

WRITING *IN* PBL | WRITING *FOR* PBL

Ryan Smith Madan
Associate Teaching Professor
Writing Center Director
WPI

"I am not writing. I hold no position. I have nothing at all to do with discovery, communication, or persuasion. I care nothing about the truth. What I *am* is an essay. I announce my beginning, my parts, my ending, and the links between them. I announce myself as sentences correctly punctuated and words correctly spelled."

~Jasper Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (1988).

“I don’t remember any meaningful project because writing to me is more of a chore for me and I do not find it enjoyable, no matter what the topic. I usually feel that when I am writing for an assignment I am writing for a purpose that is not for myself, I am writing to appease the teacher and I am writing to get an “A”

~ student quoted in *The Meaningful Writing Project* (43)

“Usually the prompts are pretty strict and pretty cut and dry. There’s really no wiggle room. A lot of people don’t like that...it’s like playing in someone else’s sandbox. You go there and you’ve got to know these rules and you can’t do this, you can’t do that, you’ve got to do this, this is the right way. If you get your own sandbox to do this stuff in, then you’re more apt to have fun with it.”

~student quoted in *The Meaningful Writing Project* (88)

Bland “Themewriting” has sent me in two directions as a teacher of Writing:

Reflection assignments unmasking the facade of “college writing”:

Who *IS* the audience?
What do these *DO*?

- Wikipedia page revisions
- *WPI-document revisions*

Project-based writing:

- Infographic Project

Stakeholders

- *Kickstarter page*

PART 1

WHAT CAN PROJECTS DO FOR WRITING?



by Mick Stevens

What makes project-based writing different than “normal” school writing?

“Project” entails some combination of...

- assignment is open-ended, encourages choice
- problem definition is integral to writing process
- writer perceives a resonant goal/need to write
- text being revised/produced will be publicly accessible
- audience is tangible and immediate beyond the teacher (e.g. read by an external sponsor)
- genre student writes in exists beyond school

Challenging problem;
Sustained inquiry

Authentic,
Public Product

Project-Based Writing aspires to harness student **agency** and **engagement**

THE MEANINGFUL WRITING PROJECT

Learning, Teaching, and Writing

MICHELE EODICE, ANNE

AND NEAL

“Think of a writing project from your undergraduate career up to this point that was meaningful for you and answer the following questions.”

707 surveys from seniors at 3 schools

27 one-to-one interviews with seniors

160 surveys from faculty who taught the classes in which students wrote their meaningful writing project

60 one-to-one interviews with faculty

According to Eodice, Geller, and Lerner,
“...meaningful writing occurs when students
are invited to

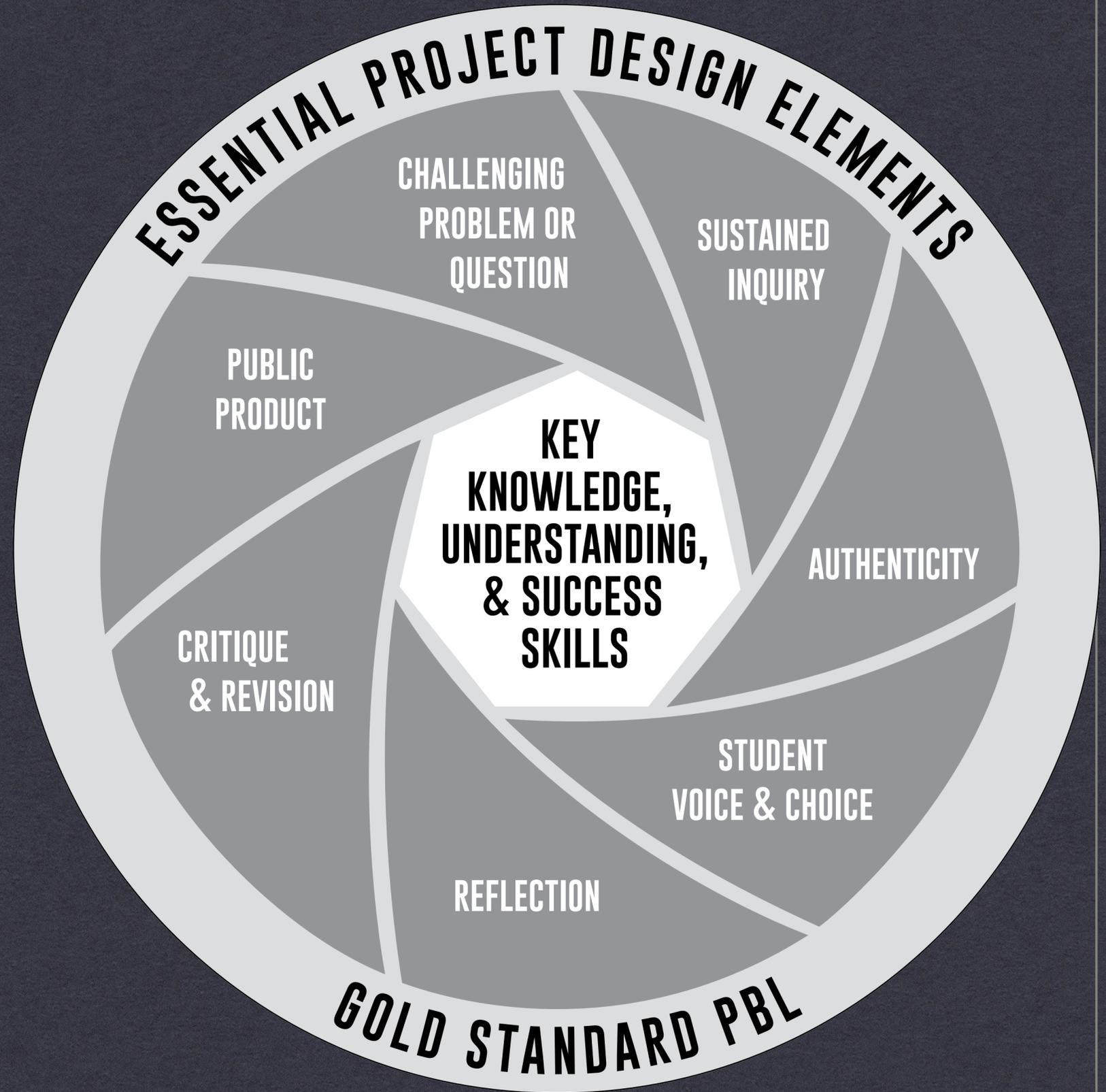
- **tap into the power of personal connection**
- **immerse themselves in what they are thinking, writing, and researching**
- **experience what they are writing as applicable and relevant to the real world**
- **imagine their future selves”**

- **personal connection**

- **immersive**

- **applicable and relevant**

- **future selves**



“It was meaningful because I was picturing myself like a professional. Those are the kinds of project reports that your boss could ask you to rewrite. I took this very seriously. It was meaningful because it was something new. But at the same time it was very, very demanding and then difficult at times. You need to gather your resources and then you need to have the adequate level of writing English skill.”

~Student quoted in *The Meaningful Writing Project* (41)

“Our claim is that students’ perception that their writing is meaningful is also a perception of that writing experience as agentive.”

~Eodice, Geller, and Lerner

When students feel agency...

- problem definition spurs critical reflection (both to find what matters to you and what matters to the world)
- research has renewed urgency; source relevance and value is filtered through bigger goals of discovery
- writing becomes the way students stake their claim in a conversation

When students feel engaged...

- professional/disciplinary conventions and community expectations become meaningful rather than “required”
- language precision takes on new importance with a public product
- Knowledge-making and writing become a form of collaboration and negotiation (engaging others)

Richard Light's interview (2001) of 60 graduating seniors at Harvard

“The seniors feel that in their first year they didn't fully appreciate writing instruction—even the many who in retrospect believe it was excellent. Most viewed it at the time as ‘just another requirement’”

“The seniors point out that...writing instruction helps most when students want it.” (30)

“they believe they learn most effectively *when writing instruction is organized around a substantial discipline*....Students urge more writing instruction in a substantive context. (30)

PART 2: LET'S DO WORK

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO CLARIFY
ABOUT WRITING'S ROLE IN YOUR
PBL DESIGN?

Important questions are ahead:

When will students write?

What is the goal of that writing? What's its value?

Who are they writing for (what audiences)?

How will that work be read, assessed, engaged with?

Exercise:

Picture the timeline, the trajectory, of your students' PBL experience—what are students doing at the beginning, middle, and end? Are they doing writing (or other communicating)? What kind?

Discuss with neighbors

Exercise: Choose one or two of the assignments you've just brainstormed

Why are you asking students to do this? What is the **purpose** of the assignment? What is its **value**? For whom?

Discuss with neighbors

Different Kinds (and Purposes) of Student Writing

Example Assignment	<i>Self-Regulate/ Motivate</i>	<i>Grow, gain knowledge</i>	<i>Provide window onto work</i>	<i>Circulate, impact readers</i>
Reflective Memo attached to assignment				
Website for sponsor				
Self/Team Evaluation				

Mixed purposes in an end-point team evaluation (senior-thesis level)

Self reflection on learning and project progress

This project presents many opportunities to gain new knowledge and learn new skills. Educational literature demonstrates that a vital element of developing understanding and practice is reflecting on learning (what you learned) and the learning process (how you learned).

Further, before we began this project, I detailed specific criteria for grading. Soon after the project began, the group agreed upon specific goals and deliverables. Please evaluate your progress thus far relative to the team expectations.

Your feedback will be useful to me in *guiding the project in the future* and also for *evaluating your performance*.

Richard Fulkerson's four ways to imagine writing's purpose and value:

Mimetic: to demonstrate accurate knowledge of the world (privileges knowledge, accuracy, logic)

Rhetorical: to communicate to an audience (privileges effect on reader)

Expressivist: to grow personally, to learn (privileges effect on writer)

Formalist: to demonstrate knowledge of convention (privileges form, correctness, following instruction)

Exercise:

Which **Audiences** are in play? Who is the student writing to? (could be multiple audiences—some real, some imagined)

Discuss with neighbors

A move to separate “supplemental report materials” from the “Report”

https://web.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-120816-202335/unrestricted/B_2016_MEFL_Booklet.pdf

https://web.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-120816-202335/unrestricted/B_2016_MEFL_Supplemental_Materials.pdf

Exercise:

Who will evaluate the student work and how will it be **evaluated** (if at all)?

Discuss with neighbors

Labor-based grading contract by Liz Prather

FIGURE 4.2

Writing Practice Contract

Writing Practice Contract for _____

To improve my practice as a writer, I commit to the following goals:

From _____ to _____, I commit to writing (amount of writing or amount of time) _____ daily or weekly (circle one) for a total of (amount of total writing) _____ in my (record of your practice) _____ due on _____.

<i>Feedback?</i>	
I would like Mrs. P to count my entries only but not read or respond.	
I would like Mrs. P to read my entries and only respond to the ones I've marked.	
I would like Mrs. P to read my entries and give me general holistic feedback.	
I would like Mrs. P to read my entries and give me feedback on each one.	

<i>My Writing Practice Rubric</i>	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Production of Writing Practice					

Signed (teacher) _____ Date _____

Signed (student) _____ Date _____

Wrap up: Look across all the categories of your assignment (purpose, audience, evaluation).

Any tension points between them? Crossed purposes? Conflicts? (share out)

What do you still need to think about or know to move this assignment forward? (write some notes to yourself)

The good news:

Clarifying these matters in your big picture PBL design will trickle down to clarifying writing tasks for your students.

Some challenges of Writing for PBL:

**More support
through
scaffolded
assignments**

**More feedback:
workshopping,
conversation,
engagement**

**Evaluating
process vs
product**

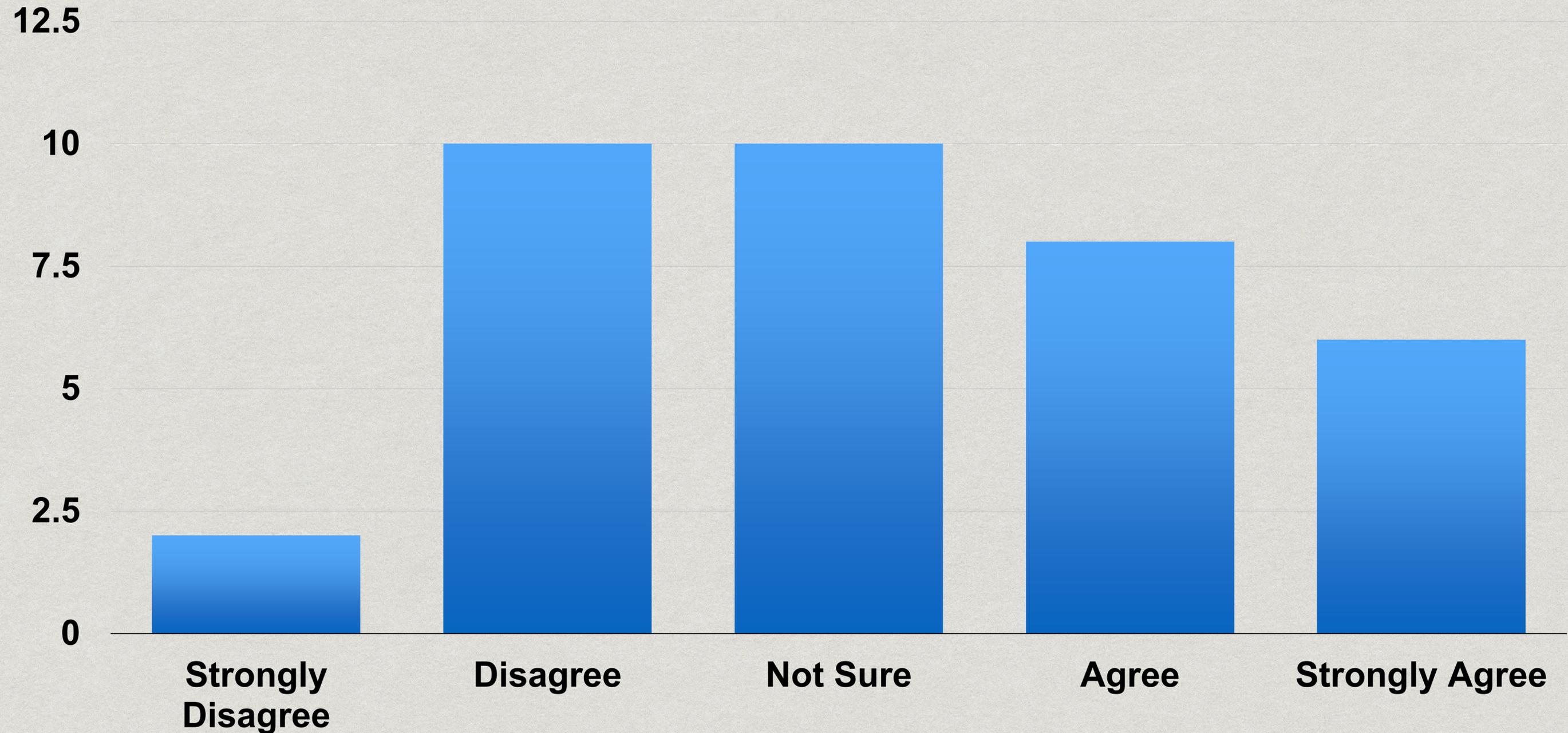
**Evaluating the
team—who is
writing what?**

**Balancing sponsor
desires with
academic priorities**

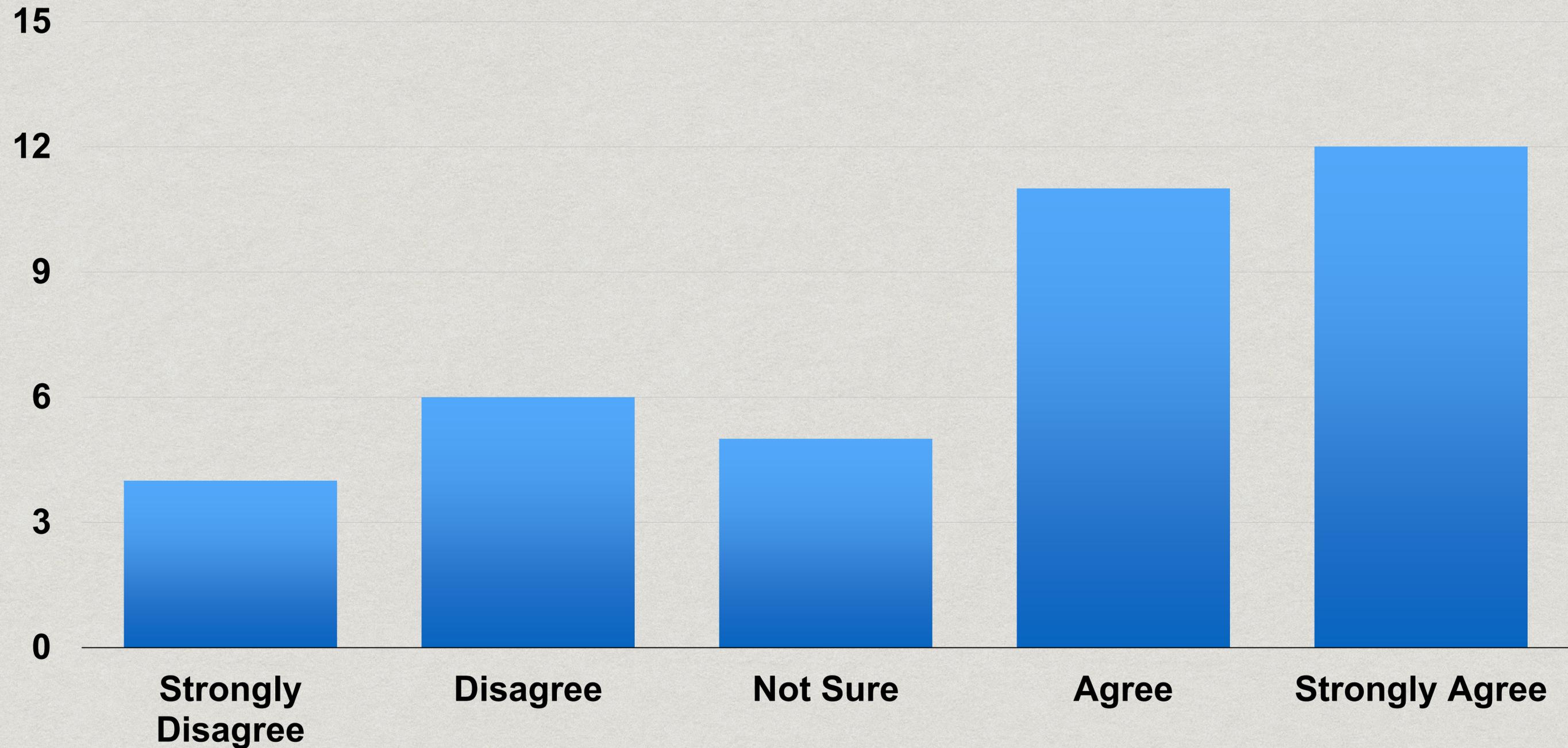
WRITING *IN* PBL | WRITING *FOR* PBL

Ryan Smith Madan
Associate Teaching Professor
Writing Center Director
WPI

“Knowing that a real reader (of Wikipedia) might read my revision motivated me to spend **more time** on this project than I would have otherwise.”



“Knowing that a real reader (of Wikipedia) might read my revision motivated me to make **more careful writing/revising decisions** than I would have otherwise.”



Prather's 7 steps of project-based writing framework:

discovering an idea

framing the work

planning the work

doing the work

reframing the work

finalizing the work

revealing the work

Prather's four P's of taking a project “public”

Production

Presentation

Performance

Publication

Richard Light (2001) interviewed 60 graduating seniors at Harvard, asking...

What is the most common misstep in writing instruction?

About one in five students lament when “a teacher seems to forget whose paper it is, and begins to change the voice of an essay from the student’s voice to the teacher’s voice” (31)

		Different Purposes of Writing				Audience(s)	What's Evaluated?
Assignment	<i>Self-Regulate/ Motivate</i>	<i>Grow, gain knowledge</i>	<i>Provide window onto work</i>	<i>Circulate, impact readers</i>	<i>Teacher; students; the institution; outsiders?</i>	<i>labor; writing skills; knowledge; problem solving; not evaluated</i>	
Example: Reflective Memo attached to assignment	not really	Secondary purpose. I hope the reflection makes them think more critically about their decisions	Primary purpose. I'm trying to see into their rationale and thinking	no	Me as teacher. This is coming to me only.	Not looking at the writing per se. I'm focused on their thoughtfulness; their intentionality, their articulation of course concepts	

“It is difficult to get close to individual desires for meaning making within the context of the culture of HE: student-writers’ efforts are inevitably channeled into working out what is acceptable within HE, rather than exploring what they [the students] might want to mean (Theresa Lillis [2002] 45. quoted in *Meaningful* 88)

“Opportunity to learn...requires that participants have the space and support for agentic action, that is, that learners have opportunities to make and remake themselves...on the basis of the new ideas, practices, or discourses learned through their participation in a learning activity.” (Moje and Lewis “Examining Opportunities to Learn Literacy” [2007] pg. 20, in Eodice et al. page 35)