

Part IV



Re-viewing Writing Groups at Work

In the three pieces for this section, we show how our writing groups' work can be situated within larger frameworks for professionalization. First, in "Reading Across Writing Groups," we share examples of project participants responding to drafts being written by colleagues who were not in their own writing groups, but who were part of the community of practice supporting all of us. Second, in "Writing with Our Eyes Open," we offer reports from a team of "first public readers"—a group of educators affiliated with our National Writing Project site whom we invited to review an early draft of our book manuscript. Third, we provide a retrospective narrative on the stages through which our overarching inquiry into writing groups and communities of practice progressed; we position our experiences within a context of scholarship on writing to learn and on successful communities of practice; and we make some recommendations to teachers who want to build on our work.



Setting Teachers' Writing Groups in Context

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How and why did we use writing groups as both a vehicle for promoting teacher professionalization and a strategy to document and interpret that process? What did we learn from our inquiry? What recommendations would we make to others interested in adapting our process? This chapter takes a retrospective look at ways that our larger community of practice supported our writing groups and, especially, at some of the lessons we learned about meta-level thinking and writing to learn that can help sustain teachers' professionalization projects. We want to make the various components and stages of our project visible to readers so that they can adopt and adapt these practices in their own contexts.

Forming the Community

We began with about a dozen educators who wanted to use shared, structured reflection and writing to examine their teaching critically and, eventually, to share their experiences with a more public audience. George Seaman, an experienced teacher consultant, had suggested we invite teachers at our National Writing Project site to explore links between writing and teacher professionalization. Having sent out a call for volunteers, we assembled initially as an inquiry community of about a dozen teachers. At the start of the project, this inquiry community subdivided into several writing groups, based on a range of factors, including having basic topics of interest in common or living in relative proximity to each other.

Before joining this collaborative initiative, many of us had participated in at least one summer institute sponsored by the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP). While a number of us had published before, or had presented teaching practices to public audiences at conferences, not every one joining the inquiry team had experience writing for professional publication. Before our the first meeting, Sarah Robbins invited Kathleen Blake Yancey to participate, since Kathi's scholarship on writing and reflection was clearly a good fit with our interests.¹ Kathi joined Sarah, George, and Dede Yow as editors. For a project studying communities of practice, shared reflection and writing groups in action, having a team of editors seemed a logical approach. Throughout the collaborative work on this book, in fact, the editors continued to operate as another writing group. We regularly "talked" online about such

questions as how to sequence the chapters and how to identify relevant scholarship for ourselves and for all project participants. We exchanged drafts and made comments, adapting protocols from the other writing groups while sharing their core values. In addition, the editorial group served as collaborative facilitators of the entire inquiry community: we often met (in person and online) to plan the sessions held for the whole project team, and we regularly reflected together about the progress of the project.

Inquiry Questions and General Findings

Before our community's first meeting in September 2002, project leaders Robbins, Seaman, Yow, and Yancey drafted several questions linking collaborative reflection, community-building, writing, and professional development.² We wondered: what can we learn about our teaching from working in a collaborative community of interlocking writing groups? We also asked: what happens, in terms of reflection as an avenue to growing professionally, when teachers use writing groups as a step toward a more public audience?

We planned from the start to investigate these questions by working in small writing groups within our larger inquiry community, while at the same time studying our processes in action. We formulated the following sub-queries related to our overarching questions:

- How does/can shared reflection in writing groups foster individual and group writing processes?
- Could writing for an audience foster professional growth, and, if so, how? We imagined two stages of "audience" here: the writing group and then some larger public.
- How can collaborative writing and reflection, in writing groups, enhance teachers' view of themselves as professionals? And their view of the teaching profession?
- What might our writing groups and our own community of practice learn from other professional groups' reflective protocols and practices?

As an entire project community, we revisited these questions periodically, often through *structured* reflective writing exercises (e.g., sequenced questions addressed during our large inquiry community meetings). Significantly, all those involved in the project conceived of themselves as investigating these questions both *while and by* working collaboratively on their own piece of writing.³ Thus, at meetings of individual writing groups and at workshops we

held for the entire team, we often moved back and forth between discussing the goals of the project as a whole, and engaging with our own individual pieces of writing. Also, we frequently asked ourselves what our work at a particular small-group or whole-team session “meant” in regard to the project’s overarching agenda. Over time, we all became quite accustomed to writing reflectively about what we were learning. Furthermore, from this body of informal writing, we identified ways in which participation in the project promoted a heightened sense of professionalism among our teacher-authors. We also tracked everyone’s increased ability to manage the interactions of a writing group and an enhanced understanding of the teaching-related topics being examined through our writing processes. We noted benefits of using *reflection-oriented structures* (such as having everyone respond to the same sequenced, written queries), and we learned to use our writing groups themselves as a *semi-private/semi-public way station* preparing teachers to reach larger audiences.

Chronology of Our Work

Deep learning, applicable to a range of diverse contexts, takes time to build, as we learned in our project. While various groups’ *initial* work on their essays was sometimes concentrated in less than a year’s time, our shared study of the *social practices* undergirding that process—and its implications for other teachers—took much longer.

Our collaborative inquiry formally began with a day-long workshop for all potential participants in September of 2002. Through the 2002–03 academic year, and again during the summer, participants met several times in the small writing groups that we formed during that first September workshop. Meanwhile, we held our second day-long workshop for the entire inquiry community in March of 2003 and a third workshop for initial revision and reflection during the summer of 2003. During the fall of 2003, the editors began to organize the essays and reflections into a draft book manuscript. In the winter of 2004, a four-person team of “first readers” wrote individual reactions to the manuscript and then collaborated on a group response. In the spring and summer of 2004, the four editors drafted the opening and closing chapters of the book. During the 2004–05 academic year, and the summer of 2005, we did additional revisions of essays in response to suggestions from more readers (e.g., attendees at the summer institutes of our National Writing Project site). By spring 2005, participants had enough distance from our original work together to be able to reflect with insight into how the various writing groups had functioned, on what their impact was on our individual essays,

and on what we had learned from the project as a whole. So, in June 2005, all project members responded in writing to structured questions about the writing groups in action and about the significance of the larger community's activities for their learning. We then crafted group-voiced introductions to each cluster of essays and revised (in this case, extended) the reflections we had outlined earlier about the social composing processes that produced our essays. We also collaborated on extensive revisions of the introductory and closing chapters of the book. All along the way, we tried to step outside of our writing processes to analyze how they were working—both to promote our text-making itself and to learn more about our own teaching.

Project Design: Core Values for Writing and Professionalization

We envisioned the basic structure of our project as a collection of circles, with our three small writing groups clustered together as a community of practice seeking to forge connections with scholarship on social literacy practices, on professional development grounded in shared reflection, and on writing as an avenue to learning. From the start, we planned that the small writing groups would be meeting in between those occasions when the large group assembled. At the same time, building on the example of Janet Swenson and her colleagues in the Write for Your Life Project, we promoted ongoing communication between the small writing groups and the larger inquiry community with a project listserv, where the four editors and all other participants could post reminders, queries, and comments. The listserv was sometimes inactive for weeks at a time, but would burst back into life when prompted by a member's request for information or a report on responses from readers of our manuscript.

Clearly, one core value everyone had in common—as underscored by participants' reliable responses to any online queries and their enthusiastic participation in the small groups—was the desire to develop a “sense of belonging to a larger community that comes from writing” (Durst 262). Indeed, *belonging together* as writers helped us generate and, gradually, extend our texts and our thinking. The attraction of writing to create and sustain community remained powerful. In that regard, when we wrote reflections about the project in the summer of 2005, many participants described “missing” the regular meetings of their small writing groups and also called on the project leaders to organize a reunion of the entire inquiry community.

Though participants certainly appreciated membership in our immediate community, they also conceived of those ties as opening up avenues to additional professional forms of belonging, as represented by the professional

reading we did together in small groups and on the larger team. But, from the outset, writing was the most crucial component of our learning, moving us from the typical privacy of classroom teaching to expanded social interaction and knowing. Both the writing done in the inquiry community (e.g., on the listserv, at in-person gatherings) and the text-making orchestrated by the small writing groups acted, all along, in a kind of “in-between” space for reflection and writing *toward* a more public discourse. On the one hand, for example, writing in our small groups—whether on a napkin during a restaurant meeting or in the margins of a colleague’s draft—allowed us to try out ideas and share tentative observations in a supportive, safe environment. On the other hand, and often at the same time, shared reflective writing for the project moved our thinking beyond such private realms as personal journals (see Hays and Holly) to a semi-public space. Pushed to write with and for others, we had to give our tentative thoughts some form, and responses from others further refined tentative texts.

Whether at our whole-community meetings, on the listserv, or in writing group sessions, we consistently affirmed the value of writing to learn as supporting our efforts to form community. Much of the writing *around* our essay-composing took on exploratory modes—tentative and formative rather than finished. The practice of sharing such writing to move thinking forward affiliated our work with concepts laid out by James Britton, Toby Fulwiler, and Art Young, who have emphasized that expressive (versus more finished, persuasive writing) “is not [produced] to communicate, but to order and represent experience to our own understanding,” thereby offering “a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding.”⁴ In line with Peter Elbow’s arguments favoring “Writing for Learning,” we viewed our frequent reflective writing occasions as “low stakes writing,” aiming “to learn, understand, remember and figure out what [we didn’t] yet know,” rather than to report on what we already understood. In particular, consistent with Art Young’s formulation of a “middle ground” between writing to learn and writing to communicate, we tried to structure the social composing space of our writing groups and our larger inquiry community as a transitional discourse between the personal and the public, between the private reflections a teacher might jot down in a notebook and the finished teacher research articles we all admire but can’t always un-pack as having been in-process at some point. To help ourselves move from reflections drafted on our own to a “finished” piece of writing about our teaching, but to leave behind traces of the process that other teachers could later follow, we aimed to enact the kind of conversational composing Young has associated with “middleground” writing. We saw our reflective pieces, especially, as bridging writing-to-learn texts and writing-to-

communicate products—as semipublic, collaborative writing that would be “enabling” for us.⁵ At the same time, through our efforts to create and save *artifacts of social reflection*, and then to reflect *about* them again later, we hoped to make our processes available as models for other teachers interested in our work and in their own writing goals. In taking this approach, we were trying to integrate promising practices from the writing-to-learn movement with research on reflective practitioners.⁶

Small Writing Groups at Work

Our inquiry community's core values for writing to learn led us to promote specific social composing strategies for the small writing groups by trying them out during the whole-team sessions. For example, we used and thus affirmed approaches such as combining oral with written response; offering positive comments before making suggestions for improvement; and critiquing our own techniques for shared reflection by asking: “Why are we doing this practice the way we are doing it?” In addition, as a whole inquiry community, we discussed scholarship on our research questions; we set deadlines that would apply to the whole group; and we had small groups share reports of their progress on the listserv and at our day-long workshops. Taken together, these *orchestrated practices* shaped the larger community itself, while modeling adaptable approaches for the small writing groups to sample, critique, and refine.

Nonetheless, as indicated by the prefatory piece for each section of our book, despite the shared belief system our large-community connections nurtured, every small writing group did develop its own distinctive strategies of operation, ranging from different schedules for meetings to different activities in those sessions, and each developed its own protocols. (See introduction.) In some cases, these variations grew out of differing needs participants brought to their groups. For instance, one group began the project with drafts on hand while another had two members with nothing but a topic in mind. In other cases, the variations in approaches for collaboration developed through careful discussion of what was working well for the group and what needed to be changed.⁷

Our writing groups also varied in the degree to which members would describe them as successful at different stages in the overall life of the project, and in the features of the work they would invoke to characterize their progress. In one group, for instance, the task of drafting and revising members' essays, in and of itself, took precedence, and they measured success largely by marking deadlines met while making substantial revisions. In another group,

unstructured, shared reflection about professional experiences actually became at least as important as composing the essays. In the third group, writing the essays and building social relationships were self-consciously designated as complementary aims all along—and that group's protocols for working were clearly consistent with such a view. Despite these differences, all members of all groups identified a number of important benefits they associated with having participated in the project; furthermore, the benefits they named were consistent across groups: becoming better writers, becoming more reflective about teaching, reaching an audience beyond the classroom, acquiring self-confidence, growing as a professional, and building personal relationships grounded in shared professionalism.

The fact that all participants in the inquiry project came to compatible conclusions about the benefits of the work was consistent, we later found, with our having assumed important characteristics for organized social learning as identified by Richard McDermott in "Knowing Community: 10 Critical Factors in Building Communities of Practice." (Significantly, rather than using McDermott's traits as a kind of "recipe," we instead gradually took on the traits he describes on our own, then discovered his profile during the final stages of writing this book, as we were seeking to understand our work in a broader context of related research.) According to McDermott, communities of practice assemble and use tacit knowledge, share strongly held interests and values, and thrive on trust supported by personal interaction. McDermott identifies a number of factors that he dubs "critical to the success of communities of practice," including focusing on topics important to members, providing time and encouragement for participation, drawing on core values held in common, fostering personal relationships, creating formal opportunities "for thinking together as well as systems for sharing information," ensuring shared access to the community's knowledge base and knowledge-making practices, and facilitating genuine dialogue about issues of importance to community members. In retrospect, we can see how the interactions between our small writing groups and the larger inquiry team we assembled for this project enabled us to tap into the success factors McDermott identifies. Thus, a key reason for sharing our work is to enable other groups of teachers to adapt our practices for sponsoring writing groups to their own local context in ways that will build communities of practice to support educators' professionalization.

For readers who want to draw on our project as a model for supporting teacher professionalization, the experience of one "failed" writing group is also important to note. Though the three writing groups whose essays appear in our book continued working together through all phases of the project, a fourth disengaged early on. This group, originally comprised of Terri Holbrook, Mary

Lynn Huie, and Kathi Yancey, disbanded without ever having a formal meeting that included all three members. Kathi Yancey did remain connected to the project as a member of the editorial writing group, but Teri and Mary Lynn, though active affiliates of our National Writing Project site, both withdrew. In an evaluation written during the winter of 2003, they observed:

Both of us have been in writing groups before, so thinking about how and why this one did not work has been instructional.... If we had met more often, we might have recognized our group problems and contacted one of the members of the larger group for help.... We were supposed to have been a community within a larger community with a shared purpose. But somehow, we were too isolated from the larger group both physically and mentally to make contact for support when we should have.

Whole-Community Meetings and Progressive Stages in the Work

As Mary Lynn's and Teri's assessment suggests, small writing groups may be less likely to succeed if their members fail to establish and maintain connections with larger social structures potentially supporting their work. For this project, although the small writing groups may well have been most responsible for shaping our authors' individual essays, the whole-community gatherings also played a vital role in that process, as well as in our investigation of overarching questions. Along those lines, whereas much of the work situated within our small writing groups maintained a focus on classroom practices and on specific techniques for preparing professional writing, the analysis we did in our larger community extended our inquiry to the type Glenda L. Bissex has described as "more interpretive than pragmatic," beyond "collecting practical strategies" for teaching to "gaining understandings and awareness" (92).

In activities for the larger inquiry community, to promote reflective analysis, we emphasized that all our small writing groups were investigating the same global inquiry questions even as they were nurturing the individual composing efforts of each teacher-author. In general, our larger community of practice was focused on setting our small groups' evolving activities in a broader context of research, on drawing comparative inferences from our groups' reports of their work, and on feeding those observations back into our small-group practices interactively (so that we were constantly "testing out" hypotheses through the actual practices/protocols of our writing groups). Accordingly, we used the occasions when the whole inquiry team assembled to

interpret the progress of the small writing groups. With jigsaw activities and whole-team discussions, we would set individual groups in dialogue with each other. We then considered the implications of our experiences for research in such areas as writing to learn and teachers' reflective professionalization. All of us recognized—and even joked about—the “meta” level of work that these whole-community meetings entailed. In retrospect, we can identify several important stages in our learning. These stages of professionalization through our project may well be helpful to others adapting our model.

Phase One: Social Brainstorming— Raising Questions and Providing Working Time

As Kathleen Yancey emphasized at our September 2002 kick-off session, crucial to our investigation was an acknowledgement that the teaching profession rarely gives organized time or systems to reflection-based learning. To illustrate that point, Kathi shared research she had been doing on physicians' communities of practice. She challenged us to see what we might learn from their emphasis on collaborative reflection to analyze both specific incidents in the classroom and promising practices for teaching.

Through discussion, we identified ways that physicians' collaborative examination of their practices could serve as something of a model—particularly in their emphasis on regularity, systematic critique, and reflection. But we also realized that our own shared reflection for professional growth would make more explicit and sustained use of *writing* to learn than the medical profession's oral critiques of its practices do. So we aimed to become a discussion-oriented community of practice. But we also established from the outset that we would ask *how and to what effect the writing done through our small groups would shape our professionalization*. Toward that end, early in our first session, we asked everyone to draft a scene from teaching, then to read and discuss that scene with a colleague, then to consider what role the writing and discussion had played in clarifying the experience behind the scene. At the close of our first day-long workshop, we all wrote about our individual responses to these terms: reflection, writing, and teaching. And we considered how those terms might be interactively related through the protocols that we would establish in our writing groups.

One pattern that emerged in this first set of focused freewrites was participants' recognition of the powerful learning promoted just by having an *occasion* to reflect and using *writing* as a vehicle for thinking. One community member's comments seemed typical: “I teach all the time, and I write all the time, but I never have time to reflect. Today, I had protected time to reflect.

The writing we did helped my reflecting. I know that both these things will feed into my teaching.” Another project goal emerged from whole-community discussion on our kick-off day: establishing regular systems for working in our writing groups—“rules” we could count on like the physicians whose regularized discussions Kathi had described. Looking back, we can certainly point to ways our writing groups benefited from this session, which identified core values for the whole inquiry community, established overarching inquiry questions, and provided some examples of promising practices for collaborative learning. Therefore, we would recommend that others seeking to facilitate teachers’ writing groups for professional growth begin with an occasion of shared goal-setting. That strategy helps participants position their work in larger professional contexts, identify possible working practices, and feel empowered to take on challenging topics in a supportive environment.

Phase Two: Generating Texts— Reflecting on Process and Sharing Working Strategies

The second whole-community meeting was held in March 2003. On that occasion, we spent a good deal of time hearing from each writing group about the protocols they had developed, and why those approaches were the ones they had adopted. For instance, one group described the role that “digital blue-penciling” was playing when they exchanged drafts via email attachments. Sharing such specific strategies gave each group new ideas. Perhaps more importantly, however, we spent some time writing and then thinking together, more globally, about how the work of the small writing groups was connecting reflection to enhanced understanding of teaching.⁸ Observations included the point that one group made about writing “forcing you to examine your teaching philosophy in order to put your thoughts on paper.” That same group also observed that their collaborative work on their essays had generated a “shared ownership of teaching stories” that in turn led to a heightened sense of teaching as public work. In a collaborative composing and revision space, which that group had begun to term “the semi-private stage” of writing, these teachers were finding that their group activity was indeed promoting learning about teaching, and they could identify specific lessons they had learned. Much of what they had done in their small-group meetings, they suggested, could “not have happened in the big group,” because the intimacy of their meetings actually enabled more intense, sustained conversations.

Hearing such observations from the small groups, in turn, led all of us to note that the writing groups we had been using had both *structure and intimacy*. We built on these observations to create personal reflections describing ways

that “belonging to” and “participating in” both our large inquiry community and our small writing groups were helping us reflect critically on our teaching, on our writing, and on the very process of learning through social reflection. Significantly, one theme that emerged from these focused freewrites, when the editors later read them as a set, was an enhanced sense of professional identity.⁹ We could see that participants were moving from a view of their teaching as primarily personal to a sense of their work as publicly significant and therefore worthy of public representation and analysis. We could also see how self-conscious affiliation with both their small writing group and the larger inquiry community was supporting that growth. Based on the generative discussions we had that day, we realized that our project had moved into a new stage, one enabling us to reflect on process and describe it to others, then use those exchanges to further refine our working practices. Therefore, we suggest others who facilitate teachers’ writing groups should create occasions when those groups can share protocols, write and think about their practices, and then identify ways such sharing can feed back into the work of the groups interactively—all the while heightening professional self-awareness.

Phase Three: Revising and Re-vising— Reaching Across Writing Groups and into Professionalization

In June of 2003, we held what we called a “mini-institute” at Kennesaw State. We hoped to analyze these components of our work: small-group protocols for collaborative reflection and writing; interactions between our three writing groups and the larger inquiry community; and the impact that participation in the project was having on all of us professionally. We had been considering these questions all along, but this occasion served as a major “checkpoint” in the process. Our work for this all-day session focused on the processes that had shaped our individual essays rather than on the essays themselves. All participants were asked, before this June gathering, to read an essay from a group other than their own. To prepare for this workshop, we all drafted the following pieces of writing:

- A written response to an essay authored by someone outside our original writing group (These cross-group assignments were made by the editorial team, based on topic connections across the essays.);
- A set of “starter draft” notes about the ways in which our essay had been influenced by our participation in our small writing group (These notes would eventually become the reflective pieces appended to the end of each contributor’s individual essays.);

- Ideas for a piece we would eventually write collaboratively with our writing group members to describe the protocols we had developed.

Besides working on the three pieces identified above, we also spent time during the day-long session writing about and discussing our “big-picture” inquiry questions. In on-the-spot writing, we described how the project had changed us professionally. Here are a few examples:

Leslie Walker: My professional identity has emerged stronger than it has ever been.... Although I have always had the commitment to teaching, working with others who have the same commitment strengthens my resolve. Sometimes one can get lost in one's own classroom. It helps to be associated with a professional enterprise...to bring me out of my high school classroom and to enjoy the intellectual discourse of a community of learners. The practice of reflecting—especially through writing—is an exercise that facilitates and sustains professional growth.

Debby Kramb: I came into this project with a strong commitment to teaching. But I had reached a point in my career when I was reaching out—striving for “something more”.... My personal identity as a teacher and a capable, intelligent person has been strengthened.... My confidence and self-esteem as a professional continue to grow.

Renee Kaplan: I feel more energized and empowered as a community of professional writers and learners who are committed to student achievement.... Collaboration and sharing...have become the energetic fuel that we all used, shared, and are storing now for future use.

Our whole-group discussion of these freewrites represented one of the most powerful learning occasions of our inquiry project. Sharing our individual notes with each other, we could identify recurring patterns—literally new ideas about our own professional identities—that had emerged from belonging to our project. We could also feel shared excitement and pride in our achievements. Though we realized our essays still required extensive revision, we knew we had all written something significant about our teaching. In addition, examining our practices through writing and reading drafts from other groups built a sense that we were starting to become members of a larger “scholarly community,” beyond our own writing groups. Reflecting and writing together, we had all found new professional voices, stronger professional identities.

Our project participants wound up extending the reflective writing we sponsored at this stage in a number of productive ways. Some made significant revisions in their essays based on reading a piece from another writing group. Some started drawing on the language we were using in the whole-

community reflections to help manage other learning situations in which they were engaged, such as graduate programs or professional committees. Given such results, we recommend that others who facilitate networks of teachers' writing groups should create multiple opportunities for participants to share their learning, write reflectively about how they are learning, and situate their work in broader contexts.

Phase Four: Publishing— Connecting with Multiple Audiences, Reshaping Learning in New Contexts

During the 2004-05 school year, George attended a district-wide inservice program where Andy Smith, one of our participants, spoke energetically about his involvement with this project and described his excitement about editing his essay with eventual publication in mind. After that presentation, George asked the other members of the editing team: *Did setting a book-publishing goal relatively early in our process (i.e., in winter of 2003) mean that the work seemed more crucial? Did having that goal give our work greater meaning than a 'typical' cluster of teachers' writing groups—one not aiming for book publication—might attain?*

We suspect the answer to George's first "setting the goal" question is "yes." Although we did not start out with a definite timetable for manuscript preparation, and although we consistently used the term "hope" when discussing our book-publishing aims, at a certain point, when the texts started to grow and we began to read across writing groups, having a published product did begin to seem achievable. Then, the pace of work certainly picked up. In addition, as happens with all types of "publication" endeavors (including posting kids' writing in a school hallway), project participants began to pay more attention to details of style, editing, and citation formatting. Writing that is aimed at a formal public audience easily claims careful attention.

However, we can now firmly answer "no" to George's second question. At a certain point in our project, we realized participants were already publishing our work in a wide variety of venues: whether or not we ever successively disseminated our story in printed book, we had successfully reached a "publishing" stage that was important to professional growth. Like Andy at the district inservice conference, many members of our inquiry community were beginning to share material from our essays with colleagues, and to share stories about the processes and implications of our writing groups and the larger inquiry community that supported them. In school-level inservice, professional development programs organized by our local National Writing

Project site, and conferences sponsored by other professional organizations, our project team members were reporting on our work in ways that enhanced their own professionalization.

We were also feeding our writing for the project—and our learning from it—into a whole array of new writing products and professional roles. Vicki Walker used strategies from her writing group's meetings and reflective writing about their protocols to guide her design of curriculum for several inservice courses she facilitated for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Carol Harrell used her writing for this project—and her learning about writing groups—to help lead a professional team of university professors writing about a standards program. George Seaman drew on his writing in our inquiry community—both in his writing group and in the editorial team—to support the reflective assessment processes of National Board certification. Leslie Walker confidently joined a team of Atlanta-area educators collaborating to write curriculum aimed at improving local race relations. Debby Krumb used her enhanced writing abilities, along with her increased self-confidence as a leader, to become a mentor for students in a graduate program, thereby expanding her professional role from elementary school classroom teacher to teacher educator. Renee Kaplan wrote about her participation in this project when applying for a prestigious national educational award—which she subsequently won.

Whatever the publications that continue to grow out of this project, heightened perceptions about ourselves as professionals may be the most important “product” of teachers' writing groups. How teachers perceive themselves certainly affects the professional choices and social contributions that they make—in the classroom and beyond. Through participation in our inquiry community, teachers used shared reflection and social writing to shore up their professional identities. Viewing our colleagues' stories and writing as a powerful source of learning, as well as hearing others respond to our own writing in the same respectful way, all of us came to see our teaching differently, to speak with greater confidence. We used the social process of writing together to learn and grow professionally. We now invite readers to adapt our model for what we expect would be equally powerful results.

Endnotes

- ¹ See “The Teaching Circle” and *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*.
- ² See Hubbard and Power on inquiry questions in action research.
- ³ See McLaughlin, Shanahan, and Wortham.
- ⁴ See “An Introduction to WAC.”
- ⁵ See Young’s *Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum*, 57 and 56
- ⁶ Schön, “Concluding Remarks”; Schön, *The Reflective Turn*; Norlander-Case, Reagan and Case, *The Professional Teacher*.
- ⁷ See, in that vein, advice from Birchak and colleagues in *Teacher Study Groups*, including ideas for dealing with conflict in groups, 118-120.
- ⁸ See McDonald, Morh, Dichter, and McDonald, especially Chapter 4.
- ⁹ See Wortham’s discussion of “a dialogic approach” to social learning, leading to “understanding and self as emerging within multivoiced conversations” positioned within ongoing “verbal practices”—160-61.

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