DOCUMENT ANALYSIS – WRITEUP AND REFLECTION

PART 1: WRITEUP

This document was written as an experimental "third link" in a chain of stories. The first link in the chain was a story told by T about a course T had taught. A shortened version of T's story had been read by R, who then responded by telling a story of a course R had taught; I then produced a shortened version of R's story as well. Both T and R's stories were in-person interviews, and I wanted to see what it would look like to ask someone to *write* a story in response to the stories of others, rather than *tell* an (oral) story in an interview, so I asked M to read the short version of both T's and R's stories and then write a third story about a course M had taught. M wrote a one-page document that is the document under analysis.

M's story echoes elements of T's and R's in its beginning. The first sentence, "I remember back to my first teaching position," references back to T's tale of being a first-time teacher, while the second, "I graduated in December and took over for the teacher who resigned," echoes R's story of needing to step in for an absent colleague. There are 4 more sentences briefly and generically outlining M's actions as a novice teacher... and then the document ceases to be a story and begins to be an opinion paper. Instead of relaying M's past actions/thoughts, they begin like so:

- I would expect...

- I would think...

- I feel...

- [item] must...

- [person] should...

- I want to...

The document ended up not being useful for my desired analysis of teaching stories, because it wasn't a teaching story.

PART 2: REFLECTION

While I'd need to throw this document out as "data" in a study on "stories about teaching change," its presence did make me think about what I wanted in my study (and I would note that in a final writeup, rather than pretending that the document never existed).
The generation of this document was not part of my original study design; I'd initially intended to study the live-edited transcript of an interview as a document, making note of the editing activity over time – what was edited out and what spoken dialogue accompanied that editing. However, participants generally did *not* censor their interviews; instead, they corrected typos. Therefore, I needed to figure out another "document" to analyze, and landed on this idea.

From the experience of collecting and analyzing this document, I learned that I should *probably* do interviews rather than asking participants to write documents (I thought that would probably be the case, but it was good to confirm it). I found myself frustrated when reading this document: "no, that wasn't what I wanted!" -- which made me think "ok, what do I want, then?" which led to a rearticulation that I wanted *stories*, and reflections grounded in those stories – not just the generalized reflections. Show, don't tell; assertions make very little sense without stories backing them as warrants. While some of my subjects (college faculty) may be perfectly able to write vivid, detailed prose, it's probably easier for them to talk about it with another person. We usually talk faster than we type, so the same "content" takes less time to generate, time being something precious and scarce for faculty. Interviews also allow the interviewer (me) to probe and the storyteller to respond; they're interactive, and that interaction (even with the interviewer as a silent witness) makes the story richer with the sort of details that I want to analyze.

I also learned that I might need to give storytellers more explicit guidance to tell *their* stories rather than commenting and critiquing the stories of others. Yes, it's nice you feel this way. Yes, it's nice you have this thought on what another person said (in fact, I hope you do – getting subjects involved in data analysis is one hope I have for my study design) but all those things are much, much less important than what I *actually* need from you, which is: what did *you* do?