

“Writer’s Notebook, how I will miss you so!”: Using Writer’s Notebooks
with Future Teachers of Elementary School Writers

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"You mean you expect us to write every day?!"

"How long do our entries have to be?"

"What are we supposed to write about?"

"Who's going to read this?"

If you are an elementary school teacher introducing your students to the use of a writer's notebook, comments like those likely sound familiar. But those comments didn't come from elementary school *students*. They came from future elementary school *teachers*. I am a teacher educator, and those are the comments from students in my class when given the assignment to begin maintaining a writer's notebook.

What is a Writer's Notebook?

There are many different definitions of a writer's notebook. It's been called a playground, a gym, a place to plant seeds. It's where writers try out new techniques and build their writing muscles. A writer's notebook is not the place where writers take pieces through multiple drafts, bring them to completion, and polish them for publication. A notebook is a place where writers play around with ideas and language and new genres. It's a place to take risks (Fletcher, 1996; Lane, 2008). In her book of strategies for the writer's notebook, Aimee Buckner asserts that we shouldn't focus on writing for significance; we should focus on building the writing habit. "It's the act of writing – the practice of generating text and building fluency – that leads writers to significance" (2005, p. 7). One way to build fluency is through the use of a writer's notebook.

Teachers in K-12 classrooms use writer's notebooks with their students in varying ways. Jones and East (2010) have their first-grade students participate in journal writing daily. Although they use the term "journal," many aspects of this writing compare favorably with aspects of writing in a writer's notebook. These include "daily practice, consistent feedback, integration into other classroom practices, a supportive environment, sharing opportunities, and a home-school connection" (p. 114). Through this practice, the authors have found potential for student writers to increase confidence in their writing abilities and control over written language. While such control in the primary grades may be indicated by a move from strings of random letters to combinations of letters resembling words, the gain in control in the upper grades may entail closer approximation to genres or sophisticated use of literary elements.

In a year-long study of their eighth-grade students' attitudes toward their writer's notebooks, Fracareta and Phillips (2000) found that while only 25% of their students thought the notebooks were of "high value" at the end of the first quarter of the school year, at the end of the fourth quarter the percentage of students indicating a belief in their notebooks being of "high value" had risen to 50%. This is a substantial gain in approval from a traditionally tough audience!

When teachers interact with students through their notebooks, either by providing written feedback on entries, or simply reading those entries to glean information, teachers have the opportunity to tailor feedback and instruction to meet individual's needs and interests. While the notebook should be a low-risk zone for students, it can provide valuable information for teachers seeking to provide

more authentic writing instruction. The main purpose of the notebook is to move student writers toward greater independence in making the kinds of decisions and doing the kind of work that “real” writers do. Think of all the decisions a writer makes before the first words even hit the page in her notebook. What kind of a notebook will she choose? Small or large? Lined or unlined paper? Spiral or stitched binding? Ideally, she should be the one to choose, based on her awareness of what will help her best do the job. And when she makes choices such as these, she is working independently as a writer, that much closer to being ready to make the harder decisions related to form, function and audience for her writing.

Why Use Writer's Notebooks in a Teacher Education Course?

Sandra Vavra (2009) has lamented the lack of consistent study and practice of writing for expressive means in teacher education programs, and she connects this void with beginning teachers' reluctance and limited ability to teach writing. Vavra contrasts their experience (or lack thereof) to that of educators in other arenas when she notes that we would never hire a tennis coach who had never played tennis competitively, nor would we hire a piano teacher who had never performed for an audience. She concludes, “*How can they teach a skill or ever feel comfortable about teaching something they do not know deeply themselves?* (p. 22).

At Washington State University, Judith Morrison (2008) used science notebooks with elementary preservice teachers in their science methods course, basing her decision on the belief that if her students are to use science notebooks in their future classrooms, a common practice in inquiry science teaching, they must first experience using such notebooks as science learners. When Morrison studied

her students' attitudes toward using science notebooks in their methods class, she found "the preservice teachers began moving away from the view that the science notebooks were just another assignment to be done for the instructor and moved towards using the notebook as a place where they could explore and document their own learning" (p. 17). The preservice teachers also indicated that they would use such notebooks with their own students. Morrison concluded that her students would not have understood the value of science notebooks if they had only been told about their use; they needed to become immersed in their use as science learners and writers themselves.

Stockinger (2007) studied the use of writer's notebooks in an undergraduate English language arts methods class in which she examined how this methods course influenced her students' beliefs about writing and writing instruction. She maintained, "Matching the learning context as closely as possible to the real thing and immersing students in the authentic context supports grounded understanding, or deep understanding" (p. 218). Stockinger found that students' use of writing notebooks significantly contributed to their developing images of themselves as writing teachers, and as writers.

Like Morrison and Stockinger, I believe in "immersing students in the authentic context" (Stockinger, 2007, p. 218). If students are going to use writer's notebooks with their students, I want them to maintain notebooks themselves, writing about topics they choose, using modes and genres they choose. I am lucky that one of the courses I teach provides the perfect context in which to maintain such a notebook.

At my university, RDNG 240 is a required course for any student seeking elementary teaching certification. The course is entitled, "Reading and Writing Connections in the Elementary Grades," and while we certainly do address issues related to reading, the main focus is on preparing students to teach writing. It is the only course in their preparation program that focuses heavily on writing instruction. A course like this is an important response to findings such as those of Gilbert and Graham (2010) who sampled elementary teachers in grades 4-6 across the country and discovered "almost two-thirds of the teachers reported that the teacher education courses they took in college provided them with little preparation to teach writing" (p. 494). Students in RDNG 240 may be sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Since it is a course they may take before being officially admitted to the teacher education program (traditionally in their junior year), many students opt to take the course before taking any other courses in literacy education. What they know about elementary school reading and writing is often based solely on their own experiences as elementary school students. Too often, I have found that their experiences writing during their K-12 school years were less than positive. All of these experiences have an impact on my students' beliefs and understandings about writing and the teaching of writing (Johnston, Woodside-Jirn, & Day, 2000). Unless I want my students to replicate past practice, which is further tainted by the infidelity of memory and the student's perspective as a student, not a teacher, I need to give my students new experiences as students of writing.

In my courses, I often require my students to participate as learners in activities that I hope/believe they will someday employ with their own students.

During these activities, I ask them to reflect as learners as well as prospective teachers. This sort of critical thinking through reflection will transfer to their work in their future classrooms (McGlamery & Harrington, 2007). Highly effective literacy teachers have been found to be more reflective than less effective literacy teachers (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block & Morrow, 2001).

Not only do I find myself working to shift students' beliefs about the teaching of writing; I want to shift their beliefs about themselves as writers. Too often do I hear students say they hate to write or they are poor writers. When I probe the reasons for these beliefs, I invariably hear stories of teachers telling them only what they did wrong in their writing, using the traditional red pen as their mouthpiece, and focusing primarily on mechanics and conventions of writing. I hear stories of teachers assigning particular genres (e.g., write a haiku by tomorrow), or topics (e.g., write about your summer), a practice that may add to the students' insecurity, disinterest, and/or disengagement in writing. Even if students say they remember writing in journals in elementary school (at which point my heart lifts), they often proceed to say their teachers gave them prompts to respond to. Rarely do my students bring stories of teachers conferring with them about their writing strengths, or teachers allowing them to write about topics of their own choosing, in genres also self-selected.

Students in RDNG 240 engage in three main ways of writing as learners: writing in response to course readings, participating in writing workshop, and maintaining a writer's notebook. The first two writing activities occur during class time; the maintenance of the writer's notebook occurs primarily outside of class

time, although students may engage in “try its” in which our whole class attempts to use a particular writing technique. Students may also use their notebooks during writing workshop to try out revision possibilities or reread entries to “lift a line” (Buckner, 2005), drawing inspiration for longer writing pieces from short entries done in their notebooks. The majority of the entries are student-driven in terms of topics and forms of writing. This is a struggle for some students, especially in the beginning of the semester when they are new to having the right and responsibility to write daily about anything they want, in any form they want. The temptation is to turn the notebook into a daily activity log, in which they dutifully record what they ate for meals, what activities they participated in, and how they feel about their homework for college. While I assure them that this might be interesting, the purpose of the notebook is to help them expand and deepen their understanding and experience. It is a tool to help them learn more about writing and themselves as writers; it’s not a vehicle to simply fill in pages to please the teacher. To help them grasp this concept more fully, I share entries from my own writer’s notebook, invite students to share what entries they’ve been making, and direct students to consult the authors whose works we’ve been reading (e.g., Aimee Buckner, Barry Lane, and Katie Wood Ray) for ideas of what they might write. Students are encouraged to keep their notebooks with them throughout the day, every day, since they can never know when inspiration may strike and they’ll feel compelled to capture something in an entry.

What Do Preservice Teachers of Elementary Writing Write About?

At the end of one semester in which I taught two sections of RDNG 240, I decided to collect students' work, with their permission, to more closely analyze how and what they wrote. With students' written consent, I ended up with work from sixteen class participants. This work included students' daily in-class written responses to course readings, final writing portfolios (including a reflection piece based on all of their writing for the course), and their writer's notebooks. I had read all of their notebook entries already – some of them twice, since I do a mid-semester checkpoint to see their progress – but I had not done any formal study of this work. In reading the notebook entries, however, I had sensed certain themes emerging. I decided to focus on what topics were recurring, and what types of “play” with writing these students engaged in within their notebooks. I analyzed the notebook entries using content analysis (Patton, 1990), reading through all entries, looking for recurring themes or topics, which were then grouped into major categories.

One category of entry repeatedly caught my interest: entries that revealed the writer's beliefs about him/herself as a writer. Within this category of entries, I identified entries focusing on the following themes: writing habits, perception of writing ability, feelings about writing, and thoughts about present writing practice. In the following sections, excerpts from students' writer's notebooks will be used to exemplify these various themes.

Writing Habits

Several entries focused on the habits of the writer, often expressing particular frustration. For example, one writer, Shelly, lamented:

I always have a writing block. I have so much going on in my life that sometimes I just can't think. I work, study, and go to school and have no time to write. But, when I do write I enjoy it. It helps me get my emotions out. I need to give myself time to write! I have to [sic] much homework in all the rest of my classes – sometimes I need to just write but I sometimes can't even write half a page.

While Shelly obviously saw the value in writing, and found enjoyment in doing it, she felt stymied by constraints of time and events. In a subsequent entry, she composed the following list:

Reasons I write:

- because I have to
- someone says something that sticks with me
- someone says something I want to remember
- to clear my mind
- to explore my imagination and creativity

This list clearly shows that Shelly is still thinking about the personal value of writing, although it is interesting that the first item in her list is the only reason that is not self-initiated. One would hope that this list is not rank-ordered in terms of the priority she places on these reasons to write. Shelly included one more entry focused on her writing habits.

I usually write in journal form where I am telling someone a story. It is a narration of my life and the things I want people to remember about me. This is my WRITERS NOTEBOOK where I am supposed to try out new writing

styles. I am not very good at writing in a grammatically correct way and I often misspell words because I am just trying to write what's on my mind. I am a very methodical person. I like organization. When I write in a journal, or take notes in class I have to use one kind of pen. Pentel RSVP BK 90 Fine tip. I just like the way it glides across the paper. Not really sure what to write about anymore so I will be done.

I appreciate Shelly's attention to how she writes, even noting her preferred writing utensil. What is most striking in this entry is her use of full capitalization in "WRITERS NOTEBOOK." This suggests she understands a distinction between a journal and a writer's notebook, but that the latter is a more weighty undertaking.

Shelly was not the only student to have a particular preference for a specific writing utensil. Megan wrote a lengthy entry about this.

Well, I just need to start off by saying that I hate this pen. It is one of those really cheap, crappy bic "round stick" pens that people buy for their kids to bring to school because you can get a 20-pack for .99 at K-mart during back to school shopping time.

When I have children and it is time for them to start school, I am going to let them pick their own writing utensils. We have discussed this in class many, many times and I completely agree that you need to have a relationship with your pen; you need to love it.

It is like in the Harry Potter books. Mr. Ollivander tells Harry that the wand chooses the wizard. So it is with writing utensils and writers. I remember the first time I used a Pilot G-2 gel pen with purple ink. When Harry Potter first

held his wand with a phoenix feather core, it was quite the moment. I felt the same way holding that purple pen. I wrote my name and it looked more beautiful than it ever had before. My handwriting had a new confidence and grace and the combination of purple ink only made that better.

I need to go to the store this week and buy more purple Pilot G-2 gel pens. I would like to go now but am stuck at home. If I had my pen right now I would be much happier about writing.

As Megan noted, we did talk about pen choice in class, but I never realized we did this “many, many times” as she claims. This naturally leads me to consider the sway our classroom discussions have over what students say in their notebooks. Because the notebook is a place for freedom in what and how students choose to write, this is a variable of which I feel I have little, if any, control.

Some students identified specific habits in their writing which reveal their close attention to their writing habits. On two consecutive days, in fact, the first two days of notebook writing, Ginny focused on the appearance of her writing:

Entry One: I love my cursive hand-writing, handwriting, hand writing.

Entry Two: I'm my 2nd entry in and I'm already frustrated by my love for perfect, straight lettering.

Ginny's second entry was followed by this statement written in large capital letters, deliberately slanting across the lines on the paper: MY WRITING DOES NOT NEED TO BE PERFECT.

Ginny is a student who understands play. She plays with spelling (e.g., hand-writing, handwriting, hand writing) and the convention of writing on the lines. Her

sense of humor and her bold approach to using her notebook are perhaps best encapsulated by this short, but pointed, entry:

How can I be willing to write my 5 page essay, but too lazy to put on a bra?

Perception of Writing Ability

While one might note allusions to the writer's perceived writing ability in some of the entries quoted above, two writers specifically addressed this issue. In both of these entries, the students chose to use a technique suggested by Barry Lane (2008), that of confronting your inner critic. The results were powerful. Alyssa wrote:

Dear Inner Critic: Stop judging me! I may not be an excellent writer, but I am good at many other things! Writing is a process that takes a lot of practice to become good at, and I just haven't gotten all of my practice yet. Give me space to let me learn how to be a good writer without feeling judged! So just mind your own business and let me be the writer I'm going to be! My sense of self as a writer can't come out with you always badgering me and telling me I'm not good! So buzz off, go on vacation or something (I hear Hawaii is beautiful at this time of year) and come back when you're relaxed and have some nice, encouraging things to say to me! Sincerely, a writer who is still learning!

Alyssa's entry is full of humor, but the strength she conveys (and not due to the proliferation of exclamation points!) shows that she is confident and serious about her work as a maturing writer. It also shows that she understands the importance of accepting writers where they are in their level of development – a valuable reminder for teachers.

Seth's entry provides a stark contrast, revealing insecurities, but with a glimmer of hope at the end. It is interesting that he signs this entry, "Seth and the Critic," as though trying to separate himself from the critic who shares his dismal view. Seth works to accommodate both identities in this entry:

At this point I just feel empty, emotionless, and uncaring. It's like I am here physically but mentally I feel trapped in a confusing memory maze, that just continues to lead me into dead ends that consist of videos or photographs of old and painful memories. My biggest goal is to be successful in all that I set my mind too [sic], my deepest darkest fear, being inadequate and unable to reach my full potential. Life like a game it is based on the moves you make, the things you say, the people you meet and the pathways you take. The problem which occurs when I think of this is, what if I fail, what if I am my own obstacle. What if I am what is keeping me from reaching my potential. Thoughts like these continuously replay themselves in my mind, why? I don't know they just do; but writing to myself helps me to better answer these questions for us! Seth and the Critic

Feelings About Writing

The previous entry from Seth shows how closely our emotions are tied to our belief in our ability. As when she tried the "write to your inner critic" strategy, Alyssa reveals her feelings about herself as a writer when she tried another strategy, responding to the prompt, "When I write I...." Her lengthy response shows how strongly emotions are engaged in writing.

When I write I..." feel stressed! When I write I begin to feel my thoughts flowing, but I feel like it's hard to grab them and put them on paper! When I write, I think a log (LOT) faster than I can write, and my thoughts end up being way ahead of where I'm writing and I get confused! When I write, I want to record everything I'm thinking, but it's harder than it seems! When I write, I feel like I'm doing something important in recording my thoughts.

When I write, I think of more things I want to write about. I recall memories of previous things I've written, and I want to remember to write things like this again. When I write, I hope I'm doing it right... I'm still not a very confident writer, especially at this kind of writing. I do better on things like research papers, but writing from the mind is so important too! When I write, I realize that I have a lot more to write about than I probably realize. When I write, I think about how other people use writing for stress relief, but I haven't yet learned how to do this. (Maybe I will, someday!) When I write, I feel proud of myself for finally getting around to it! When I write, I am no longer procrastinating (something I'm very, very good at!) When I write, I want to share with others my thoughts and ideas. Sometimes I don't think people "get" me. When I write, this could be a way to help them with that.

When I write, right now, I wonder how much time is left in this freewrite...When I write, I get stuck sometimes. I need motivation and ideas to keep writing! When I write, I push myself, because I know how valuable writing is, and that it's good for me in so many ways! When I write, I open new doors.

Sarah's entry linked ability and emotion starkly, within her first sentence.

She wrote:

When I think about writing... I think about how very bad at it I am and how much I hate doing it. I hate assignments that involve writing papers. Im [sic] always scared to get them back, no matter how many times I read them over. I feel like my school didnt [sic] do a good job teaching me the basics. Im [sic] not good at knowing when to use, ; or spelling. Sometime I wonder if my writing makes me look like a bad student. And I don't [sic] like asking for help because Im [sic] 24 and I should know much more than I do. Maybe one day it will just all click.

This entry reveals the problem that can arise when a writer feels she "should know much more" than she does: She doesn't like to ask for help. As a result, Sarah probably won't "know much more" because she will stay isolated as a writer, drawing only on her own limited knowledge. This is a frustrating cycle that an elementary teacher needs to be aware of, and needs to find a way to break.

Unfortunately, Sarah did not grow to love using her writer's notebook. In her final entry, she wrote:

I'm sorry to say but I am excited to hand this in tomorrow. I ran out of ideas a long time ago. I liked this notebook in the beginning but I am ready for it to be done. I think its [sic] a good idea but to have to write in it every day is hard.

Thoughts About Present Writing Practice

Many entries reflected students' thoughts about their current writing, specifically in their notebooks. Arlene started the semester by setting goals.

This marks my 1st entry in my writers notebook. Here are a few goals I have for this semester...to write something different and new...to maybe, perhaps, start working on that life goal of being an author to a childrens book, collect a few fun stories, poems, quotes etc.

A bit later in the semester, she captured her thoughts about teaching in this entry's poem.

Today I learned...

I want to be a reflective teacher
Teaching is not an easy job
Worksheets suck! And Dr. _____ hates them
I'm scared to lead a classroom
Scared of not being good at it

How do I know if I'm doing things right?
How can I make sure my students are learning?
Teaching someone to read sounds scary

What am I doing?
Nervous breakdown... I think yes!
OK. Mental check to self. You wanted this.
You loved working with the kindergarteners [sic]

Think Lawton. Think Mrs. Szalay. Think passion.
Duh. This is great.
You're going to be great.
You want this.
You're learning.
You'll be ready when the time comes.

Don't worry! Yup today I needed to learn
not to worry.

Maybe I will tomorrow

Shelly, whose entries about her writing habits revealed frustration over the constraints keeping her from writing, also used her writing for mental pep talks. In this entry, she seemed more resolved to write, with an interesting nod to Pat

Benatar:

Some people write about extravagant stories that seem like they just pop up into their minds and magically stream through their pencils. It seems as if these writers are geniuses. For me, I am going to start off writing about what I know. Some writers write about what they know. I will start by making characters from people who are close to me and I will give them real hurdles and then I will construct a story to go along with it. I'm not much of a story writer so I will give it my best shot. So... hit me with your best shot... fire away!

Unfortunately, Shelly's resolve didn't last. As the following entry shows, she still has writer's block from time to time:

No matter how hard I try my brain won't loosen up. I am in school essay writing mode and I feel as if I am stuck! I feel as if I have run out of things to write about.

Despite the frustrations she frequently felt, it is a quote from Shelly's final notebook entry that forms part of the title of this article. In her entry, Shelly tried the strategy of writing directly to her writer's notebook. Here is the result.

Writer's Notebook, how I will miss you so. Look how much you have grown. At first all pages were blank, now your [sic] full of ideas, thoughts, poems and stories. I enjoyed my time spent with you and I will miss you. Now your [sic]

full and leaving me, never to be opened again. I will look back at you every once in a while just to see what I was doing and thinking about that semester.

I really enjoyed playing with my writing. I do hope to start another writers notebook in the future, especially when I am a teacher.

Shelly hopes to start a notebook “in the future,” especially when she is a teacher. Hopefully, she will start one before that time, but at least she recognizes the importance of using a writer’s notebook in the classroom. And she’s thinking ahead to when she has a classroom of her own.

This entry from Francine, written to her own notebook, suggests she, too, recognizes the value in using a writer’s notebook, and leaves us with a teaser – she may “visit” her notebook again, despite this being her final entry.

Dear Writing Notebook, Wow you have been great this semester. Thank you for being a constant persuasion to write even when I didn’t want to. Thank you for motivating me to write down the seemingly insignificant aspects of my day in the process. I have learned to appreciate the small moments.

Writing is one amazing way to capture those special times. It’s been fun, WN, I may have to visit you again.

Ginny also wrote an entry directly to her notebook, but hers was composed while her notebook was in my care during the midpoint checkpoint. She wrote the following on a separate piece of paper, and inserted it into her notebook when it was returned to her:

Dear Writer’s Journal, Your near week of absence has been almost unbearable my lovely. I have witnessed copious amounts of stories with not a

soul to share the anecdote with. I know you would have appreciated a few my darling, but alas I fail to recall a single one. Oh, I do not blame you, pet, you had business to attend to, as did I. I just wanted to tell you I am glad to have you back in my arms. Faithfully yours, Ginny

Unlike Shelly, Ginny suggests that she can't bear to be without her notebook. Will Ginny wait until she is a teacher before she starts writing in a notebook again? If the entry above is any indication, it's doubtful.

Why Does This Matter?

We know teachers' attitudes and experiences affect their teaching and their students' learning (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999; Powers, Zippay & Butler, 2006). By surfacing preservice teachers' beliefs about writing and themselves as writers, I am better able to channel my energies toward creating more positive views of writing and writers. I want these future teachers to feel enthusiastic, engaged, and empowered as writers and teachers of writing. It has been shown that teachers' sense of efficacy in teaching writing leads to better and more varied use of strategies for management, engagement and instruction in writing (Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011). I want my students to feel they have the confidence and strategies to write with their students, and guide students in constructing their own texts.

As teachers find their face time with students more and more consumed by increasing curriculum demands, time devoted to writing instruction is at risk. In their study of teachers in grades 4-6, Gilbert and Graham (2010) found that teachers reported spending approximately 15 minutes a day in writing instruction. The authors suggest that viable ways of increasing student writing are to encourage

more student writing outside of school, and use writing more in other content areas. Writer's notebooks are one way of utilizing these strategies. With their flexible and low-risk employ, writer's notebooks can be a vehicle for students to process their thinking about what they are learning in their subject areas and in their life experiences in all of life's arenas.

By rereading writer's notebook entries such as those included in this article, teachers can better understand what happens inside the heads of many writers. One limitation of this study is that all of the writers are students who, to a greater or lesser degree, willingly are pursuing a career in education. What would we find if we looked inside the heads of writers who have no desire to pursue their education? What would those writers say in a writer's notebook? If my students recognize the difficulty in maintaining stamina, thinking of topics, and accepting their limitations in writing (all concerns present in the notebook entries in this study), they will better understand their own students' struggles. Prospective teachers need to consider that if they feel frustration over their writing ability, if they feel "stuck" in their writing, if they feel less than enthusiastic about writing, they can be awfully sure that at least a few of their students will feel that way, too. Perhaps this will make them more empathetic and more willing to explore further alternatives to engage students in writing without dread.

Where Should We Go Next?

Just as for a writer, the work never seems completely finished, the same is true for a researcher, especially for one holding such a rich collection of artifacts as I have in my students' writing. There are several research paths I might still follow

with this data set. For example, I could investigate a correlation between particular majors and minors and the writing done in those students' notebooks. I suspect that those students who have declared majors in Reading or Language Arts may have brought different attitudes and beliefs to the work than those who are Math or Science majors. I could do a focused study of one writer's case, examining her/his writer's notebook to see the progression of writing from one day to the next throughout a whole semester. As noted when discussing students' entries in "writing to their inner critic," many students used strategies suggested by writing "experts" whose work we read in class. A future study might explore how students used those strategies or adapted them for their own use.

I have additional writing artifacts from the same students. At the beginning of each class session, students completed free-form written responses to the course readings they had prepared for that day. Without doing an in-depth analysis, I have noted that these responses often hold many connections to students' prior experiences with writing as students. A culminating project for the course is the compilation of a writing portfolio containing two final drafts of pieces written during our writing workshop, and a reflection piece in which students discuss the writing they have done during the semester, as well as their beliefs about themselves as writers and their plans for their future writing instruction. Taken in combination, the writer's notebooks, the daily reading responses, and the final writing portfolio can paint a more complete portrait of the writer.

Ultimately, the goal of the work we do in RDNG 240 and the research I've begun conducting using these writing artifacts is to increase the comfort and skill

with which my students teach the writers in their own future classrooms. Does the experience my students have in RDNG 240 significantly impact the way they work with child writers in school? Following these students into the field is an important next step. Students in early field experiences conjoined with teacher education courses, students in their student teaching placements, and former students in their beginning years of teaching in their own classrooms will all have opportunity and responsibility for guiding student writers. It would be interesting and potentially enlightening to see if and how they use writer's notebooks themselves and with their students.

Conclusion

In her writer's notebook, Ronilyn talked about how her writing changed as she got older.

I used to write all the time, I used to write about everything. Love, boys, friends, parents, brothers, crushes, divorce and myself. Writing helped me vent and find myself. I used to write all the time until my time was consumed by love, boys, friends, work, parents, brothers, crushes and knowing myself a little better.... My writing helped a great deal.

This entry shows the power that writing has to influence and be influenced by what is happening in life. By studying preservice teachers' writing, and by having them reflect on that writing, the hope is that writers won't lay down their pens or turn away from their keyboards when the exigencies of life make themselves known. Instead, we hope they recognize what Ronilyn acknowledged. Writing can help a great deal.

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