Democratic writing pedagogy and the Southern Nevada Writing Project

Thomas B Smith
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DEMOCRATIC WRITING PEDAGOGY AND THE
SOUTHERN NEVADA WRITING PROJECT

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Brigham Young University
1996

Master of Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2003

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Teacher Education
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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Democratic Writing Pedagogy and the Southern Nevada Writing Project

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Democratic Writing Pedagogy and the Southern Nevada Writing Project’s Summer Institute

by

Thomas B. Smith

Dr. Marilyn McKinney, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Literacy Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purpose of this study was to examine how practicing teachers acted to incorporate a more democratic writing pedagogy in their classrooms after participation in the Southern Nevada Writing Project’s Summer Institute. Democracy in this study refers to a critical view of democracy. This research is a multiple case study of five teachers’ practice during the first half of the school year following their participation in the Institute. The participants teach in schools of varying grade levels, SES, and achievement. Data sources included classroom observations with follow-up interviews, a final group interview, and artifacts from the Institute. These data were examined to identify common events and practices in each participant’s teaching. Through a systematic analysis that involved multiple readings and codings of the data and incorporated a number of potential frameworks, four themes, each related to democratic pedagogy, were constructed: Writing Instruction, Democratic Classrooms, Influence of the Institute, and Obstacles and Supports to Change. All of the participants reported moving their practice towards a more process approach (Writing Instruction). The
teachers' change was evidenced in the goals identified by the participants for their students and in their decision-making concerning teaching. In terms of their classrooms, the participants were found to exhibit each of the five "democratic supports" identified by McIntyre, Kyle, and Moore (2006) in their work on democratic pedagogy (Democratic Classrooms). Each participant was observed using both practices and principles espoused in the Institute to guide their classroom planning and practice beyond those evident in the other categories (Impact of the Institute). It was found that all of the teacher faced a unique set of challenges and support as they worked to change their practice (Obstacles and Supports to Change). The experiences of these teachers demonstrate the value and power of democratic pedagogy and the difficulty of the struggle to adopt a more democratic practice in the current educational climate. Importantly, this study highlights the role of teachers as intellectuals, provides examples of some limitations in prevailing, liberal ideals of democracy, and supports the need to make democratic practice a prominent goal in teacher education programs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................. iii

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
Democracy in America ...................................................................................................... 4
The National Writing Project .......................................................................................... 12

CHAPTER 2  REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .................................................. 19
Democracy .................................................................................................................................... 20
Learning to Teach in Democratic ways and for Democratic Purposes ......................... 46
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 83

CHAPTER 3  METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 85
Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 85
Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................. 86
Methodology ................................................................................................................................. 90
Data Sources ............................................................................................................................... 99
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 103
Limitations of the Study .......................................................................................................... 106

CHAPTER 4  FINDINGS OF THE STUDY ..................................................................... 108
Individual Cases ........................................................................................................................ 109
Cross-Case Analysis ............................................................................................................... 152

CHAPTER 5  CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ................................... 195
The Results ................................................................................................................................. 197
Conclusions and Next Steps ................................................................................................. 224

APPENDIX A  DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ....................................................... 227

APPENDIX B  CLASSROOM OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT ................................ 229

APPENDIX C  GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ........................................................ 235

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................... 237
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  How SNWP Practices tie-in to Democratic Pedagogy .................19
Table 2  Characteristics of democratic writing instruction and connections to democratic pedagogy.................................37
Table 3  Democratic Underpinnings of Several Common Process Approach Teaching Strategies .........................................................42
Table 4  The ways in which my data sources informed my research questions ..................................................................................97
Table 5  Representative classroom practices that suggest democratically founded classrooms ...............................................................161
Table 6  Participants’ practices that suggest adoption of Institute beliefs and practices ...........................................................................175
Table 7  The challenges faced by the teachers, external resources they drew on to face the challenge, and their courses of action in each case.......183
Table 8  An overview of how Ball’s (2006) model of teacher growth can be used to understand the learning and growth of the teachers in this study....213
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Also, Drs. Helen Harper and Sandra Odell, deserve special mention. They both were always on my side and never let me settle for anything but my best here or in the classroom.

All of my committee, Drs. McKinney, Harper, Odell, Liz Spalding, and Lori Olafson, deserve a big thanks for their time and effort. They all set a standard of excellence and pushed me to achieve that. At the same time, they were supportive and helped with concrete answers whenever possible. I hope, one day, to be like them.

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Finally, and most importantly, my wife. There simply aren’t any words in the English language that could describe how I feel about my wife and what I owe her for her unfailing support and encouragement. It is a trite statement, but this degree is as much hers as mine—at least. Without her I would not be the man that I am. I love you, Julie.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It all happened by accident.

I was teaching in a lower-middle class rural town at the base of the Wasatch Mountains when my students came to me with a problem. The district was going to cancel Four Hour Science.

Four Hour Science (FHS) was an institution. For over fifteen years, FHS students had been trekking to the nearby mountains on their mountain bikes to observe and document what they found at their assigned investigation sites—precipitation, plant growth, animal tracks, etc. FHS students learned to rappel so they could rappel down the cliff walls to observe the geology of the mountains. The whole class was invited to participate when the Bureau of Land Management reintroduced the turkey vulture into the Wasatch Mountains. During Winter Break, the FHS students spent a week in Yellowstone carrying out observations there, and the first two weeks of summer vacation were spent off the coast of Catalina engaged in similar activities.

The students at the school loved it. There were consistently more applicants than slots and many of the students who did not get in were still proud of the program. Maybe this was because it received numerous awards and honors from outdoor groups and government agencies in charge of wildlife and land management, and this town did not always receive good publicity.
Whatever the reason, the students were upset and wanted answers. So I did some investigating and told them that yes, the district was planning on cutting the program. I thought it was over.

Jessica had a different idea. “So, what can we do about it?”

I did not know. I did some more checking. The school board would be discussing FHS at an upcoming meeting, and there would be time for public presentations. Following the enthusiasm and energy of the students, we began to make plans to present our concerns at the meeting. We discussed the best type of presentation and decided on a series of posters accompanied by an oral presentation (Jessica would be our speaker).

Then, we talked about what information was necessary and how to find it. Students did research on injury rates in Physical Education classes (the reason given for canceling FHS was student safety, although the worst injury received in the fifteen year history of Four Hour Science was six stitches to a student who slipped on some gravel. On the other hand, two students had already broken arms in P.E. that year in our school). Other students explored the costs associated with the program. We all discussed presentation skills—speaking, posture, and dress. All of the students worked to make sure their posters and written materials were free from mistakes. We worked hard and we were ready.

On the night of the presentation I was unable to go, but the students were ready and I felt confident in their abilities. So did they, despite nerves.

It turns out that all of our efforts were for nothing. Not because we lost the fight, but because we did not even get to present our findings. It turns out that word had gotten
out and over 500 people were in attendance—some from as far away as New York City. All of them there to argue against getting rid of FHS. My students did not present because time ran out, but FHS was kept.

The next day, we talked about what had happened. The students were disappointed (and a little relieved—speaking in front of that many people was daunting) that they had not been able to present their information but happy because FHS was kept. On the way out the door, Jessica told me that even if no one had shown up the students “could have taken” the school board.

Whether my students would have been able to “take” the school board and single-handedly win support for FHS will never be known. What I do know, though, is that one experience changed what I felt about teaching in a fundamental way. Because of my training I was already using a curriculum that stressed working from the students’ lives and trying to get them to see the purpose and place of our learning beyond the walls of my class. This experience, though, cemented my commitment to these principles. At the time I did not know it, but I had taken my first step towards becoming a teacher focused on democratic principles. And while I was not always able to duplicate the energy or real-world, urgent purpose of that experience, I looked outside of my classroom to understand my students and to situate my teaching.

I wanted my students to understand their own power in shaping their worlds and the larger world for better. Also, I wanted them to understand how they were minimized and marginalized in many ways by the larger society. At the time, I may not have articulated it in precisely these words, but I wanted my students to understand how a democracy works and how to access and leverage power in such a society.
Democracy in America

The idea that all people are created equal and that everyone has certain basic rights as outlined in the Declaration of Independence have become a touchstone in American society, regardless of one's ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background (Gutmann, 1999). The idea that people should be free to pursue those things they aspire to and that issues such as class, color, or religious background should not stand as barriers to the pursuit has been the aspiration of much of United States history (Charlotte, 2001). Unfortunately, the history of the United States and other democratic countries provides ample evidence that such a lofty goal is not easily attained.

Consequently, democracy is never a finished product. As Greene (1985) notes, "democracy is neither a possession nor a guaranteed achievement. It is forever in the making; it might be thought of as a possibility—a moral and imaginative possibility" (p. 3). Democracy is something that we are forever aiming at and the goal is not to achieve democracy today (for such a goal is unattainable), but to come closer today than we were yesterday. However, progress towards democracy is not an even uphill march. Instead, the road to democracy is marked by backsliding and hesitation as much as it is by progress and achievement. Accordingly, the pursuit of such a goal must include a multitude of means and methods.

In democratic societies public schools provide potentially the most potent tool in facilitating the pursuit of this ideal (Giroux, 1993; Powell, 1999; Michelli, 2005). Purpel (1993) puts it this way,

Organized education is to be seen not predominately in the service of scholarship nor primarily to serve the state or the economy but primarily to serve the task of
Organized education is to be seen not predominately in the service of scholarship nor primarily to serve the state or the economy but primarily to serve the task of nurturing, nourishing, and sustaining the quest to meet our highest aspirations and most profound commitments. The standards of a society (and hence of its educational institutions) involve concern for the degree of freedom, equality, justice, and fulfillment enjoyed by its members. (p. 79-80)

Similarly, Dewey (2003a/1916) claimed that the purpose of schooling was to provide students with a place where they could practice and learn about democracy. Dewey suggested that teachers needed to examine society to identify those parts that were most democratic and then use these aspects as the foundation for their classrooms; aspects of society that were undemocratic were not to be replicated inside the classroom. In this way, classrooms would be democratic environments in which students would learn skills that could then be transferred to life in the larger society.

Under this view, teachers are supremely important. In the spirit of this argument, Giroux (2005) attempts to put forth a vision of schooling as a site for democracy and, consequently, a perception of “teachers as intellectuals who both legitimate and introduce students to a particular way of life” (p. 72). In a sense, then, teachers are responsible for the future of the democracy because the ways in which they structure their classrooms in a democratic sense have the potential to lead to the democratic or undemocratic structuring of society in the future (Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005).

Barber (1984, 2003) draws a distinction between two broad types of democracy—protectionist and participatory democracy. For long periods of time, including the present, the United States’ enactment of democracy has come closest to the protectionist
form of democracy. In this conceptualization of democracy, a good citizen votes, helps out his or her neighbor, and follows the lead set by the leaders of the community. This form of democracy limits the power and choice of its citizens by not allowing them a voice in the criteria used in coming up with potential solutions to problems. Instead, citizens are simply allowed to choose from a laundry list of choices provided by others, without ever having the opportunity to add to that list (Charlotte, 2001).

In contrast, Barber's (1984, 2003) second notion of democracy, participatory democracy, urges greater involvement from the people. In a participatory democracy citizens are urged to participate in hammering out the criteria for determining solutions and not simply choosing from what others have outlined. Furthermore, in this characterization of democracy, it is the responsibility of citizens to question and interrogate the decisions of government (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Powell, 1999). Citizens are to actively participate in civil matters by adding their own voices in productive and responsible ways. Citizens, then, are responsible for the co-governing of their respective communities beyond simply voting (Giroux, 2005; Gramsci, 1971; Fischman & McLaren, 2000).

Throughout the history of the United States, it has been moments of participatory democracy that have brought about greater equality for marginalized groups (Gutmann, 1999; Giroux, 1993; Keiser, 2005). It is this revolutionary nature of participatory democracy that makes it so vital at this point in history (Giroux, 2003, 2005; Michelli, 2005; Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005).

Recent marches, protests and legislation around the issue of immigration – legal and illegal – underscore the current unease and difference of opinion emanating from the
increased diversity of American society. As of 2000, people of color make up twenty-five percent of the total U.S. population. That figure represents a five percent increase over the previous decade. Along with an increasing diversity of ethnicity comes an increasing linguistic diversity. Eighteen percent of residents speak a language other than English in their homes with Spanish being the most prevalent but by no means the only other language (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Furthermore, the number of new immigrants reached in highest point in United States' history in 2000, and unlike previous waves of immigrants, relatively few of them came from European backgrounds; instead, most came from Latin America and Asia (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002).

Furthermore, the days of patriotization by assimilation seem to be over as more and more immigrants retain strong ties to their country of origin (Banks, 2006). Consequently, new voices and perspectives are being added daily to the discourse in American public life, and these voices are not likely to blend in quickly. Blending in is not truly the issue—no one should be forced to give up their culture, value, and beliefs simply to be heard (hooks, 2004); however, many of these voices have no place in the chorus and have little, if any, chance of getting in (Giroux, 2005).

Part of the problem is that what counts as a valuable contribution in the decision-making discussions of today’s United States is very narrowly defined in such a way that most new citizens’ voices are not allowed in (Carlson, 1998; Giroux, 2003). In fact, marginalized groups in general lack access to these discussions because they do not understand how to use the dominant, decision-making discourses in their own communications and are kept from such knowledge by structural inequities (Carlson, 1998). Further because of the hidden difficulties in acquiring this type of discourse, it is
unlikely that a great number of people can gain access to the dominant discourse simply through their own means; instead, there must be direct interventions in their learning to help them gain this discourse (Giroux, 2005). Consequently, the issue then becomes how these groups learn to have their voices heard.

The answer, though complicated, comes back to schools; schools are the primary sites of democratic renewal, and they will continue to be such (Dewey, 1938, 2003; Giroux, 2005; Gutmann, 1999; Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005). However, schools have been increasingly positioned to limit teacher power and vision in ways that serve to maintain the status quo (Giroux, 2005). Focused efforts by some political groups to define education as certain “proficient” scores on standardized tests have created an atmosphere in which teachers feel increasingly pressured to inculcate their students with basic skills in order to achieve better test scores (Greene, 1988; Giroux, 2001, 2005). However, to focus so intently on basic skills, “can result in students’ getting a few more correct answers on a test and still not seeing how their lives will be improved” (Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005, p. 71). Equality cannot be reduced to simply mean equal opportunity to take a standardized test (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Giroux (2005), Cochran-Smith (2004), and Greene (1998) argue that teachers must take on the imaginative work of envisioning how democracy looks in schools and what spaces are ripe for democratic action. Teachers must begin to be more concerned with the why of curriculum, methods, and evaluations than the specific instructional methods, although the latter are important (Giroux, 2005; Zeichner, 1983; Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005) so that they can help students understand the ways in which curricular and other decisions are grounded in political, cultural, and historical power.

As teachers enact this type of pedagogy, they take up a unique place in the struggle to renew and even transform democracy to a more inclusive plane. Freire (1970, 1992) provides one model for how this can be done. For Freire, the struggle is most easily imagined as a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed are those who are not allowed to participate fully in society; while the oppressors are those who keep in place the structures and values that keep the oppressed on the outside of power. Teachers, beginning with the knowledge the oppressed already have, work with the oppressed to help them see how their position as oppressed is socially and historically constructed. By understanding the constructedness of the world the oppressed can understand that there are other potential ways for power to be organized. With this knowledge comes the ability to stop their oppression. As the oppressed rise up to take action to reconstruct, or to rewrite, their worlds, they free not only themselves from the oppression they are under, but also the oppressors from being dehumanized as they oppress. “The oppressed, as an individual and as a class, liberates the oppressor, by the simple fact of forbidding him or her to keep on oppressing” (Freire, 1992, p. 85). Freedom only comes as the oppressed learn how oppression is structured and that other structures are possible. Therefore, it is not enough for teachers to provide marginalized groups with access to those social forms and norms which translate into social power; teachers must add to those skills new ways for the marginalized groups to consider and
think about power relations and democratic action (Freire, 1970, 1992; Giroux, 2005; Michelli, 2005; Gutmann, 1999; Macedo, 1994).

Among the groups that can count themselves as oppressed are teachers (DeBlase, 2007; Giroux, 2005). The current era "political and educational climate... conspires to silence and dismiss teachers’ voices" (DeBlase, 2007, p. 188). This silencing is leading teachers to doubt the validity of their own experiences, which in turn leads to teachers allowing others to "write" their stories for them. In contrast, as Freire (1998) suggests, "teachers must . . . critically reject their domesticating role; in so doing, they affirm themselves professionally as teachers by demythologizing the authoritarianism of the teaching package and their administration" (p. 9). If teachers do not take this stand, "it is a short leap" to a view of education which has as its purpose "to forge industrial soldiers fueled by the imperatives of excellence, competition, and down-home character" (Giroux, 2005, p. 71). Teachers, therefore, must go through a process of liberation in order to show their students the way to stake out spaces for empowerment and democratic action in society (Giroux, 2005; DeBlase, 2007; Freire, 1998).

Literacy education is at the heart of the call for democratic transformation (Freire, 1970, 1992; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Macedo, 1994; Powell, 1999). As Mantle-Bromley & Foster (2005) say, "It may sound dramatic to state so simply, but the future of our nation depends at least in part on the commitment of our current language arts teachers toward democracy and social justice" (p. 70).

The prominence of literacy education is due to the vital role of reading and writing in the enactment of a democratic society.
A democracy demands a special kind of literacy that goes beyond merely comprehending words on a page . . . It requires a literacy that includes such skills as critical inquiry; knowing how to ask questions and what kinds of questions need to be asked in a given circumstance; knowing how to evaluate the legitimacy and accuracy of an argument and the data that accompany it, to view issues from a variety of perspectives, and to evaluate the implications of a given text, read between the lines, and recognize and understand the unstated, the omitted, the subtext. In other words, literacy in a democracy is not only a special kind of literacy; it is also a more complex kind of literacy. (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004, p. 8-9)

To use Freirean (1970, 1992) terms, literacy in a democracy means being able to read the word and the world and to use the word to write the world anew. That is, it is not enough to simply decode written letters on the page; students must be able to understand how texts are made up of cultural, historical, and political influences that serve to shift the meaning. As students gain this knowledge, then, they will be empowered to not only understand texts using these skills, but also create their own texts that re-imagine the world in ways that include their voices and perspectives (see also Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Still, it cannot be assumed that all teachers will automatically understand how to take up these issues in productive and meaningful ways (Michelli & Keiser, 2005). Teachers must learn to enact pedagogies which will lead to a strong democracy (Fischman & McLaren, 2000). Many teacher education and professional development programs are mirroring the current problems with education in that they are promoting a
technical, reductionist vision of education, learning, and literacy as a series of skills that are understandable decontextualized from the social world in which they are used and learned. However, “teacher education should be inextricably linked to critically transforming the school setting” to move it in democratic ways (Giroux, 2005).

The National Writing Project

The National Writing Project (NWP) was started as an answer to poorly conceived professional development models and a lack of skill in teaching writing (Gray, 2000). In contrast to the current conceptualization of teachers, NWP honors teacher expertise, knowledge, and skill by creating spaces for teachers to see themselves and their peers as intellectuals as they teach and learn from each other through shared conversations and teacher demonstrations (National Writing Project, 2003; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Furthermore, NWP’s model of professional development pushes teachers to consider the social aspects of literacy and the ways in which diverse forces contribute to an overall understanding of the world (National Writing Project, 2003; MacLean & Mohr, 1999). NWP aims to improve teacher skill in order to positively impact students’ abilities to navigate the world in meaningful and significant ways (Gray, 2000). The most singular element, and the one NWP is most known for, is “the community of writers that is integral to the Summer Institute” (Gray, 2000, p. 48).

Previous studies have documented the success of NWP in a variety of ways (for example Inverness, 2005a, 2005b; Wilson, 1997). However, because of the NWP’s “naunced” approach to professional development (LeMahieu, 2005), it is difficult to
generalize findings to every local WP site (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). These two facts combine to add special impetus to the idea of examining local NWP sites.

Currently, there are 195 active local sites of the NWP across the United States. One of the local sites working to enact NWP’s vision of is the Southern Nevada Writing Project (SNWP). In existence since 1983, SNWP serves the teachers in Carson County School District and surrounding areas.

Following the NWP model, SNWP hosts a vibrant Summer Invitational Institute that runs five days a week for four weeks and is housed on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Each participant receives six graduate credits for completing the Institute. The participants apply to attend the Institute and are chosen with an eye towards having a mix of teachers (grade level, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and bringing together teachers who are interested in looking rigorously at their own teaching. The Institute itself is planned jointly between one or two directors and a number of facilitators, former Institute participants who return as guides and resources for the participants. The facilitators and directors meet regularly, beginning before the Institute starts, to discuss the way the Institute is progressing and activities they feel would help the participants move to a deeper understanding of teaching writing. As per the NWP model, writing and the sharing of writing are central aspects in all of these plans.

In general, each day of the Institute follows a routine model, which is marked in many ways by democratic practices (see Table 1 for a description of these practices and their democratic tie-ins). As participants arrive in the morning, they find a selection of foods that a few participants have brought for all to share. While everyone gets food and starts to get settled, the air is filled with the buzz of friends greeting each other and last
minute morning business being taken care of. Soon enough, the participants all find seats around the tables that have been pushed together to listen to the scribe report. The scribe report, which participants sign up to do, is a recap of the events from the previous meeting. These reports can take any format the scribe chooses—a game, a poem, a story, a skit, etc. Whatever the format, these scribe reports often cast the previous events in humorous ways, and the laughter sets the stage for the rest of the day.

Following the scribe report, one of the facilitators shares a writing prompt with the group to help get the participants started on their writing. The participants are free to follow the writing prompt or to take up a different topic or form depending on their individual needs. For the next hour or two the participants will read or write. Free to move about and find the space that best suits their needs, some participants sit outside in the sun, while others may find a couch to lie on while they work. Still others may ask another person for some input on a piece they are working on. During this time, the participants are free to meet with the directors or facilitators if they have questions or concerns about something in the Institute or about their teaching demonstrations; otherwise, the directors and facilitators are doing their own reading and writing.

Following this period, participants come back together to share insights or writing that occurred or to engage in a structure activity, e.g. book groups, a guest speaker, or a discussion around some aspect of writing or teaching writing. These activities are planned in ways that are designed to help the participants think more deeply about writing and the ways in which it is or should be taught and discussion protocols are used during these events (and peer response groups) as a way to make discussions more democratic.
Lunchtime marks the meeting of the peer response groups. Three to five participants along with a facilitator will meet for a couple of hours to provide everyone with the opportunity to get in-depth feedback on their writing. During this time, facilitators work to build community and to ensure that writing and privacy are respected. In many ways, these groups form the heart of the Institute and often continue beyond the Institute.

When the response group time is over, all of the participants come back together for the last part of the day. The activities at the beginning of the Institute are often similar to the types of activities that take place immediately preceding the peer response groups. However, later in the Institute, after the sense of community has begun to be established, the afternoon is marked by teaching demonstrations. A basic belief underlying the Institute is that teachers are knowledgeable about teaching. Therefore, space is made for the participants to bring in examples of their best practices, to research some more, and to present their knowledge and learning with the group as a whole. Teachers are encouraged to critique their own practice as they make their work public. The formats of these presentations can vary, but each participant is encouraged to include participation by the audience in multiple ways and to provide opportunities for the group to reflect and write. Following the teaching demonstrations, there is time for feedback both orally and in writing. And the day is over.

Built into the Institute are a number of other features that are designed to provide the participants with ways to make their voices heard, to learn from each other, to build meaningful professional relationships, and to deepen their understanding of what it means to be a teacher of writing. For example, not only are participants free to choose the
Table 1

How SNWP Practices tie-in to Democratic Pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNWP Practice</th>
<th>How it works</th>
<th>Democratic tie-in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scribe Reports</td>
<td>Participants present a review of what happened the day before in the Institute. These may take the form of a game, a skit, a poem, a story, or any other genre that the participant wants.</td>
<td>Provides choice in genre and timing of student work. Promotes a shared responsibility for the recorded history of the group’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Protocols</td>
<td>During discussions, agreed upon guidelines prevent a limited number of participants from dominating the talk and encourage others to voice their understandings as well.</td>
<td>Promotes democratic discussion principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Groups</td>
<td>Teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss their own writing and teaching practice.</td>
<td>Values individual participants as creators of work that is worthy of attention from others. Values individual participants as respondents to the writing of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Demonstrations</td>
<td>Teachers share their own best practices with the other teachers in the group.</td>
<td>Values and honors teacher expertise and knowledge. Promotes the creation of a network of intellectuals who can work together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Work</td>
<td>Facilitator’s works with response groups to help promote equitable sharing and respect among members. Facilitators also share in the planning decisions and other concerns associated with operating the Institute.</td>
<td>Promotes democratic discussion and sharing practices. Broadens the decision making base of the Institute. Emphasizes on-going process of learning to teach.</td>
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formats of events like scribe reports and teaching demonstrations, but also they are free to choose when to do them and, in the case of scribe reports, are also free to choose whether
to do them individually or with others. Also, at the end of each day, exit cards are solicited from the members of the group. The exit cards, which may be anonymous, provide the participants with an opportunity to bring up issues that they feel need to be addressed but which they do not feel comfortable bringing up in other settings. Also, time is taken at the beginning of the Institute for each participant to make a simple ‘mailbox’ where notes can be left for them. These notes provide another way to create community.

By basing its approach to teacher education on democratic principles and supporting a view of literacy and writing that is democratic in its purposes and its processes, SNWP (and, by extension, NWP) offer insight into how teachers might become better teachers of democracy. There is a growing body of research around the Institutes across the country and how they impact teachers. The most striking results tend to center around issues of community (Sunstein, 1994; Lieberman & Wood, 2003) and strengthening teachers’ voices (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Wilson, 1994). Both of these areas of findings are also areas that are prominent in the literature on democratic practice. The tie in is not coincidental; the Institute is designed to honor teacher voices, promote access to a deeper understanding and more formal discourse around teaching writing, and aid teachers in contributing to the body of knowledge surrounding teaching writing.

However, there is not a body of research that examines the NWP model from an explicitly democratic perspective. Given the current political landscape and the constraints placed on teachers as they attempt to exercise control and make decisions in their classrooms, combined with the increasing population of marginalized students, there has never been a better time or a greater need for this research. Consequently, the
purpose of this study is to examine how participation in the NWP model of professional development impacts the ways in which teachers understand and enact principles of democratic pedagogy inside their classrooms.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

With an increasingly diverse population and a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in the United States, the education system in the United States needs teachers—especially literacy teachers—who can teach students in ways that prepare them for life as active, engaged citizens in democratic communities that value and uphold the rights and contributions of every member of society in every aspect of life. Preparing teachers to take up a position that allows them to help students develop the abilities and knowledge necessary for complete democratic participation is a difficult process. The purpose of this study is to examine how participation in one professional development model underpinned by democratic ideals helps teachers progress towards enacting such a pedagogy. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research that supports the two broad areas of democracy and learning to teach writing.

The democracy section of this chapter includes sections on types of democracy and their characteristics, the role of schooling and writing in a democracy, the characteristics of democratic pedagogy, and the observable traits of democratic writing pedagogy. The second part of this chapter that focuses on issues surrounding learning to teach, includes sections on the characteristics that make up effective professional development, research related to NWP and its approach to professional development, the role of teacher beliefs in learning to teach, and a model from the literature of how beliefs change and grow through writing.
Democracy

According to the American Dream, anyone may achieve socially, politically, or economically. In many cases, it is this dream that is driving the mass immigration—legal and illegal—that is causing such commotion in the United States today. While it may be more possible for a person in the United States to achieve enough work and money to live better than other places, that does not mean that the American Dream is truly available to all. Instead, we live at a time when there is a growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots perpetuated by serious structural elements of society that set up high poverty and middle-class students for a lifetime in the same economic conditions (Carlson, 1998; Giroux, 2005). Furthermore, the disparity extends far beyond economic realities. Many people are excluded from having a say in the decisions that impact their lives for any number of historical and political reasons (Giroux, 2003).

One structure that helps to maintain the status quo is the prevalent notion of what a good citizen is (Giroux, 2005). Barber (1984, 2003) suggests that there are two types of democracies in action, each valuing different qualities in its citizens. The first is what he terms a protectionist democracy. The idea behind this approach is to protect the status quo. In this model, a good citizen votes, is quietly and submissively obedient to the established roles he or she is to fulfill, and helps his or her neighbors when needed. Furthermore, this approach is marked by an unfailing sense of patriotism and belief in the almost flawless goodness of the government (Giroux, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2003). This approach to democracy would mean that the problems facing our country in fifty years would be essentially the same as they are today (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003).
In all fairness, it should be noted that this type of thinking about democracy, citizenship, and, by extension, schooling has led the United States to a position as a world leader in terms of equity and potential justice. However, the challenges facing the United States today will require a new commitment to a new form of democracy—what Barber (1984, 2003) calls a strong or participatory democracy.

In this democracy the people are not committed to the particular officials in office per se; rather the citizens are committed to issues of justice and equity. While there will be obvious differences in wealth and power, ultimately the goal of a participatory democracy is to create a situation where all are involved in determining the course of action for the communities in which they live. As a result, a vital part of this type of democracy is the role of each individual citizen to question and interrogate the work of the government (Giroux, 2001; Whitty, 1998; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). In this way, decisions which affect all citizens are influenced by all citizens, whereas in a protectionist democracy the majority of influence is wielded by a minority of people (Giroux, 1993).

A participatory democracy is also marked by the fact that citizens in a participatory democracy take into account the ways in which each decision they make will impact other members of the community (Michelli, 2005; Dewey, 2003a/1916). In this vein, Gutmann (1999) suggests that the hallmarks of decisions need to be nonrepression and nondiscrimination, and these factors are not only considered in terms of the present conditions, but also in light of the possible impacts a decision would have on the future condition of the community.
Furthermore, the payoffs of a participatory democracy go beyond simple economics. What is called for in a participatory democracy is a place where people can make not only a good living, but also a good life. This is done as power is shared. Gramsci (1971) explained it this way, "democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him [sic], even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this" (p. 40). We need a democracy where equity and justice demand that every person be prepared not only to earn a better living (although that is part of it) but also to have a real say in the operations of their communities (Dewey, 2003a/1916; Giroux, 2005; Gutmann, 1999). We need a participatory democracy to live up to our stated ideals (Giroux, 2005).

Democracy and Public Schooling

Saying we need a participatory democracy and creating it, however, are radically different. In any democracy, schools play an important role in preparing citizens for life in the community (Michelli, 2005; Westheimer & Kahne, 2003; Apple, 1995). Historically, this is true in the United States. Charlotte (2001) pointed out that Thomas Jefferson placed education at the center of the governmental mission of the United States when he called for government funded schooling. However, Jefferson did not place education in a contention-free zone. Instead, "Jefferson placed schooling at the center of the American project of building state and national identities and simultaneously made it a primary tool for establishing and defending freedom" (p. 10).

The idea that education is simultaneously a tool of nation building and of freedom finding set the stage for a variety of competing movements throughout the two hundred
plus years of public schooling in the United States. Movements such as social efficiency and back-to-basics have stood in contrast to movements such as progressivism and critical pedagogy (Pinar et al., 2000). Today, the situation is still much the same (Charlotte, 2001). However, given the demands placed on the United States society due to an ever-increasing diversity of citizens, the course schools take in this battle is increasingly important. Furthermore, given the mission public schools are charged with in the United States, the decisions made are moral. Schools and teachers have the moral responsibility to take up these issues (Freire, 1970).

In order to allow all citizens a greater stake in society, Charlotte (2001) and others argue that schools and teachers must begin to focus on helping students learn to "negotiate actively in the decisions that affect [their] lives" (p. 28). What is needed are not schools that are structured to place civil peace and the economic status quo ahead of the individual; instead, public schools need to help every member of the public ready him or herself to contribute meaningfully and responsibly to public life. Furthermore, schools must be truly public in the sense that they serve all students and allow complete access to all students; otherwise, schools will fail to meet these requirements (Guttman, 1999).

To make this shift will not be easy. In fact, as Michelli (2005) notes, "learning to be free may be as difficult, or perhaps harder than gaining freedom" (p. 6). Learning to live and act in a participatory democracy is a process that is difficult and demands the best of teachers and students (Freire, 1992; Dewey, 2004/1916).

Regardless of the difficulties in moving to a more inclusive posture, there seems to be a general agreement among scholars that if the change is to take place, it will begin in the schools (Dewey, 2003a/1916, 1938; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux,
In the extremes, schooling takes one of two forms—either as a tool of society to reproduce the same inequities and injustices that are currently being enacted or as a tool for society to improve itself. As Dewey asked, do we want education as a function of society or a society as a function of education? (Dewey, 2004; McLaren, 1989; George, 2001).

Dewey (2003a/1916, 1938) states that school’s job is not to be moved by society; rather the purpose of schooling is to move society to a more democratic practice.

Dewey (2003a/1916) suggests that change can happen as teachers make conscious choices about what are the best aspects of society and work to bring those aspects into the classroom while at the same time altering those forces that are not democratic, equitable, and just.

As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is the chief agency for the accomplishment of this end. (Dewey, 2004/1916, p. 20)

Based on this premise, Giroux refers to teachers as “radical intellectuals” (2005) and “transformative intellectuals” (1993). Intellectuals in this framework use their positions to bridge equitable movements inside and outside of schools to strengthen both. While the impetus is on moving students to a greater degree of democratic praxis, students may move beyond what even the radical intellectuals envision (Dewey, 2004/1916). Such a position stands in stark contrast to the production of “teacher proof” materials and the impetus to control teachers being exerted by the political extremes (Giroux, 2005; Freire, 1992); in this light, teaching is a highly moral practice that
demands the moral best of all involved and places teachers and schooling at the center of

**Democratic Literacy**

The structure of power and democracy in the world is heavily reliant on literacy
skills (Freire, 1970, 1992). Therefore, if society is to undergo a democratic renewal it
will be built on the use of literacy skills especially writing (Powell, 1999; Laidlaw, 2005).
However, this is not just any set of literacy skills. A strong democracy requires “a more
complex literacy” (Goodland, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004, p.9). This more
complex literacy comes from the idea that reading and writing involve more than simply
letters on a page. Instead, democratic literacy requires a recognition that all literacy acts
are grounded in the social worlds around them (Powell, 1999; Easton, 2005). In this
sense, Freire (1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987) spoke of reading the world and the word.
Reading the word refers to the simply, instrumental aspects of literacy—decoding,
handwriting, spelling, etc. Reading the world, however, is understanding how the word is
used as a tool to create visions of the possible and being able to use the word to inscribe
one’s place in the world (Bee, 1981). In this way, “literacy . . . becomes the central
pedagogical and political mechanism through which to establish the ideological
conditions and social practices necessary to develop . . . movements that” take social
justice as their primary aim (Giroux, 2005, p. 152; see also Rosatto, 2005; Powell, 1999;
Macedo, 1994).

When understood this way, what has been taken for granted as ‘just the way
things are’ is suddenly viewed for what it really is—a ‘reality’ that is malleable and
constructed (Foucault, 1980). Students become “agents of their own history,” able to
actively participate in the creation of their future and their current place in the world by naming their world (Rossatto, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Therefore, those with this knowledge are able to use their words to “revise” and “rewrite” their places in the world; suddenly, the world can be reshaped to include more space for the story and voice of everyone (Rossatto, 2005; Laidlaw, 2005; Carlson, 1998). Such is the power of literacy in this framework.

Gee (1996) uses the idea of discourse to explore how literacy helps construct identities and place students socially, politically, and historically. For Gee, a discourse is “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (p. 21). Thus, rooted in language usage, discourse is an “identity kit” tied up with literacy skills (Whitney, 2005; Lyman & Figgins, 2005). Consequently, every student comes to school with a discourse that is theirs. However, the discourse of the school (the one officially sanctioned and valued by the school) is often at odds with the discourse valued by the students (Powell, 1999; Giroux, 2005; Fischman & McLaren, 2000; Freeman, 2005). As a result, these students must learn a new discourse or a new way of being in order to be recognized as literate or educated.

However, as students learn a new discourse they are changed. Students never “assume” the dominant discourse “without being assumed by it” (Freire, 1992, p. 157). Being assumed by a discourse means that, in some ways, the students adopt the views and opinions underlying the dominant discourse. This includes visions of their own possibilities and powers. Unless, therefore, students learn the constructed nature of
discourses and opportunities, gaining access to a dominant discourse does not allow full participation in society (Freire, 1970, 1992; Giroux, 2003).

Thus, because literacy can be cast as either a constricting set of skills that are supposedly value-free or as a potent tool for shaping and changing ideas about the world, it is a double edged-sword. On the one hand, literacy in the instrumentalist sense is a tool easily used to maintain the hegemonic inequality that marks our current society (Giroux, 2003; Freire, 1970; Macedo, 1994; Rossatto, 2005; Lyman & Figgins, 2005) and on the other hand, a democratic literacy creates space for more discourses while at the same time providing the keys to the dominant discourse to more students (Carlson, 1998; Whitney, 2005). As students develop democratic literacy, they can begin to use writing in the latter sense. When this happens literacy becomes a transformational tool that allows students to “turn [the dominant discourse] against itself” (hooks, 1994, p. 175) and to be effective at bringing about democratic renewal and even transformation.

Democratic Pedagogy

Working from the premise that schools are a vital site of democratic renewal, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) point out that there are different approaches to bringing about this renewal. The result of these different approaches is, not surprisingly, that a number of different conceptions of democracy are being enacted with and upon students in a number of different settings. At the moment, the largest push in laying claim to schools as a tool for a certain vision of democracy is coming from those who do not wish to see a participatory democracy in action (Keiser, 2005). Those advocating this view are trying to stake out control of the schools through rigorous and inflexible policy initiatives.
and mandates such as the No Child Left Behind legislation (Giroux, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2005).

The idea of leaving the decision of what it means to be literate and educated in the hands of relatively few people stands in direct opposition to the type of democracy outlined above as necessary for today’s society in the United States. Consequently, the question becomes how to create democratic classrooms and democratic schools that value students’ voices, ideas, and cultures. In the literature, several theorists have outlined the principles of what they define as a democratic pedagogy that would meet the needs of an informed, active citizenry (see for example, Sehr, 1997; Powell, 1999; Banks et al., 2001; Fischman & McLaren, 2000; Banks et al., 2006). From these readings, I have identified five characteristics of democratic pedagogy. Accordingly, democratic pedagogy must be:

1. Directed towards giving students the cognitive and linguistic tools necessary to take an active part in society
2. Centered in students’ lived experiences
3. Inclusive of diverse perspectives
4. Mediated by structured democratic discussions and practices
5. Aimed at action.

Democratic pedagogy must be directed towards giving students the cognitive and linguistic tools necessary to take an active part in society. Despite the fact that many progressive educators view the current system as inequitable in opportunities and possibilities, teachers still must help students learn to function within the dominant discourse, as much as possible. As Carlson (1998) notes,
It will do no good to help ‘at risk’ and other marginalized youth find their voices, if they continue to fail proficiency tests and thus are effectively locked out of power and into poverty. Given existing realities, progressive educators will need to prepare young people for these tests and ‘making it’ within the dominant culture. (p. 97)

Delpit (1995) stresses this same idea of a dual mission as she talks about the future of our students.

Let there be no doubt: a ‘skilled’ minority person who is not capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low-level functionary of the dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly. On the other hand, a critical thinker who lacks the ‘skills’ demanded by employers and institutions of higher learning can aspire to financial and social status only within the disenfranchised underworld. (p. 19)

There are tools that students need to find success socially and financially in the world. Most striking among these tools are the use of Standard English in speaking and writing (Ladson-Billings, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 2002) The world itself may be unfair, but as Dewey (1938) suggests not preparing our students to face it in the name of fighting for more justice would, in the end, be the ultimate injustice. Furthermore, only as students become adept at using these skills can they expect to make their voices heard and listened to. In turn, then, our students can use their position inside the dominant discourse to argue for a widening of that discourse to allow in an increasingly disparate range of voices (Carlson, 1998; Giroux, 2005; Dewey, 1938, 2004; Banks, 2006a).
Democratic pedagogy must be centered in students’ lived experiences. Dewey (2004) argues that as society progresses and becomes more advanced and complex, learning from the abstract or from the world of adults becomes increasingly more difficult for students. As a result, the school runs the danger of becoming “remote and dead” (p. 8). In order to combat this tendency, Dewey insists that the curriculum needs to be grounded in the lived experiences of the students (Pinar et al., 2000; see also Sehr, 1997). As Freire (1970) puts it, “the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 85). What issues are our students struggling with individually, as a class, and as a school? What problems are affecting them in their communities and neighborhoods? These situations provide spaces to discuss democratic practices and decision-making as it relates to things that our students know.

This ideal lies in opposition to what many schools do—especially schools that are predominantly made up of students marginalized by race or poverty (McLaren, 1989; Fischman & McLaren, 2000). Because of pressure—real and perceived—many schools are adopting “teacher proof” approaches to teaching. These approaches are based on uniform, step-by-step progressions that always “work.” If there is a problem when using these systems, it is purported, then the problem lies with the teacher, the students, or both (Giroux, 2005). In light of current views on teaching and learning—that students do not come to school as a uniformly developed mass all at the same level with the same interests, desires, abilities, and motivations—the idea that such programs could consistently work seems naïve at best. Often when these programs do succeed, it is not because of the programs; rather teacher innovation within the program is the true key to
success. In these cases, the teachers make changes to the material based upon knowledge of the students in the class—a more democratic approach (Giroux, 2005; Palmer, 2002; Mullins, 1997).

According to many scholars it is by starting locally that students are able to gain a greater, more developed world view (Banks, et al. 2006). As students take up issues locally, they begin to see how the issues of their homes, schools, and neighborhoods are tied up in broader state, national, and world issues. As a result, students begin to see that the world is the result of numerous competing, complementing, and conflicting sources. Along with this idea comes the feeling that ultimately, they can wield power in reshaping the world itself (Merryfield, 1998; Pike & Selby, 1995).

Freire (1970), whose goal was the active participation of every citizen in a society, advocated this same approach in his work with adult literacy for some of the same reasons. He structured his literacy classes in what he called culture circles. These groups began with pictures of issues and things within the communities from which the students came. By focusing on the immediate lived experiences of his students, Freire accomplished two things. First, the people in the culture circles would begin to understand that they did “know” things. They had a body of knowledge that was valuable and had merit, just as other groups did. Secondly, with the realization of their own importance, they began to understand that they had a vision of the world worth sharing and, consequently, some power in the world.

Democratic pedagogy must be inclusive of diverse perspectives. While starting with local issues is important, educators cannot stop there. Teachers must take conscious action to introduce students to perspectives that they may not otherwise encounter.
(Gutmann, 1999; Dewey, 2003a/1916). This can be done in two ways. First, teachers can bring in texts that represent other cultures and other ways of thinking (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003; Wile, 2000; Ciardelli, 2004). Second, students can be involved in discussions with students of varying developmental, cultural, political, and religious outlooks (Banks et al, 2006; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The introduction of new ideas allows students to imagine new possibilities for action as well as to see that problems have more than one side; both of these are indispensable to a participatory democracy.

_Democratic pedagogy must be mediated by structured democratic discussions and practices._ John Dewey (2003a) said, “we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment” (p. 18). The best way to teach students to be citizens in a participatory democracy is to allow them to act in a participatory democracy within the class and school. In this sense, Fischman & McLaren (2000) speak of schools as “laboratories of democracy” (p. 171).

In establishing more democratic communities in the classroom, special care must be paid to the nature of talk and the student-teacher relationship. First, in any participatory democracy, the role of dialogue is vital in that with so many voices to be heard, there must be a way designed to make it possible for all to participate in the discussion. Kreisberg (1992) contrasts this type of dialogue with debate or argument, during which two people communicate with one or both trying to convince the other to adopt a certain position or take a certain action. Dialogue, on the other hand, is communication to create understanding of different perspectives. For many people the
bulk of their communication falls into the former category. As a result, people do not necessarily know how to have dialogues (Kreisberg, 1992).

In classrooms, democratic dialogues take planning and structure. Several researchers have identified ways to structure dialogue in the classroom in democratic ways. Alibrandi & Seigel (1996) suggest that posing problems that the students are familiar with is one way to initiate these types of discussions (see also Freire, 1970; Rosatto, 2005; McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). Another suggestion is the use of small groups (Alibrandi & Seigel, 1996; McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). Also, certain boundaries must be set and maintained for all parties involved to maintain their humanity and personality; therefore, some comments are unacceptable because they are discriminatory or repressive (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006; Beck, 2005; Powell, 1999; Gutmann, 1999). Wile (2000) posits that dialogue of this nature takes time and an attentiveness to audience. There must be time to reflect, to listen, and to respond (Powell, 1999), and the focus must be on the audience; the teacher cannot be the ultimate audience. If real dialogue is to happen it must revolve around real issues with real invested people. There must be a reason to talk, time to think, talk, and formulate opinions, and a purpose to share it with others (Bridges, 1988).

The second issue that teachers must be concerned with as they seek to establish effective democratic communities is their relationship to their students. In the traditional approach to education, teachers sit in front of the classroom and dispense knowledge and allow privileges as they deem important (a position that also inhibits democratic dialogue [Powell, 1999]). However, such a position is hardly democratic—at least in the sense of a participatory democracy. Instead, in preparation for a lifetime of participatory democracy
citizenship, steps need to be taken to enlarge the place of common ground among teachers and students—often this may take the form of decision-making and, where appropriate, rule-making (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006; Banks et al., 2006; Banks et al., 2001; Alibrandi & Seigal, 1996).

In discussing this point, Rossatto (2005) takes exception to the traditional notions of teacher-centered and student-centered classrooms. For him, both limit the possibilities inside of a classroom because each perspective is limited; fixating on either teachers or students tends to limit the possibilities of both groups. Instead, for Rossatto what should be at the center is the study of the world around them (see also Giroux, 1988; Freire, 1970). Placing the students' world at the center of the classroom can open that world up to critique and dialogue. These activities of critique and democratic dialogue place both teachers and students in new positions.

Through dialogue [engagement with the subject], the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers . . . the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is . . . taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. (Freire, 1970, p. 53)

This does not mean that the teacher relinquishes authority simply the position of authoritarian (Bartlett, 2005).

Not only does the shift in relations affect the roles of teacher and student, but also according to some the shift to empowering students sets the stage for increased learning and knowledge. “Knowledge and the quest for knowledge tend to follow rather than precede political engagement: give people some significant power and they will quickly
appreciate the need for knowledge, but foist knowledge on them without giving them responsibility and they will display only indifference” (Barber, 1984, p. 234). When students see a need for knowledge then the knowledge becomes coveted. Democratic participation in meaningful ways will lead students to desire that knowledge (Palmer, 2002). Creating a more democratic relationship between teachers and students, then, is a way of increasing the potentials, possibilities, and learning of both.

The use of democratic structures is vital, then, to the educating of an informed engaged citizenry. It is only as students have a chance to experiment with democratic action in a class or school that they begin to understand what it means to be an active citizen. Otherwise, the conceptions may remain simply at the level of citizen as consumer and perhaps voter. These structures though must include the time, space, and training for democratic dialogues and the restructuring of the teacher-student binary.

Democratic pedagogy must be aimed at action. The ultimate aim of a participatory democracy is action by its citizenry. Indeed, it is the action taken that separates a participatory democracy from a protectionistic one. Schools, therefore, must keep in mind the notion of action. This action must be aimed at identifying problematic situations, imagining possible remedies, and acting on them. As Michelli (2005) notes, “Preparing students for democracy means preparing them to see the problematic and to act on it. We need to be active, not passive; engaged, not bored” (p. 7). Similarly, Giroux (2001) comments that democratic pedagogy must begin with the assumption that its major aim is not “to fit” students into their existing society; instead, its primary purpose must be to stimulate their passions, imaginations, and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social,
political, and economic forces that weigh heavily upon their lives. In other words, students should be educated to display civic courage, i.e., the willingness to act *as if* they were living in a democratic society. (p. 201)

If students are to be active engaged adults, they must be active, engaged students. The idea is that student action will increase justice and equity in their worlds now and position them for future action in their communities outside of school.

In conclusion, schools are a vital cog in a democracy. They do much to determine the direction of a democracy by the types of citizenship that they train their students for (Westheimer & Kahne, 2005). No one is born understanding how to be a member of a participatory democracy—that is learned, and generally that learning happens in schools where students have the opportunities to encounter new situations that must be addressed in conjunction with a diverse population in ways that are mutually beneficial and, hopefully, promote justice and equity.

Teachers have the responsibility to design pedagogy that encourages the development of those traits that are most conducive to an engaged, active citizenry. This type of pedagogy will include the cognitive tools students need to function in a strong democracy. Also, a democratic pedagogy will begin with students’ lived experiences, provide them with opportunities to encounter differing viewpoints, be structured around democratic principles including democratic dialogue, and aim student development towards action.

*Democratic Writing Instruction*

Democratic writing instruction fits into the framework of democratic pedagogy outlined in the previous section. However, given the importance of writing within the
ideal of democratic pedagogy, there are some special applications. Powell (1999) lays out in broad terms, five characteristics of democratic writing instruction.

1. Literacy instruction ought to promote freedom of thought through encouraging diverse perspectives and welcoming productive critique.
2. Literacy instruction ought to enhance students' communicative competence by considering the social, cultural, and hegemonic dimensions of language use.
3. Literacy instruction ought to be consciously political.
4. Literacy ought to be taught in ways that make students aware of the power of language for transformation.
5. Literacy ought to be taught in ways that nurture a culture of compassion and care.

(p. 65)

These criteria are designed to be used as a way for teachers to examine their practice to determine how well they are reaching this ideal. These are potentially powerful guidelines for teachers to use as they reflect critically upon their practice.

Based on Powell's work, as well as the democratic writing of Giroux (2005, 2003), Guttman (1999), Dewey (1938, 2004/1916), and others, I suggest the following areas of classroom practice that would be observable (visible and/or audible) to an outsider may serve as an indication of democratic writing pedagogy. These areas are the nature of community, the nature of dialogue, the democratization of the student-teacher relationship, the purposes of writing inside the classroom, and skill instruction for real purposes. Table 2 provides a graphic showing the alignment of observable characteristics of democratic writing instruction with those of the more general democratic pedagogy.

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The nature of community. As was pointed out previously, students grow into the environments they inhabit (Johnston, 2004). As a result, if we expect our students to become a new kind of citizen, we need to provide them with a new kind of society to learn and grow in. Often in schools, students work in groups. Unfortunately, they seldom work as a group—sharing ideas and visions, exchanging information, committing to the same goals (Johnston, 2004; Rogoff & Toma, 1997). We need to change that. When students simply work in groups, they are not pushed to evolve and change. True democratic communities that are transformative are also challenging—not in the sense that there is a power struggle; rather members “help each other and check each other’s tendencies to purely idiosyncratic or self-interested thinking” (Young, 1992, p. 8). In a classroom using democratic writing pedagogy, for example, the students might work together in peer response formats to help every member of the community become a better writer. A democratic community is a different type of community in which it is not always required that students feel 100% comfortable. The work of developing democratic consciousness is a tricky and difficult business, and students will have to struggle some as they re-envision themselves as well as their communities (Giroux, 2005).

The nature of dialogue. Democratic dialogue is marked by the participants exchanging views in an effort to understand what each person is saying, not to convert the other person. Teachers in literacy classrooms can structure their classrooms in ways that foster this goal. For example, the teacher can bring in texts which describes a known event or situation from a fresh perspective—one that the students may not be familiar with (Ciardelli, 2004). By introducing texts that take up different perspectives, teachers
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<th>Democratic Writing Instruction</th>
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| Nature of Community            | Centered in students’ lived experiences  
|                                | Structured democratic dialogues and practices  
|                                | Aimed at action  |
| Nature of Dialogue             | Inclusion of diverse perspectives  
|                                | Structured democratic dialogues and practices  |
| Student-Teacher Relationship   | Structured democratic dialogues and practices  |
| Purpose of Writing             | Centered in students’ lived experiences but moves beyond to increase knowledge of and access to the dominant discourse  
|                                | Structured democratic dialogues and practices  
|                                | Aimed at action  |
| Skill instruction for real purposes | Giving students cognitive skills  
|                                | Centered in students’ lived experiences  
|                                | Inclusion of diverse perspectives  |

are helping students build their social imaginations, a skill that is vital for reading and writing (Dyson, 1993). Furthermore, students who have been trained in this type of dialogue and social imagining, will use words such as because, if, and why more often than students not familiar with these skills suggesting they understand the constructed nature of social relationships (Mercer, 2000). These types of dialogues structured into the literacy classroom help students to understand that knowledge, status, and position are most often social constructs and must be contextualized and explained for a full understanding.

*The democratization of the student-teacher relationship.* The traditional student-teacher relationship gives great power to the teacher and little to the students—a very non-democratic relationship. The writing class allows for some unique opportunities to
upend this dichotomy. For example, many proponents of democratic pedagogy advocate that students be given more real choices in the classroom. Within the context of a writing classroom such decisions that can be turned over to the students are abundant. Students can make choices concerning the content and form of their writing (Romano, 1987; Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1983). In fact, choices of subjects that represent what the student is really living can be powerful platforms to guide student learning and thought (Romano, 1987).

Another way to democratize the teacher-student relationship in the writing classroom is by altering patterns of instruction. Individual one-on-one conferences where students take the lead in setting the agenda are a powerful way for teachers to continue meeting the demands of curriculum, while honoring the knowledge and skills their students already possess (Romano, 1987; Anderson, 2000). Holding these conferences helps students to see the teacher as someone who is helping them achieve their own goals, not simply trying to force them into doing something they have no interest in. A second way to alter the instructional patterns is to use students in the class as experts using processes like peer-conferencing and peer editing (Graves, 1994). Again, this honors student knowledge and skill, but it also strengthens the bonds between students as they look to one another for specific help—just as they would do in a democratic community.

*The purposes of writing.* Finally, the purposes of writing are indicators of the degree to which teachers have adopted and enacted democratic practices in the writing classroom. Traditionally, writing instruction has focused on artificial, skill-based writing procedures (Laidlaw, 2005). Such approaches to writing do nothing to help students
learn how writing can be transformative; rather they reinforce the student idea that school work has no "real world" application (Dewey, 1938). Students should be encouraged to write for real people outside of the classroom and for real purposes that may have nothing to do with the classroom (Powell, 1999; Kixmiller, 2004). Writing that reaches beyond the school walls for information, audience, and purpose helps "students make sense of their world while advocating for change" (Kixmiller, 2004, p. 29). Furthermore, this type of writing prepares them to be active members of a participatory democracy.

In summary, democratic approaches to teaching writing are observable through the community created inside of the classroom and how that is accomplished, the dialogue in the classroom, the way in which teachers and students relate to one another, and the ways in which writing are used in the classroom (see for example Dyer, 2005; Petrone & Gibney, 2005). While the ways in which these areas might be enacted in each classroom may vary, the goals and areas listed are fruitful places to look for evidence of democratic writing instruction (or lack thereof).

**The Process Approach to Teaching Writing**

In the 1970’s and 1980’s approaches to teaching writing began to change. Prior to that time, writing was seen as a mechanical exercise and writing lessons focused on handwriting, spelling, and grammar. Students rarely had the opportunity to express themselves or write anything that they chose (Laidlaw, 2005). Researchers such as Elbow (1973), Graves (1983), Calkins (1986), and others began to advocate teaching from the premise that if we are teaching writing, then we should be teaching students to act like writers act. The focus shifted from word-by-word writing to writing for meaning and expression (Laidlaw, 2005; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). In a review of the
literature surrounding the process approach to teaching writing, Pritchard & Honeycutt (2006) found that while the specific ways in which teachers implement the process approach to teaching writing vary across classrooms, the principles underlying it are fairly consistent.

It is these principles underlying the process approach to teaching writing that tie it so closely to democratic writing instruction. For example, the process approach is based on the idea that students, indeed everyone, can write and wants to write (Graves, 1983; Elbow, 1973). It honors a student’s knowledge and skills. Also, it empowers students by allowing them choice. In this approach, students are free to make many choices without fear of penalty or reprisal (Graves, 1983). Perhaps most importantly, this approach is based on the idea that students are writing not for the teacher and not what the teacher wants. Instead, the writing is drawn from the student’s needs and directed to whomever the student chooses. These ideals tie in with democratic ideas of true decision-making, respect, and communication. Table 3 briefly outlines practices common to the process approach to writing instruction, how they are carried out, and the ways those practices reflect democratic beliefs and attitudes.

Powell (1999) suggests that because the process approach to teaching writing is so varied in the ways it is enacted, at times the true democratic power of the approach is obscured. Generally, this happens as teachers begin to see the process as the end in and of itself; teachers need to keep in mind why students are learning to write and to discuss this with the students. As teachers bear in mind the purposes of learning, the process approach can be a powerful way to enact a more democratic approach to teaching writing (Powell, 1999; Olkowski & Ihrke, 2005). The very nature of the process approach does
move classrooms closer to the democratic ideal that is needed and farther from the skills-based models that serve to disguise the gatekeeping functions that literacy serves
(Edelsky, 1991; Powell, 1999).

Table 3
Democratic Underpinnings of Several Common Process Approach Teaching Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Approach Teaching Strategy</th>
<th>How it is done</th>
<th>Democratic tie-in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Conferences</td>
<td>Teachers review student work and instruct students individually.</td>
<td>Values the knowledge and skills students already possess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reforms the student-teacher relationship to a more equitable plane.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student choice of topic</td>
<td>Students choose what they are going to write.</td>
<td>Allows students to exercise their own prerogative as they write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing of student writing</td>
<td>Student work is made public in ways the student chooses consonant with their purposes. This may mean traditional publishing outlets (e.g. books or posters) or other less traditional outlets (e.g. websites or letters).</td>
<td>Adds value and prestige to student work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pushes the students to consider an audience outside of their own classroom/teacher.</td>
<td>Allows students to imagine themselves as having a meaningful voice outside of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Instruction</td>
<td>Teachers couch their instruction in terms of how to help students achieve their own writing goals.</td>
<td>Honors student decision-making and purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reforms the student-teacher relationship to a more equitable plane.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer conferencing &amp; editing</td>
<td>Students act as editors for both content and form of other student writing.</td>
<td>Gives students a valuable place inside the working of the classroom community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values the knowledge and skills students already possess.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values student voice in terms of honoring their place not simply as writer but also as audience.</td>
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</table>
Using a process approach to teaching writing, many literacy teachers are pushing their students to enact a "literacy that is both politicized and holistic" (Powell, 1999, p. 121). For example, Webb (2005) recounts how her class used their knowledge of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Non-Violent Change to try and make a difference in the world. As the class discussed the civil rights movement, the students began to understand how the rights many people now enjoy were fought for and won. As part of the discussion, the class visited the Center where they toured the facility at their own pace and chose from a selection of activities to guide their viewing. Many of these activities included writing; further, many students also did writing of their own born out of the emotional connection they were making with the material. The next day, back in class, Webb shared with them how she had worried that they would not be able to go so she had taken photos to share with them a little of the Center's feel. As the students discussed the idea that not everyone in the world could attend the Center, they decided that they wanted to create an on-line virtual museum with their own writings as captions and audio commentary of Webb's pictures. In this way the students believed they could share what they had felt and learned with those unable to attend the Center.

Another example comes from the work of Kixmiller (2004), a high school teacher in Indianapolis. In her class, research papers were designed around issues and problems the students felt needed to be addressed in their communities. One of her students, Terri, who had done little, if any, work during the course of the year, discovered that she really was allowed to write about anything she wanted. She began to research the problem of racial profiling commonly used by the Indianapolis police force at this time, and became energized as she interviewed people, read news stories, and tried to understand statistics.
she found. Then, Terri came back and shared her work in an emotional appeal to all of the students that a stand must be taken. Because of the process approach of her teacher, Terri was able to use her literacy skills to bring to light what she felt was a problem her classmates were too passive about.

In each of these examples, students were free to make conscious decisions about their writing. Specifically, in each case students used this freedom of choice to write for transformative goals that extended beyond the classroom. Such projects might be found in classrooms not using the process approach; however, the process approach, with its focus on students choice and decision-making, creates an environment that is more likely to foster these types of experiences (Romano, 2000; Powell, 1999).

In summary, democracy is constantly in a state of flux and renewal. Each day the equity and justice in a democracy is potentially changing in radical ways (Gutmann, 1999). In order to ensure that the power of all people to have a voice in matters and have real choice in addressing issues facing them, citizens must learn how to act in a democracy. Schools are the primary place this learning happens. Furthermore, literacy skills play a vital role in a person’s ability to participate in a strong democracy. Therefore, teachers—especially literacy teachers—need to consciously enact a pedagogy that prepares students for a greater role in the dominant discourse, respects the students’ knowledge, brings in diverse perspectives that are unfamiliar to the students, gives them a chance to experiment with democracy, and leads to social action (Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005). In this way, teachers can help students prepare to transform the democratic state in which they live.
Learning to Teach in Democratic ways and for Democratic Purposes

An understanding of the vital role teachers play in democratic renewal leads to the issues surrounding how teachers learn to teach in democratic ways and for democratic purposes. In this section, the areas of teacher education programs, professional development (with an emphasis on the professional development model of NWP) and teacher beliefs are discussed in terms of how these factors impact and fail to impact teacher learning.

Teacher Education

Under a framework that places such a heavy emphasis on teachers, it is only natural that the education of teachers themselves is of utmost importance. As Wile (2000) notes, “pedagogy that seeks to empower students must first empower teachers” (p. 175). Mullins (1997) in a case study of teachers trying to enact democratic approaches to pedagogy notes that teacher education plays an integral role in a teacher seeing herself as able to enact democratic pedagogy. Consequently, teacher education is “a key site for initiating practices aimed at opening new spaces of democratic space” (Fischman & McLaren, 2000, p. 177).

In addressing the rapidly increasing need for teacher education programs to address issues of social justice and equity, Nieto (2000) calls for programs to take three steps: take a stand on social justice and diversity, make social justice omnipresent in teacher education programs, and emphasize a vision of teaching as a life-long process of transformation.

Taking a stand on social justice. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) says that we “need many more school- and university-based educators willing to take a stand as public
intellectuals in order to expose the far-reaching consequences of the prevailing political agenda and challenge the co-optation of the language of 'equity,' 'high standards,' 'pluralism,' and 'leaving no child behind'” (p. 156). Nieto (2000) further suggests that colleges of education need to take down their lofty mission statements and put them to work in the classroom so that those teachers who leave their institutions are armed to defend the need for a truly equitable education and to critique currently popular notions of what it means to be educated and literate.

Making social justice ubiquitous in teacher education. Despite the rhetoric about cultural diversity, some critics claim that most colleges of education send messages about diversity that are fragmented and present an elusive vision of multi-cultural education that sends contradictory messages, at best, to prospective teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2003; McDonald, 2005). Instead, of treating social justice and issues of democracy as issues that are covered in one class separate from everything else, they need to be taken up in every class throughout a program (Nieto, 2000; Giroux, 2005). Teacher education programs must redefine the debate and inject the idea that social justice is an appropriate goal for education and schooling (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Giroux, 2005). The movement to place social justice at the center of education will not be easy, but it has never been more imperative if we are to prepare students for a participatory democracy (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Giroux, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Emphasizing a vision of teaching as a life-long process of transformation. “To successfully prepare effective teachers, teacher education should lay a foundation for lifelong learning” (Hammerness, et al., 2005, p. 359). Presently, some critics claim that there is not a body of knowledge for teacher education and so the field is rather
superfluous (Labaree, 2000; see also Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2005). As a result, many practicing teachers see little reason—other than pay—to get more education (Hammerness et al., 2005). Nieto (2000) and others argue that it is incumbent upon teacher education programs to help both prospective and practicing teachers understand that there is a whole body of knowledge that they do not currently have and may never totally have that is based on learning both in their own classrooms and from the research of others.

**Teachers as Adaptive Experts**

Beyond Nieto’s (2000) call for these characteristics, the National Academy of Education (2005) calls for all teachers to become “adaptive experts.” “This means they must become able both to use efficient routines and to seek out and apply new strategies in situations where routines are not enough” (p. 31). Adaptive Experts combine an ability to perform routines efficiently with the ability and disposition to innovate when needed.

When teachers lean too much towards either routines or innovation, teaching is skewed towards ineffective and non-democratic ways of teaching (Hammerness, et al., 2005). Teachers who rely too much on routines “develop a core set of competencies” that govern their approach to teaching (Bransford et al., 2005, p. 49). These teachers, then, are concerned with efficiency and eliminating rather than solving problems (National Academy of Education, 2005; Bransford et al., 2005). At times, over-reliance on routines may be a signal that the teacher is applying new routines and cannot cognitively attend to innovations at the moment (Bransford et al., 2005). Teachers who favor innovation too much have to spend inordinate amounts of time dealing with minor problems that more proficient teachers can handle quickly and efficiently through
routines. As a result, student learning can suffer (Bransford et al., 2005). An adaptive expert is proficient with general routines but is also comfortable and willing to stray from the routine when the situation calls for it.

Teachers who are adaptive experts hold certain notions of teaching that underlie their approach. First, adaptive experts realize that learning and teaching are contextual and, therefore, always open to change. In this way, adaptive experts view change not as a failure of an approach, but rather as a success and an inevitable part of teaching (Hammerness et al., 2005). Second, adaptive experts realize that teaching requires life-long learning (National Academy of Education, 2005). Finally, adaptive experts are willing to live with ambiguity as they rethink their perspectives. They are able to unlearn previous routines and let go of previously held beliefs to refine their approaches (Bransford et al., 2005).

Adaptive experts are capable of efficiently using routine procedures as well as developing new methods to best meet the long-term needs of their students. An over reliance on either routines or innovation can cause teachers to be less effective. Teachers with adaptive expertise are prepared for change, additional learning on their part, and ambiguity during the process.

Professional Development

As Hammerness et al. (2005) note, “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for optimal teaching are not something that can be fully developed in preservice education programs” (p. 358). That is why some models of teacher development are beginning to take a more long-term approach to learning to teach (see for example,
Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In these models, professional development is becoming a more prominent part of teacher learning and growth.

The area of professional development is one of the areas most impacted by the dueling notions of what it means to teach for democracy. Recent decades have seen several major changes in the assumptions underlying most approaches to professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2000). In too many cases, teachers were positioned as either "passive consumers" of teacher-proof approaches to teaching or "compliant participants" whose job was to silently absorb whatever information had been chosen for them (Lieberman & Wood, 2001). Teachers were 'developed' just as students were to be 'developed'. Also, many of these approaches relied on one time interventions to change beliefs and practices—something that seems destined to failure because beliefs themselves can take up to three years to change (Kagan, 1992b). Newer models are built on the same socio-cultural theories of learning that are becoming more prevalent in the literature about student learning, namely, that teachers enter professional development courses with needs and knowledge that is particularly theirs. Another part of this change is the way in which the role of being a teacher is conceptualized. Under a participatory democracy pedagogy, teachers are expected to do intellectual work wrapped up in their specific teaching contexts. Consequently, teacher knowledge must be ever evolving and learning to teach is not complete when a teacher receives her degree.

In their examination of professional development models, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) have identified three main approaches: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. Each of these approaches is built on different assumptions about learning, teaching, and the purpose of professional development. The
first two approaches are built on problematic binaries while the third is more congruent with democratic approaches to teaching and learning. Approaches using a knowledge-for-practice orientation assume that university-based researchers and other experts develop knowledge, including codified practical knowledge, and prepare it for teachers to learn and use. The second approach knowledge-in-practice assumes that the only valuable knowledge is that which is learned in the classroom. In this case, teacher learning is seen to occur as teachers have the opportunity to examine the work of expert teachers and to reflect on their own practice.

Both of these models are built on dichotomies that are false (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2000). The first of these dichotomies is the theory-practice dichotomy. This idea supposes that there is such a thing as theory that stands separate from and unconnected to practice. Statements like “that’s too theoretical” underscore this position. The two positions above each place value and emphasis on opposite sides of this debate, but the underlying assumption is the same. Such rigid dualism only limits the possibilities of what is open to knowing and asking because there is little, if any, room in either conceptualization to value knowledge from the other side.

The second dichotomy can be termed the expert-learner dichotomy and refers to the positions of those in the know and those wanting to know. This assumption positions people in certain strict relations to others. Those who are the experts teach and those who are not learn. There is no room in this model for a reciprocal teaching/learning relationship that we understand to be such a large part of real teaching and learning. Furthermore, this dichotomy perpetuates the idea that learning to teach is something that
can be accomplished in entirety and then checked off of one's list, so to speak. Neither of these situations is adequate in the light of democratic, post-modern sensibilities.

The final conceptualization of professional development is knowledge-of-practice. Approaches from this perspective assume, "that the knowledge teachers need to teach well is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation" (Coehran-Smith & Lytle, 2000, p. 48). This approach rejects the dichotomies underlying the other two and lays claim to a middle ground where theory and practice co-mingle and have equal value and where all teachers are constructors of knowledge or intellectual workers (Cochran-Smith, 2004a).

By rejecting the dualistic nature of the first two conceptualizations, such an approach also opens the door to a more democratic practice (Rodriguez et al., 2003; Coehran-Smith, 2004a). This happens as spaces are created for more people to contribute to the body of knowledge extant in the field. In this conceptualization, the first-year teacher is just as able to question practice and to add knowledge as the veteran teacher or the university professor. Multiple types of knowing and ways of knowing are validated under this new positioning (O'Quinn, 2006). By opening up intellectual discourse to all forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, "democracy [becomes] as much a theory of learning as it is a political theory" (Glickman & Alridge, 2001, p. 15). Another level of democratic practice is opened as teachers involved in inquiry take up issues relating to justice and equity in their own practices—something that some researchers claim these
teachers do more often than teachers in traditional professional development programs (Kelly, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Glickman & Alridge, 2001).

Furthermore, under this framework, teachers approach their craft with inquisitive minds. They want to know about their teaching and their students’ learning. In fact, in this situation, classrooms become sites of learning for teachers and students (Speck & Knipe, 2005). In many ways, classrooms working under this conceptualization are simply an extension of the preparatory education classes already taken in preparation for entry into the field (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Under this approach it is not just new teachers who have two jobs—teaching students and learning to teach students; every teacher has these jobs because neither one is ever done. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) says, “obviously, learning continues for thoughtful teachers as long as they remain in teaching” (p. 1039).

Even when approaches to professional development use the same framework, there are still differences in the resulting programs because of contextual differences. However, many researchers report that there is a body of principles that underlie any effective enactment of professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Rodriguez et al., 2003; Speck & Knipe, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Although the various researchers claim differing numbers of key characteristics, the idea that there are certain underlying principles of effective professional development is consistent. Also, in many ways this body of characteristics is still evolving and growing (Richardson, 2003). At present, a review of the literature yields at least four qualities that are necessary for effective professional development. High-quality professional development should:

- Contextualize problems and the approaches to courses of action.
- Value teachers' knowledge, expertise, and experience
- Directly link student and teacher learning
- Be fostered in learning communities that are supported by school policies and organization.

*Professional development should contextualize problems and approaches to courses of action.* For far too long, professional development has been something that is done to teachers as opposed to something teachers do (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). As a result, the instruction often did not meet the needs of the teachers in their efforts to create, support, and sustain deep learning on the part of their students. Consequently, traditional models of professional development received little support from teachers in the form of enthusiasm, attention, or adoption (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Greene, 2001; Viadero, 2005). However, when professional development is designed specifically to meet teacher needs, it is met with more enthusiasm and shows more impact in terms of changes in teacher practices and beliefs (Sydow, 2000; Samuels, Rodenberg, Frey, & Fisher, 2001; Hogan, Rabinowitz, & Craven, 2003). As McClain (2005) concludes, “the most effective form of professional development begins with the self” (p. 50).

There are steps that can be taken to improve the likelihood that professional development will be attuned to the needs of the teachers and result in improved teacher practice. First, teachers can be an integral part of the planning of such activities (Kelly, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Speck & Knipe, 2005). In this way, teacher voices are heard during the process, and teachers not directly in on the decision-making may feel that they have recourse to someone who will really listen to their ideas, if they want to see something different (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Another way to increase
the connection between professional development and teacher needs is to have teachers set goals that relate directly to professional development content. This is especially effective when the professional development is of a long-term nature and directed at specific objectives (Saylor & Kehrhahn, 2003). Finally, creating professional development models that are geared around real examples of student work has been shown to increase teacher buy-in (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Viadero, 2005; Ancess, 2001).

Black, Molseed, and Sayler (2003) report on a study that demonstrates another way professional development can be contextualized in the teacher’s world. Five middle school math teachers in Spearfish, South Dakota opened up their classroom and their practice to a coaching model housed in the university. In this program, two professors from the university came to their classes as fellow teachers. As a result, the teachers were given the opportunity to observe someone else teach their students their curriculum and to be observed by other teachers and university participants as they did the same. Then, conversations were held to discuss what had taken place. After a semester of participation, all teachers reported benefiting, they felt more aware of their classrooms, they asked more questions, and expected to come up with more potential answers to those questions. By contextualizing the study in the teacher’s own classroom, it had the effect of fostering discussions of real teaching issues, and helped teachers make meaningful changes to their teaching practice.

In a larger study, Lowden (2005) examined the impact of professional development by collecting surveys from 250 teachers from 11 different schools in the same district. The teachers were divided into two groups—those who were involved in
what the literature would characterize as ineffective professional development and those
who had been involved in effective professional development. As a result of analyzing
the surveys and the models, Lowden recommends that future professional development
be “job-embedded.” Professional development must conform to the contexts in which
the teachers work. This includes demonstrating how such growth supports and ties into
other efforts that the teachers are to be involved in, e.g. school development plans and
teacher evaluations.

In order for professional development to have a significant impact on teacher
practice it must be contextualized in what teachers are doing. It must relate directly to
their content areas, their student populations, and their goals. There are many different
ways to do this such as including teachers in the planning and centering professional
development activities around real student work. However it is done, though,
professional development must reflect integral parts of a teacher’s working life.

*Professional development should value teachers’ knowledge, expertise, and
experience.* In many traditional ways of viewing teaching, there is a division between
two types of knowledge—practical and theoretical (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).
Practical knowledge is the domain of the teacher and is based on teachers’ reflection-in-
practice and reflection-on-practice (Schön, 1983). Theory, on the other hand, is derived
from the ‘scholarly’ work of the researcher and lies beyond the domain of the classroom.
Inevitably, in this dichotomy there are tensions and struggles that make either position
almost unsustainable. Sipe and Rosewarne (2005) argue that effective professional
development “provides [teachers] the opportunity to look both ways—at the knowledge
base of the profession beyond the classroom and at the classroom itself—to intensely
seek new levels of understanding that will support student learning” (p. 42). From this new vantage point between and above the traditional two, teachers can see both bodies of knowledge and draw on both to address issues of student learning. Further, by rejecting the dualism inherent in the traditional view of knowledge, teacher knowledge and researcher knowledge are equated in value and actually fuse to form a new body of knowledge characterized by multiple voices and ways of understanding.

James Gray’s (2000) experience is an example of professional development foisted on teachers with no recognition of their knowledge or skills. While teaching in a California high school with a group of teachers who were trying to take an active role in understanding their students and how they learned, the English department was subjected to a lecture by two local university professors. Never were the teachers asked what they did that was effective or what they had experienced. Instead, the covert message was that the teachers did not know anything that could be of any worth to the researchers. Consequently, Gray and the rest of the staff endured the two hours and returned to their own practice and inquiry feeling that the entire lecture was wasted time. This became one of the experiences that led Gray to conceptualize the National Writing Project model with “teachers at the center.”

The impulse in the past has been to ignore teachers’ abilities to participate in the intellectual work of untangling their experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004a). Instead of ignoring teachers, they must be added into the process and be allowed to play integral roles as decision-makers. In this way, professional development programs reach back to their democratic roots (Glickman & Alridge, 2001; Kelly, 1999)
and begin to show real impact in terms of teacher practice (Lee, 2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Professional development should directly link student and teacher learning. An increasing number of studies have demonstrated the connection between teacher learning and student learning (Huffman, Thomas, & Lawrenz, 2003; Lowden, 2005; Sydow, 2000). In fact, professional development is “critical” for teacher and student learning (Lowden, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1998). The aim of much professional development as it is currently practiced is not to improve student learning; instead, it is based on the traditional view of teaching as a paint-by-the-numbers endeavor and is aimed more at controlling what goes on in the classrooms than what is learned in the classrooms (Glickman & Alridge, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004a). Ironically, the purpose of much of this professional development that denies teachers a valued role as critical thinker and evaluator is to get the teachers to teach in such a way as to produce students who are capable of critical decision-making (Giroux, 2005).

Well-planned professional development should lead towards a more inclusive, standards-based approach to teaching—teaching which values teachers and students as active constructors of knowledge (Lee, 2005; Hammerness et al., 2005). Also, student learning should be a part of the process in evaluating professional development efforts (Heller, Daehler, & Shinohara, 2003).

An example of this focus on student learning is the National Staff Development Council’s (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development (2001). These standards list three points under the content of professional development programs. Each of these points relates directly to the achievement of students. The first deals with teachers’ knowledge
of students and how they are unique and learn in individual ways. The second addresses the teachers' content knowledge as a vehicle to increasing student achievement. Finally, the last standard suggests that teachers also be taught about ways to involve the families of the students so that student achievement receives support outside as well as inside of school. According to NSDC, the content of all high quality professional development is directly tied to increasing student achievement.

In her study of school change and student learning, Little (2001) noted that change is slow and comes in small increments; as a result, student learning is not dramatically affected. However, she did find “the most supportive learning environments for students . . . [was found] where teacher development was also valued and supported. Conversely, the most impoverished learning conditions for students (especially for low-achieving students) persisted where professional development was relatively peripheral” (p. 24). Student learning and teacher learning are linked, and to ignore teacher learning is to inhibit and diminish student learning.

*Professional development should be fostered in learning communities that are supported by school policies and organization.* “The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving” (National Staff Development Council, 2001). The formation of these communities empowers teachers to implement professional development that encompasses all of the other recommendations, and indeed becomes part of the school culture. Furthermore, when teachers meet together regularly to discuss teaching and what they are observing, wondering, and trying, the result is “shared intelligence” (Rodriguez et al. 2003). The
shared intelligence is community based and offers teachers a powerful way to envision possibilities for their own work. O'Donnell-Allen (2005) refers to this process as "pedagogical recycling." It is what happens whenever teachers meet and exchange ideas in a communal setting. Because the ideas come in contextualized, supportive communities, teachers feel free to take them back to their classrooms to adapt them to use them for "identical, similar, or altogether different purposes" (p. 59).

Achieving these community relations may be the most difficult aspect of quality professional development to implement, according to some researchers (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Part of the reason for this difficulty is that it does take a significant amount of time and space to enact (Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Building this type of relationship cannot be squeezed into the thirty minutes between the bell releasing students and the clock chime releasing teachers, nor can it be confined to a simple nine-month block with little continuity year after year (Poulson & Avramidis, 2003; Speck & Knipe, 2005).

Participation in communities of practitioners that are built on time and space "shapes not only what we do, but also what we are and how we interpret what we do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). For example, Lieberman and Wood (2003) point to the National Writing Project as a professional development program that provides this time and space and, as a result, transforms individuals. The reason behind the transformation is envisioned as the time to enact certain social practices, e.g. sharing writing, talking about concerns and successes, and trading ideas. Another integral feature of this community is that is must be based on ideas of pluralism and mutual respect so as to avoid tensions which could threaten to tear apart the community. Furthermore, professional
development that is long-term in nature shows a greater impact on teacher practices (Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005; Garet et al., 2001).

While these relationships must be personal, several researchers point out that such relationships can be fostered or hindered by school policies and organization (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Sydow, 2000; Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Zuzovsky, 2001; Hirsh, 2004). In fact, Brandt (2003) lists 10 questions that can be asked to determine if an organization (school) is a "learning organization" meaning is it committed to the learning and growth of its members. Of these 10 questions, four deal with issues of structural organization.

Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) recommend three guiding principles in developing a policy to support the formation of these groups. First, there must be opportunities for teachers to participate at all levels and all areas of schooling—curriculum, mentoring, etc. Teachers must be given real authority and autonomy, if such action is to effect meaningful change (Fullan, 2001). Second, funding must be directed towards those areas that support teacher participation. At the moment, lack of funding can serve as a disincentive to participation. Also, in many cases, there is no professional recognition for these types of professional development activities (Ancess, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Finally, these policies must be focused on the environments that lead to such collaboration. Quality professional development may have a life cycle and may be outgrown or reach an end to its usefulness. Consequently, the focus cannot be on providing any one program or type of program; instead, the focus must be on creating an atmosphere where these types of groups naturally occur around real issues that teachers are grappling with, and success should be measured by the
“menu” of such opportunities. In fact, over-emphasis on any one approach can take on the appearance of mandated practice or approach and actually stifle collaboration and learning (Poulson & Avramidis, 2003).

Still, policy solutions have seemed elusive, at best, in the United States. Therefore, perhaps it would prove beneficial to look to other countries for models that will provide a framework that allows the necessary time and space. Other countries provide teachers up to twenty hours a week to engage in professional development activities including observations and discussions (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Such a change, however, will require that policies and school structures on all levels change (Speck & Knipe, 2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Despite the difficulty, establishment of these types of communities is integral to true high-quality professional development.

In the end, professional development does matter, and not just for teachers. Professional development that is based on teachers’ immediate contexts, built on the principles of collaboration, focused on increasing teacher knowledge to improve student achievement, and designed to give voice and value to teachers’ ideas and knowledge will, ultimately, lead to student learning and improved opportunities for students to achieve academically and humanely.

The National Writing Project as Model Professional Development

Several researchers point to the effectiveness of the National Writing Project (NWP) in providing teachers with the necessary conditions to effect real change in their teaching practices and beliefs (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Wilson, 1994). While helping teachers to learn to teach writing better, the NWP stresses inquiry into
practice supported by time and space, a collaborative community in which to seek for answer, and an emphasis on student learning.

McCorkle (1995) writes about the ways in which participation in the writing project transformed her teaching. As a teacher of special education kindergarten and first grade classes, she did not think that the Writing Project would be of benefit to her. However, she has found a place where she is challenged to reexamine her work with her students and supported to be critical and risk-taking in her attempts to improve. Furthermore, she has found a place that values her contributions and that allows her to share what she knows and believes. In the final analysis, as always it is about the students. McCorkle records that she now videotapes her assessments and shows them to parents. The parents are amazed at what their children are able to do because of McCorkle’s reinvigorated practice.

Visions of teachers empowered and making this type of difference in students’ literate lives has been at the heart of the National Writing Project since its inception. The National Writing Project started over 30 years ago when James Gray and others formed the Bay Area Writing Project (Gray, 2000). In the early 70’s, Gray was working at the University of California at Berkeley supervising student teachers and teaching courses. It was in his work here that Gray began to be concerned about the way writing was being taught: his experience told him that it was not being taught. As a result, Gray who had worked extensively with teachers in professional development settings drew up a plan implementing what he considered to be the best of all the professional development he had been involved with either as a teacher or as an instructor. At the same time, the university where he was working, the University of California at Berkeley, was
concerned over the lack of writing skills in the entering freshmen. As a result, when he presented his plan to the administrators at the University of California at Berkeley, they immediately arranged for him to have released time to implement his idea. Working through the school year, Gray, with the help of a couple of friends, designed what would eventually become the model for the National Writing Project.

Gray based his model on certain "tenets" that he gleaned over the years of his work with students and teachers. One of these tenets is that there is no single right way to teach English. On the surface, this statement could seem to be an invitation to chaos. However, it is not as open ended as it might seem. In reality, the Writing Project espouses a certain vision of teaching writing; it is the ways in which this vision is implemented that is not rigidly defined. This vision of teaching writing is most prominently labeled the process approach to teaching writing (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). This approach emphasizes teaching writing as a process that moves from fluency to form to correctness as students use their skills to produce a variety of types of writing for a variety of purposes (Blau, 1988). As Wilson (1994) notes, this view of writing is grounded in the idea that writing is a complex cognitive process that is made meaningful by the contexts in which it is created, towards which it is aimed, and in which it is read. Therefore, as a teacher operates within this ideal, she relies on her knowledge of her students, their lives, and their knowledge to make decisions regarding the ways in which writing instruction is enacted and the order in which processes are addressed. As a result, the methods may vary, but the underlying principles are firm.

A second tenet that Gray built into the Writing Project model is to honor teachers. In essence, this means that the teachers participating in the Writing Project programs are
recognized as being skilled at what they do. The program aims to “recognize—even celebrate—teacher expertise” (Gray, 2000, p. 56). Teachers are treated as “creative intellectuals” (Christensen, 2006, p. 1). As a result, they are invited to share with the other participants those things they do best. The idea is that as people share what they are best at, all the participants grow and the profession as a whole is enriched and strengthened.

Also, in the Writing Project model, teachers themselves get into the messy work of writing. For example, in the Portland Writing Project, “All the teachers . . . participate in reading groups, writing response groups, role plays, and simulations. They write every assignment. They learn the strategies by doing the strategies, not by having someone talk about [them]” (Christensen, 2006, p. 3, italics in original). The underlying assumption is that teaching writing is difficult work made more difficult by the fact that many teachers have not had the experience of learning by writing (Wilson, 1994). Thus, using the principles of a process approach to writing, the Writing Project immerses the teachers in a writing workshop giving them the opportunity to experience what it means to learn by writing.

Finally, the hope is that these teachers, then, turn around and provide leadership in the surrounding area by becoming teacher leaders and sharing the work with others. In some cases, this aspect of the writing project has been seen as almost a religious missionary aspect with the former participants zealously spreading the news of the Writing Project and what it has done for them (Wilson, 1994). While the religious-ness of the Project may not have been the intended goal, the idea from the beginning was to bring good teachers of writing together so they could make each other better and, then, in
turn, go back to their schools and work locations to make others better. The idea of the writing project is not to “fix” teachers (Christensen, 2006), although not every teacher who participates is an excellent teacher of writing. The purpose is to provide good teachers with an opportunity to examine and discuss their practice in ways that do not happen in traditional professional development models.

Furthermore, the opportunity to examine one’s practice and discuss the thorny issues of teaching has never been envisioned as the work of a single summer in the Writing Project. The idea has always been that during the initial experience with the Project, teachers would create ties and form bonds that would then supercede the Project while at the same time be the backbone of the Project’s appeal and strength. This aspect of the Project has been described in the literature as “a learning community with an open-ended future” (Eidman-Aadahl, 2005, p. 5). Again, this idea goes back to the contextualized view of writing, living, and learning espoused throughout the Writing Project. Learning is best accomplished in groups—especially groups that understand the specific context in which they work (MacLean & Mohr, 1999).

The Southern Nevada Writing Project (SNWP), founded in 1983, adheres to these same principles and aims to renew the teaching of writing in Southern Nevada much as NWP hopes to renew it nationwide. As such SNWP is home to an active body of teacher consultants (TC’s, teachers who have already attended a Summer Invitational Institute) who are active leaders in the professional development efforts of the local school district. SNWP itself is involved in efforts that reach out to both the student and teacher populations of the local school districts. For the students, SNWP hosts writing fairs and other efforts aimed directly at the students. SNWP is also home to a vibrant Family
Writing Project, which brings students and their families together to write and chronicle life in their families and communities (for a report on this project see National Writing Project, 2006). For the teachers, SNWP leads out in various professional development activities including but not limited to the Summer Institute.

The Summer Institute is one of the most integral aspects of the Writing Project movement (Gray, 2000). In this program, a group of teachers meet together to share their successes, read the literature in the field, discuss their questions and concerns, and, of course, write—intensively and extensively. The Summer Institute was the first and most basic part of the Writing Project. In fact, all of the other programs emerged from this program (Gray, 2000). In the context of SNWP, these institutes meet five days a week over four weeks during the summer. By the end, it is hoped, that the teachers truly feel that they have found a home—pedagogically speaking—where they can come and contribute.

*Review of National Writing Project Literature*

There have been a number of studies that looked at the effects of participation in the Writing Project on teacher beliefs and practices. For example, two of the largest such studies were recently completed and published by Inverness Research Group. One of these reports (2005a) looked at the effectiveness of NWP in reaching a large audience. The results were impressive. According to Inverness, NWP reaches 1 out of every 35 teachers in any one given year; that equates to 1 out of 8 teachers that are directly responsible for teaching writing. In the years between 1994 and 2005, Inverness estimates that teachers who have participated in one of the NWP Summer Institutes have reached 600,000 students. Combining this with NWP student programs means that the
Writing Project will reach either directly or indirectly almost 2 million students per year (about 4% of the student population). These results are impressive in terms of scope.

The other study conducted by Inverness (2005b), specifically measured the satisfaction of participants with the Writing Project’s Summer Institute. Reporting on the results from the last six years, Inverness found that on every question they asked 95% of teachers responded positively about their experience. Based on the feedback from this questionnaire, Inverness contacted all who followed up as participants of the 2004 Summer Institute to ask questions about the impact of participation in the Summer Institute. They received over 1,000 surveys back across all grades levels and demographics. In response, 98% of teachers said that participation in NWP had given them an increased range of concrete teaching strategies to use in their classrooms; 95% claimed that they had received a greater knowledge of current research; 90% indicated that they felt more able to teach diverse learners and that they had gained ways to assess student work so that it could inform their work; 89% cited an increased ability to help students meet standards and a heightened desire to participate in more professional development. Furthermore, almost 90% of teachers claimed that the Writing Project is also about teaching reading and 79% said that their participation made them better reading teachers as well. Finally, a large majority (79% to 90% depending on the particular aspect) claimed that their participation in the Writing Project had made a positive impact on their students’ learning.

Much of the research about the impact of the Writing Project on teachers deals with this notion of community (see for example, McCorkle, 1995; Sunstein, 1994). Lieberman and Wood (2002a) call the writing project, “arguably the most successful
teacher network in the United States” (p. 40). Based on a two year study of two writing project sites, the authors identify two key components of NWP’s approach to professional development that they claim are the reason for its success and popularity (see also Lieberman & Wood, 2002b, 2003): a distinctive set of social practices and networks that organize and sustain the relationships established.

According to these researchers, these social practices are unique and tend to take current models of professional development and accountability and “turn them on their heads.” This is because they go against what most of the current thinking says. In Smith’s (1996) article, she claims that as opposed to the “professional distance” many models of professional development build, the writing project goes out of its way to create spaces for multiple voices and identities to co-exist meaningfully. The writing project does this by creating valid spaces for its participants (McCorkle, 2004). This is done as each participant is seen as a valuable member who can learn from and teach others how to teach better and the participants take ownership of the learning. Also, the project allows multiple entry and existence points by giving place for teacher researchers, teacher writers, teacher teachers, and those that just want to teach writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). This is done because in the writing project philosophy all teachers are all of those things. As a result, teachers are simply allowed to work where they fit best and every position is respected and valued (Smith, 1996).

The issue of teacher networks grows out of the social practices. The practices give people a reason to be there, and the networks give them a support system to keep them there. The keys to this network are the fact that there are multiple places a person can enter and be in the writing project landscape. Furthermore, the issues taken up by the
various NWP sites change and evolve as communities and schools change and evolve (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). As a result, spaces available are not tied to issues and stances that are no longer being taken up vigorously. For example, SNWP from time to time has been the site of groups interested in ELL students, action research, social justice, and writing assessment. These groups fluctuate as the interests of the teaches dictate.

These two factors are woven tightly together and lead to an equally enmeshed third part—teacher learning (Lieberman & Wood, 2002b). The result is what Rodriguez et al. (2003) call “shared intelligence.” This concept is based on the idea that learning best occurs when a person discusses practice with others who are working and excelling in the same or similar contexts. One of the most important aspects of this shared intelligence is that it leads to a more reflective, culturally responsive practice (Rodriguez et al, 2003; Kelly, 1999). Consequently, continued participation in the National Writing Project can lead to a heightened sense of social justice and sensitivity. This is not surprising since diversity forms such a central part of the NWP mission statement (National Writing Project, 2003). Not only is sensitivity heightened, but also practices that are seen as culturally responsive are encouraged. For example, Pritchard and Marshall (1994) found that NWP participants at all levels used more varied writing activities than did non-NWP teachers—a practice commonly associated with more effective teaching of disenfranchised students.

Other changes related to teacher practice with students are seen as well. For example, it is fairly well established in the literature that teachers who have been through NWP training spend more time on writing than other teachers (Inverness, 2005b; Fischer, 1997). Plus, some studies show that students who have Writing Project-trained teachers
score better on writing tests than students whose teachers do not have this training (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Roberts, 2001). In one study conducted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) (as cited in Lieberman & Wood, 2003), over 1,900 third and fourth grade students’ writing performances were examined over the course of a school year. In timed writing assessments, over 80% of both groups had achieved adequate or strong scores for effectiveness in persuasive writing by the end of the school year. Almost as high a percentage (72% and 78% respectively) demonstrated mastery of writing conventions such as spelling and grammar by the same time. Wilson (1988) found that over two-thirds of Institute participants indicated that their experience had led to substantial changes in their teaching.

An examination of the research around NWP also demonstrates strong ties to democratic principles. For example, Lieberman & Wood (2003) suggest that NWP provides teachers with a “third space” to stand apart from both school and the university. As such it breaks down many of the binaries inherent in undemocratic practice, e.g. professor-student, teacher-learner, practical knowledge-formal knowledge. The result is a more democratic community where teachers operate as equals and intellectuals in the heavy work of expanding student literacy. Another example of this is an edited book Writing America: Classroom Literacies and Public Engagement (Robbins & Dyer, 2005). This book documents the various practices of a group of Writing Project teachers who are in the process of implementing a place-based approach to teaching literacy. The idea here is “to promote a view of learning as reaching outside the classroom walls” (p. 8). Although the successes and the levels of democratic practices enacted vary across cases, the picture taken as a whole is that of a group of teachers trying hard to implement
a pedagogy that will create more equity and justice in the world around them and in their students' lives. Along the way, these students create virtual museums to spread the word about non-violence, produce and enact performances to inform others of the wrongs done to Native Americans, and research, analyze, and publish local histories that serve to help increase their own and others' sense of community. All in all, these types of projects speak to the level of democracy that is possible within a literacy classroom when teachers are given time and space to think, plan, and work.

There are multiple reasons to extend the research on NWP. First, while NWP sets out a frame of professional development, the individual sites are left to implement this model as it best suits their sites. This "nuanced" (LeMahieu, 2005) approach means that sites are empowered, but it also makes research of the Writing Project more difficult (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006) because generalizations may be more difficult to make. Secondly, while there is some work which looks at how teachers from NWP teach writing from a research standpoint, some reviewers have claimed that the research backing to this model is sketchy and needs to be more robust (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). In fact, much of the research that deals with teacher practice is based primarily on self-reporting procedures which may be flawed. Furthermore, research that attempts to be rigorous and public conducted in ways that provide rich contextualized pictures of teaching practice are especially necessary in light of the No Child Left Behind Act (Zeichner, 2005). Finally, research is needed to strengthen and make more explicit the ties to issues of social justice, equity, and democracy in the Writing Project model. In fact, the entire field of teacher education is in need of research that places these issues at the center of examination (Cochran-Smith, 2004). More research is needed on
democracy and the writing project in order to establish the viability or lack thereof of such a model and especially to document the growth of democratic ideals in education today.

**Teacher Beliefs**

Teaching is the only profession where most people entering have an intimate knowledge of the job and deep-seated even foundational beliefs about the way it should be done (Richardson, 1996; Lortie, 1976; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The literature is clear—teacher beliefs do affect teacher practice (Richardson, 1994, 1996; Errington, 2004; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). According to some researchers, this impact is especially potent in the teaching of literacy skills (Troia & Maddox, 2004) due to the power literacy skills have in the shape and course of one’s life (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

What is a little less clear is how to define teacher beliefs. While many researchers in the field of teacher education would say that the definition is fairly well established (Richardson, 1996), others would argue that the definition is a bit more elusive (Pajares, 1992). The reason for the discrepancies in vision is the contextualized nature of teacher beliefs (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). Teacher beliefs are entangled with the specific contexts in which they find themselves. This is in agreement with prevailing social cultural theories surrounding teaching and learning. Accordingly, I will take beliefs to mean the psychological constructs, assumptions, and knowledge concerning teaching, learning, cognition, and curriculum as these are played out in specific contexts.

**Sources of Teacher Beliefs.** Teacher beliefs are a potent force in the lives of teachers and, by extension, of students. These beliefs are not single entities, rather teacher action is influenced by a “constellation” of beliefs (Berry, 2006). Kagan (1992b)
suggests that such a number of beliefs come into play because of the complexities of the classroom. While these beliefs are myriad in nature and scope, generally speaking these beliefs come from three basic sources: personal experience, experience with school, and experience with formal knowledge.

Personal experience refers to the lived experiences of teachers. These experiences shape the images teachers have of the world, which, in turn, effect the ways in which education, schooling, and pedagogy should look, sound, and be like. These images could come from any number of factors including social, racial, economic, or religious factors. For example, in a case study of a principal, Clandinin & Connelly (1987) found that many of his ideas about increasing community involvement in his school had roots in his recollections of growing up in a tight-knit smaller community. Grossman’s (1990) study found that English teachers with backgrounds that stressed a high-degree of top-down imposition of knowledge tended to focus more on helping students understand the way things were, i.e. they stressed prescriptive notions of grammar and interpretations of literature at the expense of other ideas.

The next source of teacher beliefs is the teacher’s personal experiences with schools and schooling. It is this area that again singles education out. Before a teacher enters a pre-service teacher education program, most will have had at least 12 years of being students. Those experiences, what Lortie (1975) calls the “apprenticeship of observation, will have made a deep impression on teachers. In fact, in one study Murphy, Delli, & Edwards (2004) found that as early as second grade students had strong ideas about what constituted good teaching and that these ideas remained fairly consistent throughout life. Also as part of an extensive research program into teaching, Kennedy
(1998) found that the overwhelming number of teachers chose the profession based on the fact that they had liked certain teachers or enjoyed schools (see also Lortie, 1975). In these cases, the teachers believed that the way they were taught was the hallmark of good teaching and was the ideal that they strove for.

The third source of teacher beliefs is the idea that experiences with formal knowledge in general and often outside of school can impact teacher beliefs and performances. For example based on the literature, Pajares & Valiante (2006) suggest that teachers learn early in life that literacy skills are more ‘feminine’ and, as a result, the motivational patterns used in literacy are based more in a “feminine orientation” (see also Peterson, 2006). In another case, Berry (2006) researched the practice of teachers in two inclusion classrooms. In both cases, the teachers argued eloquently for inclusion being the best practice. However, in one class the teachers viewed writing mistakes as “breakdowns” that required a structured approach with a heavy emphasis on phonics and a stair-step approach to learning to write. In the other class, the teachers approached knowledge and the skill of writing as something that is built in a community. As a result, the students worked predominantly in teams and the special education students were allowed to participate and expected to contribute to their own and others’ learning. Thus, the ways in which these teachers viewed formal knowledge impacted the way in which they applied a common belief set—inclusion.

Beliefs as Filter. Each of the sources of teachers’ beliefs derives from intensely personal sources. As a result, teacher beliefs are laden with emotion and not particularly subject to logical discussions (Richardson, 1994, 1996; Pajares, 1992). Furthermore, most of these experiences begin early in life, and research shows that the earlier a belief
is developed the more difficult it is to change (Pajares, 1992). It is as if, over time, these beliefs and the identity of the teacher become wrapped around each other and to disturb one is to threaten the other. In fact, the role of beliefs is so pronounced in teacher practice that in one study, Richardson et al. (1991) found that they could predict teacher behavior, practice, and approach based on an understanding of the teacher’s beliefs.

Teachers often filter new information through their beliefs before accepting the information as true (Richardson, 1990, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Roehrig & Kruse, 2005). This has application both ways. For example, Clegg & Bradley (2006) found that interventions that were designed to align to some degree with teachers’ current beliefs created growth because the similarity facilitated adoption or alteration. On the other hand, Middleton (2002) found in her work with pre-service teachers’ beliefs regarding diversity that “some were so strongly motivated by their existing beliefs that they chose not to explore some of the ideas presented in the course” (p. 356). The years of experience that teachers and prospective teachers have as students may actually be a barrier to learning to teach and professional growth (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). It is important to recognize that when speaking of changing teacher beliefs, the focus is not on change. Change in and of itself is not a worthy end to our actions; instead, the change must be directed towards a more democratic, just vision of teaching, schooling, and learning (Richardson, 1990). At times, this focus blurs and the end does become the change itself as opposed to an ultimate goal.

In any case, teacher beliefs can result in a number of different reactions to proposed change. As has been shown, beliefs can facilitate change or lead a teacher to outright denial of the intended change. More often, though, a form of accommodation
happens, where teachers adopt the practices outlined for them, but do not abandon their prevailing beliefs. The result is an implementation of a practice that is largely ineffectual (Berry, 2006), as documented by Foote, Smith, & Ellis (2004) in their work with Early Education teachers in New Zealand. In response to a nation-wide push, the teachers had all taken steps towards creating rich literacy environments designed to allow students to discover with guidance reading and writing skills. Furthermore, in interviews all of the teachers spoke of providing authentic literacy experiences for their students. However, in practice many of the teachers resorted to skills based activities designed to give the students the knowledge the teachers believed necessary. As a result, the authenticity of their approach was compromised in the classroom. Teachers superficially enacted one type of pedagogy and even orally defended and praised the pedagogy, but in the end, the teachers resorted to more traditional types of teaching on a regular basis because these matched their beliefs to a higher degree.

Caution should be taken, however, in assuming that all mismatches between practices and beliefs such as the one above are a result of the teacher undermining her espoused approach. In another study, Richardson et al. (1991) found that at times, the mismatch may be the result of a teacher who is in the middle of change. In this study, the researchers sought to understand teacher beliefs and then use them to predict the type of learning and teaching taking place in the classroom. In one case, they were wrong, upon further research, however, it was discovered that this teacher was in the middle of a belief/practice change. Consequently, she espoused the virtues of her new position, but had not worked out exactly how to enact those beliefs in the classroom. Although there
was a mismatch during this time, over time, her practices came to match her verbalized beliefs. The implications are that such change needs support, time, and focus to happen.

**Beliefs as Focus (of Teacher Education Programs).** Teacher beliefs (and changing those beliefs) are at the center of teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith, 2004a; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Smith, Tanase, Leavit, & Sowder, 2007). Still, the process is long and involved because teacher beliefs are so tied to a teacher’s identity and, therefore, emotional and resistant to change. Still, some keys seem to be emerging in the literature as to how beliefs can be confronted. “In order to continue learning in and from teaching, teachers must be able to ask hard questions of themselves and their colleagues, to try something out and study what happens, to seek evidence of student learning, and explore alternative perspectives” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1040).

These keys to impacting teacher beliefs echo the foundations of effective professional development discussed earlier. Both require designs that encourage teacher to reflect on their practice and ask hard questions growing from their in-class experiences (Schon, 1983; Liston & Zeichner, 1991); provide teachers with opportunities to experiment with learning (Timmerman, 2004); tie teacher and student learning together (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2005); and push teachers to consider new notions of learning, teaching, and schooling (Middleton, 2002).

**Teacher Beliefs in Learning to Teach Writing.** Some researchers claim that the role of beliefs in learning to teach literacy skills is especially powerful (Troia & Maddox, 2004). For example, Baumann & Ivey (1997) have shown that what a teacher believes about students and the curriculum will affect the class structure and the entire approach to
teaching literacy (Baumann & Ivey, 1997). In a field as contested as literacy education is the resulting practice is potentially dramatic different (Goodman, 1992).

The contested nature of writing instruction makes for some of the most interesting developments in an examination of teacher beliefs. The two approaches to teaching writing, skills-based and process-based, seem on the surface to be complete opposites and highly incompatible. However, a number of studies have found that teachers of writing do hold beliefs consistent with both approaches, despite their differences (Kennedy, 1998; Foote, Smith, & Ellis, 2004). For example, in Troia & Maddox’s (2004) survey of teachers, they found highly conflicting reports on beliefs. On a likert scale, 95% of the teachers surveyed agreed to some extent with the statements that were consistent with an explicit instruction model of teaching writing. At the same time, 88% agreed with items that were designed to represent a process approach to teaching writing. Similar results were found with special education teachers.

Kennedy (1998) suggests that “immediate concerns” serve as a bumper between these beliefs. In her work with in-service and pre-service English teachers, Kennedy found similar disconnects between teachers stated beliefs and their practice. However, she explained that the difference was moderated by “immediate concerns” which suspended teacher ideals for a time while issues that demanded attention were taken care of. For example, she found that teachers often expressed one idea about what made writing effective, but then focused on another given a sample of student writing. This would suggest that in the face of actual student work, priorities shift and other things come bubbling to the surface. The decision-making in these situations and similar ones in the literature bring back the idea of practical knowledge that suggests teachers of

In conclusion, teacher beliefs are formed early in life and remain fairly stable unless challenged. Because of their sources, personal experience in life, with schools and schooling, and with formal knowledge, these beliefs are emotionally-charged and related closely to teacher identity. Consequently, teacher beliefs tend to be durable and act as a filter for other incoming knowledge. That which does not fit the belief structure of a teacher does not find a place in practice. In order to change beliefs, teachers need time and space to talk, experiment, examine student learning, and consider alternative perspectives. These program elements are going to be necessary if the field of teacher education is going to realize its goal of putting a highly qualified teacher in every classroom (National Academy of Education, 2005).

A Model for Changing Beliefs

Ball (2006), recounting and examining her work with literacy teachers over two decades, suggests that a change in beliefs is not only imperative, but also possible. In her work, Ball is pushing teachers to adopt more democratic understandings, beliefs, and practices in their classroom work. Ball’s approach stresses the use of “writing as a pedagogical tool to motivate, facilitate, and document teacher change” (p. 2). Whitney’s (2006) study suggests that it is not simply writing by itself that fosters such change, rather it is writing in a professional environment where change is supported and nurtured, an environment that takes as its aim to provide a professional outlet for teachers. Furthermore, in both Ball’s and Whitney’s work a majority of the writing is based in talk,
is narrative, and pushes the participants to plumb their own lived experiences for writing material.

Ball (2006) also suggests that in addition to writing, a major component of her approach is the introduction of transformative academic knowledge to the teachers. “Transformative academic knowledge consists of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream knowledge” (Banks, 1996, p. 16). Furthermore, transformative academic knowledge pushes teachers to examine mainstream ideas of the purpose of knowledge. The new understandings, then, push teachers to take action in and, where possible, out of their classrooms (Ball, 2006).

In discussing the resulting change in beliefs, Ball, working from Vygotsky’s work (1978, 1986) stresses that everyone has a zone of proximal development related to their beliefs. Some people are simply not in a position to change their beliefs regardless of the intervention. When pushed to reach outside of their zone of proximal development, teachers ignore, superficially accommodate, or write off the new experience. Also, Ball (2006) stresses that discourse changes before, and paves the way for, practice changes.

Ball suggests that there are four levels of changing beliefs as those beliefs relate to democratic practices: Metacognitive Awareness, Ideological Becoming, Internalization, and Active Agency. First, teachers come to a metacognitive awareness. At this stage teachers begin to “narrativize their own personal literacy experiences and challenge long-held perspectives” (p. 61). Stage Two, Ideological Becoming, is marked by teachers engaging with and reflecting on new theories in such a way that these theories begin to impact the internal discourses these teachers find persuasive. The third stage, Internalization, is the stage where teachers begin to examine, often in organized
ways, their own practices and use that knowledge to plan future growth and next steps. Finally, Active Agency refers to teachers who are taking action to enact democratic approaches to teaching that they not only parrot but also deeply understand and belief. At this level, the discourse centers not around the formal literature, but, because that literature has become such an ingrained part of their thinking, these teachers speak more from their own experiences and ideas.

Any model of development is by nature problematic because it is an arbitrary designation of what people should do (Foucault, 1980). Ball (2006) herself noted that movement between these levels of development is not a linear process and, in fact, can often be deceptive in that teachers can simultaneously present indications of being in multiple levels at the same time. Development, then, can be best understood as a trend towards a certain way of acting—as an act in progress not a finished project. All models, including Ball’s, nonetheless provide a way of understanding and verbalizing teacher change.

Ball’s (2006) model seems especially pertinent to this study because of the similarities between her work and the experience of the Institute. Both are centered in reflective, personal, narrative writing, and both aim to help teachers reach all students—not just those served well by traditional approaches to literacy education. Also, both models are based extensively on Vygotskian (1978, 1986) notions of learning and teaching.
Conclusion

Following the lead of Guttman (1999), Giroux (2005), Dewey (1938), and Freire (1970), I claim that the type of citizen needed for the next century in the United States is one that is informed on, concerned about, and engaged in issues related to social justice and equity. In order for this type of citizen to emerge, the schools will have to play a vital role (Dewey, 1938, 2004/1916). Only as students have chances to learn what it means to be this type of citizen and have opportunities to practice this type of citizenship can it be expected that they will be equipped to step up and fulfill this role in the coming years. However, many teachers are unsure of how to enact a democratic pedagogy like the one needed.

Teachers of writing must understand their vital roles in such a society and work to learn and enact a democratic writing pedagogy with their students. A student’s ability to navigate the issues related to such a society will be intricately tied to their ability to write.

In order to help students develop these skills, teachers must begin to understand that learning to teach is not a process that is completed in the four years of their undergraduate program or even in the two years they may take to earn a Masters degree; instead, learning to teach is a life-long endeavor. One way of understanding the goal of teacher education is to conceptualize teachers as “adaptive experts” (National Academy of Education, 2005). These are teachers who can both implement routines effectively and efficiently and develop new strategies when existing routines prove ineffective.

To help teachers develop the skills of adaptive experts, professional development opportunities must be founded on stable, reliable principles that focus on providing opportunities for teachers to explore their beliefs in relation to democracy and democratic...
pedagogies. At least one model of teacher change (Ball, 2006) suggests that the change to democratic teaching is a four step process beginning with engagement with new ideas and a reflection on personal experiences and leading ultimately to an active agency where teachers teach and act in democratic ways.

Based on the Process Approach to Teaching Writing, the National Writing Project is one model of professional development incorporating the characteristics established in the literature that provide meaningful learning experiences for teachers. NWP pushes to help teachers develop meaningful, democratic approaches to teaching writing that shows considerable effectiveness in terms of helping teachers adopt and understand better the principles underlying the process approach to teaching writing, an approach, which itself has several ties to democratic practice and thought. Based on this premise NWP becomes a site ripe for investigation in terms of democratic pedagogy.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways teachers who have participated in the Summer Institute of SNWP incorporate a democratic writing pedagogy in their classroom. SNWP's Summer Institute immerses teachers in a professional learning community based on process approaches to teaching and learning. Through this experience, teachers live and learn in a democratic environment with a group of peers that helps them to reflect on their approach to teaching in ways that are designed to move them towards enacting a process approach to teaching writing in their own classrooms. Thus, the experience of the Institute (and other continuing programs of SNWP) provides teachers an opportunity to live amidst, possibly internalize, and possibly articulate through reflection and writing what it means to live in a participatory democracy and to create such an environment in their classrooms. The process approach used and advocated by SNWP provides teachers with a potentially more democratic way to understand and implement writing instruction in their classrooms.

Research Questions

My primary research questions are these:

What is the evidence of democratic writing instruction in the classrooms and practices of teachers who have participated in the Summer Institute of the Southern Nevada Writing Project?
What factors—including the Summer Institute—helped and hindered these teachers in their efforts to change their writing pedagogy practices?

By focusing on these questions, this study will add to a growing body of research that deals with both the idea of democratic pedagogy in general and the effectiveness of NWP’s model of professional development in addressing issues of democratic writing instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Pedagogy

To frame this study, I am drawing primarily from the field of democratic pedagogy with its roots in progressive education. Democratic pedagogy, closely tied to critical pedagogy, provides a framework for understanding how schools serve to construct (or replicate) current social structures, what roles schools should be serving in society, and how they should be going about the process of fulfilling their functions in society (Dewey, 2004/1916). Critical pedagogy posits that the job of a teacher is to help those who are marginalized—for whatever reason—gain greater access to full citizenship (Freire, 1992, 1970; Giroux, 2005). As marginalized students learn to access the dominant discourse, they are able to move in society towards a less marginalized position. This means that the teacher must engage in pedagogical practices that both help marginalized students develop the discourses needed for greater inclusion and provide dominant group students opportunities to recognize and value other ways of being and knowing.
Critical and democratic pedagogy mark the work of schools in two ways—as sites of construction of knowledge and skills and as a moral place (Dewey, 1938, 2004/1916). Schools are charged with educating students. However, under the framework of critical pedagogy, schools also function as "laboratories of democracy" (Fischman & McLaren, 2000). As Glickman & Alridge (2001) suggest, "democracy and education, thus, are . . . two sides of the same coin" (p. 16). Helping students understand how a democracy works and how to contribute meaningfully and respectfully in a democracy is best done as it is embedded in the actual environment of the school (Dewey, 1938). Students who have the chance to participate in democratic situations and communities in their schooling years will be prepared to live a democratic life (Dewey, 1938, 2003a/1916; Fischman & McLaren, 2000; Sehr, 1997; Vygotsky, 1979, 1986).

As teachers and administrators work to construct an environment that will help students to understand their roles in society, it is important to not limit the students' conceptions of the possible (Dewey, 1938; Sehr, 1997); instead schools should open new vistas for students. As Carlson (2002) puts it, "Progressive forms of education are not primarily about the transmission of a codified body of knowledge or truth. Progressivism is about learning to think and act in new ways . . . that open up democratic possibilities for the development of self and culture" (p. 3). Under this framework schools have the moral responsibility to help students see the possibility of equity and justice in life.

Teachers help students prepare for doing this work as they enact teaching practices that help students develop the skills of the dominant discourse, honor the lived experiences of the students including their primary discourse, bring in unfamiliar voices and viewpoints, are structured in democratic ways, and lead to action. In this pursuit,
reading and writing become vital tools for anyone to understand and to shape the world (Giroux, 2005; Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005).

Fisher (2005) uses the term “literocracy” to refer to the connection between literacy and democracy. Literocracy is “an intersection of literacy and democracy, a concept that connects the democratic principles of student choice and action to the practices of literacy” (p. 92). This phrase places an emphasis on the relationship between literacy enacted and democratic enactment and suggests that the purpose of literacy skills is to create a more equitable and just society. When Freire (1970) speaks of learning literacy in ways that help students understand not just the mechanics of reading and writing, but also how to use those tools for diverse purposes and in diverse ways, he speaks of people becoming human—that is they are more prepared to take a full, active part in determining their own destinies. Dewey (1938) puts this idea into slightly different words, but they convey the same meaning. “What avail is it . . . to win the ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul?” (p. 49).

Democratic pedagogy brings to light the important role of public schools and teachers in democratic renewal as they help students to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to bring about greater equity and justice. This is a moral work that places teachers in positions of extreme importance. To live up to the task, teachers must seek out spaces in their classrooms and schools to live and allow to be lived this form of democracy (Mullins, 1997; Banks, 2006). An understanding of democracy and literacy leads to a conceptualization of the work of literacy teachers as vital to the pursuit of a more equitable democracy (Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005).
Furthermore, if teachers are to take up equitable, just pedagogies in meaningful ways they must first inhabit environments where democratic pedagogies are exemplified and democratic identities are supported (Michelli, 2005). Teacher education efforts for both pre-service and practicing teachers must provide environments marked by a distinctly democratic practice. They must “bring out the fact that there are other ‘readings’” of what a classroom is (Freire, 1992, p. 96). Teacher education programs need to illustrate these other ‘readings’ in ways that allow teachers to experience and to reflect on them in light of past experience (Dewey, ; Michelli, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004). As teachers ‘live’ in democratic models they will be better equipped to enact democratic models of pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1979, 1986).

In summary, democratic pedagogy suggests that schools and teachers play pivotal roles in the renewal of democracy and that as a result, their decisions and actions are moral. Students need the positive model of democratic schools and classrooms to help them develop their democratic potential. Similarly, for teachers to undertake this form of pedagogy, they too must have positive models in professional development and teacher education programs so that they can envision new ways for schools and teachers to be and believe. Teachers, however, are not always free to act as they might wish because society assigns certain roles (or at least in some cases, teachers perceive this) they must fulfill and lays out rules that teachers must follow. The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers learn to take up literacy (specifically writing) instruction that is upheld by democratic principles, to incorporate democratic principles in their instructional decisions, and to navigate the moral, democratic portions of their positions within the boundaries placed on them by the rules and roles society has assigned them.
Methodology

I obtained permission to conduct the study through the Behavioral Sciences Committee of the Institutional Review Board at the Institution at which I was studying. The date this approval was granted was April 27, 2006.

This study is qualitative because of the nature of the question asked. As Creswell (1998) points out, qualitative research allows us to answer questions involving the *how* and *why* of things. The purpose of qualitative research is to attempt to get as close as possible to the insiders point of view and is based on the idea that everyone experiences things in a unique way that is dependant on the contexts in which they work (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Richardson & Placier, 2001). As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) say, “[qualitative researchers] are interested in how different people make sense of their lives” (p.7). In this case, what does it mean to be a teacher of writing who has participated in the Summer Institute of SNWP?

Another reason for the use of qualitative research methods is in response to the calls from various researchers who emphasized the need to paint a picture of what the world of teacher educators is like. For example, Ducharme & Ducharme (1996) say that the most pertinent, important questions in teacher education “do not lend themselves well to [quantitative methods]. Future research must be much more qualitative in nature. Researchers must be able to conduct interviews with faculty, spend considerable time in institutions, acquire a sense of the ethos of differing preparation institutions” (p. 68). Furthermore, Fry, Smith, & Johnson (2002) conclude that the teacher education profession needs a knowledge base that “recognizes the complexity of teaching and
learning” (p. 1). Such knowledge is not easily obtainable and requires more effort and time (Little & Lanier, 2001).

Under the broader umbrella of qualitative research, this proposal is an example of case study research. More specifically, this study is what Stake (2003) would call a “collective” case study. A “collective” case study is used when the desired knowledge is not about a particular case, but rather an understanding of “a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 138) is desired. Still, what is aimed for is not a set of findings that are generalizable in the traditional sense that every teacher passing through the Summer Institute will feel and act exactly as these teacher consultants do. Rather, I am “more interested in deriving universal statements of general social processes than statements of commonality between similar settings” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). In educational research, case study can prove especially fruitful as “they detail developmental paths that . . . illuminate facets of life as members of those groups [being studied]” (Bickmore, Smagorinsky, & O’Donnell-Allen, 2005, p. 26-27). Merriam (2001) would call case study for this purpose “interpretive.”

A final reason for taking up this study through the use of a qualitative case study methodology has to do with the theoretical framework of this study. Qualitative study is inherently tied to structures of power (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). By designing a study that allows such a rich description of the context in which the participants operate, this approach to research necessarily confronts the ways in which power is built, used, and perceived—Foucault’s (1980) “regimes of truth.” Such a stance is in line with my theoretical framework in which I have drawn on Freirean notions of critical literacy and Deweyan ideals of democratic practice to take a stand that says that schools are built on
and reproduce certain views of power and the ways in which they are enacted and that teachers as actors within these systems must find spaces for critical, liberating, democratic practices.

Context of the Study—the Southern Nevada Writing Project’s 2006 Summer Invitational Institute.

The Southern Nevada Writing Project’s Summer Institute is designed to be a place of teacher learning and growth. During the summer of 2006 the Institute took as its theme “Mission Possible: Teachers as Agents of Change.” In doing so, the directors and facilitators made a conscious decision to focus the Institute experiences around issues of social justice and equity. Teachers were pushed to consider their own ability to change their practice, their schools, and the lives of their students.

Beyond the process approach to teaching writing, the directors and facilitators were careful to choose protocols, activities, and guest speakers to support the chosen theme. The protocols were adapted from Critical Friends Groups (National School Reform Faculty, 2007) and were chosen to both model and use ways of structuring discussion that emphasized valuing feedback and honoring teacher knowledge. The purpose of a protocol “is to have an in-depth, insightful conversation about teaching and learning” (NSRF, 2007). Activities used included things like Chalk Talk. This is “a silent way to do reflection, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects, or solve problems” (NSRF, 2007). During this activity, the participants gathered around the white board where several markers were placed. Without speaking, the participants were to writer words, or phrases related to what was already written on the board—“justice.” Participants were encouraged to make connections between these words and phrases with

92
lines and circles. Several moments passed in silence as the participants took time to read what was written and to think about the issues being raised. The purpose was to help the participants think in fresh ways about the issue of justice as it applied to them as a person, a student, and a teacher. Finally, guest speakers, chosen mostly from TC’s, engaged participants on a variety of subjects including visual literacy, cultural literacy, and argument. All of these experiences were planned so as to provide teachers with multiple perspectives on teaching and learning and to allow multiple entry points into these ideas for every teacher.

At the end of the Institute, the facilitators and directors agreed that this group was exceptional in terms of cohesiveness. Throughout the Institute, the participants seemed to extend themselves in the pursuit of the Institute goals and to be willing to try new things. As a result of this willingness to stretch, the participants themselves mourned the end of the Institute time. Since, then, one member of the Institute, Ann has planned three or four informal activities so that they could all get together again and see each other.

Context of the Study—Area Schools

SNWP’s Summer Invitational Institute may be viewed as the focus of the study, but the most important context of this study is each individual participant’s teaching context. The teachers themselves (Nikki, Charlotte, Debbi, Ann, and Vanessa) and their individual classrooms will be introduced later. The work of these teachers inside their classrooms was impacted by the school environment each worked in.

The five participants in the study each teach at a different school in Carson County School District, a large, rapidly-growing urban area. Each school is unique and
was chosen not only because of the participant, but also because of the nature of the school climate itself.

*George Washington Elementary.* Washington Elementary is a school with a high percentage of English Language Learners. Traditionally, this school has been a low achieving school (as measured by standardized tests) and last year failed to meet AYP. As a result, the school has employed a heavy focus on literacy and math skills. According to the principal, Washington is “a Writing Project school.” The principal made this claim because several of the teachers have ties to SNWP. Also according to the principal, the literacy specialist at the school was chosen in large part because of her ties to SNWP.

*Benjamin Franklin Elementary.* Although Franklin Elementary is also a school that traditionally underperforms on standardized tests; however, it met AYP for the year previous to the study. The principal at the time permission was granted to study this site (a different principal was in place when data collection started) indicated that meeting this standard was due to hard work by the teachers. The school used a pre-packaged writing program; however, with a change in the administration some of the teachers were uncertain about how use of the program would be enforced. There were no known TC’s at Franklin prior to the study, although two teachers from this school attended the Summer Institute during the study.

*Betsey Ross Elementary.* Ross, located at the extreme Southern end of the metropolitan area, generally performs well on standardized tests and met AYP for the year prior to the study. According to the principal, this performance is because the school is “focused on writing.” The school has a lower percentage of minority students
and students on free or reduced lunch than the district average. At the time of the study, Debbi (the participant in the study) was the only known TC at the school.

*Southern Valley Vocational Technical Center (V-Tech).* V-Tech is a magnet high school located in the Southern part of the valley. Being a magnet school, V-Tech offers many specialized programs of study such as nursing, culinary, and cosmetology training and is open to students from all across the district. Admission is granted based on application. Ann is the only active TC at this school.

*Applied Technologies Academy (Ap-Tech).* Ap-Tech, considered by many to be one of the district's flagship schools, consistently wins national recognition for its programs and for the work of its students in national competitions. The curriculum at Ap-Tech is fairly traditional and focuses on college preparation. While admission is based on application and open to the entire district, in general the teachers and students in the district see it as the school for college-bound students. Ap-Tech hosts no sports teams of any kinds, although they do have other extracurricular activities such as forensics. Vanessa is the only current teacher at Ap-Tech to have participated in the Institute, although in previous years, other TC's taught there.

*Participants and Participant Selection*

Participants in this study include five teachers who attended the Summer Institute during the year of the study. They were Nikki (5th Grade), Charlotte (4th Grade), Debbi (5th Grade), Ann (High School), and Vanessa (High School). These teachers had all taught between one and eleven years in a variety of places. A more thorough description of each will be given at the beginning of chapter four. Appendix A contains a chart outlining the teachers and giving some demographic information on their schools.
In order to attend the Summer Invitational Institute all teachers must go through an interview process. Willingness to participate in the study was not used as an admission criterion for participation in the Institute, nor did the study alter any of the regular Institute processes. In fact, the research was not brought up during any of the interviews. As a matter of procedure SNWP regularly screens participants in the Summer Institute through an application and interview process in order to get teachers from a mix of grade levels, schools, and backgrounds. All of the participants in this year’s Institute were white females. As a result, all of the teachers in this study are white females (Appendix A has a more complete demographic profile of the participants and their schools).

At the beginning of the Institute, I presented to all participants my role in the Institute—both facilitator and researcher—and explained the purpose and methodology of my study. Near the end of the Institute, six teachers were identified as potential participants for the study. These six teachers were invited to a special meeting where an invitation was extended to participate in the study. It was made clear at that time that anyone who did not want to be part of the study was free to remove themselves at any time. All six agreed to allow observations in their rooms and to participate in interviews. One teacher had to be excluded later for logistical reasons.

The selection of these teachers was made with two primary considerations in mind. First I strove to select teachers from a wide range of teaching contexts (elementary/secondary, low SES/high SES, high levels of minority students/low levels of minority students, content area teachers). Secondly, based on what they said the teachers selected all appeared to have made significant strides towards adopting a more process-
oriented approach to teaching. They were chosen, in part, because they were perceived to be data rich subjects (Stake, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

The Role of the Researcher

During the Institute, I acted as a facilitator. Therefore, I was a full participant (Spradley, 1980). I participated in the same ways that the other facilitators did. I was part of a response group. One of the study participants, Charlotte, was in my group. I led whole group activities from time to time and was in charge of certain aspects of the Institute.

After the Institute, my role became more of an observer, although at times I became a participant. During most of my observations, I did not make an effort to become part of the class. Instead, I was simply an observer. I tried to sit in discrete places so as not to interfere with student work or the teaching of the class. I chose this stance because I was not trying to understand what it was like to be part of the class; I was trying to document and understand what the teachers were doing.

At times, though, I stepped out of the role of observer to become more of a participant. I did this only at the invitation of the teachers and the cases were relatively isolated, one-time events. For example, Vanessa asked me to teach a short ten minute lesson designed to give her students a creative writing prompt. On that day, though, I did not do an observation of Vanessa’s teaching. I had to leave immediately following my time teaching. When Debbi decided to introduce her class to response groups she asked my advice in planning the class. Also, during the first class, Debbi and her class asked me questions as they were discussing how to act during response groups. Finally, on a
few occasions students would ask me to read their work. This I did, but only as an
audience or peer. I never attempted to teach the students in this occasions.

Before the study began, I spoke with Dave Wilson about his research on the
Institute (personal communication, February 2006). Wilson completed a dissertation that
examined the work of three Institute teachers in the late eighties (1988). A few years
later in preparing a book about his research (1994), Wilson found that one of his
participants had "faked" his teaching during the dissertation. As a result, I was
particularly concerned about this and questioned the teachers about the impact of my
presence in their classroom. Furthermore, this consideration pushed me to be more
methodical about documenting what I saw during the observations and to approach this
data with a greater focus on maintaining rigor.

When questioned about how my classroom observations impacted their teaching,
only one teacher, Nikki, made reference to her teaching. Speaking about this, she said, "I
stepped up my mini-lessons. I always made sure I had a really decent mini-lesson"
(February 8). In Nikki’s case there are indications that while she may have prepared
more thoroughly in anticipation of my observations, she did not substantially alter her
approach to teaching. During the course of my observations, I surprised Nikki twice with
my observations. On the first occasion I thought that my scheduled day to observe her
was two days earlier than she thought it was. When I entered, she was already in the
middle of her mini-lesson and the observation that day did not show any substantial
difference in teaching approach than the other days. On the second day, she simply
forgot I was coming. Again, I did not notice a substantial difference except that this was
just following her school’s proficiency preparation and so there was a heavy emphasis on
idea generation. In response to my questions about the impact of my presence in their classrooms, the other teachers most commonly mentioned being concerned about the behavior of their students, but no other teachers mentioned their teaching in response to the inquiry.

In summary, my role during the observations was primarily that of observer, while during the Institute I was a full participant (Spradley, 1980). When invited I would step out of my role as observer to meet the requests of the teachers and their students. Furthermore, I was concerned about the teachers performing for me in an effort to present what they perceived I wanted. There is no evidence that this happened, and in fact some evidence that it did not happen. Instead, most of the participants were concerned more about the behavior of their students than their own teaching.

Data Sources

Primary data sources included in class observations, brief follow-up interviews after each observation, and a group interview based around the observations (see Table 4 for a brief explanation of how each of these sources helped address the research questions). Other data sources that were available included artifacts from the Institute, e.g. weekly facilitator reflections, participants’ applications, handouts, agendas, presentation packets from the participants. These data sources were used rather sparingly and mostly to help confirm, round out, or triangulate what was reported by the participants.

In-class Observations. The purpose of the observations was to provide insight into the participants’ practice. By observing the participants interactions with their
students and their implementations of writing lessons, I gained an understanding of what went on in the classrooms of the various participants.

I visited each classroom between five and seven times. All visits occurred between September 2006 and January 2007. These visits lasted for one writing “lesson”—anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. Observations were completed using the “Classroom Observation Protocol” developed by Nikki Robb Singer, PhD. for the Gateway Writing Project (Appendix B).

Table 4

The ways in which my data sources informed my research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-Class Observations</th>
<th>Follow-up Interviews</th>
<th>Group Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the evidence of democratic writing instruction in the classrooms and practices of teachers who have participated in the Summer Institute of the Southern Nevada Writing Project?</strong></td>
<td>Documents what teachers are doing in their classrooms</td>
<td>Allows the teachers an opportunity to talk about how they understand their practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What factors—including the Summer Institute—helped and hindered these teachers in their efforts to change their writing pedagogy practices?</strong></td>
<td>Provides an opportunity to see how teachers deal with these factors and to hear the teachers name and discuss these factors.</td>
<td>Provides a forum for the teachers to name and discuss these factors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form was used for two primary reasons. First, the instrument was specifically designed to document a teacher’s approach to teaching writing. It allows for
a rich, textured picture of teachers’ writing instruction practices. Second, it has been used in a quasi-experimental study previously (National Writing Project, 2006). As such, it has already been shown to be an effective instrument in data collection.

**Follow-up Interviews.** Each observation was followed by a brief interview that generally lasted anywhere from ten to thirty minutes. While a basic protocol was used to elicit information about teacher decisions and perceptions across all cases, I also used more specific questions with or in place of the general questions based on what had been observed or mentioned in the current or previous meetings. This interviewing technique is in keeping with suggestions from several voices in the literature (see for example Riessman, 1993; Charmaz 2003, 2006). By tailoring questions to the teacher, I could provide opportunities to discuss events or comments that seemed to hold special meaning in the work of each individual teacher.

Merriam (1998) suggests that interviews should be like conversations between trusted colleagues (see also Kvale, 1992). The rapport established between the teachers in this study and me during the Institute fostered these types of conversations during the interviews.

**Group Interview.** At the end of the study, the teachers participated in a group interview during which they were asked to discuss questions and issues surrounding the four major themes of data analysis (Siedman, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Following the interview pattern used in much of case study research, this interview was semi-structured (See Appendix C for a copy of the interview protocol designed for this study).

In anticipation of the interview, I e-mailed a copy of the protocol to each of the participants. This allowed them to reflect on these issues ahead of time and also served
as a guide during the discussion. To facilitate a discussion-like atmosphere and avoid a simple question-and-answer format, the first question under each section was what Spradley (1980) calls a grand tour question. A grand tour question is designed to give the respondent ample opportunity to approach a topic from any point they choose. It was anticipated that during the interview, the grand tour question was the only question that would be asked verbatim from the form. As it turned out, only one grand tour question was used verbatim. Instead, the conversation was allowed to grow and continue spontaneously as it stayed within the focus of the study. Several comments during the interview suggested that the participants had reviewed the form and were conscious of the themes under discussion, but there was no evidence that they were overly conscious of the specific questions underneath each heading.

The purpose of this interview was to provide an insider's view of the themes constructed from the observations. As Dyson & Genishi (2005) point out, any interview should "deepen an understanding of what we observe in the classroom and . . . help interpret observed activities from participants' perspectives" (p. 76). The group interview provided an opportunity to uncover the participants' thinking about their own practice, democratic pedagogy in general, the change process, and the role of the Institute in their growth as teachers. Furthermore, because the participants had already established relationships during the summer Institute, bringing them together to discuss their practice allowed them to compare and contrast their practices. The goal was to foster a discussion atmosphere in anticipation that a discussion would encourage the participants to reflect more deeply on their practice and to share their thoughts (Merriam, 1998).
Data Analysis

Beginning with my first observations I wrote narrative reflections of the observations to reflect on what I had seen. After each observation and interview I reviewed my field notes and then wrote a narrative of what was observed. The purpose of the narrative was to tell my story of the observation including suppositions, questions, and events. After the narrative was recorded, I reviewed the field text and added thoughts, questions, and possible connections in the designated column. According to Clandinin & Connely (2000), the act of moving back and forth between field notes and narrative helps “maintain a sense of moving in and out of the experience” (p. 87). This movement fostered an understanding of the events I had seen as well as a sense of being in the experience.

After I had observed each teacher twice, I began to examine the extant data in order to begin constructing initial themes within each case individually. These tentative themes helped me to understand each case individually and to begin seeing cross case connections and were used to help hone further observations and provide direction for the questions in the follow-up interviews (Spradley, 1980; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, my observations became more focused on certain groups of events. For example, in my observations of Charlotte, I began to pay special attention to her work with the special education students in her class. At the same time, I was vigilant to avoid reducing my observations to simply looking for very particular exemplars of any given point. One method I used to avoid this was to return to and re-read my observation forms as a whole across and within cases trying to identify new themes that I could construct from the data.
As time passed, the themes became more focused. After I had at least four observations of each class, I returned to the observation forms to color code examples of each of my themes. Using a different highlighter for each of the five themes identified at that point allowed me to see at a glance, the quantity of evidence under each category. Also, having multiple examples of each theme easily accessible made it possible for me to quickly review the evidence for a given theme over time and within and across cases. Based on what I saw from this color-coding I collapsed two of my initial themes (democratic dialogue and democratic curriculum) into one more general theme. I repeated this color-coding process twice more during the course of the study. In the end, then, I have identified four over-arching themes around which I frame my discussion of the results: Writing Pedagogy, Democratic Classrooms, Influence of the Writing Project, and Obstacles and Supports to Changing Practices. Each of these themes provides a different way of understanding the work of these teachers as they strive to enact a more democratic writing pedagogy.

Concurrent to my observations and color-coding efforts, I was talking over and about my work with college professors, other doctoral students, and in one case a colleague at another institution (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This technique helped insure that the ideas I was constructing were grounded in what was being observed in the classroom and being reported by the teachers. Also, I went to the literature during this time to not only continue the development of my own knowledge, but also to provide myself with multiple ways of seeing the data. For example, as I was reading I came across a number of articles that talked about fostering democratic discussions in the classroom (an aspect of democratic classrooms). Many of these studies provided
frameworks to understand what led to, hindered, and resulted from these types of discussions. These frameworks (and similar work on other areas) pushed me to examine my data in new ways and under new conditions. Again, this helped me to move in and out of my data in meaningful ways.

After I had completed the observations and had constructed the four main themes of my study, I began to prepare for the final interview. I viewed the group interview as a chance to listen in while five professionals who already had a personal and professional relationship discussed their teaching practices and beliefs.

Following the group interview, I listened repeatedly to the tapes and transcribed them as well. The transcript and tapes, then, were mined for information and/or comments that would support the broad themes previously constructed from the data, deepen my understanding of these themes, and challenge my thinking by casting events and even the themes in new light. For example, Ann and Vanessa spend time discussing the way in which their students' narrative writing increased their ability to create expository pieces of writing. Such a discussion had not surfaced prior to the group interview, but it pushed me to see the role of writing in these teachers' classrooms in more nuanced ways.

In the end, events and comments were combined under the headings of each of the four main themes. Patterns were constructed from this data that attempt to give a sense of each participant's experiences as they worked in their classrooms during this study. Also, I examined the cases as a whole in order to identify common experiences or patterns of acting. Throughout this process, I endeavored to maintain not only the themes
that I was constructing but also the story that was being written in the works and words of these teachers.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in at least four ways. The first limitation is time. The data collection from this study only covered one semester of teaching. As a result, long-term change cannot be seen, whether it exists or not—potentially a troubling shortcoming (Grossman et al., 2000). Second, the study is limited in that only 5 teachers were observed in their classrooms. Because there were 11 teachers who participated in the Institute, it is possible that some perspectives were left out. Next, it is possible that the Institute’s nature (time and effort intensive and the screening of applicants) skewed the initial population to include teachers who feel more confident already in their abilities and who may already use an approach to teaching writing that is more closely aligned to the process approach, although internal self-reporting by the teachers suggests otherwise. Finally, because of logistical reasons, there is no data concerning the participants’ teaching before participation in the writing project. Efforts were made to invite TC’s to self-report on their previous teaching practices during both follow-up interviews and the group interview. Further, artifacts from the Institute such as the Application were examined for more statements of the teachers’ previous practice in the teaching of writing. Still, it will be difficult to say with certainty that the results are because of the Summer Institute.

Despite these limitations, this research fills a valuable niche in the literature in terms of democratic literacy instruction and how such a process is learned and enacted. By following the TC’s into the classroom and observing their practice this study stands
out in NWP literature. The findings have application in what is understood about teacher change and learning as well as the teaching of writing—especially as these are related to democratic pedagogy.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I present the individual cases of the teachers who participated in the study. In the second section, the cross-case findings are presented and described.

In presenting the individual cases, I am providing a textured telling of each individual’s story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 1998). For ease of reading and to make the structure more uniform each case story is presented in four sections: pre-institute, institute, post-institute, and in the future. Each section is headed with a direct quote from the participant referring to that time period. Inside of each story, the sections are aligned chronologically.

I present these cases as narratives in part to honor the efforts of these teachers. The stories result in a textured, context-laden picture of the work these teachers struggled to carry out. Each teacher taught in a different school and, consequently, faced very different challenges and supports. The stories present these differences in ways that allow the reader to see not only the differences but the teachers’ responses to them—a characteristic of the knowledge gained from case study research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2003). It is anticipated that through these stories, the reader can begin to see the themes constructed and discussed in the latter section of this chapter. At the same time, the stories may also provide the reader with an alternate view of the cases. The result is an increased faithfulness to the integrity of each case individually.
Individual Cases

**Nikki**

Nikki is naturally athletic and seems to approach her teaching as she might a softball game—full of enthusiasm and energy. She has a quick smile and a comfortable personality. She genuinely likes people and quickly befriends them. Nikki is always open to new ideas and works hard to incorporate them whether it is in her personal writing or in her teaching. This openness would prove to be a valuable characteristic during this year.

*Pre-Institute: I Hated Teaching Writing.* When asked about her teaching of writing the previous year, Nikki responded quite emphatically, “I hated it. I tried to avoid it.” Her school uses a writing program that Nikki does not like; however, prior to the Institute, she did not know how to change the program or alter her own approach in a way that was effective for her or the students. As a result, she simply did not teach writing any more than was absolutely necessary, which it turns out was not very often.

When she did teach writing, Nikki followed the program, which had the whole class undertake a single prompt and follow-through en masse from one part of the writing process to the next. On day one the students would get a prompt (provided in the program) and begin organizing their ideas and writing a rough draft. On the second day, the students were to revise, and the last day was for editing and making a final clean copy of their work. According to Nikki, the work was stilted. During this time, Nikki would conference with those students who were the lowest achievers. According to her recollection, she often spent twenty minutes or more on one conference, but did not accomplish much. “My conferences were much longer than they’re supposed to be . . . I
would sit down with them for twenty minutes at a time . . . and I was looking at too many pieces at the wrong stages. You know, I was looking at their spelling during their brainstorming stage . . . my priorities were all out of whack” (January 25). The result was very little writing that reflected her students’ personalities and ideas. Instead, in her own words, “I simply got my own work back because I had spent so long telling the students exactly what words to use that it was really my own writing coming in” (October 19).

_Institute: I found my voice._ When Nikki came to the Institute, her goal was “to improve [her] teaching strategies in the area of writing” (Application). During the Institute, that continued to be a focus of Nikki’s. During one of the book groups, she chose to read Fletcher and Portalupi’s (2001) guide on incorporating a writing workshop in the classroom. For her teaching demonstration she addressed both a concern and a fear of hers in researching and presenting on ways to use technology in the classroom. What she learned from her reading and her presentation showed up in her classroom during the year through her teaching and her class’ website where she posts student writing throughout the year.

In the beginning of the Institute, as the facilitators and directors were forming response groups, they identified Nikki as having the potential to be one of the more prolific writers in the Institute. Based, in part, on this perception, Nikki became part of the smallest response group with other teachers the facilitators felt would write profusely. Her response group was made up of her, Vanessa, Debbi, and a facilitator. The bonds of this group were strong and formed quickly; as soon as the first week of the Institute, the
group was making plans to extend their meetings beyond the Institute. Now, they get together on a more or less regular basis to write and talk.

Reflecting back on the Institute, Nikki said that it “gave me a passion for teaching that I haven’t had since my first year of teaching. I feel like a new teacher” (February 8). Beyond her passion for teaching, Nikki also suggests that the Institute helped her discover a love for writing that she had not had before.

Post-Institute: Now, I Know What I am Doing. Of her teaching this year, Nikki said, “it’s completely different than anything I have ever tried and I am so much happier with it” (October 5). No longer does she hate writing time. In fact, it has become an indispensable part of her teaching day and the activity her class does first thing in the morning. Nikki has adopted a writers’ workshop approach to teaching writing. In her own words, Nikki’s classes are “about half me and/or them talking, and about half them writing. We start with a mini-lesson, and then have time for the students to work on their writing. At the end, there is always time for sharing” (Sept. 26).

This balance is not always easy, and Nikki is clearly concerned about the amount of time her voice monopolizes the room. During one interview, she commented that the mini-lesson that day had gone long (about twenty minutes) because she got on a tangent to her focus. “I’ve got to cut down on my talking” (Sept. 26). When Nikki is in response groups, she makes a conscious effort to simply become another member of the response group. For example, on September 14, Nikki had the students working in response groups. In these groups, the students are to listen to the author read his or her piece and offer one specific thing they liked and make one constructive suggestion for helping the student with his or her piece.
As Nikki sat in a group, one girl looked at her and said, “I liked the part where he made the barking noise.”

“Don’t tell me. Tell [author]”

The student, then, looked at the author and repeated her comment. After this two other students made comments directed to Nikki as the teacher. In both of these cases she redirected the students to the author and simply listened. This process was repeated throughout her teaching and as a result, over time I did not notice any questions or comments directed inappropriately at Nikki during peer response time.

Nikki took other steps to insure that her students were given equal say. For example, even when Nikki was participating as a member of a peer response group, she acknowledged the students’ expertise in areas unfamiliar to her. On September 26, Nikki was sitting in a group and listening to a student’s story that was based on a comic book known to the other students in the group. After commenting that she said that she would have appreciated more back story for the main character, Nikki asked the other responders what they thought. They all disagreed with her. They explained that it made sense to them and one student said that telling it the way the author had was like the book. Nikki listened, and then explained that she was probably wrong. Because she was not familiar with comic books, the other responders were probably better suited to give feedback on that genre of writing.

Nikki does not simply monitor her physical voice, but acknowledges—as demonstrated above—that her ideas and voice are no more valuable intrinsically than her students. During the first couple of weeks of school, Nikki shared her own writing with the students on two separate occasions to show them how a piece came about and to get
their feedback on one of the pieces. In fact, Nikki made a change in an essay she wrote about her beliefs on teaching when a student recommended that beginning differently would make it more interesting to the readers.

Not only is Nikki concerned with her physical voice dominating in the classroom, she is concerned that she not be the only source of ideas in the room. Nikki spent a considerable amount of time at the beginning of the school year trying to help her students understand that their ideas and their stories had value and were worth telling. For example, Nikki started the year with every student bringing in an artifact that represented them, an activity used in the Institute every year. Nikki did not simply ask the students to bring in an artifact and sit passively as they shared their artifacts. Nikki helped the students by passing around the artifacts and asking questions. When one student mentioned that the skateboard he brought in as his artifact is also where he lost his first adult tooth, Nikki responds incredulously, “You mean, you’ve already lost a grown-up tooth? On your skateboard?” The student says that it’s true and then shows her the spot on his skateboard where his tooth hit when it was knocked out. Nikki looks and then takes the skateboard around for all of the students to see the scratch the tooth had made on the skateboard. Later, when Nikki concludes the activity by explaining that the class has shared stories with power and importance and suggests that these stories might provide a springboard for student writing, this student quickly begins to write about losing his tooth on his skateboard.

Another way in which Nikki’s practice exemplifies this struggle to honor, foster, and encourage her students’ individual voices is the way she structures the work in her classroom. Choice is a regular part of Nikki’s classroom. Students are generally free to
choose topics, genres, and even, in many cases, work schedules. Furthermore, Nikki’s
decision to move away from the writing program used by her school is another piece of
evidence of her efforts to honor her students. According to Nikki, the program is “very
cookie cutter” and it does not work for her students because “they are all very individual
and [the school’s writing program] doesn’t allow them to be that” (January 25).

Nikki feels that her students have come to understand the worth of their own
stories. Still, Nikki feels there are times when she cannot teach as she wants. In the five
school weeks leading up to the Nevada State Proficiency Exam in Writing, Nikki’s whole
school spends each week in test prep. Under the model, which mirrors the testing
procedures, that is given them, the teachers are to present a topic on Monday, do pre-
writing and drafting strategies on Tuesday and Wednesday, then allow time for editing
and final drafting on Thursday and Friday. Nikki does not feel that she can go against
this mandate so her class marches along with every other class in the school.

In the end, Nikki feels that her class came through the experience better than most
of the others and better than her classes in previous years because of the work they had
done on writing in the months leading up to this time. Still, afterwards, Nikki has to take
special pains to remind her students of their own creative powers and the value of their
own ideas. One week after the test, she told her class, “I want you to get back to the
creative way you were working at the beginning of the year and using your own ideas . . .
So, instead of a new prompt, I thought I would just give you a way of coming up with a
new story.” At this point, Nikki gives a strategy and afterwards, says, “Remember if this
doesn’t work for you, you can always write about anything you want.” Eventually,
Nikki’s efforts are rewarded as her students come out of the prompt-driven writing funk of the days following proficiency. Still, it is not without work on Nikki’s part.

Also, Nikki was very concerned about the lack of sharing of writing that the students were allowed to do during the proficiency period. Before this time, peer response groups as well as read-arounds were an integral part of Nikki’s class. In fact, at one point, Nikki claimed that the students all wanted to share everyday and that it took great effort on her part to balance that desire with making it worthwhile. Because the test prep period effectively did away with sharing during writing time, Nikki had to look elsewhere for an outlet for her students.

Her solution was both ingenious and successful. During computer time, Nikki had her students type up a poem they had written shortly before the test prep began to display on the wall outside of her room. Beside each poem was a little pocket made of construction paper, and teachers and students were invited to vote on their favorite poem on display. The top three vote getters, then, got to read their poems over the intercom on the school-wide daily announcements. Then, at the prompting of the school literacy specialist, the pockets were transformed into mailboxes. Paper was set out and passing teachers and students were invited to write notes to the authors telling them what they liked about the poem. Each student in Nikki’s class received multiple letters from teachers and students. The activity proved so successful that it stayed up for over two months with the authors still receiving mail.

Nikki’s changes did not come about unhindered. From her perspective, Nikki had to make a few concessions in her beliefs about teaching writing. In addition to the way in which testing altered her approach, Nikki expressed concern over the fact that she was no
longer using the old teaching writing program. Nikki worried that her administration would be upset and she would get in trouble if they found out that she had essentially abandoned the program. As a result, she made a conscious effort to include some of the graphic organizers and thinking maps advocated by the previous program. She felt that these had some value when used correctly in teaching writing; therefore, the inclusion of these allowed her to stay close to her teaching beliefs while at the same time meeting the requirements of her administration.

Despite these concerns, Nikki became an outspoken advocate of both the process approach to teaching writing and SNWP’s Summer Institute. The first time I went to Nikki’s school—just to see where her room was and meet the office staff, Nikki came to get me and make the introductions. When we got back to her room, another teacher was there to drop off some science materials. Nikki introduced me to her colleague, and as soon as Nikki mentioned my association with the Writing Project, the other teacher got very excited. She told me that she would be part of the Institute next summer and that Nikki was “teaching” them all about writing workshop. The teacher went on to say that all of the fifth grade teachers were coming to Nikki for advice and instructions on how to implement their own workshop. Later when I asked Nikki about this, she explained that she was sharing what she had learned, including lessons. The week before, all of the teachers in her grade level had taken an idea that Nikki gave them about teaching students to generate ideas and used in their own ways. During the year, Nikki occasionally took ideas and student work to her grade level’s regular team meetings to share. Nikki later reported that while no other fifth grade teacher adopted a full-fledged writers’ workshop in their classes, they often used ideas she provided. At least one other
time, Nikki opened her classroom to another teacher so that teacher could bring her students in to learn from Nikki and her students. Nikki was becoming not only a practitioner of, but also an advocate of writing workshop.

In the Future: Just tightening up. Reflecting on what she wanted to do in the future, Nikki says that she wants to be more true to the writing workshop model. Also, she is looking forward to using an I-search paper in her class, another staple of the Institute.

I want to tighten up my conferences and mini-lessons, which is what my initial plan had been. But now as I am over half way through the year, I’m finding that I’m a little dry on new ideas so I have to kind of revamp that a little bit and find new things to do my own little mini-lessons on.

The biggest thing I am looking forward to in the spring is I am going to do an I-search and I cannot wait for that. That is absolutely my big project for the third trimester. And next year just tightening up and getting a little bit more organized. (February 8)

Charlotte

The first thing you probably notice about Charlotte is her laugh. Even though she is tall, the volume is surprising. Her laugh booms out of her, and it comes easily. Charlotte loves life and loves to laugh. She is a second-year teacher in “a writing project” school (her principal’s words based on the number of teachers at the school who have participated previously). As a teacher, Charlotte readily admits that she is still learning, but also stands firm on the point that she does know much about teaching and does good work. Charlotte is committed to doing all she can for her students. Her goal is
to eventually teach special education (she is dual-licensed in special education), but feels that it is important to experience teaching in a regular education room for a few years before making the transition.

*Pre-Institute: I am working with Writing Workshop.* According to Charlotte, her first (and only) year of teaching was one of trial and error. She felt that she did not necessarily help her students as much as she would have liked, but she worked hard and she did seek out help. Terri, the literacy specialist at her school and an SNWP TC, was a mentor to Charlotte in much of what she did. Terri pushed her to recognize her own potential and the quality of her current practice by suggesting that Charlotte make presentations to the other faculty on what she was doing in the classroom. In these cases, Terri worked with Charlotte to prepare for and, in some cases, present the information. As a result of this collaboration and exposure, Charlotte felt surer of herself and her ability to teach writing.

Charlotte’s first year was marked by a student-centered approach to teaching. For example, about 2/3 of the way through her first year, Charlotte’s class read an article about murals. The students began asking about murals—they could not quite grasp the concept. So Charlotte did some research and brought in pictures of murals from around the world. After seeing the murals, one of her students asked in class why they couldn’t paint a mural. Based on the students’ interest, Charlotte went to the administration with a proposal to do a mural. Her administration said yes as long as they approved the design beforehand. Thus began an involved process that saw Charlotte help her students to collaborate on a design and aid them as they negotiated with the administration and each other the logistics of the project. In the end, Charlotte’s class painted a mural that is
roughly fifteen feet long by eight feet high. Every student in the class was involved from
the conception of the design all the way through the painting of the mural. In the end,
one student who had initially resisted the idea of painting because he felt that he couldn’t
paint well enough, told Charlotte, “I think I’ll be a painter when I grow up.” Charlotte
knew she was a success.

Institute: It was the first college class I wanted to get up for. Charlotte came to
the Institute prepared to learn. Terri nominated her for inclusion and encouraged her to
apply and attend. It was this pushing and prodding by Terri that not only led Charlotte
into the Institute, but also led Charlotte to expect a great experience. In her application,
Charlotte wrote, “If I can gain one thing from the institute that will help my student then I
will be happy. I am interested in learning more about Writing Workshop specifically, as
well. I think that I may also grow as a writer through the Institute.”

Charlotte did grow as a teacher and as a writer. As a result of some of the
discussions and readings done in the Institute, Charlotte developed an interest in the idea
of voice in writing and chose the topic for her teaching demonstration. Charlotte said that
part of the impetus for the choice of voice was her own writing. She had begun to see
herself as a writer and to enjoy crafting pieces of writing. So, her presentation focused on
ways to help students understand the idea of voice in writing and how to incorporate
more voice in their own writing.

Looking back on the Institute, Charlotte said, “it empowered me to have courage
but also to step out of the box. . . . I would never have taken on some of the things that I
have taken on this year without it” (February 8).
Post-Institute: I'm trying to dive deeper into what they are writing about. During my first observation (September 21), I was struck by something unusual in Charlotte’s class. It began normally enough. She was using a writers’ workshop approach to teaching writing. All of the parts were there—mini-lesson, time for students to write, opportunities for the students to choose topics, genres, and audiences, opportunities to share. However, the unusual part came as the students were working.

Following her mini-lesson, Charlotte told the students to begin working on their writing and headed for the back table. She called to Paul as she sat down and took out a piece of paper and a pen. He jumped up and brought his paper to the back table. “Okay, can I see your paper?” Charlotte asked. Paul handed his story over. Later I would learn that the paper was filled with what appeared to be random letters. Taken together the letters did not form any words.

Charlotte asked Paul to tell her what he wanted to write about. He told her he was writing about his first day of school. Charlotte asked if she could help him and told him that she will jot down his story as he tells it to her. For the next fifteen minutes, Paul told Charlotte his story and she wrote it down, stopping once in awhile to ask questions. Then, Charlotte asked him to follow along as she read it to him. Following this reading, Charlotte asked Paul what would come next and she made note of what he said on a post-it. She gave him the paper she wrote along with the post-it and pointed out what she had written on the post-it. Then, she told Paul to return to his desk and add a paragraph to his story. After that, he could draw a picture to go along with the story. Paul returned to his desk and Charlotte walked around the room checking in quickly with the other students for the last five minutes of writing time.
I was surprised that Charlotte spent so much time with Paul. After all, to me he did not seem any more stuck in the process than the other students. In fact, he seemed to be expecting her attention, and the type of work she did with him seemed a little unusual given that Paul is in fourth-grade. When I asked, it turned out that this is pretty much how everyday is.

Paul has been diagnosed as high functioning autistic. He cannot read or write on grade level—or even close to grade level. On a reading assessment at the beginning of the year, Paul could only read seventeen words a minute on the fourth-grade level. In fact, writing is so hard for him that he does not do it if left on his own. Plus, if he does try to write, his spelling and penmanship are illegible to anyone else and, at times, to him. So, every other day, Charlotte works one-on-one with him because it is the only way he gets a chance to write anything. The other days, Charlotte works with Stephan who is also autistic. The difference is his reading and writing skills are lower than Paul’s. On the same reading test, Stephen could only read three words per minute. Charlotte’s help is their only door into a substantial fourth-grade language experience.

At the same time Charlotte provides help for Paul and Stephan, she worries about how these students impact her other students because of her need to spend so much time with them. According to Charlotte these things “affect [the other students] terribly . . . it disrupts the class because it takes time away from me . . . but at least [Paul and Stephan] both know that . . . I care about them and that I can work with them” (December 11). Charlotte is carefully balancing the needs of all her students and making choices that she feels best help all of the students. At the same time, she wants all of the students to be part of the class. Last year, her one special education student ended up rather isolated.
from the room by her choice and by his. When he could not function as part of the room, he ended up sitting by himself in a removed part of the room. Charlotte did not know what else to do. This year, she is committed to keeping all of her students together.

This respect for students includes all of her students. Later in the year, Charlotte received two more special education students into her class. At that time, the administration offered to remove from her class two other students who were known discipline problems—according to Charlotte, “they are good kids; they just have a problem sitting still.” But Charlotte felt that the change would make it difficult for these students to be successful in school, so she decided to keep them. Charlotte knew that it would mean an increased burden on her, if she kept them, but if she let them go it would be an increased, perhaps unbearable, burden on them. She was unwilling to take that risk, so she kept the students.

The disparate needs of all of her students needs eventually led Charlotte to eliminate whole class instruction from her room during writing time. Because her students had such different needs and whole class instruction left many of them bored or frustrated which caused behavior problems, Charlotte went to all small group instruction. This allows her to meet with all of the students and to do so in settings where she is better able to target their abilities and interests. According to her it is more work, but it is the only thing her class can handle. Charlotte respects the needs and abilities of each student in her approach to classroom instruction and management.

Other evidence of Charlotte’s respect for students is the sense of community that she works to build. Throughout the room, Charlotte has reminders that the class is a special community of which everyone is a part. For example, Charlotte’s class together
wrote a constitution, a declaration, and a bill of rights to outline their responsibilities to themselves and to the classroom community. These are posted prominently in the room.

Perhaps, though, one of the best examples of community building is an incident on November 14. On this day, Charlotte received a new student, Jose, from another class. When he came in, Charlotte stopped the class and asked him to introduce himself. She asked Jose his favorite color, food, and movie. At each point, she made connections between his answers and what she knew about her other students by saying things like “Blue, isn’t that your favorite color also, Julie?” or “Didn’t you say you liked that movie, Jay?” Then, after the new student introduced himself, she asked the rest of the class to introduce themselves and tell one of their favorites. In this way, Charlotte did not just introduce Jose to the class, but she introduced the class to him and laid the groundwork for connections to be made between and among the students.

Charlotte worked hard at balancing her students’ needs and at creating a strong sense of community. However, this work was often done in spite of her teaching context, which she felt was anything but supportive. The largest factor impacting her work is the number of special education students in her room. Charlotte’s school began the year with a long-term substitute in the position of special education teacher. Given Charlotte’s background in special education, her administration decided that the optimal situation would be to simply put the fourth-grade special education students in Charlotte’s room. Charlotte did not receive fewer students than the other teachers; she just had an exceptionally high percentage of special education students in her room. At the beginning of the year, she had no help in her room and eight of her twenty-six students were special education students—most of whom qualified under guidelines for a self-
contained classroom. At the end of the study, Charlotte had ten students out of twenty-seven that were special education students.

In mid-November the school was able to hire a special education teacher. Instead of pulling out the special education students, though, the decision was made to simply have the new special education teacher work in Charlotte’s room. In order to help with Charlotte and the special education teacher work together more productively, Charlotte was sent to special training about how best to provide help to special education students who are included in regular education classes. Ironically, the guidelines given in the training said that no class should ever have more than 25% special education students and that at no time during instruction should all of the special education students be in the room. Instead, there should be a kind of cycling through of the special education students to other sites and other teachers. In Charlotte’s class not only was the percentage well above the guidelines, but also, there were no other arrangements made for the special education students at any time during the day. They were all always in the room.

Following this training, Charlotte struggled to find a balance between what she felt she should be doing based on the training received, and what she believed was best based on her own ideals. Working with the special education teacher, Charlotte set up a rotation system for days one through three and a workshop system for days four through six (Charlotte’s school works on a six day rotation). The rotation system plan comes from the training Charlotte attended and divides the students into thirds. One group meets with her, one with the special education teacher, and one group works independently. The workshop days function much like her class did during the observation described at the beginning. According to Charlotte, “Stations are more like
[traditional] teaching” while conferences allow her to be “working with the students and hearing their work.” In this way, Charlotte finds space within her classroom to teach in ways that she personally finds more beneficial to students.

In the Future: It won’t be as adventurous. Charlotte feels that next year will be calmer for her and she wants to use that break to organize her approach to teaching writing to be more responsive to the needs of the students.

I think next year will feel very dry for me. It won’t be as adventurous everyday, as new for me. For next year I want to be more organized. . . .

But also just maybe even making a more structured timeline. . . . I now know what a fourth-grader needs as a next step. So it’s sort of making that plan. (February 8)

Debbi

As Debbi answers questions and explains concepts to her students, it is easy to believe that her students are all great intellects because she treats everyone that way. Her calm, quiet demeanor suggests a certain respect for everyone around her. Her students flock to her for feedback or just to share a joke, and students—past and present—coming in after school is more the norm than the exception.

During the course of this study, Debbi was asked to be a cooperating teacher for a student teacher from another university. This experience in some ways challenged Debbi’s beliefs about the value of voices and abilities. And in some ways it pushed her to more clearly define what she believed that her students needed in terms of learning and teaching.
Pre-Institute: I used to give a prompt on Monday and collect it on Friday. Debbi teaches in a school that the principal describes as a “writing school” and according to him, Debbi is one of his best teachers. During our initial meeting, he could not stop singing her praises. Yet when Debbi talks about last year, she feels that she did not do enough to help her students. In fact, a part of her is worried that she may have done them a disservice because of what she perceives as a lack of ability or know-how in teaching writing.

Describing her work last year, Debbi says that she faithfully taught writing, but that it was not very effective. On Mondays, she would give her students a prompt to write about. Then, during the rest of the week, the students would proceed through the writing process under Debbi’s care. All of the students worked on the same aspects of their writing at the same time and brought their writing to a conclusion on Fridays when they would turn in their finished pieces. The lesson material for her lessons came from Teaching the Qualities of Writing by JoAnn Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher (2000), known proponents of the process approach to teaching writing. Still, she used the lessons in the order they appeared in the book with little thought about which lesson would be best or what order the lessons would come in. She described the resulting student writing as stiff.

Institute: The Institute was the first time I felt part of something. Debbi was one of the quieter participants in the Institute. In fact, for awhile the directors and facilitators were concerned that her voice was not being heard. It did not take long to realize that, though Debbi may be quiet, she was not going to be silent. She would speak up when
issues were important enough and her comments were on the mark and made for a richer discussion.

Debbi came to Institute "because writing is my favorite subject to teach. I am always looking for ways to improve my techniques. . . My goals are to acquire new ways to motivate children to write and to become a stronger writer myself. I would also like to meet more teachers who share my passion for writing and be able to collaborate with them" (Application).

From the beginning, her writing talent is obvious as she shares a fictional letter that she wrote to an actual ex-boyfriend, who, at least reportedly, had mob connections. This letter was one in a series that she envisioned forming a "Dear John" book. Throughout the semester she continued to write pieces that uncovered new parts of her to us. Similarly, she spent the Institute really grappling with issues around her teaching. For example, her teaching demonstration, which focused on methods to teach students to ask questions that would direct their learning has become a central part of her teaching day.

Debbi looks on her experience in the Institute as a first for her. "It was really nice for me to feel part of something. . . I've never really felt a part of anything and to me the Institute was the first time I felt a part of something that—I really did. I loved coming to class in the morning. This was the first time I felt a part of something. . . I think that's carrying over in my class" (February 8).

Post-Institute: I Understand Writing is an On-going Process. This year, Debbi has been blessed with, in her words, "a dream class." She had many of these students a couple of years ago when she was teaching a different grade level, and they come to her
well-versed in the writing process, and ready to write. In fact, she says that they began writing the first day and rarely stopped at all. Many of her fifth-graders are writing chapter books. Because her students are so exceptional she wonders sometimes whether how much her improvement as a teacher of writing is her and how much is her students’ own abilities and enthusiasm. Still, Debbi works hard to be the best teacher she can be.

Because of the skills her students had when they came to her class and their enthusiasm for writing, Debbi chose to focus her efforts this year on helping her students learn to revise their work. To do this, Debbi taught some strategies for revision, but mostly she seems to stress to the students an attitude of revision. She wants them to literally see their work anew from different perspectives. She works towards this goal in several ways. She provides structured opportunities for her students to receive feedback—including suggestions for improvement, helps her students see themselves as capable of better work by providing them with models of writing from herself and published authors, and pushes them to understand that the pieces she is sharing with them did not simply spring out of someone’s brain this way, but have been carefully crafted—something they are capable of as well. Furthermore, in Debbi’s classes these strategies lead the students to recognize the power and possibility of their own voices.

Sharing is a large part of Debbi’s class—both informally and formally. For example, Debbi has instituted “Quiet Corners.” This refers to the fact that some or perhaps all, depending on the day, of the corners in Debbi’s room are designated Quiet Corners. These corners, then, are available for any small group of students to use as a place to quietly confer and/or share their writing. Additionally, many of Debbi’s students will quietly ask a neighbor a question about a piece they are working on and simply slide...
the piece to the other person. In both ways, students are empowered to seek out and find help and an audience with their peers.

Debbi has structured her sharing time to push students to see their work in new ways and discover ways to improve their texts. On September 15 for example, Debbi implemented peer response groups, based loosely on the peer response groups from the Summer Institute. Within these groups, the students were to listen to the author read, and then, following the same pattern as their whole class shares, the listeners were to write a note to the author that included a compliment, a question, and a suggestion—in that order. By asking for a suggestion from the respondents the implicit message is that authors may change their piece—even if they had thought it was done. Therefore, these response groups as well as the whole group sharing are formal instances that Debbi has built into her class to help her students see their work as always in progress.

Debbi also uses professional models of writing and her own writing in ways that cause students to see themselves as capable of the same type of work that more experienced writers do. For examples, on January 22, Debbi taught her students about writing in the first person from a character’s viewpoint by modeling using excerpts from the writings of Roald Dahl and Richard Peck. While this practice does not necessarily equate to helping students see their potential, Debbi’s words pushed the students in that direction. Debbi begins the class by saying that today they are going to work on writing stories in first person. After having the students arrive at the idea that writing in the first person means that the author uses words like I, me, and we, she reads a selection from Boy by Roald Dahl and asks the students to listen for these words. When Debbi is sure that the students understand the concept, she says, “We have already done this. We have
written a number of our own stories from our point of view. Today, we are going to write someone else’s story but in the first person like these authors did’’ (italics added). By adding that last phrase, Debbi emphasizes that the students can do the work authors do.

However, she didn’t simply help students see that they could write like authors. She helped them see that authors worked at their craft—and that she worked at her craft. After giving them the assignment above, Debbi had her students help her write a first person story from her shoe’s perspective. Debbi writes the first two sentences stressing that she does not want to reveal that it is her shoe talking. Then, she asks if anyone can come up with a good sentence to follow that one. After a suggestion that she takes, Debbi asks if now would be a good time to reveal the shoe’s ‘identity.’ Some students think so, others disagree. After a vote, Debbi writes a sentence that makes it clear she is talking as a shoe. Following this sentence, Debbi starts to write another sentence when a student calls out one she likes better. Debbi quickly erases the sentence she had started and writes the student’s suggestion commenting, “Oooh. That’s good. I like that.” By modeling the decisions that a writer makes during writing and stressing that there are multiple ways to craft a story, Debbi’s students are shown that good writing is carefully crafted and sometimes even changed. Debbi’s teaching lets them know they are capable of doing the work of professional writers but that it takes careful work and a willingness to change and revise.

While she is teaching students about revision, Debbi also teaches them the importance and power of their own ideas and voices. The lesson above, where Debbi uses a student’s suggestion instead of the sentence she had originally come up with is one example. Another example comes during small group peer response time. Debbi
provides students with scratch paper to write their comments on. This, she tells them, allows, "the reader to save it and come back to it later.” The comments and suggestions the students make have a value that is worthy of some permanence.

One-on-one conferences with students are another way Debbi stresses the value of the students’ ideas and plans. Most days, Debbi spends some time conferencing with students. On September 26, the students were asked to go back to a piece they had already written and make sure it had all of the elements of a story that the class had just discussed. They were to try and add details to make these elements stronger. As the class began to work, Debbi asked if anyone wanted to conference with her or her student teacher. Several students raised their hands and both Debbi and Mr. B, the student teacher, chose a student to work with. When the boy got to the back table, Debbi asked, “Why do you want me to read this?” He responded that he thought it was funny and would like to make it funnier. At this point, Debbi read the piece and asked several questions that focused on the content of the story—not specifically on the devices, although each question is in essence doing that. After listening to his answers and asking a couple of follow-up questions, Debbi made one suggestion in line with his request and asked him, “So, what are you going to do now?” This question lays the decision making power at the student’s feet and he is free to determine his next course of action with this piece.

The respect Debbi gives her students is not visible solely in her conferences with them. She invites them into the class decision-making and problem solving. After the class used response groups for the first time, Debbi asked the class if there were any concerns or problems. It was brought up that the room was so noisy during the process
that it was difficult for the groups to function efficiently. Then, Debbi said, “This is all new to me so having your input is very important and helpful to me. What do you think we should do to address the noise level?” Then, Debbi took out a piece of paper and wrote down the students suggestions. After several solutions were offered, Debbi said, “Thank you for your suggestions. I already see a couple that I think will be extremely helpful.” Debbi did not abdicate her role as decision-maker. This was not a decision she was willing to let the students make; however, she did provide a real, meaningful opportunity for students to all have a voice in the course of the class structure.

Debbi’s student teacher pushed her to more clearly delineate what she wanted for her students and to stand up for them when they were not receiving what they needed. When Debbi learned that she would be assigned a student teacher, she had mixed feelings. Then, when he got there she felt he was not really trying to learn to be a better teacher. She said that when she provided him feedback or even directly told him that he needed to do something, he would listen but not respond to what was said. According to her, Mr. B.’s university supervisor had similar experiences. As a result, Debbi struggled to fulfill what she felt was her obligation to him to provide an opportunity for him to practice his teaching skills in a mentored situation while at the same time ensuring that her students were getting what they needed.

At times, Debbi felt she had to step in for the good of her students. Debbi indicated that she had struggled with the idea of taking over on occasion. “For a long time, I wouldn’t jump in and say things, but now I do when it’s important” (November 8). In one case, Debbi was concerned about Mr. B.’s work with the low achieving small groups in math and writing. After modeling how to work with these groups, co-teaching
a few breakout sessions with him, observing Mr. B. work with these students, and conferencing with him about his efforts, Debbi eventually stepped back in as the primary teacher in these settings. For the rest of the time Mr. B. was in her room, Debbi and he co-taught the low achieving groups in both math and writing because she felt he was teaching “above them” and they were falling farther behind as a result.

Mr. B. was not the only external factor Debbi faced as she tried to change her teaching practice and help her students grasp their own power as writers, thinkers, and people. The administration carried out several practices, which Debbi felt did not help her students. The most noticeable revolved around the writing proficiency test given in mid-January. Beginning in early November, Debbi’s class began to have proficiency preparation lessons. These lessons consisted of school-wide writing prompts given on Mondays. Then, in a pattern much like the one Nikki went through, Debbi’s students marched through one piece of writing after another. On January 22, the Monday after the proficiency test, Debbi taught a mini-lesson to the students and ended with an idea for the students to write about. Right after telling the students to work on their writing, one boy asked Debbi if the class was going to take this writing prompt “through the process this week.” Debbi said no and, a moment later, interrupted the class to stress that if this idea wasn’t working for them, they could choose another idea or an earlier piece of writing to work on. In reflecting on where this question came from, Debbi attributed it to the proficiency preparation the school had been engaged in for so long. She concluded that the proficiency preparation and test had made her students, “lose passion and creativity. They don’t enjoy writing as much now as they did at the beginning of the year. I think they saw it as more of a chore.”
Three days later, Debbi was still struggling with getting her students to write for their own purposes and audiences about their own ideas. “I really just want them to try and get them back into the workshop way of life. You know, being creative and writing for the love of it” (January 25). Debbi was working hard to ensure that her class did not have any of the rigidity of the writing proficiency. Her lessons were focused on the craft of writing and on idea generation. Two weeks later, at the final interview, Debbi indicated that she felt she had made some progress in getting her students back to where they were before the proficiency test, but that it would take more time to restore their love of writing.

In the end, Debbi has come to see herself as a good teacher of writing and truly values the power of her voice and that of her students’ voices. She works hard in formal and informal ways to help her students recognize their own ability to work with and change their text and the power and value of their ideas and decisions. This is work that she strives to do in spite of pressures from outside of her classroom.

*In the Future:* *I would like to develop more of the love for writing.* When asked what her goals were for the future, Debbi spoke about incorporating more strategies from the Institute and in increasing her students’ love of writing.

“I plan to take more ideas from the Institute and implement them in my writing class. I really would like to start doing the "silent response." I also need to do more of the response group. I think I will have scheduled days for that, so it is not so loud in my class. Those are the two biggest ones. . . I would like to develop more of the love for writing, so they are
simply writing because they feel like it. I am not quite sure how I will do that, but I would like to see more enjoyment of writing” (February 8).

Ann

Ann is unique. There is no way around it—Ann is unique. Her look changes everyday. Some days, she has the highly styled coiffed hair of a 1940’s pin-up along with clothes to match. Other days, she is a rock-a-billy princess complete with skull-and-crossbones printed shirt. On yet other days, she is a professional business woman in a stiff, business suit. Regardless of the persona, however, Ann is always herself—happy, caring, outspoken, funny.

Having taught for six years in Florida and Nevada, Ann is now at a vocational magnet high school in the South part of the Valley. Here she teaches Junior and Senior English to students who have already chosen a career to prepare for, paths that include everything from nursing to the culinary arts, construction to computer graphics. The resulting class has students in scrubs and others who just finished making baked goods that frequently will end up in the teachers’ lounge and part of Ann’s lunch. Such diversity is fitting for Ann. Her varied looks blend in, and what most stands out is her 1,000 watt smile.

Pre-Institute: I didn’t do much writing. Previous to coming to the Institute, Ann approached her English classes in a fairly traditional way. She had her students read stories from a textbook, complete fairly simple writing assignment that were fairly removed from most of the rest of her class, and taught grammar lessons that consisted mostly of fill-in-the-blanks type activities. Even in this approach, though, there seems to have been some pulling away from strict traditional approaches. For example, Ann has
used portfolios in the past to assess student writing. The portfolios included two or three pieces all of Ann’s choosing and none of the pieces had gone through a peer revision process of any type. According to her, the writing was uninspired and did little to excite Ann about what was going on in her class. She knew that a change was needed.

Still, these seeds of more progressive approaches to teaching included the ways in which she interacted with students and the goals she had for them. She reportedly has always had an ability to see students as individuals of worth regardless of their physical appearance. Also, Ann was a writer long before she came to the Institute. She was a veteran of open mic nights at various hot spots both here and in Florida, her previous home. She wrote both poetry and prose extensively and quite capably. She wanted her students to have the same type of feelings towards writing as she did, but they weren’t getting that from her class. Hence, her application to the Institute.

_Institute: SNWP gave me follow through._ In the institute, Ann’s ability to write quickly captivated her peers. Whether she was writing about meeting a man with one arm in a bar or misspelling the word “fabulous” in the school spelling bee, her stories warmed hearts and brought tears of laughter to the eyes of her audience. Ann wrote often and loved to share.

From a professional standpoint, Ann wanted to attend the Institute because she felt she needed a better understanding. “I need to develop a new skill, teaching students the skill of writing. . . My main goal is to improve the quality of writing for every student that sits in my classroom” (Application). As a result, during the Institute Ann studied and worked hard at developing her craft. Her teaching demonstration centered on creative revision techniques that she could use in her teaching. She found this material so
valuable that she has been lobbying to have a platform in her school to share it with her colleagues at Vo-Tech.

When she considered how the Institute impacted her she spoke of courage—the courage to teach in ways that she found meaningful. It also did more. "I think also SNWP gave me follow through—taught me that I have to follow through with something. It might not be the next day, but even if it's not going the way I planned, I need to keep going until I figure out how to make it the way I planned. You know change it around as I go" (February 8). SNWP set the stage for Ann’s teaching by giving her courage and determination.

Post-Institute: I wanted to give student ownership to writing. Based on her comments, Ann entered the school year after the Institute committed to helping her students see themselves differently. She said that her goal for this year was for her students “to leave my class saying they are writers, not just students” (September 14).

Her first step was a simple one. She wanted her students to write and to write for enjoyment on topics of their own choosing. Her school had designated Tuesdays as Silent Sustained Reading times, a common practice in the district. Ann designated Thursdays as Silent Sustained Writing (SSW) times. The format of these classes followed a fairly established pattern. For example, the first day of SSW brought four prompts about the artifacts that they had recently used to introduce themselves to the class or “if the muse [did] not speak to [them],” they were free to choose another topic to write about. Along with these prompts was a hint to focus on sentence construction in their writings. This caveat was related to the lesson given that day on simple, complex, and compound sentences. The students then spent the rest of class writing.
Along with the SSW time, Ann introduced peer responses into her classroom procedures. While this element helped the quality of the papers, Ann said that another reason for it is that it helped her students see their writing as having an audience that was not limited to her. Also, as part of this process, Ann created a form for the students to use as they completed their peer response groups. At the bottom of the form, was a section they were to use to outline their proposed next steps. This helped her build into her system a re-enforcer for the idea of revision. It helped underscore the idea that the students’ writing was something they were in control of and could change.

Another emphasis of Ann’s work this year as a teacher involves the assignments she made. Ann made a conscious choice to bring in her students’ perspectives and talents. This was done in two ways—bringing student culture into the classroom and providing multiple avenues to demonstrate learning and achievement.

The best example of Ann’s efforts to bring student culture into the classroom was her CD project. This was an extensive project that lasted almost two months and was made up of multiple parts. The project began with the students identifying a song whose lyrics spoke to them about themselves—a song in which they could ‘see’ themselves. These lyrics were brought in and shared. Then, students were asked to write their own song lyrics that told about themselves. The second part of the project was designed to review the elements of literature (character, theme, plot, setting, conflict, point of view). In groups of three, the students were to choose songs for a CD. The lyrics of each song were to highlight a different element of literature. The students were then to type the lyrics and put them into a CD jacket of their own making. The only real guideline was that all the lyrics had to be school appropriate. In introducing this rule, Ann discussed
with the students why that rule needed to be there. The students did not rebel and even
spent some time talking of ways to find school-appropriate versions of their favorite
songs.

According to Ann, this project was successful for a number of reasons. It helped
the students understand that writers used the elements of literature to create songs the
students liked. It also required the students to think more deeply about the elements
themselves. They had to proactively look for what they needed. Most importantly,
though, it brought something of the students inside the classroom. Ann commented that
the students were “totally into the CD project” (October 5). Ann also felt that it led the
students into the writing and the attitudes towards writing that she was after.

Another way in which Ann built on the students’ identities and strengths was her
use of layered curriculum. Layered curriculum, as described by Ann, is an approach to
classroom organization where the teacher identifies a series of projects that are worthy of
receiving a C, a series of projects that are worthy of a B, and a series of projects that are
worthy of an A. Then, time is devoted to the students completing C level projects, then B
level projects, and finally A level projects. Within each level, there are multiple choices
of projects that are designed to approach the concepts being taught from a variety of
perspectives. For example, on one A level project list, Ann gave the students the option
of creating a computer graphics montage, a diorama, a powerpoint, a paper, or a character
in a skit. By giving such choices, Ann felt that she was providing every student with a
way to demonstrate their learning in ways that built on and highlighted their strengths.
Furthermore, within each potential project, Ann gave the students a significant amount of
leeway, which resulted in even greater diversity of products.
By providing these varied opportunities, Ann hopes to help her students develop a love of learning that transcends and even minimizes the importance of schooling and grades. The idea is that by providing a place for students to bring in parts of themselves—in ways that are not viewed as strictly the domain of school (video and computer literacy, for example), students begin to see themselves more as constructors of knowledge and less as consumers of knowledge.

Interestingly, Ann’s efforts at change were met with little official resistance. Her administration allowed Ann a great deal of autonomy in how she approached her classes so when questioned about the pressures against change during our interviews, Ann never discussed her administration or school structure as a significant factor. However, there was resistance from the students’ own inability to function appropriately in these settings as well as some opposition from her teaching colleagues.

The way in which the students hindered her work in doing all that she wanted was more of a function of their inability to draw a line between what was appropriate and not than a function of their displeasure with what was going on. In fact, as we will see later, the students were among the greatest supporters for Ann in her efforts to change.

Early in the year, Ann did an activity where she put three to four foot long swatches of butcher paper on the walls. Each strip of butcher paper (there were five in all) had a label such as ‘things that annoy me’ or ‘things I am good at.’ In groups, students would circulate around the room spending a couple of minutes at each station. During this time, they were to add as many new topics as they could that fell under the category listed. Then, at the end of the day, Ann took down the sheets and had her aide type up the lists which were then printed and passed out to all of the students for
inclusion in their notebooks. The idea was to provide the students with a list of potential writing topics and to emphasize their ability to come up with valuable ideas on their own.

However, during the period before the observation on this day, one group of students wrote some racist comments on one of the sheets, while another group wrote inappropriate things about police officers. As soon as she noticed, Ann stopped the activity. She talked with her students about why the activity was stopped and asked them to write her a letter explaining what they thought of what had happened and why it was inappropriate.

In talking with Ann later, she said that she knew who had written the racist comments—two boys who had espoused those views in the beginning of the year. At the time Ann had spoken to them about it and until this day, nothing more had been said or shared. In the meantime, Ann had consciously tried to structure opportunities for these boys to broaden their views. She purposefully brought in readings that dealt with issues from a number of different perspectives including that of people of different racial backgrounds and that presented the contributions of peoples of different backgrounds. Also, she physically arranged the class and structured activities so that these boys would have to sit by and work with people from various racial backgrounds. Still, it had not been working very well, it appeared. “I don’t know what else to do. I can’t just quit letting my students speak up, but these boys make it difficult to do that.” (September 28).

In the end, she would keep doing what she had been doing and hoping for better results. Still, the views were offensive enough that, as her comment indicated, Ann felt pressure to avoid her planned approach.
The staff was another source of resistance to change. While Ann said that no one spoke up in front of her, she sensed that some teachers wondered, “What I’m doing? And why?” (October 19). This situation was exacerbated as the teachers met to plan common lesson plans for the first days of school. While Ann advocated for writing time and space, the other teachers balked. In the end, the plans revolved around readings and exercises from the textbook. Ann took these plans with a grain of salt. She changed them where she felt she could get away with it and also accepted the fact that these plans only covered the first few weeks of school after which she could return to what she believed was right.

When asked about her reaction to this event, she said the students were her main source of confidence for continuing. “It’s the students really. They come up to me all the time and ask to keep doing what we are doing. They love it.” (October 19). So, the students’ desire and energy—something that Ann had not seen previously—was a major factor in her resolve to keep pushing what she had started. She also talked about the writing that students were doing. She mentioned on several occasions being impressed with the quality of work the students were doing and that they seemed to be enjoying it. Often, when asked how she felt her class had gone, she responded with answers such as “excellent—better than excellent” (November 2).

In the Future: I want to start moving them into peer conferencing. Ann’s teaching has changed a great deal since the year before the Institute, but she is not content to let it ride. She has plans to implement new elements in the hopes that these will push her students to even better writing.
I want to keep with what I am doing no matter what. Stick with the creative and the writing... and the peer response once a week. I think I want to start moving them into peer conferencing not just peer response sheets but actually sitting with two or three people reading each others pieces... and then I also want to do more self-evaluation. (February 8)

Vanessa

In my mind, Vanessa’s most defining characteristic is her courage. At the beginning of the summer institute, Vanessa’s cancer was in remission; however, during the third week of the institute, Vanessa was admitted to the hospital again. The cancer had returned. Vanessa did not let this stop her attendance in the Institute. Nor did she let chemo or the accompanying avalanche of side effects slow her down during the school year. During almost the entire time of this study, Vanessa missed one out of every three weeks in school to receive chemotherapy. In addition, the medicine she took to go along with the chemo caused her to lose feeling in her fingers and toes. As a result, for a time it was difficult to enter grades, type lesson plans, or complete most of the clerical work associated with teaching. After winter break and the end of her chemo, her new medication caused her to have short-term memory loss and a lack of mental focus. Through all of this, she fought on.

However, to focus only on Vanessa’s illness would be an injustice. Vanessa is a great teacher. She cares passionately about her students and their learning. She teaches at the top performing school (academically speaking) in Carson County School District. As a result, most students come from families that expect them to be worthy of Ivy League admissions. Vanessa takes this challenge seriously and pushes her students to
live up to those expectations both in terms of quality and quantity of work. Also, Vanessa expects her students to recognize and be able to explain that others have different viewpoints, and to be able to empathize with those viewpoints and the struggles of others so that her students begin to see themselves as capable of working for change.

**Pre-Institute: I want to do something different.** In her time before the institute, Vanessa viewed herself as much an academician as a teacher. Her school has the reputation of being full of straight A students. According to her, this meant that the students were technically proficient; on the other hand, Vanessa felt that the students failed often to question what they were learning and to elaborate with thoughts of their own. Indeed, the parents of her students do have very high expectations of their students and, by extension, their students' school. Falling in line with this viewpoint, Vanessa was a stickler for punctuation and grammar. She required her students to spend a lot of time engaged in academic writing. Her biggest worry was teaching her students to move to a more scholarly writing focus in their work.

As a result of this emphasis, Vanessa said that she kept the focus of student writing on expository writing. Students were expected to use their writing to demonstrate their knowledge and ability to perform. All writing was extensively graded and turned back to the students, but seldom revisited in a substantial way. Sharing did not really play into the class. According to her, Vanessa's students were sometimes successful in producing scholarly writing, but they were unable to balance the personal voice and the scholarly one—the result was writing that was often well below what Vanessa wanted or expected.
The Institute: I was so proud to be part of it. Vanessa came to the Institute to address her teaching. She felt that a focus on mechanics was necessary but "for me [her class] doesn't seem to feel 'fun' until fourth quarter when students do more freewriting without prompts." Vanessa came to the Institute to find ways to make her class less "teacher-centered" (Application).

In the Institute, Vanessa quickly became a leader. Some of the phrases and ideas from the Institute that caught on and became most enduring came from her. On the first day as the group was discussing norms Vanessa said that everyone needed to have "big ears" meaning that everyone needed to listen to understand what other people were saying. This phrase and idea quickly caught on and was heard repeatedly throughout the institute. In fact, two of the other teachers in the study, used this phrase while talking to their students about how to be a part of a peer group.

In speaking of the Institute, Vanessa felt like she had found a group she could be part of. "I think the Institute was a breath of fresh air. It's my fifth year of teaching and for five years I felt like I was the zebra in a herd of horses, and what the institute did was I found all these other people that were just as, um, curious as I was. You know that okay this is the way they say we have to teach it but it's not working and... all of a sudden I met a group that was like "well, I don't do it that way. I do it this way." Because that's how I was doing it, but I was doing it in secret and I wouldn't tell anyone... I met the people like that at the Institute" (February 8).

Post-Institute: It completely changed everything I feel about education. Of all the teachers, Vanessa was the most vocal about the impact of the Institute on her teaching and especially about her beliefs about herself as a teacher. Following the first
observation, Vanessa offered the following summation of her experience in the institute.

"It completely changed everything I feel about education. It gave me the freedom to

 teach how and what I believe." Vanessa believes teaching should be is intellectually

 rigorous, and she embraces writing as a way to think and a way to be. She pushes her

 students to take up and see through the eyes of other people especially oppressed or

 marginalized peoples. Vanessa believes that teaching should be political because we live

 in a political world and, as a result, current events are often brought up and discussed

 through multiple lenses.

 Vanessa’s classes are the definition of “multi-genre work”. Two days a week,

 Vanessa teaches on a block schedule. On these days, she has her students for 85 minutes.

 A typical lesson might include silent writing time, small and large group work, a

 streaming video about the day’s topic, a look at resources on the internet, class

 discussion, and music. Her own description of her class is that it is a “machine gun of

 information.”

 An example of this approach is Vanessa’s American Literature class on

 September 21. The class started with the students writing a response to the famous

 picture of the soldiers raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Then, Vanessa ‘told’ the story of Ira

 Hayes, one of the men in the photo and a Native American, by reading to the students the

 words of a Johnny Cash song. Immediately, afterwards, she played the song itself. The

 students at this point wrote again—this time about their reactions to what they have just

 learned. This was followed by her reading another of Cash’s songs as poetry. This song

 told of the Native Americans’ expulsion from their lands. Then, she simply read to the

 students a time line of dates around the suffrage movement—Native Americans were
given the right to vote after every other minority group in America including African Americans and after the voting age was dropped to 18. At this point, she asked the students to write “the things you feel most passionate about. How do you react to this?” Following this, the class watched a video that Vanessa streamed from the vault at KLVX, the school owned public television station, and she told the students to jot down one word ideas as they come to them. Finally, the students wrote down one high point and one low point of what they learned in class. These last comments were shared by the students on a volunteer basis—almost every student volunteered. The class was dismissed.

This class period was not unusual in the times that I observed Vanessa working—neither in terms of the sheer volume of activities, ways information was presented, or amount of writing. Vanessa is, as could be guessed, quite technologically literate and she understands that her students are fluent in literacies that she is only vaguely aware of. As a result, she pushes herself to learn and use these new technologies, but she also pushes her students to access them and use them in their own work by setting up e-mail chats with students during her times away from school for treatment and by providing students with other forms of acceptable work that involve technologies.

For Vanessa, writing is a way to think, and she treats it as such with her students. On three occasions during observations, Vanessa stopped a discussion because she said her students needed to think a little deeper about something so she had them write. Once in a class on Homer’s Odyssey, Vanessa wanted them to see how Odysseus’ journey would apply to their lives. On another occasion Vanessa told her students to take out some paper because “we need to do some thinking.” At this point, Vanessa wrote with her students. Later, Vanessa discussed with the students what the term witch hunt meant
and its origins. Then, she invited them to “think on some paper” as they prepared to
discuss witch hunts going on in today’s world. In each of these cases, the writing did
serve as a way to think. It is as if Vanessa has created a space where writing has less to
do with pencil and paper and more to do with thoughts and ideas.

Writing, though, is not simply a way to think more deeply about something; for
Vanessa, writing is also a way of being. Based on her experience in the writing project,
Vanessa this year allotted the first ten or fifteen minutes of each class period as writing
time. Often, Vanessa started with a prompt or a mini-lesson, but sometimes it was simply
a time for the students to write. At the end of each week, Vanessa asked her students to
turn in a piece of writing that was simply a creative endeavor.

Also, Vanessa began to use personal writing as a way to increase and improve
scholarly writing. For example, at one point Vanessa asked her students to write an ‘I
am’ poem using a template she provided. Then, the students were given the opportunity
to share their poems. It was a powerful time for the students. In the class period
observed, after the bell rang, the students simply sat for a couple of seconds as if they
were afraid that movement would break the spell of what they had heard. Based on this
experience, Vanessa later asked the students to write ‘I Am’ poems for a Native
American that they learned about—either a tribe or an individual. In this way, Vanessa
began to use the students’ personal experiences to increase the depth of their scholarly
work.

Vanessa drew on this connection between the personal and the academic again
when she assigned her students to write a paper on *The Scarlet Letter*. Before reading the
novel, Vanessa had introduced the class to the six Socratic Questions (taken from
Socrates’ Café by Christopher Phillips). These questions included inquiries such as ‘what is piety?’ and ‘what is goodness?’ In the paper, then, the students were required to define the concept from their own experiences. Using this definition the students then were to apply the question to one of the characters in The Scarlet Letter and argue whether the person did or did not fit the definition given. This position was compared and contrasted with what Hawthorne would say. Vanessa felt that by synthesizing the personal with the academic, the students’ writing was more powerful and better crafted.

Throughout the study, Vanessa pushed her students to take on the perspectives of others as a way of helping the students understand that the world is not perfect, but they can have an impact. In her discussion of the Native Americans, Vanessa pointed out the efforts of many people to bring about greater equity for these peoples. She asked her students to think like Dimmesdale and like Hester; she pushed them to see Song of Myself from Whitman’s perspective as a historical and cultural being; she invited them to consider why Odysseus might be so important to Ancient civilizations. In all of these lessons, she was developing academic rigor along with a more compassionate, humane view of schooling and students.

Furthermore, Vanessa understands that for something to be powerful it must start by being personal. As a result, she brought in examples that revolved around topics students are interested in. During the discussion on witch hunts, the class talked about being of Middle Eastern descent (or appearing to be) in today’s world. On another day, Vanessa shared with them a piece of legislation to be presented in Nevada that would make it illegal for dropouts to have a drivers’ license until they were 18. During a different class, Vanessa discussed with the students a recent local law that made it illegal
to feed homeless people or to sleep within 100 feet of excrement. In each case, the students shared vocal opinions and expressed concern. Vanessa then used these examples as ways to enter broader topics about being marginalized and un(der)represented in today’s society.

All of these efforts, though, were not met without some obstacles, and on occasion Vanessa felt a need to make concessions. For example, because of her repeated absences and the extra class time it took to engage in the writing and discussing Vanessa values, she fell behind the other American Literature teacher. Because the school uses common assessments and stresses that all teachers be at the same place in the curriculum, Vanessa felt pressure to catch up to the other teachers. So, for a few weeks, Vanessa taught “from the book a little more.” By this she means that her students read some pieces from the book and answer questions at the end of the chapter. Vanessa does not consider this the best approach to teaching, but it is the price she and her class pay for having more meaningful and deeper experiences during the rest of the semester.

For Vanessa, the most surprising source of obstacles that she encountered are the parents themselves. During the October 9 observation, Vanessa reported that she was having an inordinate amount of parent teacher conferences this year because she was asking her students to write “personal, non-school” things and because she was asking students to do less regurgitation of information and more thinking, synthesizing, evaluating, and applying. She was preparing to go to another one that day after school. While explaining this, Vanessa asked me read a piece of student writing. Vanessa felt that the piece, a well-crafted poem in the style of Anne Bradstreet, and others like it should be proof enough of what she is doing. She reported that she often took student
work like this to the conferences. Also, Vanessa reported using articles on business and
the 21st Century workplace as support for her approach.

Prior to the Institute, Vanessa felt that she could not teach in ways that she
believed were most beneficial to her students because of the pressures she perceived as
coming from her administration, school culture, and department. Looking around her
Vanessa saw many teachers approaching their subject matter in very traditional ways and
receiving good evaluations for it. As a result, she felt that was the type of teaching
valued in her school and the type she needed to take up. However, the Institute gave her
the courage to teach “how and what [she] believes” (September 21). The Institute and the
many people she encountered there helped Vanessa see the power of her own convictions
in ways that enabled her to rely on those beliefs as a counter argument to the pressures
faced from traditional ideas of schools and schooling.

In the end, then, Vanessa pushes her students to be rigorous and scholarly in their
work. She has them write as a way of deepening their thinking and as a way of
broadening their horizons. She views writing as a way to humanize schooling and
learning. Indeed for Vanessa, schooling, teaching, and learning are only truly powerful
as they are humanized.

In the Future: Just kind of weeding it out. While Vanessa is excited by what she
has been able to do this year, she is also concerned about the effects of this much work on
her students. As a result, her future plans call for a more streamlined approach.

I think I want to work on pacing next year. One I like that it was so raw—
that you have all this passion. You come out of the institute [and] you
just hit it running, but on the other side I also generated a lot of work for
[the students] that maybe I can cut down on... maybe they write a piece once every two week instead of every week, but I’m still talking with that idea because until I know what their results are... it will be interesting to sit down and reflect myself on what worked, what didn’t work, what got the biggest bang for the buck. So they don’t have to do all five of these assignments to get what I want so it’s just kind of weeding it out. (February 8)

Cross-Case Analysis

The stated purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which teachers change their teaching (specifically of writing) to more democratic approaches, how one model of professional development (SNWP’s Summer Institute) facilitates these changes, and what obstacles and supports teachers draw on as they make these changes. From the narratives told of each individual teacher’s work during the course of the study, four themes centered on these purposes were constructed. They are Writing Pedagogy, Democratic Classrooms, Influence of the Writing Project, and Obstacles and Supports to Changing Practices.

These themes were constructed by examining the observation records and the interview transcripts from the case studies. As potential themes were identified, multiple observations were examined to see if the theme would bear up under the weight of the data. Additionally, as time passed, the data within each theme was examined through different lenses. The result is a picture of the change one group of teachers undertook, how they understood what they were doing, and what eased or blocked that change.
Writing Pedagogy

This section is the most obviously direct result of this study. How do these teachers teach writing? How, if at all, is their teaching different than past approaches? How do we know the Institute impacted these practices?

Writing, and by extension, the ways in which writing is taught are vitally important in a democracy. Since writing is a primary means to sharing and exchanging ideas, whether students have been aided in developing or not the necessary skills and attitudes towards writing is vital to the students' abilities to function meaningfully in a democracy. The teaching of writing should not only help the students develop the skills necessary to use Standard English (the overarching dominant discourse in the United States) but also positive attitudes towards their own discourse and their ability to use multiple discourses.

The Institute advocates a writing process approach to teaching writing. The specifics of what makes-up process approach teaching are highly debated (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000). Still, an examination of the professional literature on the writing workshop approach, the most widely-used iteration of the process approach, offers some insight into typical elements and structures found in a process approach classroom. Writing workshop approaches are characterized by such structures as mini-lessons; one-on-one conferences between student and teacher; peer response structures; time to write; student choice of topic, genre, progress, and audience; and opportunities to publish. From the individual stories, it is apparent that many of these structures are present in their classrooms and represent significant changes in practice.
Still, not all of the teachers in this study use these elements or structures. This brings up several questions. Is the presence of these structure in and of themselves proof positive of a change? Are these teachers—even the ones missing parts—using a process approach? Or are they simply doing what they have always done and there just happens to be overlap? Has participation in the Institute really affected their teaching of writing?

Atwell's (1998) description of the process approach to teaching writing seems to stress that this approach is not so much about a set of practices as it is about a way of viewing writing, students, and learning. Graves' (1983) classic work on the process approach takes a similar approach. The process approach to teaching writing is an attitude and belief about teaching writing more than it is a set of practices. Two ways of examining teacher beliefs in this regard are to examine their goals for instruction and their decision-making in relation to teaching practices (Kennedy, 1998; Grossman, 1990)

*Goals for Writing Instruction.* The way in which writing is viewed can alter dramatically how it is taught and for what purposes (Honeycutt & Pritchard, 2006; Pathey-Chavez, Matsumura, & Valdes, 2004). Following the institute, the teachers in this study all entered their rooms committed to helping their students not only be able to use writing proficiently in a number of ways but also to enjoy the process. When asked about their goals for writing instruction or when these areas were approached in conversation, the most commonly heard answers involved “giving the students the freedom to write,” (Vanessa) “helping students be creative in their writing,” (Debbi) and “sparking a passion for writing in their students” (Nikki). Ann’s goal goes beyond the students simply enjoying the act of writing; she said that when students leave
her room, she wants them “to leave saying ‘I am a writer,’ not just a student” (September 14).

Charlotte’s work with her autistic students is an example of how these goals find actions in the classroom. Charlotte spends a considerable amount of time helping Stephan and Paul tell their stories in ways that make the stories available to the rest of the class. On a regular basis, Charlotte invites one of the boys to her back table where she patiently helps him get his story down on paper in a standard form. Doing so has multiple goals. The boys have a chance to “tell their story” (November 14), and they get “to be proud of what they have done” (November 14). Charlotte works hard to make sure that these boys—and all of her students—have experiences with writing that brings them back for more.

These goals seem in line with what the literature suggests the goal of this type of approach should be. Murray (1985) states, “Teachers should write first of all because it is fun. It is a satisfying human activity that extends both the brain and the soul” (p. 73). Romano (1987) refers to this as “cutting them loose” and says that the most important role a teacher can fulfill is “to switch on our students’ dynamos and keep them in good running order” (p. 8). This means that teachers have as much responsibility to get students to see writing as enjoyable as they do of teaching certain skills. According to Fletcher & Portalupi (2001), the job of a process approach teacher is “fostering a love for writing” (p. 23).

The teachers in this study took seriously not only the goal of instilling a love of writing, but also the goal of improving writing skills. The teachers in this study seemed to feel that the way to improve a student’s writing was to improve the student’s attitude
towards writing. "I ask myself does a musician become a good musician because he knows the notes or because he has a passion for playing so invariably he’s going to play more because he has a passion for the music and the same thing with the students in my class. I developed more writers because I have raised the level of passion of the writing.” (Vanessa, Feb. 8). So, for these teachers creating a climate that increases student enjoyment of writing is synonymous with creating a classroom where student writing improves.

According to the teachers, they have been successful. Nikki expects that the results of her students on the writing proficiency test will back up her belief that they have become better writers. After attending an in-service day where a scripted reading program was introduced, Nikki voiced concern that she would have to abandon her new approach to teaching writing. When told that her writing program could stay, she was relieved but still reported telling her administrators that if her students’ proficiency scores “are what [she] expect[s], [her] writing workshop isn’t going anywhere” (February 8, italics added).

Ann and Vanessa push this idea even further in their discussion of the effects on their high school students. The process approach has found limited acceptance on the secondary level because the traditional English curriculum is slanted in favor of a body of knowledge (everyone must read Scarlet Letter) as opposed to a set of skills (reading, writing, and thinking skills). Also, there seems to be a sense at the secondary level that students need to learn expository writing and not narrative writing and there is an idea that the workshop approach to teaching writing only fosters narrative writing (Romano, 1987, 2000). Ann and Vanessa would, it seems, disagree. Both teachers made explicit
connections between the narrative writing their students did, their students' love of writing, and the quality of work they found in their students expository writing.

Ann has instituted Silent Sustained Writing on Thursdays. This forms the backbone of her approach to teaching writing, but she claims that it has carry over value everyday of the week. During the final interview, Ann reflected back on the connection between her students' passion for writing and the quality of their expository writing in these words:

I noticed that the more my kids wrote for fun on Thursday, the more—the more—just the bulk of writing improved. Instead of getting two sentences on a subject like . . . “Elie Wiesel used sensory images in Night because it makes the reader feel like they are there.” That’s a decent response. I got great responses—they added on there; they justified it; they expanded a lot because they got used to the actual passion of writing and they understood “in my own writing I need to expand; so in this academic level writing it’s the same thing.” (February 8)

Ann explicitly connects the love of writing with the fact that her students do more expository writing when needed. The result, according to her, is not simply more words, but also better words and better reasoning.

Vanessa came into the Institute concerned about how to push her students from a more personal, colloquial style of writing to a more academic, critical stance in their writing. During the Institute, she pursued this question more formally and during the last week of the Institute gave her teaching demonstration on how to set the stage for this growth. At that time, she seemed fairly certain that movement in this direction was
possible and had begun experimenting with ways to build on personal writing as a way to reach more academic writing. Still, she was surprised when she returned to her class and saw the results. “I knew it would eventually happen, but I was kind of surprised when it eventually did. Instead of just targeting in those three lower levels of Bloom’s, [her students] were all of a sudden writing to those three higher. The idea was to take them from casual writing, a written response to literature, to a more formal critical response” (February 8). Furthermore, Vanessa claims that she has already “brought them farther in writing [ability] up to this point” than in entire years previously (February 8). This progress includes the conventions. According to Vanessa, doing this much writing “is a good way to . . . to provoke a deeper thought process through the mechanics. And because they are writing their mechanics automatically improve” (September 28).

Ann and Vanessa’s experience would suggest that narrative writing and the principles of a process approach to teaching writing are as valuable in improving expository writing as in improving any other type of writing. This connection tends to run counter to much conventional wisdom and to many of the approaches to teaching writing advocated under current legislative movements. However, there are those who would argue that Ann and Vanessa are correct (most notably Romano, 1987, 2000; Atwell, 1998; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Furthermore, these two teachers view their approach to teaching writing—new in many ways this year—as being instrumental in the improvement of their students’ writing skills, love of writing, and ability to access and use the dominant academic discourse.

The idea that a goal of writing instruction should be an increased passion for writing seems to have deep roots in the institute for these teachers. Not only is the
increasing of passion for writing a major goal of the Institute, but also these teachers made specific connections between their experiences in this regard during the Institute with their practice as classroom teachers. During the final interview, Vanessa explained the connection between her goals for student writing and her participation in the Institute. As she spoke these words, the other teachers chimed in with “yeah,” “mm-hmm,” and nodded their heads. “[My goal in teaching] is just giving [my students] wings to their voice and that is honestly what SNWP did for me. It opened up this whole--- ‘try this’ . . . this feeling that it’s okay. ‘I want to listen to you.’ I found that very empowering and wanted to give that to my students as well.” Echoing this statement, Nikki said that the Institute restored her “passion for writing . . . and [she wants] to give that to [her students]” (January 25).

In summary, these teachers have chosen goals this year that focus on increasing student writing ability by, in part, increasing the passion for writing felt by their students, a position that speaks to these teachers’ beliefs about teaching writing and learning to write. Additionally, they are working hard to provide their students with experiences that aid in the acquisition of writing conventions and other writing skills. Interestingly, in the case of the high school teachers, the two outcomes are intertwined; increasing passion leads to improving skills. The notion that a teacher of writing on whatever level could and should take as a goal of instruction the increasing of students’ love for writing seems to have awakened out of participation in the Institute.

**Decision-making about practices.** Even if teachers choose to use a set of practices it does not necessarily mean that they fully understand the practices, nor does it mean that they understand or have adopted the underlying beliefs of the practice. Some
proponents of the process approach have argued that many teachers simply adopt the forms without an understanding of the principles behind the approach (Romano, 1987; Graves, 1994). In re-writing her book *In the Middle* Nancie Atwell (1998) says that she, “hopes, fervently, that [the new edition] avoids the formulas and jargon that made it possible to read the first edition . . . as a cookbook: one teacher’s collection of recipes for whipping up” a process approach classroom (p. 16). Consequently, identifying practices does not mean that a teacher has learned or understands what she is doing. The goals the teachers espouse and the alignment with process approach practices and beliefs is one indication that the use of the process approach to teaching by these teachers is the result of understanding.

The decisions teachers make about implementing a vision of the process approach, though, can shed some light on teacher understanding. The teachers in this study make critical decisions regarding their instructions that are in accordance with the principles underlying a process approach. For example, Charlotte’s work with her autistic students is a demonstration of a decision made in the context of a process approach classroom that is supported by the principles underlying this approach, but may result in some elements of the process approach being diminished—in this case, time spent conferencing with all of her students.

In describing her previous approach to teaching, Debbi had some elements of the process approach to teaching writing. However, it was all contained in a regimented approach. Her students began a writing assignment on Monday as a class and progressed through the week as a class until everyone handed in their finished products together on Friday. Then, it started over the next week. In fact, during the week, Debbi even based
her lessons on materials created by JoAnn Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher (2005), process approach advocates, to be used in process approach classrooms. Still, what Debbi was doing was not very process oriented.

This year, however, Debbi still uses the Portalupi and Fletcher resources often, but mostly she is creating mini-lessons based on her students' needs. She is giving students time and power to decide what they will write, when they will draft, revise, edit, etc. Her class is full of the elements of the process approach to teaching writing. More importantly, though, she is making decisions regarding those elements and when and how to implement them. She is not simply using some of those elements like she was last year; she is critically considering their use and using those elements to achieve her goal of students loving writing and working hard to master their craft. Such decision-making is a strong indication that Debbi's beliefs about writing and writing instruction are much more in line with those underlying the process approach to teaching writing than they were in the past.

The other teachers demonstrate similar decision-making within their given contexts. Vanessa, for example, feels that high schools are set up to mitigate against the use of these principles (interview February 8). As a result, her adoption has not been different, but she has placed great importance on giving her students time to write each day (interviews October 9, February 8). Ann also felt trapped by her curricular and school demands. Thus, her adoption is similarly modified (interview February 8). These cases will be treated in more depth in a later section.

Nikki is the one teacher who still seems to approach the process approach to teaching as a recipe that must be followed. This is seen in her concern for following the
'correct' form for mini-lessons—as she understands that form—on October 19. During the lesson that day, she had covered two topics. One topic, voice, was addressed to her students and the second, how response groups work, was addressed to a group of third graders in her room to learn about peer response groups. The fact that she covered two topics in a mini-lesson and that the mini-lesson lasted about twenty minutes really seemed to bother her and in the interview she addressed that fact right away. “I knew it went a little long. I was covering two things by doing the voice and the response group, and I knew that I shouldn’t do that because a mini-lesson should be [about] one thing [and] short.” This statement seems to suggest that Nikki is using the structures but does not feel comfortable making decisions to go away from formulaic adoption.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that she is making some decisions about the practice. In her one-on-one conferences, Nikki is using a form to track the conferences of students from a book by Fletcher and Portalupi (2001). The form has various columns that are filled in by the teacher and student. In planning for her teaching, Nikki decided that one of the columns tracked information she was less interested in, but she wanted to stress with the students the idea of trying out different genres of writing. So, she photocopied the form and then used white out to change the original column heading with ‘genre’ to meet her needs.

While these events may provide differing views of Nikki’s practice, her uneven decision-making may be tied to her complete adoption of the process approach to teaching writing. One approach to understanding a teacher’s growth is the idea that teachers are to be “adaptive experts” (Bransford et al., 2005; Hammerness et al., 2005). An adaptive expert combines a mastery of basic routines in a classroom with the ability
to innovate, in my terms make critical decisions. When first learning a new task, though, innovation seems to decline as more cognitive resources are allocated to carrying out the new task making growth towards becoming an “adaptive expert” uneven (Hammerness et al., 2005). In this light, Nikki can be seen as simply mastering the basic forms of a process approach to teaching before being able to make substantive decisions regarding the way these elements look in her classroom. It must be pointed out, though, that some teachers simply master the basic forms of a pedagogy without ever adopting innovations. For these teachers, efficiency is the goal and the success of teaching is viewed in terms of how easily a lesson unfolds (Bransford et al., 2005). The fact that Nikki has made some small decisions already may be evidence that she is progressing towards becoming an “adaptive expert” capable of making critical decisions about her use of the process approach, but it is impossible to say for certain or to pinpoint a timeline for development. Nikki’s focus on routines has other consequences in her teaching that will be discussed later.

In conclusion, the goals these teachers have adopted as well as the types of decisions they are making suggest that the Institute did empower them with new ideas about teaching writing—ideas that have impacted them beyond just a simply adoption of practices.

Democratic Classrooms

In order for students to leave school equipped to function and contribute to a democratic society, they must have experience living in democratic societies and participating in democratic dialogues in schools (Dewey, 2004/1916; Parker, 2006; Fairbanks, 1998). Based on extensive classroom observations in a classroom that creates
a democratic environment and incorporates democratic dialogue, McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore (2006) identified five “democratic supports”. These are elements of a class that support democratic practices and dialogue. According to the authors, the presence of these elements in a class suggests that democratic practices and dialogue are being used. These supports are: a problem-solving environment, student decision making, student choice, collaborative work, and respect.

It seems that the connection between democratic instruction and dialogic classrooms is not simply a matter of doing one and getting the other. Instead, there is evidence which suggests the path goes both ways (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; McIntyre, Kyle, & Morre, 2006; Parker, 2006); therefore, these two items seem to be related in a symbiotic way—strengthening either one will strengthen the other.

McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore's (2006) framework provides a useful way to examine the work of the participants in this study. Table 5 provides examples of events and comments from each teacher’s practice that fit these categories. The events are ones that I witnessed first-hand as well as events that were reported by the teachers. In this analysis, comments from the teachers served to help me understand the reasoning behind their decisions.

The first row under the headings is made up of definitions of each of the democratic supports. Below that are the examples from each teacher. It should be noted that some of the events in the chart are specific one-time events while others refer to events that took place on multiple occasions. Some events on the chart were moments that for various reasons seem especially pertinent or powerful to the discussion. Special note of these events will be made in the discussion that follows.
Table 5

Representative classroom practices that suggest democratically founded classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem-solving</th>
<th>Student decision-making</th>
<th>Student choice</th>
<th>Collaborative work</th>
<th>Respect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students a meaningful say in classroom decisions</td>
<td>Allowing students to make decisions about how to demonstrate and carry out their learning</td>
<td>Allowing students to choose between alternative tools of learning</td>
<td>Providing opportunities for students to work together as groups</td>
<td>Fostering respect between students and teacher and among students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nikki

- Peer response format
- Student-led conferences
- Writing choices
- Writing process usage
- Strategy instruction
- Response groups and peer response
- Work with 3rd Grade class (Nikki & her students)
- Seating arrangement
- Response group guidelines & modeling
- “Big Ears”
- Interactions in peer response groups
- Group work with 3rd graders

Charlott e

- Class meetings
- Student grammar tools
- Staging of Class Play
- Invitations and invitation list to Class Play
- Peer response
- Workshop time in class
- Sharing
- Strategy instruction
- Peer response
- Class constitution, declaration, and bill of rights
- Peer Editing
- Invitations to Class Play
- Seating
- Rules of discussion and (dis)agreement
- Work with Stephan and Paul
- Student ownership of work

165

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Debbi</strong></th>
<th>Response groups &amp; debriefing</th>
<th>Response group discussion</th>
<th>Writing choices</th>
<th>Response groups and peer responses</th>
<th>Written responses</th>
<th>Sharing &amp; response group guidelines</th>
<th>Response groups debriefing</th>
<th>Quiet corners</th>
<th>Stepping in with student teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native American Books</td>
<td>Student voting on borderline comments/suggestions</td>
<td>Student-led conferences</td>
<td>Voting on Seating group arrangement guidelines</td>
<td>Comments/suggestions</td>
<td>Native debriefing</td>
<td>American Books</td>
<td>Quiet corners</td>
<td>Stepping in with student teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ann</strong></th>
<th>Learning Logs</th>
<th>Layered curriculum projects</th>
<th>Writing choices</th>
<th>Peer response format</th>
<th>Peer response</th>
<th>A-level products</th>
<th>Seating arrangement</th>
<th>Group work guidelines</th>
<th>Participatio n in peer response work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of violence in writing</td>
<td>Peer response format</td>
<td>&quot;Authorial license&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing portfolios</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vanessa</strong></th>
<th>Handling grading procedures and timing</th>
<th>Peer response format</th>
<th>Writing choices</th>
<th>Peer conferencing</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Seating</th>
<th>Rules of discussion and (dis)agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

166
Problem-Solving. The idea that democratic classrooms are characterized as problem-solving environments means that there are significant classroom decisions that are brought before the class to be discussed. For example, Charlotte incorporates regularly scheduled classroom meetings into her class. During these meetings, students are free to bring up issues they are struggling with in the class and to provide input into the discussion of these problems. Similarly, these meetings are a time for students to recognize each other or the class for positive accomplishments. Another example of this problem solving environment is the way Vanessa approaches the timing of work and assignments in her class. Because she was out of school on a regular basis during her treatment, Vanessa would solicit comments from her students about how her absence was affecting them. Based on these comments, then, Vanessa would often approach her students with questions regarding what they needed in terms of time to work and resources to support their work.

Both of these examples demonstrate not only what a problem-solving environment is but also what it is not. A problem-solving environment means that the students have a say in what is deemed a problem and an opportunity to provide input into
eventual decisions; however, students do not necessarily have the final say in the decision (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). Nevertheless, in democratic classrooms, the students do have the opportunity to make meaningful suggestions.

One notable absence in this column is the lack of a problem-solving experience in Nikki’s class. There were several times when student opinions were asked, but never about truly meaningful decisions and in these cases, it was simply a matter of choosing between certain items. For example, the school was participating in an event where they wanted the classes to sing *The Star Spangled Banner*. Nikki played several recorded versions for her students and asked them which one they preferred to use as a model.

While I cannot rule out the possibility that Nikki may have engaged her students in problem-solving situations when I was absent, I believe that the reason for the absence lies more in the fact that Nikki was in the process of such a radically new approach to teaching writing this year. As discussed above, Nikki’s newness to this type of teaching is causing her to focus on her own concerns and in performing correctly within this model. Just as Nikki’s focus on the model keeps her from making critical decisions on her own about the implementation of the process approach to teaching writing, this focus keeps her from inviting her students into that process of innovation. Allowing her students to be involved in decisions could lead to unexpected innovations that Nikki is not in a position to support. As a result, Nikki currently does not invite her students into problem-solving situations; however, as she becomes more adept at implementing the forms of the process approach, it is likely that Nikki will open her classroom more to allowing student input in the form of problem-solving.
**Student Decision-making.** Student decision-making is the next characteristic identified as a hallmark of democratic classrooms. Student-decision making means that students have opportunities to make meaningful decisions about their own learning. These decisions differ from simple choices in that they are made generally as a group and determine the course of student learning, whereas choices are more individual and tend to relate more to the tools of learning. For example, McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore (2006) suggest that selecting a book to read in literature circles is an example of student choice, but deciding as a group how they will demonstrate their learning is a decision.

A prime example of decision-making from the study would be the student-led conferences that Nikki, Charlotte, and Debbi used with their students on repeated occasions. All of these teachers repeatedly conducted one-on-one conferences with the students that were designed in such a way that the students set the agenda for what was to be discussed (at times this agenda included nothing—the students felt good about what they were doing). Even when the students asked for specific guidance Charlotte reported that her students would often want to discuss different things other than she did. Still, she “respected their decision” (February 8). After allowing the students to set the agenda, these teachers gave them multiple possible strategies to use in attacking the issue at hand (see Anderson, 2000 for a discussion of this type of conference). In this way students are empowered to make real decisions about their learning and their class.

Another strong example of this practice is Ann’s use of portfolios as assessment tools. At the end of each quarter, Ann asked her students to turn in a writing portfolio that represented their work. The portfolio, in the two quarters I observed, consisted of three pieces of writing. The first would be a major assignment that Ann would require
and that played a large part in the class. The last two pieces would be any pieces that the students selected. In this way, the students “get to decide what they want to showcase” (February 8). Not only is this an example of Ann providing students with a chance to make meaningful decisions about their work, it is also a new practice for her. In previous years, she has used the portfolios as well, but in those iterations Ann chose the pieces that would be required in the entire portfolio. She changed because in previous years the portfolios “represented [her] more than [her students]” (October 30). Ann’s use of portfolios is one example of both student decision making and teacher change.

**Student Choice.** Choice is a hallmark of the process approach to teaching writing (Hansen, 2001). Students choose almost every aspect of their writing: topic, genre, pacing, audience. Choice means that students are responsible for a greater portion of their learning; they get to choose the tools of how they learn. A student who chooses to approach a very controversial topic and one that chooses a more personal topic both learn about writing; it is just through different tools.

All of the teachers in the study consistently provided students with the choice of what to write about and what genre to write in. Similarly, to some degree or another, each teacher allowed her students to choose at what stage in the writing process to work. As a result, a typical day in these classrooms found some students engaged in pre-writing activities, some in creating first drafts, others editing, some in groups of peers getting feedback, and some working to publish their pieces. Nikki, Debbi, Ann, and Vanessa all credited the increase in student choice to the Institute.

Charlotte claimed that she was incorporating a great deal of choice in her classroom before the Institute. After the Institute, however, it became more deeply
ingrained. Last year, Charlotte had a special education student who was well-below grade level and acted out as a result. To deal with him, she seated him on the periphery of her class and gave him assignment to complete. He did not have the same opportunities to choose that the other students did. This year, though, her Charlotte is making a concerted effort to give all of her special education students the help they need to write about what they choose, for whom they choose, and in the way they choose.

Collaborative Work. The fourth characteristic fostering dialogic classrooms is collaborative work. Simply put students in a democratic classroom work together for a common goal. Collaborative work is a common feature of many classrooms and each teacher in this study used group work on a regular basis before this study. Still, there are examples of these teachers using collaborative strategies in ways that were explicitly derived from the Summer Institute. Nikki, Charlotte, and Debbi made a concerted effort to institute response groups in their classrooms. In all cases, the teachers made efforts to incorporate various forms of peer response (usually less formally than response groups) into the structure of their classes. Nikki, specifically, connected the response groups to a collaborative nature. According to her, all of her students “are there for the same reason—to help the writer get better... They have learned to help each other” (February 8).

Another example of collaborative work is Ann’s layered curriculum. All of her A-level projects, those activities the students need to complete in order to get an A, are collaborative projects. The group decides how to go about completing the projects, makes work assignments, and comes together on a regular basis in class to discuss
progress and any setbacks. The result was that students were provided with structured
time to collaborate to achieve learning goals in class.

Respect. The last characteristic discussed by McIntyre, Kyle, and Moore (2006)
is respect. Respect goes beyond a teacher simply respecting the offerings of students to
an environment that fosters not only student-teacher respect, but also student-student
respect. To some extent all of the teachers’ classrooms worked towards supporting this
facet of democratic classrooms.

One of the most prevalent ways this characteristic was observable was in the rules
set up to monitor the peer response activities. All of the teachers established guidelines
with their classes to guide the students as they responded to each other. The guidelines of
each teacher are almost the same and mirror those used in the response groups in the
Institute. These guidelines, as listed and explained by Nikki’s fifth-grade class to the
group of third-graders in their room, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things to do in peer response</th>
<th>Things to not do in peer response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Give good feedback using examples</td>
<td>Don’t be negative (begin with a positive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use ‘Big Ears’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes on the piece so you know what to say</td>
<td>Don’t talk out of turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author is the boss.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These guidelines suggest several things. First, the teachers stressed respect
between the students. Second, the students (at least in Nikki’s class) understood clearly
the expectations and were able to verbalize them. Finally, the consistency among the
teachers and the degree to which these guidelines mirror the Institute’s practice suggest that this way of teaching and demonstrating respect (the teachers abided by these same guidelines when participating in peer responses) has ties to the Institute.

Vanessa took the idea of guidelines for peer response one step further. During classroom discussion, Vanessa stresses respecting opposing viewpoints and opinions. She spends time giving students opportunities to express their ideas but also helps them understand how to disagree with someone else’s argument while still respecting them. During one observation (September 21), Vanessa specifically gave the student three potential sentence stems to help them frame their comments in respectful tones, e.g. “I see what you are saying, but I would argue . . . “ Then, as the discussion unfolded she repeatedly pushed students to begin with these sentence stems. It should be noted that valuing this type of discussion is not a new aspect to Vanessa, but, according to her, the Institute gave Vanessa the confidence to bring these issues out into the open in new and more obvious ways.

*Putting the supports together.* A potent example of a classroom incident that demonstrated a teacher putting each of these characteristics into practice was Debbi’s discussion with her class about the peer response groups. After the class’ first time in response groups, Debbi debriefed the experience with the students and they ended up discussing the noise level in the class (problem-solving). During the discussion, Debbi asked for input from the students into the situation. Then, she listened without comment and wrote down the possible solutions the students suggested. Whenever students made comments about what others had said or try to speak out of turn, Debbi reminded them to be polite and respectful (respect). In this way, the students worked together
(collaborative work) to decide on a solution. In later classes, the students met together again to finalize a list of acceptable solutions (problem-solving and decision-making) and then from that list the students chose the final form of response groups (student choice).

Other Strategies to Promote Democratic Classrooms

While Debbi’s example illustrates how one teacher can approach her class in such a way as to foster the development of a dialogic, democratic classroom, there are more subtle techniques imbedded within these characteristics that teachers use to help their students engage in more democratic discussions. Two of these from the data stand out—teacher fronted talk and stepping in.

Teacher fronted talk is a situation where the teacher, ironically, spends more time talking then the students and/or co-opts some types of communication as only available to the teacher in order to model for students proper forms of communication (Forman, McCormick, & Donato, 1998; Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). In the case of the teacher in McIntyre et al’s (2006) study, the teacher chose to dominate the discussions at the beginning of the class in order to model for her students appropriate ways to talk about and question a genre of literature that the students had little experience with, mystery. Gradually, as the days passed, the teacher began speaking less and less until the fourth day of the unit, when the students spoke a majority of the time. At the same time that the students began speaking more they also began using the genre specific vocabulary and ways of talking more and more in their written work. McIntyre et al. (2006) conclude “it is evident that teacher-fronted talk and true dialogue are not mutually exclusive” (p. 59).
In terms of this study, the most common occurrence of teacher-fronted talk was the teachers assuming full responsibility for “cool feedback.” Cool feedback, a term based in Critical Friends work, is used in the institute to refer to suggestions made about what does not work in a piece of writing. Charlotte, Debbi, and Vanessa all explicitly told their students at the beginning of the year that they as the teacher would be in charge of all “cool feedback.” The teachers went over with the students what cool feedback was and would even use the term when a student would accidentally give a comment that was deemed too suggestive of needed action. As Vanessa said, “‘cool feedback’ is mine. They are too new to be able to do it correctly, but eventually, little by little, they’ll do it. At least that’s the goal” (September 21).

This example of teacher-fronted talk is about establishing trust and respect between the students; it is about guiding the students towards democratic talk instead of towards academic talk. It appears, then, that teacher-fronted talk is a legitimate strategy used by these teachers to foster democratic dialogues.

The second strategy the teachers were observed using is stepping in. Evans (2002) says that teachers have a responsibility to step in when students are engaging in behaviors that silence or push others to the margins. Again, this is a case where the teachers adopt a stance not only to prevent this type of action, but also to model appropriate responses to such actions for their students. Charlotte, for example, had to step in often as students expressed opinions that marginalized the special education students in her room. Ann had to step in during a class activity when students wrote racist comments on a poster. She ended the activity and then, just as importantly, discussed with the class why she felt she had to stop the activity and then asked the
students to write their response to what happened. By stepping in at appropriate times, Charlotte, Ann, and the other teachers helped create an environment welcoming to all and modeled to the students how to act against marginalizing comments and actions.

Taking political action

Democratic pedagogy should incorporate teaching that is overtly political (Powell, 1999; Giroux, 2003, 2005). For some advocates, the lack of political action is what separates true democratic pedagogy from other pedagogies (Michelli, 2005). According to this position, teaching that is not overtly political does not give students the tools necessary to challenge the status quo in society that privileges traditionally powerful groups, e.g. white, Christian, males.

In this study, the teachers who overtly took up political issues were the two high school teachers. Ann’s discussion with her students around racism is one example of this. Vanessa’s curriculum was permeated with political issues. For example, she spent a lot of time dealing with the Native American perspective in her American Literature class, even though the other American Literature teachers think that this unit should, “go very quick. You know they were here and then the explorers come” (September 28). She felt it was necessary to help her students understand different perspectives and pushed them to take up these perspectives as they thought, spoke, read, and wrote. Also, Vanessa brought up and discussed issues surrounding homelessness with her students, especially in light of recent ordinances passed by the city that were aimed at the homeless. By making these issues a central part of her class, Vanessa was teaching as she believed she should—in a way that highlighted the social constructedness of society and offered the students a view that they could take action.
Still, the question remains: Why is there no evidence of the elementary teachers taking up such issues? Perhaps, it is simply the sample or the dates of the observations. Maybe it is just these elementary teachers that do not take up these issues while other do. Or maybe I just observed on the wrong days. Other factors may be that elementary teachers are more subject to the pressures of NCLB and standardized tests. After all, each of the elementary teachers mentioned testing pressures, whereas Ann and Vanessa seemed to simply see testing as an inconvenience because it took away from instructional time. Another possible explanation lies in the nature of secondary and elementary classes (at least as conceptualized by these teachers). In elementary schools the craft of writing is the focus of the lessons; in high school, the focus seems to be on content with the writing serving a supporting role. This difference would open up the secondary teachers practice to more involvement with issues. This perspective suggests that I may have been more successful in seeing these topics explored in other lessons the elementary teachers taught as opposed to writing lessons. Furthermore, the current political and social climate in and around Carson County School District can be seen to inhibit political action. While these are all possibilities, further research is needed to come to a more definite conclusion.

In summary then, the teachers in this study worked to create environments in their classrooms that fostered dialogue between them and the students as well as among the students. The teachers’ classes were characterized by a problem-solving environment, student decision-making, student choice, collaborative work, and respect. Furthermore, in establishing these characteristics, the teachers of this study used the methods of teacher-fronted talk and stepping in. In many cases, the teachers reported that the
presence of these characteristics and strategies in their classrooms is a result of their experiences in the Summer Institute.

**Impact of the Writing Project**

Examining the impact of the Institute on the practice and beliefs of these teachers is a central purpose of this study. The previous sections seem to underscore the fact that at least in the participants’ eyes, the Institute did change them as teachers. Whether it was the ability to adopt a whole new approach to teaching writing (Nikki) or simply the courage to teach to one’s convictions (Vanessa), the Institute did impact these teachers.

In this section, though, I look at their practice for evidence of change in a more systematic way. I have conceptualized a continuum of practice that provides a way to categorize change from the mostly technical to the mostly cognitive (see Table 6). The continuum of practice is fairly straightforward in that it is imagined that there are levels or degrees of impact the Institute could have on the participants. The most basic level would be to simply adopt without alteration a practice from the Institute. The second level would be adopting a practice from the Institute but only after modifying it based on the perceived needs of the students. Next, would be evidence of the participants using the principles to either identify good practices to adopt from their own research or to create new strategies of their own. It is expected that if the Institute was truly effective and provided relevant teaching examples, each participant will demonstrate adoption at all three levels.

*Level One: Simple Adoption.* The most basic level is when a participant takes a practice or method introduced in the Institute (from the Institute workings, the presentation of a peer, or reading associated with the Institute) straight into their own
Table 6

Participants’ practices that suggest adoption of Institute beliefs and practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level One: Straight Adoption</th>
<th>Level Two: Adoption with Modification</th>
<th>Level Three: Evaluation or Creation According to Underlying Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Writing Workshop Model from Institute practice and reading in Institute*</td>
<td>Fletcher book’s forms</td>
<td>Adaptation of school adopted writing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Response protocol*</td>
<td>Inquiry Topic Generation Activity</td>
<td>Revision/Voice lesson with combination 5th &amp; 3rd grade classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student choice*</td>
<td>Peer Feedback written down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing with students &amp; sharing writing with students</td>
<td>Student-teacher conferences</td>
<td>Sharing during proficiency practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of published authors’ works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual literacy work</td>
<td>Angie’s presentation</td>
<td>Grammar lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Response protocol*</td>
<td>Peer response (forms)</td>
<td>“Word wall”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of the “writing cycle”</td>
<td>Work with special education students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of published authors’ works</td>
<td>Approaches from special education inclusion training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with students</td>
<td>Response groups</td>
<td>Using Fletcher’s Teaching the Qualities of Writing strategically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in writing process*</td>
<td>Peer feedback written down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many elements of writing workshop model*</td>
<td>Angie’s presentation</td>
<td>Grammar posters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet room (corner)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing of writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Response protocol*</td>
<td>Inquiry Topic Generation Activity</td>
<td>Layered curriculum (continuing with it)</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Angie’s presentation*</td>
<td>Student Portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with students</td>
<td>Peer response (forms)</td>
<td>Grammar instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Response protocol*</td>
<td>Writing workshop model (Silent Sustained Writing or Thursday writing)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angie’s presentation</td>
<td>Curricular decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to extend Native American unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Use of article from Educational Leadership to guide talk about expository writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual Literacy work*</td>
<td>Assigning multiple perspectives for student writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Workshop Model</td>
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Note: * marks items adopted from the Institute without change, but which the participants speak of in ways that suggest consideration and deliberation were part of the adoption process.

practice. This level could represent anything from straight imitation without consideration or deliberation to direct implementation based on serious consideration and a decision that no alteration to a given strategy or approach is necessary. Many of the practices used and modeled throughout the Summer Institute were designed to be applicable in a variety of classrooms and grades.

For some practices adopted, there is evidence in the form of comments by the participants that simple adoption was a decision made carefully in light of student and
teacher needs. These practices are marked with an asterisk (*) in the figure. For example, all of the teachers used a fairly straight-forward adoption of the guidelines used in the Institute’s peer response groups. In talking about their work, though, each of the teachers explained that they were using these because of the power they felt they afforded those in the groups to learn and grow. They adopted these guidelines as they are, but only because they viewed them as powerful for learners.

*Level Two: Adoption with Modification.* Level Two adoption is not simply imitation; it is taking a practice from the Institute and using it in the classroom after modifying it to fit the specific needs of the students in that context. It is suggested that the changes made, especially when the teacher could discuss why the changes were made, were evidence of critical decision making on the part of these teachers. For example, Nikki not only changed the tracking form from Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), but she could also explain why. By altering a practice from the Institute to better serve their students, the teachers demonstrate not only a mechanical adoption of elements, but also an understanding of underlying Institute principles that focus on students. Thus, this level suggests a transformation in the teachers’ themselves as well as their classrooms.

An example of this type of work is the use of Angie’s teaching demonstration by four of the participants. Angie, another participant in the Institute, engaged participants in exploring how popular music could be brought into the class to effectively teach the standards and help the students write original work. The four teachers who were observed using some variation of this practice all took the idea of using music to teach the standards and tweaked it to fit their own needs. Charlotte uses music in the morning a couple of days a week as a writing prompt to get students to simply write something.
Debbi used music to demonstrate how a small moment of time could be turned into a complete story. Ann asked her students to identify songs that talked about someone’s identity and then to write their own lyrics that showed their identity. Vanessa used Johnny Cash songs to reinforce the ideas she was trying to convey in her lesson on Native American rights. The four teachers who used these variations all referenced Angie’s presentation either formally or in passing while talking about these lessons with me.

Another example of adapting an Institute practice is Debbi’s use of “quiet corners.” In Debbi’s classroom, “quiet corners” are the corners in her room that are available for students to use in peer conferences. While there the students who are conferencing are to talk in whispers so that the rest of the students can write without being disturbed by the conversation. This is a variation on a common Institute practice in which one room is designated the quiet room. Writers are given the freedom to stay in the room and write. Inside the room, though, there is no talking. If someone needs to talk, they must leave the room. Debbi does not have the option of instituting the quiet room practice in her class, but when she identified a need the students had—some needed time and space to confer with a peer while others needed quiet time to focus on their writing—Debbi drew upon the Institute practice of the quiet room to design her own quiet corners activity.

*Level Three: Evaluation and/or Creation.* While both of the other two levels represent an awareness of and ability to think critically about practices and strategies used and taught in the Institute, level three demonstrates a deeper understanding of these practices. At this level, the practices under scrutiny did not arise out of what was observed in the Institute. Instead, at this level, the participants are drawing on the
underlying Institute principles to create and/or adopt a new practice. In each of these cases, the teachers explicitly made reference to their experiences in the Institute or the Institute itself when talking about these practices.

Charlotte’s work with her students, which has been discussed previously, is an example of this. Charlotte reported that last year she had a student with similar difficulties and he ended up sitting at the back of the room by himself and she seldom included him in the class. However, she said that after experiencing the Institute, she wanted to do more for her struggling students this year and felt that if they “succeed in writing something, they will feel... like they can do more” (November 14). Based on her Institute experience, then, Charlotte is committed to all of her students having a positive experience with writing.

Ann’s use of writing portfolios is a good example of a classroom strategy used in past years that was re-visited after the Institute. When asked if she had used portfolios before, Ann said, “I’ve never done a writing portfolio like this before where they pick out their own work. Usually it’s, ‘I need your three essays we wrote.’... But I’ve never done like, ‘okay there’s one assignment that I have assigned that you have to do and you pick two pieces of your own writing.’” (October 19). Ann’s reasoning for making this change echoes strongly the ideals of a process approach classroom. “So it’s their writing. They own it. I don’t. I’m just the editor so to speak... But it’s all their ideas and so far they seem pretty cool with this writing thing because they get to pick their topics... They get to make choices that normally they probably wouldn’t in the classroom” (October 19). These comments serve to underscore the fact that Ann has adapted her practice in this regards to align with the ideals advocated in the Institute.
Beyond the Continuum. Another way to look at the impact of the Institute on the lives of these teachers is to examine the ways in which they are advocating in their local contexts for the Writing Project and the process approach to teaching writing. In her first meeting with her grade level teachers, Nikki brought up her experience. According to Nikki, after hearing about the process approach to teaching writing, “they all jumped right on board. Everyone jumped right on board and got ideas from me. We’ve all kind of tweaked it to make it fit their needs... I got real lucky that way” (February 8). As described earlier, during my first visit to Nikki’s school, I met one of these teachers who enthusiastically talked about what Nikki had shared with them and her own plans to attend the next Summer Institute. Nikki continued working with these teachers throughout the course of the study by taking ideas and work samples to the group’s regularly scheduled meetings.

Not all of the teachers found a reception like Nikki did, but they still tried to share what they learned in the Institute. Ann pushed for her colleagues to try process approaches or at least process approach activities when they met to jointly plan the first few weeks of school together. While these efforts were rebuffed, Ann remains steadfast. She is currently trying to get her principal to let her conduct a short workshop on revision techniques with her department during the next professional development day.

Charlotte found the Institute powerful enough that she “really, really [wants] to get [her] school to just jump in, to just be on board”. Also, Charlotte is teaching a course on teaching writing for credit to some of her faculty. Optimistically, she says, “I’m sure that once these teachers give it a chance, I’m sure they’ll understand” (February 8). Vanessa spoke of a desire to get the teachers at her school to “just try it out” (November
10). Debbi was supposed to teach a ninety minute presentation on teaching during the in-service days before the school year started, but it ended up being only fifteen minutes because other presentations went over time. According to her it did not go well, and she does not think it had any real effect, but she is hoping for other opportunities to present the information again.

In summary, then, the practices and beliefs of these teachers demonstrate that their participation in the Institute impacted them. Beyond the factors pointed to in terms of the participants’ approach to the teaching of writing and efforts to create democratic classrooms, other practices suggest that the changes from the Institute run the gamut from a mere technical adoption of practices to critical decision-making based on underlying principles of the Institute. In every case, though, not only did the teachers in this study try to change their own practice but they also became advocates for the process approach to teaching writing and the Summer Institute. The Institute did influence these teachers.

Obstacles and Supports to Change

Ritchie and Wilson (2000) describe teacher learning and change as “an ongoing process of negotiation and struggle among various narratives” (p. 75). Under this view, teachers are presented with a number of different narratives about how teaching should be. These may be in the forms of policies, programs, or simple suggestions. Plus, a teacher holds his or her own narrative about how teaching should be. At times, these narratives may contradict each other. For example, in this study, all three of the elementary teachers were at in-services where their schools were presented with a scripted reading program for them to use. The fact that teachers are told to use scripted programs is one narrative of how teachers are to be—a narrative that these teachers did
not agree with and that some critics disagree with as well (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Giroux, 2005). This conflict underscores the need to understand the factors impacting change as teachers try to work in democratic ways and towards democratic ends. As a result, for some teachers change is the act of balancing what is believed right with what is believed possible and permissible.

The teachers in this study are no different. Each teacher faced a unique set of obstacles as they worked to implement a different teaching pedagogy. As a result, each of them took steps to remain as true as possible to her beliefs while at the same time, meeting the impositions she felt from outside. In many instances, the teachers drew on sources external to themselves to meet the challenge. Table 7 shows the pressure each of these teachers felt, the external resources they drew on in each case, and how they responded to that challenge.

Themes of Opposition. While each case of opposition and support are different, some commonalities were identified. In every case the pressure to alter or discontinue the preferred method of teaching comes from within the school context. Furthermore, the majority of these in-school pressures are related to testing concerns. The heavily scripted, mandated approaches to preparing for the Proficiency test were especially brutal for both Nikki and Debbi. Both of these teachers work with fifth-graders—the grade where the elementary proficiency test is administered. Although Charlotte, a fourth-grade teacher, had not experienced this same pressure during the time of the study, she reported that her class was going to undergo similar preparation in anticipation of next year’s testing in the near future. Even the school-wide writing program used in Nikki’s class was adopted because of low test scores and the perception that the program would
Table 7

The challenges faced by the teachers, external resources they drew on to face the challenge, and their courses of action in each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External pressure</th>
<th>External supports</th>
<th>Course of Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td>External pressure:</td>
<td>Adopted elements of the school-wide program into mini-lessons in class</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-wide writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>program.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Uncertainties about</td>
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<td></td>
<td>new administration)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proficiency test</td>
<td>Bulletin board sharing outside of room</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>Planning ahead to buffer the impact of the proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on returning to workshop after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Overloading of</td>
<td>Adapted workshop approach to include voices of those who could not express</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>special education</td>
<td>themselves</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students</td>
<td>Relied on other students' good will and hard work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humor</td>
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<td>District Trainings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on test scores</td>
<td>Continued practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>where her kids do</td>
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<td></td>
<td>poorly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debbi</td>
<td>Proficiency test</td>
<td>Emphasis on returning to workshop after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stepped in when necessary to aid students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

187
help the school raise its scores. The pressure on Vanessa to 'catch up' to the other American Literature teachers was based on the idea that all of the American Literature classes would take the same semester exam; therefore, she had to have covered everything the other teachers had regardless of how well it was covered.

Perhaps the impact of the testing should come as no surprise. The fact that testing is altering approaches to teaching is well-documented (see for example, Jones & Thomas,
2006; Irons & Harris, 2006; Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). It is worth noting, though, that the pressures resulting from this emphasis are so overwhelming as to be the only pressures identified by some of the teachers as hindering their efforts to change. If there were other factors serving to impede the change process, they were too minor in comparison to the testing mandates to register on the teachers’ experiences.

While most of the teachers seemed to view test preparation as something that simply had to be endured, Nikki actively worked to make it a positive for her students. She did this through her early work with writing and the ways in which she reportedly talked to her students about the test preparation. Nikki mentions that she took special pains to prepare her students for the proficiency period by making sure they liked writing ahead of time. “The very first thing I wanted to do was get them to buy into the idea of writing, which I think I did. I think I did that effectively. Because I knew that I would have to be regimented when this time came... I wanted them to already be comfortable writing” (January 25). During the time they were preparing for the proficiency, Nikki did not focus on passing the test. Instead, Nikki focused her students on their growth. She talked to them about looking at their work for signs of improvement. Summing up the effects of the way she approached the Proficiency test beginning in August, Nikki said “I think the whole concept really gave them confidence. The whole thing we were doing, I think they became much more confident writers” (January 25). Nikki was able to take something she considered a negative experience and work with it to make it a positive experience for her kids. Still, the approach to teaching during this time was one that Nikki neither advocated for nor believed in.
Both Ann and Vanessa faced pressures from their departments that worked against their change. Ann’s department met at the beginning of the year to plan the first three weeks of lessons so that students who were moved between classes would have the same scores and experiences. Ann approached the meeting “excited to share some new ideas about what we could do” (February 8). Instead, her colleagues resisted her ideas and, in the end, she capitulated to their desires. Back in her room Ann followed the lesson plans of the department except in her English II class. Here, there was only one other teacher that Ann’s students would be transferred to and that teacher had been somewhat receptive to Ann’s ideas. Thus, Ann ignored the lesson plans and when two students were transferred, she worked out the grading concerns with that teacher.

Vanessa, however, was not able to reach such an agreement. During the first semester, Vanessa had fallen behind the other American Literature teachers. As the semester was nearing an end, she began to receive pressure to catch up with everyone else so that the exams would be the same. In the face of this pressure, Vanessa did “some book teaching” for a couple of weeks before the exam (January 11). This means that she assigned some reading from the adopted textbook and had the students answer the questions at the end without much discussion or exploration of the pieces. After the exam, she went back to her own plans. It is not clear why Vanessa did not use a different exam; perhaps that was not an option because of school mandates.

Vanessa also faced a number of complaints from parents about her inclusion of writing in her teaching (October 9). Referring to this obstacle, Vanessa said, “The curse that came with [this new type of instruction] was I had to meet with parents all semester and defend to the sophomore and junior parents why their students [were writing
"everyday]" (February 8). According to Vanessa, the parents did not value the creative writing she asked the students to do because they perceived it as being unimportant for success in college. While Vanessa relied on what she viewed as exceptional quality of work and growth in ability from her students to counteract these protests, this perspective seems to have had an effect on Vanessa's perceptions of school. In the final interview, Vanessa shared what she said worked against her goals for her students more than anything else.

When we look at how school is structured, do we give our kids time to or a purpose for revision? I know at the high school level, it's like, "The paper's done. I did the term paper. Now you have to grade it." There's a timeline all this has to happen. How do we get them to value this revision and how do we do it respectfully? Because what they expect us to do is that we revise it for [them] and we hand it back. We bled all over [their] paper and now [they] fix [their] mess and then... give it back. (February 8)

This quote seems to indicate that, in Vanessa's eyes, the structure of school supports the perception of writing espoused by the parents—that only certain types of writing and writing activities matter. Vanessa did not offer an overall plan for changing the school structure, but she did maintain her focus on writing and continued to create room for her students to write and talk about writing “much to the chagrin of some of [her] colleagues” (February 8).

Themes of support. In the face of all of these pressures to maintain the status quo, these teachers worked to implement change. In doing so, each drew on a unique set of
supports. However, there were two types of supports that show up repeatedly: student work and experience in the Institute.

Repeatedly during the observations and interviews when the participants spoke about pressures to return to a more traditional approach to teaching, they ended by saying they could not stop because of the quality of work their students were producing. For example, when I entered her class on October 9, Vanessa came up and showed me a piece of student writing and said that she was having a number of parent conferences but that “this [referring to the student work] is why I do it.” Vanessa went so far as to take samples of student work to her conferences to highlight the results of her approach. Charlotte calls the opportunity to simply listen to the students read their work “powerful” (February 8).

The idea that the work of a student or a group of students is motivating to teachers is not new. Lortie (1975) found that teachers routinely point to student work as a motivating factor in their work and often define success in the classroom by the work of a student. Lortie goes on to suggest, though, that defining success this way can lead a teacher to miss how all of the students are progressing. This does not seem to be the case with all of these teachers. Vanessa, for example, kept samples of student work from all of her classes and those examples served as a defense to parents. Also, Nikki and Charlotte seemed to speak with a great deal of knowledge about each student in their class. However, since student work samples were not taken, the validity or accuracy of these statements cannot be measured in this study. Research does suggest, though, that students in the classes of Writing Project participants’ do better as a whole than do
students of teachers without this experience (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Smith, 2000) so there is reason to suspect that the teacher perceptions may be accurate.

The other area of great motivation was the experience the teachers had in the Institute. The power of the Institute experience seems to be the emotional reaction to writing more than anything else. As Nikki talks about her experience in the Institute and her class she says, "Passion. The Institute gave me passion for writing and teaching. That's what I wanted for my kids—to have that passion for writing" (February 8). Vanessa expressed similar feelings, "It's just giving them wings to their voice and that's honestly what SNWP did for me" (February 8). Debbi explained her experience in these words, "I finally felt a part of something. I felt like I was part of a community and I wanted my students to have that same sense of community and belonging" (February 8). Charlotte and Ann shared similar sentiments on different occasions. The emotional power of writing and the connections that it forges as experienced in the Institute were, for these teachers, powerful enough that not only did these feelings guide many of their curricular and pedagogical decisions but also these feelings sustained them in the face of obstacles to their change.

Change for these teachers, as for any teacher, was a difficult process. Each teacher faced a unique configuration of obstacles, although pressures from standardized testing were the most commonly cited pressures associated with change. In response to these obstacles, each teacher likewise drew on a unique combination of supports. Chief among these supports were the work of their students and their own experiences with writing in the Institute.
Conclusion

The data show these five teachers working to change their practices to align more closely with either reinforced or new beliefs about teaching writing and the classroom community. As they worked to change their practices they drew on Institute practices and principles to guide the technical and creative aspects of their classes. In each case, these teachers cited their Institute experience as a significant impetus to their change. At the same time, all acknowledged a number of different forces that were pushing them to abandon their new ideals and return to a more traditional teacher-centered classroom. Still, by drawing on the power of their students' work and their own Institute experiences, these teachers found energy to continue working towards change.

While the future is an incomplete picture, the comments of the participants suggest that the changes are just beginning for these teachers. Each of them has goals aimed at creating a classroom that is more democratic, student/writer-friendly and student/writer-centered.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In examining the ways in which one group of teachers learned to enact a more
democratic writing pedagogy, I asked the following questions.

What is the evidence of democratic writing instruction in the classrooms and
practices of teachers who have participated in the Summer Institute of the
Southern Nevada Writing Project?

And

What factors—including the Summer Institute—helped and hindered these
teachers in their efforts to change their writing pedagogy practices?

To answer these questions, I followed five teachers from one Summer Institute into their
classrooms during the semester following the Institute. In doing so, I observed each one
a minimum of five times and conducted short interviews following each of these
observations. The observations allowed me to document the practices of these teachers
and the interviews allowed me to pose questions concerning their sense of how that day’s
lesson fit into the overall class structure and to inquire about specific practices.

As time passed, I examined the observations and interviews and began
constructing themes from the data. These evolving themes provided new ways for me to
look more directly at parts of the teachers’ practices. Gradually, I worked with these
themes until I came to the four that I used to guide my analysis and discussion of the
data: the teaching of writing, democratic classrooms, the impact of the Institute, and
obstacles and supports to change. Using these four themes, I devised a final interview
protocol. On February 8, all of the teachers gathered together at UNLV to participate in a group interview around these four themes. As hoped for, this interview proceeded very much like a discussion between colleagues with the participants sharing experiences and asking questions about practice. The audio tapes of this interview as well as the transcripts formed the last form of data from this study.

I began to write up the data by focusing first on each case as an individual story. These stories were then sent to the participants to review and comment on. Each of them responded favorably, and in one case, the teacher requested that the case study write up be sent to her administrator. Finally, the cases were examined together in light of the four identified themes. Throughout the process, I discussed the process, data, and results with my chair, various committee members, and others as the need arose. Also, I continually went back to the published literature for new ways of understanding the data itself.

Ultimately, I aimed to create a picture of how this group of teachers worked to implement their new understandings in their classrooms. I understood that such implementation would not be uniform (in fact, may not even be present) and that it would be difficult to see.

The results of this study contribute to the larger fields of teacher education and democratic teacher practice. Specifically, the results speak to the growing body of research surrounding the National Writing Project (NWP) and its constituent sites (specifically the Southern Nevada Writing Project [SNWP]) especially as this group works to help teachers of writing take up more democratic writing pedagogies. Furthermore, this study contributes to our understanding of the ways in which teachers
take action to make their teaching more democratic. Finally, the findings from this study have implications for future research around NWP, teacher education, and democratic pedagogy.

The Results

Each of the teachers reported that the Institute had impacted their understanding and practice. Viewed through the lenses of my four themes, change was evident in all of the participants in all of the areas. Beyond the themes I constructed, I used Arnetta Ball's (2006) model of teacher change to examine the ways the participants shifted their practice to a more democratic stance. Also, drawing on the literature surrounding democratic pedagogy that frames this study, insights and implications emerge in terms of the role of teachers as intellectuals, the limitations of liberal visions of democracy, and the importance of the prominent positioning of democracy in teacher education.

Teacher Work in terms of the Four Constructed Themes

Each of the teachers credited their participation in the Institute with being a major influence in their learning and understanding of being a teacher of writing. Each of them cited ways in which their teaching was changed because of what they learned in the Institute. Nikki provided the most dramatic shift in beliefs, practices, and attitudes. Nikki said that prior to the Institute she hated writing and would avoid it when at all possible. However, after the Institute, writing became an integral part of Nikki’s teaching day; she enacts a very definite writing pedagogy with understanding, and she says that she “loves it.” For Vanessa, the change was not as drastic but still as meaningful. She
says that the Institute did not give her any new ideas about teaching writing per se, but it did give her “permission to do what [she] believed in” (September 29).

Further, each of the teachers’ classrooms had evidence of “democratic supports” (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). These included problem-solving, student decision-making, student choice, collaborative work, and respect among students and between students and teacher. For example, when implementing a new strategy (response groups) Debbi relied on her students to help her make decisions about the way they were using it so that the groups met the needs of all the students and of Debbi.

Nikki’s implementation of the process approach to teaching writing highlighted a dilemma often faced in teacher education. Because Nikki was so new to the process approach of teaching writing, her cognitive efforts were largely dedicated to making her practice fit what she perceived to be the “rules,” thus compromising her decision-making capabilities. She was focused on becoming a “routine expert” at the expense of being able to use “innovation” to make her teaching more effective (Bransford et al., 2006; National Academy of Education, 2006). In addition, I posit that this focus on the routines of her classroom also prevented Nikki from implementing problem-solving in her classroom structure. Still, Nikki is making some small innovations in her practice and has begun to view her practice as more problematic so it is likely that as she becomes more familiar with the routines of the process approach that she will incorporate more opportunities for both her and her students to enter into meaningful problem-solving situations.

In examining the impact of the Institute on the practice of these four teachers, several strategies surface that have ties to the Institute. Some of these practices such as
the protocol used in peer response are taken directly from the Institute where other strategies such as the Inquiry Topic Generation Activity show adoption with alteration suggesting a more complete understanding of the principles underlying the Institute. Finally, these teachers also use the principles underlying the Institute and process approach theory to evaluate potential new practices and to re-evaluate old practices. Then these principles guide the adoption or alteration of practice. For example, Ann uses what she learned to make her portfolio usage more student-centered and Charlotte uses her experience to adapt a new approach that her administration advocates for her inclusion classroom.

Finally, all of the teachers encountered a unique set of obstacles to their change as well as a unique set of supports. It was telling that all teachers met some resistance related to standardized testing and curriculum. Both Nikki and Debbi struggled with their students as they implemented school-wide test preparation programs for extended periods of time, and Charlotte reports that her school will go through a similar phase in the near future. On the other hand, many of the teachers spoke of their student work as a form of support for their new work. Vanessa would take writing samples to parent conferences to show what her students were accomplishing.

In each of these ways, the teachers undertook change that was based in democratic action. The teachers were claiming their place as intellectuals (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Giroux, 2005) by making these decisions. As they did so, they were met with resistance and support as they shifted their practice. In each case, the teachers had to negotiate the specific ways in which they would teach writing. At the end of the study, each felt successful.
This study, then, adds a textured picture of how SNWP can be a force for helping teachers develop approaches to writing that are more democratic. Further, this study suggests that not only the practices of these teachers, but also their beliefs were affected by participation in the Institute. The findings also provide a picture of teachers trying to claim positions of greater autonomy and decision-making and the forces working for and against that change. Finally, the study provides insight into how teachers come to understand and enact democratic principles of teaching writing.

Ball's Model of Teacher Change

Arnetha Ball (2006) suggests that as teacher educators strive to help the practicing and pre-service teachers in their classes make personal commitments to teach and act in socially just, democratic ways they use pedagogies steeped in writing—writing for learning, writing for reflection, and writing for expression. As teacher educators do this, they will be able to see the growth of the class members towards a more democratically committed praxis through their discussions of theory and their plans for and actions in their classrooms.

Based on her work in the United States and South Africa, Ball (2006) proposes a model of teacher growth that consists of four stages: metacognitive awareness, ideological becoming, internalization, and active agency, guided by personal voice. Teachers who move through this progression begin by understanding that the way they view the world is only one way to see and understand it and that their students—especially students of different ethnic, racial, or social backgrounds—have different ways of seeing, understanding, and being (metacognitive awareness). Building on this understanding, they begin to examine new theories of teaching and learning to gain
insight into their own practice and the work of their students (ideological becoming). Next, teachers begin to make plans to implement changes in their teaching to make it more democratic and equitable for all (internalization). Finally, teachers begin to combine new theory and their own experiences to create new ways of teaching that are relevant and equitable for their students and the broader communities—present and future—of their students (active agency).

Teacher learning and change in Ball's (2006) model is rooted in sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1979, 1986). Under this framework, the focus is on the learner taking an external idea and making it uniquely his or her own (Lee & Ball, 2005). To make the shift from external factor to internal aspect of being, the idea must fall in the learner's zone of proximal development. This explains why teachers demonstrate differing levels of growth and learning from professional development experiences; they each arrive with a different zone of proximal development. Learning, in this model, is not a linear process; it is often recursive and complex. Therefore, teachers can demonstrate aspects of different levels in their learning. Furthermore, this model takes up teacher learning as involving teacher beliefs; as teachers learn, their beliefs change. In fact, learning, on occasion, may be understood more as an entrenching of beliefs than as a new set of skills (Ball, 2006). Still, Ball suggests that by observing the actions and listening to the language of a learner, teacher educators can begin to understand the development of the learner—especially as that growth and learning are connected to ideas of democratic pedagogy.

In this study, the participants were active members in a professional development community that used writing both as an aim of pedagogy and as a tool of pedagogy.
Participants in the Institute write intensively and extensively to express themselves and to reflect on their experiences as writers, students, and teachers. Furthermore, an underlying goal of the Institute is to move teachers to a more democratically oriented writing pedagogy. Therefore, Ball’s model provides a useful lens for looking at the participants’ progress towards democratic praxis in writing instruction (See Table 8 for an overview between Ball’s model of change and its relation to the practice of these teachers).

*Metacognitive Awareness.* Teachers at the level of Metacognitive Awareness begin to understand that the way they understand and see the world is from a certain vantage point and that there are other vantage points from which to know and comprehend things. In terms of writing instruction, this awareness can be manifested in the ways teachers think about the purposes of writing and writing instruction, the methods employed in teaching writing, and the reasons given for writing inside the classroom. The participants of this study all entered the Institute having experienced and been introduced to a variety of ways to think about teaching writing from the very traditional (red pen and strict rules) to the more progressive (Writing Workshop) and many places in between. Understanding that there are new ways of understanding and envisioning writing instruction came as they interacted with others prior to coming to the Institute. Charlotte’s comments from her application are representative of what the other teachers shared.

I was never a good writer or reader in school, and through the years I have struggled. My teachers taught with a red pen and strict rules for how we wrote and what we wrote. The Literacy Specialist at my school opened my eyes to Writing
Workshop. This has been a great way for me to interact with and teach the students writing.

Ideological Becoming. At this level of development teachers begin to use the ideas of others to understand their teaching. The ideas have not become their own; rather, the ideas are used consciously in the planning, reflecting on, and implementation of teaching strategies. Four of the teachers in this study came to the Institute operating at this level. For example, Debbi’s application discussed her use of the Poralupi and Fletcher (2005) materials in her teaching. Charlotte, Ann, and Vanessa had similar positions that emerged during the initial phases of the Institute.

Nikki is an example of a teacher who took the step of ideological becoming during the Institute. Nikki came to the Institute as a teacher who “hated teaching writing”, but she left with “a difference in philosophy” (February 8). Her decision to change her approach to teaching writing was a critical, carefully thought through decision. Still, the ideas she is using, though she is committed to using them and believes them to be effective, lie outside of her. They are more of a measuring stick as opposed to a guiding light. As seen in her concern with issues such as the length of her mini-lessons, Nikki is still trying to fit her practice into what she perceives as the boundaries of a process approach to teaching writing. In her own words, “My whole writing is based completely on the writers’ workshop. Everything’s a workshop” (February 8).

Nikki has made a critical decision to adopt a process approach to teaching writing based on her experience in the Institute. At this time, though, she is still getting comfortable with the framework of the process approach (specifically, writers’ workshop). As time passes and her sense of efficacy as a process approach teacher
grows, she will move beyond this phase of learning. Indeed, as will be discussed shortly, Nikki has already begun to exhibit certain characteristics of internalization, the next step in Ball’s model.

**Internalization.** At the stage of internalization, teachers begin to make new ideas uniquely their own. This happens as teachers combine these new ideas with their own experiences to create their own understandings and implementations of these ways of being in a classroom. At this stage, teachers take responsibility for student learning as opposed to leaving that responsibility at the doorstep of theory. These teachers realize they are responsible for their students’ learning and the theories that guide their practice are simply tools to understand and interpret student and teacher work. Often, this stage is characterized by teachers making plans to look at their own practice in significant ways, usually through research or action research projects.

At least one teacher came to the Institute poised to make this step. Debbi’s application read in part, “I have been taking a class based on Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi’s "Teaching the Qualities of Writing" and would like to combine my strategies for teaching writing with the strategies I will take from the Institute” (February 8). In addition to Debbi, Charlotte and Ann are teachers who are in the process of internalizing more democratic ideas about teaching writing. That these teachers take responsibility for their students’ learning and have made the theories underlying their classes uniquely their own can be seen in a number of ways.

Charlotte used a variety of theories to make sense of her previous experiences in the classroom as well as to guide her actions during the course of the study. Charlotte had used a process approach to teaching writing her first year and had been supported in
that by the literacy specialist at her school. However, according to her it was the Institute that really helped her to internalize the process approach—to use it in ways to help her reach her goals. According to her, because of the Institute she has “a lot more courage to step out of different boxes” (February 8). Using this new courage, Charlotte made very conscious efforts to include a process approach to teaching in her class. Part way through the study, Charlotte’s administration sent her to a district training on inclusive classrooms—classrooms that have a significant number of special education students in them. In the training she was introduced to several strategies that were designed to help her special education students function more effectively in the classroom. Instead of adopting this model wholeheartedly, Charlotte combined it with her knowledge of and commitment to process approaches to ensure her classroom was built on principles she believed in. By critically choosing to alter her approach to teaching in meaningful ways based on her learning and her experiences, Charlotte demonstrated a level of internalization of the process approach to teaching.

That Charlotte took responsibility for her students’ learning is seen in her work with Paul and Stephan as well as with the rest of her class. At one point, the administration approached Charlotte with an offer to transfer some of the students in her class to another teacher. After considering it, however, Charlotte felt that she could not do it because, according to her, the students they were going to transfer would not learn as much in their new classroom because they would have trouble fitting into the new classroom. As a result, Charlotte continued to have the largest fourth-grade class in her school.
Debbi’s teaching decisions during the course of the study suggest that she has made substantial steps to move beyond using a single understanding of teaching writing to including her own experiences to make these theories her own. In previous years, Debbi used the Portalupi and Fletcher (2005) book almost without deviation. She did not apply her own experiences to make critical decisions about how that approach would look in her classroom. During the course of this study, she has used these resources as well as others only as she has judged them to be useful in light of her experience. She is no longer trying to make her practice fit a notion she has of what her class should be like, based on a specific approach; instead, she is using those points of view in conjunction with her own experiences and knowledge to make appropriate decisions about her classroom.

Because Debbi feels ultimately responsible for her students’ learning, she was concerned that her student teacher was not meeting the needs of her students and felt that she had to step in during lessons to present additional information and during small group instruction to co-teach the lessons for her lowest achieving groups. Debbi did this because she was concerned that these students were missing out and as she said, “they are my students; I had to do something” (November 8; italics added).

Ann’s use of portfolios is an example of a teacher combining theory with her experience to make critical pedagogical decisions around the teaching of writing. In previous years, Ann had used portfolios regularly. However, Ann felt that her students had simply changed the things she suggested. The result was that the students turned in what Ann felt was really her work. As a result, the portfolios did not have a sense of who the students were, “because they were my papers that I was writing for the kids with all
the corrections I was making on their papers. . . they are not learning if I am doing all of the work” (October 19). Ann wanted the work to be the students’ work; she wanted them to have control and power. This year, after learning more about the process approach to teaching writing, Ann turned control over to them. Still, Ann retained some power, because she felt some assignments were so important that they must be in the portfolio. The resulting portfolios were a combination of student choice (2 pieces per portfolio) and teacher choice (one piece per portfolio). Ann used what she knew about students and the curriculum of her school in combination with what she had learned about the process approach to create an assignment that met the goals Ann had set for her class.

Ann’s ultimate goal is that the students in her class would become self-directed learners, but she took responsibility to lead them to this idea. Ann built several structures into her class such as peer response forms with action plans and learning logs that she felt fostered the idea of student ownership of work. Ann views the process as a long and involved process but she is seeing progress. “The kids are more into it. They are more participatory. . . They were a little bit freaked out at first. They were like, ‘this isn’t normal. What do we do? How do we get started? Why are we doing this this way? Why aren’t you just telling us what to do?’ and then they started really getting into the writing so I like the way I teach it this year” (February 8). Ann feels that the increased participation and student involvement in their writing is a result of how she has structured her class and the pedagogical decisions she has made. Ann took responsibility for the students’ learning by consciously planning for it and keeping it foremost in her mind.

Each of these teachers combined process approach theory and experience to make critical decisions about their classroom practice. By internalizing the theories and using
them in combination with their experience and localized knowledge, they took responsibility for their students’ learning and did not rely on a mechanical adoption of theory to account for student learning.

Another way the Institute fosters this step of development is through the teaching demonstrations that each participant presents. Teaching demonstrations are to be an opportunity for the Institute participants to take a specific aspect of their work that they are willing to share but have some questions about, research that aspect of teaching writing, and present their findings to the group. Often, these presentations include student work. Along with the presentation given to the group as a whole, participants prepare a written paper outlining their findings and insights into their question. Teaching demonstrations provide the participants with a way to begin formally synthesizing research and experience in new ways and are examples of what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) call knowledge-of-practice.

Ball (2006) says that as teachers at the level of internalization engage in thinking about their practice in research-based ways, they begin to make plans for their own future practice. These plans—made from a combination of theory and experience—are another indication that the teachers are internalizing the theories.

Charlotte, Debbi, and Ann all completed teacher demonstrations that were intensely personal in that the demonstrations all dealt with issues the teachers were struggling with. Furthermore, Charlotte, Debbi, and Ann each used their teaching demonstration from the Institute to meaningfully plan for and make changes in their classrooms. For example, Charlotte used some of the strategies from her demonstration of teaching voice in writing during the study. Ann’s teaching demonstration on creative
revision provided a backbone for much of her writing push during the study and served as
the fodder for many of her mini-lessons during this time. Debbi's teaching demonstration
on student inquiry came to form a framework for her day-to-day work with her students.
In every case, the teachers were able to use the insights and information gained through
the process of researching, planning, and presenting the teaching demonstration to change
their practice.

In terms of the role of teacher-research in the development of teachers, Nikki is an
interesting case. Nikki's teaching demonstration from the Institute did not seem to have a
significant impact on her classroom practice during the study. However, she is beginning
to speak about her practice as an object she can question and examine for results.
Specifically, Nikki feels confident that her new approach to teaching writing helped her
students do better on the writing proficiency. So when she felt her approach was being
challenged she responded,

I want to see how my kids did on the writing proficiency before I hear anything
about my writers' workshop. I'm not changing anything until I see what those
results are. And if those results come back the way I think they are probably
going to come back, my writers' workshop is going to stay right where it is.
(February 8).

Talking about her practice as a site for investigation demonstrates that Nikki is not simply
acting at the level of Ideological Becoming. At times, she is moving to taking positions
that speak to the Internalization stage.

Charlotte, Debbi, and Ann combined new ideas about the process approach to
teaching with their previous experiences to make critical teaching decisions that resulted
in unique contextualized ways of teaching writing. They also took responsibility for their students’ learning and built into their classroom practice ways to support and enhance this learning. Finally, each of them used the insights and information gained from their Institute teaching demonstrations to make plans for their classes. These plans formed a meaningful part in each teacher’s classroom. These teachers began to internalize the idea of a process approach to teaching.

**Active Agency.** Teachers at the Active Agency level of growth use their knowledge to move beyond simply combining theories of others and their own experience to positing their own theories about teaching and learning. These theories will lead to efforts to research their own classrooms on their own in an effort to improve their practice. Furthermore, teachers pushing students to think critically and consider new perspectives are teachers enacting a curriculum that is on the Active Agency level (Ball, 2006).

Vanessa is the only teacher in this study to exhibit characteristics of this level of growth. During this school year, Vanessa has begun to reflect on and wonder about the role of the climate in her classroom and how that affected student writing. During the group interview, Vanessa spoke of her teaching this year. “I brought them farther in writing up to this point [compared to the end of last year]. They’re much better writers and they are much better readers because they are writing so much.” Vanessa theorizes that the climate in her room led to her students’ growth as writers. “I think it totally has been creating a climate of writers” (February 8). This theory represents Vanessa’s attempt at trying to understand what is happening beyond what she learned explicitly in the theory of the process approach.
Beyond her theories, Vanessa began to wonder about specific aspects of her class—most notably, her students’ use of conventions in writing. Following the Institute, Vanessa had taken a much more hands off approach to teaching conventions than in previous years. In September, Vanessa characterized the change and her outlook in these words, “Whereas before, teacher stands at the front of the room, does the lecture, they write the notes, and we move on so. . . [This year] because they are writing their mechanics automatically improve—because they share their writing with each other during different points of the week” (September 29). At the end of the study, though, Vanessa was beginning to wonder and had planned a way to examine her students’ knowledge of the mechanics of writing. “it’s going to be interesting to evaluate. . . if [the students] learned those mechanics on their own—just on trial and error and typing so many pieces—you know saying it to each other—you know, peer editing each other” (February 8). To examine this, Vanessa is planning on using the end of year tests given at her school.

Beyond looking at her classroom as a site of investigation and learning for herself, Vanessa pushes her students to investigate and think independently by taking up new perspectives. Previously, I have discussed the curricular choices Vanessa made, which suggest that she is operating at the Active Agency level. Another example of her work as seen from the eyes of her students, though, demonstrates that her students have noticed the difference in the material Vanessa is teaching. Vanessa recounted the following story during the group interview (February 8).

At the beginning of the second quarter, a parent called to schedule a conference with Vanessa. After speaking to him on the phone, she was concerned that he was upset
so she invited her assistant principal, Ms. Safir, to sit in on the conference with her. After a few pleasantries, Ms. Safir asked the parent to explain the concern. The parent felt that Vanessa’s class was too hard because her student who had previously received straight A’s had received a lower grade. In response, Ms. Safir asked the student to explain what his previous English teachers had asked him to do. He responded that they had asked him to give the right answer and then moved on. Then, Ms. Safir asked him what Vanessa did that was different. “Well, she expects us to think,” the student replied. Realizing that this answer was probably not worded well, he tried again. “I mean, she expects us to synthesize and evaluate all this stuff.” The tenor of the conference quickly changed, and, since that time, Vanessa says that parent has been one of her biggest supporters. Even her students understand that what she wants them to do is different than their other English class experiences.

Vanessa is a teacher who has begun to take an active role in theorizing on the learning of her students and begun to formulate her own research based on what she is doing in class. In the future, Vanessa will be able to adapt her teaching in response to her action research plans. Furthermore, Vanessa is enacting a curriculum that pushes her students to take up different perspectives and, as her student said “think.” While these actions may be new, the mindset behind them is not, according to Vanessa. She said that what the Institute really did was give her the confidence to teach how and what she always believed was right. So, instead of the Institute causing a change in Vanessa’s beliefs, it is more likely that the Institute affected her confidence so that she was able to change her practices so they aligned more fully with her beliefs. This finding is
Table 8

An overview of how Ball’s (2006) model of teacher growth can be used to understand the learning and growth of the teachers in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Past Practice</th>
<th>Current Level</th>
<th>Current Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td>Constrained teaching of writing.</td>
<td>Ideological becoming</td>
<td>Process approach to teaching writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Use process approach to teaching writing with minimal understanding because her literacy specialist advocated it.</td>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Uses her experience in the Institute in combination with her growing understanding of process approach to guide her inclusion of special education students when presented with new ideas about inclusion classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbi</td>
<td>Used a very rigid approach to teaching writing that had surface elements of process approach but without a full understanding.</td>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Uses process approach theory with her own experiences in the Institute to encourage student growth and ownership of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Taught writing as it fit into a narrow conceptualization of</td>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Stresses student ownership because of process approach theory and her own Institute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

213

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writing.

Often ended up receiving her “own work” back instead of student owned work.

experiences.

Takes responsibility for her students’ learning.

Uses her teaching demonstration as a way to advocate for change in her department as well as a way to change her own teaching.

Vanessa | Focused on mechanical aspects of writing. Felt unable to teach how and what she believed was the right way to teach. | Active agency | Feels confident to teach how and what she believes. Theorizes about the role of classroom climate in the writing growth of her students. Makes plans to investigate aspects of her students learning.

consistent with Ball’s (2006) acknowledgement of the zone of proximal development in her work as well as the need for increased confidence as well.

Summary

Ball’s (2006) four-level model of teacher growth is a useful tool to examine the growth of these teachers in adopting a more democratic writing praxis. All of the teachers demonstrate growth in skills, ideas, and/or confidence. Nikki’s efforts to incorporate a process approach mark a dramatic departure from her previous ideas about teaching writing, and currently she is still focused on fitting her practice to the theory (ideological becoming), although there are signs that she also acts at times on the Internalization level. Charlotte, Debbi, and Ann have all begun to combine theory with their experience to make critical decisions that result in contextualized practices of teaching writing that are unique to each teacher. Furthermore, when pushed in structured
ways, these teachers can make action plans for their teaching based on their research and can implement these plans (internalization). Vanessa has moved to the point where she is explicitly creating her own theories about teaching and learning. Also, she has begun to individually make plans to look at her practice in action-research based ways and to change her approach accordingly (active agency).

*Teachers as Intellectuals*

Regardless of how one views the growth of these teachers, the overriding message of this study is that teachers are intellectuals. By this I mean that these teachers realize that they have a unique knowledge of their classrooms and that knowledge coupled with their understanding of teaching writing positions them to make informed, critical decisions regarding what goes on in their classrooms. Teachers, like those in this study, who understand the process of writing and teaching writing are capable of making critical, educated decisions regarding their students' lives and learning.

Earlier, I cited the work of Freire (1970, 1998), Dewey (1916/2004, 1938), and Giroux (2005) to explain how teachers needed to be empowered in their decision-making if we, as a society, are to move towards the goal of true democratic education. Gutmann (1987) suggests that in the work on democratic education the teachers are the most commonly overlooked part of the process. In this work, teachers must be "at the center" (Gray, 2000).

In order to effectively make the transition to teachers as intellectuals there must be movement in and out. Teachers must be brought into the discourses and discussions of practice and theory in academic and administrative circles and into the conversations around policies and laws governing schools and education. At the same time, there must
be a movement out. The work of teachers needs to be taken out to the general public. Accounts of good teaching—critical teaching in the face of obstacles and challenges need to be read by the public just as much as they need to be read by the academicians.

*Bringing teachers in to the conversation.* Teachers must be brought into the academic discussions surrounding teaching and learning. While it is important to set out and outline educational theory and to conduct ‘objective’ research on teaching and learning, the experiences of teachers in real classrooms are just as valuable, if not more so, because those stories are concerned with the ways humans interact with the theories (Ball, 2006; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Without the teachers’ narratives, accounts may over-simplify or over-dramatize the struggle teachers face in the classroom (Michelli, 2005). Consequently, teachers must be invited into the discussion surrounding what works and what does not work pedagogically. This means that teacher education needs to make room for teachers’ stories both in classroom and research settings (Cochran-Smith, 2004). For example, the work of Ann and Vanessa suggest very definite connections between narrative and expository writing in their students work. The connection between these types of writing has been and continues to be an issue for many researchers (see for example Romano, 1987; Tchudi & Mitchell, 1999; Gere, Christenbury, & Sassi, 2005). Ann and Vanessa seem to have something very definite to say based on their classroom experience—something that academia would be well-served in listening to.

Also, teachers’ voices need to be brought in and honored when considering curriculum (Cochran-Smith, 2004). All three elementary teachers reported going to inservices where scripted, “teacher-proof” programs were introduced. Such programs are
evidence of a “total lack of faith in the possibility that teachers can know and create” (Freire, 1998, p. 8; see also Giroux, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004). From this study, however, it seems clear that these teachers know and create in critical, ingenious ways. Charlotte, for example, knows what it is like to be in her classroom and to deal with the overwhelming challenge of large numbers of special education students. However, on multiple occasions during the year, she felt her story was being disregarded and she was being treated as if “nothing [she] did was worth anything” (January 18). Allowing her to have a place at the table may have not only improved the quality of Charlotte’s year, but also may have helped design interventions and curriculum to better meet the needs of all the students at her school.

On a larger scale, teachers’ voices need to be heard in the political sphere. Currently meaningful participation in political discourse is denied teachers (DeBlase, 2007). Failure to make room for teachers in legislative and governmental dialogues dooms education to continue making the same mistakes over and over again. Perhaps the best example of this is the skills-laden education put forth in NCLB. NCLB simplifies learning and being educated to simplistic notions of knowing and mechanical bits of information. In part, this simplification is both based on and leads to an over-simplified vision of what it means to be teacher (Giroux, 2005). Furthermore, NCLB and like-minded legislation fail to include teachers as primary informants or agenda setters—a troubling fact (McCracken, 2004).

Teachers’ narratives—like those of Nikki, Debbi, and Vanessa—can be powerful lenses for legislators to understand the effects of so-called accountability policies and high-stakes testing has on children in the classroom and on the efforts of teachers to reach
those students. How might legislation be changed or viewed differently if lawmakers considered the effects testing and test preparation have on Nikki and Debbi’s students?

Having said that teachers need to be moved into the discussions surrounding teaching and learning at all levels suggests that teachers are waiting eagerly to share these stories. This is not the case. While some teachers certainly are reaching out to share their stories in all of the arenas and more, many teachers are not ready to take this step (Burns, 2007). To some degree, this is a result of the conditions they work in. Top-down management, teacher-proof curriculum, and the public disenfranchisement of teachers has led to a disheartened teaching population (DeBlase, 2007; Burns, 2007; Giroux, 2005). Many teachers no longer trust their own story or voice; consequently, “it becomes relatively easy to let others name the ‘reality’ of what constitutes best practices and suitable belief in... teaching” (DeBlase, 2007, p. 118).

Still, teachers must be more pro-active in sharing their stories and their understanding. There is no single way such sharing must look. DeBlase (2007) suggests that grass roots efforts are a key in expanding the places teacher voices count. The first step in this framework is for teachers to step out of their classrooms and begin talking amongst themselves. Burns (2007) highlights the necessary role of professional organizations and suggests that these groups need to be more politically aggressive. The implication is that teachers should belong and actively participate in these types of organizations. Lortie (1975/2005) suggests that action research is the key. Teachers need to begin to see themselves as researchers and their classrooms as sites of investigation. The resulting knowledge will give teachers confidence to stake out a larger place in the discussion (see also Cochran-Smith, 2004). All of these approaches have
some merit, and the best approaches most likely lie in some combination of these three
approaches and possibly others.

*Taking Teachers’ Stories Out of the Classroom.* Regardless of the approach taken
by individual teachers, the culminating effect of each of these approaches is that teacher
stories are being taken out to a wider and wider audience. There is a vital need to take
teachers’ stories out to the general public. Wilson (personal communication, February
2006) suggested that one of the biggest needs in educational research today is not
necessarily learning more about teaching, but making the lived experiences of teachers
more known to people outside the field of education.

As I entered the classrooms of these teachers, I repeatedly found myself in awe at
the work they were doing. I was continually impressed by their caring, their
professionalism, and their commitment. How do we take that story to the public in a day
and age where teacher and school bashing is the norm and teacher praise is generally lip-
service and simply political correctness? How do I reveal these stories with all of their
richness and texture in ways that cause regular citizens to sit up and take notice—to
understand the difficulty of the teaching context in twenty-first century America?

Certainly the approaches suggested by DeBlase (2007), Burns (2007), and Lortie
(1975/2005) provide some ideas about ways this can happen. Additionally, some books
and movies are making efforts but these generally do not deal in-depth with the very real
obstacles and challenges the teachers face on a regular basis. There needs to be more
attention given to the sharing of real stories of teachers—from their own perspectives and
in their own voices—and this sharing must reach the general population and not be
confined to the relatively small segment of the United States working in and around
education. Education in a democracy should place the stories of the full participants—students and teachers—at the center of agenda-making and knowledge building.

In summary, teachers need to be invited in to the discussion about education at every level and it must be in meaningful ways, and once that invitation is opened, teachers must be positioned to accept it in significant ways. Teacher stories and voices need to be shared with the larger population to create a true understanding of what teachers do and face every day. If we fail to take these movements, we will be relegated to perpetuating an already elitist system for another generation (Freire, 1992; Giroux, 2005). “It is through the mediation and action of teacher voice that the very nature of the schooling process is often either sustained or challenged” (Giroux, 2005, p. 144). If we want to have schools that enable democratic ways of being for our students, we need schools that are homes to democratic ways of being for teachers. Teachers are the key to learning and living in a democracy.

Limitations of Liberal Democracy

The approach most commonly associated with democracy in today’s society is a liberal approach to democracy (Gutmann, 1999; Giroux, 2005). Liberal forms of democracy are built on the idea that individual voices and choices are to be prized and valued above all else (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). At the same time, the rights of every member of the community are to be respected. What happens then when an individual espouses views that are racist, sexist, or similarly elitist in nature? At this point, liberal democracy leaves teachers with no direction (Giroux, 2005). For example, how was Ann to justify silencing the two students in her class who espoused racist views? A liberal democracy would say that while repugnant, such views are part of the democracy and
individual ideas and voices must be honored. The result is a striking tension between two
tenets of liberal democracy: everyone has the right to speak and no one has the right to
say prejudice comments. This is the limitation of liberal notions of what it means to live
in a democratic community (Giroux, 2005; Abowitz & Harnish, 2006).

When teaching for a democracy, however, Dewey (2004/1916) suggests that
teachers are to identify those things that are least democratic (in this case, racist
comments) and exclude them from the class. Building on this notion, Giroux (2005),
Gutmann (1999), and others argue for what is called a radical view of democracy.
Radical democracy, instead of focusing on individual choice, takes care and relationality
as the keys to decision-making (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Gutmann, 1999).

In the end, Ann did what she should have done, but she did it while
acknowledging that what she did may have been wrong given her understanding of
democratic living. Radical democracy, however, provides Ann with a moral position for
her decision to step in to the classroom action. In this light, Ann (and, by extension, all
teachers) has a moral obligation to step in and silence the offending students because
such views are repressive and restricting to the group as a whole. Radical democracy
provides a rational and critical framework for understanding and guiding schooling and
teaching in the coming years.

The Positioning of Democracy in Teacher Education

Nieto (2000, 2005), Darling-Hammond (2005), and Cochran-Smith (2004) are
among the leading voices in teacher education that are calling for a greater emphasis on
issues surrounding democracy, social justice, and equity in teacher education. According
to these and other researchers, teacher education must place the goal of democracy and
social justice squarely in its sites. "A goal of teacher education is to make it normative rather than exceptional for teachers and teacher educators to work as advocates for social justice" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 23). If teacher education does not do this, we are sentencing a whole generation of children to a life of poverty—materially, intellectually, and morally (Giroux, 2005). Freire (1992) suggests that the work of teacher educators needs to be centered on helping teachers to understand the ways in which their places in society (and, by extension, those of their students) are socially, historically, and politically created. This knowledge then provides the key to a more equitable practice.

In this study, none of the participants named themselves as intellectuals, their work as democratic, or their curriculum as liberating. At the same time, these teachers were acting as intellectuals by making critical, informed decisions regarding their practice and their students; they were working to implement and build in more democratic structures in their classrooms; they were bringing in and highlighting literature that portrayed new ways for students to name their own experiences and see themselves as agents in constructing a place for their voices.

In their practice, these teachers were doing courageous work, but they would have been better served, if they had a greater ability to name what they were doing. Naming does several things. First, when we name something it becomes open for discussion and critique (Shannon, 2001). Second, naming a position gives proponents a platform to stand on when defending their ideals (Shannon, 2001; Nieto, 2000). Naming an idea or practice also opens the conversation around education more equitably because all participants have the power to name and introduce topics (DeBlase, 2007). Finally, the act of naming an idea, goal, or strategy is an act of ownership. If the goal is to help
teachers enact democratic pedagogies in meaningful ways, then they must own that work in personally valuable ways. One step in this process is naming.

The teachers in this study had recently completed intensive work that was built upon the ideal of social justice and the proposition that teachers were central to the work of social justice and democratic education. Will they name themselves in terms consistent with democracy and social justice down the road? It is possible. As with anything else, this could be a matter of time in learning. Only time will tell. However, it is a possibility for these teachers because democratic education was a central part of their development at least for this summer. All teacher education programs need to make it a consistent focus of their programs (Nieto, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004). In this way, the focus of democratic education is not the matter of a summer but the matter of years. With time, the likelihood of teachers naming and owning their central roles in their students’ understanding increases. Ultimately, that ownership and praxis is the most important outcome of teacher education programs.

The teachers in this study demonstrated change and growth in terms of their approaches to teaching writing and their commitment to constructing democratic classrooms. Evidence suggests that participation in the Institute was a personally meaningful experience for each teacher that resulted in a new practices and ideals. Still, each teacher faced challenges as they sought to change their practice. These challenges were met with the aid of various supports. Also, looking at these teachers in terms of Ball’s (2006) model of teacher change provides another way of understanding their growth to more democratic practices and pedagogies. Finally, the teachers’ work highlighted their roles as intellectuals, provided examples of some limitations in
prevailing, liberal ideals of democracy, and supported the need to make democratic practice a prominent goal in teacher education programs.

Conclusion and Next Steps

I began this dissertation by explaining my first contact with democratic writing pedagogy and how that impacted me as a teacher. Based on that first experience I spent nine more years in the secondary classroom looking for ways to open up my practice in more critical, more democratic ways. Now, as I sit on the verge of becoming an officially decorated teacher educator, I am concerned with how to help other teachers (practicing and pre-service) take up similar ideals and concerns. I feel strongly that teacher education must push out in ways to make the purpose of education just as much an issue of research and thinking as the methods of education; we need to ask about the best goals of education as well as the best practices of education (Zeichner, 1983; Giroux, 2005; Freire, 1998; Dewey, 2004/1916). Furthermore, the purpose of education must include helping all students develop the necessary skills to take an active part in every aspect of society without respect to ethnicity, race, class, or any other elitist notions of privilege and well-being (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2005).

In order to examine how teachers could be pushed towards critical encounters with democratic praxis, I chose to examine the work of the Southern Nevada Writing Project’s Summer Institute. I chose this focus because the Institute advocates a democratic vision of writing pedagogy and is built on democratic principles of professional development. In the end, I would suggest that the Institute—at least this iteration of the Institute—was successful in terms of moving teachers to more democratic
praxis. Based on what I observed and what they said, the teachers in this study are changed in a number of ways.

Nikki, Charlotte, Debbi, Ann, and Vanessa have moved towards a more democratic writing praxis and are concerned with meeting the needs of their students. To do this they have made critical decisions and engaged in innovative approaches to teaching writing and providing their students with ways of experiencing what they variously described as the “power,” “love,” “passion,” or “energy” of writing. Their experience in the Summer Institute of SNWP has served each of them as a source of knowledge, courage, and passion.

Still, their journey is not over.

And neither is mine. As a teacher educator and a researcher in the field of democratic writing pedagogy and teacher learning, I see myself engaged in this type of research for years to come.

In the future, more work needs to be done to examine the ways in which teachers take up democratic practice over time. This could include the ways in which understandings change and the ways in which experiences prepare teachers for making democratic changes. These studies need to be longitudinal case studies that examine the process of change over years not semesters. Furthermore, as we expand our knowledge of how change takes place, we must examine how teachers are emotionally sustained during the change process. Or, as Vanessa put it, “where do you go to keep getting your tank filled?” (February 8). How to support and encourage change over the long term are issues surrounding democratic teacher education that also need more exploration. This study could be used in some ways to provide clues about potential answers, but more
specific studies need to be undertaken. Finally, more in-depth examination of how teachers become “adaptive experts” (Bransford et al., 2006; National Academy of Education, 2006) is needed. What factors lead to an over dependence on either innovation or routines?

In doing any of this research, though, the teachers participating need to be given more voice. It is not enough to claim that teachers are intellectuals; researchers must honor teacher knowledge by making a central part of their work (Lortie, 1975/2005). As researchers, we need to make efforts to understand what teachers know and to share teacher stories in all of their richness and complexity. It is the rich, textured pictures of teachers at work, critically approaching their teaching that will become a force for answering the concerns of critics and detractors (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Fry, Smith, & Johnson, 2002; Little & Lanier, 2001).

In the end, as researchers, we must live the ideals we advocate. Empowering teachers can begin with us. As teachers are empowered to make decisions and to claim the title of intellectual, they will be better positioned to help students understand their own power and value.
Demographic Information on the Participants and their Schools

### Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>School/Grade Level</th>
<th>School Demographics</th>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

Classroom Observation Instrument

**Classroom Observation Protocol**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Date</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observer’s Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class/Grade Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Time/length</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical Setting/Classroom Context**

Briefly describe the classroom setting. For instance, consider the room arrangement and what’s on the wall/board. Also consider what’s not there. Do the details suggest student-centered or teacher-centered instruction? What are the details that stand out to you concerning the teaching of writing? If helpful, sketch the layout of the classroom designating desk/work and writing spaces/supports (e.g. computers).
### Strategies

What kinds of writing did you see used? Leave blank if not observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Notes/Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quickwrites/free writes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of view writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogues/plays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Narratives/memoirs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays of various kinds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research papers/projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading response journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning logs/classroom notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

What strategies did you see used? Leave blank if not observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Notes/Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphic organizers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers notebooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word walls/word banks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word building activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence combining/building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini-lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running records</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-teacher conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoring guides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Oral Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Circles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other major strategies (specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What aspects of the writing process did you observe? Leave blank if not observed.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Notes/Evidence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prewriting</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Responding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing student work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you observe support as students developed a major writing assignment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Notes/Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss the assignment in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide choice within the assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow the students to work on the assignment over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give opportunities for writing in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference with individual students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for revision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use examples of finished products as models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss and analyze these models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give students opportunities for feedback from peers on drafts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide some instructions in how to respond to drafts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alot time for editing and proofreading of drafts before they are submitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Did you observe response to student writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Notes/Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write comments in the margins or at the end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer students specific written suggestions for revision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide comments and a grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write comments on post-it notes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use editing symbols and abbreviations</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put comments on a response form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference with individual students</td>
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### Did you observe the sharing of student writing?

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<tr>
<td>Read around</td>
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<td>Bulletin board displays</td>
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<td>Author’s Chair</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Websites or online conference boards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Other Observations*

Please record any additional notes/observations/insights you might have.
Post-observation Interview
1. How do you feel today's lesson went?

2. Is today's lesson typical of your classroom?

3. What would you hope students would learn from this lesson?

4. How does this lesson relate to the overall unit objectives? To other lessons previously taught?

5. Do you have any questions for me?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (Min.)</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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APPENDIX B

Group Interview Protocol

Topics for Group Discussion

The Teaching of Writing

- Describe how you are teaching writing this year.
- How is this different than previous years?
- What are your goals for your students in writing now? In what ways are these different than previous years? How have they changed since the beginning of the year?
- How have your students reacted to your efforts to teach writing this year?
- Do you believe that seeing yourself as a writer helps you be a better teacher of writing? How so?
- How do you select new ideas for your classroom? What guides do you use to judge the quality of lessons?
- What role does the sharing of writing play in your classroom? How does that effect your students?
- How has my presence in your room impacted your teaching?
- How do you envision your teaching changing in the next semester? Year? Five years?

Respect for Your Students' Knowledge/Voices/Cultures, etc.

- How do you make room for your students' voices in your classroom?
- What would your highest achieving student say about your class? Your lowest achieving student?
- Describe your interactions with your students.
- How do you get to know your students as individuals?

Implementing Change

- How have you changed as a teacher since the Institute?
• What tensions/problems have you faced this year as you have tried to change as a teacher?
• What has supported/aided your efforts to change as a teacher?
• Have you shared any of what you learned in the Institute with other teachers or administrators? In what context?
• How has my presence in your room impacted your efforts to change?

**SNWP and You**

• How do you feel that your experience in the Institute impacted your image of yourself as a person? As a teacher? As a writer?
• How might your answer to that question be different now than what you wrote on your final Institute questionnaire?
• What role did the writing you did in the Institute impact you personally? Professionally?
• What strategies from SNWP have you used (or adapted and used) in your teaching this year?
• Now that the experience is over, how do you see yourself using these principles in the future?
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Dissertation Title: Democratic Writing Pedagogy and the Southern Nevada Writing Project

Dissertation Examination Committee:
   Chairperson, Dr. Marilyn McKinney, PhD.
   Committee Member, Dr. Helen Harper, PhD.
   Committee Member, Dr. Sandra Odell, PhD.
   Committee Member, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Spalding, PhD.
   Graduate College Representative, Dr. Lori Olafson, PhD.