to come to school anymore because other students are calling her names, Jenna sympathetically writes, *"Poor baby girl. I remember what that was like. Feeling like you just don't fit in, and looking at these snobby girls with perfect lives and knowing you could never measure up. Don't let them get to you, girl! You're too smart for that!"* When her student then reveals that she and her sister were adopted, Jenna writes, *"This is news."* Finally, when the student writes that Jenna is the only teacher she will tell this, because Jenna makes her feel good, Jenna writes, *"Wow. How did I do that?"*

When I ask Jenna what made her think about this for a piece of writing, she tells us she started reading the letter when she was exhausted, but that her reaction to the letter changed as she read it. She read the letter in many different ways, as exhausted, as sympathetic, and even as mentally correcting the grammar.   Through the written note, Jenna had a more private glimpse of her student's life than before, and Jenna says the letter made her have more patience with her students.

This was a different type of writing for Jenna, who had previously worked exclusively on her narrative "The Dancing Game," which she shared over four meetings and which originated with a timeline exercise we had done together as a group. In this new piece, Jenna has re-invented a student's note, interweaving her own writing with her student's words to recreate her shifting mental reaction and capture her realization about her student's inner life. Here Jenna can be seen writing out of present experience, and she shares getting an idea for this text at a specific moment, when she had read and internally responded to this student's letter. Jenna's written responses to the note reveal the strong emotional reaction Jenna had when reading, climaxing in her "Wow" at the end, which also may have been part of what drew her to this writing. At our meeting, Jenna explores ideas of turning this into a short story or a poem. While she does not share this letter again at a group meeting, it still demonstrates a strategy Jenna used to invent writing from her everyday life, to observe and act on an idea in the moment.

Inventing a Poem from a List: Nell's Found Poem from Lost Text Messages

Several months later, at the end of August, Nell brings a poem based on "lost" text messages from her cell phone. She had realized that some of the text messages she sent from her phone were not being received, and her wireless carrier had suggested that she keep a log of which texts did not transmit. As she kept that list, Nell got the idea to arrange those text messages into a poem, to essentially "find" a poem among them. This strategy of writing a found poem, which had come up in other group meetings (and which we first shared in our poetry unit during the university class), involves taking words and phrases from one text (or

even group of texts) and arranging them to create a desired effect in a poem. Nell had posted a beginning draft of her found poem, which she describes as basically a grouping of several text messages that she knows did not go through. She tells us, "Mostly I wanted some direction on how, where I could take this."

Like Jenna writing from her student's note, this was a different sort of writing for Nell. Up until this point in our meetings, Nell had shared a number of poems in which she explored her reactions to experiences and relationships. She also had shared her drafting for her sister's wedding toast and for a graduate school assignment. In this poem, however, Nell is sharing a poem that she invented using a different strategy, as she got an idea while compiling a list for the phone company. She tells us she was struck by how each failed text message represented a communication breakdown, an idea that seems particularly interesting to Nell.

As we talk about Nell's poem, we discuss ideas for making it clearer that these were "lost" text messages, to emphasize the breakdown in communication that seemed to capture Nell's attention. This conversation leads to many possible directions for Nell to take her poem, from other styles of poetry to writing about communication breakdowns. We also discuss Nell's writing strategy itself, writing from text messages, and what this may suggest about writing opportunities in general. "Interesting!" Nell proclaims when we finished this conversation. "You guys can take any small idea I have and blow it into something worth trying." I laugh in response and Nell joins in. "Very nice!" she adds, enthusiastically.

"I love the fact that you're looking at text messages," says Chloe. "Like, when you sit back and think about how much you're writing every day, with emails and texts and everything, there's so much material."

"Yeah!" Nell agrees. "It seems like it should be there ripe for the taking."

"Right," Chloe laughs, and then adds, "This would be a fun lesson, too, to have your kids pull out their cell phones and find a text and like, manipulate it."

"It would be kind of fun," Nell agrees.

"It would be," I chime in. "And it would kind of emphasize all the writing that they *do* do." Nell and Chloe agree.

Nell's immediate reaction, that we can take "any small idea" and "blow it into something worth trying" highlights the way our talk in writing group meetings can contribute to the invention of a text, where our discussion about Nell's re-inventing text messages as poetry generated multiple possibilities for future writing. Chloe also highlights Nell's use of text messages, observing how much we write every day, from texts to emails, and how much "material" this generates for us as writers. She then connects this back to the classroom, observing how they could teach their students to "manipulate" their own text messages into something new, to use this idea to teach their students invention strategies as well. Chloe's mental leap from Nell's writing to their teaching is exactly what advocates for teachers-as-writers hope will happen when teachers write, whereby they get ideas while writing that they can bring back to the classroom. Thus, while this is certainly not the focus of our discussion, Chloe's observation shows how connected our writing and our teaching can be.

Inventing Narratives from a Tweet: Chloe's Writing on the Theme of Cultural Barriers

At the same meeting in which Nell shares her lost texts poem, Chloe brings a group of three narratives she wrote. These are stories of three immigrants Chloe knows and the

communication barriers she observed them facing in the United States. Chloe tells us how her narratives originated with a conversation with one of these individuals, a colleague at work, which led to Chloe Tweeting her thoughts: "Thinking about language barriers: Not the kind that prevent people from communicating but other obstacles faced by immigrants because they aren't fluent in the language or culture of power." When she got home later, Chloe used this Tweet to begin writing these stories, which she titled "Barriers."

Unlike Nell and Jenna, Chloe's idea for writing did not begin with a written text, but rather with a conversation. That conversation, she tells us, "led up to this Tweet" that she used to open her writing, "and then it started making me think about other scenarios." In this example, Chloe used Tweeting as a strategy to capture an idea in the moment she has it, and then later to use that Tweet as a seed idea for writing. As with Nell and Jenna, Chloe is trying a new way to generate writing, letting her experiences inspire her to write a small text in a Tweet, and then later to develop this into several full narratives.

The above examples, writing from a student's letter or a list of lost texts or a Tweet, all represent group members' creating strategies for "finding" writing ideas in their everyday lives. Each woman describes a moment where she got an idea for writing and pursued it within a relatively short period of time, later bringing it to the group to develop and discuss.   In sharing these texts with other group members, they also shared their strategies for inventing those texts.

Inventing Ways to Find Writing That "Percolates" in Our Heads over Time

Unlike the previous examples, where the writer had an idea and fairly quickly developed it into a draft to share, the next two examples explore times when members nurtured an idea in their heads for a while before writing. When the writer eventually did begin writing about the idea, it was often just a beginning, which was then developed more fully through conversations in group meetings. These examples show different strategies for invention, whereby the writer has a recurring idea over time, and then develops that idea more fully through talk with writing group members. These examples suggest that the writing group conversations support the development of the text even after a significant time lapse occurs between drafts. Thus, this section explores group members' strategies for responding to ideas that "percolate" in their heads over time, which include attending to the ways ideas develop before writing and discussing these ideas (and related texts) in group meetings. These group discussions seem to help sustain the idea over time and support the later revision of those texts.

"Finding" a Poem among Emails: My Poem for My Aunt

It is August, and the warm summer days that stretch until almost ten at night can make time feel like it lays itself out in front of us lazily, no rush. And yet, my thoughts that month are with my aunt, living on the opposite coast, in Washington State. She is my godmother, a woman I dearly love and admire, and in August she is dying of cancer. So the long summer days feel like an illusion, and time feels shorter than it should.

For the past several months, my aunt had sent regular emails to her friends and family, updating us on how she was feeling, on what she was doing, and on how her treatment

progressed. "I remain focused on living and loving each day," she wrote, describing her

"incredible circle of family, friends and neighbors." Her voice came through as surely in her

emails as it did over the phone to me. I had the idea of writing a found poem from her emails,

the same type of poem Nell used with her lost text messages, where I would lift words and

phrases from emails and arrange them into a poem. This was an idea I kept coming back to as I

read my aunt's messages, as I thought about how such an arrangement of her language would

celebrate her voice and highlight the poetry I felt was hiding among her letters. In preparation

for our writing group meeting that day in August, I only had the time to go through a few weeks

of my aunt's emails, gathering phrases and chunks of paragraphs that stood out to me,

assembling a collection of passages in which to look for a poem. I ask Nell and Chloe at that

meeting if "maybe we could just talk about if there's any pieces that really stand out to you, or,

and what kind of form you can see me maybe playing with this with?"

As Chloe and Nell read the two-page collection of sentences and paragraphs I had

collected, I begin to reread it myself, bolding bits and pieces that particularly jump out at me.

Earlier that same meeting we had discussed Nell's found poem from lost texts (a pure

coincidence), so we had already been thinking about found language that day. Our first

comments are ones of admiration for my aunt, as Chloe and Nell observe her vibrancy, her

positive perspective, and the way she seemed "really at peace with her life." When I ask what

they think about my idea of writing a found poem, both Chloe and Nell are enthusiastic in their

support. Chloe observes places in my aunt's language where, "as she's talking about day-to-day

things you really get a feel for what her priorities are, what she values. And why other people

value her." Nell agrees, adding, "some of the parts I felt the strongest were… like she expresses

this…almost reverence for everyday things. Like the farmer's market and the sunshine and taking a walk… these little details that she decides to include are really telling and I think that they're really rich." As Nell continues, she suggests that I might begin by "trying to find the theme I want to use," and she even suggests that I might consider writing several different found poems from the gathered language.

What Chloe and Nell provide here is primarily the affirmation that yes, there is a poem, or even poems, hiding in my aunt's words, that my idea is a good one, and that I should pursue it. This validation is important to me, as it allows me to hear their perspective on my idea and begin to see possibilities for my poem. They also are able to share with me some of what they read and observed in the pieces of language I had assembled, giving rise to a conversation in which we discuss how I might organize a found poem drawing from months of emails. Chloe then asks me what made my aunt so significant for me, which leads to me sharing stories about experiences we had shared together. After listening to me respond, Chloe comments, "I think that a lot of the things that you were saying about what you admire about her and just really appreciate about her are things that you are really able to convey through her language." This statement again affirms my idea for using my aunt's language, in the form of a found poem, to celebrate her. Chloe then suggests that this might be a way for me to think about a theme that I might use to tie the poem together.

We end that conversation in August with me feeling affirmed that my idea for writing a found poem was promising, and with ideas on how to pick language I wanted to include. The conversation also helped me articulate why I wanted to write the poem in the first place, which I ultimately explain as a way of honoring my aunt and showing some of what I had learned from

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her. As a writer, I leave that meeting with a clearer sense of how I might organize the poem, how I might choose what to include, and how I might focus the poem on what I love and respect from my aunt's words and life.

It is another two months before I actually write the poem, however. August had raced by as my family prepared to move out-of-state, and September brought the complexities of putting down roots in a new home. During those months, as I continued sharing emails and phone calls with my aunt and my family, I also found it difficult to think about pursuing this poem any further. It made me sad to work on it, and so I did not return to it at that point. I was not ready to write it. Then in early October my father called to tell me my aunt had passed away, and as I packed my bag to fly out for her memorial, I went back to my office for the writing I had done for that August meeting. Waiting out a three-hour delay at the airport, I began composing the poem by hand, arranging my aunt's language to see if I could find a poem within it. I worked for several hours, writing and revising by hand, not sure if I would even share it with anyone else besides my writing group. Yet at that moment, sitting in the airport, I felt a sense of urgency to write the poem, in an effort to somehow do something to celebrate my aunt, and as a way of working through my grief. Perhaps the urgency I experienced was my desire to also remember my aunt, through writing this poem. As I wrote, I thought a great deal about my writing group, knowing even as I struggled to get the poem's language to do what I had in my mind that I could bring it to the group later and receive the extra support I needed. That helped me worry less about getting it "right," and allowed me to dig in and try different things. I finally settle on a completed draft of my poem:

I am OK,
staying open
to the beauty around me.

It is so very nice
to smell spring and
see the flowers.
Sunny weekends
with soft air,
bright sun on the deck.
Time for me to read and write.
Nice chunks of time with my family
good walking, time to talk
sharing stories, memories and feelings.
Unexpected blessings.

I am focused on savoring these days
    strolling Vandusen gardens in Vancouver,
    the Farmers Market in Bellingham.
Delighting in my children and grandchildren
    a hilarious game of Apples to Apples,
    a chance to play in the water at Lake Sammamish.
Remarkable hours of family time.
An incredible circle
Of family, friends, and neighbors.

I am grateful for
the encouragement, prayers,
positive thoughts and creative expressions
of your caring.
The richness and love you have all brought
and continue to bring
has made me feel fortunate indeed.

I feel blessed for the time I have had
to adjust to this eventuality.
It's hard to know
what the future will bring.
Having hope is vital
for any kind of healing to take place.

I am OK,
staying open
to the beauty around me.

A week later, I share this experience with my writing group, describing the way our conversations had supported me writing this poem and ultimately being able to share it with my family at my aunt's memorial. "I'm going to keep working on it a little bit," I tell them. "But it was kind of cool, though, because honestly, had I not been working with you guys, you know, I was telling somebody recently, I never would have put this together. You know what I mean?"

"Oh, well, I'm glad you did!" Chloe responds.

"Yeah! I am too," I agree. "I think that it was like sitting down with you guys and saying, I remember that one day [back in August] and thinking, 'yeah this is something I'd like to do,' and pulling some of the language. And so I already had it partway done, and then I was able to bring it to the airport, and working on it there and knowing I'd be able to come back and talk to you guys, it was, you know it was kind of…you know it kind of created this space for me to write this…So it was nice."

"I'm glad!" replied Nell.

This conversation reveals some of the strategies I used in inventing the found poem, as well as ways my participation in the group supported those invention moves. The idea for this poem had come to me on several occasions over time, as I read my aunt's emails and thought about commemorating her. Yet it was not until that first meeting in August that I began to translate the developing ideas in my head into actual writing, when I gathered some language together to discuss in group. This represented a strategy I tried, as I got the idea and gathered language and brought it to a meeting. Through the conversation in that meeting, I began to envision what I might do with the poem, as group members and I collaboratively invented

possibilities for my poem. Then when I did sit down in the airport and draft the poem two months later, without a computer or the comfort of my own home, I drew on the energy from that first conversation, as well as the knowledge that I could share my draft the following week at our meeting. In my mind, the only audience I committed to sharing my poem with as I wrote it was my writing group, even though I knew I might one day want to share the poem with my father and my cousins. In this way, supported by my initial gathering of language and our talk during that August meeting, as well as the knowledge that I would bring this new draft to our next meeting, I drafted my poem and was ultimately able to share it with my family as well.

Listening to Characters "In My Head": Jenna's Fiction Writing

As when I began thinking about writing a found poem for my aunt, an idea that kept coming back to me as I read her notes, Jenna describes an idea for a fictitious character that she had been thinking about for some time before bringing it to the group. "I've been wanting to write from this person's perspective that I met," Jenna says, introducing us to the character sketch she had posted one day in late August. "And so this character that I sort of like based on her, um, like I tried to write the way she would talk…It's just like a character rant and I didn't know if it would be the start of something. There are a few other characters that I was, that have been in my head."

What Jenna had posted that week was a character sketch of sorts, a "rant" by a character she modeled on a woman she used to know. As Jenna continues to describe this fictional character sketch that day, as well as future character sketches she envisions, she repeatedly refers to having "characters in my head." She explains, "I was just thinking about

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writing a few little stories about their [these characters'] perspectives and kind of like tying

them all together or something." Her writing that day was a first step of putting this first

character, Jo, onto the page, writing from the character's perspective in an effort to begin to

transition from having Jo in her head to on the page. As we read Jenna's draft, she asks us for

feedback on how we imagine the character and on whether the writing is interesting and clear

to us as readers. Here is an excerpt from the final portion of Jenna's character sketch, which

she calls "Jo's rant":

> But anyway, I'm sittin' in the front room, eatin' Ensure crap-in-a-can, and lookin' through the winda' to the sidewalk, to see if I can catch a glimpse of my neighbor walkin' his dog to the walk in front of my house so he can leave a big pile in my yard—have people these days heard of a little goddamn courtesy?—when I notice this green Honda creepin' up the street in the direction of my house. It stops one house down, real slow and silent, and the two shadows in the front seats lean into each other and stay there for a long time. Huh. Like anyone would want to see them makin' out or whatever else they're doing that a self-respectin' person wouldn't be caught doin' at this hour. The light from the streetlamp is makin' it hard to see through the windshield too good. Oh well. A minute goes by and then the passenger door opens. I lean forward, and squint these tired eyes of mine to see who it is.
>
> Out comes a ratty sneaker, then another one sets on the ground. Above these sneakers are socks much too bright to be flashin' around any time of day, and tucked into those are the tightest pair of jeans I think I've ever seen. What are parents thinking lettin' their kids dress like that? Above the door pops a head with hair dyed the color of my butterscotch pudding, with three inches of dark roots at the top of her head. She looks like a skunk in reverse. I feel my mouth smush into a grimace and my eyebrows push down my forehead in disapproval. It's the neighbor girl, lives with Dog Crap Man over there, and his little shadow of a wife. She walks across the grass of *my* front yard and makes to go to her back door. I don't know how she could tell I was there, but she stops walking, turns her head, and looks straight at me, pushing her eyebrows down her forehead and smushing her mouth so she's wearing the look that I have on my face. I jerk my head back in surprise, and almost drop my pudding. Her face relaxes into that snotty little smirk that teenagers carry around these days, like they're better than we are and they know something about life that nobody else is good enough to figure out, especially old ladies like myself.

I stare at her as she strolls on back to her house like she hasn't a care in the world. That girl is trouble. I can feel it in my old, achy bones. I'd better keep an eye on that one.

After we finish reading, Jenna's first questions to us concern our gut reaction to the character: "What are you getting from her?" Can you "even get interested in her?" and "Can you like her?" Just as I did with my poem for my aunt, Jenna seems to be asking for a first level of feedback as to whether this writing project has potential, and whether we see promise in it. Our discussion is lively as Chloe, Nell and I heartily agree that not only do we like the character sketch, but we find this nosy, cranky old woman oddly interesting and sympathetic. Our conversations at this stage are not overly focused on revising the actual text. Rather, we respond to Jenna's direct questions ("Did the dialect get irritating?" "Does she say 'damn' too much?"), affirming that we like the dialect, that the way the character speaks seems consistent and to fit her. Our only suggestions are small edits, like how to punctuate one section to avoid confusion. We compliment Jenna on how she developed "Jo" through her actions and interior monologue, prompting Jenna to tell us more about the real person on whom Jo is based. Again, as in our first discussion of my found poem, our initial conversation prompts storytelling, allowing us as a group to discuss additional details that may fit into later drafts.

We primarily discuss Jenna's vision for how she will continue developing this character and others, prompting Jenna to begin sharing and orally inventing next steps.   "This is like, I don't know, probably thinking a little big," Jenna laughs. "But I have these characters in my head and this is one of them. And another one is like this housewife that's like more timid and when she's by herself and no one's watching her she's kind of quirky and fun and you know has

all these qualities but there's something, I don't know, she's insecure about herself. So she doesn't let other people see it."

"Mmm hmm," I respond.

"And then there's her daughter," Jenna goes on, "who I think is the character that's this girl that's sneaking around [in Jo's rant]." We respond enthusiastically and Jenna continues. "And she's all attitude and she's like embarrassed of her mom, so. It might be a little clichéd but I was just thinking about writing a few little stories about their perspective and kind of like tying them all together or something."

"Yeah!" Chloe encourages, and I add, "I think that's neat."

"That's fun," Nell agrees. "It sounds like a neat idea if you've got these characters in mind already."

In this conversation, therefore, Jenna is both talking about her posted text as well as her ideas for how to extend it and begin to develop additional characters. Drawing on a strategy for invention many of us had used before, Jenna describes some of her other ideas, essentially orally composing in preparation for when she does sit down to write.

Two weeks later, in our meeting in early September, Jenna returns with more ideas for this developing story. At that meeting Jenna does not bring in an actual written text. In fact, it being the first week of school, none of us have written texts to share. But when I ask Jenna if she has ideas she wants to talk about, she replies, "Yeah, ideas percolating in my head." She references Jo's rant again and begins to share more of her ideas for a developing story. "I had the, you know, character sketch from that old lady, and the ideas about I want to do another one of the girl that makes a face at her. And I've just been thinking about her [the girl]." As

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Jenna continues to tell us her idea for developing this girl's character into a sketch of her own, she tells us that some of her ideas "just popped into my head," and she takes this as "a sign that she's an actual good character, cause she's kind of leading me."

As Jenna continues to explain her notion of a "good character," she references something she had heard about Cornelia Funke (author of the young adult *Inkspell* series), who apparently said she had one character she had planned to kill off in the first book but who just wouldn't die. "And so listening to her talk about that I'm like, I wish I could be that cool, that you know I'd get these characters and then they'd live their own stories. I mean that's just crazy."

"Yeah," agrees Nell.

"So this is the first time that I've even had an inkling of that," Jenna continues, "because it's like I haven't tried to write these characters down, they've just kind of, well the first one I already knew, but this girl like I wasn't feeling a lot of connection to her at all." Jenna pauses here, and then she continues. "I was just thinking 'oh, I'll probably throw her in there.' And then I just kept, like thoughts just kept popping up in my head, and now I've got a character I think is workable and it's kind of like she…you know I don't want to sound all weird or whatever, but you know she just stuck in my head, and she was just kind of coming to life. And it wasn't because of me almost…"

In this exchange, Jenna again mentions having a character in her head, a character who seems to be taking on a life of her own. Jenna describes this as a new experience for her as a writer, where she was not actively trying to invent a character, but where ideas just seemed to come to her. Jenna then continues to develop these ideas orally, as she describes them to us.

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In our conversation she also develops this new strategy for invention, this attending to ideas that "percolate" in her head. In discussing that experience with us, she also shares this strategy with us.

As we continue talking, we explore the way our discussion may help Jenna hold onto and develop her ideas, especially at a time when she has not written much of this down. Nell observes that it seems like Jenna had "thought about it [the story idea] a lot, like it's fleshed out in a way." Jenna agrees, describing it as "weird," and observing that "a lot of times I'll have ideas and I won't write them down cause I think … I'll never forget them, and then I forget them." She laughs at this and Nell joins in, and then she continues. "And this has been…like I haven't written it down. I haven't made a point to sit down and write about it, but for some reason it's still stuck in my head." Jenna says she thinks "maybe that's a good thing, that they're still stuck in my head, because that means there's something there, for me anyway."

I agree with this observation, adding, "I think you're on something there, like when it really sticks, when it really sticks with you that that feels really significant. Kind of like a story trying to get out, you know?" Jenna agrees, and I continue, "I also think that there may be something significant just about, you know even about what we're doing right now, just talking through stories, because it kind of, I wonder if it almost feels a little bit like a way of writing. Because when you say it, like first it's in your head, and then when you put it on paper or when you say it out loud, there's sort of a sharing and…I don't know a…um, you know kind of a, it kind of like airs the character, it brings them to life a little bit." Jenna agrees.

Here, as Jenna continues to explore why these characters and this story are still with her, even though she had written only a small part of them down, she suggests that that might

mean that there's "something there." Again, she can be seen practicing this new strategy of attending to what is present in her thoughts, using her observations to suggest her next writing moves. I also suggest another strategy that might be at work, when I wonder if our conversation may be a part of the ongoing invention of these characters as well. My suggestion links our talk and Jenna's writing, as I suggest that Jenna is actually engaged in something related to writing, as she moves her invention of these characters from "in her head" to "in the air" in our conversation. Jenna seems to agree with this description.

As our conversation continues, Jenna and Nell further explore the difference between talking about new ideas and writing about them. Jenna observes that she feels "self-conscious" talking about ideas before she writes them, because "telling people about it is kind of hard! It's harder to talk about it than it is to just say 'here's what I've got.' And to show you."

When I wonder why this is, Nell says she thinks "both are hard," but observes, "when you talk, it's so...fleeting? You know like you just have to come up with like the words. And so when I have ideas in my head and I'm not sure how to express them...you know like, when I'm writing something I can agonize about how I want to describe something. And if I'm talking I just kind of like slap a word to it and throw it out and see what you guys think." She laughs at this description, and Jenna agrees with her. Then Nell continues, "And like your reaction like either validates it or, you know, makes me wonder if the word I slapped on it is not good."

Again Jenna agrees, describing herself as "way better at communicating through writing than I am verbally, just for that reason. Because I feel more comfortable, because I can revise...you know, make sure that this sounds the way I want it to sound. Whereas when I talk it just comes out and like 'wait, does that make sense?'"

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In this exchange, Jenna and Nell talk about how it feels to essentially invent while talking with us, compared to how it feels when they invent in writing and then share that text with the group. Jenna seems to find it harder to invent orally, since she cannot revise her language before we receive it. Nell also comments on how "fleeting" talk can be and how difficult it can be to try to find words in the midst of a discussion. Nell highlights the way our reaction to her talk either validates her, making her feel like the words she chose work, or makes her question these words. I agree, adding that sometimes I even find myself doing "revisionary work out loud," where I might say, "oh, that's not really quite it; it's more like this." This conversation functions to highlight the way we can use oral discussion before writing to help us invent a text, and it also shows how challenging that strategy can be sometimes. This is interesting, because one might think that orally telling a story is easier than writing it down. Nell and Jenna's comments show how the "fleeting" nature of oral language may make this more difficult for some writers, as they seek to make themselves clear without the benefit of revision.

I then add one final layer to our discussion of talk as a strategy for invention, as I suggest that orally discussing a story or writing idea may actually help us remember details later, for when we have time to write. I explain that sharing my ideas for future writing feels like it will help me "when I do sit down to write about it," allowing me to "return , not just to my notes, but also just to the memory of the conversation." In this comment, I extend our oral discussion strategy beyond a strategy for *invention* to also consider it a strategy for *memory*, another of the five rhetorical canons. As Hawhee does in her discussion of invention-in-the-middle (18), I am exploring ways that the canons are not mobilized sequentially, but have a recursive relationship, in this case with a memory of invention leading to future invention. I also am

suggesting a relationship of audience and even context in that initial inventive moment, which can be conjured up to aid in the remembering of it.

In fact it is another four months before Jenna shares more writing about these characters or this story idea, when she shares a character sketch of the girl she began orally inventing during this meeting. It is then another two months before Jenna brings another character sketch to the group, this time of the girl's mother. As with my poem for my aunt, there is a significant gap between "drafts" or pieces of writing, yet when I eventually do bring my poem to the group and when Jenna eventually does bring additional character sketches, the group members present have memories of our previous discussion of these texts and ideas. As we introduce later versions of our texts, we orally connect the new version with a previous version shared during another meeting, thereby recalling the memory of those earlier discussions.

In both the case of my found poem and Jenna's character sketches, we developed our less formed ideas through talk in the group meetings, sometimes prior to writing, helping us take ideas that had been in our heads over time and finally bring them to the page. We also brought initial pieces of writing to the group to further anchor these discussions. For example, having already gathered some of the excerpts from my aunt's emails seemed to allow me to feel already inside the project, not beginning with the blank page. For both Jenna and me, talking through ideas before they were written seemed to allow us to begin writing after already orally inventing a layer of our texts. These examples reveal our expanding inventive strategies as writers, first as Jenna and I were attending to ideas that grew slowly in our heads over time, and then as we brought the fairly unformed ideas to the group to orally invent future

directions for our writing. These group discussions also seemed to support re-entering our texts later, even after a gap of several months, allowing us to enter works-in-progress rather than beginning from scratch.

Indeed, there is a gap of time between drafts on a number of other occasions in our group as well. For example, Chloe set aside her "Identity Crisis" piece (discussed here in Chapters 3 and 4) for over a year, finally returning to it in October 2010. At that point, as with Jenna's and my work, other group members still had strong memories of her text and our previous discussions, allowing us eagerly to anticipate later versions of the text. Similarly, Karen wrote a poem about her relationship with several relatives, first sharing it in December 2008, and then returning to it again in June 2009. I wrote a piece in which I likened learning to garden to learning to research, drafting it in August 2009 and returning to it in January 2011. In each of these cases, having shared an early version of a piece, even in raw form, seemed to enable us to return later to these drafts and revise. We spoke of having a piece "in my head" or "on my mind." This goes beyond merely having an audience and incentive to write, as we had hoped when we first started the writing group. Rather, group members have become both collaborators in inventing our writing as well as supporters in remembering those texts, even across many months, helping us re-enter a piece of writing after extended time had passed.

The examples shared thus far in this chapter reveal group members developing new strategies for invention, both finding new ideas for writing and drawing on group discussions to develop ideas and revise writing. These examples reveal group members inventing texts from our everyday lives, from student notes and text messages, from emails and Tweets, and from

observations of people we know. In some cases, these ideas are quickly translated into writing,

partly in preparation for group meetings, and members discuss what we like in the writing and

possibilities for future writing. In other cases, ideas for writing percolate for weeks or months

in the writer's head, before she eventually brings even a small bit to the group to begin growing

it into a more developed text. In those cases, those initial moves of translating an idea into

writing and then bringing it to a group meeting seem to support the later development of the

text, even when months pass in between drafts. Part of this progression seems due to the

social aspects of our invention in group meetings, where ideas and texts are re-imagined and

extended orally, in conversation with the author. Part of this also seems to relate to ways

group members function both as audience and participants in a memory, which seems to allow

writers to return to a piece after time and feel confident that the rest of her audience will not

only remember the text, but will be ready to pick up again with that previous conversation.

This chapter so far has focused exclusively on the writing that group members initiate.

Yet beginning in late February, group members also began sharing writing that we did not

initiate, writing that we were doing in response to an external invitation, assignment, or writing

task. Even though the writers did not initiate these next texts, we still can be seen drawing on

familiar inventive strategies and, indeed, finding ways to make these texts our own.

Inventing Ways to Find Writing within an Externally-Initiated Writing Task

Throughout our group meetings, we had numerous conversations about the many kinds

of writing we do in our lives, beyond those texts we shared in meetings. I often initiated these

conversations when a group member came to a meeting and apologized for not writing, or said

she did "no writing" that week. In those moments especially, I wanted to call attention to the fact that she likely had done quite a bit of writing, but it was writing she chose not to share in our meeting for any number of reasons. More often than not, the bulk of that "other" writing was associated with teaching, such as the lists many group members reported making as they prepared their classrooms and materials at the beginning of a school year, or the lesson materials we each wrote as we taught our various courses. Indeed, the literature on teachers-as-writers observes this very problem, noting that these types of writing are often ignored when teachers are encouraged to "write."

In late February, I was the first group member to bring a text that I wrote in response to an external "assignment" or writing task to a group meeting. In the months that followed, many other group members shared additional texts that they did not initiate but that they wanted feedback on or support in writing. Nell's wedding toast for her sister and Chloe's Title III presentation for her administration (from Chapter 5) fall into this category of writing tasks that were initiated by other people or groups. Table 2 at the beginning of this chapter shows all such externally-initiated tasks underlined, to show when these were shared and by whom. Some of these texts, such as my teaching award essay, Chloe's Title III presentation and school newsletter, Jenna's article for her school newsletter, and Nell's student recommendation letter were also professional writing tasks, directly related to the work the writers did as teachers and professionals. Other pieces, such as Nell's wedding toast for her sister, Chloe's introduction for her grandmother's cookbook, and my home information sheet (a handout for people potentially interested in purchasing our home) were more personal, but still initiated by others (Nell's sister, Chloe's grandmother, and my realtor, respectively). Finally, Nell also brought an

assignment for a graduate summer class she was taking. The reasons for bringing these texts

ranged from seeking to discuss a challenging writing situation or a new genre to seeking to

polish a text before making it more public. Table 3 below displays the externally-initiated texts

we discussed in group meetings, showing who initiated each text. Table 3 also sorts these texts

into categories representing why the author brought the text to the meeting: texts where the

writing task or genre presents a particular challenge, and texts the author wants to polish

before making public.

Table 3. Primary Reasons Group Members Shared Externally-Initiated Texts

Challenging writing task/unfamiliar genre	Polishing a text before making it public
Christine's teaching award essay (initiated by Department of Teacher Education)	Chloe's school newsletter (initiated by school)
Chloe's Title III presentation (initiated by district-level administrator)	Chloe's introduction to grandmother's cookbook (initiated by grandmother)
Nell's wedding toast (initiated by sister)	Jenna's article for school newsletter (initiated by principal)
Nell's research proposal (initiated by university professor)	
Nell's student recommendation letter (initiated by Nell's student)	

Making Sense of Challenging Writing Tasks and Unfamiliar Genres

As discussed in Chapter 5, one reason members brought externally-initiated texts to the

group was to seek help making sense of or writing in response to a challenging writing task.

Chapter 5 looks in greater detail at two such examples, when Chloe brought her Title III

presentation materials and when Nell brought her draft for her sister's wedding toast, both of

which also represented challenging in-person interactions the authors had to navigate through

their writing. Along similar lines, in February I brought an essay about my teaching, a text I had been having considerable difficulty writing and needed help discussing.

In each of these three examples, while we do talk about the texts Chloe, Nell, and I posted, group members primarily use these posted texts as content and starting points for discussions, in which we talk more deeply about the rhetorical situation of the text and what we find most difficult about it. In introducing my teaching essay, I tell group members I had been nominated for a teaching award, and the awards committee had invited me to submit an essay about my teaching practices, which they would use as part of the selection process. I explain that my task was to "nominate certain practices from my teaching and then figure out ways of representing certain practices to a committee who are not English educators, but who are teacher educators…so they can get inside my practice." Although I posted my entire draft essay, I ask group members to read "just the first couple, the first two or three paragraphs…because that's the hardest for me right now." I explain how the writing task had been "consuming me," and, while it may not be "as fun to talk about" it had been causing me a great deal of difficulty. In this way, I describe this as a challenging writing task that was initiated by someone else, and I begin to articulate where I needed help.

As we discuss my essay, however, we hardly focus on what I had written. Rather, Nell and Karen and I spend the bulk of our time discussing their recollections from being students in my classes, and what teaching practices they think were most significant. Karen mentions that "teachers are more likely to incorporate things that they've actually done into their own classrooms." Nell agrees, adding, "even as I try to think about what to do in [my] class, like the things that always pop into my mind first are the things that you had us do." She then gives

several examples of lessons in which I modeled teaching strategies, adding, "so that element of your teaching really still resonates with me, I mean almost daily."   As the conversation continues, Nell and Karen continue to develop a focus on modeling, again telling stories to illustrate additional ways that modeling was significant to them as learners. I also ask them about a few other elements of my teaching. Across most of this conversation, we do not focus on my posted text at all, but rather on the writing task itself and what content I should emphasize. As we continue talking, I suggest that maybe what all these stories are suggesting is that I could focus my essay in a different way, and it is only at this point that we return to what I had written to plan possible revisions.

This example is similar to those reported in Chapter 5, where Nell was writing her sister's wedding toast and Chloe was writing materials for her Title III presentation. In both of those examples, as with my teaching essay, Nell and Chloe brought a text to the meeting but the bulk of the conversation focused on the writing task, the rhetorical situation, and the core content and effect that the writer wanted to develop. Across all three of these examples, we are bringing an externally-initiated text to the group, and we are seeking support in organizing our thinking, in determining our purpose, and in figuring out how best to tackle the "assignment." Our discussions focus on asking and answering questions and telling stories related to our topic to help orally invent ways of entering the writing task and ways of creating a piece of writing that seems to fit our own purposes and interests in addition to those of our audience (who initiated the writing task in the first place). Much of the feedback therefore extends beyond the draft text, as we collaboratively seek to re-envision it or make it a less challenging writing situation.

We also draw on invention strategies related to genre across these conversations, especially as we discuss ways to organize and enter a writing task. In the case of Nell's wedding toast, group members affirmed Nell's idea of writing a poem in place of a more common wedding speech, and in the case of Chloe's Title III presentation I suggested changing her rather dense handout into a PowerPoint and handout combination. In other cases, such as in my teaching award essay, the genre is fairly set so the discussion focuses more on content and purpose.

In some other cases, however, the genre itself contributes to the difficulties an author experiences in writing a text. For example, Nell brings a student recommendation letter and a research proposal to the group, each of which represents an unfamiliar genre to her. In these cases, neither the content or rhetorical situation of the text causes the primary challenge; rather, Nell seeks help and models for working with an unfamiliar genre, to make sure her writing conforms to those genre expectations.

When Nell shares her research proposal, for example, an assignment for a graduate class in educational research, she posts both her proposal and her professor's assignment, telling us, "I don't really know what he's looking for." She asks us if we are able to "get an idea of what I'm going to try to do, like what the actual study will entail" when we read her draft. She describes herself as most concerned about justifying her choices, which seems to be one of the professor's expectations. As Nell talks us through each of the four sections of her research proposal, she is focused on the expectations reflected in her professor's assignment, and whether or not she has met them. She explains, "I've never really written a proposal. And for me, like the study design and data sources and procedure, like design and procedure, seem

really, like intertwined for me. So I have a hard time separating these four things." She adds that she is afraid she is both repeating some things and not covering others. As we respond to Nell, both Karen and I give the feedback she requests about clarity, organization, and repetition. Then, as the group member more familiar with this particular genre, I am able to discuss with her some of the genre conventions for a research proposal, as well as procedural comments for how to design a research study.

Similarly, in October Nell brings a draft of a student recommendation letter she had been asked to write. As with her research proposal, Nell primarily is seeking feedback on how to write this new genre, one that she considers particularly high stakes for her student. She wonders what type of content to include, how to structure the letter, and what conventions might be expected for language and phrasing (e.g., how to begin and end the letter, how to discuss her knowledge of the student). Again, as the writing group member with the most experience writing this genre, I am the primary respondent to these genre questions, sharing possible phrasing for different sections of the letter and ultimately providing some model letters to help Nell envision the genre. As with the research proposal, the focus of our conversation is on what Nell needs, a better understanding of how to carry out a writing task in an unfamiliar genre.

Across these examples, while the writers do not initiate the writing situations, we are inventing strategies for entering these challenging writing tasks, especially as we choose to bring our writing to group meetings. One such strategy is articulating what help we need in order to move forward. In some of these situations the writer relies on the social interaction of the group to make sense of the writing task, to brainstorm and develop content, and to plan

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out organization and ways of writing the text. In other cases, such as Nell's research proposal and student recommendation letter, the conversation focuses more on making sense of the conventions of an unfamiliar genre. Across these examples, however, group members can be seen adapting strategies we use for our personal writing in order to help us with other, externally-initiated writing tasks.

Polishing an Externally-Initiated Piece of Writing before Making It Public

On a number of other occasions, group members also bring externally-initiated pieces of writing that are farther along, primarily seeking more text-specific revision and editing work. In these cases, unlike those described above, group conversations stick more closely to the text, with the understanding that the writer is sharing a fairly polished version and that it will be going to an external audience shortly. For example, my realtor suggested that I write up an information sheet about our home, which would be included in a packet of material that potential buyers would take while touring our house. When I bring this text to a meeting, I have a fairly advanced draft, and I am primarily trying to make sure my writing makes sense and is effective.

Jenna and Chloe each bring pieces that are slightly more substantial than my home information sheet, but for similar reasons of polishing their writing before making it public. For example, Jenna was asked by her principal to write an article for her district newsletter on her coaching involvement in Girls on the Run, an after-school running and character education program for girls. The text that she writes will be printed in the district newsletter, which goes home to all parents. Jenna is under pressure to write something that represents her, her

school, and her district well. The text she shares with us is fairly developed, and it shows

Jenna's ability to invent an effective and creative text even in the midst of the constraints and

pressure that she experiences as a writer. The article draft she shares with us begins this way:

> There we were, forming a huddle before the Midtown 5k race on May 21.
> Coaches were giving their final, and most important, pep talk to a circle of girls
> with excitement lighting up their eyes and nervous energy causing their feet to
> hop up and down. One coach prompted, "And remember, the most important
> thing is that you do…" "YOUR BEST!" The girls interrupted her with their high-
> pitched cheers. Despite icy winds and pouring rain that Friday night, spirits were
> high for these Girls on the Run runners. They were ready to race.
> For the third successful year, Midtown School District has sponsored Girls on the
> Run, a program that trains our 4th through 6th grade girls to run a 5K (3.1 mile)
> race. Through team-building activities, discussion of important topics, and good
> old-fashioned running, volunteer coaches work with participants to help them
> reach their goal. Not only does this program encourage physical health by
> promoting exercise and nutrition, it "nurtures the development in girls in [other]
> areas of their lives: relational, emotional, intellectual and spiritual."

In this text, Jenna effectively captures moments from the experience of coaching Girls

on the Run to show readers what it is all about. In writing an article for a newsletter, Jenna

could easily have written a very different type of text. Yet the text she does craft takes

advantage of the flexibility of the newsletter expectations and makes good use of Jenna's skill

with writing narrative, which she honed in her piece "The Dancing Game."

In Chloe's case, her grandmother was writing a cookbook and had asked Chloe to write

the introduction for it. The task was a little more challenging, however, because Chloe was

writing *her grandmother's* introduction to the text, having been asked to write this text in her

grandmother's voice, anticipating that it would have her grandmother's name signed at the

bottom of it. As with Jenna's article, the text Chloe shares with us is fairly polished, and it

shows Chloe as a confident and creative writer, even as she approaches this task that has more

constraints than much of her self-initiated writing. This is the beginning of the text she shares

with us:

> Food. It's more than nourishment. It's a source of comfort and warmth. It's a symbol of our homes and families. It's for celebration and recognition. Food is for remembering.
> Over the past 80 years, food has been the tie that has connected me with places and people throughout the different chapters of my life. Wanting to remember the faces and meals throughout these years, I was inspired to write this book, in hopes of recording the many recipes from these chapters—rather than letting them fade away. In the same way, this act of remembering also represents my own history.

In this text, Chloe uses the first person narrative in a powerful way, consistent with the

way she wrote her narrative portions of "Identity Crisis." Indeed, she draws on a number of

effective and creative strategies, from the parallel structure in her first paragraph (which she

breaks in the first and last sentences), to the personal connection she forges in the second

paragraph. It is a thoughtful and personal text, one that Chloe has invented even though she

did not initiate it.

In both cases, the texts that Jenna and Chloe bring to the group are fairly developed

drafts with all the primary content in them. Jenna and Chloe are looking for feedback about

whether their writing makes sense, is an appropriate length, and is effective to us as audience

members. In a way they seek something of a trial run before sharing their writing with a wider

audience. Consequently, our discussions stick pretty close to the text itself. In each case we

spend a good deal of time on the texts, highlighting parts that we like, pointing out areas that

cause confusion, exploring specific ideas for revision, and even trying out new language orally in

places. This excerpt from our discussion of Jenna's article gives a representative example of

these conversations:

Christine:	I would actually, in the beginning paragraph, make it a little clearer who you are. How many coaches are there?
Jenna:	There are seven.
Nell:	Oh, yeah.
Christine:	Okay. And how many girls are there?
Jenna:	Thirty-three.
Christine:	Awesome!
Nell:	I think you should mention that.
Christine:	Yeah.
Nell:	In the first, like even in that first line. I think that would help us, that would be a good…reference, too.
Jenna:	So what if I said, "There we were, thirty-three Girls on the Run participants and their seven coaches?" Or something?
Christine:	Yeah, or just "seven coaches."

This conversation shows that while we are not collaboratively inventing the content or form of the text, we may be inventing actual language for revision. Additionally, in bringing a text like this to a group meeting, a member is also extending her audience for that text and using the group discussion to help her text come as close as possible to the audience reaction she seeks before she makes it public.

Across these examples of externally-initiated texts that we share in writing group meetings, while writing group members do not invent the writing situation, we are still actively involved in inventing our ways into those writing tasks. We draw on strategies we have used in other contexts to make sense of the features of the rhetorical situation surrounding the text, especially as it relates to the expectations of whoever is initiating the piece of writing. Even within the constraints of a set writing assignment or task, group members still can be seen inventing content and approaches to writing those texts.

Strategies for Inventing Ways of Finding Writing

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, whereas other literature on teachers-as-writers may focus on their work in specific contexts or for particular purposes, this study has the benefit of being able to consider teachers' ways of writing across one calendar year, and across many varied writing situations. During our first year as a writing group, group members share many texts that we initiate ourselves. Indeed, these self-initiated texts are consistent with the reasons we discussed for wanting to do a writing group in the first place: to help us pursue our own writing projects and to give us the push we felt we needed to overcome constraints (most especially our limited time) and actually write. Yet this chapter shows how far beyond our goals our strategies for inventing have gone, as we not only have initiated multiple personal texts, but we also have invented ways of entering and developing texts that we did not initiate ourselves. We have "found" poems that hid in our lives, attended to the development of our personal writing projects over time, and discovered ways of writing in response to even the most limiting of assignments and externally-initiated tasks. As in other chapters, we have used many strategies for invention along the way.

Strategies for Inventing Ways to Find Writing That Hides in Everyday Places

One of the strategies that writing group members use to find writing opportunities in our everyday lives is to pay attention to triggering ideas or moments. Unlike some of the strategies for inventing ways into writing (as discussed in Chapter 3), the strategies in this section focus more on attending to an idea that the writer almost stumbles across in her daily life. For example, Jenna has a "Wow" reaction as she reads her student's letter, which seems to

prompt her to write a responding text. Nell makes an observation about failed communication

as she compiles a list of lost text messages, prompting her to think about writing a found poem.

Similarly, Chloe has a thought about communication barriers when talking to a coworker,

prompting her to Tweet about her observation. In each of these cases, the writer not only

describes a triggering moment, but she also translates that into writing fairly quickly thereafter.

For Nell and Jenna, the writing they share is a quick first pass at turning their ideas into text.

For Chloe, her Tweet can be seen as that quick pass, and she develops that further before

bringing it to our meeting.

A second strategy each of these women uses is to bring that initial text (or, in Chloe's

case, a more developed version of it) to our writing group meeting to discuss. In conversation

with fellow group members, the writers consider the strengths of what they have and explore

future possibilities for their texts. In doing so, they also share their strategies for inventing the

text in the first place, strategies which other members may then consider in their own writing.

Strategies for Inventing Ways to Find Writing That Percolates over Time

As noted in the chapter, some ideas for writing come over time, rather than in a quick

burst like those described above. One important strategy for developing these slower-growing

texts is simply the writer's attention to the growth of those ideas over time. Jenna and I each

describe thinking about our writing, playing with the ideas in our heads for a bit. Then, as seen

in the section above, we each translate those thoughts into some beginning writing move (for

me, gathering my aunt's language, and for Jenna drafting a first character sketch). Neither of us

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immediately jumps into the larger text we are imagining (my found poem and Jenna's fictional story).

Another strategy we use is to bring those initial writings to our group meeting, where we actually focus less on the writing we bring and more on the ideas for future writing. In this way, we use our first writing moves as springboards in group meetings, from which to launch expanded visions of what we might try. An important related strategy is getting affirmation from the group, not just for the immediate text but for the greater vision we have beyond what we initially share. Then we draw on invention strategies discussed in other chapters, as we question group members, as we respond to their questions, and as we engage in prompted and unprompted storytelling. These strategies help us orally invent next steps in our projects.

We also seem to be using our group discussions to help us remember and re-enter these projects, even after time passes. Thus we may invent a text in an early form, discuss it in a group meeting (possibly orally inventing future possibilities for the text), and then set it aside for some time. As we return to that text, it seems that the experience of discussing it orally in a meeting supports us in re-entering the text at a later time, if only because we can situate our revised text within the context of earlier group experiences with that project.

Strategies for Inventing Ways to Find Writing in Someone Else's Writing Task

When we are called to write a text that is initiated by someone else, we are often more constrained as writers than when we initiate our own texts. When someone else asks us to write a text, his or her purpose and interests may limit what we can do with that text. Still, in the face of these constraints, members of our writing group draw on familiar strategies for

invention that allow us to both enter and develop those "assignments." One such strategy is, just as with our own writing, to bring a small bit of writing to a meeting as a springboard for discussion. Often those early bits of writing help us discuss in greater detail our own goals for the writing as they relate to the goals of the person(s) who initiated it. In these discussions we can explore other constraints on the writing, such as conventions of a particular genre, which may affect the writing process of that text. Also as with our other writing, we often orally invent future versions of the text, sometimes going so far as to try out actual language the writer may include in her text.

A particularly important strategy for inventing ways of working with externally-initiated writing tasks is articulating what we need as writers. While this strategy is one we use across writing contexts, it seems particularly important with those texts where we feel more constrained. In writing group meetings, therefore, we try to specify ways that our group members can help us deal with (and sometimes push against) those constraints. Finally, a related strategy is simply recognizing writing in different parts of our lives, from writing that we initiate for our own enjoyment or other purpose to writing that we feel compelled to do, perhaps in response to the request of an outside party. Recognizing these different texts as *writing* helps us then mobilize familiar strategies in entering and developing those texts. It seems that one significant way of treating a text as *writing* is simply bringing it to a writing group meeting to discuss.

Across these strategies for invention, writing group members are involved with finding ways to write that feel effective to us as writers. We can be seen observing writing we do every

day, from text messages to poetry to school newsletters. As we develop and mobilize similar strategies for inventing these texts, we are building cohesion into our writing lives. Thus, this chapter considers that our use of the above strategies may be seen as our invention of ways of being writers, across contexts and texts. In some cases we, as authors and writing group members, are the primary audience of the texts we write, and we have developed strategies for finding writing opportunities in our lives. In other cases there are other audiences who have specific expectations for what we write. What this chapter shows is ways that we are engaging in writing in cohesive ways, across these contexts and purposes. We find our ways into writing, we develop our writing through talk in group meetings, and we support each other in doing the same.   These observations are important in conversations about teachers-as-writers because the literature often does not discuss how teachers develop writing strategies and texts across contexts. Additionally, the literature focuses almost exclusively on teachers' self-initiated writing projects, from personal writing to writing about their practice. In doing so, the literature largely does not explore teachers' responses to externally initiated writing projects. This chapter shows a group of teachers engaging in both self-initiated and externally-initiated writing projects, and it also shows them drawing on similar invention strategies as they do so. Consequently, this chapter seeks to contribute to conversations about teachers-as-writers by highlighting ways our writing group members have invented ways of being writers across contexts and writing situations.

CHAPTER 7: "A MORE COMPLICATED HUMAN BEING THAN JUST A TEACHER": INVENTING WAYS TO BE TEACHER-WRITERS

> *Summer is the time to write. I tell myself this*
> *In winter especially. Summer comes,*
> *I want to tumble with the river*
> *Over rocks and mossy dams.*
> *. . . . .*
>
> *Yesterday someone said, "It gets late so early."*
> *I wrote it down. I was going to do something with it.*
> *Maybe it is a title and this life is the poem.*
>
> Naomi Shihab Nye, excerpts from "The Time," 1998 (Fuel 103)

"I think it was like also a nice chance to shift and think about myself as a writer. But to also think about myself as like, you know a more complicated human being than just a teacher." This quote is part of the scene featured in the prologue of this book, where Karen is telling us what she appreciates about our writing group as we discuss what we want to foreground in an upcoming conference presentation. Her words resonate with other members of the group, who chime in to agree with her. I, too, have appreciated this aspect of my participation in the writing group: I got to focus on being a writer, and through our writing and talk I also got to focus on a lot of other aspects of myself that sometimes were pushed aside by the demands of my professional life. Like Karen, I appreciated a space where I could think about myself as "a more complicated human being."

Yet as much as Karen's words resonated with us, her fellow writing group members, they stand in sharp contrast with much of the literature on teachers-as-writers. That literature

tends to foreground the *teacher* role, with writing often depicted in service of that teaching, either on the local classroom level or on the larger professional landscape. In focusing on the "teacher as writer" or the "teacher-writer," other literature foregrounds the teacher part of our identities, sometimes casting all these other complex ways of being into shadow. To be clear, that is the explicit intention of those texts, to present ways that teacher writing benefits students and the field, so situating these discussions on the figure of the teacher makes sense and in many ways is appropriate for that purpose. It also makes sense in the way teaching can sometimes loom large in our lives, as we find ourselves planning lessons while in line at the grocery store or thinking about a student while having coffee with friends.

This project has sought to alter that focus, however, to foreground the writer self, and to even foreground the person of the teacher in this study. In writing about our work together as a writing group, I have tried to present us as whole people, as people who are in relationships, as people who value and also struggle with family, as people who are sometimes too busy for our comfort levels. We are sisters and mothers, wives and girlfriends, granddaughters and nieces. We dance and we coach, we read fantasy books and travel abroad, we live in cities and in small towns, we garden and we send text messages. And we teach. Amidst all of these other things we do and all of these people we are, we write lesson plans, we grade student work, we make bulletin boards, we serve hall duty, we teach classrooms of students. We are teachers who value teaching, who want our students to see themselves as writers, and who think of our students and our teaching often. And we are teachers who write. In our writing group, and in our own time, we invent ways into writing, we invent ways of being through writing, we invent ways of using our writing to intervene, and we invent ways of being

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writers across contexts. Thus we are complex, more-than-teaching people, who savor success and fear failure, who can find poetry amidst the little moments in life, and who can find the little moments in life amidst the lines of each others' poems.

Inventing More Than Texts: A Look at Contributions across the Chapters

The chapters in this book explore the strategies writing group members use to invent our own writing projects, working within and against constraints. In the context of that exploration, this book also explores what else, besides written texts, is invented, and how these various outcomes shape writing group members' experiences and future inventive acts. Chapter 3 begins this inquiry, looking across one writing group meeting to explore group members' invention of ways into writing, especially amidst the constraints in our lives. That chapter attends to the ways that talk, both about and not about written texts, functions in these inventions. It highlights the significance of our reconnecting time, the beginning 25% of our meetings, when we do not talk about texts specifically, yet we continue to build relationships, tell stories about our lives, and discuss our experiences while writing. These strategies, in conjunction with those that emerge as we discuss texts (such as beginning with low-stakes writing, writing in appealing genres, giving and receiving oral feedback, and discussing connections between our texts and our oral stories), support the invention of ways into writing. Whereas most of the literature on teacher writing groups assumes that the talk that is about texts is the most useful for supporting writing, Chapter 3 highlights the significance of less text-oriented talk as well, especially in how such talk foregrounds the writer, the whole person, as she invents ways into writing across texts.

Chapter 4 then builds off of Chapter 3, as it follows the conversations about and the development of three texts into our next writing group meeting (Karen's writing about teaching, Chloe's epic poem/narrative "Identity Crisis," and Nell's poem "Older Single Women"). Yet rather than focusing on the development of the texts, Chapter 4 explores what else, besides the texts, is being invented. That chapter attends specifically to writing group members' invention of ways of being, through strategies associated with the talk and texts shared during the meeting. In Chapter 4, we see Nell inventing ways of being a single woman, Karen and Chloe inventing ways of being an urban teacher, and all three women inventing ways of being writing group members. Karen also is inventing ways of remembering through her writing, and Chloe is inventing ways of making a decision. These women draw on strategies such as writing themselves into their texts in certain ways, using humor, and telling stories to support these inventions. Much of the literature on teachers-as-writers seems to prioritize the tangible outcomes of their writing, specifically the texts and the writing experiences that can be transported from the teacher into the classroom to support writing instruction or into the field to contribute to knowledge about teaching and learning. While this study certainly values the significance of the texts and writing strategies that the group members produce, Chapter 4 explicitly looks beyond those texts to consider the other equally important outcomes of teachers' invention. In this way, Chapter 4 contributes to literature valuing the experience while writing, focusing on the person who is writing rather than merely on the text she produces (Yagelski).

Chapter 5 then explores group members' use of writing to intervene in challenging, in-person rhetorical situations. While group members' texts featured in Chapters 3 and 4 are

primarily personal in nature and written for our group as an immediate audience, Chapter 5

explores texts that group members wrote explicitly for external audiences. Chapter 5 therefore

attends to the ways writing group members mobilize familiar strategies for invention, by

drawing on strategies we use to invent ways into writing and to invent ways of being in difficult

situations. Chapter 5 looks at how writing group members adapted other familiar strategies,

such as focusing on audience and purpose of a text, to attend to the ways that the audience

may have a different attitude and purpose than the author. Like Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter

shows writing group members inventing within and against constraints, focusing on those

constraints associated with the rhetorical situation surrounding their texts. Whereas literature

on teachers-as-writers often focuses on the textual production strategies of teachers, seeking

ways to transport these into the classroom, Chapter 5 considers highly contextualized texts

with very specific rhetorical purposes in mind. This is not to say that these texts would not be

useful as models in a writing workshop. Rather, it is to say that these examples show teacher-

writers involved in complex writing tasks that extend beyond the scope of other literature on

teacher-writers, as they assess audience attitude and interests, consider their own comfort

level and the context, and then purposefully craft texts that allow them to intervene in those

situations in certain ways, essentially helping them invent ways to *be* in those contexts.

Chapter 5 also extends the literature on teachers-as-writers by considering ways that teachers

are using writing to intervene in rhetorical situations outside their classrooms.

      Chapter 6 rounds out these explorations, as it looks across one year of shared writing to

consider writing group members' invention of ways of finding writing, across contexts and

amidst constraints. Chapter 6 looks beyond the texts and talk shared in the previous chapters,

to explore how group members find writing opportunities in our everyday lives and grow ideas for writing over time. Yet Chapter 6 also looks at the ways group members draw on similar strategies for invention while faced with writing tasks that are initiated or assigned by other people. The chapter considers how group members can be seen, when looking across these various writing contexts, to be inventing cohesive ways of being writers. This chapter contributes to literature in the field first by extending what counts as teacher writing. Whereas most of the literature in the field prioritizes teachers' personal writing (to support development of writing pedagogy) or teachers' writing about teaching (to inquire into and make public their practice), this chapter also explores teachers' professional writing. These work-related and academic texts are often ignored in the literature on teachers-as-writers, which tends to emphasize teachers' self-initiated writing projects. Thus, this chapter moves to reclaim these professional genres as creative, rhetorical genres, where teachers can mobilize writing strategies. Additionally, most of the literature on teacher-writers focuses only on teacher writing in specific contexts, such as a NWP summer institute, or in production of particular types of texts, such as a published article. By contrast, Chapter 6 takes advantage of the opportunity to look at teachers writing together over the course of one year, showing group members drawing on similar strategies to invent texts for varying audiences and purposes.

In what follows, I continue on the trajectory set up by Chapter 6, looking across the chapters in this book to consider patterns in writing group members' strategies for invention as they work within and against constraints, as well as what these suggest for ongoing conversations about teachers-as-writers.

Strategies for Working within and against Constraints: Articulating Constraints and Finding Ways into Writing

Like other writers and other teacher-writers, the members of our writing group faced significant constraints, both to enter writing in general and to enter specific writing tasks. One of the most important strategies for working within and against these constraints was acknowledging and articulating them. Our reconnecting time played a big role in this process, as we talked about our busy schedules, the demands on us in our jobs and home lives, our energy levels, how well we were sleeping or eating, and how we were feeling in general. These were not therapy sessions; rather, we used our reconnecting time to give voice to what was happening in our lives, and to listen and respond, as friends, to each other. This seemed to allow us to acknowledge these life situations as constraints, both to pursuing writing and to doing other things we valued. Airing these constraints in our writing group meeting also allowed us to address them explicitly, to help each other discuss strategies for still engaging in writing even amidst these challenges.

Articulating constraints also became important when we were writing for a specific external audience or in response to a writing task someone else initiated. In those cases, our discussion of the interests and purposes of the audience, as well as the other features of the rhetorical situation, helped us articulate the constraints within which we were writing. Sometimes even the genre of a task was challenging, such as when Nell was writing her research proposal or recommendation letter. Discerning the limitations and the expectations of particular writing tasks seemed to help group members feel less constrained, and it seemed to allow us to sometimes figure out ways to adjust boundaries to fit our own needs or interests.

For example, as Chloe planned her Title III presentation, some of the most important work in our discussion involved her articulating what her administrators wanted to hear, where she thought there might be misunderstandings, and what her concerns were regarding their attention level and interest in her topic. Identifying these challenges helped Chloe invent, in collaboration with me, a plan for a PowerPoint and handout that would allow her to present her information effectively within these limitations. She also used her knowledge of these constraints to insert her own, separate purposes into the presentation. Similarly, when Nell understood the conventions of the genre for a letter of recommendation, she was able to worry less about those conventions and focus on applying her own knowledge of writing to the task.

Finally, we articulated constraints that had nothing to do with our time to write or a given writing task, as we discussed how our own interests can both call us to write at times and limit us from writing at others. In this sense, we discussed the importance of respecting when we felt like we did not want to write something or when we were actively avoiding a particular piece of writing. When Nell said she did not want to work on her poem about loneliness anymore after starting to date someone, when Karen said she did not want to write about teaching anymore because she needed a change, and when I realized I did not want to work on my found poem for my aunt because it made me sad, we were each experiencing limitations as writers. Rather than looking at these moments of avoidance as problems to be overcome, as a group we tended to focus on articulating why we felt constrained, and then respecting that and allowing ourselves to set pieces of writing aside (when we were not bound by requirements to submit a text to an outside audience), sometimes indefinitely. This strategy allowed us to follow our energy into a new piece of writing (instead of persevering on a piece where we did

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not feel energy at a given time), and it also seemed to help us find our way back if and when we felt renewed urgency. Karen did write more about teaching, only through a different genre and by taking advantage of humor, and I eventually did write my found poem.

Articulating and acknowledging our constraints was one important strategy for inventing ways into writing. When we first formed the writing group, we spoke of wanting accountability and support to make time for writing. It seems that we, like much of the literature on teacher writing groups, expected that incentive to come in the form of group members pushing us to be "prepared" for writing group meetings, so that we were putting writing on our calendars (Elrod). This strategy certainly was one that we used, as we made time every two weeks to at least talk about writing. We also developed other specific strategies for inventing ways into writing. We sometimes made just enough time for low-stakes writing (Elbow), such as journals or timelines, which we could write in the fifteen minutes before a group meeting, allowing us to have something to share and discuss. When we did discuss those bits of writing, we were presenting ourselves as writers, as we would tell the group "in my writing today" or "I hope you can help me do this." These conversations positioned us as writers with each other, foregrounding our writing selves if only for that two-hour meeting.

We also developed ways to hold onto writing ideas when we had them, even if we did not have time to develop them fully. Sometimes this meant taking a quick pass at a draft, such as Nell's poem about lost text messages and Jenna's writing in response to her student's note, and sometimes we just came with an idea for writing at a later time, such as Jenna's oral descriptions of her next fictional characters. Members tried other technologies as well, such as Chloe's keeping her writing on a blog that she could access anywhere, or Tweeting an idea for

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future writing. Many of these were little moves, moves through which we sought to squeeze writing in among the other things in our busy schedules.

These strategies for working within and against constraints, both through acknowledging limitations and inventing ways into writing, contribute to discussions in the field about some of the reasons that may prevent teachers from writing outside the classroom.   One of the most important contributions is simply acknowledging that constraints exist and they are difficult to overcome. These constraints rarely are emphasized enough in the literature, which tends to focus more on the payoff once teachers do write. Recognizing constraints may be particularly important for teachers just beginning to pursue their own writing projects, who may judge themselves as unsuccessful when they meet significant obstacles in their writing lives. Indeed this project suggests that not only is it important to acknowledge constraints, but that doing so may actually help teachers find space to build their own writing into their lives. This study also suggests ways that teachers might take advantage of even the smallest of time windows to begin to pursue writing, which may lead to momentum (and even urgency) in the future.

Strategies for Inventing through Talk: Reconnecting, Storytelling, Questioning, and Experimenting

In our group, we talked about writing, and so a lot of our inventing actually happened in our oral conversations. As Chapter 3 revealed, some of our invention work happened when we were not even discussing texts. Even in our reconnecting time, we can be seen inventing ways to "do" writing in general, such as when Nell discussed her quandary over whether to

handwrite or to type.   Our reconnecting time served most importantly to connect and reconnect us as writers, to help us invent community in our group by sharing glimpses into each others' lives. This supported the trust we came to feel in the group, which in turn supported the sharing of deeply personal texts, like my poem for my aunt, Chloe and Karen's writing about their teaching and related fears, Jenna's stories about her past experiences as a dancer, and Nell's poetry about relationships.

Storytelling was a related strategy that appeared throughout both our talk of texts and our reconnecting time. Writers often ended up telling stories to explain or extend a piece of writing, such as the stories Nell told about her lost texts, Jenna told about her note from a student, and I told about my aunt. We told stories to explain the context or audience of our writing, such as my letter to Angela, Nell's wedding toast, and Chloe's introduction for her grandmother's cookbook. We also told stories that extended beyond what was in our text, such as Chloe and Karen's stories about their teaching and Nell's stories about her coworkers, many of which were not featured in the text itself but which still were related to the topic or writer's ongoing interest in those texts. Some stories took on decidedly performative qualities, as Karen got us laughing about her students' interactions with her, changing her voice to impersonate her teacher-self or a given student. Sometimes our stories also triggered other, related stories from other group members, who might chime in and tell about a related experience.

Across these many different uses of storytelling, there is consistent evidence of invention, often related to writing or ways of being writers. Often the telling of stories would elicit commands of "write that down!" from other writing group members, as they heard bits

and pieces of speech that would work well in the author's text. When Nell was talking about her poem, "Older Single Women," for example, Chloe simply began taking notes for her, recording comments from Nell's stories that she thought might be useful to Nell as she revised her poem. Other times, telling stories helped a writer arrive at a realization about how to refocus her writing, such as the way Nell and Karen's stories about my university class helped me refocus my essay on my teaching. In many ways, these oral stories can be seen as layers of the shared text, a part of the author's writing process.

Stories were often initiated by a group member's question to an author. When Chloe asked me why my aunt was so significant to me, I began to tell stories of our experiences together, and when I asked Nell what made her think some of her colleagues were so crazy, she began telling us stories to explain. Indeed, questioning was an important strategy we used to invent through talk. Quite often these were questions that group members asked the author, to try to understand the writer's purpose or hopes for her piece of writing, or to better clarify moments in the text. One quality of these questions was their authenticity (Nystrand); we asked questions we genuinely wanted answered, which seemed to come out of a respect for the author's expertise on her text. Our questions reflected our curiosity, where we wondered about things as we read or as we listened to the author speak.

We also increasingly asked questions about our own writing, directed at our fellow group members. Jenna can be seen engaging in this question-asking when she had us read her character sketch about "Jo." In that exchange she asked us specific questions in order to gauge our reactions to the way Jo speaks. Many of these author questions were introduced to frame group members' reading of a text, so that we were looking for ways to increase a desired effect

or to overcome a stated difficulty. Authors also asked questions throughout the discussion of a text, often in order to get feedback on new ideas or to clarify feedback. Across these uses of questioning, we can be seen engaged in the invention of the text (and, of course, many of the other outcomes of invention that are discussed in this book).

One specific use of questioning can be seen as we orally compose new versions of a shared text. For example, when Chloe and I were discussing her Title III presentation, we both engaged in actually orally inventing possible language for her presentation and accompanying texts. Often, these oral rehearsals were accompanied by questions, or even just implied questions, as one of us might try out possible language and the other responds affirmatively. This oral invention of language also can be seen in the discussion of Jenna's school newsletter article on Girls on the Run, where I asked how many coaches and girls there are, Jenna replied, Nell suggested she should include that in the article, Jenna tried out possible language for doing so, and I responded with "Yeah." This oral invention of actual language for a piece is a particularly clear way of seeing how invention, even of written texts, can happen in talk.

These strategies for inventing through talk contribute to the literature on teachers-as-writers in several ways. First, they highlight the importance of building time for talk that is not directly associated with discussion of written texts (or teaching, for that matter) in teacher writing groups or other networks that support teacher writing. Because teachers are busy, it can be tempting to think that going immediately to talk about writing will maximize their time. This study suggests differently. Additionally, these oral invention strategies suggest the benefits of teacher writing groups involving opportunities to talk about writing, and even to talk beyond writing (in telling related stories, for example), during their meetings.

Strategies for Inventing through Attention to Genre

Another strategy that group members use for invention is attention to genre. In some cases, pursuing a different genre provides a way in for a group member's writing. For example, when Karen first shared journals about her teaching, she told us she wanted help finding a new genre. She even thought she wanted to write fiction to give herself a break from the reality of her job. When she then shifted to a multi-genre text to explore her first year of teaching, she took advantage of this idea of trying a fresh genre. In that case, rather than writing *about* her frustration when receiving high-pressure emails from administrators, she wrote actual emails. Her use of exaggeration and parody set the stage for several other humorous, satirical genres that she might include in her piece. Similarly, Chloe used poetry mixed with narrative to explore her first year of teaching. As with Karen's emails, Chloe's poem was able to do things that a reflective essay or simple narrative could not do, especially as she crafted a metaphorical battle between herself and a shadowy creature. Nell's approach to her wedding toast offers another example, this time of Nell's purposeful switch from a speech-toast to a poem-toast, through which she was able to write a difficult text in a genre that was more comfortable for her. In all of these cases, the writers not only found ways into writing through genre, but also took advantage of the opportunities of that genre in their writing.

These uses of genre contribute to conversations about teacher-writers, especially as they relate to what kinds of teacher writing are significant in the literature. As Anne Whitney observes in a case study of a teacher-writer from an NWP summer institute, the teacher's writing is "never neatly divided into personal or professional" ("Writer, Teacher, Person" 253), but rather these strands of personal and professional writing are complex and often intertwine.

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Whitney ends her article with a call for NWP site administrators to invite teachers to engage in both personal and professional writing and to support teachers in exploring the purposes for each and the relationships between them. This strategy of playing with genre, of writing about the professional in multiple (and not traditionally academic) genres, and of reading a rhetorical situation in order to discover opportunities to manipulate genre, can be seen as responding to Whitney's call.

Strategies for Inventing Ways to Be Teacher-Writers: Expanding What Counts as Writing

Writing group members mobilize the above strategies as they invent ways of being teacher-writers, across writing situations. As has been discussed already, writing group members are inventing much more than texts, as they invent ways of being sisters, friends, teachers, and writers. Sometimes these inventions help group members create ways to make time for writing or to intervene in interactions with other people. One particular strategy we draw on, as we invent ways of being teacher-writers, is expanding what counts as writing. We write and share texts that we initiate, texts that are personal and may align with what one might associate with "creative writing." We also write and share texts that we do not initiate, texts we sometimes feel compelled to write. In sharing both types of texts in writing group meetings, we mobilize strategies for invention across contexts, and we include many more genres in what we consider writing. This may seem like a small point, for clearly Nell's student recommendation letter or Jenna's Girls on the Run article are written texts. In the literature on teachers-as-writers, however, these work-related texts are rarely discussed and often ignored when teachers are encouraged to write. What the study of this teacher writing group does,

therefore, is explore ways that even job-related writing is worthy of study, especially when

teachers can be seen mobilizing writing strategies across personal and professional texts, as

they are here.

Contributions of Inventing an Online Teacher Writing Group

Chapter 2, which introduced the way we set up the writing group, begins with an

excerpt of Judy Sorum Brown's poem "Fire," which reminds us "What makes a fire burn/is

space between the logs," advising that piling on too many logs can put out a fire as quickly as a

pail of water. Too often, writing is presented to teachers as another log, a good thing they

"should" do to become better teachers. As Gillespie notes, for hard-working teachers these

messages can be tough to stomach ("Revisited"). This study, however, suggests that writing

may also be experienced as the space between the logs, a "breathing space" which must be

protected amidst those other things that both fuel and sometimes smother a teacher's fire. In

so doing, this study seeks to contribute to conversations in the field through the way we set up

(or invented) our writing group.

Inventing Our Writing Group: Committing Ourselves to Creating Space for Writing

In seeking to invent ways to be teacher-writers, such that writing could help feed our

"fires" rather than smother them as an added burden, we sought to create a writing group

experience that was at its most basic level enjoyable. From the start, we discussed a

commitment to flexibility, to an openness to adapting our group to suit our needs. Our early

meetings were marked by experimentation, as we tried various technologies to support our

meetings, and as we tried various structures. Would we write together in meetings? Would we

have assignments between meetings? Ultimately, we settled on the most simple of plans, to

begin by chatting with each other, reconnecting after two weeks apart, and then to talk about

whatever pieces of or ideas for writing any group members chose to bring. Both parts of this

meeting plan supported our goal to make our group meetings an enjoyable experience, one

that would feed us rather than deplete us as we anticipated and participated in meetings.

Another contribution of this approach to our writing group meetings is the way it

foregrounds the whole person, not just the teacher or the writer. We designed a writing group

experience that focused on supporting writing that mattered to us, rather than an experience

that focused on how our writing would shape our teaching. While we certainly did on occasion

observe ideas for our teaching, inspired by what we talked about in our group (like Chloe does

when she says it would be fun to have students manipulate their own text messages into found

poems), this was not a focus of our meetings. Aside from our reconnecting time, we spent the

rest of our meetings discussing our writing, giving full attention to whatever each writer wanted

or needed help with, without then analyzing our moves or how we could use these experiences

to inform our teaching. This is different from many other teacher writing group experiences,

such as those reported by some participants of NWP summer institutes, where the participants

are often explicitly involved in considering how their experiences as writers can inform their

teaching.

As a writing group, we also emphasized the importance of our freedom to choose how

we participated in meetings. We chose what we shared, how we shared it, at what stage we

brought writing (often just sharing an idea for future writing), and even if we shared at all.

Protecting this range of choices may seem counter-intuitive for our goals of the group being an incentive to write and develop our writing, yet it was a critical element of our group's flexibility. Simply put, this was one way that we sought to ensure that our writing group experience was space between the logs in our fires, rather than an additional log we were laying on top. Having this range of choice in ways to participate meant that group members did not have to apologize for not having writing to share, because having writing was not a pre-requisite for attending meetings, and no one would give anyone a hard time for not bringing a text. Rather, in coming and talking about other group members' writing, we were still involved in thinking about writing that week, even if only for those few hours. Writing group members also chose whether to revise texts or when to revise them. Once again, the writer controls her text and her ways of participating in the writing group. This emphasis on choice is a different way of looking at a writing group for teachers. Rather than focusing on accountability or meeting goals between meetings, as some writing groups emphasize (Lawrence), it focuses on participation, even just in talking about a friend's writing.

This emphasis on our ability to choose how we participate in meetings is directly connected to our decision to have live, talk-based meetings. By meeting live, it expanded the choices we had for how to participate. Even after a busy day, even on weeks when other commitments crowded out our writing time, we could still show up to meetings and talk about someone else's writing, or discuss ideas for something we would like to write in the future. Additionally, building in time that was not focused on discussing texts allowed us to also foreground and develop our relationships with each other. As discussed above, this

reconnecting time shaped many of our strategies for invention. It is also a contribution to literature on how to organize writing groups. While there is literature on how to set up a writing group or how to participate in one (Reeves, Schneider), this study emphasizes the importance of building time into the meetings that is not about discussing texts or writing strategies.

Inventing Our Writing Group: Creating a Way to Share Talk and Writing Online

Finally, our writing group contributes to literature on how to do writing groups online. While there is some literature on online writing groups (Rosenthal) and on online teacher writing groups (Elrod, Lawrence), these writing groups tend to focus on textual response, with group members electronically exchanging writing and then receiving feedback on the texts. While these approaches are certainly useful, with group members reporting positive experiences and experiencing support for their writing, the asynchronous, text-based approaches do not allow for the invention through talk or the range of ways to participate in writing discussions that we were seeking. Our writing group's experience can support teachers and writers interested in forming a writing group by creating a model whereby writing is discussed orally even if the members are geographically dispersed or unable to all come together physically. By using Skype and a private, password-protected wiki, we were able to create a virtual meeting in which we could share writing privately and discuss writing with each other, even though we could not gather in person. This approach to an online writing group could be useful in particular if members of an existing writing group move away from each

other, or if short-term writing groups (such as with the NWP summer institute, a university

course, or a writing retreat) want to continue meeting after they have returned home.

Contributions of Using Invention as a Theoretical Frame

An additional contribution of this study is the use of invention as a theoretical frame.

The written texts, the conversations, and the group itself did not exist before we began

meeting. In focusing on group members' strategies for invention, I am able to look across oral

and written language to focus on the creativity of teacher-writers, as we do more than invent

texts, and as we are engaged in inventing across the course of our writing group meetings. Our

talk and texts shared in this writing group bear out Karen Lefevre's observation that invention is

a social act. Whereas other studies of teachers-as-writers may focus more on the development

of written texts and strategies, this study looks across oral and written language to focus on

teachers creating not only texts, but ways of being writers amidst constraints.

Using invention as a theoretical lens also allows me to consider invention as an

experience in itself. This expands the work that focuses on writing as an experience (Yagelski)

to foreground other invention that occurs in writing group meetings and the significance of

those experiences on the group members. The significance of the experience while inventing

can be seen perhaps most clearly in the chapters that deal with group members inventing ways

of being, where we ourselves are shaped in some ways by those inventions. As Bob Yagelski

writes, the text may be irrelevant when compared to the experience the writer has while

writing it. Karen's journaling about teaching, for example, may not have been shared beyond

our group, but the experience she had while writing that, and then later while discussing it in

group, especially in connection to Chloe's "Identity Crisis" text, may have had a much different impact.

My decision to focus on invention also allowed me to bound my project in important ways. For example, I did not explicitly consider the relationship between invention and style, arrangement, memory, and delivery, although these other canons are evident throughout our many discussions of writing. Rather, I chose to focus on invention to highlight the creativity of writing group members that runs throughout our participation in the group and throughout our interaction with different texts. Similarly, I did not choose to follow any writer's processes of working with one text across time, because I wanted to emphasize the people, not the texts, the constraints under which we were working, not just the features of our writing.

Contribution of a Line of Inquiry

Through this project, I have contributed a line of inquiry into teachers' writing on its own terms, beyond looking at the written texts or classroom benefits that may come out of it. This line of inquiry recognizes the constraints that teachers face, particularly in beginning to integrate non-classroom writing into their lives, and it focuses therefore on the invention teachers display as they pursue their own writing. This is not to say that other lines of inquiry which consider how teachers' writing relates to their writing pedagogy or participation in the field are not fruitful or needed; rather, it is to say that these other lines of inquiry do not account for the complex and varied ways teachers invent in the context of writing, or how they are changed by their experiences while inventing.

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Implications for Future Study

This book presents an extended inquiry into the invention of teacher-writers in this writing group during our first year together. Currently, our writing group is preparing to begin our fourth year together, prompting additional questions. How might group members' experiences in years two, three, and so on continue to help the field re-imagine teacher-writers? How might group members' writing group experiences affect their classroom practice, such as their ways of framing writing instruction, their incorporation of their own writing experiences into pedagogical decisions, and their ways of providing feedback?

This project also has implications and raises questions for future work by other teachers, teacher educators, and writing researchers, extending and looking beyond what I have presented here. This study has argued for considering teachers as whole people, and it has explored ways that writing might help feed teachers' energy, beyond the classroom. This argument has implications for teachers, raising questions such as what else, besides writing, might help teachers create space to do important inventive work, especially as it relates to inventing sustainable ways of being teachers? This project also raises questions about how else, besides a writing group, might teachers find the support and the space to pursue writing that matters to them, across contexts. What role do some of the features of this writing group, such as the relationships and commitments shared by members, play in the above inquiries, and how might these differ with other teacher-writers?

Additionally, this work encourages teachers to consider the variety of ways they are writers and the variety of texts they write throughout their professional and personal lives. Whereas so much of the literature on teacher-writers seems to discount the professional

writing teachers do as part of their jobs, or writing that teachers do not initiate, this project

explicitly considers those other forms of teacher writing. In doing so, this project shifts

attention from the texts (and even genres) teachers write and emphasizes instead the

significance of how teachers engage in writing those texts. How do teachers invent ways of

writing even externally-initiated texts? How do teachers invent ways of engaging in writing,

even amidst constraints? These are just some questions implied for teachers interested in

pursuing writing lives and acknowledging the many ways they are writers.

There are similar implications for researchers interested in teachers-as-writers. For

those researchers, this project presents a call to extend our consideration of what counts as

teacher writing and why. While the outcomes of teachers' writing are certainly significant, such

as texts and teaching strategies and contributions to the field, this project emphasizes the

importance of teacher writing on its own terms and the recognition that teachers' writing is

worth studying in ways beyond its impact on the classroom. Additionally, as noted above, this

project points to the significance of other genres of teacher writing, beyond those traditionally

studied. In particular, teachers' professional writing and writing that others initiate bears

greater study.

This study also has implications for teacher educators and educational researchers. For

example, what are other models for collaboration between teacher educators and beginning

teachers? How might teachers' writing lives shape their induction experiences? What other

ways, besides collaborating in a writing group, might teacher educators support teacher-writers

at different points in their development? How might writing groups be implemented in

preservice teacher education or in K-12 classrooms?

Finally, this project has implications for writing researchers. For example, a future line of inquiry relates to aesthetics and the affective dimensions suggested by this project. What are some of the emotional reasons teachers and other people write? How do our emotional reactions or experiences while writing relate to what we choose to do as writers? How might participation in a writing group impact these aesthetic experiences associated with writing? Along these lines, the rhetorical canon of memory was referenced at several points in this book, such as when group members have written to remember (Karen with her first year of teaching, me with my aunt), or when memory of a conversation in a group meeting seems to play a role in a writer being able to re-enter a text after time has elapsed. These initial observations raise questions for future research: How might audience and memory be related? How might the memory of past writing experiences shape current and future experiences?

Conclusion

In closing, this study has contributed a view into one online writing group, comprised of four beginning teachers and an English teacher educator/educational researcher. In looking across thirteen months of writing group meetings, I have explored the strategies our group members used to invent ways into writing amidst constraints, ways of being, ways of intervening, and ways of finding writing across contexts. I end with a call for additional research into ways of supporting teacher-writers as people who are, in the words of Karen, "more complicated human being[s] than just … teacher[s]."

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Table of All Written Texts Shared during Focal Year

Table 4. All Written Texts Shared during Focal Year of Group Meetings

	Me	Chloe	Nell	Jenna	Karen
12/4/08	Poem on fantasy books	Mother timeline		Pregnancy timeline	
12/11/08	Poem on fantasy books	School poem			
12/27/08	Christmas poem			"Dancing Game" narrative	Rant poem
1/15/09		"Foreign" (school poem)	"Comfortable Hell" poem	"Dancing Game"	
1/29/09	Poem on fantasy books			"Dancing Game"	
2/12/09	Letter to Angela	"Identity Crisis" poem/narrative	"Older Single Women" poem	"Dancing Game"	2 journals about teaching
2/26/09	Teaching award essay	"Identity crisis" poem/narrative	"Older Single Women"		Multigenre on teaching
3/26/09				Writing from student note	Multigenre on teaching
4/30/09	Journal ideas for writing about moving	"The Battle" (retitled "Identity Crisis")	Wedding toast for sister (poem)		
5/28/09	Home information sheet	Presentation notes for Title III meeting	Wedding toast poem [didn't get to share it]	Girls on the Run article	
6/25/09	Journal writing about home/moving		Research design assignment for graduate class		"The Luckiest" poem
8/6/09	List of found language from aunt's emails	"Barriers" vignettes	Found poem on lost texts		
8/27/09	Gardening and doctoral program essay		Life lessons essay	Jo's rant – character sketch	
9/10/09	Oral brainstorming for essay			Oral brainstorming for fiction	

Table 4 (cont'd)

	Me	Chloe	Nell	Jenna	Karen
9/24/09		School newsletter			
10/22/09	Found poem for my aunt	Introduction for grandmother's cookbook	Student recommendation letter		

Appendix B: Inventing Inquiry

While I have chosen to focus this book on the ways group members (myself included) invented ways of writing amidst constraints, I make visible another layer of invention in this appendix. As a writing group member who also was researching the writing group, I was inventing inquiry as I sought to balance my roles, to gather and make sense of the talk and texts we shared in meetings, and to decide on where to focus my attention. Writing runs throughout my inquiry: I wrote to transcribe audiotapes, to annotate and reflect on transcripts and shared texts, and to compose (and revise and compose again) the stories and arguments I set forth in these chapters. Indeed, as I will discuss below, this theme of writing to learn in research runs throughout the research traditions that inform this study (Heath and Street; Schaafsma and Vinz; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw). In this appendix, I provide a view into my inquiry and my writing choices, and I consider the affordances and limitations of those choices.

My approach to this inquiry was informed by work in both ethnography and narrative inquiry. As I will discuss in greater detail below, I take an ethnographic approach for gathering the talk and texts associated with thirteen months of writing group meetings. I wrote fieldnotes, audiotaped and transcribed group meetings, gathered shared texts associated with group meetings, annotated and coded my sources, and wrote layers of memos (Bogdan and Biklen; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw; Heath and Street), all of which are methods found in ethnographic research (cf. Cintron; Fisher; Geertz; Heath Ways with Words; Heller; Lindquist). Ethnography has roots in anthropology and traditionally emphasizes the study of culture, where a researcher enters a group or culture for purposes of studying it and learning the ways of those who are native (Cintron; Heath and Street).   Ethnographers write of being "in the field"

for a length of time, acknowledging that it takes time to build ethos and gain the acceptance of the group they study in order to be able to gather their data. It is important to note that in the case of my study, however, I was not entering a culture or group of "others," but rather co-creating a writing group with them. Before we began to meet online, and indeed before I began sending emails to organize us, our group did not exist. Certainly I was not a first-year teacher anymore, or even a secondary English teacher, but I was entering the group as a writer. This is an important differentiation between my study and many ethnographies, for I was an active participant from the start, and I contributed to the culture we created as a group. Even so, I did not focus my inquiry on our group culture. Rather, I focused on the various inventions of teacher-writers in the group. I am not, therefore, looking to define this study as an ethnography, but rather to recognize the tradition of research practices which informed my approach to gathering the talk and texts associated with the writing group.

My research moves were also informed by the growing tradition of narrative inquiry. Indeed, narrative inquiry has ties to ethnography, especially in the way ethnographers seek to provide thick description for the cultures they study (Geertz). Narrative inquiry is distinct from ethnography in its emphasis on narrative as a mode of inquiry as well as a genre of communicating that inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly; Schaafsma and Vinz; Pagnucci). In what follows, I draw on recent work in narrative inquiry as I discuss ways I used narrative writing in both my analysis and my "writing up" of this book.

Managing My Overlapping Roles of Writer, Teacher Educator, and Researcher

My role in the writing group was complex from the start. I was a fellow writer, and I identified as a teacher-writer as I sought to develop a writing life while teaching, just as the other members were. I also had a history with my fellow group members, having been their instructor in a series of university teacher education courses. Finally, and significant for the purposes of this appendix, I was interested in studying our writing group as a researcher. For me, navigating these roles became a matter of foregrounding and backgrounding, as well as being open and explicit with my fellow group members.

Indeed, the navigation of complex and overlapping roles is not uncommon for ethnographic and other participant-observer research. For example, in her ethnography of working-class rhetoric, Lindquist discusses how she had to navigate her own working-class background, her role as a bartender in a working-class bar, and her role as a university graduate student (Lindquist). Similarly, in her ethnography of a women's writing group in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, Heller described her own initial discomfort over being a white, middle-class graduate student entering an established writing group (Heller). In my case, however, I was grappling with how to shift my role from that of the instructor, where I had assigned and assessed my students' writing, to that of a fellow group member, where we would each be initiating and pursuing our own writing projects and developing ways of assessing our own progress.

When I orally introduced the idea for the writing group to my university class, I deliberately tried to separate the writing group from our work as a class, emphasizing that my participation in the writing group was not an extension of my role as instructor. In my email

follow-up, when I invited interested individuals to contact me about the writing group, I

described the writing group as "not a space focused on instruction or lesson plans, but a space

where we would write for our own purposes and audiences." This was a beginning move on my

part to highlight my roles as a fellow writer and distinguish the writing we would do in the

group from the writing we had already shared while I was their instructor. Later, in preparation

for our first meeting, I again raised this issue in an email I sent to Nell, Chloe, Jenna, and Karen:

> I should mention - I have thought a lot about my role in this group, too. I know I
> was your instructor in TE classes, but in this group I really would like to be a
> fellow writer and share my writing and thinking along those lines with you, for
> your support and feedback. Of course, I am happy to help do the work of
> coordinating our meetings (confirming times, sending emails, etc.). Also, if you
> would like me to provide any "invitations" to write… I am happy to as well, with
> me writing right alongside you.

In this email, I call attention to my shifting role, from instructor to group member, and I try to

position myself explicitly as a writer in the group, seeking their support and feedback on my

own writing. I invite the other group members to help define my role, offering to handle some

of the logistics associated with starting the group. I also offer to bring some writing activities to

group meetings, if that is what others want.

   I explicitly discuss my role in the group at least one more time, during our first meeting,

when I tell the group that I do not want to be in a "teacher role" in the writing group. When

Jenna asks how they can help with this, saying she does not want me to feel like I have

responsibility for directing the group, I suggest that we can all use the wiki (our group webpage)

to collaboratively plan meetings. Even so, for the first several meetings my transition from

instructor to group member is evident. For example, I sent everyone a follow-up email after

our first few meetings, and these follow-up emails were a common practice I had used as an

instructor as well. I also prepared an agenda for the first few meetings, and I led the discussions on getting accustomed to our online technologies. Additionally, I brought invitational writing prompts or exercises to the first few meetings, in response to group members saying they were interested in possibly trying out some of these to inspire their writing. All of these practices can be seen as holdovers of my instructor relationship with these women.

It was not until later, after our meetings began to focus more on the writing we each brought, that I began to foreground my role as fellow writer more successfully. While I still continued facilitating the organization of meetings, sending reminders and helping coordinate schedules, I began to step back from "running" the meetings. I believe sharing my own writing helped with this transition; I deliberately shared personal writing from the start, such as a poem about my love for young adult fantasy novels and a poem about Christmas. These were pieces I wrote about topics that were personal, not professional, and they provided a view into parts of my life that were different from what I may have shared before. These also were pieces I genuinely wanted to write and improve. Thus, my questions about how to revise my poems were authentic, and the feedback I received was genuinely helpful. As a result of my participation in the writing group, I wrote pieces I would not have written alone, and in ways I would not have written them. The group members played a strong role in my own invention as a writer.

Even as I tried to foreground my involvement in the group as a fellow writer, however, my own views about writing shaped how I enacted this "writer" role, such as how I responded to other members' writing and how I chose what writing I wanted to share. For example, as a

writer I find it useful to talk about my work at different stages of a project, sometimes even before actual "writing" on paper/computer begins. This approach led me to sometimes share my ideas for future writing, as well as to ask group members if they had ideas they wanted to talk about when they did not have actual writing to share in a meeting. Similarly, given my interest in considering all the writing I (and other teachers) do, from professional to personal texts, I often observed writing that group members did in addition to that which they shared with our group. I also sometimes brought professional texts, such as an essay on my teaching, or other genres, such as a letter to a friend. These were purposeful moves on my part, bringing texts that I genuinely wanted to improve while intentionally modeling different possibilities for what we could share in group meetings. After I shared my letter and essay, I noticed others began sharing pieces they were writing for outside audiences as well. Thus, my role as a group member was still complex, as I was both authentically asking for feedback and help with my writing, while still aware of times when I intentionally modeled other options for what we might share in group meetings.

Grappling with my roles as former instructor and fellow writer had direct relevance to my role as a researcher studying our writing group. My goal of studying our work together as writers depended, in many ways, on our group developing a comfort level together, on trusting each other and sharing meaningful writing and stories. Consequently, I did not want my role or my actions as researcher to become a focus of our meetings. At our first meeting, when I introduced the possibility of me studying our group, I emphasized that the group would be formed and would meet regardless of whether or not I studied it. I wanted our experience as writers to be dominant. I talked with the other group members about my willingness to use

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pseudonyms (which I have, throughout this work), and I emphasized that they had the final say on what texts or talk I collected and included in my study. For the same reason, I chose to delay audiotaping our group meetings until February, after the group had met for approximately three months. I felt this choice would give us time to get comfortable with each other as a writing group, without the added awareness of having every word captured on tape. Thus, while we certainly talked about the fact that I was studying our writing group, and while my dissertation work came up sometimes in the context of our conversations about writing, I participated in the group primarily as a fellow writer. This choice to foreground my role as fellow writer felt appropriate, because I genuinely had initiated the group to pursue my own writing.

Inquiring into Our Writing Group: Gathering Talk and Texts for My Study

As noted above, my approach to gathering talk and texts for this study was ethnographically-informed. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw write that ethnographic research involves the researcher entering "a social setting" and getting to know the people, participating in routines, and observing and writing down in "regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns" through this participation (1). In the case of my inquiry, I was creating the social setting alongside my fellow group members, co-creating our own group culture as we established routines and continued to build relationships. We had a relationship with each other prior to beginning this writing group, but that relationship (and indeed our own roles) was in a state of change as we began meeting as a writing group. We had scattered geographically, and Nell, Chloe, Jenna, and Karen were immersed in the experience of starting

their first teaching jobs. No longer was I their university instructor, and no longer were they my

university students. As we began meeting, therefore, we were all teachers and writers creating

a social group, and I used various strategies to regularly and systematically write down what I

observed during our meetings.

My interest in observing our invention in talk as well as in writing led me to record our

conversations during meetings by taking fieldnotes and by audiotaping our meetings. From the

very first meeting, when I introduced the idea of studying our writing group, I began taking

fieldnotes during our meetings. Our group's online format actually helped in taking fieldnotes,

since no one could see me writing. This eliminated concern over how my notetaking may have

affected group members' comfort in the meeting, as is possible in face-to-face interactions

when individuals may wonder why some comments are written down and others are not

(Emerson, Fretz and Shaw). In taking fieldnotes, I wrote jottings during meetings in order to

keep an account of what texts we discussed and what stories group members told, noting in

particular where members discussed writing strategies, constraints they experienced that

related to their writing, and how they worked within these constraints. Before I began

audiotaping, I also used fieldnotes to record only brief excerpts of speech, focusing more

commonly on paraphrasing content of our conversations. When I began audiotaping, I noted

the time for short excerpts or paraphrased topics of conversations in order to help me later

connect my audio with my fieldnotes (Heath and Street). Finally, I took note of events that may

have occurred during a meeting, such as the arrival of a member, difficulty with our online

technology (difficulty hearing, or dropping a call), or any change in routine. I then went back

and typed these jottings up into more elaborated fieldnotes as soon as possible, often immediately following the meeting.

In composing my elaborated fieldnotes, I used my initial jottings to spur my memory as I sought to describe the main events of a meeting. I typically began my fieldnotes with a description of who was present, what time we started meeting, and what time each member joined our conversation. I noted the main topics we discussed during our reconnecting time, noting who brought up each topic and any key aspects of what we discussed. I also typically included a description of and reference to texts we discussed, the reasons each author shared her text (perhaps the feedback she was seeking, or the audience for whom she was preparing a text), and the main topics that were generated during our feedback. At the end of each fieldnote entry, I noted how the meeting concluded, which usually included a discussion about who would be present at the following meeting.

My fieldnotes typically included both descriptive notes about what happened in a given meeting, as well as my reflective comments on the meeting (e.g., how the meeting ran, our level of comfort with the technology, connections between meetings, etc.). While some researchers choose to prepare two-column fieldnotes to differentiate observations from reflections and sense-making (Heath and Street), I opted to place my reflections in brackets or inserted comments within the body of the fieldnotes, which helped me preserve the context for these observations. It was through these reflective notes that I began to attend to the group members' strategies for writing and the constraints they experienced.

I waited to begin audiotaping until February, a little more than three months after we began meeting. I delayed audiotaping in order to allow the group time to get comfortable with

the online technology (primarily Skype and the wiki) and with the fact that we could not see each other in person. I was concerned that audiotaping during those initial meetings, when we were more self-conscious about not speaking over each other and when our technology problems were more pronounced, would make it even harder for us to be ourselves and relax. I wanted us to find a rhythm in our conversations, so we could focus on our work together as writers before I introduced an awareness of additional technology in the form of audiorecording.

To further foreground my role as a fellow writer, as well as group members' control and choice during meetings, I made a point to ask if I could turn on the recorder at the beginning of each meeting. I also repeated this question for any member who arrived late to meetings. I emphasized that any member, including me, could request that the recorder be turned off at any time, without needing to provide a reason. As it turned out, I was the only one to choose to turn off the recorder, and I did this on two occasions when other members were sharing particularly personal stories related to their writing. On those occasions, I elected to turn off the recorder in order to further protect their privacy (there then being no audio record of that conversation) and to foreground my presence in those moments as a supportive group member and fellow writer. I wanted members to feel free to share openly without worrying about a long-lasting audio record of that conversation, and I wanted the other group members to see how simple it was for me to turn off the recorder, should they ever request it. The personal nature of those unrecorded conversations eliminated them from what I would have included in my inquiry, in any event. Overall, audiotaping our talk during group meetings allowed me to

look more closely at our invention through talk, providing a record of the stories that were told and the invention of texts and strategies for writing.

Because I was interested in how our talk related to our writing, I also gathered all written texts we shared with each other over the focal year of this study (the first thirteen months of our work together as a writing group). In all, group members shared a total of 31 distinct texts, many of which were shared in different forms over several meetings. Our wiki allowed me easily to collect the writing that was shared in group meetings, and these became additional primary sources for my study on our writing group. I collected any pieces of writing that group members shared during meetings, which were most commonly shared via the wiki or Chloe's blog. On occasion, group members also shared writing via email (such as between meetings), which I also collected (Table 4 in Appendix A shows all written work that was shared during the focal year of this project).

These texts shared in meetings, as well as fieldnotes and audiotapes (and later transcripts) of meetings became the primary sources for my study of this writing group, capturing the texts and talk shared during writing group meetings. I also collected email correspondence, which was typically associated with setting up meetings, as well as fieldnotes from phone conversations about the writing group, which became secondary sources. I used these secondary sources mainly to confirm and clarify my understandings of what happened during group meetings.

While our group continues to meet regularly, this book represents my inquiry into the first thirteen months of our work together as a writing group, beginning in October 2008 and extending through November 2009. I focus on this particular time window to capture meetings

for at least one calendar year (a full academic year plus the summer break), and to be able to look across experiences associated with the other group members' first year of teaching. As noted in Chapter 1, as beginning teachers the other members of the writing group faced significant constraints as they sought to pursue writing lives, especially in the midst of entering their first classrooms. The first year of teaching can be an overwhelming experience, as teachers not only enter their first classrooms but also must acclimate themselves to a new school culture and new curricula. Our first year together as a group captures many instances of invention, from the collaborative invention of our writing group itself, to invention of texts and ways of being teacher-writers in the midst of these and other constraints. Extending my study through November 2009 also allows me to include discussions from our two November 2009 meetings, during which we planned a national conference presentation on our work together as an online writing group. Those two November 2009 meetings involved group members reflecting on our first year in the group together, with a focus on how participation in the group has shaped us as writers and teachers.

Inventing Inquiry: Organizing and Making Sense of Our Talk and Texts

My inquiry questions, informed by my theoretical framework of invention, asked the following:

1. How do teacher-writers use participation in a writing group to invent ways to work within and against constraints to initiate and develop their own writing projects?

2. What else, besides written texts, is invented by teacher-writers during writing group meetings?

3. How do the various "outcomes" of teachers' invention shape teacher-writers' experiences and future inventive acts in writing group meetings?

These questions led me to look at my primary sources, the talk and texts from group meetings in certain ways.

The work of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw on writing ethnographic fieldnotes proved particularly useful in writing and analyzing my fieldnotes and in transcribing the conversations on audiotape.   Writing fieldnotes is, in itself, an interpretive act, as is transcribing audiofiles, perhaps especially in the case of our online meetings (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw). I could not see facial expressions or body language during meetings; oral cues were all that came through on our Skype calls. As I wrote about the talk in our meetings, in both fieldnotes and in transcripts, I used oral cues like pauses, inflection, volume, background noise, overlapping of comments, and contextual information to help me describe the speaker's tone, delivery, and content. Often I would return to the same piece of audiotape repeatedly as I wrote, listening again and again in order to try to better translate an oral interaction into written language. These were my first analytical moves: to take what happened in an online, oral meeting and translate it into various forms of text, attempting to characterize tone, emotion, and context.

My fieldnotes tended to emphasize the oral stories and the texts that were shared during our meetings. In fieldnotes I also attempted to connect what happened in meetings to other relevant information: if Karen had told me on the phone that she was having a hard time with one of her classes, for example, I might connect that to what was discussed in a meeting. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw call these notes "asides," which they describe as "brief, reflective bits of analytic writing that succinctly clarify, explain, interpret, or raise questions about some

specific happening or process described in a fieldnote" (101). I made use of asides in writing both my fieldnotes and transcripts. These brief interpretive or questioning moves, bracketed in my fieldnotes and transcripts, often became a launching point for later analyses.

As I wrote fieldnotes and transcribed audiofiles, I also wrote analytical memos, elaborating my asides and exploring next steps and next questions (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw; Heath and Street; Bogdan and Biklen). I used analytical memo-writing to refine my inquiry questions, sometimes looking across a transcript for themes or connecting talk and texts across multiple meetings to follow the development of a text or conversation. For example, in a meeting where Jenna first described her invention of her fictional character "Jo", I made a note of Jenna's reference to Jo being "in my head" first as an aside in my fieldnotes. I then returned to the transcript and fieldnotes to elaborate that aside into a multi-page memo, in which I explored all such references to character invention and Jenna's development of ideas during that meeting. I then looked at the texts and talk from each meeting where Jenna described her fiction writing, which became a later memo. Memos like these often became springboards for future analytical writing, as I synthesized multiple memos on related topics to refine my interpretations and to look across group meetings and texts for similar patterns. These memos that began with Jenna's development of her fictional character eventually turned into a portion of Chapter 6 in this book. This process of memoing, or writing to learn and make sense of my inquiry, also resonated with me as a writer. Indeed, my writing played a critical role in my research process, as I inquired into and made sense of invention in our writing group.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw also emphasize the significance of researchers treating the fieldnotes as a complete text, "reviewing, experiencing, and reexamining everything that has

been written down, while self-consciously seeking to identify themes, patterns, and variations within this record" (144). This emphasis on *reading* my data also resonates with me as an English teacher educator and as a writer, and it was a central feature of my analysis. Reading across my fieldnotes and transcripts, as well as across group members' written texts, allowed me to explore development, recurring themes, and the way we orally connected our inventive work across meetings and across texts. In all, I had fieldnotes and transcripts for twenty writing group meetings, each two hours in length. I also had email correspondence and fieldnotes from several phone conversations with members between meetings. Reading through these texts for patterns informed my analytic memo-writing. As Heath and Street write, "Most of us think through writing. The more we write, the more we think, and the more we read our own writing, the more both our thinking and our composition improve" (128).

The way I organized my sources also supported my reading and analysis of the talk and texts in this study. For example, in one analytical pass, I aligned the fieldnotes, transcripts, and shared written texts from each meeting. This move also allowed me to "locate language and modes in use within their scene, situation, and time frame" (Heath and Street 127). Reading through all the texts associated with each meeting, in the order they were experienced, allowed me to re-experience that meeting. As I read through the sources in this way, I again created initial jottings, where I annotated the texts I was reading to capture my observations and the patterns I was observing. For example, in reading the texts and transcripts from our first meeting in February 2009, I observed group members telling multiple and varied stories about teaching and writing, sometimes orally and sometimes through writing. I initially focused in on the stories associated with Chloe's text "Identity Crisis," noting what constraints Chloe

reported and how her written and oral stories related to other stories told during that same meeting. Those memos became the first layers of what is now Chapter 3 in this book.

I also conducted focused reads of just the written texts each group member shared during this focal year, and I then connected these back to the transcripts and fieldnotes in order to further analyze patterns I saw developing. To support my organization and reading of these texts, I created a table of all writing that was shared during the focal year, noting either the title or description of the text as well as the genre (a variation of this table is presented above as Table 4 in Appendix A). I used this table, and variations of it, repeatedly as I wrote about the texts group members shared. For example, because I was interested in how writing group members invented our own writing projects, I made one pass through this chart and coded all self-initiated projects in one color and all externally-initiated projects in another color. I then coded again for the intended audience of each text. I used those coded tables to help me read back through group members' texts as I wrote about ways we approached writing in different contexts. That analysis became the basis for Chapter 6, where I explored various ways group members initiated their own writing projects and responded to writing projects initiated by others (a variation of that coded table may also be found in Chapter 6). On another pass through the chart, I noted the central topic or theme of each written text, paying particular attention to where we wrote about personal content and where we wrote about content related to teaching. That analysis, and the memos that came out of it, helped me consider how the genre and audience of a text shape the inventive strategies we used. In writing memos based on those coding observations, I also made connections back to the transcripts and fieldnotes.

Overall, my analysis of the talk and texts from our writing group meetings emphasized *writing and reading* throughout, as I wrote in various genres to describe and show oral conversations (in transcripts and fieldnotes), as I wrote about patterns and questions that arose from reading through data (in analytical memos), as I wrote to describe types of talk and texts that were shared in meetings (in transcripts, narratives, and dialogues), as I wrote to articulate questions and interpretations, and as I re-read all of these texts to explore patterns and generate additional memos. Each of my interpretive moves was situated within my inquiry, in which I sought to showcase and explore ways of being teacher-writers that are not foregrounded in the literature, such as Karen and Chloe inventing ways of being urban teachers or Nell inventing ways of writing even professional texts like student recommendation letters. I sought to look beyond the texts to consider what else was being invented, to explore how group members felt constrained as writers and how they worked within and against those constraints, and to discern how outcomes of our inventions led to future inventions. These and related questions guided my ways of organizing the talk and texts I had collected, my ways of reading, and my ways of talking about these with my own research colleagues.

Inventing Ways to Inquire through Writing, and through Writing to Share Inquiry

This was a study where the line between the "inquiry" and the "writing it up" were blurred and sometimes did not even exist (Schaafsma and Vinz; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw; Heath and Street). I was writing and inquiring throughout this project: as I wrote my own texts and shared these with fellow group members; as I wrote about what we discussed in my fieldnotes and transcripts; and as I wrote again and again to explore patterns, consider

inventive moves, compare experiences across meetings, and inquire into my interpretations.

Across these different experiences with writing, I wrote different genres depending on my purpose and what I was exploring. Many of my initial memos and comparative memos might read almost like lists, or journal entries, or quick question-and-answer responses. Sometimes I took a piece of data and wrote down all I could observe about it as a first step. These were my ways into writing about this writing group.

I also began to draw more purposefully on work related to narrative inquiry as I moved through my analysis, using narrative writing as an additional mode of inquiry (Schaafsma and Vinz). In their text *On Narrative Inquiry,* Schaafsma and Vinz describe the process of writing a narrative account of an experience as a process of inquiry. They advise taking moments from a study and writing them up as "narrative nuggets," or narrative bits, which "might nudge you to question further, to tell other stories," describing such stories as "often the beginning of the inquiry"(3). They write that research grows out of the "telling, questioning, and rendering of narratives," where *narrating* "is to do more than 'give' an account or 'tell' a story" (3). Citing Riessman (2008), they speak of the writing itself as a critical analytical tool, with a central goal "to *(re)live* an experience in narrative" (Schaafsma and Vinz 53; Riessman). This discussion of narrative inquiry deepens some earlier work in the field (Clandinin and Connelly), with Schaafsma and Vinz emphasizing the significance of storytelling craft decisions, of showing (rather than telling) what occurs in a research setting, thereby drawing on moves often associated with creative nonfiction writing . They claim, "the verb *narrate* suggests shaping through strategies such as repetition, intensity, linkage, magnification, tensions, and/or interpretations," making the presence of the author visible "in the markings of the text and in

the crafting and shaping of the experiences" (3).   In making these claims, they join other

researchers who look to story as a tool for inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly; Pagnucci; Paley

"Must Teachers Also Be Writers?").

Indeed, this tradition of narrative inquiry is not so far removed from ethnography.

Heath and Street advise ethnographers, "Give transcribed material identity with the speaker(s).

Consider the work of novelists who enable readers to know the character as well as to hear the

words he or she speaks" (Heath and Street 127).   Yet where Heath and Street are suggesting

writing up research using techniques borrowed from novelists, Schaafsma and Vinz (and other

researchers identifying with narrative inquiry) are explicit in pointing to the significance of

narrative as a mode of inquiry as well.   They are pointing to the process of writing narratives

based on the texts and transcripts from research, as a means of inquiring more deeply into

those sources.

Indeed I found this process of writing narrative bits from my research, drawing on the

strategies associated with creative nonfiction, to be a critical part of my analysis.   For example, I

wrote vignettes from the transcripts of Chloe sharing each version of her "Identity Crisis" text,

using the genre of narrative to help me inquire into relationships between Chloe's text and the

talk during those meetings, as well as to show the interactions between group members.

Writing those vignettes in narrative form forced me to attend closely to the flow of the

conversation, the way different people spoke or responded to comments.   Doing this kind of

writing required me to listen to audiotapes and revisit transcripts over and over again, as I tried

to "(re)live" those moments from past meetings.   In other narrative vignettes I wrote, I was

pushed to characterize the nature of a verbal exchange, for example the discomfort in Nell's

voice as she talked about having to prepare a wedding toast and the ways Karen took on

different students' voices when she told a story. In this way, writing so much of this book

through narrative forced a different kind of attention to detail, and was an important part of

my analytical process. All the time I was writing these narrative bits of this story, I continued

writing memos and reflective notes on new patterns that emerged. Writing truly ran

throughout this inquiry.

Ultimately, I chose to write as much of this dissertation as possible in narrative form. I

made this choice for three reasons. First, I felt that narrative allowed me to bring thick

descriptions of our writing group meetings to life, to allow readers to experience something of

our writing group meetings and witness something of our inventions. Indeed, narrative writing

is featured in many ethnographies (cf. Cintron; Fisher; Heller; Lindquist), as well as in other

qualitative or interpretivist research (cf. Dyson; Paley <u>You Can't Say You Can't Play;</u> Paley <u>White</u>

<u>Teacher</u>). Second, writing this book in narrative form had the additional affordance of being

consistent with my choice to employ narrative writing as a mode of inquiry. Writing narrative

vignettes forced me to attend in different ways to the talk and texts shared in our meetings, to

seek to tell a story about moments in group meetings and patterns across group meetings. As

mentioned above, re-creating transcripts and audiofiles as written stories or vignettes often

required me to return to the same excerpt of an audiofile over and over as I sought to best

show group members' interactions. This writing process also forced me to consider how best

to relate the different moments I wanted to include, which prompted another layer of

interpretation as I considered how best to *show* these relationships among moments, wherever

possible.

Finally, I wrote in narrative form because I wanted this book to speak to a broader audience. Not just English teacher educators, not just educational researchers, not just teachers, but all three. While a range of genres are promoted in teacher action research, the ones that are published in practitioner journals are often written in a different genre than those published in research journals. There are mixed messages on what counts as what kind of contribution to the field, with third-person expository/analytical writing often prioritized over first-person narrative. In writing up this study, however, I felt I would lose too much by sacrificing the narrative. Writers will tell us that content and purpose should suggest form and genre, that an aesthetic fit and an audience fit matter when making writing decisions. This book, as it seeks to speak to a wide audience of teachers, English teacher educators, and educational researchers, and as it seeks to show the talk and texts writing group members share, felt like a strong fit with narrative writing. I believe that a contribution of this study is the way it enacts, through writing, the collaboration between its various audiences. Indeed, that collaboration runs throughout our writing group experience.

Indeed one of my personal goals for this project was to create a text that performed, through the writing, my commitment to collaboration between teachers, writers, English teacher educators, and English education researchers. I wanted this to be a book that would speak across audiences and in some small way, help legitimize the ways of writing promoted for teacher-researchers (Check "I Teach, (I Feel), I Write"; Whitney "Writer, Teacher, Person"). Teachers often are encouraged to write in order to take what they learn in their classrooms and in their writing lives and share it with a broader audience in the field. In this case I was not in a classroom, but I was learning a great deal about writing and invention through my interaction

with my writing group members, and I wanted to share that learning with as broad an audience as possible.

In her article about a participant's overlapping use of personal and professional writing in a NWP summer institute, Anne Whitney observed, "a barrier to teachers who would write professionally is not only the challenge of putting insights into seemingly inaccessible academic prose but also the potential inaccessibility of those insights themselves when they are pursued solely through academic prose" ("Writer, Teacher, Person" 256). In this statement, Whitney highlights the importance of teachers and researchers exploring ways to both inquire into and write about their practice using a variety of genres and styles. I seek to provide a book-length model of what this might look like, a model of a way to stage a serious and nuanced inquiry incorporating the use of narrative writing.

Bounding This Inquiry

While there are many things this inquiry can and does explore, it is just as important to consider what it does not set out to do, or its boundaries. This project focused on invention in talk and writing during writing group meetings. I did not follow the teachers into their classrooms to see in what ways, if any, they used strategies or texts we discussed in writing group in their classes. I did not ask them to share all the writing they did in between meetings or track what happened to texts outside of meetings, such as which texts they revised and in what ways. I cannot know, therefore, whether Nell wrote five or two drafts of a poem, or what other texts Karen wrote besides those she shared. I cannot know what writing Chloe may have shared with her students, or when Jenna actually wrote a text she shared with our group.

Unless actions are described out loud, they are hidden in group meetings. Indeed, each of us is only aware of what other group members choose to share and what comes up organically in our conversation.

While these other approaches of following the production or sharing of texts may be intriguing and may show certain things that this study cannot, following any one of these alternate approaches would require shifting the focus from the writing group meeting as a site for study. They would also involve shifting the focus from the writer to the development of a text or classroom practice. These boundaries are important to this project, however, for they foreground my interest in our social invention as a writing group, as well as our invention of other things besides texts and classroom practices. Overall, I sought to create a study that foregrounds teachers as whole people who write for many reasons, not just in service of their teaching and professional gains, and who seek to purposefully invent space in their lives for that writing. Consequently, I focus this study on the talk and texts that are shared during writing group meetings, and I look there for evidence of this invention.

Additionally, this is not a study of a professional development program, or a model of an intervention into teacher learning. I did not seek to prepare a program or an experience for others and then observe what happened, and I do not intend to present a model of a writing group that can be replicated exactly in a different context or with different participants ("meet twice a month, add talk, and stir"). Rather, this book presents a close look at people talking and writing together over time and through careful attention. Our writing group would look different with different writers, and our group experience would change if any one of us were to leave the group, or if another writer were to join. That, in itself, is one of the contributions

of the study, in that it foregrounds the whole people who join together and collaborate to invent a writing group.

Contributing an Example of Collaboration between Teacher-Writers

As noted earlier, I had several overlapping roles in this writing group: I was an English teacher educator (and the other group members' former university instructor), I was a writer, and I was a researcher. I was not, however, an institution or a part of an ongoing professional development initiative. I was not working through a school district that employed any of these teachers, and I was not affiliated with any particular writing program or network. I suggested and helped create the group because I, like the other members, wanted to write. I like these women, and I wanted to both help them and receive help from them in creating space for writing. So, while my role was complex and layered, I was primarily a fellow writer. As such, I shared my writing, I developed strategies for inventing ways into writing, ways of being, and ways of intervening. I wrote things I would not have written, in ways I would not have written them, were it not for the conversations and support of my fellow group members. I invented ways of being a writer, just as other members did. Therefore, my inquiry into this project was never that of an outside observer, watching what "they" did. My inquiry was into what *we* invented, in various ways and across various meetings and texts and conversations.

Grace McEntee, in her article "Diving with Whales," advocates for teachers to write for publication because, while so much writing about teachers and teaching is from the outside, teachers are uniquely able to write from the inside. In this inquiry, I was in the metaphorical water with my fellow writing group members. In many ways this is an unusual collaboration

between an English teacher educator and first-year teachers. In this writing relationship, we invented ways to interact with each other, and these teacher-writers truly shaped my ways of writing. I believe that this collaboration between my fellow group members as beginning teachers and me as educational researcher/English teacher educator is an additional contribution of this study, providing a model for collaboration between those committed to teaching and writing in the university and in schools.

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