



2020

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<https://commons.und.edu/tlpp-fac/16>

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## The Dimensions of Teachers Who Write and The Essence of A Writing Life

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### Recommended Citation

Daniels, Shari L. and Beck, Pamela (2020) "The Dimensions of Teachers Who Write and The Essence of A Writing Life," *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol9/iss2/3>

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## The Dimensions of Teachers Who Write and The Essence of A Writing Life

### Cover Page Footnote

I am in gratitude to the teacher-writers who who took time out of their busy lives to share their writing identities and the details of their writing lives with me.



## **The Dimensions of Teachers Who Write and The Essence of Their Writing Life**

Shari L. Daniels, *University of Minnesota Crookston*  
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“That’s the power of the practice. It alivens and awakens every cell,” instructed yoga teacher Vytas Baskauskas, during a recent online yoga session (2020). “Hmm, same with writing,” I pondered. Richard Quinney (2006) echoes this sentiment, “The motivations and needs are various [in keeping a journal]. But, at the heart of my effort is a single reason – to study oneself is to forget oneself, to become part of that which is larger than the individual self,” (p. 26). He adds other reasons: “to recognize the significance of life; to keep track of my life and thoughts and feelings, and how they change with the days; to bring me to an awareness of what is going on around me and within me; to make a record that may be of use to others as the live their own lives. . .” (p. 12). A writing practice can be a guide, an anchor, a life buoy, and a companion throughout our days, especially for teachers, who often go about their days with their students isolated from other adults and bombarded with the demands of today’s current states.

A diary was gifted to me at the age of twelve and a relationship with writing was born. Now, at 55 years of age, dozens of notebooks line my shelves demonstrating evidence of a sustained writing practice over the years. For myself, writing has been both an anchor and a buoy, personally and professionally, as a teacher and human being. In the wake of current social issues of 2020; a global pandemic, civil rights movements, emergency online instruction, and the growing unrest and divide during an election year, now, more than ever, personal writing has been a daily life support, offering clarity, guidance, and a written documentation of this segment of time as a witness. But, also, writing has cultivated a sense of awareness that softens the days’ worries and centers my attention on the present moment bringing with it wonder and awe.

As an elementary teacher and literacy coach, when sharing my experiences with writing, I was usually received with puzzled looks. This phenomenon has been explored and researchers conclude that many teachers have views of writing that draw on their experiences as a student in k-12 settings. These experiences, especially negative, affect how and how often they teach writing in their own classes (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Beyond revisiting early histories as a writer in an effort to reshape their writing identities (Knowles & Reynolds, 1991), and emphasizing the benefits of being a model for their students, what more could be done to encourage teachers to embrace the writing life? This cognitive dissonance in how to encourage teachers to write was the spark that led to this study.

This research explores the *impetus* for teacher-writers to write. The Webster dictionary defines the word *impetus* as:

1. a. (1) a driving force; IMPULSE  
(2) INCENTIVE; STIMULUS
- b. stimulation or encouragement resulting in increased activity

To clarify, I am interested in the ongoing motivation and essentials that enable one who is a teacher to also live a writing life personally. There seems to be a greater inner drive, a purpose that prompts teachers to write beyond the goal of modeling for our students. I wanted to know that I was not alone, but also to have some idea of what to name this *impetus* I embody.

Donald Graves, instrumental in shaping beliefs about teachers modeling their writing life for their students concluded, “Seldom do people teach well what they do not practice themselves. . . What is not valued by teachers in their personal lives will not be introduced into the lives of children,” (2013, p. 27). Several advocates followed suit, such as Atwell (1987), Calkins (1994), and Murray (2009) who argued that when teachers write themselves, they gain personal experience as a writer that can be used to model in the classroom. Teachers have more empathy for writers who struggle and are able to draw from a personal storehouse of expertise, an inner curriculum. This urgency for teachers to write, however, has a heavy emphasis on outcomes for their students. Yet, might it be the outcomes for teachers personally that actually propel them to write and to sustain their writing lives in the first place?

Cremin & Oliver report as findings, in their critical literature review of empirical studies from 1990-2015 on teachers as writers, very few teachers write alongside their students or live a writing life beyond their profession as educators (2016). Teachers that do write, do so through journaling, blogging, and participating in both in person and online writing groups and projects, and some publish for a wider audience. Just as Graves found that “every child had behavioral characteristics in the writing process that applied to that child alone” (1983, p. 29), the complexities of why and how teachers write is also true. “Understanding of the

complexity of writing in its many dimensions and manifestations has grown, with research, for example, on issues such as the psychological processes, social situations, motivations, and self-perceptions of writers” (Bazerman, et al, 2017). While research continues to gain insight into generalizations, when studying writers of any age, embracing the diversity becomes more informative.

### *Purpose*

This study contributes to a rich history of teacher-writer research by highlighting these various complexities as we explore the impetus and essentials that sustain teachers’ devotion to write and to a writing life. What key aspects contribute to what a writerly life is? What are the personal benefits beyond the classroom? While classroom pedagogy is implicitly and explicitly impacted when teachers write and can be one driving force to write, as previous research suggests (Graves, 1978; Atwell (1987), Calkins (1993), Dahl (1992), and Murray (1978), this study focuses primarily on the individual teachers’ impetus or inner drive to write outside of classroom pedagogy goals.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Teachers of Writing Should Write and Live a Literate Life*

This study is situated in the context of the growing body of teacher-writer research pioneered by Emig (1971), Graves (1983), Atwell (1987) and Calkins (1986), who first shed light on the pedagogical benefits when teachers of writing also write themselves. As teachers write alongside students, they are a positive model, gain confidence in teaching writing, develop their own toolbox of strategies from their personal experiences as a writer and learn empathy for students as they wrestle with the challenges of writing (Gillespie, 1985). Cremin & Oliver in their systemic review of 438 studies on the subject of teachers as writers, concluded that the students of teachers who write also receive more writing instruction, have more responsive one-on-one instruction focused on individual need, and a likelihood to develop a positive attitude towards writing (2016). Research is evident to suggest when teachers write themselves, students benefit.

Graves (1985) goes further than to urge teachers to write themselves. He invites teachers to live a “literate life” as both writer and reader (Graves, 1985; 1990). This requires the teacher to go beyond solely writing alongside the students in the classroom during classroom time. It means writing purposefully outside the context of the classroom and sharing writing with others. Living a literate life enables teachers to model to students their own writing in the real world of writers. They can also model what *they* do rather than just what ‘writers’ do. Teachers redefine their role from that of giver of information to that of writer, reader, and learner (Kaufman, 2009; Murray, 2009).

Rebecca Woodard (2015) used case study methods to explore how two teacher-writers out of school practices informed their writing instruction in the classroom. She valued teachers' writing experiences outside of the classroom and recognized how they "lived their identities and practices across times and spaces" (p. 31). While findings indicated the writing activities outside of teachers' professional day influences decisions that inform instruction, she calls for additional studies and professional development that explore and increase "teacher-writers metacognition about their own textual practices , including identifying their actions, naming them, and attempting to unpack the multiple practices embedded in them" (p. 56).

### *Teacher Writing Identity*

While studies accrue, reiterating the benefits students receive when teachers write, there are fewer studies that emphasize the individual benefits and necessary essentials for the teachers to write personally, outside of these professional settings. Teresa Cremin (2017), in her recent book, *Writer Identity and the Teaching and Learning of Writing*, defines teachers who live a literate life through writing as "teacher-writers", and shares her extensive research and the work of others about "the connections between self-identity or self-efficacy and writing motivation" (p. 53). Addressing the teacher-writer as a whole person and creating conditions for them to explore the many possibilities for writing in their lives "can help them experience and compose ways of being in the world" (Dawson, 2017, p. 4).

### *The Experience of the Writer While Writing*

Yagelski (2011) explores the concept of writing as an ontological act. In his writing, he explores the experience of the "writer" as they are writing (2011). He examines how "writing intensifies [one's] awareness of [the self and their] sense of being" (p. 104) and describes how something psychologically takes place. He details his own experience as a writer and how at the present moment of writing, one is "thoroughly engrossed in this task of writing such that it becomes almost synonymous with consciousness" (p. 103) and at the same time feels intensely "connected to something larger that is not here and how" (p. 103).

Frank Smith (1994) adds to this conversation with his own interest in what writing does *for* the writer. "People gain by writing" (p. 11). He emphasizes in his book, *Writing and the Writer*, "Becoming a writer [enlarges] the role of the character we play as we strive to compose the stories of our lives," (p. 181). Smith "suspects that story-telling is so central to the human mind that writing must be one of the more natural things for anyone to want to do – to tell stories about what they and the world are like . . ." (p. 182). Neuroscience reveals how our brain is hardwired for story and "what draws us in and keeps us attracted to the story is the firing of our dopamine neurons, signaling that intriguing information is on the

way,” (Cron, 2012). How might neuroscience be related to a teacher-writer’s motivation to write? Could it be through story-telling or the desire to shape our vision of who we are that compels the act of sustaining a writing life?

Murray (1985), in his book, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, emphasizes that writing is about discovery and he exclaims his joy in this experience. He writes, “This is the writers’ addiction: we write because we surprise ourselves, educate ourselves, and entertain ourselves,” (p. 7). Graves (1990) teaches us that writing takes dedication and is a way for others to reach the goal of life long wonder of learning. Writing becomes a path to “explore the wonder, complexity, and mystery in the world” around us (p. 124). “Writing, we see more, feel more, think more, understand more than when we are not writing in our head” (Murray, 1985, p. 7). Murray, as well as other professional writers (Cameron, 1992; Elbow, 1973; Maran, 2013), admit that writing can be a way to achieve sanity and became a psychological necessity.

Recent reflections on the “teacher as writer” movement and its development as advocacy and resistance has been documented by Whitney, Hicks, Fredricksen and Yagelski (2014). Building on the work of Yagelski (2009, 2011, 2012), they assert the need for additional research in the “ways in which acts of writing-in-the-moment are connected to our very sense of being in the world” and also outside the context of formal professional development settings.

This study explores the perceptions and writing identities of ten teacher-writers in an effort understand the aspects that contribute to what a writerly life is and their impetus to write. Our intention is to understand what these aspects are, in hope that we might be able to piece together underlying personal motivations and essential practices that sustain a teacher to write. Ultimately, a teacher who writes is a model for their students, however, the impetus of this research study is a focus on the teachers who write. This research is guided by these questions:

As a teacher-writer:

1. What does it mean to live a writer’s life? What factors contribute to sustaining a writing practice/writing life?
2. What personal and pedagogical benefits does a writing life provide for a teacher who write

## **Methodology**

### *Study Design*

An interview case study with a grounded theory lens, was adopted to explore the preceding research questions. Glasser and Straus (1967) employ “grounded theory to explain behavior and develop a usable theory for practical applications, giving the practitioner some control and understanding of situations” (p. 3). This process involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data to generate categories (a theory)



to interpret an interested phenomenon (Opie, 2004). In this way, the theory is grounded (or rooted) in the available data.

Multiple cases were examined for likenesses, to gain understanding (Creswell, 2012) and to explore this phenomenon (Glesne, 2005). To ensure validity, a series of three interviews were conducted, both face-to-face and in writing. Supporting data from participants' written work was also obtained to provide background and support for data collected through interviews. Data from interviews and artifacts were analyzed through a systematic design process through three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to investigate how certain factors and strategies can effect and lead to certain outcomes of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

### *Participants*

Ten K-12 teacher-writers participated in this study, three males and seven females. All are teachers in Midwest K-12 schools and represent a range of teaching positions in which the research was conducted. All participants have sought additional school or training beyond their undergraduate degree and come from diverse teaching experiences. (See Table 1 for demographics and summaries.) Participants were given opportunities to opt out of the study to ensure the offering of data freely, yet, all participants were extremely willing to participate. Each was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

TABLE 1: Teacher-Writers Participant Synopsis/What Sustains Writing				
Teacher	Themes of a Writing Life	Teaching Experience	Education	Tools to Keep Writing
Melissa	Daily writing Online community Triggers –social media #WOD (word of the day) To inspire others Reflect/learning Discover what I think	Elementary teacher grades 4/5 9 years Present: Creator of a site for teachers to write as a community	BS in English and Elem. Education Masters in Children's Writing Institute	*blogging *leads Twitter chats, social media *daily writing *#WOD *reading *solitude *sentence a day journal
Patty	Discover meaning Write to learn Connect with people - grandfather	Spanish/Russian Language Teacher High School 27 years	BA in Languages and Science Masters	*reading *goals *writing groups *challenges
Nicole	Discover meaning Create/curiosity	ELA Teacher High School	BS in Journalism	*reading *goals

	Committed to learning Connections	31 years	Teaching Masters	*publishing *writing group at revising
Erin	Connections-NWP Committed to learning Well-being Discovery/reflection	ELA Teacher 9 years Coaches speech	BA in Eng. Education Masters	*sentence a day *writing partner *blogging *reading *conferences/retreats
Jackie	Well-being/emotions Connection 31 day SOL chall. Discover meaning Aliveness/joy	Elementary Teacher 4 <sup>th</sup> grade 5 years	BS in Comm. Went back to school for Elem. Ed.	*reading *challenges *place *blogging
Larry	Need to create Committed to learning Unfulfilled when not writing	ELA teacher High school and College in the HS Speech coach 10 years	BS in Eng. Education Masters in English	*time and place *plans *goals/project (book) *reading
Dennis	Solitude Discovery/reflection Committed to learning Connect to self	Teaching in Japan 4 years ELA teacher High school 8 years	BS in Elementary Education & MS- ELA	*reading *time and place *goals/project (book) *conferences *social media
Rick	Connections Committed to learning Discover meaning Aliveness/joy	ELA teacher High school and College Comp in HS 15 years	BS in ELA Masters	*blogging *reading *writes with students *social media
Joline	Curious/committed to learning Emotional need connection	Elementary Teacher Literacy Coach 5+ years	BA in Psych BA in Elem.ED Masters ECE	*blogging *time and place *reading *goals (dissertation story)
Cari	Connections Emotional well being Committed to learning	Math Teacher 3 years Elementary teacher 4 <sup>th</sup> grade 8 years	BS Elem.ED & MS-math Masters	*notebook out *writes with students *writers notebook fodder

### *Data Sources and Analysis*

A series of three individual interviews, spanning approximately 4 months, was the main source of data for this research project. The first interviews were in-depth, semi-structured, and conducted face to face, in person or through technology. Key interview questions focused on personal and professional backgrounds, first influences to write, essentials for an on-going writing practice and the effects of being a teacher-writers, both professionally and personally (see Appendix A for Interview Guide).

These first interviews were transcribed by the main researcher and coded. Next, a second set of questions were developed for each participant. These questions were comprised of follow up and clarification questions, along with requests of participant descriptions of their writing. Second interviews took place approximately one month after the first interview – again, face to face, in person or through technology. The third interview contained two main questions for all participants to respond in writing. These two questions were emailed to participants and asked what the effects/benefits of being a teacher-writer inside and outside of the classroom, along with other effects/benefits professionally and personally. Written artifacts, published or unpublished writing, were also requested to analyze, in an effort to support or disconfirm interview statements and findings (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Data analysis progressed through several stages. Memos followed each interview to document initial reactions during the experience of each interview (Wertz, 1985). These memos were used to comprise summary sheets in an effort to highlight main concepts and intuitions from the memos. Interviews were then transcribed by the primary researcher for timely and accurate interpretations (Bailey, 2008). Finally, three stages of coding data took place.

Open coding was enacted first to construct initial categories of information by labeling important words or phrases (Creswell, 2012). Next, axial coding enabled us to look for relationships amongst the initial categories and for distinct concepts and categories of code families. Finally, through selective coding, we sought to interpret the interrelationships among the concepts and categories formed from the second stage of coding. We sought interconnections to generate a theory regarding the factors that effected the overall phenomenon and participant, as a teacher-writer (Creswell, 2012, Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). We were able to sift through the various categories and organize the findings into the following attributes of a teacher-writer's life: Dimensions of Writing, Habits of Mind/Attitudes, and Tools of the Trade.

Measures were taken to ensure internal validity and credibility of the research study. This included peer debriefs throughout the study, progressive subjectivity and triangulation of data. Peer debriefs were documented through

emails, via technology, face to face and phone discussions regarding conclusions and to verbalize tacit and implicit information from participants and in interpretations of data (Creswell, 2012). The primary researcher consistently monitored bias through memos and reflective writing after interviews and during data analysis. Recording of initial assumptions and predicted findings demonstrated progressive subjectivity throughout the research process (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation of data strengthened the study credibility and confirmability by affirming or countering participant responses of the three separate interviews and participant writing samples (Robson & McCartan, 2016). To strengthen external validity, the initial agreement form stated that participants could request to see transcripts to ensure accuracy and clarify their responses. This agreement was read to each participant, signed by the participant and each received their own copy.

## Findings

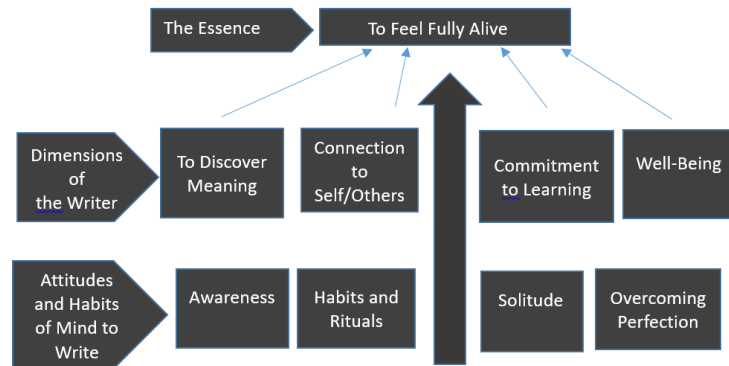
As previous writers and researchers have revealed, the commonalities and complexities of writers are nothing short of diverse (Graves, 1978; Calkins, 1994 ; Smith, 1994). Data analysis resulted in a conceptual framework to aid in understanding of the teacher-writers' life (see Figure 1). Four main themes were labeled as *dimensions of the writer* that teacher-writers described as processes, intentions, benefits or that they experienced in both the act of writing and as a result of writing: 1) to discover meaning, 2) connection, 3) a commitment to learning and 4) for well-being. These threads were interwoven, overlapped and/or occurred simultaneously during and as a result of writing creating an experience of both pleasure and purpose.

In addition to the *dimensions of the writer*, four themes were also labeled as *writing habits of mind*. These appeared to be necessary essentials to cultivate, support and sustain a writing life. The *writing habits of mind* include: awareness of the world, overcoming perfection, rituals and habits and solitude. It was not clear if the *writing habits of mind* were cultivated as a precursor to developing a writing practice or if they emerged as a result of the writing practice. Regardless, it was apparent, that without these *habits of mind*, writing would not occur on a regular basis, if at all.

Finally, many *tools of the trade* were necessary for achieving these writing commitments and developing the habits of mind, such as blogging, writing groups, challenges, coaches, retreats, reading, and mentors.

In this section, we share descriptions of data that support each element of the conceptual framework.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Dimensions of A Teacher-Writers' Life**



***Dimensions of the Writer***

Writers write for many reasons. Frank Smith describes, in his book, *Writing and the Writer*, that teachers write for three main reasons: “to communicate, to make a permanent record and as a means to create,” (1994, p. 8). Yagelski (2011) adds that writers write because of its transformative power and Murray (2009) describes writing as a way to listen. We could add that writers also write to advocate, to share voices and stories, to argue, persuade, and entertain. Teacher-writers in this study, repeatedly, the various impetuses that propelled them to write. It’s important to note, however, while a writer may have an intention or purpose for writing at the beginning of a writing episode, more often they do not. Therefore, we identify these main themes as *dimensions of the writer*. Sometimes they are conscious, sometimes not.

***Discover Meaning.***

In many ways and contexts, participants experienced the discovery of new understandings through their writing practices. Writing was used to clarify thinking about a topic, arrive at solutions to a problem, discover significance in a specific thought, image, or memory, or to reflect on an event. Through writing, participants were able to follow the threads of their writing, in a free write method, to witness epiphanies that seemed to emerge.

Dennis, a high school English Language Arts teacher (ELA), explained this purpose for writing as a way to navigate in his life. He claimed writing was an important piece in his life in terms of reflection and in attempting to sort out who he is, at least who he thinks he is. He emphasized that gaining new perspectives and seeing things in a different light contributed to this self-growth. He asserted:

Writing is thinking and so often you end up discovering things as you’re going through the process of writing. I really feel like those are the flames

of inspiration that are the moments that bring you back to the page again. When that happens, it's easy to come back again and feel like – okay, I'd like to experience that again.

In this way, Dennis attributed writing to enabling his growth in his own personal development. However, he also described the surprise part in this discovery process as the experience that brings him back to his notebook.

Rick, a high school ELA teacher as well, also shared the experience of discovery and the excitement in not knowing what was going to appear in his writing each time he wrote. When asked if this was something that kept him writing, he answered:

Yes, absolutely, I think it's the surprise in what's going to come next. I'll have this event that happens and I won't really know the significance of it until I've been able to sit down and kind of shape it in my writing. Writing is an art – there is a magic that happens and stories take on a life of their own, whether it's fiction, non-fiction or creative non-fiction. I just love seeing that come to life.

Rick's energy and enthusiasm was palpable when he talked about the mystery of meaning that shows up in his writing.

Like Rick, Patty, a high school Spanish teacher, also used writing as a way to discover meaning. She described how she would start with a simple image or one memory and do free writes with a goal of discovering more about her past, the people in her lives and who she is:

It's interesting to learn more about the world, without necessarily needing to do research. I can write [sic] and discover what's already inside of me and synthesize what I'm thinking from my memories, and something new comes out of that. In some ways there are some things that I have discovered through writing that, until I'd put the pen on the paper, I hadn't realized I knew. And, so that was interesting. I remember specific moments where I was, "Oh, wow! I didn't think about that before and now that I wrote it down, it's true!"

Patty talked about an experience that took place at her first National Writing Project that was highly influential in her understanding of how powerful writing is and how it could help her to discover so much about the people in her family. When asked if she thought she would be able to arrive at this discovery about her grandfather without the act of writing. She explained:

You know, I don't think I would have because life is so busy that I just don't take time to ponder some of those things. But, when I sat down to actually reflect for the purposes of writing, then I was able to do that. So, had I not been writing, I don't think I would have gotten to that point. I would not have been reflecting on that I don't think ever.

After her NWP experience, her grandfather continued to show up in poems she wrote deepening her understanding of who he was even more.

For most of the participants, discovery and searching for meaning were key intentions for writing and continuing to write. Their discoveries led to new learning about something intellectually, about themselves or others, or was a creative act of narrative writing, essay, or poetry. They experienced an energy and aliveness when these points of discovery emerged on the page, as if they were not the ones holding the pen, or clicking the keys on the keyboard.

#### *Connection.*

For participants, countless connections were made through the act of writing. Some connections were obvious, such as writing used for communicating with other people in their present life. However, other connections were not so transparent, such as connections to oneself, to those that had departed, and even to those in the future.

Melissa described how connection to others was the fuel for the energy that keeps her and many of those she connects with writing. As a teacher-writer, she found herself alone and isolated in her passion for writing at her school, as other participants also described, and her connections to others in online social media groups were a necessary part of her writing life. She explained this in her interview:

I felt very different than everybody because this was a passion that I had, that other people quite honestly didn't understand. Their own feelings about writing, their own histories were not good ones, so they didn't understand how someone would want to torture themselves and get papers back with red pen all over them – because that was their memory. I was able to erase that.

Melissa's passion for inspiring and supporting teachers to write led her to leave her position as a classroom teacher and to create several online social media sites to encourage and support teachers who want to write. What started as a passion has grown into a large community of teacher writers. She remarked that the teacher-writers in these communities have a strong sense of belonging and connectedness. These connections feed their writing lives, hold them accountable, and push them to grow as learners.

Erin, a high school ELA teacher, echoed Melissa's feelings in connecting with a community of writers during her experience as a part of a writing community in her first National Writing Project institute. Her energy was high as she talked about this experience:

I never had my writing so affirmed by other people who actually knew what they were doing. It was just this beautiful experience of learning. This conversation was going on and I had no clue what was happening! Friendships were the biggest effect outside of the classroom. I have made many writing friends.

Erin's experience with a community of writers provided support and encouragement for her as she developed as a writer. Receiving validation from more experienced writers gave her confidence to write. She gained more enthusiasm to write from the energy she felt when surrounded by other writers.

In the past, Patty had led writing groups and summer workshops to follow up National Writing Project institutes to keep energy going. She claimed teacher-writers need a "booster-shot" now and then to rejuvenate their writing lives. However, for herself, along with Nicole, Dennis and Larry, writing groups were more so used at the point of revision in a writing piece when they needed another set of critical eyes to give them feedback. Nicole described this:

Sometimes I don't know what to do. I've gotten myself this far along and I don't know the next step. You need someone who can help you through this and propel you, someone to say, "You've done this trick 50 times and it was boring at time 5." So you figure something else out.

These writers have been writing for years and were involved in writing projects – some for publication. The need of a writing community to sustain their practice was not necessary for them, yet in revision stages, other writers pushed them to accept critical feedback and enabled them to continue to grow as writers.

As discussed previously, one main purpose for these writers to write was to discover more about who they are. Almost all participants talked about using writing as a tool to develop a closer relationship to the self in order to grow personally. Erin and Jackie described this:

Erin: It also allows me to honor who I am because yesterday I took some time to just sit with a story I had been avoiding. When I try to make the story how I think the story should be instead of sitting with the story, I learn so much about the character and about my own life.



Jackie: The process, the reflection, the solidifying thoughts, what you learn about yourself through writing that is powerful.

Using writing as a tool to shape identity and gain perspective were common with all of the participants. These teacher-writers had a deep sense of who they were from a result of the amount of writing they did. In essence, they were able to see through their masks one wears throughout a life and discover their authentic self as a human being through the act of writing.

Connecting to others in the past or the future also was a means to keep participants writing. Documenting happenings from their lives for family and loved ones to read in the future was a common theme throughout all of the interviews. There was a common sense of agency in leaving behind a part of themselves. More intriguing, however, was how some participants wrote to keep relationships alive, especially with those who have departed. Patty shared this sentiment in her words about her grandfather mentioned prior. She wanted to know him more, who he was, and why he was the way she remembered him to be. Rick, a high school ELA teacher, also described this purpose in talking about his father, who passed away several years ago. He believed that writing can deepen relationships with people we lose.

My father died in 2006 and when he was diagnosed with cancer, I started chronicling our journey together and I would write a blog post every day. When he passed away I went back and looked at it and I was amazed at all the stuff that I'd forgotten. I think that's the power of writing. A friend gave me a quote once that read "Nobody a writer loves is ever really dead," and so whenever a friend loses somebody, [sic] I help them to see how you can deepen your relationship with that person [sic] through writing. You get to relive those experiences. That's what I do with my writing is I deepen my relationships with my loved ones who are no longer here with me. I think that's often an aspect of writing that isn't taken nearly as often as it should be.

This form of connection with others in the past or the future (our children, grandchildren and beyond), created a deep sense of purpose for Rick. His relationship with his father was strong and he did not want to forget how that felt. By continuing to write about his father, he kept their relationship alive and this brought him a sense of peace.

Others made a conscious effort to document memories, thoughts, and events for those to read in the future. Melissa, Jackie and Erin, a fourth grade teacher, emphasized this in their interviews:

Melissa: Writing is telling my story and it's preserving it for generations to come. By not writing my story, I'm robbing my future grandchildren the opportunity to know me. There is no other way to preserve or to become eternal or whatever.

Jackie: When I became pregnant with my daughter, I just wanted to document some of these things, because it's so incredible. And, now going back into those entries, it seems dreamlike until you read about it. And then, it's just this beautiful documentation of one single moment.

These participants emphasized how writing down these memories was important to their own self-development of who they were. By documenting their own lives, they felt they were leaving evidence of their living here on earth for generations to come and this brought immense purpose to their writing.

Through the perspectives of others and emerging meanings in their writing, participants were able to see parts of themselves in relation to others that they may not otherwise be able to notice. Participants shared these stories through smiles and laughter, and other times in melancholy. A wide range of emotions was exhibited in retellings and in talking about the satisfaction of recording these memories and discoveries.

### *Committed to Learning.*

All participants shared evidence of a commitment to learning as an intellectual in their field of education and as a human being. Writing was their tool to help them continue to grow. These teacher-writers also sought avenues to continue their growth as writers through reading, conferences, attending National Writing Projects (for some, more than once), book studies, blogging, publishing writing, and in providing professional development for their colleagues or at conferences. They also were very active in areas outside of their writing lives.

Participants used writing to push themselves to take risks and perform small or large acts of bravery. In Jackie's first interview, she confessed that writing for herself and her students was satisfying for her and she had no desire to venture outside of those perimeters. Once nudged to blog online, with hundreds of other teacher-writers, she attained new level of empowerment. She wrote about this in her third written response interview:

Starting my own Blog and participating in the 31-day Slice of Life writing challenge has absolutely been the biggest risk I have ever taken as a writer. [Sic] A part of my soul, my very being, in put on display for the world to see. How liberating! I have developed a genuine appreciation for this community of writers. We have one thing in common. We are brave. Being

surrounded by such powerful, effective writers has allowed me to elevate my writing. I am continually surrounded by powerful language, unique craft, engaging dialogue, and the strongest voice I have ever read!

In her second interview, Jackie also described this blogging experience with a sense of aliveness and joy evident in her voice. The connections she made with other writers while stepping outside of her comfort zone to put her writing out into the world empowered her to want to do more.

Participants shared how they pushed boundaries in their teaching, discontent with the status quo. They used current and cutting-edge best practice methods and techniques in their teaching, even if it required more of them. Rick explained this:

It's easy to teach sentence structure and essay with the five-paragraph theme. You can grade it and get it back to them in a day. I have my students do a braided essay where they take 3 different essays about the same topic and weave the together. It takes me about 3 weeks to grade because everyone is in a different spot and approaching it differently. There's a lot of sloppiness and messiness to that. I think it was Donald Murray who said, 'It's hard work – you put your boots on and you go to work and writing is the habit.'

Rick cared deeply about his students and wanted to give them writing experiences that were authentic and meaningful so they, too, would find value in writing. This required continued writing and improvement as a teacher of writing to stay one step ahead of his students' writing.

Several participants talked about needing the mental stimulation that writing provided, a need for cognition that excited them and kept them excited about writing. Getting lost in the work of revision brought them pleasure. Working to find a specific word or phrase to communicate what they wanted to say and then discovering it was mentioned as one of the great joys of writing. Larry, a high school ELA teacher, Nicole, and Patty all described this:

Larry: I like the puzzle side of writing. I find it fun to think about if you put this piece here and this piece there and see what that does.

Patty: I also really like what a challenge it is to try to approximate people to write really great poetry to find the exact right word with its meaning, with its meter, with its sound, quality. It's really a big puzzle to put that together and that's challenging. Hours can go by, because I'm trying to think, is it start or starting (laughs) so that engaging for me.

Nicole: I have to have something creative in my life. I have to figuring something out or moving forward, so if I'm not writing, I need to have something else ~making tofu – gardening.

These teacher-writers shared a common trait of needing to be intellectually challenged and writing brought that challenge to them. When Nicole was asked if she considered herself a learner, she responded:

Yes, fundamentally, learning is my identity. You need to be willing to go one more step – push one more time and figure out what you can do to push yourself.

Writing stimulated learning in all areas of their lives. It clarified their thinking, caused them to reflect, and pushed them to keep growing. For them, writing, thinking and learning were all part of the same process and were inseparable. All participants appeared to rise to various writing challenges and this brought about a fulfillment both intellectually and emotionally.

#### *Well-being.*

Participants used writing as a tool for emotional and mental well-being. They told stories of how writing was a method for personal growth, how it was a tool for downloading rambling thoughts from mind to paper in an effort to clear the mind. They were able to write through emotional experiences to find meaning. Writing also allowed participants to slow down, sit in solitude, and be present. Almost all participants shared these types of stories.

Erin, Jolene, and Cari all voiced how writing helped them to clear their minds. Erin's mother had died seven years ago and it was through her grief she discovered poetry.

Writing just helps me to slow down because my brain goes really fast and in a lot of different directions. It has to keep up with a lot whole bunch of stuff, so it allows me to just pause and write. I let myself grieve and cry and it was in that season that I really named myself a poet because I was expressing myself through poetry. Poetry became my healing genre. It also allows me to honor who I am because yesterday I took some time to just sit with a story I had been avoiding. When I try to make the story how I think the story should be instead of sitting with the story, I learn so much about the character and about my own life.

The story Erin was writing was fiction, but the character she was writing about was herself. Through writing narrative, she brought her own life story into the character's life and continued to make discoveries about who she is, why she does things she does, and what she might do next. Her character endured emotional turmoil and uncertainty, just as Erin experienced with the loss of her mother. When Erin went through periods of emotional struggle, she took those feelings to paper. Writing helped her to heal from the loss of her mother.

Jolene also voiced how she uses writing for emotional well-being. She enjoyed many kinds of journaling. She described her journaling:

It is cathartic for me to put things down [sic] on paper and why that is I don't know, but I've always been that way. It feels good to let it out of my head. To transfer it from the thought realm to paper, there's something physical about the written word. It makes it concrete and real, so I don't know if I need to validate those feelings to myself, but I have given them a place to rest. I learn from my own emotional journey and process. It's a documentation of things, yet deeper reflective ugly honesty, too.

Jolene is honest in her journals about what is goes on in her head. In the past, she was not comfortable showing her true self on paper. However, she felt it was important for her to deal with underlying issues and writing was her way of doing that.

Cari also used writing as a tool as a way to sort out issues she was having in school or in her personal life.

During the school year, I notice myself writing when I'm more stressed out and I've got too much going on in my head – I just need to let it all out. Just recently I was super overwhelmed and I just wrote and wrote until it sparked an idea and I went on and made some lists of things that I could try.

For Cari and others who used writing in this way, it seemed difficult for them to name what might be lurking underneath their emotional struggles until they see it on paper. They came to their notebooks open and willing to accept whatever appeared. Seeing their true thoughts and feelings on paper was an important part of their emotional work.

These four main intentions of discovering meaning, connection, being committed to learning, and well-being all overlapped in each participant's writing life. For example, when Rick shared how writing brought him closer to his father, he was also connecting with himself as he discovered new meanings about his relationship to his father and this contributed to his own identity personal growth and well-being. His desire to continue to write about his father also shows his

commitment to continue to learn more about who he is. Cari stressed how writing helped her to manage the struggles she has with her professional life. Teaching can become overwhelming in the number of responsibilities and relationships a teacher must manage and teachers can feel isolated and disconnected from others in resolving the many issues that arise. Writing is a way to slow down and sort through what is really happening in order to see clearly and come to some solutions.

### ***Key Essential Attitudes or Habits of Mind***

In order for participants to achieve these dimensions of seeking meaning, making connections, commitment to learning, and achieving personal well-being through a writing practice, several attitudes or habits of mind emerged these writers had cultivated. These include awareness and curiosity, habits and rituals, solitude, and letting go of perfection or fear. It can be difficult to determine whether the habit of mind was cultivated as a result of the writing practice or if the habit of mind attributed to ripe conditions for writing. Our hypothesis is that they nurture each other.

### *Awareness and Curiosity*

All participants shared attitudes or habits of mind that activated awareness and a high sense of curiosity. This awareness was apparent when they paid attention to a thought, image, scent, sound, experience or any other triggering moment. Their curiosity about the significance of these topics caused them to collect the idea in their notebooks for use at some other point in time in writing. Patty described how this happens:

Just thinking about a particular phrase, or if I overhear something, even a scent can really activate a memory that makes me ponder things. And emotion, or sometimes just the way the light comes through the living room window, all of those types of sensory images from all different five senses can activate that type of reflection. And sometimes those kinds of moments are just ephemeral because I can't get to paper or have a way of writing things down.

Cari and Rick describe similar examples of this writers' habit of mind, the types of events that capture their attention, and how they find ways to document them:

Cari: We took a trip one Thanksgiving and the whole way I wrote this poem in my head. I had it going for over an hour because it was a comical road trip. I wrote it all out as soon as we got to my mother in laws.

Rick: I think just having the writer's eye, just to notice things, things that will stick with me, whether it's the way my mom cheered me on at a baseball game or images and moments that I could delve into and explore. I think because I've written so much I've just become a noticer and just be curious to know more.

This awareness fed the participants' writing lives, but also contributed to their overall sense of well-being. Being aware of the small moments helped them shift a focus to the present moment. Writers who are keen noticers are also metacognitive and are able to see significance, both personal and universal, in the smallest thread. This keeps the writer alive in this world.

### *Habits, Rituals and Solitude*

Participants varied greatly in their habits and rituals to attain a regular writing practice. For most, writing took place every day, but for a variety of purposes and in different contexts. Much writing happened with their students during writing workshop classes, either modeling or completing similar assignments in order to be a community member of the class. Participants also described writing to communicate or to write curriculum. Personal writing, which included anything a participant did outside of their actual teaching, was sporadic for most participants and dependent on the need for reflection and writing to learn. However, most had some habits, rituals, or triggers that enabled them to keep writing.

Melissa and Erin attempted to write daily. Both keep their goals reachable at just a sentence a day, yet more writing typically follows this sentence once they begin. Both participants commented on this experience.

Melissa: One of the things that's affected me the most is through regular writing. I have a 5-year sentence a day journal and that's the first thing I do when I get up in the morning. I'm on year 3. If I can't think of anything to write, I'll write down what the price of gas is!

Erin: My New Year's resolution is to write one sentence a day because I was overwhelmed with being back in the classroom and staying committed to writing. I find if it's only a sentence, I sit down and it's never a sentence – its' a paragraph or a page or two.

Erin also wrote with her students and kept a writer's notebook. She confessed that when she decided to make a commitment to writing, stories that wanted to be written tended to find her.

Rick also wrote with his students frequently during the school year as a practice. Like Erin, much of his time is consumed with teaching responsibilities, so

writing alongside his students keeps his writing practice alive. He believed that writing with his students contributed to the writing culture he was trying to build. Writing alongside of them, they learn from each other as well. Writing in this way builds a sense of comradery with the class and a willingness to embrace uncertainty in where writing might go. In addition, Rick regularly drafted and revised in front of his students, not only for his students, but for his own practice.

Most participants described the school year as full of duties and responsibilities, in and out of school, and this made it difficult to commit to a regular writing practice. All of them wished they had more time to devote to writing, but summer is the time when more energy is reserved for writing. Rick writes his blog posts in the summer, Larry and Dennis are working on young adult novels, Jolene has committed to academic writing, while Cari and Jackie use the summer to document family stories. Nicole and Patty admitted to taking a break from personal writing for now, in the sense of projects for publishing. However, writing was an active part of their teaching and learning every day.

Another condition for writing as a sustainable practice was solitude. Participants needed to be intentional about planning for quiet alone time for words to formulate onto the page. Melissa stated that her friend likes to write in coffee shops, but there is just too much going on for her in these kinds of spaces. Jolene commented on needing solitude as well:

I like that time with my own thoughts and I just feel it is restorative. If I don't have reflective personal time, it really stunts my writing I think.

Solitude was a mandatory need for most participants, whether it was public solitude in a coffee shop alone, or at a kitchen table in the morning before small children woke up. These teacher-writers honored their need to write by creating opportunities, free of outside influences, to give focused attention to what was important to them.

### *Overcoming Perfection*

A final habit of mind or attitude these participants felt was necessary was letting go of perfection and not being afraid to write down what comes up. Each one described, in his or her own way, how this absence of fear contributes to the freedom that writing brings. Patty commented:

It doesn't have to be anything. I know that I can just start writing and I don't have to worry about it being quality. It doesn't have to be perfect when you first get it down, so I can just type up or hand write my thoughts and if I do want to do something with it later, I can revise.



Accepting the ability to embrace uncertainty and allow whatever is written down was a common narrative amongst all participants. A clear understanding of this as a main factor in the writing process gave them freedom to follow where their writing led.

These teacher-writers had a strong sense of who they were as writers, teachers, and human beings, and they had an attitude in which they were not afraid to fail in their writing, whether the writing was just for them or for an audience. Patty and Nicole stated this several times in their interviews, and Patty confessed that rejection letters are actually pretty nice. Jolene remarked on this absence of perfection or fear as well:

I'm not worried about being accepted or rejected. I want to write because I want to write, not because I need to be received. It's just the joy of the journey for me to process – getting this stuff on paper.

Absence of fear can give one a sense of joy as taking risks becomes more natural. In order to be committed to learning and create conditions for discovery, participants understood that overcoming perfection was mandatory

## **Discussion**

The findings of this research study attempted to answer our questions:

1. What does it mean to live a writer's life? What factors contribute to sustaining a writing practice/writing life?
2. What personal and pedagogical benefits does a writing life provide for a teacher who writes?

We were astounded by the both the commonalities and the complexities of our ten teacher-writers, while also awed by the multitude of intertwining essentials that contribute to their sustaining writing practice. Essentials that go beyond that of attaining the goal of modeling for their students. We hypothesized that writing groups, documentation and committed daily habits to be main contributors as an impetus to write. Our results proved we were thinking too small. With multiple avenues to follow in the discussion of our findings, we chose to focus on the main dimensions and the overall essence of aliveness to understand the impetus to write for these teachers.

Our conceptual framework explaining the dimensions of teacher-writers writing lives brought to mind a similar literacy conceptualization. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) developed and created a system of strategic actions for reading, their goal to help teachers conceptualize the numerous, intertwining and simultaneous actions the brain engages in as we read. Their system of strategic actions describe the act of reading as a complex in-the-head processing system. "Readers use all of these actions simultaneously in a smooth and orchestrated way. They cannot be used or learned separately," (p. 201). Writers seem to undergo quite similar

processes. Building on the work of Marie Clay (1991), they teach us about the strong reciprocity between reading and writing. “Processes are built up and broken down in both, but writing ‘slows down’ the process and makes it more visible,” (2017, p. 196). Understanding this can help us envision writing as learning the play the piano. “We don’t think of one note as a single entity; you think of continuous melody. . . if you focus on one finger at a time, you are likely to stumble along slowly, or, at best, produce a very mechanical version,” (p. 363). Each piano player produces their own versions of a melody, integrating emotion, craft and meaning.

The writing lives of teacher-writers also gave rich descriptions of engagement. The work of Ellen Oliver Keene (2018) resulted in a conceptual framework to give language to authentic engagement of children, identifying four main pillars as keys that support engaged learning: intellectual urgency, emotional resonance, perspective bending and aesthetic experience. She discriminates the difference between internal motivation and engagement, “Internal motivation may lead you to take some action; but for many, engagement refers to what we experience during the activity . . . and engagement, by far, the most powerful and lasting driver,” (p. 16). Keene emphasizes that while teachers create conditions for engaged learning, ultimately we can also model and teach our students these modes in an effort to gradually hold them responsible for their own engagement. Our own conversations in relation to Keene’s conclusions prompt us to believe we can model and teach teachers writing dimensions and engagement pillars (which are more like a committed effortful in-the-head processes) and to urge teachers to develop this agency.

Janet Emig’s insights in her essays compiled in the *Web of Meaning* gifts us with another layer of sense making in relation to our findings. She brings up Alexander Luria’s rationale for writing as a heuristic medium (1983, p. 128), a self-rhythmed mode for thought and learning. The writer shuttles among past, present and future tenses making what Luria calls *immediate synpractical connections* in a chain-like process of analysis and synthesis, a cognitive tango, one that begins with an effortful precursor; an intent to discover meaning. Epistemic curiosity plays a role, in that the desire to know creates a tingle of anticipation at the prospect of discovering something new – there is an itch to explore, one that requires sustained effort and discipline (Leslie, 2014).

Finally, while each dimension and habit of mind beg for deeper analysis and research, it is important to discuss the overall essence of the writing experience for these teacher-writers. Every participant described how writing brought feelings of joy, energy, aliveness and purpose in their conversations about their writing lives. This appears to be related to the feeding of each writer’s natural curiosity. Ian Leslie, author of *Curious*, concludes that “the true beauty of learning is. . . it takes us out of ourselves, reminding us we are a part of a far greater project,” (2014, p. xxiii). “An engaged learner has a strong sense of purpose. There is something to be

learned that reaches far beyond the words on the page or the immediate experience. Engagement is a significant part of what makes us feel truly alive,” (Keene, p. 17). Kaufman & Gregoire (2016) argue there is something at the neurological level involved. In their book, *Wired to Create; Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, they acknowledge the role dopamine plays in the drive to learn and discover. “Dopamine’s primary role is to make us *want* things. We get a huge surge of dopamine coursing through our brains at the possibility of a big payoff, but there’s not a guarantee that we’ll actually like or enjoy what we’ve obtained,” (p. 85). Yet, it is the release of dopamine that greatly increases motivation to explore.

What does this mean for teachers who would like to write but do not know where to start? How do we invite teachers to write who hesitate because of prior writing histories? What seems to be most important when asking teachers to be writers? We address these questions in the implications, along with future research possibilities.

### **Implications**

There are many implications for the work we need to continue to do in supporting teachers in cultivating a writing life. These implications pertain to all teachers, not just ELA teachers or teachers who teach writing. Every human being can benefit from a writing practice to discover meaning, to make connections with others, to remain committed to a life of learning, and to maintain well-being. This list is not exhaustive and we invite others to add to the conversation about what is possible:

1. When teachers have a clear and personal purpose, their sense of agency for wanting to achieve that purpose is stronger. Simon Sinek (2009) in his book, *Start With Why*, writes, “When a WHY is clear, those who share that belief will be drawn to it and maybe want to take part in bringing it to life.” (p. 136). Helping teachers establish clear purposes in how a writing practice can be a way of feeling alive and bring personal joy to their lives may propel more teachers to believe in its power. Providing experiences for them to empower them to discover meaning, especially in free writing to cultivate surprise, bridge connections, follow their curiosities and establish an emotional and mental well-being can result in more teachers choosing to write because they want to, rather than feeling they should (Murray, 1985). Identifying their purpose will help them to find authenticity and meaning through their writing.
2. Teachers deserve training in understanding how the brain works, including the neuroscience involved in the act of writing once a cultivated practice has been established. We tend to focus on the products and effects as opposed to the cognitive processes that go on in the brain during the act of writing. Deborah Ross and Kay Adams (2016) have done extensive research

in the braiding of journaling, neuroplasticity and meditation to understand the “writing has the potential to change the way [we] see the world” (p. xx). Providing opportunities for teachers to engage in daily writing, if even for 20 minutes, will increase the possibility for these episodes of engagement to occur.

3. We can develop, model, and teach for a common terminology for the habits of mind that typical writers have cultivated to sustain an ongoing writing practice. Horace Mann (n.d.) is quoted as saying, “Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it (Costa & Kallick, 2009, p. xvii). We can explore literature such as Costa and Kallick’s work on habits of mind to develop strategies and curriculum to strengthen the dispositions writers hold. Murray (1985) and Graves (1990) also write about what it means to live with a sense of awareness and both offer strategies to awaken our eyes to the world and follow the questions that arise while writing. “The writer is a receiver of information. The writer must develop the ability to lie in wait, to be alert with every sense to what is going on. The writer is spy on life” (Murray, p. 13).
4. Changing our language from “teachers should write” to an invitational tone, as Donald Grave’s intended, may soften teachers’ defenses when suggesting another practice for them to adopt. Graves (1990) in his book, *Discover Your Own Literacy*, compassionately invites teachers to squeeze in writing in small 10 minutes increments, a reachable goal for the busy lives of teachers. Both Murray (1985) and Graves remind us not to judge our work or our processes as each writer has their own process. Their tone is nurturing and kind, as opposed to pressure and authoritative.

## Conclusion

Teachers need reminders that writing is “a way” to reach the overarching purposes we all have in life, just as Murray (1985) and Graves (1990) teach us that in writing, there are many ways of writing, many kinds of writers, and many ways of teaching writers. It is important to learn how to be responsive to each unique writer. However, when considering the many ways to our purposes in living: meditation, exercise, prayer, etc., writing is one of the few ways (along with reading) that meets them all and also benefits students by passing the torch on to them.

## **Appendix A: Interview Guides**

### **Questions for Interview #1**

**This is a semi-structured interview and these questions are only a guide.**

#### **Personal background**

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. What experiences led you to be interested in teaching at your school?
3. Can you briefly describe your educational history?

#### **Professional background**

4. How long have you been a teacher? How long have you worked at this school?
5. What did you do before coming to this school?

#### **First Influences To Write**

6. What initial experiences influenced your identity as a teacher-writer?
7. Have you always defined yourself as a writer? Can you talk about this more?
8. What were your early experiences in school as a writer? How did this shape who you are as a writer?
9. How have you grown as a writer? What factors caused this?
10. What writers, teachers and authors influence your writing self? Why?

#### **Essentials For An On-Going Writing Practice**

11. Describe yourself as a writer
12. When, where and how often do you write?
13. What is essential for you to keep an ongoing writing practice? Is anything more important than other elements?
14. What gets in the way of your ability to write as a practice?
15. Describe any habits, rituals or obsessions you have that are necessary for you to write.
16. Are there any habits of mind, attitudes or necessary ways of thinking you have?
17. Do you have any fears as a writer? What are they? Do you have strategies for overcoming these fears?
18. What strategies do you have when you are stuck or in a slump?
19. Describe your writing process? What parts of the process do you enjoy/dislike the most?

20. What types of writing do you feel are the most important for you do? Why? Is this the type of writing you enjoy the most? Do you do any other types of writing?
21. Is your personal writing different than public writing? If so, how?
22. Describe your goals or hopes and dreams as a writer.

### **Effects of Being a Teacher-Writer Professionally and Personally**

23. What is your overall approach to teaching writing? Can you explain what that looks like?
24. How do you organize or structure this type of teaching? (Probes: whole group? small group? Is there a structure to your lessons? Describe it.)
25. If I were to do a walk in observation of your writing lesson, what would you be teaching? What would the lesson look and sound like?
  - How long would it be?
  - What might be a topic?
  - How would you open the lesson?
  - What would happen in the middle of it?
  - How would it end?
26. List as many topics as you can think of that you teach to your students, especially in a whole group setting.
27. Where do your ideas for your lessons or these whole group lessons, come from?
28. What do you think is most important for your writers to know and be able to do?
29. What are your challenges in teaching writing?
30. What are your strengths, despite any challenges?

### Closing

- Thanks for sharing your experiences and ideas with me today.
- Do you have any questions for me? Are there any other things about being a writer you would like to share that I did not ask you?

**Questions for Interview #2 will be developed from the data gathered in interview #1. These questions will be to clarify and distill further the essence of a teacher-writer.**

**For Interview #3, teachers will be asked to respond to these questions in writing:**

1. What are the effects/benefits of being a teacher-writer in the classroom? Are there other effects professionally?
2. What are the effects/benefits of being a teacher-writer outside of the classroom? In your personal life?

**If further clarification or additional information is needed, a 4<sup>th</sup> face to face interview will be developed from the written response questions.**

The interview protocol has been developed and adapted from Lock, L. F., Spirduso, W. W., & Silverman, S. J. (2014). 2014). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

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