

Growing Writers

PRINCIPLES FOR HIGH SCHOOL WRITERS AND THEIR TEACHERS



ANNE ELROD WHITNEY

Principles
in Practice

WRITING IN TODAY'S
CLASSROOMS

Dear Reader,

As a former high school teacher, I remember the frustration I felt when the gap between Research (and that is, by the way, how I always thought of it: Research with a capital *R*) and my own practice seemed too wide to ever cross. Research studies—those sterile reports written by professional and university researchers—often seemed so out of touch with the issues that most concerned me when I walked into my classroom every day. These studies were easy to ignore, in part because they were so distant from my experiences and in part because I had no one to help me see how that research could impact my everyday practice.

Although research has come a long way since then, as more and more teachers take up classroom-based inquiry, this gap between research and practice unfortunately still exists. Quite frankly, it's hard for even the most committed classroom teachers to pick up a research article or book, figure out how that research might apply to their classroom, convince their administrators that a new way of teaching is called for, and put it into practice. While most good teachers instinctively know that there is something to be gained from reading research, who realistically has the time or energy for it?

That gap informs the thinking behind this book imprint. Called *Principles in Practice*, the imprint publishes books that look carefully at the research-based principles and policies developed by NCTE and put those policies to the test in actual classrooms. The imprint naturally arises from one of the missions of NCTE: to develop policy for English language arts teachers. Over the years, many NCTE members have joined committees and commissions to study particular issues of concern to literacy educators. Their work has resulted in a variety of reports, research briefs, and policy statements designed both to inform teachers and to be used in lobbying efforts to create policy changes at the local, state, and national levels (reports that are available on NCTE's website, www.ncte.org).

Through this imprint, we are creating collections of books specifically designed to translate those research briefs and policy statements into classroom-based practice. The goal behind these books is to familiarize teachers with the issues behind certain concerns, lay out NCTE's policies on those issues, provide resources from research studies to support those policies, and—most of all—make those policies come alive for teacher-readers.

This book is part of the second series in the imprint, a series that focuses on writing in today's classrooms. Each book in this series highlights a different aspect of this important topic and is organized in a similar way: immersing you first in the research principles surrounding the topic (as laid out here in NCTE's *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing* position statement) and then taking you into actual classrooms, teacher discussions, and student work to see how the principles play out. Each book closes with a teacher-friendly annotated bibliography.

Good teaching *is* connected to strong research. We hope that these books help you continue the good teaching that you're doing, think hard about ways to adapt and adjust your practice, and grow even stronger in the vital work you do with kids every day.

Best of luck,



Cathy Fleischer

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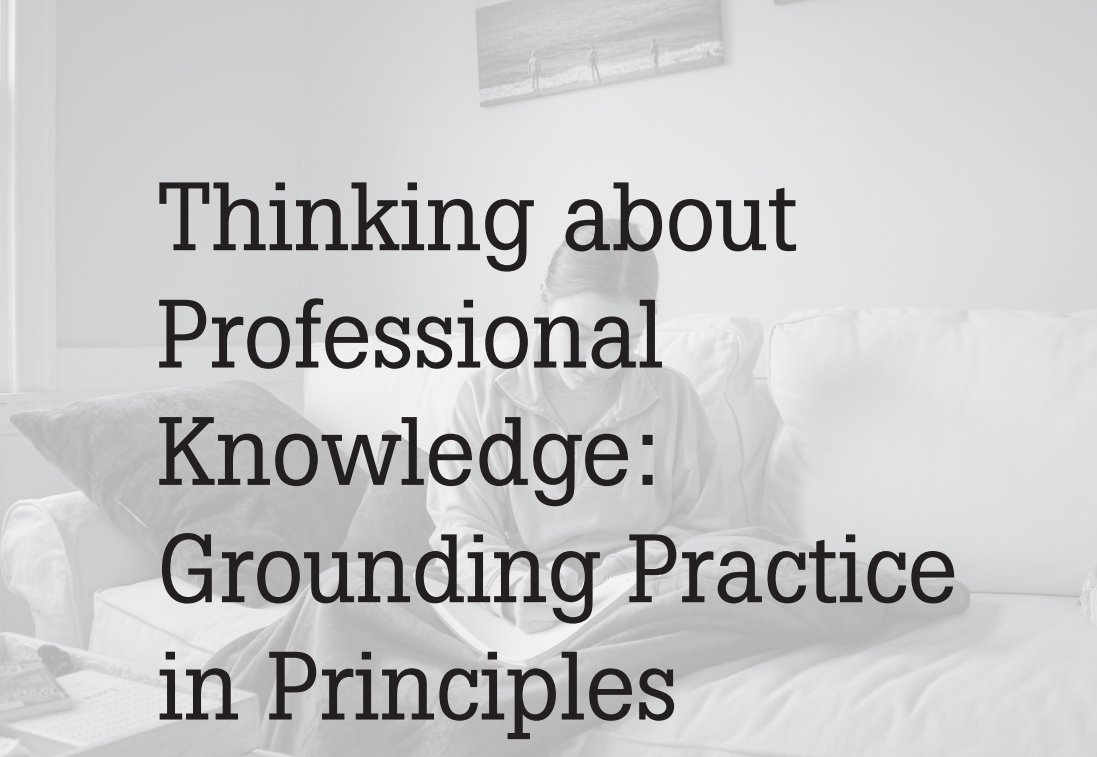
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Contents

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------|
| | Acknowledgments | ix |
| | <i>Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing</i> | xi |
| Part I | Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing | 1 |
| Chapter 1 | Thinking about Professional Knowledge: Grounding Practice in Principles | 3 |
| Chapter 2 | A Vision of Writing and Writing Instruction | 12 |
| Part II | In the Classroom: Teachers on Their Practice | 37 |
| Chapter 3 | Writing for the Soul: Dispelling Shame and Surveillance through Sustaining Writing Practices Jenell Igeleke Penn | 41 |
| Chapter 4 | Expanding Creative Writing to Collaborative Genres. Paula Uriarte | 50 |
| Chapter 5 | Embracing Messy Writing Rituals. Amanda Micheletty | 59 |
| Chapter 6 | Disrupting Texts: Principled Writing Instruction for Advocacy and Argument Lyschel Shipp | 67 |
| Chapter 7 | Contemplating Civic Identity: Explorations through Multimodal Writing. Janelle Quintans Bence | 78 |
| Chapter 8 | Revision Plans: Teaching Students to Process Their Choices during Interludes for Reflection Derek Miller | 98 |
| Chapter 9 | Guiding Youth Voices: Teaching Students to Write for Many Audiences and Purposes Paul Allison | 111 |
| Part II | Concluding Thoughts | 119 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| Part III | Growing On from Here | 121 |
| Chapter 10 | Growing Your Own Professional Knowledge as a Teacher of Writing | 123 |
| | Annotated Bibliography | 133 |
| | David Premont | |
| | References | 139 |
| | Index | 143 |
| | Author | 149 |
| | Contributors | 151 |



Thinking about Professional Knowledge: Grounding Practice in Principles

Why This Book? The Case for Principles

“He who floats with the current, who does not guide himself according to higher principles, who has no ideal, no convictions—such a man is a mere article of the world’s furniture—a thing moved, instead of a living and moving being—an echo, not a voice,” wrote nineteenth-century Swiss philosopher Henri Frédéric Amiel in his journal (1885, p. 209). Isn’t it so for teachers of writing? Teaching can sometimes feel like floating on a sea of approaches, philosophies, curricula, strategies, policies, and reforms. So many stakeholders have opinions about our work: it seems like every year or two, either *Newsweek*, the *New Yorker*, or the *Atlantic* chooses to run a piece or series with the words *writing crisis* in the title. At social gatherings, when I tell people I teach writing, they tell me how poorly kids write today, or how poorly adults do, and they have strong opinions about what we (!!) ought to be doing differently to fix it (mostly, teach more grammar). States institute writing standards and writing tests, revise them and/or repeal them, then institute new ones in a cyclical fashion. And in schools, it’s common for a new curriculum to be adopted or a new resource to be purchased,

to have an initial burst of professional development around it, and then move on to something else just as quickly. All of these ideas about how to teach writing swirl around like foam on the waves, and if we're not paying attention, we writing teachers can find ourselves bobbing along without direction of our own or, worse, swept up in currents that take our writing instruction in directions we never meant to go.

This book is about centering our teaching on principles. The imprint of which it is a part, called *Principles in Practice*, expresses both an aspiration and a truth: first, an aspiration that teaching practice can be grounded in principle, centered on ideas that cohere and guide decision making; second, the truth that it is also possible to find ourselves engaging in practice that is just practice: doing things without knowing why we are doing them, or doing things that, though they “work,” can also undermine what we are really trying to do with writers in the long term.

Principles Ground and Focus Our Selection and Adaptation of Practices

I entered the teaching profession with a strong grounding in teaching writing as process, in workshop-organized writing classrooms in which students would choose what to work on and direct themselves through drafting and revision at their own pace, and in which teaching any genre would begin with organic study of actual pieces of writing in that genre. I had learned these principles through university coursework, interaction with teachers who had been connected to the National Writing Project, and deep reading in the professional literature of our field—books like this one, most of which I had found in the shelves of my college library during slow hours at my tutoring job in the writing center. One thing I KNEW I would not do was assign a five-paragraph essay. I would not have students write essays for an unnamed (teacher) reader, either. And I DEFINITELY would not proffer a one-page template for essay planning. What if students' arguments contained more than one main point? What if they had fewer or more than three reasons, or if the reasons students had to offer for their claims were layered, varying in importance, or drawing on different sources of evidence? Nope, I would not do it.

Then, of course, I did it. While I did also teach in many of the ways I had hoped I would, after exactly one year I found myself handing out a photocopied essay template I had borrowed from a seasoned colleague. I had started having “timed essays” many Fridays, though not every Friday, like my colleague next door. And I had a poster on my wall, adapted from materials from Jane Schaffer, advising students that an essay paragraph should contain a just-so prescribed ratio of “TS, CDs, CMs, and CS”—that is, a formulaic recipe of Topic Sentence, Concrete Details, Commentary, and Concluding Statements.

Why do we so often do what we wished we never would, or find ourselves teaching in ways that openly clash with some of our dearest held teaching values? My values as a teacher had not changed, nor had my students become more needy or less skilled as writers. The truth was that there were things in those materials that my students and I needed: scaffolding for structuring arguments, tools for planning, and so on. We do first with support what we will later do on our own. As experienced adult writers, we can see how one might start with a formula provided by another, then quickly break the tool and go off on our own when our needs as arguers call for something different. Yet, when I photocopied and handed out worksheets in which students could basically fill in the blanks and produce a cookie-cutter essay, I know I wasn't helping students to work at that level of nuance. Instead, I left my students with two conflicting bases for action as writers: one that said writing was developing a form in light of your own purpose and your audience's needs, and another that said, "Here; fill out this form."

Even the very best teachers I know have had times like these—times when practices that “work” to teach a particular skill don't work together, or don't fit into the broader vision we have for students. Or times when, after using a strategy or making an assignment again and again over time, we lose the reasons *why* we do a thing and find ourselves doing it because, well, that's what we do in English 9. Also, if you like employment, there are times you have to go with the flow, right?

What I've discovered over time is that there is a place for those essay-writing supports in my writing instruction, but because I had not examined them thoughtfully in light of the principles I had identified as important, I wasn't able to bring to students that relationship between the help of the scaffold in the near term and the longer-term project of becoming an adaptive, flexible writer with skills to acquire new genres. Some of this was about me, but more of it was about the way my own principles sometimes—or often—seemed at odds with those held by others around me, and almost always at odds with those my school, the district, textbook publishers, or government entities were expressing. In situations where I cared most about students communicating, some other influence made it about achieving. Or when I cared most about emotions, some other structural frame foregrounded skills. Frankly, few of the holders of institutional power are ever focused on the heart of one kid the way a teacher can be.

Principles Make Our Instruction More Coherent and Intentional

Even when we're feeling strong and grounded in our practice, paying explicit attention to the principles that we teach from and within is a useful and sustaining practice. Principles offer a set of intentional, powerful lenses through which to view and reflect on our own practice as teachers. And the benefits of reflection are

by now well known, helping teachers to gain deeper critical insight into their own practice (Boud, 2001; Boud et al., 1985; Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Our principles don't benefit only us, however. They also help us to make our instruction more coherent and purposeful for our students. Research shows that when lessons are more coherently focused around clear goals and principles, students learn more (Erickson, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2000; Seidel et al., 2005). And it makes sense, doesn't it, that when activities are connected to clear purposes, and fit together with other activities and their purposes over time, students can better make use of them for learning.

When I think about coherence, I always think about two classrooms in a study I was involved with (Whitney et al., 2008). Both teachers were working with similar kinds of kids in similar schools, and both teachers were using the same district-provided materials, in this case a set of reading and writing lessons centered on Amelia Earhart. The basic activities and sequence of instruction were the same for these two teachers—activities to support invention, planning, drafting, and revision—and both of them were very good at working with students through these activities. However, one teacher often stepped back to place the activities within a bigger picture. She articulated why a particular strategy was good to use, beyond that assignment. She always made ties between what was happening now and what might happen in the future or in other writing situations, when the same moves would be called for. She even engaged the students in thinking together about why Amelia Earhart was someone worth learning about. The nuts and bolts of this teacher's instruction were basically identical to that of the other teacher, but the framing was clear and coherent. Activities had a place in a broader set of ideas that drove her teaching and that also powered the students' engagement in what they had been asked to do. And when the students wrote, they had a clear sense of why they were doing so: beyond the fact that a teacher had asked them to write, they had things they wanted to say about Amelia Earhart and a sense of who they might say those things to.

This is the power of principles. Principles tie instructional moves together into bigger frames. Principles give activities a "why." Principles offer both teachers and students a way to hook into a bigger picture that unifies and gives significance to what we are doing.

Principles Make Our Practice Shareable

What's more, keying our teaching practice to specific principles makes it shareable. Maybe having your ninth graders write and produce video PSAs about water quality, for example, is local to your specific teaching context, where water quality is a pressing issue and where PSAs are specifically called for in a district curriculum

document. So the details of that specific teaching sequence in and of themselves may not be directly useful to a colleague who teaches, say, fiction writing in grade 11 in a distant location. However, the details of that specific teaching practice become *very* useful (and provocative!) to that teacher when they're offered not as an account of one particular assignment but as an example of working with students as they write for authentic audiences according to their different purposes. Perhaps one teacher is having students craft PSAs for an audience of local citizens, and another is having students craft informational books about middle school for rising sixth graders currently attending elementary school—these specifics come together and become mutually informing when they are linked by a shared principle, in this case “Writing grows out of many purposes.”

Clearly identified principles are the language—and result—of a lively, ongoing conversation among teachers of writing. The principles featured in this book aren't one teacher's intuition or one colleague's version of “what works”; they reflect years of experimentation and collaboration by teachers and of more systematic research and scholarship by both classroom teachers and other educators. In other words, naming and claiming these principles connects us to a long tradition of other teachers of writing who have struggled together to understand the very things we are contending with, and also to whose discussion we ourselves might have something to add.

Take the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), for example, whose press is publishing this book and whose members crafted the statement of principles upon which this book is focused. NCTE was founded in 1911, and it was in that first meeting that the *English Journal* (first published in 1912) also was founded. From its beginning, this community of teachers has gathered to talk about issues literacy teachers face—and has made the effort to share thinking via publications, in-person meetings, and, later, online resources and interactions. Each of these texts or events does not stand alone; taken together, they represent a conversation. Through that conversation, some core principles have emerged.

The conversation wouldn't be much of a conversation if people just asserted their own ideas without learning and linking to the ideas of those who have come before. Think about how you talk at a party. You don't walk into a crowded room, take off your coat, clear your throat, and begin immediately to give a speech. No, you take as a given that people who are already there are already talking about interesting things. So you hang up your coat, maybe greet a few people you know, and edge up to a group whose conversation is in midstream. You get a sense of what they are saying, catch up on the thread of talk, before you jump in to add your own ideas. And when you add those ideas, you have some expectation that they'll be listened to and responded to. Others will build off of what you say, maybe to disagree or maybe to add on or explore an implication of what you said. And by

the end of the night, you and the other folks you've been talking with all know a bit more than you did when you came in, or at least can ask some new questions. This is only possible because you talked together, taking turns and threading together various comments with shared themes that served as through-lines for the conversation. Shared principles of professional knowledge are like that—they are through-lines for our shared conversation that allow our wonderings, observations, and insights to be talked about outside just our own heads. The guy who interjects a bunch of non sequiturs at the party isn't participating in the same way.

Principles Provoke Inquiry and Reflection

One of my favorite things about clarifying principles for practice is the way they provoke and focus my questions as I teach. A principle like "Writing is social" leads me to "How can I develop writing partnerships for my students?" And systematic inquiry enriches teaching with new information and insight that we can put directly back into teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001; Fleischer, 1995; Whitney et al., 2008).

One way principles provoke and support inquiry is by making our questions better. Instead of asking, "Why is this not working?" or "Why is this student not learning?," we can ask, "What processes are students engaging in here, and what resources do they need to succeed?" Or "How can I better support this student?" Without thoughtful questions, it's easy to fall into the trap of deficit perspectives that harm students and stop us from doing our best work.

***Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing:* About the Principles Document**

This book, of course, isn't about just any principles; it is grounded in the set of principles laid out in the position statement *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*, adopted by NCTE in 2016 and reprinted in the front matter of this book. So let me share a bit of the history behind that document and its meaning as a statement of shared grounding principles for practice, developed, assembled, vetted, and articulated by the professional community of which you as readers, I as author and editor, and the teachers who contributed later chapters are all members.

The history of the Principles, as I'll call them throughout this book, is really two histories: one, the history of the document, and the other, the history of the ideas in it. First, a brief history of the document: NCTE has often taken formal positions on a range of issues inside and outside of the classroom, and in 2004 the statement *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* was adopted by the NCTE Executive Committee. The Executive Committee comprises elected members

of NCTE representing all its various sections; they are classroom teachers and teacher educators, like you and me. The origin story of the Principles goes like this: In 2002, that group decided to embark on a two-year focus on writing, discerning NCTE's positions on writing and what actions NCTE might choose to take relative to writing. A writing study group was formed, and one product of that group's work was *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* (BATW), which was presented to the leadership of NCTE and approved by its members; the document was ultimately adopted as NCTE's official position on the teaching of writing in November 2004. More than a decade later, the NCTE Executive Committee engaged a wider review and refresh of existing policy statements, updating some and sundowning others. This provided an opportunity to incorporate new research into the statement on writing as well as make it responsive to changing contexts, though the basic ideas in the document remained consistent. A committee was appointed to examine and update BATW, and the product of that group was eventually adopted as *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*. While I admire the document, its name is long, and PKFTW is not a very sayable acronym, so in this book, I'll usually call it the Principles.

The history of the ideas that constitute the Principles document is of course much more complex. The next chapter presents a bit of the background and support for each of the ten principles; here, I want to step back a bit to offer a perspective on the community discernment process by which these ideas gain currency, are vetted, and become shared beliefs of a professional community. That process is less formalized than was the creation of the actual Principles document, but it matters nonetheless because it shows that the principles we come to identify as a community aren't just the opinions of a few powerful people, not fads or the educational flavor-of-the-month.

We gain professional knowledge from formal and informal inquiry, in and out of the classroom. So some of our shared professional knowledge comes from teachers who develop wonderings from their own daily teaching practice, who systematically investigate those, and who then make changes in practice from what they find as well as share their learning with other teachers. This movement and source of professional knowledge we call teacher research or practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 2009). Its history is rich, dating to the beginnings of research on writing and having roots in the work of progressive educators like John Dewey and his colleagues in the United States as well as others like Lawrence Stenhouse in the United Kingdom later on. Teacher research as a needed and legitimate source of knowledge for practice grew in influence in the US largely through the National Writing Project (e.g., MacLean & Mohr, 1999), whose teachers-teaching-teachers philosophy fit well with teacher research and whose teacher-leaders rightly perceived that there really was not much empirical informa-

tion available about what worked for writing instruction in the K–12 classroom from *any* source. Teacher research also took hold in teacher networks and organizations serving teachers such as the Bread Loaf School of English (whose DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest–funded large-scale network of rural teachers included teacher research as a core component) (Goswami & Stillman, 1987). NCTE and its members have been ever-present through these developments (Fleischer, 1995; Stock, 2001, 2005), and the organization has long supported teacher research, providing venues for its publication through its journals and conferences, hosting countless convention sessions dedicated to supporting teacher research or sharing its results.

Meanwhile, knowledge that confirms, extends, and at times challenges what we can learn directly from practice also comes from qualitative and quantitative studies originating outside the classroom (but almost always carried out with insight from teacher partners). This work is usually led by university faculty. These researchers are NCTE members too. NCTE as an organization has supported this kind of knowledge generation for the teaching of writing through its research-focused journals such as *Research in the Teaching of English* and *English Education*, through the NCTE Research Foundation, and through other research supports such as the CEE (now ELATE) Research Initiative. It also encourages and recognizes this strand of research through mentorship and dissemination structures such as the L. Ramon Veal Research Seminar and the Research Strand at the NCTE Annual Convention, in which proposals go through a research-specific peer review process before approval for the Convention Program.

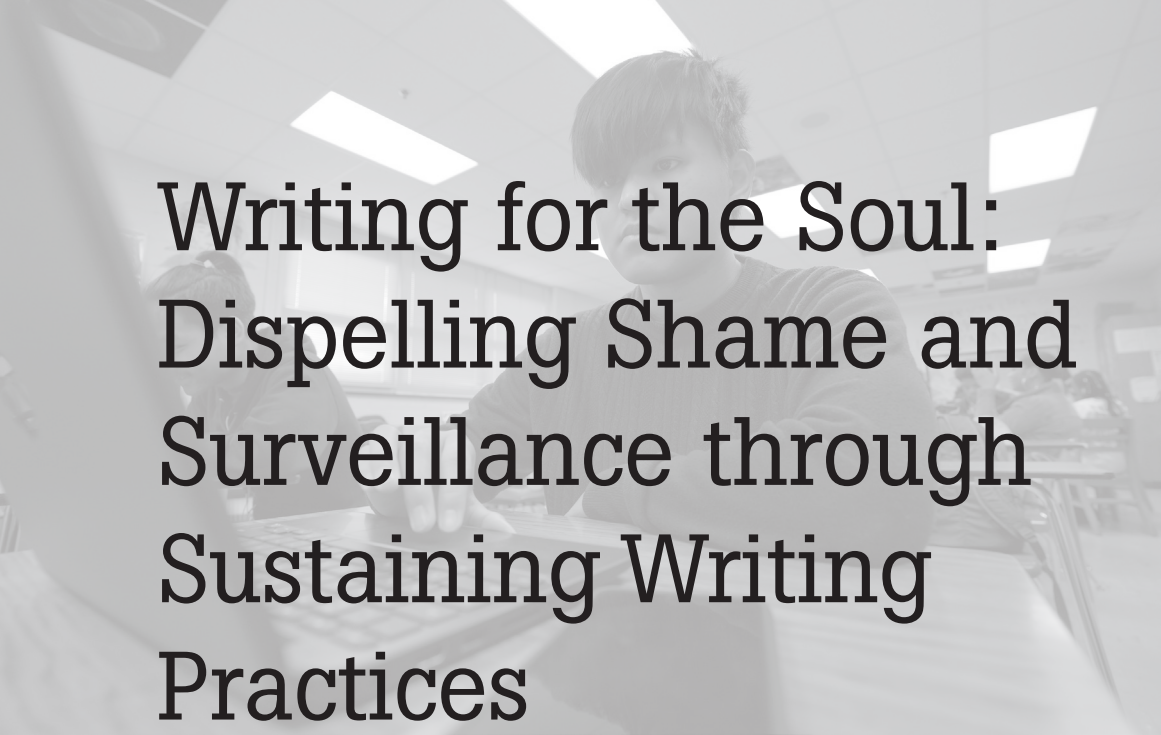
All of this is to say that the knowledge expressed in the Principles is *our* knowledge. It is not just someone's opinion, and it's not just the practice of another teacher. It isn't new or fashionable. It has been vetted by our community, not only in the process of the formal drafting of the Principles document but also, and more important (and much more extensively!), through the vetting and peer review that goes into research collaborations, peer review, reviewing for publications, and putting one's ideas out in front of a conference or roundtable. These are not the ideas of faraway experts, and they are not ideas picked up outside and imposed on our teaching by policymakers from outside. They are *our* ideas.

This means that *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing* gives us at least these four gifts: It gives us a source of ideas for practice when we need ideas. It gives us a reflective filter for enhancing and deepening the practices we already work with. It gives us an evaluative filter for evaluating practice suggested (or mandated) by others. And it gives us a place to stand in the face of bad ideas for practice or when we need to defend practices we know are good for student writers.

In This Book

The rest of this book offers a chance to think through this powerful set of principles so that you can make use of them. It is a chance not only to consider principles on the abstract level, but also to see and hear from other teachers exactly what these ideas look like in real writing classrooms with real kids. Along the way, side boxes invite you to reflect and think further about applications to your own teaching every day.

In Chapter 2, I unpack each of the ten principles laid out in *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*. Chapters 3–9 are invited contributions from teachers of high school writers who have spent some time thinking about what these principles look like in their own practice and have described those so that we can think together about them. Chapter 10 backs up again to a bigger picture, adding all of this up into a discussion of professional knowledge and how we grow it, helping you form a clear plan going forward. I close with an annotated bibliography, written—not in academic prose, but in teacher-friendly language—to encourage you to keep exploring, questioning, and reconsidering as you continue this conversation.



Writing for the Soul: Dispelling Shame and Surveillance through Sustaining Writing Practices

Jenell Igeleke Penn

Writing is embedded in complex social relationships and
their appropriate languages.

Everyone has the capacity to write.

Note from Anne

In this chapter, veteran teacher Jenell Igeleke Penn illustrates how she worked with high school students to move from feeling like their writing is “trash” to finding writing important for thinking about things they want to—need to—think about. As she describes her students, their writing, her own transparency, and her own acts of support, she also shows how the principles that “writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages” and that “everyone has the capacity to write” drives her decision making to, first, help students find ideas that they care about and, then, work through their own vulnerability in order to produce pieces of writing they can share with peers.

I'm
 Just
 That
 Good
 I could be a rapper if I really tried
 Expose all the mannequin and their lies
 But I really don't have the time
 Too busy keeping up with the rights
 Of people my
 Age
 Color
 And size
 You should be crowning me
 All this thick sensory surrounding me
 I'll put you in the center of my world
 I swear it's lit
 After being in the dark so long
 I think I deserve it.

A resounding and collective “Oooohhhhhhhh!” filled the space.

Dominic jumped up from his desk and ran across the class to Maleeyah's desk, his hand balled into a fist and leaned in for the dap.

“You killed it, Maleeyah! Who's next?” he shouted.

“I can't go after that!” Dasia protested.

“C'mon, y'all. This is what it's all about,” Dominic responded.

This *is* what it is all about. Though Dominic came into my fourth period eleventh-grade American Humanities class with great experience and confidence in his writing abilities, very few of the other young people in the class did. In fact, when asked about their writing abilities, many responded with comments such as, “My writing is trash” and “I'm not a writer.” Maleeyah was one of many juniors in the class who loudly wore this badge. Through these declarations came the echoes of writing positioned as something at which only the esteemed and learned succeed, and, even after engaging in writing together for three months, the badge remained.

For several years, I had struggled to truly engage students in writing. Each year I'd start off the school year teaching students about several lenses (feminist, critical race, queer, historical) they could peer through to think deeply and differently about the texts we read, listened to, and viewed (Kinloch, 2011). From these lenses, students engaged in thoughtful discussions about our class texts, their own lives, and larger world contexts, but they pushed back against creating their

own texts. I'd assign several essays: narrative, critical analysis, literary analysis, argumentative. They'd turn them in. I'd pull out my red pen and provide meaningful feedback on the paper *and* the rubric, just like I was taught to do in my teacher preparation program. I'd offer the option of revising, but very few students took me up on the offer to revise a B+ paper. Writing was an action done for the teacher, and once submitted, the piece of writing belonged to the teacher. The students didn't own the writing and they didn't want to grow or talk with me about their writing, let alone with one another.

Writing requires risk taking, and writers have to allow themselves to be open, to be vulnerable. How could I get my kids to allow themselves to be vulnerable? The majority of my students were low income and/or Black youth, and they were not afforded the privilege of choosing to be vulnerable. Historically, Black children have been continuously, intentionally, and undesirably vulnerable to violence, hunger, stereotypes, correction, and surveillance. And, in that space of vulnerability, they've been positioned as adults and/or criminals, and they've been expected to be strong and resilient or have "grit" (Duckworth, 2016; Yeh, 2017). So why would they choose to be vulnerable, especially in schools, a space in which they have experienced so much racial violence and erasure?

Additionally, a common false assumption is that simply being a Black teacher will build connections for Black students. However, systems of oppression and white supremacy are in all of us, and being a Black teacher did not erase the violence associated with being a teacher and so-called progressive teaching practices in my students' lives. In so many school spaces, my students have been told to leave their social vernaculars, their language, and their personal experiences at the door. But how can students connect to school and see the benefits and power of writing if they are asked to strip off and whitewash parts of their identities when they walk through the classroom door?

The Principles document asserts that "Writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages." The difficult and long-standing tensions between students and teachers, between home and school languages, and between Black students and teachers and the systemic structures of oppression present in schooling do not just evaporate because I want students to write: writing, as the Principles state,

happens in the midst of a web of relationships. . . . Therefore, power relationships are built into the writing situation. In every writing situation, the writer, the reader, and all relevant others live in a structured social order, where some people's words count more than others, where being heard is more difficult for some people than others, where some people's words come true and others' do not. (pp. xii–xiii; all page references to the Principles map to the front matter of this book)

In the midst of these truths, I somehow needed to help my students be free to choose to be vulnerable in my class, and to know that it wasn't solely so that they would do what I ultimately wanted them to do. I needed them to choose to grow as writers because they wanted to grow for themselves and for one another. My students were not connecting when it came to the way I was teaching writing—except on Mondays. Something was happening on Mondays. Something good.

Writing for the Soul: Read-Arounds

On Read-Around Mondays, I saw all of my classes for forty minutes, and I saw each period every other day for blocked periods the remainder of the week. Because of the shortened period on Monday and the ability to see each class, Monday became a great day to explore varied forms of writing. Therefore, each Monday we dedicated the entire class period to read-arounds for forty minutes. Drawing on a practice I learned from Robin Holland through the Columbus Area Writing Project and featured in her book, *Deeper Writing: Quick Writes and Mentor Texts to Illuminate New Possibilities* (2012) and in Linda Christensen's book *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (2017), I presented a read-around prompt, one that paired with a mentor or thinking text and offered three options for creative writing. These options connected to our topic for the grading period: American Identity (GP1), American Nightmare (GP2), American Dreaming (GP3), and Using Your American Voice (GP4). Each week we focused on a different read-around. Sometimes the prompt asked students to try out a specific container (e.g., a six-word memoir or a collaborative story); other times, the prompt asked students to address specific themes or topics such as different versions of the American Dream, how musicians respond to oppressions, biases in our perspectives, different metaphors for America, and what students know they know—epistemologies (ways of knowing how we know what we know, what counts as “truth,” and where beliefs inform truths) and ontologies (ways of defining and naming categories and characteristics so that we can talk about them) that are typically left out of schools.

When my students wrote, I wrote. When they shared, I shared. When my students asked for feedback or advice on their writing, I asked for feedback and advice on my writing. Everyone shared; not always with the whole group, but everyone wrote because everyone could. It was important for me to model both vulnerability and confidence in writing with my students so that they could see how I asked for help, how the writing process unfolded, and how my writing changed over time. In her book *Black Literate Lives*, Maisha Fisher (2008) argues that English teachers must be “practitioners of the craft” and model and engage in the literacy practices with students. She further argues that taking this stance builds strong community with students and fosters growth. For this new path to work,

my students and I had to trust one another. After describing the read-around concept, I discussed with students our expectations as a community of writers. We agreed on three expectations: (1) everyone writes; (2) a writer shares when and what they are ready to share; and (3) feedback is constructive and encourages further development. Often as teachers we set expectations for our students, but we don't embody them ourselves. I knew that if I wanted my students' writing to improve, they needed to care about their writing and see themselves as writers, and for them to see that, I needed to show my own vulnerabilities.

So it was during read-arounds that space was created for the soul and the whole to be present. Most important, no language, no "drama," and no words were off limits, and everyone in the room (classroom aides, visitors, students, intervention specialists, and myself) participated. We encouraged one another to not just write for the soul but to soulfully listen as well. We extended our understanding of reading deeply and differently (Kinloch, 2013), to writing deeply and differently, and to listening deeply and differently. During this particular school year, I lost a child, and my students were aware. Instead of pretending it didn't happen and leaving my "personal drama" at the door, I wrote about my pain. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) writes:

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (p. 21)

I not only became a practitioner of the craft with my students and, therefore, part of the writing and revision group, but I also confessed what made me feel joyful or broken. Thus, I positioned myself as both vulnerable and empowered by the writing process. I extended this same space for my students. One particular week I shared a prompt that asked students to explore the concept of "home." One student, Jason, wrote about feeling at home when he smokes marijuana. Some educators would censor students' writing at this point. However, for a student who needed intensive writing help and was opening up for the first time all year, I did not want to squash his engagement. Instead, I saw this as an opportunity to engage Jason, to move him toward wellness, and show him that he could write. To say that his piece could not be part of the class would have been counter to the com-

Note from Anne

In keeping with the principle that "writing and reading are related," it is in Jenell's existing practice as a reading teacher that she finds ways to open doors to writing that students had kept closed. Along the way, she and her students form a powerful community of writers who trust one another enough to take chances with their writing—and with each other.

Note from Anne

Jenell and the other adults in her classroom enact a simple yet challenging piece of wisdom from the earliest process-oriented writing teachers: write along with your students. It is so valuable, yet so difficult to do. Practically, it's hard not to claim that time for recordkeeping, managing interruptions, or organizing the next activity. Emotionally, it's hard to slow down enough. To take your attention off of the students for long enough. Or to get vulnerable enough. Even when not bravely sharing an experience of grief like Jenell's, writing authentically tends to take us to some tender places. We don't always know whether we can trust students with that, either. But when we can, not only do we get to model writing practices, but we also get to model vulnerability. Jenell's students show us why this is such a gift.

munity we had created. It was part of him; therefore, it was part of us. While not every teacher would or, depending on circumstances, could make the same choice, I chose to prioritize my concern about evoking writing, any writing at all, from Jason over my concern about how my decision might look from the outside. This is what happens when, as Anne Haas Dyson (1993) puts it, we make the curriculum "permeable," where students can enter and influence it and where it can enter and influence the lives and minds of students: once you engage students so authentically, they also will engage the work authentically, and they will bring with them all that is real to them—including things we as teachers are not always ready for.

Vulnerability: Letting Themselves Be Seen

It was through this Monday read-around practice that I realized that for my students to grow in all aspects of writing, they had to let themselves be seen as writers, as creators. In assigning writing the first half of the year (and every year prior), I had mainly

focused on the skills and knowledge the state said my students needed to have and know. My overall curriculum was grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992), and students engaged in social justice capstone projects, but when it came to writing, the things I was asking them to do were not truly responsive, sustaining, or led by them. In contrast to the vibrant, student-centered, deep engagement with issues that mattered to students during read-around, when it was time for writing, I reverted to teacher-assigned prompts that resulted in rather listless products. Read-Around Mondays were great, but the practice stayed in the Monday slot, and students never received sustained meaningful feedback on or continuous time for creation and revision of their read-arounds. But this is when I saw students come alive. This is where they saw themselves as writers, saw that each and every one of them could write something. This needed to be the norm in my class.

So I committed to making a change. I hemmed and hawed over my decision to forego a focus on standardized and formal writing as the most important as we moved into the second half of the school year and instead put my energies into writing for the soul. Rather than a final analysis paper, the final project focused on

read-around. Considering teacher evaluations, I was terrified. What if what I did set students back? What if they don't score well on the ACT? What if, what if, what if? I looked into the deep pool of what ifs and jumped.

I wanted to push students to really see and embody the writing process and to challenge myself to strengthen my students' writing skills utilizing different methods. Instead of moving to read-around every day (a new prompt, a new start), I shifted to developing a piece of writing (often begun in read-around) into something more polished, with each student taking ownership so that we could continue to build trust and confidence in our writing skills and in one another. I decided to have students choose one of their own pieces from the year, and I charged them with perfecting the chosen piece into something complete and publishable. I encouraged them to choose one that would best showcase their growth and talent. Once the students had chosen their pieces (e.g., blog posts, fan fiction, poems, editorials), I provided them with the following list of tasks:

- Choose a container and make it shine.
- Propose below who will be in your group. There must be at least three people in a group and no more than five.
- Read work aloud during group meetings.
- Revise and edit one another's work.
- Provide timely feedback to other writers.
- Assist in research and revision.
- Participate in a variety of revision exercises.
- Provide group members updated pieces to read and hear.

Allowing students to organize themselves into writing groups was a critical step in showing students that I believed in their writing abilities. I was demonstrating that I believed not only in their abilities to write but also in their abilities to support one another's writing, both emotionally and academically. Part of the writing process is revising and writing with others, and for this to become clearer, I needed to share the pedagogical hat. We had learned from one another all year as a whole-class read-around group, but I was the sole facilitator. Now I wanted them to teach and learn from one another in smaller read-around groups. I emphasized the importance of supporting one another through the writing process by providing meaningful feedback, listening ears, and creative ideas. Additionally, I looked for evidence of active and collaborative revision within the writing groups each week.

At first, students resisted.

"What's the template for writing something like this the right way?"

"Why do I have to have him read my writing? You're the teacher!"

“I don’t know how to fix this!”

“I’m tired of fixing this.”

It seemed that assigning the read-around process and products as the final project somehow triggered certain hardwired anxieties and fears about writing. The project was going to be graded, and graded meant judging, unchosen vulnerability, and surveillance. It was hard not to abandon ship, but I wanted students to see that to be writers, they didn’t have to rely solely on me. They already were writers and they already knew so much about writing. Writing isn’t easy, but just because it isn’t easy didn’t mean they couldn’t do it. So I did two things. First, I led students through the assignment (which I had decided without them) and we co-constructed expectations. Second, at least once a week I led a mini-lesson on some topic related to writing that the students found challenging: comma usage, writing with metaphors and allusions, parallel structure, setting development, the art of peer revision. Sometimes I led the class; sometimes Mr. Johnson, our intervention specialist, led the class; and sometimes the students led the class. But, no matter how hard it seemed, we kept writing and we kept progressing.

At the end of the year, we held our final read-around session. This session was about honoring the writing we had produced and celebrating our collective growth. Deciding to make this change midyear was scary. I’m a planner, and my plans for the year were set! So I was reluctant, but I came to understand that writing instruction wasn’t about me. It was about my students and what they needed. And the fire in my chest whenever I heard them share on Read-Around Mondays meant I needed to prioritize their languages and interests. I chose my students. I chose to honor their languages and their interests. They could and should own and command writing; it did not command them. They could insert themselves into the conversations that were important to them. This is not to say that our other writing assignments were unimportant and would be forgotten, but I needed to reframe them in ways that allowed students to own the writing and the evaluation process. Writing is not about shame, surveillance, and correction, but about celebration, growth, and inclusion of our whole selves.

This example of a poem read by one student at the end of the year illustrates this point:

To be American is to be the black bird.

The bird that soars the sky; over the strange fruit dangling, hanging,
melting off the trees with cocoa brown leaves onto the dark green
grass left there for several days – in and out.

To be American is to use the “American Language.”

To be Ebonics as proper grammar. To speak how I was raised. To slang
and slur my words. To use words like “cuz,” “ya’ll,” and “finna”
because I can.

Not because I do not have the mental capacity to do otherwise.

To be American is to learn about my people, culture, and lifestyle instead of a whitewashed copy.

Like the things you learn in history books.

To be American is to use Ebonics because it is culture – not remedial.

I argued at the outset of this chapter that the ways I work with student writers in my setting are grounded in the principle that “writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages.” This fact, and the fact of schools’ long-term complicity in silencing student voices rather than elevating them, poses a special challenge to writing teachers like me and other teachers working with students from backgrounds that are too often marginalized and oppressed. Yet, another principle opens possibility: Everyone has the capacity to write; writing can be taught; and teachers can help students become better writers. The question is, are we paying attention, and have we told our students otherwise?

Note from Anne

This student’s poem makes the point, just as his teacher has in this chapter, that “writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages.” I love how this student uses language to talk back to language, not only in his direct comments about Ebonics but also in the way he wraps images like “strange fruit” and “whitewashed” in the same Standard English that he names as having positioned Ebonics as “remedial.”

**Chapter
Four**

Expanding Creative Writing to Collaborative Genres

Paula Uriarte

Writing grows out of many purposes.

Writing is a process.

Note from Anne

Paula Uriarte describes how her juniors and seniors in Boise, Idaho, who have elected to take an advanced creative writing course, typically see writing as a solitary activity. However, most writing that adults do involves collaboration. Writing in unexpected genres helps Paula's students to experience collaborative writing in genres they typically wouldn't encounter in school. Here she describes an example that shows how her students enact two of the principles in the Principles document: writing for many purposes and writing as a process.

My Advanced Creative Writing class, juniors and seniors who have already taken two semester-long prerequisites, is mapping out character connections on the whiteboard as we prepare a Murder Mystery Dinner for a group of teacher-leaders who provide professional development for other teachers around Idaho. The students pitched ideas in small groups for what our story should be, and now we've gone with *The Night Howler's Ski Lodge*. Here's the backstory as written by the students:

Klyde Poe is a banker who has been stealing from his clients. He has a religious conversion and decides he needs to atone for his mistakes, so he invites his clients to the Night Howler's Ski Lodge to give them back their money and treat them to a great weekend to make amends.

Today we are making sure all of the connections characters have to each other are clear so that it's hard to trace who the real killer is but not impossible. This is a large group for this kind of work—twenty students, all creative people—and you can tell there's a little frustration but also a deep desire to figure out this web of characters.

Creative Writing courses at my school often tend to attract students who want to just write and be left alone to do so. Many of them see the work as solitary, and they like it that way. While I hate to generalize, I have come to expect students who might be described as “angsty”—who like to write abstract and often morose poetry, students who love science fiction, and lately a group of girls who are devoted to “fan fic” from *Supernatural* to the Harry Potter series and anything I can possibly imagine in between. Most of them want to write the Great American Novel or try to make their living as a writer. Some just like to write and want a space to do so. Regardless of where they come from, they are not used to writing anything collaboratively. But statistically, very few of them will eventually be in a position where they write fiction or poetry, solitarily, to pay the bills. If part of my job is to mentor students into the practice of the discipline, I need them to see the more realistic possibilities of the kinds of work they could do to make a living as a writer. Newspapers, magazines, television shows, websites, escape rooms, gaming companies all have teams of writers, not one, lone cigarette-smoking, whisky-swilling, typewriter-punching icon. This means students need to experience the kinds of writing they might have to do. In this chapter, I show how I have worked with my Creative Writing students to write in many genres, in keeping with the principles articulated in the NCTE Principles document that “Writing grows out of many purposes” and “Writing is a process.”

The group of writers who planned the Murder Mystery Dinner described above were sophomores through seniors of diverse identities, including gender expressions. Most students in this group were incredibly talented writers. While

they started the year with definite preferences for certain genres, they were willing to try new forms and were often surprised at their success. This success led them to take more risks as the year went on. These identities were always at play in the writing and even influenced some of our discussions of direction for our Murder Mystery Dinner.

Writing in Creative Writing: From Journals to Real-World Genres

A typical day in the class begins with a journal prompt. I liken this writing to playing scales or doing voice warm-ups in music or stretching before a run. In our introductory classes, these prompts are usually tied to skills. If we are looking at characterization, they may be writing character sketches from pictures or trying several different ways to describe the same character or showing the age of a character without using any numbers. If we are working on plot, they might begin with a loose plot structure (man and woman get into a taxicab) and, over the course of the week, write different versions of a story that fits that plot. Often these prompts come with a mentor text of the kind of writing they will do. I ask students to write at least one line in response to the prompt, but it's a rare occasion that students don't try what we are doing. When we finish, they are given the option to share. This is always an option for journal prompts. I often name one or two things I see the writer doing, but for the most part we show appreciation instead of critique. I try most of the time to write with my students, and sometimes I will share. Every year it is a goal for me to write with them *every day*, and every year I fail.

In time, the students take over the task of creating journal prompts.

They write prompts for our journals on index cards and someone different draws each day. They base their prompt writing on our investigation of the prompts they liked in the first-year class. We discuss those favorites and why students liked them. Eventually, students develop a shared set of criteria for good prompts, such as “open-ended, but not too open,” “gets a variety of responses,” and “intriguing.” They know their audience well, because students in the class will actually write to one another's prompts. These experiments in journal prompt writing serve an important purpose: teaching the class to be audiences for one another's work and developing shared understandings of what different audiences (in this case, creative writing students!) might need.

Note from Anne

Of course, prompts are themselves a genre, one that students have interacted with many times by the time they reach Paula Uriarte's course. The difference here is that Paula helps the students engage the prompts not only as instructions for success in a school task but also as examples in a genre, one whose features can be recognized and analyzed. This work with the genre of prompts lays groundwork for the more explicit genre analysis in which they will next engage.

As Creative Writing progresses, students write nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, always working from mentor texts to identify what they might like to imitate in their own writing. Every six weeks, they take a piece to publication, drawing on feedback from small groups to revise, then reading from an Author's Chair in a celebration. After these experiences, and after trust and collaborative skills have developed, we turn to Murder Mystery Dinners and Escape Rooms as collaborative writing challenges.

Close-up: Murder Mysteries and Escape Rooms

None of the students had ever participated in a Murder Mystery Dinner, so we started our work by playing the game “How to Host a Teen Mystery: Hot Times at Hollywood High,” which my friend Chris had found at a thrift store. Murder Mystery Dinners are events where a group of people come together and role-play a character in a particular scenario where some mystery is solved in the course of the evening. Usually there is a backstory or inciting incident, and then clues are revealed throughout the meal or event that lead to the final reveal of who perpetrated the crime. It's like a live version of *Clue*. I also shared with students a dinner I put together for my stepdaughter for her birthday—a “Talent Show,” in which characters were created and assigned based on the family and friends who attended. Like the “Hollywood High” example, we used “Talent Show” as another mentor text. In addition to having students analyze features of these two mentor texts, I was also able to model process using “Talent Show,” sharing how I made decisions when creating it, what went well, and what I would do differently for the future.

A friend suggested his group of teacher-leaders as the audience for our murder mystery night. The students loved the idea of the project, especially having a live audience of real teachers at the other end who would be playing the mystery. We created shared docs and folders, which not only made it easy for us to collaborate, but as one student said, “Then later we can play it with our friends and families.” Over a four-week period, we played our mentor text game, deconstructed its components, pitched ideas for backstory, voted on one idea, and then started creating characters. All of this we deliberated using what we knew or could assume about our target audience.

Our mentor text had descriptions for each character in three rounds that included “Hidden Truths” and “Gossip about Others.” To fit our large audience,

Note from Anne

I think this step of locating an audience is key to the success Paula had with this project. How many times have we asked students to write something for an audience, yet we and they both knew that the writing wouldn't actually be read by that audience? We up the stakes—but also the potential for meaningful engagement with a writing task—when we set students up as writers for an actual audience.

we had to create a larger number of characters than our mentor text had, allowing for sets of partners to work on a character. Once we had a round of ideas for each character, we came back together in the whole group to see how each idea fit with the other characters. Students did a lot of mapping on the whiteboards and had to revise their ideas based on what was happening with other characters. These conversations were powerful to observe; students sometimes had to let an idea go, and at other times they were visibly excited as they brought characters together and developed more complicated story lines. This process included constant discussion and revision and some passionate but productive arguments. We also had a hitch close to the end when our teacher-leader group increased by one and we needed a new character. This sent the students back to the whiteboard and forced one more set of revisions. As we put the package together, student strengths came out in the creation of invitations, directions for game play, and the design of the box filled with the evening's props and clues. Even the format of our mentor text was updated by the use of technology.

Our mystery mentor text came with a cassette tape to narrate the game (and luckily one of our media specialists still had a tape player in the library for emergencies); updating this, our students who were also in the Video Broadcasting course gained access to the green screen to film an opening. A video created by the students (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y82o8m4YMX8>) introduced the mystery to game players: during the opening, Klyde dies, and the guests must figure out how he died while role-playing their given characters. We did a dry run, then finally handed the student-illustrated box of invites, props, and clue envelopes to my teacher friends for their June meeting.

After their mystery night, the teacher-participants wrote thank-yous, most of them as their character, and took pictures for us. Some comments included: "Thanks for a dark and twisted time. The carnage was excellent." "This was a great experience. Who knew I could possibly commit murder?" "Thanks for helping me get in touch with my inner actor!" "Wow! So wonderfully written and organized. I never would have spent this much time working on it, but I will take it." Everything had gone smoothly, and the clues and plot were easy to follow. The reveal was not obvious, and the teacher coaching team was really able to do some bonding through participating in the game before they started the hard work they had to do.

The following school year, I was introduced to Escape Rooms, which have exploded in popularity. Essentially, a group of people surrender their cell phones and are "locked" in a room for an hour with a series of puzzles, varying from word-play to ciphers, to solve in order to escape the room before the time is up. The rooms have a theme and a backstory and there are many variations. Some Escape Rooms use actors to narrate the story, and then take participants into the room. Some open the door and let players in to figure out what is happening. Most of



June 2016: Idaho coaching network Night Howler's Ski Lodge participants Jackie Miller (Mary Sanguinum), Brandon Bolyard (Hank), and Emily Morgan (Black Star) in character.

them have some form of help if the players are missing clues. This also seemed a great opportunity for students to collaboratively create. I did some online research and found a skeleton of ideas for creation at <https://lockpaperscissors.co>. I also contacted a local Escape Room and asked if the writers would come talk to my students. I was planning to then go online to find a preestablished Escape and then create one myself as a mentor text. But the owners of Boise Escape suggested that instead of Boise Escape coming to my classroom, I bring my students to them to experience an Escape for themselves, *free of charge*. This was an incredibly generous gesture, as it's about \$28 a person to attend in normal circumstances. After our experiences with the “Lost City of Z” and “Tick, Tock, BOOM!,” my students then collaboratively created “Escape the Speakeasy” and “Escape the Drawing Room” experiences for other teachers and staff in our building. We started by identifying the characteristics of the genre we experienced and then brainstorming ideas for a theme. We had several possibilities, but it happened that many of the students had been reading *The Great Gatsby* or *Pride and Prejudice*, so there were campaigns for themes stemming from both novels. In the end, we decided to do two small groups because we couldn't agree as a class on one theme.

Note from Anne

Conceiving of writing as a process does not mean prescribing a specific process to students. Instead, it means helping them learn to adapt processes they've used before to new situations and suggesting actions they might take in the process of developing a text that is new to them. More difficult for many of us, it means remaining open to processes our student writers employ that are different from those we have taught or those we might use ourselves, but that are helpful and effective for them.

The Escape Room presented challenges different from those of the Murder Mystery Dinner. The students quickly created a scenario that “locked” participants in but then had to think about the physical space of the classroom and how it could be transformed between Escapes (and quickly), as well as how they could monitor what was happening, in order to provide clues to participants since we didn't have the advantage of surveillance video. This problem-solving not only forced them to pay close attention to details, but they also had to shift their narratives at times to accommodate the changes. For example, the Speakeasy group decided they would have “bartenders” stay in the room so they could provide clues when needed. The Drawing Room centered on the story of Eleanor, whose crazy uncle was forcing her to marry someone she didn't like. That group's solution was to have Eleanor locked in the room as well, and when the participants struggled, she surreptitiously text-messaged a colleague in the next room, who would slip note card clues under the adjoining door, much like what students had seen in the Boise Escape experience we used as our mentor text. The note card clues required some impromptu thinking and for the clue-writing students to really know and understand their story. When students were working on their rooms, they were alternately at their tables brainstorming together or hunched over the laptop composing an activity or clue. When individuals finished a piece, they brought it to the whole group for feedback and any necessary revision. The process was embedded in the activity.

Creating a variety of clues proved difficult at times, so students did some online research as well. They wrote poems that held clues, created riddles, and made ciphers with books and their titles. We ordered locks and borrowed boxes and props from other teachers in the building.

Finally, we ran the rooms. One of the groups escaped at the last minute, and the other didn't. We then debriefed what we could have done differently and looked at surveys we gave our participants. This helped to demonstrate to my writers the importance of feedback and reflection before and after revision.

Note from Anne

Reflection helps writers move from simply doing something to realizing what its effects were and in what situations they might wish to do it again. Paula Uriarte supports her students in reflection via an oral debrief after the class has tried something new or test-run a draft.

Teaching from Principles

The students who select my creative writing courses have often come with a preconception that the only reason to engage in creative writing is for self-expression and that the only way to do so is alone. In the teaching I have described here, I have tried to broaden their experiences in creative writing to include a variety of purposes. As the Principles document states,

Since writers outside school have many different purposes beyond demonstrating accountability and they use more diverse genres of writing, it is important that students have experiences within school that teach them how writing differs with purpose, audience, and other elements of the situation. (pp. xi–xii)

Much of our work together aims for this goal. In experimenting with prompts and in creating games, we are also developing ways of understanding our audiences and of understanding why genres have the particular features that they do.

Further, my efforts to engage students in writing as collaborators in unfamiliar genres also stems from my belief in the principle that “writing is a process.” It was really easy when I started teaching Creative Writing, an elective class, to find “fun” things for my students to do that kept their attention and got them writing, but I started to see so much potential in making every activity applicable to a broader understanding of what writing is and is capable of doing for a student as a communicator, and ultimately as a human being. I could have just assigned a game, or assigned them to create some writing prompts. But by engaging students in collaborative writing, I am able to foreground process in my teaching, looking beyond the product they are creating to the processes they are using to create it. When coauthoring, they are forced to speak aloud about the decisions they are making and why, making processes explicit. From there, students can support one another through those processes, and I can supply needed instruction along the way. As a writer, I’ve always had a sense that giving my students “formulas” was a bad idea, as five paragraphs with a three-part thesis didn’t look anything like the writing they would see anywhere else. I’ve got overheads from early in my teaching of hamburgers, trains, and sandwiches as metaphors for what an essay should look like, and I had been to various “trainings” to teach me how to be a better writing instructor—some better than others and some that were downright horrible. Since I began working with the Boise State Writing Project in 2005, I’ve been trying to move toward a more conscious competence about what I am doing and why. The idea that “creative” writing is different from other writing is erroneous; the process we go through in creative writing applies in any writing course.

Many of my Writing Project colleagues also validated some of my core beliefs about writing: Teachers should write along with their students since modeling is an integral part of the process. Students should be given the opportunity to see good and different models, a belief that was reinforced by an elementary colleague who introduced me to mentor texts. Students should write—a lot—and for many reasons, and choice should be involved whenever possible.

The most visible differences from my earlier teaching are in the genres in which students write, including the mysteries and escapes I have described here. Deborah Dean's *Genre Theory* (2008) was an important work in this shift. Dean's work gave me a starting point for conversations about genre with my students and moved me to start with genre in any writing situation—what are the typical characteristics of the form we are writing if it is a genre familiar to students? If it isn't, what models will I provide that will help students see not only the typical characteristics but also the ways that various authors may have manipulated the traditional characteristics for some effect? What will their assignment be that seems relevant to current kinds of writing in the world, optimizes choice, and gives them an authentic audience? What will I write and how will I share my choices with students in the process of our work?

In all of the courses I teach, students become investigators instead of followers. When I give students models of the kinds of writing we do, they name what they see as characteristics of the genre and effective moves in the writing. With practice, students imitate those characteristics and often manipulate them for effect. My goal is to get them to a place where they feel confident enough to make bold choices in their own work and articulate their reasons for doing so—not only in their semester in Creative Writing, but also in their lives writing in all kinds of situations and genres.

Understanding Writing in Today's Classrooms: A Summary

[Adapted from NCTE's *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*]

Over the last decade, the everyday experience of writing in people's lives has expanded dramatically. Many factors inform this expansion: from the increase in technology as an instrument for writing to the rise in multimodal composing; from the growing connections between written and spoken words to the increasing acceptance of linguistic fluency and multilingualism that in turn impacts writing. Yet, even as these expansions have enlarged the experience of writing for many outside school, implementation of the first US nationwide standards in literacy—the Common Core State Standards—has, in some places, contributed to narrowing students' experience of writing inside school.

Writing is a complex act. And it follows that teaching writing is an equally complex act. Fortunately, we have identified some professional principles that can guide effective writing instruction.

We know that:

1. Writing grows out of many purposes.
2. Writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages.
3. Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies.
4. Conventions of finished and edited texts are an important dimension of the relationship between writers and readers.
5. Everyone has the capacity to write; writing can be taught; and teachers can help students become better writers.
6. Writing is a process.
7. Writing is a tool for thinking.
8. Writing has a complex relationship to talk.
9. Writing and reading are related.
10. Assessment of writing involves complex, informed, human judgment.

When principles guide our teaching, we can better understand our teaching purposes, make decisions about approaches and content, vet ideas supplied by others, and grow as teachers of writing. In *Growing Writers*, veteran teacher educator Anne Elrod Whitney explores how the principles defined in NCTE's *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing* position statement can support high school writers and teachers of writing because they undergird our practice through knowledge and a conscious search for meaning in our writing activities.

As part of the Writing in Today's Classrooms strand of the Principles in Practice imprint, the book includes snapshots from high school teachers working in a variety of settings who illustrate how their own principled classroom practices have helped both them and their students to grow, whether they are writing for advocacy, learning the importance of revision, experimenting with new audiences, or embracing the vulnerability and the power of writing.

The principles come alive through the author's analysis and friendly discussion and the contributing teachers' everyday practices. Whitney's compassionate support and encouragement of active, ongoing learning is supplemented by further-reading lists and an annotated bibliography of both print and digital texts to accompany us on our journeys to ever-greater effectiveness as writers and teachers of writing.

Anne Elrod Whitney is professor of education at Pennsylvania State University and a former high school English teacher. She is the author of several books on writing and writing pedagogy.



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