CHAPTER 2.

FACULTY PRESENCE, INFLUENCE, AND AUTHORITY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY, MULTI-LEVEL WRITING GROUPS

Aileen R. Taft
University of Missouri

Rebecca Day Babcock and Maximillien Vis
The University of Texas, Permian Basin

Abstract: *This chapter's research focuses on group dynamics, authority interactions, and group stability. The chapter outlines how faculty benefit from these groups by gaining mentorship, diverse perspectives, and sustained engagement in their writing practices. The authors highlight the advantages of mixed-level groups, particularly for contingent faculty and graduate students, and argue that writing studies could lead in promoting such groups for inclusive writing support across academia.*

The authors are members of a research team that has been looking at the social nature of writing since 2014. So far, we have done several conference presentations and produced several article manuscripts around this theme. Babcock's team comprises students (both graduate and undergraduate, including Aileen), adjunct, non-tenure track, and contingent faculty. The activities they are engaging in are writing fellowships, writing retreats (both online and in person), writing groups, and writing workshops. The reason for this is a workaround, as Babcock's home institution does not have a writing center in the traditional sense. This study looked at the experiences of faculty who participated in feedback-giving writing groups (as opposed to "just write" groups) that were multi-level and interdisciplinary. By "multi-level," we mean writing groups that included people from various disciplines and stages of career. Since we are affiliated with a medium-sized institution, such groups become a necessity as we sometimes do not have enough people to form a segregated group.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2025.2555.2.02

For instance, we tried recently to hold an online graduate writing retreat, but after not finding enough graduate students to participate, we opened it to both undergrads and faculty. We studied two iterations of one such group based out of a regional comprehensive university in the Southwest. Members of the groups were from the disciplines of English, Spanish, history, and psychology, both part-time university graduate teaching assistants and full-time community college faculty along with undergraduate students. We also presented narratives from faculty members who are in writing groups with non-faculty, both in the academic and non-academic context. A special focus will be on comparing the interactions with the authority of the participants, outcome, stability, and effectiveness of the writing groups.

Writing groups take many forms but primarily are broken down into feedback groups where writers share drafts and give each other feedback and "just write" types of groups where participants actually sit and write in supportive community settings either online or in person. Groups can be self-sponsored, or university- or workplace-sponsored. Wolfsberfer (2014) found that they can also occur in private, for-profit settings. Groups can focus on academic or creative writing, on a single discipline or level, or be mixed. Groups can be single gender or mixed gender. They can be online or in-person. In-person groups can meet in university settings, in public places such as coffee shops, people's homes, or outdoors. The combinations are endless, but the goal is the same: to develop as writers. Through participation in mixed level groups, faculty can benefit from viewing other perspectives, from having opportunities for mentoring, and for learning firsthand about various writing processes and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing studies research has argued for the importance of writing support for a variety of faculty and students, including contingent faculty and graduate students from across the disciplines. However, writing studies scholars have not researched mixed-level groups, perhaps because these groups are still uncommon, despite the benefits these types of groups can offer all members such as peer mentoring, unconditional support, and a fresh perspective on ideas. Of course, various challenges are also involved, which our research will show. We draw from the higher education book *Writing Groups for Doctoral Education and Beyond: Innovations in Practice and Theory* (Aitchison, 2014), but we argue writing studies may be particularly well equipped to research mixed-level groups and that such groups may be especially helpful in providing the kind of writing support our field has called for, especially for graduate students and contingent faculty. Our chapter is a first step toward filling this gap.

One of the editors of this collection suggested we look at the edited collection *Speaking Up, Speaking Out* (Edwards et al., 2021) for potential mentions of writing groups. Interestingly enough, the collection does not mention writing groups at all, except for briefly and in passing. For instance, Mulally (2021) mentions other scholars talking about writing groups. One chapter mentions writing in a coffee shop (Gumm, 2021) yet rather than gathering to write, the two faculty who encounter each other at the coffee shop in this chapter actively avoided each other rather than engaging in community writing practices. Another article mentioned two faculty members writing together as a duo (Joseph & Ashe-McNalley, 2021). Perhaps the lack of attention to or mention of faculty participating in writing groups has to do with the high workload and lack of pressure to produce scholarship among non-tenure track faculty.

The collection *Working with Faculty Writers* edited by Geller and Eodice (2013) also mentioned faculty writing groups, including interdisciplinary faculty (Clark-Oates & Cahill, 2013) and graduate student groups (Garciaet al., 2013), but none of the groups mentioned in this collection were multi-level. Our group was not sponsored by a writing center; the lack of a writing center at our institution was one of the reasons why Babcock has arranged these groups. However, our group displayed many of the same dynamics as the writing center-sponsored group that Clark-Oates and Cahill described, such as "tensions" arising from "disciplinary differences," and groups having to "commit to co-constructing solutions to writing tensions by recognizing one another as fellow writers" (p. 114). As a multidisciplinary group, our group also displayed the positive effects noted by Garcia et al. (2013), such as witnessing ways of "thinking, researching and writing" other than what they "had grown accustomed to" (p. 267). We also reached the outcomes they mentioned of peer mentoring and learning about different writing processes and practices. Smith et al. (2013) found that in addition to professional development goals, writers also found a social outlet and support in their multidisciplinary faculty writing group.

Like many such groups, the make-up of the groups we studied was primarily women, which Bosanquet et al. (2014) noted in their literature review is very common. Bosanquet and her colleagues did not deliberately set out to form an all-women writing group, but it just turned out that way. Female faculty members in writing groups have indicated that their group "was able to informally provide writing supports, relationship supports, and a mechanism for understanding the culture of the … university" (Penney et al., 2015, p. 462). These groups can begin to construct an informal community of practice that extends beyond academia enabling "participants to reflect more meaningfully upon their own story and create a space for a collective understanding of experience and knowledge co-creation" (Penney et al., 2015, p. 463). The writing group

assumed a role beyond critique where participants exchange similar experiences and challenges in their respective roles. While our groups were not exclusionary and were open to any gender, the group ended up as mostly female with only one consistent male student attendee and one or two other male attendees who visited for one meeting and did not return. All of the group's faculty members were female, not by choice but by coincidence.

Writing groups can offer early career academics a chance to find pleasure in academic writing (Dwyer et al., 2012). Other benefits of writing groups were "publishing acumen … collaborative collegiality … leadership" and enhanced affect, meaning over time, writing group members become "motivated, more confident, satisfied, pleased with the investment" (Galligan et al., 2003). Although the groups mentioned here in this chapter are not "just write" groups, as group members offered each other feedback on actual texts rather than just spending time writing together, the groups we reported here are for the most part interdisciplinary and multi-level. This allowed for flexible roles and for group members to act both as mentors and mentees (Mewburn et al., 2014).

When faculty were present in groups with undergraduates, graduate students, and even non-academics, roles were fluid and the "lines between 'master' and 'apprentice' [were] lightly drawn" (Maher, 2014, p. 91). Presence in the group by people at different points on the academic journey can be distinctly positive. Although faculty may hold the highest status within academia in relation to scholarship and student identity, a disparity exists between faculty and other individuals with assorted identities. Faculty often find themselves, as students well do, wearing multiple and variable hats. Faculty members not only serve students, but also may be graduate student teaching assistants serving their fellow peers, who may range from graduate students to post-graduate junior faculty to senior tenured faculty. Faculty status does not magically ensure independence but only further complicates the interdependence of faculty's multifaceted identity. Faculty in mixed-level writing groups working alongside graduate and undergraduate students can model what it looks like to be a productive writer and researcher. Maher (2014) noted that faculty presence in the *Write On!* writing group she studied was an inspiration to graduate students who could witness a model of productive writing and researching. These groups were not feedback groups but "just write" kinds of groups. Murray (2014) also noted the presence of "doctoral and post-doctoral writers" (p. 107) in the micro-writing groups she studied.

Scholarship on faculty identity in writing groups has been centered upon scholarly productivity. Whether that be doctoral studies within medicine or the liberal arts or science, scholarship centered around faculty focuses upon the discrepancy which exists in scholarship of post-graduates who serve as faculty in

some regards and established and oftentimes tenured faculty. Chai et al. (2019) found that "Implementing a writing group focused upon junior faculty members that provides structured time for the discussion of academic advancement, while providing peer support in an equitable environment, can help to guide new faculty members" (p. 569). These transitional identities are seen to focus upon the scholarly responsibilities of faculty and downplay the intersectionality of teacher-as-student reality.

The writing group in its complex nature with regards to variable identity and scholarly or personal wants and needs establishes a microcosm of the expectations, practices, and standards of academia. Whereas interdisciplinary writing groups may or may not influence these scholarly social constructions, little has been done to elucidate how faculty benefit from being in writing groups with students. According to Haas (2014), whether a group is single- or multi-disciplinary or single- or multi-level does not influence the potential success of the group.

Multidisciplinary groups allow for cross-pollination and "fresh eyes" to look at writings as an educated outsider. Yet, the interdisciplinary aspect of academia seems to be a growing trend amongst post-graduate studies. Guerin et al. (2013) state that

> As traditional disciplinary boundaries blur and Ph.D. projects are increasingly focused on interdisciplinary investigations, the scholarly identities formed during the doctorate are also shifting. As disciplinary identities become progressively uncertain, so too do the proscribed communities of practice those identities seek to operate within. (p. 78)

The current trend of interdisciplinary scholarship increases the need for interdisciplinary writing groups as a writer may face multiple and various disciplinary connections through their research and writings. The more interconnected scholarly and scientific research becomes, the more there is a need for interdisciplinary feedback and peer review amidst academia. Multidisciplinary groups also run the risk of confusing people and making them feel the feedback is irrelevant. Faculty presence in writing groups whose participants include non-faculty members can initially cause the non-faculty members participation anxiety, as they are inclined to believe that their critiques are peripheral. However, the varied input from differing levels of academia as well as mixed disciplinary groups proves indispensable to the growth of writers, in particular, faculty participants who often lack professional academic interaction with student-level writers beyond the classroom (which can cause a messaging disconnect between entry-level audiences and academic audiences).

To investigate faculty presence and experience in writing groups, we decided to study the dynamics of two interdisciplinary, multi-level writing groups that contained both faculty and student members—including those (Graduate Teaching Assistants) in an in-between space. The first group we discuss was composed of three graduate students who met infrequently during a spring semester on Fridays for a writing "power hour." For some of their meetings, the three graduate students were joined by a faculty member of their acquaintance. For this group, we investigated the experiences of the faculty members present (and not present) in the group and how their authority was created and maintained (or not). We considered the intersectional nature of graduate teaching assistants for their perceived and interpreted faculty identity. We also speculated on people's motivations for participating in the group and what they took from it.

METHODS

We obtained IRB clearance to perform naturalistic observation through audio recordings of two iterations of a university-sponsored interdisciplinary, multi-level writing group. The nature of the group is to provide faculty members a community of practice through exposure of different viewpoints and methodologies and support as writers. Each group held semi-structured meetings in which participants met to discuss writing. These groups were not sponsored through a writing center or writing program, and two different master's students (graduate assistants) were assigned to facilitate such groups by their supervisor, Babcock, as part of their duties. Each graduate student was to meet with the group weekly and to solicit their participation in this study. Taft was a member of both writing groups, although she was more of a regular member of the first group and only an accidental member of the second. Researchers gained permission under IRB-003-2018 to conduct this research. Participants were not required to participate in the study to participate in the writing groups.

DATA

The data collected for this study consisted of Taft's and Vis's narrative recollections of the first and second groups and recordings and transcripts of the second group from three sessions in November 2023 (November 11, 18 and 25) during Writing Power Hours. Neither group was consistent with their documentation of the meetings due to technological and human errors. As a result, most of our data presented in this chapter consisted of Taft's and Vis's narratives and quotes from the recorded group. For a paper that analyzed the group talk itself, see Vis and Babcock (forthcoming).

Taft's Narrative of the First Writing Group

The first writing group began in the fall of 2018, the last semester of my graduate school experience. Tasked with co-founding a writing group by my department chairperson and supervisor, a fellow graduate teaching assistant (GTA) and I began a yearlong adventure into critiquing everything from freshman composition essays to adjunct faculty forays into psychological thrillers.

We met weekly in a classroom at the university. Attendance at the writing group varied, but after a month of meeting once a week, we established a reliable base group of writers. The group included Renee—my fellow GTA in the English department, Edwin—a freshman geology student, Kaitlyn—an adjunct professor in psychology, and me (all names are pseudonyms).

Given the varied academic background of each writer, the conversations surrounding the offered texts often sparked interesting dialogue and built a unique camaraderie among members. This was even clearer when a certain level of comfort was reached among the participants of the group. The intimidation of presenting writing to individuals who were still strangers caused some awkwardness, particularly to those in the group who were not used to critiquing or grading writing. To begin, Renee and I laid out some ground rules for our small group of aspiring and experienced writers. We would take turns presenting our writing to the group so that each person could receive help without any one person dominating the ability of the others to receive feedback. Renee first volunteered to share a term paper that she was writing for one of her graduate classes. Edwin and Kaitlyn were slow to offer input in the first meeting and would hesitate when giving an opinion or would second-guess themselves. They would make statements like, "I am sure you know the answer to this, but should there be a comma or a semicolon there?" and "I am a little unsure what you mean there, but I probably just missed something." These types of hesitant critiques were typical when either Renee or I would present our academic writings from the various classes we were attending. Kaitlyn was an experienced writer and did not want her voice to be the loudest in the room with writing feedback. Although Kaitlyn was the faculty member in the group, which may have warranted for a supervisory or expert role, her self-declared expertise was in psychology, not in writing. This caused Kaitlyn's faculty role in the group to fall into a unique position where she sought to benefit from less experienced writers because their area of focus was writing. Kaitlyn made occasional statements about her hesitancy to offer feedback since she was sure that GTAs in English knew much more than she did and that, since she had not taken the same writing-intensive classes, she felt she did not have as much to offer. Even though both Renee and I assured

Kaitlyn that her unbiased outside perspective on our writing as a reader was of great value to us, the same hesitancy remained.

When it was Kaitlyn's turn to present her writing, she primarily shared pieces of creative nonfiction and narratives about mental health that stemmed from her research interests. Kaitlyn's writings focused on a young woman who dealt with a multiple personality disorder and was on the Autism spectrum. Kaitlyn used her background in psychology and personal narratives to inform her writing, and she wanted the themes in the story to transcend beyond a simple work of creative nonfiction into a therapeutic piece to which others sharing similar diagnoses as that of the primary subject could relate. Consequently, her apparent valuing of an academic critique appeared higher than that of Edwin, the student writer in the group. Renee and I would offer both higher-order and lower-order critiques of a more academic nature, while Kaitlyn and Edwin would discuss the creative writing elements, such as dialogue. Kaitlyn accepted feedback with an attitude that displayed genuine appreciation and interest, whether it was from Renee and me, who could almost be considered peers to Kaitlyn (as graduate teaching assistants and adjuncts are only one step away from each other on the academic hierarchy), or it was from Edwin, a first-year writer with similar interests but below Kaitlyn in education and writing experience. Kaitlyn served as a mentor for Edwin, helping him craft a more mature approach to his work by sharing her own ups and downs when she was a new writer. Kaitlyn's faculty experience allowed her the ability and comfort to have difficult conversations with Edwin, the student member, when he would get off track not just in conversation but in writing content. Kaitlyn's writing could be categorized as creative nonfiction since her narratives applied her academic experience in the field of psychology along with her personal experiences with family mental health and her work in the field as a licensed therapist. Because of the need for anonymity while writing about more sensitive mental health issues, Kaitlyn embraced the genre of creative nonfiction for much of her academic writings.

As the writing group meetings continued throughout the semester, Renee and I brought fewer pieces to critique since we were writing on tighter deadlines, and we would often already have a paper written and submitted to our professors and advisors for evaluation before the writing group would meet. Since our work was already being evaluated for a grade, we did not feel the need to receive additional critiques. Edwin also seemed to prefer critiquing other people's writing over having his own writing examined by the group, presumably because of his insecurities about constructive critiques. Thus, Kaitlyn became almost the sole contributor of writings for the group to discuss in the last couple of months the group met. This arrangement, while perhaps not seeming equitable at first glance, worked well for the group members as we settled into a

comfortable routine. Renee, Edwin, and I were all happy to give Kaitlyn insight into her work, and Kaitlyn made statements about how she would never run out of things to bring since she had been working on her writings for a long time and enjoyed hearing other perspectives. Kaitlyn did not have a standing office at the university and did not have frequent opportunities to interact with her academic colleagues or to share professional work. The writing group became her outlet for academic collaboration. Given Kaitlyn's apparent view of Renee and me as peers with equal or superior knowledge of academic writing, Kaitlyn's adjunct faculty status did not appear to impede her ability to accept the group's critique or to function on a similar level. Being the teacher of record for freshman comp classes while in grad school appeared to help lessen any perceived gap in ranking between Kaitlyn and me. Even though Kaitlyn chose to often write narrative and creative nonfiction, her academic research within those writings focused on similar themes as Renee's. These shared research interests of social justice within writing centers (Renee) and social justice for mental health diagnoses (Kaitlyn) created cohesion within the writing group even though we had several different faculty disciplines and levels represented.

The writing group continued meeting for about two months following the same established pattern until the onset of two challenges to the group's long-term preservation. Often, when the group had completed an hour's worth of writing-focused dialogue and the meeting had officially concluded, Renee, Kaitlyn, and I would remain for up to thirty minutes longer conversing about personal perspectives and shared experiences, typically academic in nature but sometimes strictly personal. Group comfort increased with continued personal conversations causing the participants' personalities to become more readily apparent. While the group was cordial and collegial with these casual conversations, Kaitlyn would often interject with information or personal anecdotes which did not align or correlate with the given topic, creating difficulties in completing critiques of writing or even politely ending the group meetings so that the members could disperse to their next obligation. As a result, when Renee and I were able to conclude the group meetings after only one hour, we discussed feeling a sense of relief since conversations involving Kaitlyn became more scattered. We believed that Kaitlyn used the writing group as a personal social outlet as well as a place to receive academic writing feedback, while Renee and I only viewed the group as an academic and professional development group. Even though Kaitlyn was a faculty member, it appeared that her tendency to stray off topic was an individual issue and not something that would be characteristic of all faculty members in a multi-level writing group. Another challenge to group persistence came when a full-time faculty member joined the writing group.

Samantha, a non-tenure track lecturer (contingent faculty) in history, joined the group approximately one month before official writing group meetings ceased. Samantha was new to the university and appeared eager to find her niche even within mixed groups with non-faculty. She arrived with knitting needles and yarn, silently listening and entertaining herself with her knitting during her first meeting. After she gained comfort with the group, she also began to offer critiques of the other participants' work, although she declined to present work of her own, relaying that she was working on something and would share it when it was nearer an intermediate draft stage. She seemed hesitant to share her own writing, perhaps because of holding the most senior academic role in the group. Yet, she was comfortable giving feedback, a task she would have utilized heavily as a faculty member. Although Renee and I were initially excited to have attracted another faculty participant to our writing group, we soon realized that Samantha's motivation for participation in the writing group stemmed from the opportunity to discuss academic knowledge and subject matter with an attentive audience. Edwin, being a student in one of Samantha's classes, readily engaged with her in debates over the meaning behind historic events or the value of one type of education over another, while the other group members tried to retain focus on the text being critiqued. After several of these meetings, attendance dissipated as Renee and I struggled to keep the group's focus on the original goal of the group (participants' writings). Samantha's dominant dynamic in the group, not only in personality but also in possessing a higher faculty status, manifested in discernible hesitancy within Renee and me. We grappled with how to maintain a role of authority within the group without appearing in opposition to Samantha's position on campus as a full-time faculty member. The authority of Samantha's position, along with her dominant personality, made it difficult to address her added dynamics within the group given that I felt my lower (GTA) status did not allow me to more directly steer the group. Kaitlyn, Renee, and I had tried on several occasions to bring the group back to a focus on the text and our academic work, but subtlety was lost on Samantha, and we did not wish to cause bad feelings or resentment. I wondered if Samantha's reaction was caused by her assumed authority as a higher-ranking faculty member or if it was simply personality driven, but either way, I was hesitant to potentially damage my relationships within her department by pressing the issue or trying to be an overly dominant group leader. Kaitlyn, who initially engaged in conversation with Samantha and Edwin, privately expressed to Renee and me that she felt Samantha's presence was intrusive and overbearing in that Samantha showed little interest in the original intent of the group and formed a distraction. Each faculty member had a distinctly different approach and formed a different role within the group, even though they served in similar academic roles. Given the repeated challenges

of the group and Renee's and my busy schedules—Renee was entering the last phase of her graduate thesis and I had since graduated and was adjuncting in addition to teaching at a local campus— the writing group's attendance waned until we no longer officially met.

Vis's Narrative of the Second Writing Group

The second writing group began as a project assigned to the graduate assistants of Babcock. As graduate student workers within the same college of our university, we shared an office space with other part-time faculty. Graduate assistants, graduate teaching assistants, and adjunct faculty all shared this same space. Due to this proximity, I believe that graduate teaching assistants at our university are more aligned with faculty through their responsibilities as educators of students than research assistants who may not have contact with students. Depending on our supervisors and status in our respective graduate programs, graduate students may strictly conduct research, assist with teaching, or instruct our own class independently. During each of our own appointed graduate assistantships, we assisted with developing lectures for specified courses, grading assignments, and meeting with students to help develop their thoughts and ideas further outside of class discussion, before being assigned as teachers of record while still graduate students. Regardless of title, all occupiers of this office would hold some agency associated with faculty teaching.

One day, Sue expressed that she was responsible for the writing group happening locally on campus. I took interest, since writing groups have always been an interest of mine. I had been unable to participate in a writing group since my own cohort could not meet to establish one due to the distance that comes with online learning. Sue was facing similar issues with attendance, so Emily and I decided to join her group to provide data for the writing group project.

We went into the project fully aware that this group would be studied and gave our consent to being recorded during the meetings. Since the three of us were colleagues of a similar age and academic background, our relationship was casual, and we met as friends. Sue had established a weekly time to meet at the local university coffee shop, and we met there a few times. Unfortunately, due to technical issues and errors, the recordings of these sessions were incomplete. Even more unfortunate was the fact that our university coffee shop kept inconvenient hours. For one of our sessions, we met at a local Starbucks to discuss our writings, joined by an additional participant who is a faculty professional (Taft). Since we felt comfortable with each other, we were fine with abandoning our post at the university and taking our small group off-campus in disregard of Sue's employment requirements. Sue led the group as facilitator and was most

concerned about her status as a university employee. She often kept us on a strict schedule because her work was paid by the hour. Although her work supervisor (Babcock) was not a part of the group, her supervisor's presence was felt during each session through Sue's actions, which called attention to the writing group as one of Sue's job responsibilities.

However, Sue's association with the group is two-fold for its faculty presence. Sue, through her writing, established another indirect connection to another faculty's influence, her thesis supervisor. All members of the group have had some experience with Sue's thesis supervisor either through taking the supervisor's courses at the undergraduate and/or graduate levels or by being employed by said faculty member. Due to this shared experience, we all had some knowledge and understanding of the faculty member's expectations and their opinions on writing feedback. Though not explicitly stated within our sessions, the faculty presence was felt in the ways in which we approached Sue's writings. Consequently, faculty presence within this group expanded from Sue's own status as an adjunct faculty member because of the role of her immediate supervisors within the department and graduate program. Her teaching assistantship supervisor contractually obligated her to facilitate and participate in this studied group, *and* her thesis director discouraged this kind of group feedback. Therefore, the thesis director's influence upon this group was felt by all members due to their own experiences with this specific faculty member. The intricacies of faculty presence cannot be reduced to the traditional professor-student authority system, but must be analyzed through marginal and liminal identities, such as graduate teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, and non-tenure track lecturers.

Taft's Narrative of the Second Writing Group

My participation in the second writing group came by way of an accidental meeting at a local coffee shop. I had recently attained a full-time faculty position at a local college and was at a coffee shop grading student work and returning emails when a former classmate, Emily, approached and invited me to join their writing group meeting. Emily had known of my former role as a writing group facilitator and appeared eager to have another person join. The regular group consisted of Emily, a psychology graduate student, Vis, a Spanish graduate student, and Sue, an English graduate student. I had either attended a class with each of the members or had known them as a casual acquaintance at the university.

The focus of the group's critique was a portion of Sue's master's thesis. She appeared discouraged and apathetic about her writing as she gave hard copies to the group. I recall her making several comments pertaining to her thesis

supervisor's recent critical feedback over her efforts. Sue expressed her struggle with conceptualizing the vision that her thesis supervisor had for Sue's thesis with her own ideas. Since Emily, Vis, and I had all taken several classes from this same faculty member and felt familiar with her expectations, we tried to offer helpful feedback. As a former classmate who held equal academic ranking with Sue, I did not give a great deal of thought to how my current faculty role might impact the reception of my feedback to Sue. The complex nature of this dynamic would materialize later during the writing group session.

Since Sue could not anticipate my presence at the meeting, she only had two hard copies of her writing, which created a natural split in the group—Vis and Sue, and Emily and me. Seating arrangements and proximity primarily dictated the two sub-groups. Also, my more immediate familiarity with Emily caused me to sit next to her when I initially joined the group, making it natural that we share one copy of the writing and work through it together. I recall asking clarifying questions of Sue, "But that's the example you're using to prove your point? It's Ovid's?" and asking Emily for confirmation, which I received, that I had correctly arrived at a particular misgiving about the meaning and interpretation of a specific passage. Being a newcomer to the group and lacking the immediate camaraderie that I had lost since progressing to a different level of academia than the rest of the group, I sought clarification of Sue's purpose and thoughts before offering suggestions on her writing. I had read some of Sue's writing before as a classmate, which led to a small bias in my expectations of what I would read. This expectation was met when some of Sue's responses appeared to vacillate in uncertainty as her disheartenment with the project became more evident.

As I offered suggestions, I felt some resentment stemming from Sue. She made an emphatic statement in reply to one critique, saying, "I thought that I did!" The resentment did not appear to be directed at anyone physically present, but more towards the thesis chairperson and her compelled participation in the group. However, her reaction caused me to think about the level of critique I was giving and scale back my honest response to some of the writing. I realized that as a faculty member I had been conditioned by grading and giving feedback on student essays, yet I had not considered the different relationship I had with Sue—thus, I had not adjusted the language of my critique to fit the dynamics of the group. Sue's patience with the feedback from everyone in the group was waning at this point in the session. Other assertions from Sue, such as, "I'm to the point where I just want to get this over and done with so I can start writing something else," allude to her eagerness to complete the writing project. Much like the group I co-founded, Sue, a graduate assistant, had been directed by her faculty work supervisor to establish and facilitate the group to contribute to ongoing research.

At this point, I knew that a more in-depth critique of Sue's writings would only further discourage her. Given my status as an invited participant to the meeting and as someone of a higher academic status, I did not feel I was privy to all of the information and critiques the group had previously offered Sue, and I had not been given the non-verbal social permission to share at the same level as the others in the group. Given this, I felt I needed to take a step back so as not to become an unwelcome presence. With that in mind, I tried to soften my feedback to structure, word choice, and grammar or low-order concerns. Since Sue and Vis were working on the other side of the table, I do not have a strong recollection of their focus during the group. In fact, the recording transcript shows that two different conversations were going on at once within the group. We continued with this same pattern of feedback until the prescribed hour for the meeting had elapsed. Sue abruptly announced to the group that we did not have to do any more since she had fulfilled the hour requirement and began to pack up her belongings. At this point, the writing group session ended, and everyone prepared to leave the coffee shop.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Two of the faculty members in the first group, Kaitlyn and Samantha, apparently used the group as a social outlet in addition to a writing group. Aitchison and Guerin (2014) noted that, many times, "the companionship of the group imparts a sense of connectedness and belonging to an academic community for those in the process of developing researcher identities" (p. 12). Kaitlyn was an adjunct who desired full-time teaching work, and Samantha was a lecturer (contingent faculty) new to the area. As such, they were seeking belonging in an academic community. Also, they could have been using the writing group for their own personal social needs. Kaitlyn's and Samantha's use of the writing group for social engagement was not initially problematic until it overtook the group's intended purpose as an academic writing and critique group. Renee and Taft were not looking for a group that served as primarily a social outlet, so a mismatch of priorities within the group caused interpersonal tension between the members.

Some of the issues we noticed at hand in the second iteration of the group were a focus on grammar and structure of the paper. Also interesting to note was the fact that the group conversation at one point broke down to two separate conversations. The faculty member, Taft, was able to use her expertise in commenting and correcting papers to help the group member to improve her paper in grammar and punctuation. In the first group, however, Taft felt pushback from the freshman student, Edwin, when commenting on his creative writing, so retreated to offering grammatical and technical feedback rather than substantive

critique, as grammatical advice can be seen as less of a face-threatening act than direct critique of the writer's content. Babcock and colleagues (2012), in their review of qualitative studies of writing tutoring, found that in tutoring, "dyads worked on grammar when they could not find a personal connection, or when they felt uncomfortable with each other" and that tutors find working on grammar to be easier and something they turned to if they "lacked confidence in a session" (p. 102). Although not a tutoring session, in the first writing group, Renee and Taft could not establish a personal connection with Edwin, which caused an organic shift in the feedback to grammar, particularly when creative writing was the object of the critique. What is more, the interpretation of creative writing as a more personal and intimate style of writing may influence the writing group's perception of feedback. To fall back upon grammar, feedback protocol may have served as a miscommunication between the disciplines of academic and creative writing.

In the second writing group, the same shift to lower-order concerns like grammar is also notable. Taft perceived an uncomfortable environment, which she concluded resulted from her informal participation and Sue's resistance to critiques being added to her thesis supervisor's feedback. Perhaps Sue, expecting a higher-order discussion with respect to her thesis work, grew more anxious with the feedback focused upon grammar and syntax after stating her concerns in previous meetings in which Taft was absent. Also, in the first writing group as a graduate student and teaching assistant, perhaps Edwin saw Taft as just an English language expert. Perhaps he did not see her as an expert on creative writing. As Aitchison (2014) explained, "One of the strongest reasons for rejecting feedback centered on an author's judgement of the authority and capacity of the feedback giver or reviewer" (p. 57). On the other hand, Edwin was an eager participant when Taft offered him advice on his paper for a course similar to the one she was teaching at the time. Apparently, he recognized her expertise in that area.

In the first group, issues of authority were present when the freshman student and the faculty member in psychology were at first hesitant to offer critique, likely in the face of the expertise of the two English graduate students in the group, one of whom was teaching her own freshman class. On the other hand, when Samantha joined the group, as Edwin's classroom teacher, she tended to dominate the critique. This is in marked contrast to the model that Ings (2014) set up in which the doctoral faculty supervisor purposefully takes a step back in the critique, allowing the collective to step in. Ings writes:

> As the candidate's supervisor I initially adopt the role of facilitator, as skills in productive questioning, recording and reflection develop, this position is increasingly assumed by

> members of the collective. The role of the facilitator is to question astutely, not to offer advice. This shifts the dynamic towards collective problem solving and away from a traditional tutorial. (p. 194)

Samantha did not choose to go this route. Given that Samantha had only newly acquired the faculty position and was new to the university, it was apparent that her palpable eagerness for social connection and intellectual affirmation overtook her ability to act as a faculty facilitator and take a less dominant role in feedback. In addition, since Samantha was a history professor, it is possible that she was not as familiar with writing pedagogy as the other group members, several of whom were graduate students in English. One of the editors of this collection noted that it was possible that she did not "know what her role should be, so she defaulted to being the teacher when in a group with students." Perhaps we assumed that people would just know how to conduct a writing group, but perhaps before each group we should/could outline the "rules" of the group for optimal participation.

In the second group, Sue's thesis supervisor was a distinct present absence, as Sue mentioned not knowing what she was supposed to do—"I don't know where it's going"—and being worried about the quality of her product: "I don't want to turn in crap. I don't want to show her, I am too embarrassed." Aitchison (2014) noted, "For writing group members the supervisor was omnipresent" (p. 60). Although in Aitchison's research, "Interviewees reported that it was not uncommon for supervisors to ask about the views of the writing circle when there was a piece of text or an issue in dispute. On occasions supervisors had suggested an author seek the views of the writing circle" (p. 59). In Sue's case, her thesis supervisor was not enthusiastic about her getting feedback from a writing group.

Faculty identity held a great presence within the second writing group based upon the members' attitudes and dialogue about faculty in the recorded sessions. Babcock et al. (2012) found in several studies over tutoring that the instructor was an absent presence in tutoring sessions (pp. 32–34). It stands to reason that in writing groups a similar phenomenon would occur; the faculty member who has assigned the work or who will be judging the outcome of the writing in the form of the master's thesis was felt by all the members. The effects of faculty influence emerged via Sue twofold: her relationship with her thesis supervisor influenced how Sue's writing was approached, and Sue's immediate GA work supervisor, Babcock, who is faculty, affected how members of the group reacted to involvement/expectations of the group. In the group, Taft's faculty identity does not display any asymmetrical status over Sue's writing; however, Taft's faculty status may influence how she approaches Sue's writings. Finally, pre-existing relationships within the group, e.g., Taft and Emily, Emily and Vis, faculty and

student, etc., may or may not influence how the writing group conducted themselves. Each of the members were at one point or another a student of Sue's thesis supervisor; perhaps assumptions about/expectations of the faculty member influenced the sessions indirectly. Aitchison (2014) noted, "intimate knowledge of their peer reviewers facilitates the agency, direction and uptake of feedback by writing group members" (p. 62) and, we might add, knowledge of non-present faculty members does so as well. Sue's thesis supervisor was a clear influence and presence in the group, even though not physically present.

We concluded that identities within writing groups depend upon the multidisciplinary nature of writing and of writer identities. Within the groups studied, each participant held various overlapping identities. Whereas each participant may be perceived superficially to hold a primary identity such as undergraduate/graduate student or faculty, additional identities may hold just as much weight within the writing group. These identities ranged from student to employee to colleague and to friend; whereas faculty presence did hold some authority within certain social contexts, the immediate faculty influence dominated each of the identities therein. Issues such as respect, seniority, and scope of responsibility may have swayed how identities are managed during the writing groups' sessions. Within the second group, we noted that physical faculty presence took on a radically different influence than indirect faculty influence. Faculty influence directed what was focused upon, how long it was focused upon, and in which manner it was appropriate to address various concerns. Within the first group, faculty presence was challenged due to the variable nature of multidisciplinary presence and academic achievement— and perhaps motivation to join the group. Participants may have questioned the effectiveness of the feedback received based upon perceptions of the potential of writing groups. The perceptions of identities of those who gave feedback may have also been questioned due to variable interpretations in levels of expertise and understanding of the writing being analyzed. Further research on multilevel groups including faculty in various academic ranks from graduate teaching assistants to tenured faculty along with students, from freshmen to graduate, will yield interesting and important insights not only on writing but also on authority and group dynamics. Future studies may want to interview group participants to confirm their attitudes and perspectives toward the group.

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