

The Dialogic Interplay of Writing and Teaching Writing: Teacher-Writers' Talk and Textual Practices across Contexts

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This study uses dialogic theory to understand teacher-writers' practices across in- and out-of-school contexts. Using case study methods to closely observe and interview a middle school teacher and a high school teacher, as well as analyze their writing, the study identified similarities in the teachers' appropriations of language, textual practices, and ideologies across contexts. However, each teacher appropriated distinct practices in discipline-specific ways, with one focused on the literate practices of creative writers and the other focused on the literate practices of online, networked writers. These contrastive examples highlight ways in which teacher-writers' literate and instructional activities dialogically inform each other in both similar and distinct ways. Ultimately, I make the argument that dialogic perspectives that attend to teachers' out-of-school practices provide richer, more complex understandings of instructional practice than currently popular conceptions of "best practices" and "value-added" teaching.

One spring Sunday in New York City, Lisa¹—an urban public middle school English language arts teacher—sat down for an hour-long session with her creative writing instructor, Will, at a bookstore and café on Houston Street. Lisa described the place as an “industrial loft meets eighteenth-century library” with a “chill vibe.” Ornate white columns framed two large winding staircases that led to an open upper level with book-lined walls, industrial pipes crisscrossed the ceiling, and The Killers were playing softly in the background. Lisa and Will began the session in their usual manner, discussing a text Will had asked Lisa to read beforehand. This time it was Joan Didion’s essay *Why I Write* (1976/2000), adapted from a speech she gave at the University of California at Berkeley. Will opened their discussion by asking Lisa for her thoughts, and she gestured to a place in the text where she had underlined and commented (see Figure 1). In this section of the essay, Didion recounted how, after briefly traveling through the Panama airport years before, an image of it “remained superimposed on everything I saw until I finished [writing the novel] *A Book of Common Prayer*. I lived in that airport for several years” (p. 23).

As Lisa gestured at her handwritten note next to this section (“years”), she told Will she was particularly interested in Didion’s description of how she sometimes “sits on [ideas] for several years” before writing about them, as she did with this im-

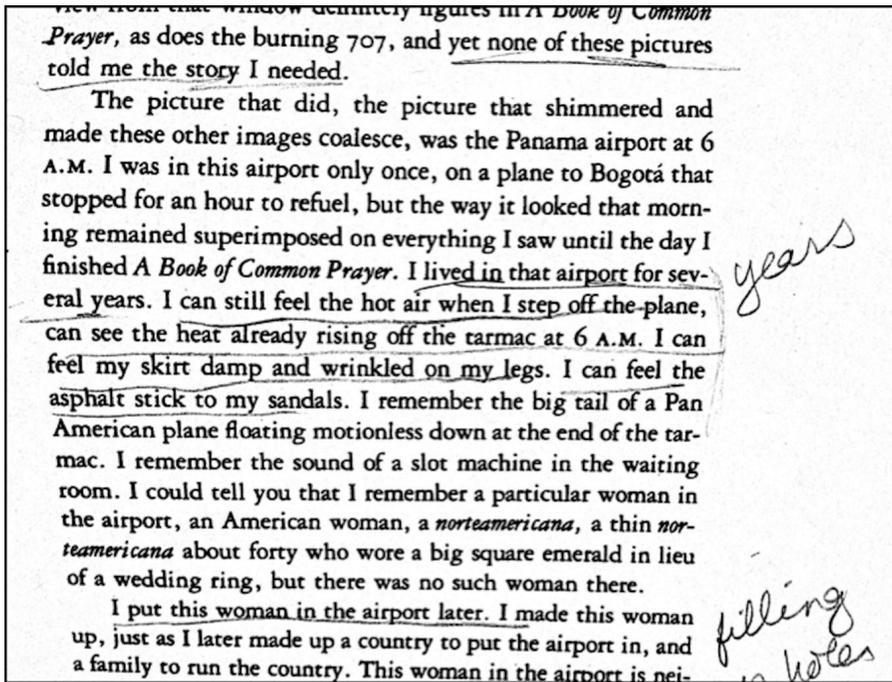


FIGURE 1. Lisa's handwritten notes on the Didion (1976/2000) text

age of the Panama airport. Lisa thought that “was pretty brave [emphasis added]” of Didion, and mentioned that she tried to let her ideas develop slowly too, but sometimes only let them sit for two months and felt like she needed to use them.

Fast-forward to the next day, a Monday morning in Lisa's eighth-grade language arts classroom in Washington Heights. The third-floor corner room had windows lining two of the walls, green lockers on another, and a chalkboard at the front of the room. From other parts of the building, you could just see Yankee Stadium in the distance. The walls were a muted yellow shade, and paint was flaking off in some places. The school building was not new, but was well kept. Hand-written posters with titles like “Good Writers Make Thoughtful Critiques: We Look at Both What Is and What Is Not Working in Our Stories!” “Revise the Heart of the Story,” and “Use Details from Books and Social Studies in Class in Your Story” lined the walls. Adolescent students, in uniforms of navy pants and white tops, sat together in small groups; they wrote silently, but Lisa often prompted them to “turn and talk” during both the lesson and writing time.

After teaching a lesson on editing the historical fiction stories they had been developing, writing, and revising for almost a month, Lisa went to meet with students in individual conferences. When she sat down with Esmerelda, who told Lisa that she had worked on her weekend assignment to make “radical revisions”

by taking out a character she deemed extraneous, Lisa praised Esmerelda for making such significant cuts, saying, “**We have a brave writer right here** [emphasis added].” When Lisa asked Esmerelda why she cut such huge parts of her story, Esmerelda told her, “There were just too many things going on.” Lisa once again reaffirmed how brave she was for engaging in this work before offering her some revision strategies.

Before her next conference with another student, Julissa, Lisa explained to me that Julissa had a really amazing character that wasn’t fitting with the plot she had predetermined, so she decided to rewrite the whole ending to make it fit with the character. Lisa mentioned that Julissa’s willingness to adapt her story to follow the character was “**really brave** [emphasis added].” In her discussion with Julissa, Lisa told her that “sometimes I think we make a plan for our stories . . . but discover that something else is supposed to happen to our character.”

After the class period ended, Lisa told me that having her middle school students make significant revisions, especially right before a project was due, “used to scare me, but now I think they are better for it.” In fact, since she had started participating regularly in creative writing herself, she had begun to encourage her middle school students to cut large parts of their drafts.² Across these quite different sites of literate activity, Lisa took up and reappropriated the term *brave* to acknowledge that being a “brave” creative writer entails specialized textual practices (e.g., brave creative writers wait to use an idea until they are really ready for it, make large cuts, and/or adapt stories to follow a character). Her participation in creative writing informed the ways she talked about, practiced, and taught writing. Such links in teachers’ language use and textual practices across classroom and out-of-school contexts highlight the profound lamination, or coexistence of multiple activities, in any given activity (Prior, 1998; see also Bakhtin, 1981; Goffman, 1981). Teaching, however, has traditionally been isolated—teachers’ rich histories and experiences outside of the classroom, particularly those that extend beyond institutional spaces like professional development or graduate course work, are rarely acknowledged as important elements of instructional practice.

This study contributes to a rich history of teacher-writer research by highlighting the significance of teachers blurring in- and out-of-school spaces, writing and teaching practices, physical and online writing, and personal and professional identities. The research draws from observations of two teachers (Lisa and Aaron) participating in writing outside of school and teaching in school, as well as textual artifacts and interviews. I contextualize this study of writing teachers in a history of “writing teachers must write” advocacy, and then pull conceptually from dialogic theories to set the stage for an analysis of writing teachers’ appropriations and recontextualizations of talk and textual practices across contexts, to ultimately argue that Lisa, Aaron, and other studies of teacher participation moving from “the coffee house to the school house” (Fisher, 2005) have something to teach us about the work of writing teachers. This perspective of teachers as beings who live their identities and practices across times and spaces, and teaching as dialogic rather than an autonomous acquisition and application of skills, is particularly important in the current era of standardization in education.

“Writing Teachers Must Write”

The idea that “writing teachers must write” (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006) has been advocated by writing process proponents (Atwell, 1998; Kittle, 2008), the National Writing Project (NWP) (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006), and the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement (McLeod, 1995) for over 40 years (see Whitney, 2009). Dawson (2011) summarizes the literature to identify “three primary reasons K–12 English Language Arts teachers are encouraged to write: to enrich and inform their teaching of writing, to participate in and shape public discussions about teaching, and to enrich their own lives” (p. 11; see also Dahl, 1992; Gillespie, 1991; Whitney, 2008). However, only a small body of research has focused on the relationships between teachers’ writing and their teaching of writing.

The few studies that explore teachers’ writing and classroom activities document complex relations between teachers’ beliefs about writing and teaching, teachers’ experiences of writing, and their instruction. Robbins’s (1990) yearlong case study of twelve high school English teachers, Brooks’s (2007) research on four fourth-grade teachers, and Gleeson and Prain’s (1996) study of seven experienced secondary English teachers all confirmed that teachers’ reading and writing experiences played little or no role in their teaching effectiveness and did not necessarily correlate with their teaching styles (see Dawson, 2011). Similarly, Cremin and Baker (2010) and Woodard (2013) found tensions in how elementary, middle school, and college composition teacher-writers enacted their identities in writing classrooms. Robbins (1992) hypothesized that this could be because there are a “whole set of complex philosophical assumptions which must also be accepted by teachers if they are to use their own writing as an integral rather than a supplemental or superfluous part of the way they teach their students to write” (p. 74). Robbins (1990) additionally found that most teachers who engaged in personally meaningful writing considered themselves nonwriters, and Thornton (2010) described how confident teacher-writers had to negotiate their own negative experiences as students of writing to ultimately create positive writing environments in their classrooms. What is clear from the literature on teacher-writers is that teachers bring a broad array of past and current experiences and beliefs with them into their writing classrooms, and must also negotiate curricular and policy mandates in their instruction (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2014). As Dawson (2011) puts it, “a teacher’s writing life is only one factor among many that shapes the pedagogy or effectiveness of his/her writing instruction” (p. 17). This study builds on the conversation about teacher-writers by highlighting some of the everyday ways that teachers’ writing *can* inform their instruction, particularly in the ways they come to think about, talk about, and act with texts.

A Dialogic Perspective: Teaching as a Nexus of Practice

In an era of “best practices,” “evidence-based practice,” and “value-added” teaching, teacher practice is often conceptualized as a set of observable beliefs, skills, and/or

actions. For example, numerous professional development frameworks attempt to understand teacher practice by identifying the links among teacher knowledge/skills, attitudes/beliefs, changes to instruction, and improved student learning (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002). Recently, researchers have also tried to specify which teacher practices link to value-added outcomes (Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, & Wyckoff, 2013). However, these popular theories make assumptions about the stability and measurability of practice, and tend to downplay the complex histories that inform teachers' practices.

Others, particularly in language, literacy, and culture studies, contend that practices are not observable units of behavior (Street, 1993). These researchers and theorists acknowledge the implicit dimensions of practice (see Bourdieu's [1977] notion of *habitus*), as well as the importance of identity, social position, ideology, and both physical and ethnographic contexts in understanding social practice. They tend to differentiate between events, or observable activities that are structured in particular ways, and practices, or recurrent kinds of ideologically laden behaviors that are "informed by the world beyond the visible one" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 9).

In Scollon's (2001) theory of mediated discourse, where he attempts to understand how discourse plays a role in social action, he suggests the term *practice* (as a count noun) to focus on a concrete action (e.g., handing, counting), and the term *nexus of practice* for a network of repeatedly linked discursive and nondiscursive practices over time (e.g., getting coffee). His concept of a nexus of practice is a particularly helpful one because it recognizes "social practice as social practices in the plural" (Scollon, 2001, p. 4) and highlights how a nexus of practice cannot be bounded by space or time. Similarly, in this work, I situate teaching within a broad network or nexus of practice. In other words, I understand teachers' habitual actions and words in the classroom—which are often conceived of as their "practice"—to be deeply "situated both *in* concrete, historical acts and *across* extended trajectories" (Prior & Hengst, 2010, pp. 1–2). This understanding aligns with Britzman's (1991) dialogic theory of teacher practice, which she bases on the theories of Bakhtin (1986) and Freire (1970):

Within a dialogic understanding, teaching can be reconceptualized as a struggle for voice and discursive practices amid a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices. The tensions among what has preceded, what is confronted, and what one desires shape the contradictory realities of learning to teach. Learning to teach is a social process of negotiation. (Britzman, 1991, p. 8)

Bakhtin's (1986) theory of dialogism highlights how speech and thought are dynamically formed in response to and anticipation of others: "All our utterances are filled with others' words, varying degrees of 'our-own-ness' . . . which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate" (p. 89). From a dialogic perspective, then, "teacher practice" can be seen as complexly layered with histories of multiple actors, activities, artifacts, and ideologies. It is dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense, in that it involves constant processes of uptake and assimilation.

Teachers' Appropriations of Talk and Textual Practices

Numerous researchers across related fields have focused on the taking up, using, and altering of semiotic materials across networks of practices—of popular culture in children's writing (Dyson, 1997), funds of household knowledge used in schools (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), school-to-work literate activities (Beaufort, 2007), teacher identities and practices across institutional contexts (Britzman, 1991; Richmond, Juzwik, & Steele, 2011), literate and textual activities (Prior, 1998; Roozen, 2009), and discourses (Scollon, 2001). Scholars use different words with similar meanings (e.g., *reframing*, *repurposing*, *recontextualization*, *revoicing*, and *remediation*) to describe appropriation as a process of semiotic uptake and “re-representation and reuse across modes, media, and chains of activity” (Prior, Hengst, Roozen, & Shipka, 2006, p. 734). Although these words have nuances in connotation and use, I use such words interchangeably in my descriptions of teacher-writers' re-appropriations across their writing and teaching.

Methods

Practice is unobservable, but both Scollon (2001) and Prior and Hengst (2010) suggest that analyses of the mediated activities of individuals in situated sites of engagement—with the recognition that such activities are always linked to broader histories of practice—can help capture the “hybrid, laminated quality that emerges when multiple histories are tied together in situated actions” (Prior & Hengst, 2010, p. 16). This close analysis of writing teachers' participation across situated activities in and out of school highlights their types of day-to-day appropriations. Much as Prior (1998) traces chains of discourse across the talk and texts of undergraduate and graduate students as they produce texts, and Berkenkotter (2001) examines the talk and texts of psychotherapy sessions, this research looks closely at teacher-writers' appropriations of talk and textual practices across contexts.

Participants and Sites

I draw from a larger study of six elementary, middle, high school, and college teacher-writers who wrote extensively outside of school in observable writing communities. I selected two focal participants—Lisa and Aaron—for this analysis because they offered compelling contrasts in the specialized ways they appropriated language and textual practices across contexts and over time, with Lisa engaged in creative writing, and Aaron participating in networked writing.

Lisa

Lisa is a White female who was in her late 20s at the time of the study. Born in Texas, she attended a large Midwestern public university, completed a bachelor's degree with equal emphases on philosophy, history, and literature, and joined Teach for America in 2003. With the exception of one year when she returned home to help take care of an ailing family member, she taught sixth grade and middle school English language arts in New York City from 2003 to 2011. In 2006, we both came to work at a small public middle school, and found ourselves collaborating on our

work there for three years. At the time of this study, she was still teaching eighth grade literacy at the middle school and I was a full-time graduate student.

Lisa joined a creative writing group in 2008 and expressed interests in eventually applying to MFA programs in creative writing and teaching writing at the college level. She served as the lead teacher on the school's Writing Curriculum Committee, which was developing a new writing curriculum to replace Calkins's (2006) *Units of Study*. She participated in extensive professional development as a member of the Teachers College Reading & Writing Project community. Afterwards, she became a literacy coach at a different NYC public middle school.

I observed Lisa across three sites—teaching writing in her classroom at her school, meeting with her personal writing instructor, and meeting with her writing group. The *school site* was the public school where we once worked together. At the time of the study, the school had 424 students; class sizes averaged about 25 students. The student ethnicity breakdown was 88% Hispanic, 10% Black, 1% White, and 1% Asian; 92% of students received free or reduced lunch; and 36% were classified as Limited English Proficient. I observed one of Lisa's classes engaging in writing workshop over the course of one month. The *writing instruction site* was a coffee shop in a downtown neighborhood, where I observed Lisa outside of school as she met with her writing instructor, Will. Lisa originally met Will when she paid to take his fiction writing class the year before the study began. She also met her creative writing group members—Kelly and Allie—in this class. Like Lisa, they were White professionals in their 20s or 30s. Their *writing group site* was a rotating location; the members often held their biweekly meetings at “little coffee shops that are kind of off the beaten path.”

Aaron

Aaron, a White male, was a second-year high school English teacher. At the time of the study, he had completed an MSED in instructional technology and worked in a networked, project-based school where each child had a laptop. After the study, Aaron went on to become a technology integration specialist, coaching teachers to work with students on effective uses of technology for learning. He wrote regularly on a blog and Twitter.

I observed Aaron across three sites—a writing group at the National Writing Project, his online blog, and his school site. We met through our participation in the local branch of the NWP, a network of sites anchored at colleges and universities that provides a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers. The local NWP Summer Institute was established in 2008 and predominantly featured digital composition. During a typical day at the four-week Summer Institute, participants wrote, gave, and responded to teacher demonstrations; met in writing or reading groups; and composed digital texts ranging from videos to online portfolios. Because I had previously participated in the Summer Institute, was attending Aaron's Summer Institute as a researcher studying teacher-writers, and wanted to develop relationships with focal participants to facilitate entry into their classrooms, I engaged in the Summer Institute as a participant observer. I participated in all activities as a fellow writing teacher, and offered support with

digital composition when needed. Due to my familiarity with the Summer Institute site and leaders, the teachers tended to see me as someone between the teacher-leaders who also had previously participated in the Institute and ran the activities, and the participants, who were experiencing them for the first time. At this *writing group site*, Aaron and I participated in a writing group together and later collaborated to author a book chapter on digital writing practices in his classroom. At the Summer Institute, Aaron shared a variety of texts—a narrative account of his earliest writing memory, the first of a series of blog posts calling for his school network to add an audiovisual component to their computer software to facilitate student feedback, and a narrative story.

Out of school, Aaron wrote at an *online writing site*—a teaching-focused blog. He started his blog in college as a preservice teacher, and primarily used it to celebrate positive teaching moments, and to promote and catalogue his work. Through Twitter, he also collaborated with fellow teachers in his school's network and interested others on topics related to education and his classroom. Additionally, he was beginning a master's degree in administration and engaged in writing for class assignments.

Aaron taught high school English at Tech High, part of the Tech High Network of schools supported by a nonprofit organization with grant support from the Gates Foundation. The network centers its instruction on project-based learning, which they encourage through the use of technology and school-culture building. The demographic breakdown at Aaron's *school site* was: 49% White, 39.5% Black, 5.5% Hispanic, 4.3% multiracial, 1.3% Asian, 0.3% American Indian, and 60% low-income. During the fall observation semester, Aaron co-taught two 10th-grade humanities sections with a social studies teacher, as well as an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) College Readiness class. I observed one section of the 10th-grade class, picked based on fit with my schedule. As in other Tech High classrooms, the curriculum was project-based. During my observations, Aaron and his co-teacher, Katie, designed and implemented writing projects, such as persuasive radio commercials related to the presidential election, narrative crime dramas, and cause/effect essays on gangs and violence. Alongside the writing, students read Rose's (1954) *12 Angry Men* and Sanchez's (2000) memoir *My Bloody Life*, and completed numerous activities, like performing plays and watching documentaries.

Data Collection

Consistent with qualitative inquiry, I collected and analyzed interviews and written artifacts from Lisa and Aaron, observed them teaching and participating in writing, and audio-recorded and transcribed their interactions across their sites of participation (see Table 1).

The semistructured interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and focused on: current and past experiences with writing (e.g., “tell me about an experience you had in learning to write”; “tell me about a recent experience you had in teaching writing”), writing processes (e.g., “give me a sense of the range of writing you engage in and who you interact with”), the writing curriculum (e.g., “what are you focusing on in your writing instruction this year?” “what are the major units/assignments?”), and teaching writing (e.g., “what would you say are your main jobs

TABLE 1. Overview of Data Sources

Data Source	Data Collection Methods	Frequency/Quantity		Description
		LISA	AARON	
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field notes • Artifact collection • Audio-recordings • Selected transcriptions 	16 observations of 8th-grade writing class periods (45 minutes each) over 1 month	17 observations of sophomore literacy class periods (1 hour, 45 minutes each) over 1 semester	Audio-recordings were taken of teacher lessons and conversations with students. Field notes were written as jottings, details, and documentation of conversational turns, which were checked and extended through selected transcriptions.
OUT-OF-SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field notes • Artifact collection • Audio-recordings • Selected transcriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 meeting with writing instructor (1 hour) • 1 meeting with writing group (1 hour) 	19 days of participant observation at the National Writing Project Summer Institute (7 hours each), including 8 focal observations	Audio-recordings were taken of teacher participation in writing groups and teacher demonstrations. Field notes were written as jottings, details, and documentation of conversational turns, which were checked and extended through selected transcriptions.
INTERVIEWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-recordings • Transcriptions 	4 interviews (30 minutes each)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 formal interviews (30 minutes each) • 1 informal interview (30 minutes) 	I met with each teacher to talk about personal histories and writing, teaching writing, and the curriculum. I periodically checked in to get their thoughts on key ideas and trajectories that I was developing in the data set to confirm, clarify, or extend my understanding of their writing and instruction.
WRITTEN PRODUCTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher writing • Curricular materials • Student writing created in observed lessons or discussed with the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 creative writing pieces • 6 entries in teacher's writer's notebook or drafts shared in class • 4 samples of classroom materials (e.g., rubric, handout) • 16 student writing samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 blog entries (13 NWP blog entries, 18 post-NWP blog entries) • 4 writing group pieces (NWP) • 10 samples of classroom materials (e.g., rubrics, handouts) • 8 student writing samples 	I collected written products produced by the teachers and students, primarily analyzing the teachers' writing for this study in order to understand the teachers' appropriations across contexts.

as a writing teacher?” “describe what a really good writing instructional period looks like”) (see Whitney, 2008); additional informal interviews occurred during fieldwork. For out-of-school observations, I focused on easily observable activities, primarily in-person and online interactions and artifacts. Understanding that observations of this participation in writing offer only a partial understanding of practice, I used our interviews to get a fuller picture of Lisa’s and Aaron’s range of writing practices. I observed and audio-recorded writing instruction and out-of-school writing group meetings, and took field notes on practices, interactions, and feedback concerning writing. Finally, I collected numerous written artifacts created by Lisa, Aaron, and their students, as well as materials referenced during lessons and meetings. However, this analysis focuses primarily on the teacher data, only including student writing to contextualize conversations and lessons.

Data Analysis

Analysis procedures involved identifying recurring phrases and practices used by the teachers across the data set. I catalogued instances in which the teachers used exact or similar phrases, ideas, or practices across interviews, observations, and artifacts, and then created narratives that layered these moments alongside one another. For example, Lisa used the term *brave* to describe writers and writing both in creative writing meetings and with her students. Once I found all examples of her using this term across observations, interviews, and writings, I wrote a narrative vignette to document her appropriations and recontextualizations of language and associated literate practices across time and space. For Lisa, the terms and practices that circulated across contexts included the appropriations of the term *brave*, as well as *show, don’t tell* and *let the story lead you* strategies. For Aaron, the recurring literate practices included a focus on “bridge building” with other people and across content interests, and a focus on advocacy/promotion.

Next, I described the nature of the teachers’ appropriations. Both teachers similarly appropriated the following types of semiotic materials: (1) language—in many instances, the teachers revoiced (Knoeller, 1998) actual words spoken by or to them in other contexts; (2) specific textual practices—both teachers took up and recontextualized particular composing processes and strategies; and (3) ideologies (values and beliefs)—particular understandings about how and why to compose were evident in teachers’ enactments. To that end, each teacher appropriated distinct practices in discipline-specific ways, with Lisa focused on the literate practices of creative writers and Aaron focused on the literate practices of online, networked writers. I share these contrastive examples to highlight ways in which teacher-writers’ literate and instructional activities dialogically inform one another in similar and distinct ways.

Teacher-Writers Appropriating Talk and Textual Practices across Contexts

Both Lisa and Aaron appropriated and recontextualized language and textual practices across contexts. For Lisa, there were similarities in the ways she talked

about and engaged in what I call *writerly moves*, or things creative writers do routinely in their practice, with students and in her own writing; Aaron's focus on networking and advocacy was pervasive in his blog writing, Twitter discussions, and conversations with students (see Figure 2). I begin by discussing Lisa's use of the specialized languages and practices of creative writers, then turn to Aaron's use of the specialized languages and practices of networked writers, framing each section with attention to circulations of talk and textual practices across contexts.

Circulations among Lisa's Talk and Textual Practices

In the vignette shared at the beginning of this article, Lisa revoiced the term *brave* in conversations with her instructor, Will, and students, Esmerelda and Julissa, to acknowledge that being a "brave" creative writer entails specialized textual practices related to putting aside ideas until a later, making "radical revisions," and adapting stories to follow a character. Also circulating across these conversations with her instructor and students were understandings of other creative writing strategies—"burying" obvious parts of texts and "letting the story lead you."

"Bury"/"Show, Don't Tell" Strategy

Lisa remediated understandings of another revision strategy across contexts—she talked with her instructor, Will, about "burying" obvious parts of her text, and with a student, Mirabel, about how writers "show, don't tell," a strategy that is also highlighted in Calkins's (2006) *Units of Study* curriculum.

During the same meeting with Will described in the introduction, Lisa and Will discussed a scene from Lisa's novel-in-progress about a woman working in a factory. Will asked Lisa to name what she wanted to work on, and she told him that the "subtlety is not there yet, but I want it to be." He agreed with her and was glad she realized the need to "go back and bury" the piece, meaning to return to the writing and make it less obvious. This strategy came up at multiple times during their discussion. For example, Will turned to a section where he had written, "need? let the reader intuit" about the end of a sentence where Lisa had written "... *oblivious the girls had even stopped*" (see Figure 3). They briefly discussed the possibility that readers could infer what was happening without the author telling them.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examples of Lisa's creative writing appropriations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. "Brave" writers engage in specific textual practices b. "Bury"/ "show, don't tell" strategy c. "Let the story lead you" strategy
 2. Examples of Aaron's networked writing appropriations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Online writers build interactional "bridges" b. Online writers build interest-driven "bridges" c. Online writers advocate for/promote themselves and others |
|---|

FIGURE 2. *Teachers' appropriations of specialized language and textual practices across contexts*

and two days later, I lost my virginity to Mike. Don't you remember?" Gene glanced around, grateful the guys were down the dirt path checking out the gun exhibition, [oblivious the girls had even stopped.] *need? let reader intuit?*

"C'mon, don't you wanna know what the future holds?" Her clasped hands and pouted lower lip *but* were too much for Gene. *need?* She sighed. "Alright, it'll be good for a laugh at least." *1 str*

FIGURE 3. Will's comments on Lisa's scene from her fiction novel

At the end of their session, Lisa mentioned that she really liked the scene but “knew it needed to be buried somehow.” Will told her that now was the time to go back and bury it: “Now you know what it looks like on the surface. So now let’s tuck it under the surface.”

A few days later, in her classroom, Lisa conferenced with a student, Mirabel, about her “radical revisions” to her historical fiction draft. Mirabel told Lisa that in her original draft, the character of Mother died at the end, but she rewrote parts, this time starting the story with Mother already dead based on Lisa’s feedback that it “might be more powerful.” Lisa read the new introduction aloud (see Figure 4).

Then, she wondered if Mirabel could “show the reader that Mother died instead of telling them.” As examples, Lisa suggested that maybe the character could think, “Gee, I wish Mother was here” or “Things would be so much easier if Mother was here.” She told Mirabel to try to find some other places where she could hint at Mother being dead without actually telling the reader, and praised her for trying

I missed having Momma around to help me. It's been much harder w/out her. Ever since she's died in a car accident with dad.

~~We over slept, I said, as I stood up. Momma jumped up and said, "Oh my!"~~
 Billy started to cry. I leaned over him.

FIGURE 4. Mirabel's new introduction to her historical fiction story

the strategy. “Because that’s what good writers do,” Lisa said. “[They] don’t tell the reader everything, but they do hint at it.” Later, in whole-class instruction, Lisa often referred to this strategy as “show, don’t tell.”

Across conversations, Lisa was taking up and repurposing revision strategies about how creative writers “bury” text, “show don’t tell,” or let readers make inferences on their own. She was developing and implementing specialized ways of talking about and acting with creative writing texts.

“Let the Story Lead You” Strategy

Another writing strategy that circulated across contexts was the notion that authors should “follow” their stories. In her conversation with Will about the Didion (1976/2000) text *Why I Write*, discussed in the introduction of this article, Lisa pointed to a section of the text where Didion (1976/2000) described how two lines of dialogue that she wrote early in a novel (“I knew why Charlotte went to the airport even if Victor did not. / I knew about airports,” pp. 24) later led to the development of an entire character, Victor. Lisa gestured to where she had underlined Didion’s (1976/2000) explanation, “These lines appear about halfway through *A Book of Common Prayer*, but I wrote them during the second week I worked on the book, long before I had any idea where Charlotte Douglas had been or why she went to airports,” (pp. 24) and read aloud the next sentence to Will, “Until I wrote these lines I had no character called Victor in mind: the necessity for mentioning a name, and the name Victor, occurred to me as I wrote the sentence” (p. 24). Lisa gestured to her hand written note (“I’ve tried this - good to know it could work out.”), and told Will that she was relieved when she read Didion’s words *I did not know a Victor*, “When I saw this I was like oh thank god. I jot these things down and have no idea where they fit into anything” (see Figure 5). It made her feel better to see that “Didion’s process is random too.”

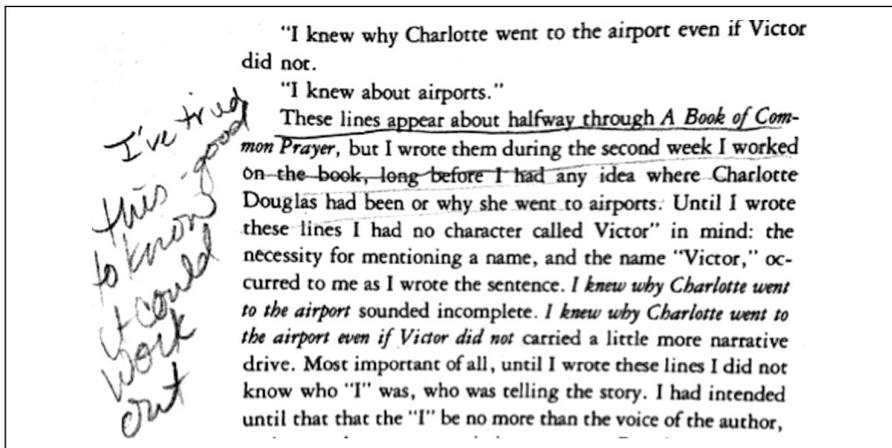


FIGURE 5. More of Lisa’s handwritten comments on the Didion (1976/2000) text

In response, Will told her, “This is true. But it’s more than random what she’s doing. It’s discovering—she’s almost letting the story lead her.” Will talked about how this process led to Victor becoming a major character in *A Book of Common Prayer*, and recommended the book to Lisa.

Later, as recounted in the introductory vignette, Lisa met with one of her students, Julissa, and discussed this same idea. Lisa thought that Julissa’s rewriting of her conclusion to fit with a character she had developed was really brave, and told Julissa that sometimes you think “you have a story to write” with a particular plot in mind, but then you realize “oh I don’t think the character has to do this.” She added, “Sometimes I think we make a plan for our stories . . . but discover that something else is supposed to happen to our character.”

In this example, Lisa remediated Will’s ideas in her conversation with Julissa. Will talked about an author “letting the story lead her,” and Lisa similarly framed this strategy for her student, Julissa, as “discovering that something else is supposed to happen to our character.” Informing Lisa’s nexus of teaching practice, then, was ample semiotic “stuff” from her own writing. She was remediating specific words, ideas, and actions about risk and bravery, as well as textual strategies particular to creative writing.

Circulations Among Aaron’s Talk and Textual Practices

Like Lisa, Aaron’s ways with writing and teaching intersected, often overlapping in the ways he talked about and engaged in textual practices. However, the specialized language and practices he drew from were more aligned with online, networked writing. In Aaron’s online conversations with peers, his in-person conversations with students, and his blog writing, understandings of particular networked writing strategies permeated—ideas that digital writing could build both interactional and interest-driven “bridges,” and could be used for advocacy and promotion.

Online Writing as an Interactional “Bridge”

Aaron repeatedly highlighted the importance of networking and “bridge building” in online writing, online conversations with colleagues, and comments to students. For example, in a blog post describing an inquiry he began into assessment at the National Writing Project Summer Institute, Aaron wrote:

Little did I realize this past summer how a response to a book would turn into a blog post . . . and then turn into a National Writing Project teaching demo . . . and then into an Ignite talk [for Tech High’s annual conference] . . . and then turn into a **bridge to the expert author-consultants visiting throughout the year** [emphasis added] to help our high school develop better writing instruction practices across the contents. There’s the power of blogging and social media for you.

The blog post that he mentioned as the initiator of this inquiry was a response to a book that all the National Writing Project Summer Institute participants read together and discussed, Spandel’s (2005) *The 9 Rights of Every Writer: A Guide for Teachers*. Aaron was particularly interested in two of the nine rights discussed:

the right to be assessed well, and the right to go beyond formula. He used these ideas to compose two videos about avoiding formulaic writing and rubrics in the classroom—one for the National Writing Project Summer Institute, and another for the Tech High Network’s annual conference.

Aaron posted all of these videos and presentations on his blog, and a few months later, he was mentioned by Vicky Spandel on her own blog post *Avoiding Formula—While Meeting Common Core Standards*, where she linked readers to his Tech High Network video as an example of “innovative comments on avoiding formula and prompting thinking among our young writers.” Aaron celebrated this connection on his own blog and through Twitter. In his blog post response ***Building Bridges with Blogging: Now Connected to Some Great Authors*** [emphasis added], Aaron wrote:

A fellow Tech High Annual Conference Ignite-er, [name redacted], put together a very moving piece that I have used in my class and referenced at least once a week not [sic] that captures my fascination with this cross-country connection. In “**Bridges and Fences**” [emphasis added], [name redacted] asks our Tech High Annual Conference audience whether we will build bridges to new experiences or to new people or whether we will box our minds and our hearts in. I am happy to say that this is one case where my bridge just made the world a bit smaller. . . . Hopefully, this could develop into a lasting relationship that benefits my students. As a teacher on-the-ground, I’m constantly trying to translate the theory into better practice.

He continued his inquiry into assessment and Spandel’s book throughout the school year as he strategically helped develop Common Core writing rubrics for his school, researched his classroom culture around writing, and implemented peer feedback for writing.

Aaron used his writing not just to deepen his inquiry and build professional bridges for himself, but also to build bridges for his students. For example, in the year prior to the study, Aaron began a project in his classroom based on a request from the local mayor for his students to create a public service announcement (PSA) to be broadcast on a local radio station about gangs and violence, issues that affected the students’ community. Aaron and his co-teacher Katie designed a unit they called “Gangs and Violence Awareness” around a book, *My Bloody Life*, written by a former Latin King gang member in nearby Chicago. Through Twitter and email, Aaron also built relationships with the creators of *The Interrupters*, a documentary highlighting the work of a nonprofit anti-gang organization in Chicago, to have them Skype with his students. This turned into a multiyear collaboration. Building up to and following the Skype interview, Aaron wrote a series of four blog posts documenting the project. On his blog, he wrote:

Since starting the *My Bloody Life*/gang awareness project this semester, I’ve been trying to establish a relationship between the documentary team behind *The Interrupters* and our school. Thanks to social media and [Tech High Network’s] sizable Twitter presence, we were able to set up a Skype session between *The Interrupters*’s producer, Alex Kotlowitz, and our sophomore classroom.

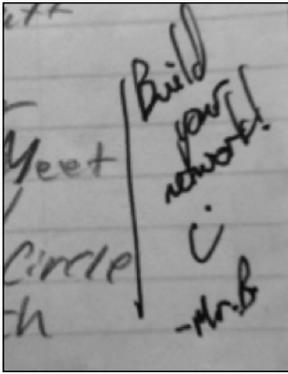


FIGURE 6. Aaron's focus on network building was also visible in his comments on student writing.

When I observed in December of the next school year, Aaron once again set up a Skype interview, this time with one of the documentary participants, Cobe. After reading about gangs in *My Bloody Life* and watching *The Interrupters*, students developed questions to ask Cobe about preventing gang violence.

At the beginning of the Skype interview with Cobe, Aaron told his students: “**We want to connect with things that will make change in your life, in this city, or wherever you go** [emphasis added].” Comments like these were also common in his writing and conversations with students (see Figure 6).

After this interview, Aaron received a request from the *Interrupters* team that he documented on his blog:

Over the weekend, I got an email from one of my contacts at Kartemquin Films, the documentary company behind *The Interrupters*, who wanted to put me in touch with other teacher-advocates who would like to build similar projects. As our trusting partnership with Kartemquin blooms, I am finding that some Chicago Public Schols [sic] are interested in partnering with my students. . . . And the partnerships grow! . . . Students helping students: **there are no fences separating our schools** [emphasis added].

Networking was something that was celebrated not just by Aaron, but also by his Tech High Network colleagues. After the interview, one of Aaron's network colleagues celebrated the partnership, tweeting to the *Interrupters* team, “Your tweets w/ @aaronb were in my Ignite talk. Link to her talk. @Interrupters are **bridge builders** [emphasis added]!”

Aaron, his colleagues, and their community partners developed specialized ways to talk about what they were doing with each other through their writing—building bridges and networks, creating partnerships and connections, and avoiding fences and separation. These sentiments were part of Tech High Network and the *Interrupters* team's missions, as well as Aaron's beliefs about teaching and project-based learning. Writing, for Aaron and his network, was one way of interacting and collaborating in the world, and they leveraged their online composing spaces to create opportunities for students to reach beyond classroom walls.

Online Writing as an Interest-Driven “Bridge”

Aaron also thought about “bridge building” from the perspective of content, connecting his personal science fiction and environmental interests in multiple professional online compositions. For example, across his previously described National Writing Project and Tech High conference videos on assessment, Aaron included references to *fracking*, a word with two types of negative connotations—as a hy-

draulic fracturing process whereby fossil fuels are pushed up out of the earth, and as an accepted expletive in the *Battlestar Galactica* television series (see Figure 7).

In the Tech High video/talk, he used the acrostic FRACK-ing to stand for “Formulaic Requirements and Creativity Killers,” saying in the script:

We live in a fracked up world don't we? . . . We've come to the point where we solve the problems on the surface without caring much what's underneath. But nothing concerns the human race more than the fracking facilitated in our classrooms. . . . My contention is the fracking encourages our kids to think like mindless, fracking cylons.

Soon after this presentation, Aaron attended a university-based institute on nanotechnologies, and composed a blog post called “Nano CEMMS (Center for Chemical-Electrical-Mechanical Manufacturing Systems) Summer Institute: **New ‘Bridges’ and New Projects (Some with Sci Fi in Mind!** [emphasis added]),” where he wrote about his ideas for bringing inquiry about technology and nano-projects into his classroom. Here is one of the ideas he explored:

Going after an environmental current events topic, I started asking questions about studying water purity at the nano scale. After watching the *Gasland* [documentary] this summer, the issues around hydraulic fracturing have been on my mind a bit. (See how I played on the term “fracking” in a recent Ignite talk at [the Tech High annual conference].) I met with a great educational outreach person at the [campus Center for Water Purification] . . . [and they seem] very happy to get my classroom in touch with researchers and students who are looking at filtering techniques and governmental water regulations.

In the same blog post, Aaron also suggested a classroom inquiry into the “projects that nanoscience is inspiring or helping create,” with the guiding question, “How far are we away from *Halo* gear?” He hoped that he might



FIGURE 7. Still shots from Aaron's National Writing Project Summer Institute video (left) and his Tech High annual conference presentation (right)

guide students through writing narratives that might include some of the latest nano-tech developments. With any luck, I may even be able to Skype with some creators or artists, too! I see on their website there's a movie in production. . . . (Off to Twitter I go . . . **"building bridges!" Help the petitioning process by Tweeting New Gen @newgenuniverse** [emphasis added])

In these examples, Aaron used his online composing to "build bridges" not just across networks of people, but also across ideas, and particularly to incorporate his personal interests into his compositions and instructional projects.

Online Writing for Advocacy

Finally, Aaron used online writing to advocate for himself and for his students. For example, in the above nano-science blog post, he enlisted his blog readers for a Twitter "petitioning process" to help his students access a movie production company. Aaron also wrote a blog post at the National Writing Project Summer Institute called "@techhighnetwork Bring on the A/V to Echo Tasks! #echoAV" that became the first of a four-part series in which he advocated that the network make "an addition [to their online platform] that would make feedback multimodal. I hope to see that Echo Tasks will allow teachers to record audio or video feedback as part of the assessment process." In an interview, he described how "the idea for this feature came to me as I have participated in the NWP and reflected on writing assessment/feedback practices," and his goal of using his blog posts to "**create an online campaign** [emphasis added]." On his blog, he wrote:

As a reader, you have a part, too. Since Echo is an online platform, I hope to leverage my readership's expertise in this cause, too, to create an online campaign. As I write through this series, I hope my readers will see the importance of adding this feature, help me cultivate a vision for the idea, and participate in its promotion. . . . I will be starting a Change.org petition that I hope anyone—teachers, parents, students, administrators and other stakeholders—will sign in support of the feature addition. With an extensive online presence and diverse support, we will hopefully see that Tech High joins the discussion, too, and facilitates the upgrade. Follow the Twitter conversation with the hashtag #echoAV.

Aaron shared a draft of this piece with his National Writing Project writing group before he published it online, because he took this advocacy work seriously and sincerely hoped his ideas would inspire change.

He also used his blog to "celebrate things I've been doing, **promote my work** [emphasis added], catalogue things I can't really put on resume." In one instance of promoting himself on his blog, Aaron documented how he applied for a Teacher Innovator Award:

After a little push by a colleague, I applied for the Teacher Innovator Award. Our partnership with *The Interrupters* and Kartemquin Films continues to flourish and may now

expand to other schools. Last week, my students interviewed Ricardo “Cobe” Williams, who was profiled in *The Interrupters*. While producing my video application, I realized I ended up making a pretty nice little recap of the event itself. I’ve got some more to add to the entire series as I debrief with students, but, for now, take a quick glimpse at some of my proudest work bridge-building out of my classroom.

In the video submission, he highlighted how, in the Gangs and Violence Awareness project, his students used Twitter to connect, Google Docs to collaborate, and their voices to bring *The Interrupters* virtually from Chicago into their classroom. Although he did not win the award, two years later he was selected as one of the Digital Innovators of the Year. These examples highlight how Aaron saw the power of online writing for advocacy and promotion, and intentionally used his own networked writing to advocate widely for pedagogical changes for his students, *and* for recognition for himself as a professional educator.

Discussion

In the current era of standardization, teacher practice is often framed as discrete, isolated skills that can be taught, mastered, and measured. Boundaries tend to be drawn between teachers’ professional and personal practices, and students’ in- and out-of-school learning. Not surprisingly, then, teacher-writers tend to note the tensions, rather than the connections, between their teaching and writing. However, the findings of this study indicate that attending to teachers’ broad nexus of practice—including the practices that stretch beyond school walls—can be useful to understand teaching as dialogic.

Lisa’s and Aaron’s words and writing practices “taste[d] of the context and contexts in which . . . [they] had lived” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Both teachers appropriated particular ways of talking about, thinking, and interacting with texts across contexts, highlighting the blurred boundaries between in- and out-of-school practices, personal and professional writing, and practicing writing and teaching writing. O’Shaughnessy (2003) and Whitney (2009) have documented National Writing Project teachers’ writing as simultaneously personal and professional. Whitney (2009) writes, “As in life, personal and professional concerns are not only mixed but are bound together, aspects of the same single stream” (p. 240). This was certainly true for Aaron, who was developing his own personal learning network online while encouraging his students to become participants in an increasingly connected world, and for Lisa, who was writing her own novel while teaching her students the writerly moves she was learning along the way.

Lisa’s and Aaron’s particular ways of talking and interacting with texts circulated across everyday and professional contexts, influencing the ways they taught. Whereas Lisa’s words and actions reflected creative writing practices, Aaron’s showcased his pervasive interests in composing to connect. In other words, the varied types of writing experiences they had seemed to matter—the teacher who participated in creative workshops brought different writing values and practices

to the classroom than the teacher who blogged and wrote on Twitter. A writing instructor from the newspaper world might value making quick decisions over waiting to be “ready to write a scene” or extensive collaboration with colleagues; such a teacher might encourage writing with precision and accuracy rather than “writerly details” or “bridge building.” Further teacher-writer research is needed on how participation in different types of writing and communities of practice affects teachers’ orientations to and enactments of classroom instruction.

These findings also bring up some interesting considerations for teaching writing related to the potentially different outcomes for students. For example, Lisa’s students may end up being better crafters of more traditional forms of writing, whereas Aaron’s students may end up better able to leverage their writing in multiple venues, particularly those based on networking. In an era of standardization, some might criticize such differences as unacceptable outcomes of teaching. However, when taking the stance that both students’ and teachers’ passions and interests should have a place in the classroom, it is difficult to imagine that all teaching and learning will—or should—lead to the exact same outcomes. Perhaps, then, there are different ways to be a good writing teacher, based in part on the passions of the teacher and the contexts in which the teacher works and lives.

These findings also add to the body of literature on teacher-writers, which primarily showcases how engaging in writing has little impact on teachers’ instructional activities (Brooks, 2007; Gleason & Prain, 1996; Robbins, 1990; Woodard, 2013). Close attention to Lisa’s and Aaron’s talk and textual practices across writing and teaching contexts clearly showcases circulations across settings, and the ways that participation in writing can be intimately tied to the teaching of writing. In addition to highlighting the dialogic nature of teacher-writers’ talk and actions, this research also situates teachers as personal and professional beings who live their identities and practices across times and spaces.

Implications

Taking the stance that teachers’ passions and engagements beyond school walls are powerful resources for teaching has implications for theorizing teaching as dialogic practice, broadening methods of research to account for teachers’ participation across social practices, and legitimizing teacher interests and experiences in teacher education and professional development.

Theorizing Teaching as Dialogic Practice

Research documenting teachers’ participation across a nexus of practice, similar to studies that have examined students’ literate lives and selves, highlights the dialogic nature of teaching and learning. The “cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices” (Britzman, 1991, p. 8) become visible. In his account of a preservice math teacher’s varied literate activities, Roozen (2007) explains how:

Far from being isolated islands, Brian's math classes, sketch comedy, and gaming are so interwoven that it is impossible to talk about one activity without bringing up the others. . . . There is no writing that is just learning math, just performing a comedy sketch, just creating content for a game. Likewise, there is no instance in which Brian is only a mathematics student, only a comedian, only a gamer, only a math teacher. . . . In light of Dias et al.'s (1999) claim that "we write where we are" (p. 223), I would argue that we write *who* we are—literate selves forged from the full range of our literate activities. (Discussion section)

Similarly, Aaron's and Lisa's cases highlight that we *teach* who we are, drawing from a broad spectrum of literate and other activities. Particularly because calls are being made for teachers to incorporate students' out-of-school interests and experiences into learning, and very little scholarship focuses on teachers' histories of participation beyond institutional contexts, I see this as a promising area for future research.

Broadening Research Methods to Account for Teachers' Participation across Contexts

Studies of teachers have tended to remain anchored in institutional spaces like preservice sites, classrooms, and professional development settings. Although this bounding certainly serves a practical purpose, when taking seriously the notion that our literate and teaching activities are not grounded in a particular time, but in "dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate [and pedagogical] action" (Prior & Shipka, 2003, p. 181, some studies—like this one—must explore multiple places and times, moving across teacher-writers' participation in their classrooms and sites of literate engagement, their print and digital artifacts, and their present and past.

Nexus analysis research that traces "trajectories of texts, actions, practices, and objects, of people and communications across time and space and multiple modes" (Scollon, 2001, p. 241) offers opportunities to see teachers and the work of teaching writing in new ways. Part of the work of this type of research involves rethinking the notions of "event," "time," and "in- versus out-of-school" that have become commonplace in literacy studies. Although this study, like many others, relies heavily on observable events to document concrete actions, it also attempts to document the layering of multiple practices within such enactments. Documentations of teacher practice do not often attend to this lamination, particularly in noninstitutional contexts. Dialogic approaches to teacher practice should try to attend to this complex layering of actors, activities, and artifacts over time. Similarly, a nexus analysis makes it clear that in-school/out-of-school distinctions falsely dichotomize the work of teaching and learning. Teachers, like students, live their identities across times and spaces, and our research methods must better account for this.

Legitimizing Teachers' Interests and Experiences in Teacher Education and Professional Development

Many teachers, much like their students, seek their own learning in varied ways outside of the institutional confines of schools. All teachers participate in lived experiences that matter to their teaching. If teachers' interests and experiences become legitimized in conversations about teaching and learning, this will also have implications for teacher education and professional development. For teacher-writers, such work might begin with increasing metacognition about their own textual practices, including identifying their actions, naming them, and attempting to unpack the multiple practices embedded in them. Beyond this, however, it seems important to explicitly engage with teachers on how to "work with, around, and sometimes against the (official writing) curriculum" (Yoon, 2013, p. 171) to attend to both the social, cultural, and developmental needs and experiences of students *and* their own passions and experiences. This might involve analyzing the ideologies and practices of official curriculum (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2014), exploring students' and teachers' funds of cultural and literate knowledge, and engaging in conversations with administrators about creating a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993) that values students' and teachers' personal interests and "unofficial" textual practices as part of official curricular implementations. I suspect that if teachers are encouraged to see themselves in their curriculum and instruction, they will be more open to and capable of seeing their students as well, both important tasks in an era of standardization.

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NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. An abbreviated version of this example is shared in Roozen, Prior, Woodard, and Kline (in press).

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The CCCC James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award Committee calls for submissions for its 2016 doctoral dissertation award in composition studies. This award is given annually to a graduate whose dissertation improves the educational process in composition studies or adds to the field’s body of knowledge through research or scholarly inquiry. Applicants must submit to CCCC the following items: (1) title page, (2) abstract, (3) summary of the dissertation (maximum length 10 pages; summary must be in manuscript form), and (4) an *unbound* copy of the dissertation. To be eligible for the award, the dissertation must have been accepted by the degree-granting institution, and the writer of the dissertation *must have received the degree between September 1, 2014, and August 31, 2015*. Submissions must be received by **September 1, 2015**. Send the materials to: CCCC James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1010 or cccc@ncte.org. *Emailed submissions are accepted and encouraged.*