The Loop Writing Process

Adapted from:


Elbow describes loop writing as a voyage – you leave on the journey, make discoveries along the way, and then return. Only when you return, the place where you started is changed. Consider a teaching incident, a management struggle, a project that did or didn’t go well, how well students did or didn’t learn, etc. Reflect on data that doesn’t seem to connect with other data or what you believe is really happening in the classroom. Or, after studying a complete data set, mull the details around by loop writing.

The Voyage Out

Use any one of the following strategies to “leave the port” and travel with your data:

- **Dialogues.** This is a good way to promote multiple viewpoints of the incident or data set. Write a dialogue between two or three students discussing the lesson or the classroom incident. Write another dialogue between a student telling her mom or dad about the lesson. Write another dialogue between an author who has published on your action research topic and yourself concerning your data set. You can write dialogues between any number of participants, both those present in the classroom and those who may not be present but could have an interest, and thus consider multiple ways of looking at your topic.

- **Narrative Thinking.** If you are confused about the subject, write the story of your thinking:
  “When I first planned to teach this lesson, I thought … and then … this happened … and I thought that … .”

- **Story.** Use a story format. Drop the formality of “memo writing” and begin with a story line, “It was a regular day in room 234 when the student teacher decided it was time for a change …”
“Sometimes, it is useful to write in the third person, putting yourself outside of the situation to see it a little more clearly.

- **Scenes.** Write in “scenes.” Focus on individual moments and write them as vignettes by stopping the action and focusing in on the moment. Don’t necessarily write these in chronological order – write as they come to mind when you recall the lesson, incident, or data set.

**The Voyage Home – or looping back to where you began:**

- Read what you have written.
- Take notes in the margins; use a highlighter.
- Write back to yourself in an attempt to create coherence out of your draft.
- Return to the guiding questions in the introduction to data analysis and attempt to answer them based upon your draft writing.