Reimagining instructional practices: exploring the identity work of teachers of writing

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Abstract:

This article provides a cross-case analysis of three teachers who participated in a two-week professional development (PD) on the teaching of writing that addressed their own identities as writers. This is an area that is commonly overlooked and how teachers view themselves as writers may play an important role in how they help their students to think of themselves as writers, may shape the conversations they have about writing, and may influence the kinds of writing opportunities they provide. Drawing on an identity perspective, the findings illustrate how the opportunity to construct and enact writing identities shaped how the teachers understood the teaching of writing. As they engaged in the writing process, collaborated in writing groups, and conversed in writing conferences with student writers in a weeklong writing camp, teachers reimagined their practice to include more nuanced writing instruction that focused on the capabilities of students as writers.

Keywords: identity | teachers | writing | professional development

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Reimagining Instructional Practices: Exploring the Identity Work of Teachers of Writing

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Understanding writing instruction, including whether or not teachers teach writing at all, has received considerable attention since the mid 1980s when scholars, such as Lucy Calkins (1984), Donald Graves (1983), and Donald Murray (1985), first promoted an understanding of the writing process as a method for teaching rather than as a cognitive process (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The plethora of professional books offered by publishers, such as Heinemann and Routledge, reflects these scholars' influence on the understanding of writing instruction and shows that there is no shortage of books that address how to teach writing. What is commonly overlooked, however, is that as teachers learn to teach writing, their own identities as writers (or non-writers) may be just as important to consider and address as the methods themselves. How teachers view themselves as writers may play an important role in how they help their students to think of themselves as writers, may shape the conversations they have about writing, and may influence the kinds of writing opportunities they provide.

This study provides a cross-case analysis of three teachers who participated in a two-week professional development (PD) on the teaching of writing. Our analysis shows that teachers' understanding of teaching writing shifted in response to the construction and enactment of writing identities. In other words, when given the opportunity to write with specific kinds of support and instruction, teachers changed their beliefs about writing instruction. While we will describe the particulars of the PD in more detail later, it is important to point out that during this time we asked teachers to engage in the writing process, compose a final piece that was shared with the whole group, participate in writing groups, and apply their understanding of writing by teaching students in a one-week writing camp. The first two of these strategies—having teachers engage in writing and participate in writing groups—are not necessarily unique attributes of this PD as these are strategies commonly used by the National Writing Project (NWP) and affiliates;

however, what is unique about this study is that we purposefully addressed teachers' identities as writers throughout the process. Further, asking teachers to apply their understanding by teaching in a writing camp provided an opportunity to explore new practices in a low-stakes environment.

Literature Review
Writing Identities of Teachers

This article draws from an identity perspective to illustrate how the construction and enactment of writer identities shaped three teachers' understandings of writing instruction and personal writing practices. Specifically, we draw from poststructural concepts of identity that are defined as "self-understandings" or "a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them" and are a base "from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (Holland et al., 2001, p. 5). Identities, then, are multiple, shifting, and are shaped by sociocultural contexts. An identity framework recognizes that learning is not only about understanding a set of skills and strategies but is also a process in which people construct and negotiate identities in order to become members of particular communities, such as a school.

Researchers often use an identity framework to inform scholarship about teacher learning specifically related to how teachers are shaped by past experiences, teacher education, and their interaction with other people (Cooper & Olson, 1996; Danielewicz, 2001) and how they negotiate previous assumptions related to sociocultural notions of education (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Fairbanks, et al., 2010). In particular, scholarship in the field of literacy education illustrates that teachers' identities shape literacy instruction (Andrews, 2008; Commeyras, Bisplinhoff & Olson, 2003; Gennrich & Janks, 2013). For example, a study of reading educators revealed how teachers' conceptions of reading identities framed and limited children's identities as readers (Hall et al., 2010). The teachers' conceptions of the students shaped how they interacted with them, and as a result the students identified as "good" or "bad" readers. Gennrich and Janks (2013) suggested that teachers may "recreate" their own literacy identities in their students. These identities shape the choices teachers make for instruction including whether lessons are teacher-directed or student-centered, how teachers speak or listen, and to whom they speak and listen. Thus, teachers can impact students' literacy identity work in positive ways by making connections to students' lives that foster investment in learning (Alvermann et al., 1999; Dyson, 1999).

With that said, literacy scholars have also been asking questions about the ways in which teachers' writing identities shape writing instruction. For decades, research has examined whether and how literacy teachers should write (Jost, 1990; Whitney, 2009). Such research offers a wide range of suggestions, from asserting that teachers do not have the time to write (Jost, 1990), to claiming that writing enhances professionalism by having teachers engaged in doing what they also teach (Gillespie, 1991). Other research questions if teacher writing shapes the teaching of writing at all (Robbins, 1996). In a recent literature review on teachers as writers, Cremin & Oliver (2016) found that many teachers do not take a broad notion of what counts as writing, and they often express having low self-confidence and negative writing histories that challenge how they write

and teach writing. With those understandings, much work in the NWP is founded on the belief that writing is fundamental to teaching writing.

To further explore this topic, more research has focused specifically on the writing identities of teachers, which we know are constructed in relation and through interaction with others such as their students (McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Hall, 2008). In addition, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors shape writer identity positionings and writing instruction (Cremin & Baker, 2014). Cremin and Baker (2010) examined the ways two teachers positioned themselves as teachers of writing. For example, the teachers had to find ways to negotiate how to develop lifelong authors in their classrooms with helping students be successful on timed, standardized writing prompts. McKinney and Giorgis (2009) used eleven teachers' writer autobiographies to explore the interconnections between teachers' identities as writers and their identities as teachers of writing. They found that the participants' experiences writing in elementary school shaped their current identities as writers and teachers of writing.

Many teachers are unaware of the role their writing histories play in their classroom pedagogy and practice (Yeo, 2007). For example, research has shown that when teachers write, their confidence, modeling, enthusiasm, and writerly behavior benefits young writers in their classrooms (Draper, Barksdale-Ladd & Radencich, 2000; Murray, 1985; Root & Steinburg, 1996). Specifically, writing groups open opportunities for teachers to write together in ways that develop confidence and strengthen pedagogy through the practice of writing and through the conversations that arise around written texts (Smith & Wrigley, 2012). Thus, talk about writing with other teachers and opportunities to write in multiple ways (e.g., narrative and/or expository) shape teachers' developing sense of being a writer and teacher (Whitney, 2009). Burke (2006) found that even if teachers have negative identities as writers, reflective practices may help them redefine what it means to be a teacher-writer and a writer-teacher. In keeping with the assumption that identity is dynamic and that the ways teachers see themselves as writers may evolve over time, PD may serve as an activity through which to reconsider writing identities.

Teacher Learning

Students need educators who continue to grow and develop their skills beyond their preparation programs. While every school context is unique, successful PD can continue to shape classroom teachers' learning. Much of the research on PD, however, shows that it is often ineffective because the teachers are frequently told by "others" what they need to know and do and leave feeling they are no better suited to meet the needs of the students in their school (Hanushek, 2005; Sykes, 1996). Research on PD for teachers has shifted in the last decade from delivering and evaluating PD programs to focusing more on authentic teacher learning and the conditions that support it (Webster-Wright, 2009). Additional research has shown that this approach to PD can be influential in determining whether or not teachers adopt new practices (Payne, 2008).

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) suggest that PD is most successful at influencing teaching practices when it a) encourages collaborative learning; b) links between curriculum, assessment and professional learning decisions; c) involves active learning; d) pushes for deeper knowledge of content and

how to teach it; and e) sustains learning over multiple days and weeks. When teachers have opportunities to learn in a supportive community, their knowledge grows at greater rates (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Furthermore, PD must engage teachers in activities sensitive to their teaching contexts and have a clear vision for student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, Yoon, 2001; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Those who provide PD can make it active by having teachers observe each other and by reviewing and reflecting on student work (Penuel, Fishman, Tamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). These activities often foster a deeper knowledge of content. Finally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) suggest that PD that engages teachers between 30 to 100 hours is more likely to increase student achievement. For this to happen, teacher learning must be conceptualized as a complex system rather than an event (Collins & Clarke, 2008), which assumes that many dynamics are interacting together in different ways and leads teachers to critically and collaboratively examine and refine their practices.

It is not surprising that teachers often find it difficult to deliver effective writing instruction (Troia & Maddox, 2004) since many teachers have had little training in the teaching of writing in their preservice preparation or inservice PD workshops (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Moreover, teachers' decisions to change their instructional practices in writing are influenced by the broader system of incentives and sanctions present in their instructional contexts (Smith & O'Day, 1991). However, one form of writing PD does not follow these trends. Research on the NWP shows teachers and their students' learning are impacted after teachers participate in their programs (Kim et al., 2011; Stokes, 2011). For example, in 2010, 96% of the 3,000 teachers who participated in the NWP institute reported that when compared to other PD, they left feeling stronger in their skills and strategies to teach writing (Stokes, 2011). For over 40 years the NWP, founded by James Gray, and its over 200 sites in all 50 states, have supported teachers in examining and transforming their teaching practice. They accomplish this goal by providing inservice teachers opportunities to share their expertise and experience with colleagues in hands-on investigations of practice so that everyone involved learns. Each local writing project site follows a model of professional learning and support including summer institutes with ongoing opportunities for learning throughout the school year. During the summer institutes teachers of writing from Kindergarten through higher education come together and learn by engaging in writing themselves, inquiring into their own teaching, and reading current research and theory about the teaching of writing. At the end of the summer institute, teachers are invited to consider how they will continue their participation in the writing project community and as teachers do this, they have an opportunity to reimagine who they are as educators.

Reimagining Practice

When teachers reimagine their practice, they push for a more nuanced understanding of their role in how much students are capable of achieving as writers. This is possible when teachers position students in a curriculum constructed of real experiences and foster interactions between learners. Becoming strong writers requires spending time writing, not just listening to instruction about how to be a good writer or using predetermined forms of writing, such as the five paragraph essay. Researchers have conducted large-scale studies of writing instructional practices at the elementary level

(Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010) and high school level (Applebee & Langer, 2009, 2011; Kiuhara, Graham & Hawken, 2009). The teachers in these studies did use evidence-based practices although more than half did not use these practices on a regular basis. A national study of primary grade writing instruction (Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, & MacArthur, 2003) showed considerable variability in how much time students spent composing, ranging from 0 to 380 minutes per week. The Writing Study Group of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Executive Committee (2004) advocated that writing instruction must include in class and out of class opportunities for writing and that students should compose for a variety of purposes and audiences. In addition, teachers of writing should know about composition theory research and how to turn theory into practice. Yet, in a study of high school writing practices (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009), teachers reported infrequent use of composition research to inform their practices. Applebee and Langer (2013) found that most of the writing that occurred in their study of 20 middle and high schools did not involve composing, but rather fill-in-the-blank, copying, and constructing short answers.

Reimagining practice means recognizing that teachers must reflect on what lies behind their teaching decisions, the assignments they design, and the comments they make about student work. In addition, they must recognize that they can be powerful models for students. As a consequence, it is essential that teachers view themselves as confident writers (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Graham et al. (2003) found that teachers with higher efficacy for teaching writing provided more opportunities for students to practice writing and made more adaptations for struggling writers. Thus, it is important for writing teachers to be aware of how their personal writing experiences and beliefs affect their instruction. When teachers engage in writing themselves, they have a greater ability to connect with their students as writers (Cremin, 2006; Kaplan, 2008). Reimagining practice means that it is never too late for teachers to question their assumptions, rationales, and even completely overhaul how they teach writing. However, gradual shifts in orientation, such as revising practice rather than radically changing it, may be more realistic for teachers who are not prepared for such drastic moves or who prefer to use their own dilemmas, perplexities, and curiosities to guide their writing instruction.

Many of the recent studies that examine literacy teachers' identities focus on preservice teachers (Alsup, 2006; Burnett, 2011) or novice teachers (Graham, 2008) and do not purposefully address teachers' identities as writers. In addition, few studies extend the scope of their focus to examine the role of writing identities in relationship to revising teaching practices. Thus, this research addresses that gap by examining how the construction and enactment of writer identities shaped three teachers' understanding of writing instruction in a two-week writing PD session.

Method

All five authors of this article designed and helped lead the PD, collected data, and analyzed the data. At the time of data collection, three of us were university faculty and two of us were doctoral candidates. We drew on qualitative case study methods (Stake, 1995) and collected multiple sources of data across the two weeks of PD. These sources included field notes, interviews (individual and focus group), audio and video

recordings of whole and small group interactions, surveys, and artifacts created during the PD that included teachers' daybooks and writing. Together these data sources helped us examine the question: In what ways did the construction and enactment of writer identities shape three teachers' understanding of writing instruction?

Context

The PD session was provided for one school district, and a total of 17 teachers attended voluntarily. The school district resided in a rural area in the Southeastern United States and consisted of eight schools (five elementary, two middle, and one high school) and about 5,000 students. This district was experiencing a shift in demographics—from a historically white student population to a Latino majority. At the time of the study, about 43% of the student body were Latinos, 38% were White, and the remaining percentage were Black, Asian, or multiracial. About 74% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch and about 18% were classified as having limited English proficiency. Representatives from the district, including the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, approached us because they were concerned about their students' writing and teachers' ability to address the district's goals. Together we created the two-week PD described here.

The PD occurred across two four-day weeks in the summer at a designated district building. In keeping with the district's writing initiative, the focus of the PD was on writing informational texts at K-12 levels. The first week consisted of addressing content such as the writing process, writing genres, content-area writing, the use of daybooks (notebooks used for writing and collecting ideas), and strategies for teaching writing. In addition to learning about and practicing instructional approaches for writing, teachers also invested substantial time on writing and engaging in writing workshop (Calkins, 1994). Participants began by composing a modification of "occasional papers" developed by Bill Martin (2003) on a topic of their choice. These personal papers were intended to be brief reflections on life in which the writer explores an "occasion" in life, such as a topic or an experience. These occasional papers served as a starting point for the teachers to build from as they composed more detailed expository texts, meeting the district's instructional focus, that wove together research, argumentation, and individual perspectives. Using the writing process, teachers learned to select forms to align with their audiences, topics, and purposes; to analyze mentor texts for elements and author's craft; to develop mini-lessons; and to employ digital publishing techniques.

During the second week, we continued to address writing instruction and teachers worked on developing their final writing pieces. In addition, we incorporated a daily two-hour writing camp with students in grades 2 through 12 that district representatives helped us recruit. During this time teachers practiced the skills and techniques they had learned with support from peers and instructors. Teachers were provided with time to plan for writing camp in the morning and then we observed them working with small groups of students in the afternoon. They worked in one of three groups depending on students' grade levels—elementary, middle, or high school. The overall goal of the writing camp was to help students write an OP and develop it into a finished piece of writing, similar to what the teachers were doing. Teachers worked

together to plan mini-lessons and confer with the students about their writing. At the end of the day, we debriefed with teachers about writing camp.

An important feature of the PD consisted of regular opportunities to reflect on the ways teachers saw themselves as writers and how such reflections shaped teachers' understanding of both their students and their teaching. These activities included post-activity responses asking teachers to reflect on the activity in relation to their writing identities, beginning and ending guided opportunities to share new or changing perspectives on the writing process and its impact on them as writers, and reflections on writing group work. These activities often involved specific daybook questions and responses about the teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers and as teachers of writing and how these perceptions were changing across the PD. The aim of these activities was to keep writing identities in the forefront as the teachers experienced the writing process for themselves. As a result, we were able to collect data that focused specifically on our research question.

Participants

All 17 teachers consented to participate in this study. These teachers' experience ranged from one to 15 years and included elementary to secondary content area teachers (e.g., social studies, journalism) and English/Language Arts (ELA) teachers. The three teachers featured in this article were purposefully selected as they represent three teaching levels (elementary, middle, and high), had varying years of experience, and had different teaching assignments. Meredith was a fourth-grade teacher who had just completed her first year of teaching after graduating from a traditional four-year teacher preparation program. Currently teaching seventh-grade ELA, Carla was in her sixteenth year of teaching. Lane was a high school teacher who taught Advanced Placement US History, Civics, and Teacher Cadets (e.g., a course for students interested in a teaching as a career). She had 15 years of experience in the classroom.

Data Analysis

We used constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop and iteratively apply open codes to each data source. We focused on drawing out themes from the data rather than using a pre-established set of codes. We used our research question to guide our inquiry: In what ways did the construction and enactment of writer identities shape teachers' understanding of writing instruction and personal writing practices? There were three main stages in our process. In the first stage of data analysis, we each focused on one type of data, reading through it multiple times to create initial codes. For example, one researcher focused on daybooks, another on individual interviews, another on field notes, etc. We then met together to discuss our initial findings. The initial codes we collectively created included identifying specific aspects of the professional development that teachers were referring to in the data sources (e.g., the daybooks, writing groups, their writing identities).

The next stage of data analysis consisted of returning to original data sources to cross-check our initial codes and reread for clarity. We grouped related codes into more descriptive categories (e.g., "being a writing teacher but not identifying as a writer"), and we focused on instances when teachers positioned themselves as writers/non-writers

(e.g., "I've never really seen myself as a writer.") or when they expressed something related to their understanding of writing instruction (e.g., "I want to make sure to give my kids more freedom to choose their own topics when they write.").

In the third stage of data analysis, we selected our three focal cases and each researcher chose one case to develop. In order to probe more deeply, each researcher created a data set for the participant she was focusing on that included interviews, daybooks, teachers' own writing, and field notes where the participant was mentioned. We reread the data sets for our focal cases and then developed portraits of each participant. This included creating a chart that listed data excerpts that were organized according to how the participant positioned herself as a writer/non-writer and as a teacher of writing. Once these individual portraits were created, we looked across the three cases to develop our cross-case analysis where commonalities and differences were highlighted.

Findings

We now turn to our three focal cases and describe the ways in which each teacher constructed and enacted her writing identity and how this identity shaped her understanding of writing instruction and personal writing practices. The three focal cases we chose were similar in that each teacher shifted her understanding of herself as a writer and of teaching writing in some way. At the same time, we were interested in these three cases because they all had different backgrounds and teaching experiences. We felt it was important to consider the experiences from different points of view.

Meredith: A Novice Teacher Takes on a Writing Identity

Meredith completed the PD fresh from her first year of teaching. She was in her early twenties and had only been out of school for one year before taking a fourth grade position in the district. She began the PD with a negative view of herself as a writer. By the end of the PD, she identified positively as a writer and increased her confidence in herself. Her new identity as a writer was important for her to share with her students so they could also see her as a writer.

A writing teacher with room to grow as a writer. While some teachers did not feel confident in their ability to teach writing, Meredith actually seemed to feel more comfortable with teaching writing than with actually writing herself. As a fourth grade teacher, Meredith was expected by her district to have her students write essays, of which she said they each wrote 10 during the school year. She admitted that when she first began, she was unsure about how to teach writing.

> I didn't know where to begin, because a lot of the students each had different things that they didn't know, or didn't do well in, so it was hard to decide where to start, because I would start with one thing, like putting periods at the ends of our sentences because some of us didn't....so it was just a struggle to figure out where to start with writing instruction. I don't know if it's, we start all the way back to making complete sentences, just, like we've been doing writing. I don't know where to go.

Like many novice teachers, Meredith was not sure about where to begin her writing instruction. With district expectations for students to produce essays, Meredith had to get

her students composing quickly. As she gained more experience during the school year, she gained a better understanding of how to teach essay writing.

Her approach to teaching writing seemed largely formulaic and process-oriented in terms of moving through different stages of the writing process (e.g., brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing). She described her strengths as a writing teacher to be: "I can explain and model how to create a well-written paragraph that introduces the topic and has a conclusion that leads to the next topic." Her report of what she did well shows how she approached essay writing as having required steps and parts. Although we did not ask her directly about why she took this approach, we can infer that this may have been how she learned to write or how the district encouraged teachers to teach essay writing.

By the end of her first year of teaching, Meredith said she felt somewhat confident about teaching her students to write essays after having the year to work on it. So, she had an identity as a writing teacher, but as far as her own writing, she still felt like she had room to improve. She said,

> I think I developed a little bit more of a confidence when I was actually teaching it, but I still feel like I could learn a whole lot more about writing. So I kind of...I'd say I'm a little mediocre, you know, not the best at it.

In this way, Meredith compartmentalized teaching writing and personal writing practices as separate from each other. She recognized that she was able to teach writing, at least the essays required by her district. On the other hand, she admitted that she needed to learn more about the teaching of writing.

Her understanding of writing as being process-oriented and skills-based, as well as her belief that she had room to grow as a writer, was further communicated when she wrote in her initial survey: "Although I enjoy teaching the writing process and conventions to my students, I believe I have more room to grow myself in writing. I feel that with more practice and time to write I can grow to become a better writer and a more fluent writer." Based on these statements, we can see how Meredith approached the PD with a stronger identity as a writing teacher than as a writer, and she viewed these as two separate identities.

A writing teacher who discovers the necessity of writing. Having a negative view of herself as a writer, Meredith believed she had room to grow as a writer. She also shared that she had mixed experiences with writing, with it especially being a struggle once she got to college and was expected to write more. As she reflected on her memories of writing from birth to the present, she said her first good experience with writing did not occur until she was enrolled in a sociology course in college. She described herself as struggling with writing and said, "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not very good at grammar and things like that." This statement also tells us about her view of what writing is, that it depends on one's ability to compose grammatically correct sentences, rather than to communicate ideas. Her experiences with writing as a student were largely limited. She said, "We honestly didn't do a lot of writing in school." The lack of writing experiences in school not only limited her understanding of writing, but also did little to build her identity or confidence as a writer.

Writing during the PD and participating in a writing group were the two things that Meredith seemed to think had the most influence in her developing a different relationship with writing. Beginning the first day, we asked teachers to write for an

extended period of time with the understanding that they would develop a final composition by the end of the two weeks. Meredith explained that she did not immediately understand the reason for asking them to write. "I had such a difficult time writing! I came into the PD with a bit of a negative attitude towards writing and just did not feel like it was necessary for me to write." Teachers' reactions to sitting and writing during the PD varied from enjoyment to resistance like Meredith. In the end, all seemed to recognize the importance of this time and appreciate it as Meredith had. At the close of the two weeks, she reflected on the professional development and said, "It was a different experience that I never thought I would have with writing. So I'm glad I was able to do it myself, like I'm glad you guys made us write." The statements she made from the beginning to the end of the two weeks show that Meredith shifted her attitude towards writing and that she came to understand why we wanted them to engage in writing.

Writing groups were important for Meredith too. During the two weeks teachers met several times with the same group of three to four teachers to discuss their writing. Getting immediate feedback and encouragement from the group was helpful for Meredith in taking up a writing identity. In a reflection in her daybook, she described this experience.

> I enjoy talking and discussing rather than writing, and now I have started to see that what I say can be put into words in an effective manner. I have realized that the only way to become a better writer is to write and let others hear and see what I have written. Not be ashamed but proud of my work even if it isn't the best.

In this reflection, Meredith shared her realization that what she says can be written down. This phenomenon is something that we often try to communicate with children, that what you can say can be put into writing. For Meredith, an adult and a teacher, to make this realization shows that it is important for anyone to understand regardless of experience or age. Had Meredith had more writing opportunities earlier on, she may have understood this in more depth. Meredith also articulated the importance of writing in order to improve, and she acknowledged the importance of sharing writing with others. The writing groups gave Meredith an opportunity to share her writing at all stages of the process. Had teachers been asked to write in isolation, she likely would not have reached the same conclusions about the importance of talking about and sharing writing. Her statement about not being ashamed of her work also shows us that Meredith was beginning to change her outlook on herself as a writer. Eventually she would describe herself as being proud of her writing. "I have been challenged to become proud of what I write no matter what it is and learned that sharing writing with others will help me improve as a writer in my confidence." Her use of the word "confidence" demonstrates that she was aware of the shift she was making in her relationship to writing and how she felt about it. She began to position herself as a writer and recognized that confidence and feeling good about herself were important for being a writer.

> I felt like I was a horrible writer, but once I started writing and just putting my ideas down, when I got into the writing group, that's where I was like, "Oh, maybe I am pretty good at this." I felt when I read my paper today, I felt really confident in it, and I don't think I've ever felt that confident in any type of writing that I've done. I felt like people actually enjoyed it and wanted to listen to it and that it just made me feel really good about myself.

T/W

Being able to immediately share her writing and receive affirmation from her writing group supported Meredith's change and gave her room to see herself as not just a writer, but as someone who is "pretty good at this." This distinction from seeing herself as "a horrible writer" to "pretty good" captures an important part of the writing identity she adopted.

A writing teacher who is recognized as a writer. As Meredith took on an identity as a writer, she related it to her teaching in that it was important for her students see her as a writer. "And to show them that I'm a writer. That's like my biggest epiphany. I think I've said it a million times, but I really want them to know that I'm a writer too, and I feel like that's going to be the biggest part." The "biggest part" she was referring to was what she would take away from the PD experience. By taking on this writer identity and building her confidence as a writer, Meredith made the connection to her teaching and the importance of having a writer identity that her students could recognize. She concluded, "I have learned that writing takes a long time to develop and you are never really perfect at it. I learned that you need to write for yourself, and don't write because you feel you have to but because you want to." While Meredith never explicitly said that enjoying writing was important, she made statements such as this that show she did find enjoyment in writing. She also developed a new understanding of what it means for writing to be a process. Where before she might have explained the writing process in terms of stages (e.g., brainstorming), she now understood writing to be an active process in which the writer continually develops over time, and that being a writer is not about attaining perfection.

Having students to work with in the writing camp also helped Meredith make the connection between being a writer and teaching writing. In her writing group, she shared that she was making changes to her writing because she would be sharing it with her students later. Meredith was being intentional about her writing so that she could use it in her instruction to show students she was writing with them and to introduce her own writing and writing process. Later Meredith reflected on sharing her writing with her students in the camp, "I was able to confidently share with the students my own writing that I just wrote, not polished writing. Students actually saw me writing and being a writer." This statement reflects the new importance that Meredith placed on her students seeing her as a writer, and she brings up confidence about her writing. Her statement also reflects her understanding that writing does not always have to be polished in order to be shared, but rather, sharing with others can be part of the process as one is engaged in writing.

Carla: A Veteran Teacher Rediscovers her Voice

Carla, a middle school English Language Arts teacher of 16 years, experienced a shift in her writing mindset over the course of the workshop. At the outset, she saw herself as a writer and as a writing teacher, but she found little overlap in those two roles. In her initial draft of the occasional paper, Carla's work was deeply personal and private. It had the feel of a diary as she explored topics such as her mother's decline in health and death, her disappointments in past romantic relationships, her hopes for a positive future with her new companion, and her passion for her pets as a steadfast comfort during lonely and difficult times. She was a quiet but attentive participant in the workshop, taking

pages of notes but rarely speaking in the whole group setting. "I do a lot of personal writing," she explained, "personal journals and jotting down stuff like that, but I don't do a lot of stuff that I want other people to read … I would describe myself maybe using the word insecure, because I love to write but I don't really want anyone else reading and judging my writing." At first she was reluctant to share her work with her writing group, describing her first draft as "awful."

Developing a public writing persona. Although Carla routinely taught her seventh graders writing skills such as crafting topic sentences and paragraph construction, she did not recall ever sharing her own work with students. As she transformed her occasional paper into an expository piece, she took up her interest in animals but made a shift from deeply personal writing that would be inappropriate to share with students to writing that was both personally meaningful and ready for a public audience of young adolescent readers. Carla wrote an editorial-style article on the topic of pets left in cars on hot Southern summer days. She blended both personal experience and deep compassion for animals with research-based facts on the dangers to such neglected pets. Her writing both informed and appealed to the emotions of fellow pet owners who might unwittingly endanger the dogs and cats they love. Carla compared her advocacy for animals to the convictions that brought her to teaching explaining, "I wanted to help people who have no voice and who are desperate to get out of the situation they are in. I see education as the tool to help my students find their voice and unlock their futures." Writing for a public audience seemed to be a new experience for Carla, and her comfort with writing grew throughout the sessions. At the end of the PD she explained, "I want to incorporate writing groups into my class, that's something that I really enjoyed. I feel like my writing group really helped shape my piece, and they gave me some great suggestions." In this way Carla's growing comfort with sharing her work with an audience and seeing herself as a writer with a public persona opened her thinking about instructional practices that might support her students.

Fostering a strengths-based approach. Early in the PD, Carla downplayed and criticized her writing and herself as a writer. She appeared shy or reluctant to discuss or to let others read her work. However, as she engaged with her writing group, her confidence appeared to grow. In alignment with the strategies presented in the PD sessions, Carla and her colleagues attended both to their writing partners' emerging ideas and successes as well as to the elements of their writing that needed further development. Carla reflected on her prior practice and noted,

> It's so tempting when you have thirty kids in a class and you're trying to help them with their writing, it's so tempting to go, "That's good," and move on to the next kid, instead of saying, "Well, I liked how you used your sensory language, how you brought out the images of sight, hearing, taste." Giving that more specific feedback, rather than just saying good, bad, ugly, you know, just making sure that you pick out something that's positive. I think a lot of times, too, I would focus on the negative, like, "Oh, that first sentence, you really need to work on that," rather than saying, "Look at this third sentence here, look how powerful that is, that's a great sentence."

In this way, Carla seemed to shift her approach to student feedback from an evaluative stance to a developmental one. She connected her experiences as a writer reluctant to

share her work and considered how her students might feel in similar situations. She was able to draw on the features of her writing community during the PD session, particularly the positive and encouraging remarks and use of specific feedback, in order to envision a new way of talking with her middle school students about their writing.

Integrating writer identity with teacher identity. In the past, Carla indicated that she had relied on formulaic writing instruction and helping students write responses to prompts. She reflected that several years ago the state had a writing test in seventh grade. During those years she noted,

> You taught the kids how to do the writing test. You taught them a five paragraph essay...it was all about passing the writing test. Well, now that we don't have a writing test anymore, it's kind of like for a few years I think people just forgot writing.

When she did teach writing, she noted that writing was an individual task and that she often rushed students to select a topic and complete their work. She explained, "I did that to my kids all the time. 'We've got to get this done. You need to be finished.'" Carla's identification as an efficient teacher who stayed on track came into tension with students' need for extended time to write. This position also put her into conflict with her own writing process, which required multiple attempts before she could settle on a topic.

Looking ahead, Carla anticipated she would shift her practice to incorporate collaboration, to allow students to see her struggle with writing, and to sustain engagement in the writing process over time. In this way she began to integrate her writer identity with her teacher identity, acknowledging that writing was a process that required time and effort to develop and that students' development of writing skills warranted the investment of instructional time. She commented,

> I teach writing, but yet I am a writer too, and I really want to model that with the kids. For them to be able to see that I'm writing right along with them and I'm struggling through the process just like they're struggling, because I think that was one thing that was really powerful for me."

She intended to devote additional instructional time to writing and observed, "That kind of helpless feeling sometimes is a good thing because you're going to be able to come through that, and you're not going to stay in that helpless 'I don't know what to write about' feeling.'" Her initial sense of uncertainty and overcoming it prompted Carla to empathize with young writers as well as to share her personal writing experiences with her students when she returned to school in August, an activity she also carried out in the camp. She commented, for example, that she would "let her students see me struggle with writing—there is value in that."

In a reflection at the end of the first week of PD, we asked the teachers to reflect by asking them how they defined themselves as writers. Carla's entry suggested both how her writing identity had started to change as well as her thoughts about instruction:

> I think my feelings about writing have definitely changed. I used to think that writers began knowing exactly what their piece was going to look like and exactly what it was going to be about. But, by putting myself in a writer's shoes, I know that definitely does not happen. Also, I only viewed myself as a teacher of writing without putting myself into the category of being a writer. As

a teacher of writing, my focus is on structure and what writing should look like. I am now aware that the process and product can take many different forms.

Although Carla does not speak directly to her specific sense of herself as a writer here, how she casts the nature of writing implies her growing sense of actually being a writer. In this sense, the experience of being a writer, rather than being a writer only in private, provided her with firsthand knowledge of how writing evolves in ways that she was eager to share with her students and now seemed to have the confidence to do.

Throughout the professional development, Carla seemed to integrate her identities as a writer and as a teacher of writing, two facets that had been largely unrelated in the past. By putting herself in the shoes of her student writers, Carla experienced the backdrop of emotions and social interactions that impact the writing classroom. She drew on her experiences with her writing group to identify and articulate the features of writing workshop she found most generative and to apply those concepts to her teaching approach.

Lane: A Social Studies and Writing Teacher by Desire

Over the two-week workshop, Lane shifted from a non-writer who composed lists and emails to a writer who valued the support and collaboration of a writing group. These shifting writing identities also shaped her understanding of teaching writing. At the beginning of the workshop, Lane situated herself as a writing teacher by necessity. At the end of the two weeks, she positioned herself as a writing teacher by desire. Below, we illustrate those shifting writing identities and understandings of teaching writing through quotes and excerpts of Lane's interviews and work.

A writer who composed for a purpose. In a survey taken before the PD began, Lane positioned herself as someone who did not write often. During the first few days of the workshop, she explained that she did not start writing until she got to high school. That writing, however, did not continue when she became a teacher. She said, "I think the last thing I wrote was the grocery list." In the few times that she did write, it was for a purpose (i.e., emails, teacher leadership documents).

Although Lane did not identify as a writer early on, she was able to explain how she situated herself as a writer in the past. In the pre-PD survey, she said:

> I dislike personal writing such as in a journal or diary, but I absolutely see the value in reflective writing about professional or even personal choices. I do not fear reflection but I sometimes take a long time to get my words to reflect what I want to say. I tend to reread what I write and then think, "Will they think I meant something else or had a hidden meaning?" So I tend to revise a lot of writing before sending it out. Also, I probably skip around a lot because my brain is working faster than my typing speed. I will write out some key points but will usually return to the idea and flesh it out.

In this written statement, Lane situated herself as a writer who valued reflective writing and revision. She took on the role of the audience when reviewing her work to make sure that she was writing clearly ("Will they think I meant something else?"). She also positioned herself as a writer who thought faster than she could type, so she used the strategy of writing out key points that she could flesh out later. However, even though

Lane stated that she was not a writer, she proceeded to describe ways in which she enacted a writer identity in the past.

A writing teacher by necessity. In the pre-PD survey, Lane also explained that she valued writing and wanted to help her students do the same. Specifically, she situated herself as a teacher of writing who helped students edit papers. In the survey, she wrote: "I like helping students effectively communicate. My strengths as a writing teacher are to be able to edit, help students more effectively speak and to trim away the excess verbiage." She recognized, however, that this strength was not always effective. In particular, she was aware that her students did not always make changes to their writing despite her feedback.

> I am frustrated when students don't listen to my feedback… A lot of times they get to the end of the year and realize that I have told them the same areas to work on every time I have provided feedback. Even though I attempt to build skills in between those formal writing sessions, the execution of particular skills isn't something they try to change.

Above, Lane recognized that the strategies she was using to teach writing in her classroom were not always successful. In the pre-PD survey, she stated that she hoped to learn more about "support or scaffolding of skills, rubrics for ensuring growth in writing, learning targets for writing, and writing assignments that tie directly to assessment of writing skills." Here, Lane used her prior knowledge of teaching writing (i.e., rubrics, assessment, learning targets) to explain what she hoped to learn about the teaching of writing. Perhaps this illustrates how she situated herself before the workshop began—as a teacher of writing by necessity.

Lane also situated herself as a writing teacher who prepared students for high-stakes assessments. In an interview, Lane stated that she used strategies such as practiced timed writing and feedback rather than a process approach in which students spend time "trying to revise or trying to back and figure it out how to do better." Thus, Lane situated herself as a writing teacher who focused more on writing as assessment (e.g., AP exam) rather than writing as a process that is refined over time through both student and teacher led feedback (e.g., peer review, teacher/student conferences).

A writer who valued meaningful writing and a supportive writing group. As the PD progressed, Lane drafted an occasional paper about her dissatisfaction with a quilting conference she had attended. This piece gave her an opportunity to write about something that was meaningful to her rather than writing something for the purpose of work. In an interview at the end of the workshop, Lane still hesitated to identify as a writer. She said:

> I don't write… So if I'm a writer, I'm usually writing for a purpose… I also just got through doing National Boards in the spring, and I also signed up to be part of the Governor's Teacher Network, and so writing… trying to reflect, and do all the sort of self-promotion… was very exhausting, so I don't generally consider myself a writer. I have enjoyed what we've done in the last couple of weeks because it's kind of given me a chance to write about something that I actually feel passionate about.

In this quote, Lane started by saying that she did not write. In the following 11 lines, however, Lane stated how she wrote over the past year. First, she positioned herself as a

writer who wrote for a purpose. By "purpose" we inferred that her writing related to moving forward in her job, such as writing reflections for National Board certification and the Governor's Teacher Network. Although this was the main way she enacted a writing identity over the past year, she admitted that this kind of writing left her feeling exhausted. This PD opened the opportunity for her to enact a different kind of writing identity—one that wrote about something that she feels "passionate about." Later in the interviews, she even admitted that this opportunity might "change her mind" about how she situated herself as a non-writer and indicated that she intended to continue writing with her students.

Lane also continued to identify as a writer who did many revisions and who composed several drafts before settling on a final piece for publication. For Lane, however, collaborating in a writing group appeared to significantly shape her writing identities over the two weeks. In the focus group interview she said:

> I think it [her writing group] was probably good for me. …[Maggie] said something about us being a band and she said something about us working together and I said, "yeah, we make beautiful music together you know" and she's like "yeah, essentially people could be great at playing their instruments individually, but until they get together it doesn't always work." But I feel like for us it did because we really wanted it to go well we wanted it to be purposeful and the purpose was more important than us individually so I believe we worked really well together.

In this quote, Lane positioned herself in a new way as a writer—as part of a writing group. This space opened opportunities for her to help others and share a sense of purpose while writing. Her statement illustrates how important the group was to her for making her writing experience positive when she stated that like a band, the process of making music does not always work "until they get together." Thus, Lane's writing group played a significant role in how she constructed and enacted her writing identities. So much so, that she believed that they played "beautiful music together."

A writing teacher by desire. For Lane, her understandings of the teaching of writing changed significantly over the two weeks. First, Lane began to understand that a student-centered approach might better foster writing than a teacher-centered approach. For example, in a focus group interview, Lane said:

> I think the first day of writing camp was something that was eye opening for me. …I feel like on that first day [of camp] we were facilitators rather than in charge of that classroom. So I feel like my change will be to "get out of their way." I really connected to something that Maggie said—that she should shut up more you know and I feel the same...I truly feel like that will probably be one of my takeaways—is to be facilitative rather than directive and just get out of the way.

In this quote, Lane's understanding of teaching writing shifted from a more directive to facilitative concept. In particular, enacting a facilitator identity in the writing camp provided an example for what it meant to facilitate in a way that she had not experienced before. For Lane, then, teaching writing meant getting out of the way of students and talking less so that students can write.

One way that she imagined doing that in her own classroom was through writing conferences, in which she took on a student-centered approach. Specifically, she said that

in the past she took on a "correcting" role and with peer conferences she wanted her students to "support each other's ideas to give insights that I haven't thought about." Thus, Lane's understanding of feedback shifted. In the past, she tended to give "broad suggestions," but from the workshop, she realized that she needed to "identify specific areas where students did well" or areas for improvement.

In relation to taking a more student-centered approach, Lane discussed how important it was for her to see students situate themselves as writers. In an interview focused on her experience with the campers, she discussed a shift in how she understood the teaching of writing. After working with the campers, she was surprised to see "the passion that some of them have for writing already." By taking on a value perspective of students, she understood that she could use that passion to "her advantage" in the classroom, even as it related to writing essays in a history classroom.

Finally, Lane stated that she identified herself as a writing teacher by desire. She said:

> I would say I was a writing teacher by necessity because essays are what I prepare my students for….I think probably now I would be a writing teacher by desire. Just because I feel like I am prepared to do what I need to do to helps kids reach their potential.

In this final statement about her shift in understanding of the teaching of writing, Lane stated that she shifted from a writing teacher by necessity to a writing teacher by desire. Now she feels prepared to teaching writing and hopes to foster the potential of young writes in her classroom.

Discussion

Findings from this research illustrate how the opportunity to construct and enact writing identities shaped how three teachers understood the teaching of writing. As they engaged in the writing process, collaborated in writing groups, and conversed in writing conferences, these teachers reimagined their practice to include more nuanced writing instruction that focused on the capabilities of students as writers. Below, we discuss the three ways that teachers shifted their understandings of writing instruction that we gathered from the cross-case analysis.

Expanding Discourses as Teacher-writers

As we analyzed data about Meredith, Carla, and Lane, their changing identities related to writing and teaching practice indicated changes that valued their own sense of themselves as writers and in the way they talked about their aspirations for practice. Although we cannot document how changes in discourse changed writing instruction, Dix (2012) argues,

> Discourses of writing that shape the teacher's identity in primary classrooms reflect that teaching and learning writing is a multidimensional and complex act: a selective practice. The discourses that teachers choose to engage with or not, has [sic] major implications for students learning to write. (p. 406)

From this vantage point, Meredith and Carla's desire to share their struggles with writing with their students or Lane's recognition that corrections were different from feedback

about students' ideas indicate that the teachers acquired new discourses about writing that would support revisions in their writing instruction.

Similar to the teachers in our study, Cremin's (2006) work indicated that teachers had varying conceptions of themselves as writers. Their concerns included frustration and lack of confidence, negative perspectives of one's ability, and maintaining emotional distance from narrative sources of their writing. In this sense, Meredith, Carla, and Lane all had writing identities that emerged as they worked on their own writing and that were revised as they had opportunities to work collaboratively and receive support. As in Cremin's (2006) study, they also reimagined teaching practices that included more collaboration among students, more choice in topics or forms, and recognition of the struggles and insecurities that most writers may experience. One difference between Cremin's and our project was the opportunity to experiment with practices in a low-stakes setting with students. As the teachers worked with the campers, they were both surprised and swayed by their responses. This first-hand experience may have helped them engage in new practices in the classroom. Most importantly, however, Cremin's (2006) study suggests that teachers need opportunities for PD that not only introduces them to effective teaching practices but also supports their growth as writers.

Behind the Curtain of Expertise

Participants in the study all appeared to value presenting themselves to students as competent and effective teachers, whether by teaching district-sanctioned writing skills and forms or by rigorously preparing students for high-stakes testing. Meredith and Carla expressed lack of confidence about their writing skills in general while Lane felt confident in her professional writing and in her knowledge of the AP essay genre but distanced her teaching identity from her writing identity. In the past, it seems that participants' writing instruction had book-ended the writing process for students: teachers gave directions and sometimes modeled the "right" way to write, students attempted to replicate that way of writing independently, and teachers evaluated their success at the end. By actually writing themselves, all three teachers seemed to envision new possibilities for themselves as more active participants in that middle phase during which students crafted writing. However, they acknowledged that writing invited challenges, false-starts, and imperfections while pieces were under construction. By participating in writing groups, an experience all three appreciated, they allowed peers to witness their struggles with writing.

In some ways, participation in this phase opened them up to appearing less expert to colleagues and students than they had when presenting district-sanctioned instruction or holding the authority of a writing evaluator. Meredith and Carla both expressed a desire following the PD session to allow students to see them muddle through the writing process and to invite students to see the work they produced. Lane did not express an intent to write alongside her students, but she planned to have them practice writing together as part of a workshop community. By opening their instructional repertoire to include making writing struggles visible and, in Meredith and Carla's cases, to give students access to their writing challenges, all three teachers had to reconsider the presentation of expertise as part of their teacher identity. Shifting from an authoritative to a facilitative role, the teachers seemed to reconfigure the hierarchical relationships

teachers and students had around writing. Like Gennrich and Janks (2013), whose study found that teachers' identities bounded the types of literacy activities they offered students, this study noted shifts in teachers' perceptions of what constituted writing instruction that seemed to correspond with their expanded view of the phases of the writing process that were appropriate to make visible to their students.

Forging a Classroom-ready Writing Persona

In addition to taking on a writing process identity, participants also diversified their writing identities to craft a writing persona that was appropriate to share with the students they taught. Carla, for example, began the PD session writing an occasional paper about her mother's death and her misgivings about a new romantic relationship. She considered her writing personal and resisted sharing with others in part because of the private nature of her work. As she built on that work to craft the letter to the editor about pets in hot cars, she retained a personal feel to the work but picked up a topic and tone that would be appropriate to share with her middle school students. Lane explained how she had used writing as a means to an end in the National Board certification process, but that this type of professional writing left her exhausted. Lane, who composed an open letter to the organizers of her recent quilting conference, also capitalized on personal experience but created a piece that could be shared with a wide audience rather than only an audience of fellow educators. Meredith had resisted writing personal pieces all together in the past, but following the PD became committed to letting students see her write alongside them and producing pieces to share with her elementary students. Rather than relying on sanctioned forms, all of these teachers seemed to work toward becoming writers who could purposefully produce and talk about their work with specific audiences.

Implications

A part of reimagining practice requires experiences from which to understand what is possible. Having teachers draft, share, talk, and revise their work offers teachers opportunities to learn from their own experiences. As all of the teachers in this study indicated, their engagement in their own writing was transformative. It is one of the elements of the National Writing Project approach that makes it so powerful. Drawing on this experience has, however, often been difficult for teachers when they returned to the classroom (Masterson, 2010). To help with this transition and with assistance from the district, we organized a weeklong writers camp for the teachers to experiment with and apply what they were learning. As the teachers indicated, they had opportunities to write with students, use their daybooks to explore a topic, compose text that was meaningful to them, and draw upon a writing group to hear others' responses. In their daybooks and reflections on this process, they consistently commented on the students' enthusiasm for writing. More importantly, they engaged in writing instruction with students, composing and struggling alongside them. In this sense, they enacted writer identities that served both as an extension of their writing activities and as a model of a writer for the students.

In order to reimagine writing instructional practices, teachers need the space and support to try on new ways of being teachers and writers. Findings from the study

illustrate the importance of PD that attends to writing identity. This means asking teachers to reflect about how they see themselves as writers before and after the PD. These reflections, either written or conversational, can be done in conjunction with the writing they do during the PD. Also, dialogue about how teachers view a writer in general can open opportunities for teachers to see how they might write in ways that they did not previously notice. One way to promote this kind of thinking is to ask teachers to bring in visuals that represent what it means to be a writer to them. In addition, teachers need time and support to write, particularly in multiple genres, in PD settings. By providing teachers with these opportunities, we are showing them that their identities as writers do matter and teaching writing and writing identities are intertwined.

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