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Creating Communities of Practice Focused on Writing Instruction

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Providing quality writing instruction amid the growing demands teachers currently face has become increasingly challenging—despite the call over 15 years ago for a writing revolution for the "neglected R" (2003, National Commission on Writing). Teachers feel overwhelmed in today's classroom. They are tasked with navigating state laws and incorporating ever-changing curriculum while still experiencing the emotional and physical toll of COVID-19 and the continuous polarization of our politics that affect classroom practice. Providing quality writing instruction has been further complicated by a lack of writing-focused courses in teacher preparation programs, and a lack of attention from district administrators (Myers et al., 2016). Writing instruction is further marginalized when school districts center reading and mathematics instruction, at the expense of writing instruction, thus contributing to the adage: "whatever is tested is taught." In a large, southern, urban school district, a group of literacy coaches are working towards changing priorities—empowering writers and moving writing instruction to a position of power within their schools. To achieve this, they developed a monthly learning community with the goal of finding solutions that could shift the current state of writing instruction within their school district.

In this article we will share literacy coaches' experiences of engaging in a literacy *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991). We will describe the writing cohort process, topics discussed, books read, professional developments enacted, and materials generated during their time of study. The writing cohort enacted meaning and identity to the community to create learning and growth. Effective communities of practice promote innovation, spread knowledge, develop social capital, and facilitate existing knowledge (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These communities learn and grow through requesting information, problem solving, and reusing available assets. After a thorough description of the writing community and its practices, we offer insights into how others can create, maintain, and foster

similar communities within their schools and school districts. This examination of writing practices profoundly influenced students as well as the cohort participants.

The Creation of the Cohort

In early 2020, a group of literacy coaches gathered for their monthly literacy training. These trainings required every literacy coach in the district to gather for professional development. Although the coaches sensed a critical need for growth within their district, these trainings were increasingly driven by isolated literacy skills and culminating performance tasks. The coaches felt a deep conviction there was more to empowering young literacy learners. They wondered: How could they inspire students to see themselves as writers? How could they lift their students' voices and center them in the writing curriculum? The coaches believed that if they could first promote authentic writing instruction through modeling in their school's classrooms, the other writing requirements would subsequently fall into place.

When these educators were presented with an opportunity to form a study group, they jumped at the chance. As literacy coaches with a passion for writing instruction, Brandi Nunnery and Melissa Knapp (co-authors of this article) stepped forward to lead the group. Over the next year, the group, which consisted of thirteen coaches, encouraged one another to think critically, balancing their personal teaching philosophy with what they learn from experts in the field, and to create institutional goals and ideals focused on writing instruction. They read professional books, discussed culturally relevant and agentive writing practices, coached one another to improve writing instruction through planning and school visits, and enacted purposeful professional development alongside teachers within classrooms.

The Guiding Principles

As the group began their work together, the coaches shared their goals for the group, collectively outlining a list of reasons they were gathering to study. Teaching writing is a complex process that requires teachers to enact the vision they have for their writers while making many decisions each day (Van Sluys, 2011). Writing is a way for students to weave their voices into the curriculum--voices that are often marginalized in classrooms. These literacy coaches wanted to examine culturally relevant practices to celebrate and welcome those voices into classrooms (Winn & Johnson, 2011). Incorporating writing practices requires negotiation between teachers, coaches, and school districts to ensure all stakeholders understand its importance for children and to create a shared understanding that "everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers" (NCTE, 2015).

Together, the group decided to center their work by inviting *community*, *meaning*, and *identity* to center their community of practice (Wegner, 1998).

Community

“A way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprise is defined and our participation is recognisable as competence.” (Wegner, 1998, pp. 4-5).

The cohort formed a community of coaches who explored the many ways writing can enhance and deepen learning for students. In order for this community to grow, the cohort implemented various routines to organize and connect the community. These routines included establishing a regular time to meet as a community and crafting inspirational spaces to share, reflect, and learn.

The group quickly discovered the importance of consistency and reliable routines to create a predictable, steady community. The cohort chose the final Wednesday of every month, from 5:00pm-6:00pm, as the sacred and protected time for the community to meet. The group committed to beginning and ending the gathering on time. During this precious hour, the cohort followed this predictable schedule: 1) Sharing personal writing from daybooks in the first 15 minutes, 2) Discussing the monthly professional reading assignment for the next 30 minutes, and 3) Reflecting on their progress within schools and goal setting moving forward during the last 15 minutes. Each segment of time was integral for the cohort to establish the foundation of the community—to define their purpose and to determine the “social configurations” needed to support learning within their community.

Communities of Practice. The literacy coaches within this study engaged in situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theory of learning is derived from the foundational theories of John Dewey (1938) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Lave and Wenger (1991) theorized the notion that people come together in *communities of practice*--a network of participants who share a common purpose, passion, or problem to solve. As people come together in this group, they exchange thoughts, experiences, and ideas which leads to learning for the collective. In essence, groups of people (communities), share a common purpose (domain), for something they do (practice). For example, a group of hikers wishing to navigate new, unknown hiking terrains might begin this adventure by collectively studying the topography, reading maps, examining risks, creating schedules, writing lists, and crafting directions. Individuals of the team might be assigned one component of these tasks to study and teach others or the collective group might do all the work together with individuals bringing forward their knowledge and strengths. Each hiker assumes two roles: teacher and learner. Importantly, the learning happens within the context of the situation -- in this case, a forest. Participants learn from one another within the community; participants learn within a specific context.

For this community of literacy coaches, learning is both situated within a context (in this case, a monthly gathering of literacy coaches within their schools), across a common interest (i.e. writing pedagogy), and with a clear purpose (i.e. enact rich writing pedagogy within the classrooms of teachers they serve). Over

time, while engaged in study, learners moved from the periphery of communities to the center as they assumed the role of apprentice. From this embedded experience, the act of learning is socially constructed with members of the community serving as both teachers and learners. It is from this stance that the literacy coaches embedded within this community became active and engaged with learning by engaging in the process of writing themselves and then engaging in frequent social interaction with fellow literacy coaches at monthly meetings. This “living context” (Wagner, 1998, p. 214) is where knowledge was co-constructed by the coaches in an environment that supported their growing interest in writing pedagogy. As the literacy coaches gained more confidence in their knowledge of writing pedagogy and their own practice of writing, they felt more assured to provide scaffolding to support their colleagues’ developing capabilities within their own classroom contexts (Rogoff & Lave, 1984).

Sharing Personal Writing. Each month writing cohort members wrote in daybooks. At times, the content of the daybooks was guided by prompts, such as this one:

Read the poem “What You’d Find Buried in the Dirt Under Charles F. Kettering Sr. High School” by Fracine J. Harris. Discuss how the poet is remembering the events on the football field by thinking about the items that might have been buried under the field, or left over from the author’s time there. Make a list of places that are important to you. Talk with your family or think about these places and the memories you have there. Select one place to write about, and talk or think about the artifacts that might have been buried there. Then, spend time writing a poem about those items. You can include things like emotions or descriptive words, you are not limited to actual items.

Other times, writing was inspired by life events. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a police officer. Cohort member Shercobia Gordon-Hal used writing to process this tragic event. Shercobia shared with the cohort what she wrote about her Black son. Her honesty and vulnerability in this moment was a turning point for the group. A new “social configuration” happened within the community. Our cohort had become a safe place, a psychological location where we could express raw feelings when we shared our writing. Shercobia read the following excerpt from her daybook to the group:

I respond because MY BLACK SON’S LIFE MATTERS, along with all people of color. I emphasize MY BLACK SON because the chances of him coming home alive after being pulled over by someone who does not have a son of color, does not look or sound like him, is slim to none. Now you understand my fear, pain, anxiety, and ultimate rage. But to say you understand is an understatement, especially if you have not walked in my

shoes as a Black mother of not only BLACK CHILDREN but especially a BLACK SON while living in this so called “America” land of the free.

Sharing personal writing became the foundation for forming this community of practice. As a writing cohort, the group members committed to enhancing their own literate lives. Many of the group members identified as readers, but it was time to balance their reader lives with more personal writing. Figure 1 shares a graphic created to enhance the work of the writing community and bring a visual to the work of transforming their personal literary lives. This literary community building began to influence each coach’s school community.

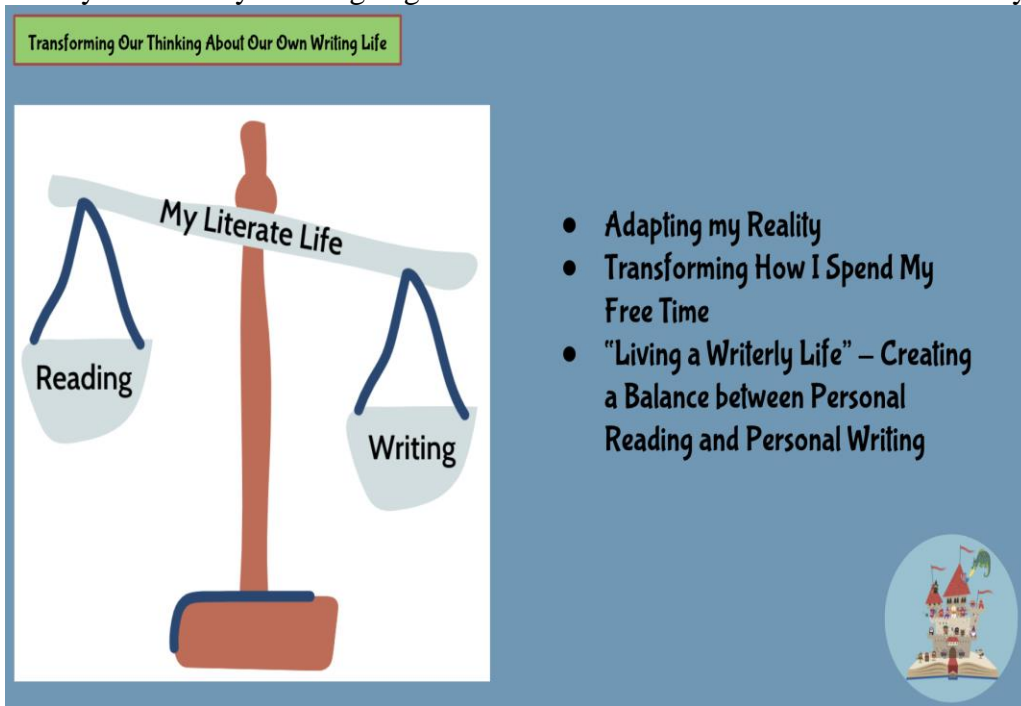


Figure 1. *Reflections for Living a Writerly Life*

School community. The practice of writing in daybooks grew in complexity, and the coaches eventually shared this practice with the greater school community. Teachers began their own personal writing journeys, and over time, a school-wide culture of writing emerged.

Changing teaching practice requires a level of trust and confidence in those who lead. Writing together as a school community served as one way to build this trust and community. In an interview with a kindergarten teacher from one of the participating coach’s elementary schools, the teacher confided, “I was hesitant at first to let go of control for this new practice. I was so used to prompting and supporting too much. I felt the only way kindergarteners could write is if I basically ‘gave it to them’. I had to trust my literacy coach. Once I committed, I was shocked at the growth I saw. It was all [the students’] work. I couldn’t believe it.”

The handout in Figure 2 shows how the coaches introduced the *daybook* with the teachers in their schools. The term *daybook* comes from Donald Murray (1985) who described his writer's notebook as, "a record of my intellectual life, what I'm thinking about and what I'm thinking about writing" (p. 68) This idea was extended to Brandi's and Melissa's school communities in a variety of ways. At Melissa's school, teachers were encouraged to routinely write their own thoughts and reflections in their daybooks. She shared a few pages of her personal daybook and ideas to help them get started. Many teachers began using their daybooks for personal reflections and to model writing for their students.

Within the cohort's school, the goal for next school year was to have every teacher start their own daybook. Monthly literacy team meetings began with independent writing time to model best practices to bring back to their classrooms. Brandi wrote and received a Dollar General Youth Literacy Grant for a \$4,000 award titled, "iRead, iWrite: Improving Achievement through Independent Reading & Writing." Although COVID delayed some aspects of the grant, the iWrite component of the grant was for the purchase of daybooks—with every student and adult in the school receiving an iWrite Daybook. These journals were used solely for independent, self-selected writing. Students and adults had the opportunity to share their writing in a special display area in the school building. The inside cover of the iWrite Daybook had a list of possible writing topics to encourage those who experience "writer's block." Brandi also modeled using an online daybook during coaching cycles. Many teachers implemented this practice in their own classrooms as a model for their students and to share their writing during mini-lessons within the Writer's Workshop.



Keeping a Writer's Daybook

Adapted from:

<https://www.thefire.org/keeping-a-writers-daybook-pamela-mitzelfeld-english-380-september-1-2011/>

The idea for a writer's "Daybook" came from a book called *Write to Learn* by Donald M. Murray. Murray's idea is that a Daybook should be an ongoing volume that functions as a place for a writer to record ideas, thoughts, and impressions. It is also intended to be a place to try out ideas and start drafts.

The following pointers will help you begin the process:

- The Daybook should be in the form of a small notebook. Keep it with you all the time.
- The Daybook should start with a Table of Contents.
- The Daybook entries should be dated-each beginning on a new page.
- The Daybook should contain (but is not limited to) the following:
 - Responses/thoughts on podcasts, books, songs, albums, movies, articles, conversations with people
 - Freewriting narratives, opinion pieces, info text, poetry
 - Observation logs: people, places, happenings
 - Creative entries of your own
 - Record daily events for later reference. ...
 - Celebrating #smallwins
 - Goals and Action Items
 - Words of Wisdom
 - Brilliant Ideas
 - Jokes
 - New vocabulary or terms of interest- defined and used in a sentence (these can be taken from reading, research, and/ or everyday life)



Figure 2. *Rolling Out a Daybook at School*

Meaning

"A way to talk about our ability to experience the world as meaningful."
(Wegner, 1998, pp. 4-5).

We centered meaning making as the foundation of our writing community of practice. During the cohort's first meeting, each person in the group shared a concern and passion for authentic writing instruction in the elementary schools they led. Through their shared conversation, the cohort realized that writing must be meaningful for students and serve a larger purpose in their lives rather than receiving a grade at school. In response, the group penned the following *Call to*

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Action:

We must facilitate an authentic writing process with student choice outside of the on-demand writing in the Scope & Sequence. Our larger purpose is to nurture students to live a literate life- to be authentic readers and writers. This big idea is larger than our schedules, the scope and sequence, and curricular resources.

After the initial meeting, each subsequent meeting began with a recitation of the call to action. Two call-to-action reflection questions were referenced throughout each meeting to keep *meaning* at the center of the work, especially as the group navigated constraints from their schools or district. The reflection questions were: *What can we do **now** to improve authentic process writing in our building? What can we work on **now** to prepare for improving writing instruction next year?*

The emphasis on the word *now* is intentional. Based on prior experience in teacher working groups, this group deliberately decided they would be problem *solvers* rather than problem *seekers*. Rather than speaking of the ways they could not do this work, they were determined to negotiate both long-term and short-term solutions for the *now*.

The cohort began brainstorming the many literacy curriculum expectations required by the district, remembering the commitment they made in their call to action. This big idea is larger than our schedules, the scope and sequence, and curricular resources. They listed the tasks they were required to complete as literacy coaches, but did not necessarily support their *call of action*, alongside the tasks they hoped to accomplish by creating a more meaningful writing community at their schools. Brandi, the co-leader of the cohort, created a graphic (see Figure 3) to encourage teachers and coaches to see the value in building authentic student writing experiences and dedicating instructional time to allow Writer's Workshop to be an integral part of the literacy block.

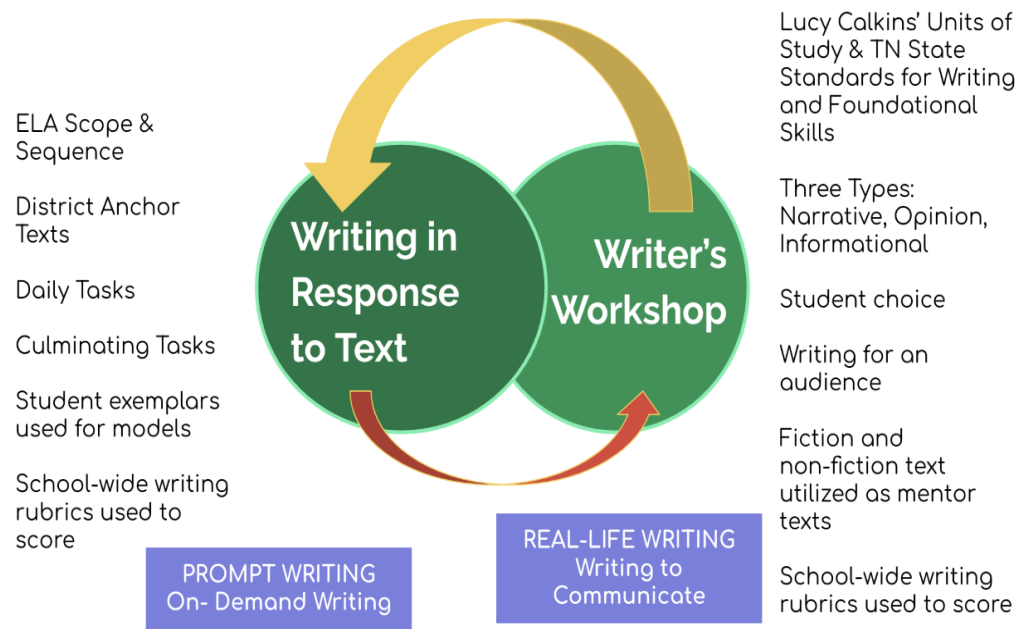


Figure 3. *A Model for Authentic Student Writing and Its Influence on On-Demand Writing*

The left side of the graphic shows an example of district-required on-demand writing prompts while the right side describes real-life writing experiences teachers wanted to explore with their students. This graphic emphasizes how authentic writing experiences engage learners and this engagement transfers into increased performance when they are required to complete on-demand writing samples for assessment.

As the group negotiated the requirements with their call to action in mind, they realized they could effectively do both. A greater emphasis on real-life writing and writing to communicate in a workshop format would result in students who view themselves as writers. These students wrote every day, using mentor text to read like a writer, and writing in various genres with choice and audience. This greater focus (hence the thick arrow from the writer's workshop circle to the writing in response to text circle) resulted in students who easily wrote to a prompt in an on-demand setting because they had built their knowledge and stamina as writers during periods of time when their writing experiences were driven by choice.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for students who are only taught on-demand writing with culminating tasks. This type of writing instruction does not lead to authentic writers; instead, it asks writers to write superficially for no other purpose than *doing school* (Jiménez-Aleixandre, Bugallo Rodríguez, & Duschl, 2000; Pope 2001). By following their call to action, the cohort's larger goal led to students who were able to accomplish two things: write for authentic reasons *and*

pass a state writing assessment. The coaches in this group held a strong belief in literacy as advocacy. As they gained knowledge within their community of practice, they were also gaining confidence (Graven, 2002) to advocate for new and different ways of learning.

Identity

“A way of talking about how learning changes who we are.” (Wegner, 1998, pp. 4-5).

One veteran, 4th grade teacher of 25 years spent part of her summer studying and preparing for a change in writing pedagogy. As she began to study new and effective writing practices she said, “I had to look within myself and recognize that I was not doing effective writing instruction. Teaching practices become an integral part of our identities as teachers, and making huge internal shifts forced us to examine our own notion of identity. Writing was painful to teach for me. It was unnatural and rote. I finally acknowledged to myself I was not being effective. I looked at my data and knew it was not working. I had to try something else.” As the coaches led the teachers in shifting their identities as writing teachers, many teachers began to feel similarly. The learning that came from their own experience as writers began to change how they approached the teaching of writing.

The teacher continues by explaining her internal shift: “It was not easy though. I am not an expert. There have been lots of growing pains. I studied my curriculum with post-its and highlighters. I started small, planning two lessons at a time. I would keep my notes and curriculum in my lap and tell my students I was learning a new way of teaching. I wanted my students to see I was a learner myself. We were all in this together. We were creating our own authentic learning community.”

Her identity as a writing teacher, as well as her colleagues, began to transform.

Reflection as Identity Building. Reflection became a consistent part of the community of practice. The members spent intentional time reflecting on what went well and what needed additional attention, sharing successes and failures at each meeting. Table 1 shows a list of reflection questions used by the group.

Table 1. *Reflection Questions for Bettering Writing Instruction*

<p>Personal Writing Reflection Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What did I do as a writer this week? ● What was difficult for me as a writer this week? ● How did ideas and lessons in <i>The Revision Toolbox</i> help me rework your writing?
<p>Building Level Teacher Practice Reflection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What did I try out this week as a teacher of writing? What went well? What still needs some tweaking and coaching?

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How am I feeling about the balance of teacher talk, student talk, and writing time? • How are my conferences going?
Call to Action Reflection Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this practice nurture students to live a literate life- to be authentic readers and writers? • What is something new I learned in our cohort meeting that I can bring back and implement now? • What am I doing now to improve authentic process writing in our building? What am I working on now to prepare for improving writing instruction next year?

A 3rd grade teacher wrote the following reflection in response: “As I was learning, I continually had to look within myself and reflect. I remember thinking one day, ‘Is this a life changing thing for me? Would I go to another school with this practice?’ YES I would. I would take pieces of this for the rest of my teaching life. I almost feel like my past writing instruction was wasted time. I am a different teacher now.”

Changing Identities. Rather than share writing with colleagues as they were mired in their processes, the writing cohort members initially only wanted to share finished pieces of writing with one another. This is similar to a common teaching practice that encourages students to only share final, published work. Many times, teachers displayed this “perfect” piece in the hallway without any sign of the revisions the writer made to add clarity to their drafts. Another paradigm shift happened when the writing cohort engaged in a book study of the text *The Revision Toolbox* (Heard, 2014). During the month in between meetings, an email went out to the writing cohort that read:

Hey, Writers! I started The Revision Toolbox this afternoon and I'm on FIRE about the content! It's everything I've been needing and wanting to (a) improve my own practice/thinking about revision and (b) transform my teachers and students thinking about revision!

For this semester, I think we should focus on taking our own writing through our revision processes and sharing what that looks like and feels like. Between now and next Wednesday, pull out a piece of writing and do some revision work on it.

Like Georgia Heard says on page 3, "When I get together with my writer friends for coffee, we spend time reading each other's work and talking about our revision processes rather than reading our finished pieces to each other. We might talk about another way we should begin a piece; point out which words are abstract or cliché; highlight a part that gives the

reader a vivid image; or discuss what changes we need to make to improve our writing."

I think we should run our "writing talk" from a REVISION lens this entire semester.....as we read the book!

Thus, a new way of talking about our writing process emerged as we gathered as a cohort. Sharing revisions, our works in progress rather than our perfect publications, required a new level of intimacy and trust. It also required identity shifts. They were beginning to identify as revisers—writers who are willing to put words on the page first and come back to it again and again. Learning from Georgia Heard (2014) began to change the identity of the cohort by changing the way they talked, interacted, and shared their writing.

Writing Identities of Students. As the identities of the writing cohort developed, the students and families at the schools began to form their own writing identities. Students took home blank booklets to write outside of school. Parents asked more about the teaching practices happening within the classroom. In short, the children wanted to write. Even when schools closed at the onset of the pandemic students continued writing. Brandi led over 100 students in a virtual Writer’s Workshop throughout the pandemic (Nunnery et al., 2021). She hoped to “nurture students to live literate lives”. Beyond the classroom, students continued to thrive as writers.

Practice

“A way of talking about shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that sustain mutual engagement in action.” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 4-5).

The practices used by our cohort worked successfully as a model for community change. It also helped us navigate the constraints within our district, the challenges experienced by teachers, and the means of creating workable solutions despite confines that were out of our control. The cohort realized these same practices could be applied within any school.

Reading Professional Texts

Reading common professional texts as a group was the first routine set in place for the writing cohort. Each month the coaches agreed on a section of reading. This reading drove the discussion in the second half of the monthly meeting. The learning from the text helped inspire action goals. Table 2 provides examples of professional texts and connected actions.

Topic	Professional Text	Actions Inspired by Text
Writer’s Workshop Framework	<i>When Writers Drive the Workshop</i> (Kissel, 2017)	Reflection time added to the workshop

Literacy Coaching	<i>Leading Well</i> (Calkins, 2018)	Demonstration days implemented where teachers, parents, and administration come into the classroom to observe or try a writing lesson
Revision	<i>The Revision Toolbox</i> (Heard, 2014)	Sharing revisions as a common practice rather than just final drafts
Launching Writer’s Workshop with Digital Video Content	<i>A Teacher’s Guide to Writing Workshop Essentials: Time, Choice, Response</i> (Bomer & Arens, 2020).	Digital video content used as a coaching supplement during remote learning
Building Knowledge around Effective Writing Instruction	<i>Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide</i> (Graham, Bollinger, Olson, D’Aoust, MacArthur, McCutchen, & Olinghouse, 2012)	This reading was used to ensure alignment with the science of writing instruction. Sharing “where we are”, “what’s important to us”, and “where we need to go”
A Classroom Culture for Writing	A revised writer(s)-within-community model of writing. (Graham, 2018)	Reflections on our writing community. What are we doing as individuals, classrooms, and schools to promote a community of writers?
Strategies for Writing	<i>The Writing Strategies Book</i> (Seravallo, 2017)	This book was used during planning time as a support for integrating writing strategies into the district curriculum tasks.

Table 2 *Professional Texts for Effective Writing Instruction*

Negotiating Restraints

Many roadblocks threatened to derail the group from their call to action. District curriculum mandates, new state literacy laws, and abrupt shifts to remote learning were all impediments to authentic writing instruction in schools. As the group maintained their focus on the call to action, they found new and innovative ways to sustain the work of the group alongside the goals of the district.

Negotiating Building Level Schedules. Time restraints have been an ongoing issue for teachers desperately trying to meet the demands of the prescribed curriculum adopted by the school district which requires teachers to complete specific reading instruction with scripted culminating tasks. These requirements compelled the coaches to seek additional time to sustain their mutual engagement in the action work of the writing cohort. The coaches negotiated a schedule that

would allow teachers to focus solely on the district prescribed curriculum for 3 days (Monday through Wednesday) and solely on Writer’s Workshop and authentic writing instruction for 2 days (Thursday and Friday). Although the coaches wished for more instructional writing time, this negotiation created hope that they could remain focused on their call to action. This schedule was dubbed the “3/2 framework” and was a time structure coaches in the cohort considered for implementation immediately in classrooms of interested teachers or for the coming year in certain grade levels. An essential component of the community of practice included co-creating schedules and advocating for dedicated time for writing instruction. The members supported each other through creative negotiation and sharing successes and challenges within individual schools.

Focus Groups for Differentiation

For some of the cohort members, school administrators did not approve the 3/2 framework. Principal support varied among the members and required an additional layer of negotiation. For approximately 6 months, the members split into two focus groups. The first group had more building-level support for the 3/2 framework. Administrators of the second group, however, restricted time for writing instruction. The second group was determined to continue their advocacy for longer instructional time for writing and did so by negotiating for small changes to the schedule. For example, the group decided to take the Writer’s Workshop framework (mini-lesson, writing time, and sharing time) to implement the district-required culminating tasks within that framework (see Table 3 for an example lesson).

	Mini Lesson Day 1	Mini Lesson Day 2	Culminating Task Day 3-5
Mentor Text	<i>What If You Had An Animal Nose!?</i> Pages 4-9	<i>What If You Had An Animal Nose!?</i> Pages 4-5	Part I: You are a journalist for the magazine <i>Our Planet</i> , and your assignment is to fly to two different regions to study the differences in animal adaptations in each region so the public can better understand how animals interact with their environments and how they avoid extinction. Your article will be featured in the <i>Our Planet</i> . Since you are one of the senior journalists, you are able to select the two regions. Part II: As a senior journalist, an important part of your
Mini Lesson	<p>Connection “Writers, yesterday we read <i>What If You Had an Animal Nose!?</i> by Sandra Markle. Today we are going to follow the text structure and features she uses to create our own writing about a different animal.”</p> <p>Teaching Point “Today I am going to teach you to use the same structure Sandra Markle uses when writing about animal noses. Like Markle, we must make decisions about the big ideas and interesting facts we want to share.</p>	<p>Connection “Writers, yesterday we used the Mentor Text <i>What If You Had an Animal Nose!?</i> to design and write your own page using the structures and text features that Sandra Markle used in her book. Today, we’re going to dig a little deeper and look at how we can vary sentence types to make our writing sound better to our readers.”</p> <p>Teaching Point “Today I want to teach you to</p>	

	<p>For example, see how Markle talks about each animal’s nose. She tells about the animal and the importance of their nose. Then she shares an interesting fact. On the opposite page, she takes the information and turns it into an “If you had a....”.</p> <p>Teaching Mentor Text- <i>What If You Had An Animal Nose!?</i> Pgs. 4-9</p> <p>Let’s look at how Markle organized pages 4-5. Chart the structure she uses and the text features on page 4-5.....overall information and importance of nose, FACT, and If You Had.....</p> <p>Shared Writing: Teacher models following this same structure to write about another animal not in the text. (Make sure the “FACT” is written as a simple sentence in preparation for the following convention lesson-when students will revise change it to a complex sentence.)</p> <p>Active Engagement Following the same structure, ask students to work in partners or groups to write about a different animal of their choice.</p> <p>Link With students, brainstorm other topics students could write about that follow this same organizational structure such as careers, places, famous people. Remind students to plan and research their topic so that they have enough information for their writing.</p>	<p>vary the types of sentences in your writing. We are going to learn how to change a simple sentence into a compound sentence. I want to see you try that in your writing today.”</p> <p>Teaching</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use slide to show mentor sentences. 2. Mentor Text- <i>What If You Had An Animal Nose!?</i> Pg. 4 (FACT) 3. Teacher models revising her fact from her page. This will be written as a simple sentence from previous lesson. <p>Active Engagement- students do a simple sentence with guidance</p> <p>Link- “Remember that writers use different types of sentences in their writing to make it sound more interesting to their readers.”</p>	<p>work is designing the layout of your article which will be featured in the “Check Out Our Planet” section of the magazine. Determine how to best present your article to readers of <i>Our Planet</i>. As you design the layout of your article, consider the text features and visuals that helps readers understand the information of your article.</p> <p>Part III: Your article will also be featured on a special edition of the <i>Our Planet TV</i> broadcast. Prepare to deliver a 1-2-minute segment that will be televised for viewers of all ages. During your segment, highlight the key findings you made while traveling to your two regions. Your purpose is to help the public understand how animals interact and survive in specific environments. As you practice your broadcast, consider what makes TV reporters successful.</p>
<p>Writing Time</p>	<p>Students: Research and write using a similar structure as <i>What If You Had An Animal Nose!?</i></p> <p>Teacher: Ask students what other topics they could write about using this structure. Could this work for all informational writing? Ask writers about their writing process by saying, “ What are you trying to do?”</p>	<p>Students-: Edit their writing by combining two simple sentences into a compound sentence.</p> <p>Conferring: Guide students to use an appropriate connector word.</p>	

Share Time	Partner Share: With partners, ask students to share their the favorite section of their informational writing.	Circle Share: Ask students to share an example of a compound sentence they created through editing.	
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Table 3 *Example Required District Curriculum Adapted to a Workshop Format*

Document Creation

Google Docs allowed for the group to co-construct a variety of documents that supported engagement in action and direct impact on the following key questions from the call to action: 1) *What can we do **now** to improve authentic process writing in our building?* 2) *What can we work on **now** to prepare for improving writing instruction next year?*

The coaches planned together, leaning on each other as experts. As a community of practice, members would take a topic of interest and hone their own writing craft, experiment with new practices, read books and articles to deepen their knowledge of pedagogy, and reflect by writing in their daybooks. This reflective stance allowed them to consider how these practices might work within the context of their own schools. The steps in Table 4 demonstrate a protocol that was created for coaches that allowed them to teach coaching colleagues within the school district. Coaches took their learning experiences back to their schools by creating one-page synopses explaining what the coaching cohort learned as a community of practice. We followed the following sequence to model our thinking and actions before asking them to plan the same way (see Table 5).

Table 4 *Steps for Coaches-Teaching-Coaches Planning Model*

Steps for Coaches-Teaching-Coaches Planning Model	Example
Review the chosen topic as a group through professional reading or examining parts of the curriculum.	Review part of a mini-lesson, review steps for lesson planning
Model the Lesson: Coaches model the lesson for other coaches	Go into a classroom with members of the cohort. One coach will model the planned lesson or try a component of the curriculum the group studied. The model coach teaches the children as the other coaches observe and take notes.
Reflect on the Lesson	The coaches gather outside the classroom to describe their observations of the lesson and the effectiveness of the instruction.
Plan a lesson individually	Finally, the coaches individually plan a lesson to be taught within the context of their own schools.

School-Based Learning Opportunities

The writing cohort was eager to create authentic professional development experiences by creating school-based learning opportunities for the members of the

group. These “cohort days” included a full day of learning on site at one of the coach’s elementary schools. The purpose of the day was two-fold: to learn effective writing practices and to apply these practices by crafting mini-lessons used to demonstrate in teachers’ classrooms.

Figure 4 shows an example schedule of a day when the cohort gathered as a community of practice. The first large chunk of learning happened through classroom observations of a 4th grade and 2nd grade Writer’s Workshop as they unfolded in real classrooms. The coaches saw teachers and children, within an authentic classroom setting, engaging in the writing associated with their call to action. Woven within the day was a keynote speaker.

Time	Activity	Location
7:45-8:00	Arrival/Drop off personal belongings	Bookroom
8:00-8:10	Setting the Stage	Bookroom
8:15-9:15	Writer’s Workshop Observation 4th Grade	Half of Group in Phillips Half of Group in Weber
9:15-10:15	Keynote Speaker	Bookroom
10:15-10:30	BREAK	
10:30-11:30	Writer’s Workshop Observation 2nd Grade	4 Groups: Sobol, Guarino, Drexler, Connole
11:30-12:30	LUNCH (and debrief observations)	
12:30-1:45	Plan 3rd Grade Model Lessons (Teachers: Melissa, Brandi, Rae, we need two more)	Bookroom
1:45-2:45	Model Lessons 3rd Grade	5 Groups: McLendon, Farrar, Storey, Knight, McCullough
2:45-3:15	Wrap Up	Bookroom

Figure 4. *Schedule for Professional Development Day*

Discussion

The components of a community of practice are “interconnected and mutually defining” (Wegner, 1998, p.5). As members moved through *community*, *meaning*, and *identity* within this cohort, they gained a collective bond which led to deeper understanding of effective writing instruction. Group members grew their own writing practice, inspired schoolwide cultures of authentic writing, learned from each other, and created resources and learning opportunities for teachers in their schools. The work of a teacher is already difficult and it’s growing more so as teachers increasingly experience the de-professionalism of their profession. A community of support can help teachers feel less isolated and more empowered.

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