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“Who We Are On Paper”: Celebrating Writing Identity and Diversity With High School Seniors in a Dialogic ELA Classroom

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Virginia and Robert Larson.

ABSTRACT

Grounded in theory that views language and writing as inextricable from the social event within which it occurs, the purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore how the dialogue produced within the context of a detracked English Language Arts (ELA) classroom contributed to students' perceptions of their writing identity. The class consisted of a racially, socio-economically, and academically diverse group of 12th-grade students enrolled in a suburban, public high school. Findings illustrated that writing identity was enacted through multiple iterations of literacy processes embedded in a curriculum that was culturally responsive and implemented through dialogic methods. The analysis of the data from macro, meso, and micro perspectives uncovered two predominant aspects of writing identity. First, students developed understandings of their unique individuality over time that deepened their awareness of writing identity in the writing process, or "who you are on paper." Second, and interwoven into the first finding, the role of the teacher-student and student-student dialogue through instructional tools, particularly the writer's notebook and peer review, played an integral role in students' literacy learning and became another important aspect of writing identity, or "the way you write." Although research on effective writing methodologies is prolific and valuable, there is less empirical data supporting how students' cultural backgrounds and educational histories shape their unique writing identities. Implications of this study's findings suggest that writing identity is a fundamental element in writing development and should be included in existing curricula for the purpose of providing all students with access to effective and equitable writing instruction.

Keywords: writing identity, diversity, detracking, dialogue, discourse, sociocultural learning theory, cultural responsiveness, writer's notebook, peer review

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CHAPTER ONE

Talking, Writing, and Learning Together

> Teaching writing has been the vehicle through which I have learned to value my students as individuals and the place in which I have found my center as a teacher. It has taught me the most about effective pedagogy, how kids learn, and the importance of being aware of one's metacognitive processes. Yet, teaching writing has also caused me inner turmoil and great insecurity.
>
> My student writers have shown me that the process of writing and learning is synonymous with adolescence. They have also taught me inexhaustible patience for people and their unique cognitive processes. Being the singular adult presence in a classroom of twenty-five teenagers is quite humbling. Their insecurities, trials, tribulations, and frustrations have consistently resonated within me throughout the years, reminding me of my own angst and confusion as a teenager. My memories of those years set the tone for my writing instruction, reminding me of how difficult it is for kids to write.
>
> There have been many avenues I have explored to help me teach writing, and I took more and more risks in the classroom as the years progressed, often delving valiantly into uncharted territory. The more I understand the personal nature of writing, the more I have been able to relinquish control, step back, and let my students find their voices. At times, students want more direction and concrete steps, and I am finding the balance more consistently in my teaching, knowing when to provide more structure during instruction and learning to let go when necessary.
>
> Reflecting on the hundreds of students I have been privileged to know, it has been predominantly through writing that I have been able to understand and evaluate their growth. It is in the classroom that their writing process becomes visible and almost tangible. Both mine and theirs. Teaching students to write well continues to pose challenges for me, yet that is another part of the job I love...figuring it out. And isn't that part of the teaching journey?
>
> - Karen Larson Buechner
> Stony Brook, NY
> 2010

When I reread this excerpt from an auto-ethnography I had written while pursuing a certification in writing and rhetoric, it was evident to me that the current study on writing identity was a natural outgrowth of my experiences of teaching and learning with my students. Inasmuch as the excerpt reveals some of the frustrations I felt at the time, it also provides insight

about my identity as a teacher, which is significant for understanding the purpose of this study on writing identity.

Eleven years ago, writing identity and its influence on writing development was not part of my instructional program, but I knew that my students’ writing voices reflected their unique styles. Yet, it would be years before I explicitly addressed writing identity in the classroom and understood its significance. Over time, as I relinquished authority and allowed the students increasing autonomy, their identities became more visible to me. For so long, I had searched for the missing pieces of the writing puzzle, and as my identity as a teacher and writer had evolved, so did the knowledge that writing identity was integral to my students’ writing lives. Therefore, the findings of this ethnographic study are even more valuable, as they reflect how working with multiple students year after year shaped my personal identity and ultimately led me to understand how honoring each student’s writing identity transformed their literacy development.

Ways of thinking about the nature of identity have been the topic of much discussion among scholars from different fields of study, spanning several decades and encompassing a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, psychology, education, and sociology (Ball & Ellis, 2008). In general, the term *identity* is often used as a way for people to articulate a sense of who they are, and theories of identity formation are historically oriented toward an individualist or social-constructionist perspective. Researchers on identity and written discourse have often positioned themselves toward one or the other of these ideologies, believing that a writer’s identity organically emerges through a uniquely personal discovery of the self, or that a writer’s identity is socially constructed and materializes through interactions with other individuals and the discourse that exists within their cultural community (Matsuda, 2015).

Ivanic (1998) challenged this polarized view of identity formation and suggested a more comprehensive understanding of the multiplicities and complexities inherent in the development of the self in writing. She posited that people simultaneously identify with a variety of social groups, at times experiencing contradictory or interrelated influences that contribute to the formation of the individual's writing identity. According to Ivanic, writers have an "autobiographical self" that they bring to the writing experience; yet the specific self the writer brings to the act of writing is also shaped by a person's social and discoursal history. From this perspective, *discourse* is understood to be "the mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity" through which people take on identities by "producing and receiving culturally recognized, ideologically shaped representations of reality" (Ivanic, 1998, p. 17). In other words, through social interaction, people take on the practices and social conventions of a particular situation in which they exist.

Therefore, writing identity is not merely an internal state (Gee, 2001) and should not be conceived as a concept to be studied in isolation of the self; rather, it must be approached with the understanding that identity manifests within a discourse or an individual's interactions in a social setting (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). It makes sense, then, to conclude as Ivanic (1998) did, that individual writers participate in the construction of their identities through predominantly subconscious choices to conform to their interpretations of what is socially mandated. Also, writers' sense of themselves and the impression they communicate of themselves is subject to change over time (Ivanic, 1998).

The typical ELA classroom of the 21st century has been one described as including students with identified or unidentified learning disabilities, highly advanced learners, English Language Learners (ELLs), culturally diverse learners, students in poverty, students who

underachieve for various reasons, and students whose degrees of motivation are disparate and indistinct (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2003). An expanded view that builds on this description is one of *social identity*, a term that encompasses the differences in students that are reflected in multiple races, ethnicities, and cultures (Beachum, 2020). This view helps to clarify the unique research setting for the current study, which is a detracked classroom where many of the participants were in a mixed-ability group for the first time in their academic career. In general, a detracked class groups students heterogeneously regardless of race, class, or academic ability (Rubin & Noguera, 2004).

Thus, within the context of this learning environment, students arrive with a writing identity that is a result of their previous exposure to and participation in a particular social group—such as their cultural backgrounds or their prior classroom experiences—and the discourses within those environments. Consequently, for many students, the high school classroom may or may not support the diverse identities young people bring with them, and educators play a critical role in developing future generations of students that are more accepting and tolerant of these differences (Beachum, 2020).

Matsuda (2015) explained that researchers and teachers who take an individualistic approach to writing identity see writing as emanating from an individual’s unique personal expression, which can be discovered only by the individual; it is not teachable. In contrast to this understanding is a social-constructionist orientation that relies more on the multiple ways writers are influenced by socially shared sets of assumptions and accepted features and patterns of language. A social-constructionist perception of discourse rejects the idea that identity—whether political, sexual, or emotional—is the sole product of a person’s mind and is actually the result of exposure to the beliefs and possibilities that exist in their social context (Burkitt, 1991; Ivanic,

1998; Matsuda, 2015). Thus, the individualist and the social-constructionist view of identity are extreme in their approach to writing identity formation; one values agency and the other denies it, but the tension that exists between an individual’s natural self-expression and societal influences suggest the consideration of both perspectives (Tardy, 2012).

Of particular importance to this ethnographic study is that identity development occurs during the critical stage of adolescence when most adolescents experience writing instruction in the classroom (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Hence, the student’s identity is subject to fluctuations that are impacted by how the individual navigates through the discursive practices of the classroom (Hyland, 2015). In this study, the participants were 12th-grade ELA students who were distinguished from one another by race, socioeconomic status, and perceived academic ability. Much of their identity emanated from their cultural experiences and was negotiated through social relations; hence, a student’s cultural identity plays a major role in determining academic progress (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, it is also important to note that students generally achieve greater academic success when their racial and cultural identities are supported by their educational experiences (Noguera, 2003).

Acknowledging that identity develops and changes over time is essential to understanding how an adolescent writer perceives himself or herself as a literate individual. For example, Connolly (1991) argued that a person’s identity is established through seeing and understanding difference; adopting one identity and rejecting others illustrate the boundaries between social groups, particularly those that are perceived as having more power. Ivanic (1998) elaborated that these dominant ideologies control and constrain people’s sense of themselves, but she also argued that this sense contributed to their acquiescence to one group over another. In other words, she recognized that identity is cultivated through both an individual’s sense of self

and exposure to social exchanges between people, such as those that occur within the school environment.

The identities of adolescents are often conflicted as they move through the emotional and intellectual paths of discovering themselves, making it almost impossible to identify with a single self (Ivanic, 1998). Students come to know themselves as literate individuals through their classroom experiences as well as those that occur in the home or community. It is during this critical time that the individual's identity can be constructed and reconstructed in the learning environment (Megan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Nasir, 2002; Noguera, 2003). As the teacher and researcher, my ethnographic study explored students' evolving writing identities, meeting them where they were in the fall of their senior year in high school and sharing their writing experiences with them throughout the school year. When students write together in a classroom, they become a community of learners, and their teachers are part of the process. As I wrote field notes and reflections throughout this year-long study, my writing identity was also developing as I navigated through the process of writing this dissertation. To further establish the intricate connection between writing and identity, the next section provides a brief overview of identity theory and its relationship with writing identity.

Writing Identity and Social Interaction

Erikson's (1968) studies on the psychological phenomenon of ego identity led to his conclusion that identity is mainly formed during adolescence through participation in various tasks, eventually becoming a static characteristic when the individual experiences a role in society that is aligned with his or her biological and psychological capacities. Although many scholars share Erikson's view, other contemporary perspectives on identity consider it to be a fluid and dynamic entity (Ball & Ellis, 2008; Lee, 2013). From this perspective, identity is not

static but changes and develops over time. Hence, an individual's identity formation is not simply an intrinsic quality but an ongoing process that is influenced by cultural exchanges and negotiated through social interactions (Ivanic, 1998; Larson, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

The design and implementation of this study is based on Ivanic's (1998) views that writing identity manifests from an individual's inner self as well as the social interactions that occur between students and teachers in a learning environment. Writing is a social activity, and research has consistently shown that students think, learn, and develop their literacies in social contexts that involve an interaction with either text, other people, or both (Beach et al., 2016). Moreover, the classroom plays a significant role in "how students come to see themselves as writers and how they come to perceive the role of writing in their daily lives" (Ball & Ellis, 2008, p. 504). These preceding theoretical principles of identity formation lay a foundation for a discussion of the critical nature of an adolescent's writing identity formation in the secondary ELA classroom and the social interactions that may contribute to its development.

Research Problem

Writing pedagogy has been studied extensively, and scholars have had much to say about preferred instructional methodologies that teachers should be utilizing in ELA classrooms (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987). Despite consistent findings that identify effective writing pedagogy, national progress reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007) and the National Commission on Writing (2003) illustrate the consistent underachievement of high school students' writing ability. According to the NCES (2011), a mere 27% of 12th-grade students across the nation performed at the proficient level; less than 80% demonstrated basic competency. Taken together, these statistics suggested a need for continued research to understand how writing should be taught in high schools across the country

and how students learn to write. Therefore, much of the subsequent research on writing instruction has focused on identifying effective methods and practices in the classroom. Moreover, as explained in Chapter One, research on writing instruction has been studied more closely in elementary and middle school classrooms, with less research having been conducted on writing practices in the contemporary high school classroom (Graham & Perin, 2007; Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Hence, this gap suggested a need to increase the focus of writing research to include the secondary classroom.

In addition to more research needed on writing pedagogy, there is less attention given to the impact of cultural backgrounds on a writer’s identity and development (Kwok et al., 2016). As discussed earlier in this chapter, an individual’s developing identity emanates from one’s cultural background and experiences and is crucial to understanding the teaching and learning of writing and a writer’s development (Gee, 2001; Ivanic, 1998). Moreover, when students interact in the social context of the classroom, writing becomes a social event (Beach et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978), because as students engage in the social process of writing, they are producing dialogue that is an integration of cognitive, textual, and social dimensions (Addison & McGee, 2010; Beck, 2009; Fecho & Schultz, 2000). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the dialogue produced by these elements plays a vital role in writing literacy as well as identity development in young writers (Stables, 2003). Although dialogic pedagogy has been the focus of much research, fewer studies have addressed the influence of classroom dialogue on the writing process (Boyd & Markarian, 2015), which is a unique aspect of my study.

From this perspective, it is logical to conclude that an increased understanding of writing identity could supplement the existing knowledge of the research on writing pedagogy. Teachers need to help students claim agency and power as they grow as literate individuals so they can

navigate the discursive communities both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, it is important for educators to design instruction that includes opportunities and spaces for students to see themselves as writers (Kwok et al., 2016) and to talk about their writing with others. This study's objective is to expand on the writing scholarship by focusing on the writing identities of diverse students in this ELA classroom during instructional activities that were implemented through dialogic methodologies. To contextualize the relationship between writing identity and writing pedagogy, a summary of the research on writing is presented in the next section of this chapter.

Research on Writing

Research on the teaching of writing has provided a wealth of data about instructional practices shown to influence and shape the writing development of students. These results have had significant implications for the composing process, research in teaching writing, and curriculum development. In his seminal study of research on writing, Hillocks (1987) reviewed 2,000 studies to examine the knowledge and practices students need to write effectively. Overall, Hillocks (1987) recommended a combination of instructional methods that engage students in the evaluation of writing and concluded that utilizing methods such as inquiry-based strategy instruction was critical to a student's growth as a writer. However, he also pointed out that instructional practices he examined were inadequate and did not reflect teachers' understanding of the complexity and difficulty of the composing process.

In another significant national study, Applebee and Langer (2011) reported some positive changes in teachers' implementation of effective writing practices. Thirty years after Hillock's study, there had been significant heightened awareness in teachers' understandings of writing and its relationship to learning. Furthermore, research teams noted that teachers used a wide

repertoire of approaches and strategies and that the majority of instruction was process based, a methodology that focuses on the stages of how a text is written rather than the final outcome (Nordin & Mohammed, 2017). However, Applebee and Langer's study also found that typical classrooms throughout the United States remained dominated by teacher-directed writing instruction where students fill in missing information or copy notes, complete worksheets, or replicate essay structures aligned with high-stakes tests.

As stated earlier in this section, seminal writing studies have emphasized methods of writing pedagogy that contribute to writing development (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Hillocks, 1987; Kiuhara et al., 2009). However, these studies, although significant, are lacking in their attention to the identities students bring to the secondary writing classroom and writing development (Kwok et al., 2016). With the changing demographics and diversification of languages in the United States, identity has resurfaced in the study of written discourse, and more research is needed to understand the role of writing identity in the contemporary ELA classroom (Kwok et al., 2016; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010). This study takes into consideration the writing methodologies that have consistently been shown to have a positive impact on students' writing development and augments these important findings with more attention to the identities that students bring to the writing classroom and how those identities are developed through their social interaction. As social interactions include dialogue between and among students, it is essential, then, to clarify how dialogue is understood in the classroom setting.

Dialogue and Writing Identity

Dialogic interaction in the classroom is consequential for learning and leads to collaborative critical inquiry and an open exchange of thinking (Alexander, 2008; Bakhtin, 1981; Burbules, 1993). Graham and Perin (2007) noted that instructional elements such as inquiry

activities and the process writing approach lend themselves to a classroom environment that necessitates talking between students and their teachers. Furthermore, students are influenced by how others respond to them as writers, particularly teachers who are a critical factor in the development of a student's writing identity, how students come to perceive themselves as writers, and the role of writing in their daily lives.

In this study, student dialogue was generated through dialogic teaching methodologies, which are those that treat students' oral interactions as a functional construct rather than a structural procedure (Boyd & Markarian, 2011, 2015). As opposed to a monologic setting where questions are usually close ended, inauthentic, and based on recall, so minimal opportunity exists for students to develop interpretive skills. Conversely, a dialogic stance focuses on a student's growing understanding of the learning content and invites interpretive authority (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Dialogic instruction requires the teacher to examine patterns of instructional delivery and make purposeful decisions about how content is presented and discussed. Thus, in this study, student talk was developed through research-based dialogic methodologies to gain understandings of how student interactions in the classroom contributed to the development of students' writing identities. By immersing myself as an ethnographer in the learning environment with my students, I experienced firsthand how their unique writing identities developed over the course of an academic school year.

Theoretical Framework

Research on *identity in written discourse* is conceptualized as either an individualist or social-constructionist phenomenon. Those who view identity as individualistic see writing as an implicit process that is unique to each individual. On the other hand, a social-constructionist orientation relies more on the multiple ways writers are influenced by societal assumptions and

patterns of language (Matsuda, 2015). The latter also rejects the idea that identity is the sole product of a person's mind but is actually the result of exposure to the beliefs and possibilities that exist in their social context (Burkitt, 1991; Ivanic, 1998; Matsuda, 2015). Both theories of writing identity were relevant to the present study based on the adolescent writing experiences that take place in the classroom. As writing identity correlates with adolescence and classroom-writing experiences, both theories of identity were of critical importance to the present study.

This chapter has also established that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and that writing identity, as explained by Ivanic (1998), is a product of both an individual's inner self and the interactions that take place in the learning environment between students and teachers. These principles of learning were critical in gaining insights about how students came to see themselves as writers and how they understood the role of writing in their daily lives (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Moreover, as writing identity in the high school classroom has not been the focus of writing research to the extent that instructional practices have been (Kwok et al., 2016; Matsuda, 2015), the present study sought to address this gap. As such, adapting Ivanic's (1998) discoursal construction of writer identity was the theoretical lens through which I examined the developing writing identities of diverse learners in the ELA classroom. Ivanic's framework embodies the belief that writing identity is a product of both the individual and social interactions. Therefore, another crucial consideration in this study was the relationship between dialogue and writing identity.

Social Learning Theory and a Sociocultural Model of Writing

Ivanic's (1998) framework is deeply rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, so both are foundational in understanding how Ivanic's discoursal construction is relevant for the present study. Social learning theory is grounded in the belief that individuals

learn through social interactions (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as being the result of the thought and development that occurs through human interaction. He was also a strong supporter of the idea that what children learned from other people in their own culture helped them progress in their development, which is directly related to the research on literacy development that emphasized the positive effects of discussion-based approaches on students' ability to engage in challenging literacy tasks (Applebee et al., 2003).

Therefore, sociocultural learning theory was a foundational framework for understanding the interrelationship among teaching, learning, and writing identity. To enhance my understandings of the sociocultural influences of literacy development, it was also essential to apply Bakhtin's theories of language to interpret the data gathered throughout the study. According to Bakhtin (1981), dialogue must be understood as a cultural tool through which individuals grow as ethical human beings. Dialogue is more than merely words but an interaction between people that reflects an openness to new concepts, ideas, and perspectives. A sociocultural perspective of writing highlights the importance of social practices students acquire (Bazerman et al., 2017), which was critical for understanding the relationship between dialogue and writing identity. Throughout the study, instruction was designed to support students' discussion skills, and combining Ivanic's and Vygotsky's theories brought focus to the diverse nature of the dialogue and social interactions of learners throughout the writing process.

Ivanic's Discoursal Construction of Identity

Ivanic (2004) viewed the act of writing as inextricable from the social event within which it occurs. Therefore, the writing event is not solely based on the individual's process but is also reliant on the existent social discourse. The discoursal construction of identity framework

incorporates this concept to show the relationship between language and identity, adding arrows to depict the reciprocal nature of language in a social context (Ivanic, 1998). Ivanic's adaptation of Fairclough's (1989) diagrammatic representation illustrates how a text is inseparable from the processes of production and interpretation that produce it and from the social forces within which it operates (see Appendix B).

Ivanic's (1998) and Fairclough's (1989) framework was further adapted in this ethnography to examine how writing identity developed through student interactions as they engaged in instructional writing processes utilizing dialogic procedures. My framework places further emphasis on how the micro, meso, and macro dimensions of social identity worked in tandem to shape students' writing identities. This revision of Ivanic's and Fairclough's framework captured the essence of the students' autobiographical selves, how they evolved through social interaction with others, and how they came to see themselves as writers.

Purpose and Research Questions

Teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms provides multiple opportunities for educators to help students develop their identities as writers. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing identity of diverse students manifested in a detracked classroom in which writing was taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. By immersing myself as an ethnographer in the learning environment with my students, I experienced firsthand how their unique writing identities developed over the course of an academic school year.

The following sections identify and explain my research questions, the underlying theoretical frameworks that guided this ethnographic study, and an overview of the research

design that helped me gain in-depth understandings of my students’ writing identities. The research design was driven by the following research questions:

RQ: How do the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners develop and evolve within a dialogic ELA classroom?

RQ1: What role do the culture and climate of this diverse mixed-ability–level ELA classroom play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1a: What role does dialogue play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1b: What role do varied approaches to writing instruction play in the development of students’ writing identities?

These questions were designed to correlate to my theoretical framework and provide a structure that would closely maintain a focus on the individual student within the exchanges in the learning environment. This helped me make sense of the collected data and how it provided information on each student’s developing writing identity. The adaptation of Ivanic’s (1998) discoursal construction of identity framework recognized that the interactions that occur in a classroom are a critical component of how students perceive themselves as individuals and writers. Hence, utilizing this framework allowed writing identity to be examined in three inextricably linked layers: (1) the micro layer, the unique cultural and linguistic experiences each student brings to the classroom; (2) the meso layer, the social interactions students experience through dialogue with one another; and (3) the macro layer, the discourse and power differentials that exist within the social context of the classroom (Gee, 2014; Ivanic, 1998).

According to Ivanic’s interpretation, social identity consists of a person’s set of values and beliefs that impact how the individual conveys meaning through language; this is represented by the center—or micro layer—of the framework. Second, social identity also consists of the

individual’s perception of one’s status in relation to others, which affects how the person communicates through language and is illustrated by the macro layer of the framework. Last, a person’s orientation to language use affects how the individual constructs his or her message through language, the meso layer of the framework. In the current study, the dialogue and instructional procedures were embedded in the meso layer. The macro layer pertained to the larger context of the conventions of classroom discourse, and the micro layer encompassed the cultural experiences of each individual.

Methodology

Qualitative researchers seek to find meaning in the context or the participants by interacting with individuals in a natural setting and interpreting how they make meaning in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Goodall (2000), being an ethnographer requires “habits of being in the world, of being able to talk and listen to people, and of being able to write—habits that are beyond method” (p. 10). Being a participant observer as a teacher researcher in my classroom provided me with an insider’s view of the day-to-day dialogic and cultural exchanges of my students.

Ethnographic research recognizes the complexity of human social life and the importance of taking the investigative stance in collecting and analyzing data (Tsui, 2014). From this perspective, the ethnographic study was an exploratory and a relatively open-ended approach to inquiry. Hence, the analysis of my observations and interactions with students were closely aligned with the research questions and contributed to the findings pertaining to the significance of dialogic methodologies.

High School Setting/ELA College Class and Participants

The participants in this study were 25 students in a 12th-grade detracked College English class that consisted of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically mixed combination of students. Students enrolled in the class had been previously placed in various 11th-grade ELA tracks, including advanced placement classes, English honors, and regular education or inclusive settings. The college class included students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), declassified special education students, students with 504 modifications, ELLs, and students who vary in writing proficiency. My intent was to gain knowledge about how the culture and climate of this diverse group of students contributed to the development of the students’ writing identities. As the teacher-participant in this classroom, I had an active role in teaching the content and observing the students’ daily dialogic interactions.

Data Collection

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended utilizing multiple forms of data and spending considerable time gathering information in the natural setting. To capture the essence of the interconnections between and among students, the following types of data were gathered: one-on-one interviews, audio- and video-taped discussions, lesson plans, measures of student literacy in the form of formative and summative writing samples including writer’s notebooks and revised drafts, classroom artifacts, teacher-researcher field notes, and reflexive memos. Data were gathered from September 2019 to June 2020, with initial diagnostic procedures and student reflections on writing identity taking place within the first few weeks of the school year. The data analysis, which is discussed in Chapter Five, was divided into two phases to clarify the findings as succinctly as possible. Following is an overview of the data-collection procedures.

Phase One Data Collection. Typically, in the first two weeks of school, I implement diagnostic procedures to ascertain my students' levels of literacy proficiency. From September to January during the pre-dissertation phase one, I observed students in small groups and wrote field notes and analytical memos. I analyzed their reflective entries in the writer's notebook, a fluency tool that is discussed further in Chapter Five and examined their writing as it manifested throughout the stages of the writing process. Doing so provided me with insight into the students' reading and writing histories. Students also responded to a questionnaire that asked them to reflect on their attitudes and evaluations of their literate selves and identities as writers. They also practiced generative writing strategies in their writer's notebook. My first samples of data were reflexive memos that captured my emerging understandings of this new group of learners, particularly my observations of their comfort level, the degree to which they engaged in discussion with their peers, and their physical mannerisms when speaking with their peers and me. I wrote analytical memos daily after observing student discussions and peer-review sessions that illustrated their emerging understandings of identity.

Phase Two Data Collection. Phase 2 included the continued collection and analysis of the data described in Phase One after I received Institutional Review Board approval (IRB) for my study (see Appendix A). More specifically, from February to June 2020, I gathered and examined writer's notebook reflections, field notes and analytical memos, audio recordings of student discussions, lesson plans, and classroom artifacts. At the end of the study, I conducted 30- to 40-minute interviews with 21 student-participants to further assess the data collected throughout the year. Four students did not keep their appointments for interviews, although each student and their parent or guardian had signed consent to participate in the study. Interviews included students' reflections on their writing process, their writing throughout the year, and

their shifting identities as writers. Additionally, they evaluated the role of dialogue in the classroom and their perceptions of how it contributed to their understandings of themselves as writers.

Significance of the Study

This ethnography evolved from a life-long interest in how students become more proficient in writing. As stated earlier in the chapter, the purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing identity of diverse students manifested in a classroom where writing was taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. Of great significance was the finding that writing identity emerged as a cyclical, interdependent process in this social and dialogic learning environment, which addresses the gap in the research on writing instruction in the secondary high school ELA classroom. From this study, I have gained deeper insights on the relationship between writing identity, dialogue, and writing pedagogy, and I perceive the findings of this study to be of critical importance to writing teachers and students as they work and grow together.

Since fewer studies addressed the influence of classroom dialogue on the writing process, the findings in my study also contribute to understandings about the connection between student talk and writing, which showed how through dialogue, students engaged in insightful and productive discussions about their attitudes and perceptions of themselves as writers. These findings can support teachers and students in the ELA classroom. It is hoped that the findings of this study contribute to teachers’ knowledge about the role of writing identity so that all students have access to the expert instruction they deserve and gain confidence in their perceptions of themselves as writers.

Writing is a multi-layered, complex process that is highly individualized and is one of an ELA teacher's most challenging responsibilities, especially in a mixed-abilities setting. Teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms provides multiple opportunities for educators to help students develop their identities as writers. The rapidly changing demographics of the American ELA classroom warrant this investigation into how students come to see themselves as writers. Much of an individual's identity emanates from cultural experiences and is negotiated through social relations; hence, a student's cultural identity plays a major role in determining academic progress (Ball & Ellis, 2008). It is also necessary to consider Ivanic's (1998) view that individuals are often subdued by trying to adapt to the conventions of the dominant discourses in place. To avoid the marginalization of any individual, it is critical that the cultural and writing identities of all students are supported through the most effective and appropriate instructional methods. The next chapter presents a review of the relevant research on writing identity, dialogic pedagogy, and writing instruction.

Definitions of Terms

Detracking: In general, detracking in schools is an attempt to group students heterogeneously to ensure that all students, regardless of race, class, or academic ability have equal access to high-quality education (Rubin & Noguera, 2004).

Dialogic pedagogy: Alexander (2008) described it in this way: "repertoires for everyday talk, learning talk, teaching talk and classroom organization on which the teacher draws flexibly according to purpose and situation, and which become dialogic when they are demonstrably informed by five principles, including collectivity, reciprocity, support, cumulation, and purposefulness" (pp. 112-113).

Discourse: Rex et al. (2010) defined it as an instance of communication through language where people draw upon their knowledge of language to accomplish a task or action in the world. The researchers wrote that discourse is culturally based and "reflects and constructs reality and meaning, power, identity, social position, and knowledge" (p. 95).

Diverse learners: According to Saravia-Shore (2008), diverse student learners are from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and communities of lower socioeconomic status. Of particular importance to this study is that the growing diversity in classrooms requires the design and implementation of diverse teaching strategies that address each student as an individual.

Mixed ability: Lyle (2008) argued that mixed-ability grouping of students creates a learning environment where both students in the low track and students in the high track benefit from the opportunity to work together.

Monologic education: Nesari (2015) described it as the teachers' ideas and voices being dominant in the classroom. Bakhtin (1981) argued that monologism emerges wherever universal truth statements do not allow any other sort of truth to appear.

Process approach to writing: This focuses on the stages of how a text is written rather than the final outcome. Rewriting and revision is understood to be an ongoing process within which the writer, the content, and the purpose are the central elements. In classrooms that implement the process approach, the teacher is facilitator and writing is learned, not taught (Nordin & Mohammad, 2017).

Product approach to writing: Product-based writing approaches to writing instruction are focused on the grammatical structures of a text, with an emphasis on producing a final

product that is coherent and error free (Hillocks, 1987; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017; Pasand & Haghi, 2013).

Sociolinguistic theory: Halliday’s (1994) sociolinguistic theory views grammar not as units of structure but as configurations of language patterns that are typical or expected in a particular social context. For many learners, this is an automatic process, but for ELLs and others that struggle with academic language, it is not automatic.

Tracking: The modern system of tracking places students in different levels of the same course or in a course with a different curriculum that is perceived to be more appropriate for the learner (Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 2005). Oakes and Guiton (1995) argued that the system of tracking is a synergistic collection of contributing factors, such as differentiated, hierarchical curriculum structures, school cultures alternatively committed to common schooling and accommodating differences, and political actions by individuals within those structures and cultures aimed at influencing the distribution of advantage.

CHAPTER TWO

Writing Identity – The Missing Piece?

This chapter reviews the research on writing identity, dialogic pedagogy, and instructional approaches to writing instruction to illustrate their relevance and interconnectedness to students’ developing identities in the ELA classroom. As previously discussed in Chapter One, the design and implementation of this study were based on Ivanic’s (1998) views that writing identity is a phenomenon that manifests from an individual’s inner self as well as the social interactions that occur between students and teachers in a learning environment. Furthermore, an integral part of this dissertation is the belief that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978), and students think, learn, and develop their writing literacy in social contexts that involve an interaction with either text, other people, or both (Beach et al., 2016). Moreover, the classroom in particular plays a significant role in “how students come to see themselves as writers and how they come to perceive the role of writing in their daily lives” (Ball & Ellis, 2008, p. 504).

It was also established in Chapter One that writing pedagogy has been studied extensively, and scholars have had much to say about preferred instructional methodologies that should be taking place in ELA classrooms (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987). Yet, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), a mere 27% of 12th-grade students across the nation performed at the proficient level and less than 80% illustrated basic competency. These statistics suggest a need for continued research to understand how writing should be taught in high schools across the country and how students learn to write. Although this contradiction between research and performance

is not the primary focus of this dissertation, the findings may inspire new areas of investigation addressing the lack of proficiency noted in these reports.

Examining the research on writing pedagogy also revealed that much of the subsequent research on writing instruction in response to students’ performance on state and national assessments has been conducted in elementary and middle school classrooms with less research reporting on writing practices in the contemporary high school classroom (Graham & Perin, 2007; Kiuhara et al., 2009). Also, Kwok et al. (2016) reviewed the research on sociocultural approaches to writing and concluded that minimal emphasis had been placed on the impact of cultural backgrounds on a writer’s identity and development. They argued that much of the seminal research, such as Graham and Perin’s (2007) study of effective writing practices, was presented in isolation from the larger social and cultural contexts in which these practices and strategies actually take place. In particular, Kwok et al. (2016) took the position that the teaching and learning of writing skills are always situated and mediated by social and cultural contexts, and that teachers had substantial opportunities to design instruction within which students could begin to perceive themselves as writers. Their review elucidated the power differentials that Gee (2001) and Ivanic (1998) identified and drew attention to the possibilities that when adolescent writers are made aware of the dominant discourses in which they are participants, they have the potential to navigate the contexts of those situations in ways that do not diminish their unique identities (Kwok et al., 2016).

These epistemological intersections further illustrate the significance of the cultural influences of an individual’s evolving identity and its critical connection to understanding the teaching and learning of writing and a writer’s development (Gee, 2001; Ivanic, 1998; Kwok et al., 2016). From this perspective, it is prudent to surmise that an increased understanding of the

importance of writing identity in the ELA classroom may provide opportunities for educators to supplement and enhance their current instructional programs.

Woven throughout this dissertation is the belief that a great deal of learning occurs through the social interaction of students in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978) and that learning to write is considered a social event by many researchers (Gee, 2001; Ivanic, 1998). Therefore, in this chapter, I also review the research on dialogic pedagogy to help explore the connections between student dialogue and writing identity. Within the social environment of the classroom, dialogue between and among students is a natural occurrence and is a critical component of a writer’s developing identity. As social interactions include dialogue between and among students, it is essential to clarify how dialogue relates to the writing process. When students interact in the social context of the classroom, writing becomes a social event (Beach et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978), and as students engage in the social process of writing, they are producing dialogue that is an integration of cognitive, textual, and social dimensions (Addison & McGee, 2010; Beck, 2009; Fecho & Schultz, 2000). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the dialogue produced by these elements plays a vital role in writing literacy as well as identity development in young writers (Stables, 2003).

Although dialogic pedagogy has been the focus of much research, fewer studies address the influence of classroom dialogue on the writing process (Boyd & Markarian, 2015), which is a unique aspect of my study. Nevertheless, a few seminal studies have substantiated the positive influences of classroom dialogue on writing development (Applebee et al., 2003; Fecho & Schultz, 2000; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987; Langer, 2001). This is where my study hopes to build on the existing body of research on writing development. By bridging the research on dialogue and the research on writing pedagogy, findings from this study may expand on the

existing writing scholarship by focusing on the writing identities of the diverse students in the ELA classroom, their interactions with one another in conversations about their writing, and their understandings of how they come to see themselves as writers.

Given that writing is a highly complex task in any environment, it is not difficult to imagine the increased challenges placed on the writing teacher in this diverse setting. In consideration of this context, the present literature review examines instructional processes that have consistently shown to be influential in the writing literacy development of all learners in a mixed classroom setting. The focal population is described as diverse students in a complex multi-dimensional classroom, a term adapted from Santamaria's (2009) research on hybrid pedagogies and best practices in which she identified instructional guidelines for teaching students of mixed-ability levels, culturally diverse learners, and ELLs.

Learning to read and write in one's native language or a new language requires the individual to have a grasp of academic language. In the classroom, this is illustrated through spoken and written discourse and requires a lexical understanding of the language of the content and the grammatical constructs of the language being spoken (Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccelli, 2009). The ways teachers use language to impart or assess disciplinary knowledge greatly influences the content students learn. Although much of the research on Academic English, also referred to as academic language, targets the ELL population, researchers have agreed that all students in content-specific classes require an acute understanding of that content's academic language to engage them in the learning process (DiCerbo et al., 2014; Snow & Uccelli, 2009; Turkan et al., 2014). To understand how a wide variety of learners acquire the knowledge and skills to write, it is integral to examine studies on dialogic pedagogy and academic language with their emphasis on linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives.

Finally, despite the efforts made by teacher-preparation programs and current educators to address the unique language needs of ELLs and other diverse students, the research consistently illustrated that many teachers do not possess the linguistic knowledge and skills that are essential for helping these students achieve academic success (Janzen, 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Lucas et al., 2008; Turkan et al., 2014). Nor do those educators fully understand the language demands placed on diverse learners in the content-specific classroom, which according to Lucas et al. (2008) is a learning situation that can be remedied by helping teachers become mindful of being linguistically and culturally responsive in their classrooms. A systemic change such as this calls on teachers to be, as Major (2006) suggested, “cultural mediators” (p. 32), a fundamental principle that is echoed by many scholars who have supported the crucial nature of culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy in classrooms with diverse populations (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lucas et al., 2008; Paris & Alim, 2014). Consequently, the findings in this ethnography support the existing research on the importance of linguistic knowledge in writing instruction and how that contributes to the identity development of all learners.

Teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms provides multiple opportunities for educators to help students develop their identities as writers. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing identity of diverse students manifests in a classroom where writing is taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ: How do the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners develop and evolve within a dialogic ELA classroom?

RQ1: What role do the culture and climate of this diverse mixed-ability–level ELA classroom play in the development of students' writing identities?

RQ1a: What role does dialogue play in the development of students' writing identities?

RQ1b: What role do varied approaches to writing instruction play in the development of students' writing identities?

This chapter begins with an explanation of the theoretical framework that underlies this study and transitions to an overview of research on writing identity. In subsequent sections, the research on dialogic pedagogy, academic language, and meta-linguistic awareness are presented to affirm the role of language in the literacy development of diverse learners. Research on writing pedagogy is also included in this review to solidify the importance of implementing instructional strategies that benefit all learners. This review concludes with a discussion of the integral connection between writing identity, dialogue, and instructional strategies.

Theoretical Framework

It has been established throughout this dissertation that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and that writing identity, as explained by Ivanic (1998), is a product of both an individual's inner self and the interactions that take place in the learning environment between students and teachers. For this reason, the main objective for studying writing identity in the classroom was to provide some insight as to how students come to see themselves as writers and how they understand the role of writing in their daily lives (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Moreover, as writing identity in the high school classroom had not been the focus of writing research to the extent that instructional practices have been (Kwok et al., 2016; Matsuda, 2015), the present study attempted to address this gap. As such, adapting Ivanic's (1998) discoursal construction of writer identity was the theoretical lens through which I examined the developing writing

identities of diverse learners in the ELA classroom. Ivanic's framework embodies the belief that writing identity is a product of both the individual and social interactions, so another crucial consideration in this study was the relationship between dialogue and writing identity.

Social Learning Theory and a Sociocultural Model of Writing

Ivanic's (1998) framework is deeply rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, so both are foundational in understanding how Ivanic's discoursal construction is relevant for the present study. Social learning theory is grounded in the belief that individuals learn through social interactions (Lucas et al., 2008). Vygotsky (1978) viewed learning as being the result of the thought and development that occurs through human interaction. Bakhtin's theories of language were also applied to the interpretation of the data gathered throughout the study. According to Bakhtin (1981), dialogue must be understood as a cultural tool through which individuals grow as ethical human beings. Dialogue is more than merely words but an interaction between people that reflects an openness to new concepts, ideas, and perspectives. Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* recognized the existence of multiple voices and perspectives that naturally occur in the dialogic interactions between people.

Taking a sociocultural perspective of writing highlights the importance of social practices that students acquire and utilize through the experience of adopting and adapting to the social and cultural contexts created by the students and the teacher (Bazerman et al., 2017). One of the primary research questions in this ethnographic study sought to understand the relationship between dialogic methodologies and writing identity, and the instructional sequence included lessons that supported students' use of language during discussions about writing. Combining social learning theory and the discoursal construction of identity theory allowed a view of

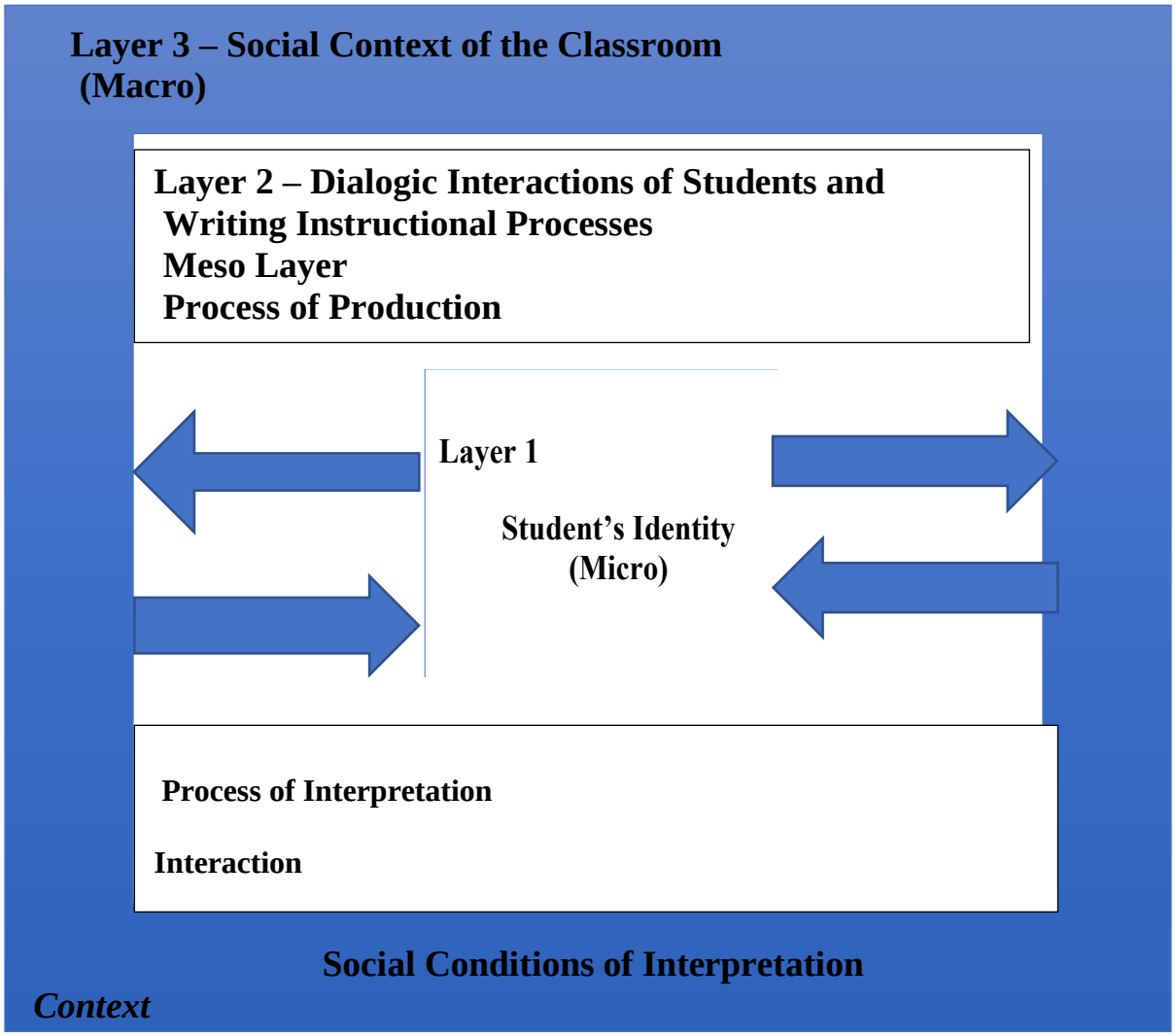
writing development from a sociocultural frame that was receptive to the diverse nature of the dialogue and social interactions of learners throughout the writing process.

Ivanic’s Discoursal Construction of Identity

Ivanic (2004) viewed writing as occurring within a social discourse in which the text and the individual’s processes of composing it are inextricable from the complex social interaction of the communicative event. Therefore, the writing event exists within the broader sociocultural context of writing and is not solely a discourse of process. Ivanic’s (1998) discoursal construction of identity framework is a variation of Fairclough’s (1989) social view of language framework that perceives a text as inseparable from the processes of production and interpretation that produce it and also inextricable from the social forces within which it operates (see Figure 2.1). Ivanic’s (1998) framework incorporates this concept to show the relationship between language and identity, adding arrows to depict the way language is both “shaped by and a shaper of social context” (p. 43). As explained in Chapter One, I explained that adapting both frameworks provided a lens through which to examine how writing identity was shaped by student interactions as they engaged in instructional writing processes through dialogic procedures.

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Framework adapted from Ivanic (1998) and Fairclough (1989)



Ivanic's (1998) framework is based on Halliday's (1994) sociolinguistic theory, which viewed language from a social-semiotic perspective, suggesting that language is one sign system within a broader network of symbolic systems that conveys meaning. Moreover, the linguistic choices of a writer are bound up with meaning and are embedded within the grammatical forms through which they are communicated. Most importantly, these language choices are often determined by the discourse conventions of the setting in which the writer is positioned. In other

words, because the language system has been socioculturally constructed, the meaning and linguistic choices writers make are dependent on the context of the situation and the context of culture (Halliday, 1994; Ivanic, 1998).

Hence, within this social-semiotic perspective, language performs three macro functions. Halliday uses the term “ideational meaning” to describe the ideas and content conveyed by language and the term “interpersonal meaning” to explain how a reader is affected by the writer to illustrate the two types of meaning that occur simultaneously in language. The third macro function that is part of language is the “textual functions” that tie together the first two functions of meaning. These understandings of language further clarify that writing identity is a product of an individual’s previous experiences with language in their social interactions with others and the social conditions within which the learning occurs.

Utilizing the discoursal construction of identity framework focused the lens on my students’ developing writing identities and how their interactions with peers may contribute to those identities. For example, an awareness of the power differentials inherent in the classroom setting informed my understandings of how students discussed their writing with peers and how the dominant discourse may have been a factor in the ways students presented themselves and their ideas to others. Additionally, knowing that each student entered the classroom with unique cultural and linguistic experiences contributed to my understandings of their oral and written language choices, which provided insights on their evolving writing identities. Most importantly, Ivanic’s framework recognized that the interactions occurring in a classroom are a critical component of how students perceive themselves as individuals and writers. In sum, this adaptation of Ivanic’s and Fairclough’s framework captures the essence of the intricate connections between the identities students bring to the classroom and how they evolve through

social interaction with others. A review of the literature on writing identity, writing pedagogy, and dialogue is discussed in the next section.

Writing Identity

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, researchers of identity in written discourse conceptualized the development of writing identity as either an individualist or social-constructionist phenomenon. Those who view identity as individualistic see writing as emanating from an individual's personal self-expression, which manifests through an implicit process that is unique to each individual. On the other hand, a social-constructionist orientation relies more on the multiple ways writers are influenced by socially shared sets of assumptions and accepted features and patterns of language (Matsuda, 2015). The latter also rejects the idea that identity is the sole product of a person's mind and is actually the result of exposure to the beliefs and possibilities that exist in their social context (Burkitt, 1991; Ivanic, 1998; Matsuda, 2015). As writing identity correlates with adolescence and classroom writing experiences, both theories of identity were of critical importance to the current study.

Writing Identity and Social Interaction

As stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, Erikson's (1968) studies on the psychological phenomenon of ego identity led to his conclusion that identity is mainly formed during adolescence through participation in various tasks, eventually becoming a static characteristic when the individual experienced a role in society that aligned with his or her biological and psychological capacities. Although many scholars share Erikson's view, many contemporary perspectives on identity consider it to be a fluid and dynamic entity (Ball & Ellis, 2008; Lee et al., 2007). From this perspective, identity is not static but changes and develops over time. Hence, an individual's identity formation is not simply an intrinsic quality but an

ongoing process that is influenced by cultural exchanges and negotiated through social interactions (Ivanic, 1998; Larson, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

In their ethnographic study of three adult literacy classes, Burgess and Ivanic (2010) concluded that writing identity is produced in part by recognizing and participating in discourses. The researchers perceived identity as having multiple facets, subject to tensions and contradictions, and in a constant state of flux. Their research question focused on how discourses construct identities in adult literacy classes, and the data collection included field notes on observations, writing samples, lesson plans, and photographs. Using Ivanic's (1998) discoursal construction of identity framework, the researchers analyzed the evidence through timescales, a technique developed by Wortham (2008) that conceptualized identity as a phenomenon that is developed over the course of events. According to Wortham (2008), an individual may be identified according to personality or demographics, but identity is also shaped by social interactions through a period of time. For example, looking at how an individual interacts within a socially dominant discourse such as the classroom and examining how a student responds to the learning content over time reveals much about a person's developing identity.

Literacy and Identity

Burgess and Ivanic (2010) adapted Wortham's (2008) design and examined the data they gathered from female students enrolled in a literacy course in an academic period. They categorized the patterns by odd or surprising ideas, how the data might relate to theory, and any evidence that illustrated inconsistencies or contradictions. One area of analysis was how writers perceived themselves as they began the class and how their life experiences thus far had contributed to their self-conception. Another category of analysis was the discoursal self or the representation of the self, which were values and beliefs the individual illustrated in his or her

writing through word choices and anticipation of the audience's reaction. At the end of the study, Burgess and Ivanic (2010) reported that the "literacy practices in which people engage cannot be separated from the processes whereby they identify with or resist particular social positionings, and these processes operate across timescales" (p. 232). The theoretical underpinnings of these studies paralleled the theme of my research study and were relevant when collecting and analyzing data.

In an earlier ethnographic study, Luttrell and Parker (2001) researched students in four high schools to illustrate the deep relationship between literacy practices and identity with the intention to redefine the problem of low literacy in high schools from one of a deficit mind-set to one that was more productive. They investigated the reading and writing habits of students and gathered data that included photos of students engaging in literacy events, classroom observations, teacher and parent surveys, in-depth interviews with students, and analysis of school records. Students were asked to keep diaries of their everyday uses of reading and writing for a week, and interviews were conducted with students who represented different reading and achievement levels. The data collection revealed that students' uses of reading and writing were deeply personal and different from how they experienced reading and writing in school. In fact, students often felt discomfort and anxiety within the context of the classroom.

Luttrell and Parker (2001) reasoned that there is a complex and dialogic relationship between students' literacy practices and their developing identities in the context of the classroom and their lives outside of the classroom. Furthermore, findings suggested that students in the study came to perceive themselves as literate individuals as a result of daily interactions in their classes. Students had been placed in classes organized around a hierarchy of perceived academic standing, so students' understanding of their literate selves often corresponded to their

academic standing. Here again, this study further supported the strong influence of school experiences on how students see themselves as readers and writers. Burgess and Ivanic (2010), and Luttrell and Parker (2001) viewed the classroom as a significant event in the life of a student, and that teachers have substantial influence on supporting and contributing to the growth of a writer’s identity. Both ethnographies illustrated relevant and valuable approaches and contributed to the evolving design of my study.

Throughout this dissertation, much research has shown that when students interact in the social context of the classroom and engage in the social process of writing, they are producing dialogue that is an integration of cognitive, textual, and social dimensions (Addison & McGee, 2010; Beck, 2009; Fecho & Schultz, 2000). Hence, it is reasonable to consider that the dialogue produced by these elements may play a vital role in writing literacy as well as identity development in young writers (Stables, 2003). A discussion of dialogic pedagogy is presented in the next section to emphasize its crucial role in the writing classroom and in the development of writing identity.

Dialogic Pedagogy

Classroom discussion practices include aspects of community, knowledge, and reasoning (Michaels et al., 2008), which were of particular importance to this study, as each of these is instrumental in the development of writing (Hillocks, 1987). In fact, empirical evidence suggested that dialogic teaching methodologies—when teachers treat dialogue as a functional construct rather than a structural procedure—promote cognitive development and inquiry, give voice to underachieving students (Snell & Lefstein, 2018), deepen the level of student engagement, improve student performance on a variety of assessments (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Higham, Brindley, & Van de Pol, 2014; Lyle, 2008), and result in overall academic

achievement for diverse populations of students (Michaels et al., 2008). There is a growing body of research that validates the benefits of dialogic teaching methodologies, and there is much information on writing strategies that work in the ELA classroom. Dialogue between and among students contributes to their learning process, and several strategies that have been documented in the research as having positive influences on writing development also exist.

One of the major tenets of this study was the possible role of student dialogue in the production and shaping of writing literacy and that classroom discourse is a powerful conduit through which students use their "knowledge about language to use language" to understand concepts and ideas (Rex et al., 2010, p. 95). A consensus among researchers is that speaking and interacting in a classroom environment among students and teachers is integral to student learning. Researchers also view productive classroom discourse as a joint, critical inquiry and an open exchange of ideas that support and promote equity and academic rigor in a culturally, linguistically, and academically heterogeneous classroom (Alexander, 2020; Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Hamston, 2006; Michaels et al., 2008; Shor & Freire, 1987). Therefore, this section reviews the studies on dialogic pedagogy and academic language to contextualize their relationship to writing literacy in the diverse classroom.

Classroom Discourse, Community, and Learning

The term *discourse* is defined in numerous ways and is applied to the study of language in many fields. Therefore, to understand students' use of language within their social interactions in the diverse ELA classroom and how that relates to their identities, and becoming familiar with interpretations of discourse by prominent researchers is critical to the findings of my study. According to Ivanic (1998), discourse is typically represented through verbal or written language, but some extend the term to include visual, bodily, or other media, and social practices

that are connected to a particular set of value, beliefs, or power relations. In general, discourse is a complex term used in different situations by different groups of people, not always connected with language use (Ivanic, 1998). However, the meaning of *discourse* in this dissertation was grounded in the inherent connection between language, dialogue, and writing literacy.

Interpretations of Discourse

In her effort to clarify the relationship between language and discourse in writing identity, Ivanic (1998) clarified that the use of the term *discourse* in the study of language exudes a sense of concern for social issues. Thus, discourse acknowledges language from the perspective of social scientists who are less interested in the linguistic aspects of language and more interested in how language functions in social processes. At the same time, including the term *language* in discoursal discussions confirms that language cannot be separate from its social context and still maintain the linguistic aspects in the study of discourse (Ivanic, 1998).

From a linguistic perspective, discourse describes how language is used in specific contexts and how words and phrases come together to form sentences that are sequenced in ways that connect and relate to each other. For some linguists, discourse analysis examines these syntactical relationships as they operate within specific contexts, through the actual utterances people use in speaking and writing. Linguists are interested in the ways that situational context influences the meaning of a person’s choice of words and the interpretation of those words. Other linguists apply the term *discourse* to the structural connections between and among sentences and use a different term—pragmatics—to study how language is used in context (Gee, 2014).

Fairclough (2012) identified the following as commonly understood explanations of the term *discourse*: (a) meaning making as part of a social process, (b) language used in a particular

social context of practice (e.g., political), and (c) the ways that social perspectives of the world are related to interpretations of ideas. These explanations served to guide my data collection and analysis of how students made meaning through their peer interactions. Being cognizant of the words and phrases students used as they discussed their writing and experiences helped me understand how they perceived themselves as writers. Gee (2014) referred to *discourse* as “interactive identity-based communication using language” (p. 24), while others defined the term as situations of communication through language whereby people use their knowledge about language to use it for the purposes of accomplishment (Rex et al., 2010). Taken together, these definitions acknowledge the interactive and social nature of language learning that guided the interpretation of student discussions.

Big D/discourse Theory. Gee (2014) explained that socially significant forms of life—identities— “talk to each other” (p. 25), as they have throughout history, and when people interact, so do these “Discourses.” In any given social situation, people communicate with one another by enacting the socially significant identities that are constructed, negotiated, and transformed within these interactions or Discourses. Since language and the context within which it occurs is inextricably bound, language use is also produced by the elements that comprise all aspects of human experience. Hence, when people communicate with one another in various situations, they have at their disposal a multitude of identity-based attributes that work with their words to convey a message. A person’s clothes, gestures, body, environment, and the social display of beliefs and values utilized by the speaker or writer contribute to enacting a “socially significant identity,” determined by the socially constructed discourses that exist in a social situation (Gee, 2014, p. 25).

The current study took place in an academic setting and was focused on how writing identity evolved through the social learning interactions of students. As stated earlier in this chapter, discourse in the classroom has a powerful influence in controlling and constraining students' sense of themselves (Ivanic, 1998). In his early work on language and power, Foucault (1972) recognized that any system of education embodies power differentials that perpetuate social divisions of labor and class distinctions. Later, Fairclough (1989) elaborated on this, adding that the system of power that exists in a discourse community such as a classroom can be hidden, meaning that the individuals within that particular community are unaware of these power relations. Although this ethnography was not intended to be an analysis of discourse, recognizing the possible influences of the classroom discourse on student dialogue assisted the process of data collection and analysis.

Dialogic Teaching, Detracking, and Language

Researchers of discussion-based approaches to student learning are interested in identifying the best instructional strategies that implement reading, writing, and speaking skills to engage students in community-based conversations that cultivate meaning making (Applebee et al., 2003; Boyd & Markarian, 2015; DiCerbo et al., 2014; Higham et al., 2014). In a large-scale quantitative study, Applebee et al. (2003) examined the relationship between student literacy performance and discussion-based approaches. They observed teachers in 64 diverse classrooms across 5 states in middle school and high school classrooms in both city districts and suburban districts. Teachers were asked to engage students in a literature discussion in whatever form the discussions were typically implemented. Measures were derived from teacher and student questionnaires as well as student literacy performance. Nystrand's (1999) CLASS 3.0 was also utilized to analyze classroom discussion and related activities, such as questions asked

by teachers and students, materials they used, and social interactions of participants. Researchers focused their observations of instruction on open discussion, authentic teacher questions, and questions with uptake—the latter being defined as subsequent questions asked in a discussion that incorporated ideas of a previous speaker.

Results from Applebee et al. (2003) indicated that discussion-based approaches implemented in an environment of high academic demands contributed most to students’ internalization of knowledge and skills that are essential for success in challenging literacy tasks. For example, when teachers asked students to use others’ questions and comments to build discussion, they did, and the questions students asked illustrated evaluation or analysis. The data gathered by these researchers also suggested that the discussion-based approaches were also effective for students of varying ability levels, races, and ethnicities; however, the results also revealed inconsistencies in tracked classrooms. Overall, students from the “low track” in this detracked class were less engaged in all aspects of effective English instruction, particularly discussion activities, which researchers interpreted as evidence of a lack of discussion-based instruction in lower tracked classes (Applebee et al., 2003). Thus, the objective of my dissertation was to examine how diverse students engaged in dialogic methodologies that would be relevant to how these students perceived themselves as writers.

Detracking in schools is the heterogeneous grouping of students in an effort to ensure that all students, regardless of race, class, or academic ability, have equal access to high-quality education (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Burris (2014) identified the practice of tracking as the sorting of students within a school that results in inequitable access to academic curriculum and the opportunity to learn. Tracking is also referred to as ability grouping and is based on the belief that students learn best and achieve the most when placed in classrooms with peers of similar

learning abilities. However, research on detracking reform has consistently shown that all students, particularly students in the low track, benefit academically and socio-emotionally (Burris, 2014; Snell & Lefstein, 2018).

According to Lyle (2008), dialogic teaching is a process that promotes the inclusion of all students and contributes to the establishment of communities of learners. Furthermore, dialogue has the power to enable student voice to be accessed and legitimized. Alexander’s (2006) research concluded that a dialogic approach encourages students who normally do not contribute to class discussions gain the confidence to participate. With regard to the current study, it was critical to examine the implications of dialogue in the detracked classroom, considering the overwhelming data that supported the benefits of dialogue for all students and the influence on writing identity.

Another study by Boyd and Markarian (2015) focused on how discourse structures typically associated with recitation could be appropriated differently through diverse discourse structures. This study challenged approaches featured in prior research studies that interpreted conventional classroom dialogue in terms of its surface features, such as the use of open questions. They argued that dialogic teaching is more functional than structural and that teachers can achieve dialogic discourse in their classrooms through instructional approaches that invite and develop a safe space within which students can be engaged in inquiry-based cognitive activities. The purpose of their study was to uncover and examine the underlying instructional stances of the classroom teacher that influence the meaning-making process of elementary students in a mainstreamed classroom engaged in book talks. A dialogic instructional stance was observable by patterns of talk, such as turn-taking protocols (Chinn et al., 2001; Nystrand et al., 1997), agenda setting in talk such as topic choice and interpretive authority (Aukerman, 2013),

and contingent practices and inter-animation of ideas such as discussion that emanates from the teacher (Boyd, 2012; Boyd & Rubin, 2006). To guide their observations, researchers employed narrative analysis and cross-episodic contingency analysis to examine the connection between the following theoretical dialogic frameworks and discourse practices that promote dialogic function: dimensions of talk (Lefstein, 2010), functions of classroom talk (Rubin, 1990), and characteristics of classroom talk (Alexander, 2020).

By focusing on the teacher's instructional dialogue and the subsequent classroom discourse through the lens of these integrated frameworks, Boyd and Markarian (2015) examined dialogue and the cognitive patterns of students' personal understandings; discourse exchanges that went beyond exchanging pleasantries and established situations of shared inquiry; and classroom talk that was supportive, reciprocal, collective, cumulative, and purposeful (Alexander, 2020). Researchers concluded that dialogic teaching practices are dependent upon the teacher's learning objectives and the specific content of the lesson. Through the observations of classroom exchanges and analysis of students' reading logs, researchers argued that discourse cannot be scripted as has been touted by the Common Core State Standards but must be grounded in the teacher's instructional stance, pedagogical flexibility, oral fluency, and willingness to listen to students and continue with discourse that directly and organically responds to students' ideas.

Combined, these studies on classroom discourse solidify the influence of dialogue on cognitive development. Furthermore, dialogue is characterized by community building in classrooms where students share knowledge and reasoning in an inquiry-based environment (Michaels et al., 2008). This aspect of discourse was of particular importance to my study, as learning to write is a social activity in which language plays a predominant and crucial role

(Hillocks, 1987; Hyland, 2007; Lucas et al., 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). In the next section of this review, I present a discussion of meta-linguistic approaches to further substantiate the critical connection between dialogue and writing identity.

Academic Language and Meta-Linguistic Approaches for Diverse Students

In addition to emphasizing the importance of instructional stances in classroom discourse, Boyd and Markarian's study (2015) highlighted the significance of cultivating student meta-linguistic awareness, a consistent theme in the research on dialogic pedagogy. In their study, one of the instructional stances used by the teacher that was deemed an instrumental factor in student learning was direct teaching of his students' use of syntactical structures. Several other studies also supported the influential role of explicit attention to both language and academic language in the learning process, particularly in the ELA classroom (Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2008; Camhi & Ebsworth, 2008; Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001; DiCerbo et al., 2014). Although the majority of these studies examined meta-language practices predominantly with ELLs, the data were also relevant to my study of writing development in a classroom that included students of mixed-ability levels, different ethnicities, and varied socioeconomic status. Moreover, it was crucial for understanding the cognitive and social connections between classroom dialogue and academic language in the production and shaping of writing and identity.

Academic English or academic language is commonly understood to be the medium through which concepts and skills are learned, social relationships and identities are formed, and increasingly complex content-specific understandings develop over time (DiCerbo et al., 2014). It was also described as being the language used in daily interactions and considered essential for achieving success in all content-area disciplines in school (De Oliveira, 2016; Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Of particular importance for my study is how the use of academic

language in the classroom contributed to students' writing identities. For example, Turkan, et al. (2014) proposed the use of Disciplinary Linguistic Knowledge (DLK) as a way for teachers to help their students comprehend the content in a specific discipline. Doing so requires teachers to have knowledge of lexical, syntactical, and discourse aspects inherent in a particular content area. Drawing on this principle, my research was concerned with implementing writing pedagogy that was culturally and linguistically responsive, or in other words, instruction that was appropriate and effective for all learners.

In her study of a language-based approach to content instruction, De Oliveira (2016) studied the effects of interactional scaffolding of two teachers on student learning in mainstream content-area classrooms with ELLs. In this approach, teachers link students' funds of knowledge from a wide variety of experiences to help identify a specific learning area based on students' current levels of knowledge. Additionally, similar to Boyd and Markarian's (2015) work, researchers examined how teachers directed discourse based on the students' contributions. This was followed by observations of the teachers' response and feedback system. De Oliveira's research procedures included compiling field notes of school activities and classroom instruction, video recordings of lessons, and interviews with teachers. Results of this study supported previous findings that implementing general strategies for ELLs in content-area classrooms is not sufficient in students' literacy development (DiCerbo et al., 2014; Turkan et al., 2014). In fact, according to De Oliveira (2016), it is crucial that students are immersed in scaffolded instruction to explicitly learn how language expresses disciplinary knowledge. Scaffolding in this context was the use of oral discourse to prompt the elaboration of ideas, build academic literacy, and cultivate classroom discourse through the teachers' strategic verbal response to students as they progressed through the learning experience (De Oliveira, 2016; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Several related studies supported these findings on scaffolded instruction and addressed ways in which the success of students is dependent on their understandings of the norms and patterns of language as used in a particular content area. In their review of teaching academic English to ELLs, DiCerbo et al. (2014) initiated an inquiry into the teaching of academic English to ELLs for the purpose of understanding how it was conceptualized in classrooms and to inform practitioners of instructional practices that would benefit ELLs and other students with little exposure to academic language. Researchers compiled studies on various strands of academic English—one of which included an examination on the length and complexity of sentences, a central principle in academic genres. Their results were closely related to Halliday's (1994) seminal research on systemic functional linguistics as well as Schleppegrell's (2004) research on meta-language awareness, both of which viewed grammar not as units of structure but as configurations of language patterns that are typical or expected in a particular social context. These studies illustrated the necessity of explicit instruction of academic language and reinforced its inclusion in an effective writing program.

In other studies, researchers specifically focused on meta-linguistic approaches and writing instruction and sought understandings about how ELLs could develop greater control and proficiency in their writing. One action research study collected quantitative and qualitative data for over three years from 1,016 ELLs at an urban community college comparing learning outcomes from experimental L2 writing classes to classes using other more conventional approaches (Camhi & Ebsworth, 2008). Camhi's (1999) experimental approach known as the GAINS writing approach (Grammar Awareness through Isolation, Integration, and Scaffolding) incorporated a reflective, meta-cognitive component within a process-oriented writing environment. Students in both groups were involved in process writing approaches, but students

in the experimental groups were also engaged in activities throughout the writing process that included self-directed grammar correction of syntactical structures and scaffolded guidance of rhetorical structures. Results based on interviews, questionnaires, and writing assessments indicated that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher number of passing scores on the assessments. The researchers argued that the meta-linguistic component that addressed sentence-level grammar and rhetorical cohesion was a factor in the students’ success. These studies are included in this review as they illustrate a rationale for including elements of both process and product approaches in a writing program.

Another related study by Aguirre-Munoz et al. (2008) supported the findings of previous studies that argued for explicit instruction in academic language (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; De Oliveira, 2016; Halliday, 1994; Schleppegrell, 2004). Their study focused on 21 mainstream teachers from three urban middle schools in Southern California who participated in a writing institute where they were trained in genre-based methods grounded in systemic functional linguistics. After being trained, teachers assessed student samples, took part in interviews, and were observed in their classrooms. Researchers gathered data from teacher responses in pre- and post-tests that measured the degree to which teacher feedback changed as a result of the training. For example, a traditional comment on student writing was “uses essay format,” whereas a comment that showed awareness of functional linguistics was indicated by a phrase such as “integrates transition and sequence words; paragraph flow” (Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2008, p. 305). Each set of comments by the teachers were then compared using a *t* test procedure. Their findings provided strong qualitative evidence that teachers who were trained in genre approaches illustrated a significant increase in their knowledge about language and subsequently were able to implement explicit academic-language instruction with moderate to high levels of success.

Moreover, of those teachers who attempted to implement the genre-based strategies, evidence suggested an increase in students' linguistic understandings of language.

Cultivating an environment in the ELA classroom that embraces dialogic methodologies creates opportunities for students to engage in discussions about language. As such, in the context of shared experience, students come to understand linguistic systems and develop proficiency as they interact with others. I hope the preceding sections on writing identity and dialogic pedagogy have illustrated their integral relationship to each other. I have also validated that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and that writing identity as explained by Ivanic (1998) is a product of both an individual's inner self and the interactions that take place in the learning environment between students and teachers. The final section of this review presents seminal research on the primary approaches to writing pedagogy and their applicability to the diverse ELA classroom.

Research on Writing Pedagogy

To understand how students learn to write, this section includes an overview of writing methodologies that have been the subject of research for the past 30 years. Teaching writing is one of the most challenging roles of the ELA teacher, and the research on writing pedagogy has typically categorized methodologies as being process-, product-, and genre-based approaches. A review of these methods and their related instructional strategies reflected both consistent and conflicting findings about which methods and strategies are most preferred or effective (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987; Hyland, 2007; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017; Pasand & Haghi, 2013), an argument that becomes more complex when these ideas are applied to diverse learners. Therefore, the following discussion of the research on each approach is guided by its relevance for all learners.

Process-, Product-, and Genre-Based Approaches Among Diverse Populations

A traditional understanding of the process approach to writing instruction is typically situated in a writer’s workshop setting and is one that emphasizes the recursive nature of writing, implemented through a variety of prewriting, drafting, evaluating, and revising activities (Hillocks, 1987; Hyland, 2007; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). Proponents of this approach value its nonlinear qualities and exploratory characteristics through which writers generate ideas and discover meaning through their interactions with peers in a socially constructed classroom setting. Researchers cited several positive outcomes of process approaches for learners, which included heightened analytic and critical-thinking skills developed through peer review and feedback (Patthey-Chavez et al., 2004) as well as noticeable increased fluency in the writing of ELLs (Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001).

Opponents of process writing instruction argued that although students benefit from being immersed in the writing experience, the planning, drafting, and reviewing structure is too narrowly focused on skills, thus interfering with language development (Hyland, 2007; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017). Other criticisms cited low English proficiency as limiting to the peer-review process as well as perceived student preferences for teacher feedback over peer feedback (Zhang, 2008); however, S. H. Kim (2015) argued that with carefully planned peer-review training sessions, ELLs can fully engage in the collaborative spirit of peer conferencing and ultimately gain a greater sense of control and authorial voice.

Meanwhile, product-based writing approaches have been described as being prescriptive in nature, focusing on grammatical structures with an emphasis on a final product that is coherent and error free (Hillocks, 1986; Nordin & Mohammad, 2017; Pasand & Haghi, 2013). From a purist perspective, this approach is grounded in the belief that students can learn to write through

traditional grammar instruction, which entails consistent exposure to decontextualized material. Several researchers have concluded that traditional school grammar instruction does not improve the quality of writing (Hillocks, 1987; Hyland, 2007; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2004; Schleppegrell & Go, 2007).

However, a consistent and compelling theme in the body of research on the literacy development of diverse learners is the significance of explicit instruction in the linguistic features of academic language (Camhi & Ebsworth, 2008; Hyland, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2013; Schleppegrell & Go, 2007; Turkan et al., 2014). For example, Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics is an approach to language learning that helps students understand the relationship between meaning and form, which in turn enables students to generate more complex ideas (Schleppegrell & Go, 2007).

A third approach to writing pedagogy is a genre-based instructional procedure that has been criticized by process-oriented teachers as being restrictive to student writers because it teaches writing through discourse analysis of mentor texts. Hyland (2007) rejected this interpretation, arguing that teaching students to study patterns of writing does not dictate how they should write but in reality enables them to make informed choices about how to express their unique ideas. For ELLs as well as native speakers, studying genres is powerful and provides writers with a framework within which to build their ideas (Hyland, 2007).

In a seminal study about writing instruction, Hillocks (1987) reviewed 2,000 studies on the composing process and teaching methods of writing to gain understandings about the knowledge students need to write effectively and the subsequent implications for curriculum design. He concluded that the most significant factor in producing effective writers was students' procedural knowledge about the composing process, the specific strategies writers use to produce

discourse, and their knowledge of how to transform their ideas into writing (Hillocks, 1987). A related study conducted by Scardamalia et al. (1982) examined the writing behaviors of fourth and sixth graders to study the relationship between content knowledge and processes and discourse knowledge and processes. When asked to write as much as possible in response to a series of prompts, even after students seemed to have exhausted their ideas, students were able to generate more writing when prompted by a conversational partner. The researchers concluded that in situations where student writers produce less text, it may not be due to a lack of knowledge about the topic but because of a lack of adequate means of accessing that information. Hillocks (1987) emphasized the essential nature of students’ understanding of both discourse and procedural knowledge in writing development.

Both studies were relevant for my research, as they highlighted the need for students to be aware of the discursive environment of the classroom to participate in the composing process of writing. Findings from both studies indicated that students require explicit instruction in the procedural knowledge of composing and how to communicate with other students about their writing. During the data analysis stage of the current study, as students engaged in these conversations about their writing, their dialogic exchanges repeatedly illuminated aspects of their writing identity. For example, during reflective discussions in which students discussed their reasoning and rationale for specific writing decisions, students were able to articulate their thought process when applying the feedback given to them during a peer-review session.

In their meta-analysis, Graham and Perin (2007) identified 11 elements of writing that, when combined, were found to be effective for developing writing literacies in adolescent writers. These elements include writing strategies: summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process-

writing approach, study of models, and writing for content learning. The researchers stressed that although each element is a distinct entity, they are often related to one another and integrating one element can lead to the inclusion of another. In fact, teachers can potentially create a writing program for a wide variety of learners just by finding the optimal combination of these elements. Graham and Perin (2007) also noted that several of these instructional elements such as inquiry activities and the process-writing approach lend themselves to a classroom environment that necessitates talking between students and their teachers.

Combined, these studies on writing pedagogy illustrated several writing practices that have positively impacted the writing development of learners. Furthermore, many writing strategies have been found to be conducive to cultivating a classroom in which dialogue through social interaction is prominent. Each study discussed in this chapter served to inform the writing instruction that was implemented over the course of the school year. It is crucial that students have access to writing pedagogy that has been consistently validated by researchers, and I hope that the results of my ethnographic study discussed in Chapter Five encourage teachers to consider the extant research on writing instruction.

Conclusion

In Chapter One, I emphasized that writing is a multi-layered, complex process that is highly individualized and one of an ELA teacher’s most challenging responsibilities, especially in a mixed-ability setting. Teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms provides multiple opportunities for educators to help students develop their identities as writers. This review has presented research reinforcing the conceptualization of an individual’s identity as a phenomenon that emanates from the integration of cultural experiences and social relations.

An integral part of this dissertation is the belief that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and that students think, learn, and develop their writing literacy in social contexts that involve interactions with others (Beach et al., 2016). The research has also illustrated that writing identity is shaped in part by these experiences and is connected to the ways in which the classroom teacher provides opportunities for learners to engage in research-based writing pedagogy and dialogic methodologies.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Research Design: Ways of Discovering Writing Identity

This chapter describes the methods and rationale used to implement an ethnographic study of the writing identities of high school students in a mixed-ability ELA classroom. Throughout previous chapters, I have established that writing pedagogy has been studied extensively and that scholars have consistently produced evidence that supports the implementation of preferred instructional methodologies, such as process approaches and reflective practices that should be included in a comprehensive writing program in ELA classrooms (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987). It has also been pointed out that although much has been documented about how writing is best taught in the classroom, national progress reports such as the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) and the National Commission on Writing (2003) have illustrated that the majority of 12th-grade students across the nation have typically been performing at basic competency levels.

As discussed in earlier chapters, an individual’s developing identity emanates from one’s cultural background and experiences and is crucial to understanding the teaching and learning of writing and a writer’s development (Gee, 2001; Ivanic, 1998). Students enter the ELA classroom with a writing identity that is a result of their previous exposure to and participation in a particular social and academic group—such as their cultural backgrounds or their prior classroom experiences as a result of tracking—and the discourses within those environments (Ivanic, 1998; Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al., 1997). Consequently, for many students, the diverse nature of the high school classroom may or may not support their social identities (Beachum, 2020).

The scholarship on sociocultural orientations to writing instruction is that it primarily addresses effective instructional strategies and practices rather than the impact of cultural backgrounds on a writer's identity and development (Kwok et al., 2016). It is also understood by scholars that writing is a social activity (Addison & McGee, 2010; Beck, 2009; Fecho & Schultz, 2000), and research has consistently shown that students think, learn, and develop their literacies in social contexts that involve an interaction between text and peers (Beach et al., 2016). Hence, the dialogue that occurs in these interactions is consequential for learning and leads to collaborative critical inquiry and an open exchange of thinking (Alexander, 2008; Bakhtin, 1981; Burbules, 1993), which in turn influences the ways in which students respond to one another as writers, how they come to perceive themselves as writers, and the role of writing in their daily lives.

Despite the vast number of studies on dialogic pedagogy—discussion-based instructional approaches to student learning—fewer studies address the influence of classroom dialogue on the writing process (Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Lyle, 2008; Michaels et al., 2008). Shor and Freire (1987) argued that dialogue is part of being human and that through communication, humans transform reality. This conceptualization of dialogue correlates to Ivanic's (1998) proposition that through dialogue with one another within the discoursal community of the classroom, identities are socially constructed and influenced by culturally recognized representations of reality. Thus, studying the dialogic interactions between and among students is key to understanding how writing identity develops.

Teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse and detracked classrooms provides multiple opportunities for educators to help students develop their identities as writers. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing

identity of diverse students manifests in a classroom in which writing is taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. By immersing myself as an ethnographer in the learning environment with my students, I experienced firsthand how their unique writing identities developed over the course of an academic school year.

The Research Questions: Three Dimensions

The following sections identify and explain my research questions, the underlying theoretical framework that guided this ethnographic research design and helped me gain in-depth understandings of my students’ writing identities. My research design was driven by the following research questions:

RQ: How do the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners develop and evolve within a dialogic ELA classroom?

RQ1: What role do the culture and climate of this diverse mixed-ability–level ELA classroom play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1a: What role does dialogue play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1b: What role do varied approaches to writing instruction play in the development of students’ writing identities?

These questions were designed to correlate to my theoretical framework, which has been diagrammed and explained in earlier chapters. Ivanic’s (1998) discoursal construction of identity recognized that the interactions that occur in a classroom are a critical component of how students perceive themselves as individuals and writers and therefore was adapted for use in this study. Utilizing this framework allowed writing identity to be examined in three inextricably linked layers: (1) macro layer, the culture and climate of a mixed-ability class with a diverse student population; (2) meso layer, the social interactions that students experience through

dialogue with one another; and (3) micro layer, the development of individual writing identities that students bring to the classroom.

Writing is a multi-layered, complex process that is highly individualized and is one of an ELA teacher's most challenging responsibilities, especially in a mixed-ability setting. Therefore, these layered research questions provided a structure through which I could maintain a focus on the individual student within the exchanges in the learning environment. These guiding questions helped me make sense of the data and the connection to each student's developing writing identity. The next section explains the underlying qualitative and constructivist perspectives that guided my research design and data analysis.

Research Paradigm: A Social Constructivist Approach

Qualitative researchers seek to find meaning in the context or the participants by interacting with individuals in a natural setting and interpreting how they make meaning. For the qualitative researcher, meaning is always derived from a social interaction with the participants via interviews or observations. The researcher recognizes how his or her own personal views and background shape the interpretations of their participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998). According to Goodall (2000), an ethnographer requires "habits of being in the world, of being able to talk and listen to people, and of being able to write—habits that are beyond method" (p. 10). Maanen (1995) compared ethnography to a documentary in that "someone actually goes 'out there,' draws close to people and events, and then writes about what is learned in situations" (p. 3). Being a participant-observer in this classroom study provided me with an insider's view of the day-to-day dialogic and cultural exchanges of my students.

As ethnographic process recognizes the complexity of human social life, and taking an investigative stance in collecting and analyzing data is a natural assumption for the researcher

(Tsui, 2014). Essentially, the participant-observer is an explorer. Therefore, knowing that my observations and interactions with students would help me construct meaningful connections between my research questions and propositions about the significance of dialogic methodologies on students’ academic writing identities, reflexivity played an important role.

At the core of my research study is the conviction that writing is intricately related to social interaction among learners, and when students are provided with dialogic methodologies that support discussion and learning, writing identity develops and evolves. From September 2019 to June 2020, each student experienced a shift in understanding of how he or she identified as a writer, although the students progressed at varying rates in both proficiency and fluency. Designing and implementing an ethnography afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in the students’ process of writing identity development.

Theoretical Framework

As explained in Chapter One, researchers of identity in written discourse conceptualized the development of writing identity as either an individualist or social-constructionist phenomenon. Those who view identity as individualistic see writing as emanating from an individual’s personal self-expression, which manifests through an implicit process that is unique to each individual. A social-constructionist orientation relies more on the multiple ways writers are influenced by socially shared sets of assumptions and accepted features and patterns of language (Matsuda, 2015). As writing identity correlates with adolescence and classroom writing experiences, both theories of identity were of critical importance to the present study.

It has also been established that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978), and writing identity as explained by Ivanic (1998) is a product of both an individual’s inner self and the interactions that take place in the learning environment between and among students and

teachers. For this reason, studying writing identity in the classroom was critical to understanding how students came to see themselves as writers and how they understood the role of writing in their daily lives (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Moreover, as writing identity in the high school classroom has not been as extensively researched as have instructional practices (Kwok et al., 2016; Matsuda, 2015), the present study sought to address this gap. As such, adapting Ivanic's (1998) discoursal construction of writer identity to examine the dialogue and social interactions of students was the theoretical lens through which I examined the developing writing identities of diverse learners in the ELA classroom.

Ivanic's (1998) framework embodied the belief that writing identity is a product of both individual and social interactions, so another crucial consideration in this study was the relationship between dialogue and writing identity. The discoursal construction of identity framework guided my analysis and led me to new understandings about how writing identity could be viewed within the social interactions taking place in the classroom. Ivanic's framework was essential for making sense of how student-student dialogue supported the construction of writing identity and was critical in the design of my new framework discussed in Chapter Five.

Role of the Researcher

Prior to taking on the role of both researcher and participant, I had considered implementing my research in another school district or in another teacher's classroom in the high school where I teach ELA. However, as the research questions evolved, I realized that I was interested in studying my own pedagogy to understand how the dialogic methods I was using were genuinely contributing to my students' growth as readers and writers. Second, as explained in earlier chapters, teaching writing is an abstract practice, which makes it challenging for the teacher to understand the degree to which each individual learner is aware of his or her own

learning that is occurring, especially when the instruction takes place in a diverse setting. Much of my writing pedagogy is based on the principle that writers are always growing and developing, and consequently, students truly learn about writing by doing it, talking about it, and refining it. Mine is not a unique philosophy; I have relied heavily on writing research and professional training in organizations such as the National Writing Project to expand my knowledge about how diverse learners write more effectively and fluently. As a practitioner, I have spent years wondering if the strategies and methods I was employing in the classroom actually increased my students’ abilities to think more critically, write with increased sophistication, and speak with conviction. This study was largely the result of the need for tangible evidence that my pedagogy had meaningful and lasting outcomes.

Dewey (1929) argued that one of a teacher’s most important responsibilities is to investigate pedagogical issues through inquiry, a practice that would ultimately lead to good teaching. This concept is still relevant today; when teachers allow students to construct understandings of concepts in a shared classroom setting, students become engineers of their own learning and begin to experience independent thought (Kincheloe, 2003). Therefore, as a conscientious educator, my goal is to always provide my students with effective teaching, so it is imperative that I embrace the role of researcher to help me answer my research questions about literacy development. Positioning myself as the researcher also provides access to the classroom where I will design and implement the instruction and learn alongside my students. As stated earlier in this section, the ethnographer’s experience in gathering and analyzing data collected from fieldwork is a journey of self-discovery (Maanen, 1995), and the story of my classroom

Research Design and Methods

Identity development occurs during the critical stage of adolescence when most adolescents experience writing instruction in the classroom (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Hence, the student’s identity is subject to fluctuations that are impacted by how the individual navigates through the discursive practices of the classroom (Hyland, 2015). In this study, the participants are 12th-grade ELA students who are distinguished from each other by race, socioeconomic status, and perceived academic ability. Much of their identity emanates from their cultural experiences and is negotiated through social relations; hence, a student’s cultural identity plays a major role in determining academic progress (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Consequently, it is critical that the identities of these students are supported in their ELA classroom through effective writing instruction implemented through intentional dialogue with peers.

Site Selection and Access

The site chosen for this study is a suburban high school located in New York State. Having worked in this school for 27 years, I have witnessed the changing demographics of the racial/ethnic landscape in the school community, marking a significant shift in diversity. At the time of the study, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians comprised 35% of this high school’s population, an increase from 23% in 2000 (NYS Report Card, 2018). In the high school, 70% of students were White in the 2017-2018 school year and 23% were Latinx (which was a 10% increase since the 2008-2009 school year) and 3% African American. In addition, more than 40% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (NYS Report Card, 2018).

These statistics reflected the shift in this district from a predominantly White population to one that is becoming more racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. The new student body has been infused and reinvigorated with increased numbers of Latinx students, African

Americans, Indian, and Asian/Southeast Asian youngsters. However, at the time of this study with a teaching staff of 150, teachers of color were virtually nonexistent, a situation that I believe contributed to an ELA curriculum that was weakened by a lack of linguistic and cultural responsiveness.

In their senior year, students in this school may elect to study Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, College English (for credit), or a variety of other courses that qualifies as the fourth-year English credit required for graduation; however, a large proportion of the students in this school enroll in the college-preparatory class, the site for this study. As explained earlier in this dissertation, the students in this 12th-grade ELA classroom have been previously tracked throughout their secondary school careers. Students enrolled in this class have mixed ability levels (including some with learning disabilities) and come from different racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. When they enter the college-preparatory class in their senior year, many of them find themselves in an unfamiliar and more competitive learning environment, particularly if they had been previously tracked in lower levels.

Literacy and Identity in the ELA Classroom

Throughout the dissertation, it has been emphasized that dialogic teaching methodologies promoted cognitive development and critical inquiry, gave voice to struggling students (Snell & Lefstein, 2018), deepened the level of student engagement, improved student performance on a variety of assessments (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Higham et al., 2014; Lyle, 2008), and resulted in overall academic achievement for diverse populations of students (Michaels et al., 2008). As a teacher, since implementing dialogic teaching for several years, I have witnessed firsthand the dynamic shift in student interaction through the power of dialogue and have worked to cultivate

an inquiry-based classroom to provide my students with opportunities to practice engaging in academic conversations about significant and relevant issues. I wanted the classroom to be a place where students would become comfortable talking with other students about what some may find to be uncomfortable topics related to immigration, race, and poverty. At the time, the primary objective was for students to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and much of the instruction through which students practiced these skills organically became tethered to the social and cultural happenings in the rapidly changing world. As pivotal events in the country and the world such as mass school shootings and racially charged issues presented students with unfamiliar ideologies, the discussions in our classroom invited critical inquiry and contemplation. It became apparent that through their literacies, students were presenting their values, beliefs, and perspectives. Prior to this shift in teaching methodologies, I had not considered the role of identity in student learning.

Ethnographic Design

Consequently, this ethnography was designed to be conducted in my classroom to study the writing identities of my students more closely. One rationalization for choosing my classroom as the site is that my research questions were based on the social interactions I have observed in the classroom. Moreover, I have been intricately involved in my students’ learning processes and wanted to understand more about how dialogue and writing instruction contributed to writing identity formation. Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) posited that every study has two stories to tell: One is about the culture through the eyes of the participants and the other is how the researcher proceeds with the research. Maanen (1995) referred to this as finding the patterns in the data that suggest or tell the emerging story of the researcher’s interpretation of a culture. For example, the ethnographer’s experience in gathering and analyzing data collected

from fieldwork is a journey of self-discovery. The writing of field notes connects the story of culture to the story of the researcher within the culture (Maanen, 1995). Therefore, the story of my classroom experience must be explored and reported by me.

***Sampling procedures*.** Students’ social identities in the classroom emerged from their differences in race, ethnicities, cultural experiences, and language proficiency. The 12th-grade students in the College English class were racially, socioeconomically, and academically mixed. Some of the students chose to enroll in advanced placement classes in 11th grade, some were enrolled in English honors, and other students were placed in a regular education or an inclusive setting. The 12th-grade college class may include students with IEPs, declassified special education students, students with 504 modifications, ELLs, and students who struggle with the writing process for various reasons. These classifications are discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

In her study of first-year college composition students, Sealey-Ruiz (2011) studied the racial literacy development of 21 students whom she described as ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse individuals. She was the professor of the course and, as a participant-observer, had an active role in teaching the content and observing the development of her students’ racial literacy. Similarly, the students in my class were also ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, and I wanted to understand how my students’ literacy and identity developed over time through my instructional program and their interactions with each other.

My procedure for eliciting student participation was to present an overview of the study at the beginning of the school year and to immerse them in an exploration of their perceived writing identities. Each student was given the appropriate consent form, which was signed by their parent or legal guardian. Students were assured confidentiality throughout the study through the

use of pseudonyms during data collection and analysis. To mitigate any student hesitation or discomfort with being videotaped or recorded, I established instructional protocols that allowed for student choice in various contexts.

To begin cultivating a sense of agency in students, they were presented with situations in which they would take onus for their decisions. For example, from the beginning of the school year, students were often given opportunities to choose texts, partners, and reading groups, which provided me with preliminary data about their choices and decisions. Additionally, instructional procedures in the classroom were designed to create camaraderie between and among students to offset any discomfort that might potentially arise with peer review or group discussions. Video recordings and audiotaping began in February 2020, so by that time, students had become increasingly confident in their sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning.

In the event that some students might express discomfort with being videotaped or recorded or parents did not sign the consent form, I had planned to group students strategically so that parents/students who did not wish to participate would not be included in the taping or recording. Another alternative was to have students record themselves as they worked in groups, but considering the potential ethical issues, that was not a viable solution. As it turned out, all students and parents signed the consent forms to participate in the study, and no students were uncomfortable with being audio- or video-taped.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting phase two of the study, I obtained IRB approval to diminish the potential for risks to the participants (See Appendix A). Additionally, I met with the district superintendent, principal of the high school, and the ELA curriculum leader to discuss my

proposed study and to secure school board approval. Students and their parents signed informed consent forms that disclosed all aspects of the research design.

Having worked with hundreds of adolescents throughout my years of teaching, I was concerned that students would be initially uncomfortable with being recorded during their small group discussions, but eventually, students relaxed and shared their ideas with each other, oblivious to the cell phone placed in the center of their circle. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time, so it was critical to build trust and credibility as a teacher from the first day of school by constructing a learning environment that encouraged individuality and respected diversity.

One of my primary concerns was to avoid disrupting the educational environment of this senior-level college-preparatory class. To navigate the role of teacher and researcher in a class of 25 high school seniors, I reminded myself that although my research was of critical importance, the students and my professional obligations were the priority. As I had suspected, the students demanded more of my time to add additional writing conferences to my schedule and provide feedback on their college essays, and so I anticipated that it would be challenging for me to balance the roles of teacher and researcher. However, remaining mindful at all times of my professional expectations enabled me to fulfill my obligations as a public school teacher and at the same time comply with the ethics of responsible research.

Perhaps the most critical area of concern was maintaining objectivity when analyzing the data. To reach quality conclusions, identify patterns, and make sense of the data, a researcher must apply a degree of skepticism when thinking about and evaluating emerging themes and concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure that my interpretations were as unbiased as possible, I found daily analytical memos to be most helpful to drawing conclusions about the

data. When re-reading and recoding interviews, I often revisited audio recordings and examples of student writing to clarify the emerging themes. Throughout the study, enlisting the participation of external auditors—in this case, teachers, curriculum leaders, and my committee members—assisted me in conceptualizing my findings and uncovering any potential biases I presented.

Data-Collection Procedures

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend utilizing multiple forms of data and spending a considerable time gathering information in the natural setting. To capture the essence of the interconnections between and among students, I used the following types of data: one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, audio- and video-taped discussions and lesson observations, measures of student literacy in the form of formative and summative writing samples, field notes, and reflexive memos. The audio taping of student discussions and video taping of classroom observations took place from February 2020 to June 2020. However, from September 2019 to January 2020, the data collection consisted of field notes, reflexive memos, lesson plans, student notebooks, and writing samples to gain understandings about the students, their writing experiences, and their self-perceptions. In the following section, I delineate the procedures in the pre-dissertation phase and the second phase of the data collection.

Pre-Dissertation Data Collection

Typically, in the first two weeks of school, in addition to diagnostic procedures to assess students' writing literacy, I ask students to reflect on their reading and writing experiences and how they have been impacted by those events. From September 2019 to January 2020, I observed students in small groups and wrote field notes and analytical memos. I analyzed their reflective entries in the writer's notebook and examined their writing as it manifested throughout

the stages of the writing process. In September 2019, students wrote about these events in a writer’s notebook, a fluency tool, which is a staple in my writing program. To establish dialogic procedures, students were immediately arranged in pairs or triads and shared their reading and writing histories. In Chapter Four, I describe these lessons and early interactions to provide a context for the research setting. Throughout this pre-dissertation period, I wrote reflections to capture my emerging understandings of this new group of learners, with a particular focus on their comfort level, the degree to which they engaged in discussion with their peers, and their physical mannerisms when speaking with their peers and me. These reflective notes were informative when grouping students in subsequent pairs and larger groups for discussions, peer review sessions, and book talks.

Students also wrote a literacy reflection that required them to examine their attitudes about their reading and writing abilities, which they later shared with peers. Additionally, students completed generative entries in the writer’s notebook regarding their histories as readers and writers as well as reflections on their learning styles. These reflective assignments naturally lent themselves to dialogue between and among students and allowed me to establish protocols for dialogic interaction.

In October 2019, students began an exploration of the concept of *identity* and studied various texts illustrating various perspectives of identity formation. Additionally, students viewed and responded to TedTalks and other videos that presented different aspects about identity. As students engaged with these texts, they wrote reflections and engaged in multiple lessons and discussions to share their emerging understandings of identity. In late October, students created mind maps that illustrated the many facets of their identities and their perception

of their writing identities. Findings from these lessons are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Phase Two of Data Collection

After receiving IRB and school board approval in February 2020, I collected a variety of formative writing samples, field notes and analytical memos, audio recordings of student discussions, lesson plans, and classroom artifacts. As the teacher-participant observer, I had access to all of the writing and reviewed all assignments. To analyze the development of students' formative writing, the writer's notebook was collected twice per 10-week marking period. Formative samples also included various essay drafts and generative writing activities in preparation for a research paper that students wrote in the spring of 2020.

Observations of classroom instruction that were concomitant with these data samples were recorded through audio and video, capturing the students' naturally occurring dialogue throughout the writing process. A detailed account of the course content is discussed in Chapter 5. Students had opportunities during the school year to interact with all peers at some point and also participated in reading and writing groups composed of four or five students. In February and March, students worked collaboratively to critically analyze a book chosen by the group. These discussions were audio- or video-taped after which I wrote analytical memos. Additionally, as the participant and observer, I joined the book discussions and recorded field notes, which were later analyzed and coded for emerging themes.

The optimal use of field notes during data collection was of critical importance to this study and would ultimately guide instructional decisions and interpretation of writing samples and observations. Bogden and Biklen (2007) suggested several strategies for researchers to assist in the analysis and interpretation of ongoing data collection. Of particular relevance to my study

was the value of field notes that provided me with detailed descriptions of the participants and setting and in the observer’s comments about the events and dialogue that I witnessed. With this in mind, I strove to maintain a reflective and investigative stance as I interacted with students throughout the exploration of their writing identities.

Developing Writing Identities and Exit Interviews

By the month of March, I had a comprehensive collection of formative and summative writing, approximately 20 per student, classroom artifacts, audio- recordings, lesson plans, field notes, and analytical memos. After coding and identifying emerging themes, I cross-checked multiple sets of data that were relevant to writing identity. At the end of the study in June, I interviewed 21 of the 25 students. As stated in Chapter One, 4 students did not keep their appointments although they and their parents had signed consent to participate in the study. The interviews included the students’ reflections on their unique writing process and their literacy development throughout the year. Additionally, they evaluated the role of dialogue in the classroom and how it shaped their writing identities (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). Interviews were approximately 30 to 40 minutes and were scheduled after the final grades had been assigned. It is important to note that interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and were conducted through the Zoom virtual platform.

Data-Analysis Procedures

To present the findings as succinctly as possible, I divided the data analysis into two phases. Phase 1 covered the period from September to January, while Phase 2 included the analysis of activities and data collected from February to June. In Phase 1, I analyzed observational data of small group discussions, which also included field notes and analytical memos. I analyzed students’ reflective entries in the writer’s notebook and examined their

writing as it manifested throughout the typical stages of the writing process. Doing so provided me with insight into the students' reading and writing histories. With the growing realization that coding ethnographic data might be messy, I kept an open mind as I sifted through the data, trying to code and make meaning from the depth and breadth of information. Also in Phase 1, from September to January, the emerging data were difficult to organize and analyze. Therefore, like Saldana (2016) did in a longitudinal ethnographic study, I mixed and matched various coding methods. Overall, I used an eclectic coding system that combined exploratory, descriptive, in vivo, and pattern coding. Ultimately, pattern coding emerged as the primary method that enabled me to analyze students' developing writing identity.

As a teacher-participant observer, it was challenging to manage the multiple forms of data collected, so having an organizational plan was critical to the process. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are simultaneous, a process that is predicated on the principle of not knowing what the inquirer will discover (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the following section, I describe the sequence and approach to data analysis.

Pre-Dissertation Data Analysis

Knowing that the instructional content of the College English course was foundational for the subsequent instruction in February, I knew that preliminary data would be indispensable later in the study to piecing together the story of my students' individual and collective growth as writers. Justifiably, it is typical for ethnographers to rely on archived data to provide them with critical information about the group and culture they anticipate studying. Prior to conducting an 18-month ethnography in 2013 on hyper-diverse student populations, Malsbury (2016) began collecting data for her ethnographic case study in 2009 to explore the nuances and intricacies of the community and better understand the cultural context of the high schools she studied.

Similarly, for months prior to implementing research, Snyder (2012) reviewed archived data of her future participants: four women from STEM fields who were entering a graduate teaching program. Various documents such as application essays and field work journals were analyzed and coded to gather evidence of transformative learning. Through the coding process, Snyder became comfortable and connected to the data, which solidified emerging themes and her subsequent steps in the study. Therefore, I designed the pre-dissertation phase of the study to include the data described in the previous section.

In September 2019, students had been informed that they would be asked to be part of my dissertation study, which would start later in the school year. We spent time discussing how the research would proceed, making it clear to students that their participation was voluntary and would not impact their grades or infringe upon their confidentiality. My goal was to create an environment in which students would not feel pressured to act or behave in a way that was inconsistent with their natural tendencies. The signed consent forms from students and parents were kept in a sealed envelope in the English Coordinator's office for the duration of the school year, thereby providing assurances to students that any data at the end of the study would only be used with their permission. At the end of the study, when I reviewed the consent forms, all students had confirmed that their data could be used for the purpose of this research.

First-Cycle and Second-Cycle Coding Methods

Saldana (2016) described coding as being reverberative in nature, suggesting that the process is cyclical. He also identified first-cyle and second-cycle methods that were integral to the analysis of data in qualitative research. In general, first-cycle methods entail initial coding of data that may include but are not limited to narrative, holistic, or hypothesis coding. After initial themes are established, the researcher moves to a second cycle, which requires analytical skills

such as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, and theory building. Saldana’s description helps to illustrate the steps I took to collect and analyze the data.

First-cycle coding included examining writer’s notebook entries for data related to the theoretical foundations of writing identity that had been documented in the literature. Initially, faced with a daunting amount of data gleaned from student writing, audio and video recordings, and classroom observations, it made sense to begin the analysis with an existent conceptual framework based on the work of Burgess and Ivanic (2010). Therefore, when reading reflective entries in the writer’s notebook, I first looked for evidence of students’ autobiographical and discoursal selves. Combined with in-vivo coding, the theory-driven categories established a clear focus for subsequent data analysis in Phase Two.

By the end of Phase One, I had collected and analyzed ample data, so when the study formally commenced in February 2020, I was able to approach the data collection and analysis in Phase Two guided by the emerging themes I had started to notice and the questions that had surfaced. During this time, I had several examples of formative and summative writing as well as copious field notes, so the goal was to search for the connections between the process of writing identity construction and how it emerged in the student interactions and writing. As both researcher and instructor, these initial findings served to refine future lesson design and implementation and provided me with insight into how to dissect and understand the literacy processes at work in writing identity construction.

Second-cycle coding entailed various procedures that led to organizing the patterns that were becoming prevalent in the data analysis. In February 2020, after reading through transcripts of audio recordings of the first book talk and examining initial writing reflections, hand coding and color coding were used to examine the words, phrases, and ideas students were discussing

and writing. Also using hand coding, I further refined the codes, using a numbered chart system to make sense of the data. Prior to reading the transcriptions, I had participated with each group of students and wrote field notes and reflexive memos of the observations of group interactions. Doing so led to further refining of the codes and emerging themes. A data inventory document was then created to begin to monitor the growing collection of data.

Phase Two of Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised thinking about coded themes as expected, surprising, and codes of unusual or of conceptual interest. They also recommended a reciprocal process to identify and revise codes while collecting and analyzing data. Phase 2 included several iterations of pattern coding and recoding of the data collected from February to June 2020, consisting of essays, writer’s notebook reflections, field notes and analytical memos, audio recordings of student discussions, lesson plans, classroom artifacts, and end-of-the-year interviews conducted in June. After coding and analyzing the students’ interviews, I realized that the comments students made about their identities correlated to the data collected from the mind maps students had made in November 2019. Thus, I made the decision to recode the identity mind maps based on resulting relationships that were surfacing from student dialogue and writing.

As an ethnographer, I wanted to examine any commonalities that existed relevant to writing identity and the dialogue between students, so when reviewing transcripts of student discussions about identity, culture, and the writing process, I adapted the method Sealey-Ruiz designed (2011) for organizing patterns of recursive phrases in her study on racial literacy. She observed four recursive phrases students “moved through and between” (p. 32) as they made efforts to overcome their racist beliefs, discuss race and racism, and embrace the meaning of

being anti-racist. After establishing the four phases, she identified common words and phrases that were present in student writings and discussions, which she considered to be representative of students' individual journeys. In my study, this process was replicated throughout to isolate codes and emerging themes relevant to writing identity. Similar to Sealey-Ruiz, I also constructed tables to organize the codes and patterns of themes. Writing codes included comments that related to students' self-perceptions as writers, references to cultural and social experiences, and attitudes about writing.

To further analyze student writing throughout the study, I adapted Burgess and Ivanic's (2010) and Wortham's (2008) methods of using timescales to categorize the patterns that emerged in the data. Timescales are literacy events or periods in an individual's life that are indicative of a person's self-perception in relation to a particular stage of life, which contribute to writing identity (Wortham, 2008). For example, in a study on writing identity in adult literacy classes, Burgess and Ivanic (2010) examined their students' developing identities by analyzing writing samples for odd or surprising ideas, how the data might relate to theory, and any evidence that illustrated inconsistencies or contradictions. They used these patterns to help them make sense of how their students' identities were developing throughout the academic period.

Exit Interviews

In Chapter Four, I describe in detail how Covid-19 presented unprecedented challenges for teachers and their students. In June 2020, all students were learning remotely and graciously agreed to be interviewed through Zoom. Using a shared Google Doc, students chose an appointment time and interviews took place from June 17 through 23. Each interview was approximately 30 to 40 minutes in duration. After interviewing 21 of the 25 students who participated in this ethnographic study, each interview was transcribed using Rev.com. It is

important to note that although all students gave their signed consent to participate in the study, 4 of the students did not keep their appointments for their interviews. However, both the students and their parents had signed consent to participate in the study. To ensure objectivity, prior to the interviews, the students' final grades for the course had been calculated and entered in the school data system.

When analyzing the interview data, the most challenging task was to unravel the complexity of writing identity development within the context of my research questions, so trying to categorize and classify student responses to the interview questions became increasingly overwhelming due to the complexity of the data collection. According to Miles et al. (2014), pattern coding is appropriate for condensing large amounts of data into smaller analytic units, the development of themes, and examining social networks and human relationships. Therefore, I selected the first four students' interview transcriptions and uploaded them to Dedoose to triangulate with the data that was already collected and analyzed.

After this initial coding using Dedoose, I created tables and charts that correlated the data with the research questions. This reverberative process (Saldana, 2016) involved an extensive re-reading of the student interviews and methods such as hand coding and color coding to triangulate the data that had been collected throughout the research. To interpret the interview data more efficiently, I constructed charts that visually represented how dialogue, classroom culture, and instructional strategies supported their interconnected role in the construction of writing identity.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Qualitative research is interpretive research, and as such inherently demands that "inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as

gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that shape their interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183). As a teacher-participant observer in the study, it was critical to sustain a reflexive mindset and use practices that would not compromise the data collection and analysis. Writing analytical memos after observations or interactions with students that focused on how my role as teacher may shape my interpretation of the results supported an objective stance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, I used triangulation of data, member checking, peer examination, and clarification of researcher bias. Toward the end of the study, I met with participants to listen to their views on the emerging themes and my conclusions. During several phases of the study, peer debriefing was also used to check my interpretations of data. Moreover, throughout this chapter, I have discussed my concerns about how the role of participant-researcher could potentially bias the study, so to minimize bias, reflexivity was a consistent practice as I interacted with participants and collected and interpreted the data. Finally, Freebody (2003) recommended that repeated viewing/listening, and cross-checking findings with colleagues to disconfirm evidence is important to the reliability of an ethnographer’s data-collection procedures. The multiple data-collection procedures utilized in this study enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

Conclusion

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative researchers must determine the form they will use when writing a research study and make decisions about the type of voice and style to be used when explaining the findings. Rather than present the findings of this ethnography as a scientific report, in the following chapters, I present my research in a narrative form that utilizes rich description interspersed with my personal understandings and epiphanies.

However, the narrative is balanced with an academic tone that is intended to draw the attention of the reader and reinforce my credibility as a qualitative researcher. In Chapter Four, I present the context for the writing identity journey experienced by my students and me. Following that in Chapter 5, I detail the findings of this study through the voices of my students.

Ironically, the subject of this dissertation is writing identity, and according to Maanen (1995), researchers must find their ethnographic self. Being reflexive was key to finding my authorial voice as I interpreted the world of the classroom around me. Doing so helped me uncover a deeper level of understanding of the research environment, my students’ writing identity, and mine.

Expected Impact and Significance of Study

This study has evolved from a life-long interest in how students become more proficient in writing. As I have stated earlier in this chapter, the purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing identity of diverse students manifested in a classroom in which writing was taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. It was designed to gain understandings about how dialogue, instruction, and classroom culture influenced the writing identities of the students. Undeniably, there is a need for more research on writing instruction in the secondary high school ELA classroom, and I perceive my study to be of critical importance to writing teachers and students as they work and grow together. It is my wish that this study contributes to teachers’ understanding about writing pedagogy so their students become acquainted with their writing identities and the reasons why that matters.

CHAPTER FOUR

Learning Together in a Culturally Responsive Classroom

The story began in September 2019 when students arrived in my classroom ready to begin their final year of high school. Neither the students nor I could have anticipated the global crisis and unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. There was no indication on that first day of school in September that the students' senior year, a year ordinarily characterized by celebratory events, would become a time of fear, trepidation, and tragedy for many families.

Beginning in the fall of 2019 and throughout the winter and spring of 2020, my students and I participated in a shared ethnographic study of their developing writing identities. Students were immersed in an exploration of their literate selves, which ultimately resulted in an exchange of the students' unique and shared values, personal histories, and cultures. It was to be a year like no other; the outbreak of Covid-19 led to the closing of our high school in March 2019, along with all educational institutions across the nation. Although Covid-19 threatened to disrupt my study of writing identity, I had already spent several months with this community of young writers and had started data collection. This diverse group of seniors had been learning together since the beginning of September 2019, so by March when we transitioned to full remote learning, students had become increasingly more comfortable with sharing their writing with each other. The last section of this chapter addresses the transition to remote learning and how the students and I continued to explore our writing identities despite the change in instructional mode.

In this study, I sought to understand how the writing identity of a diverse group of learners is shaped through the culture and climate of a classroom grounded in writing instruction that is implemented through dialogic methodologies. Earlier chapters have established the need

for further exploration of the identities that students bring to the secondary writing classroom and how writing development is influenced by students’ perceptions of themselves as writers (Kwok et al., 2016). The most significant matter is that students—particularly high school juniors and seniors—come to know themselves as literate individuals through their classroom experiences when the individual’s identity is constructed and reconstructed in the learning environment (Nasir, 2002; Noguera, 2003).

This chapter describes the climate and instructional dynamics of the College English class in this study. First and foremost, in this space, each student’s presence was of critical importance to the day-to-day function of the learning environment. As I explained to the students, we were a community of learners and each day was an opportunity to interact with each other, share ideas and perspectives about important topics, and develop as literate citizens. Each student’s voice was an integral part of this classroom that must operate as efficiently as a well-oiled machine. To function wholly, students become part of the culture of this learning environment through consistent rigor and validation of each other’s contributions.

It has also been established throughout this dissertation that writing is a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978) and that writing identity, as explained by Ivanic (1998), is a product of both an individual’s inner self and the interactions that take place in the learning environment between students and teachers. Knowing oneself as a writer is a phenomenon that develops when students are provided with opportunities to exchange their ideas in a sociocultural setting where they are encouraged daily to view the world through another person’s eyes. Acknowledging that identity develops and changes over time is essential to understanding how an adolescent writer perceives himself or herself as a literate individual. As students see and understand differences, they adopt

one identity and reject another, traversing the boundaries that exist between social groups (Connolly, 1991).

In this chapter, I describe the sociocultural environment in the classroom and recount how dialogic methodologies were implemented through the daily interactions of students. In Part One, I describe the data collection and analysis procedures, where I also discuss my rationale for including preliminary data from September 2019 to January 2020 and why it was essential to understanding writing identity. Part Two introduces the 25 students who participated in the study, who through the expression of their unique cultures and experiences embodied the possibilities of transformational learning that took place in this educational setting. Part Three illustrates the culturally responsive character of the classroom and includes relevant background information about the system of tracking that exists in this school district and how students are placed in the College English class. Woven throughout these discussions are my personal philosophical ideologies about the teaching of writing that were gleaned from the day-to-day experiences with the students. Additionally, in Part Four I, introduce an overview of the instructional context of the classroom that contributed to and shaped students’ understandings of their writing identities.

Part One: Mining the Data

As discussed in Chapter Three, ethnographic research is participant-observation research and, as such, relies on spending a great deal of time in the cultures that are being studied (Kahn, 2011). Good ethnographic writing demands a juxtaposition of observation and participation and through watching, learning, and participating, reports on the relationships, values, and habits that make people understand themselves as members of a group. Therefore, my role as ethnographic researcher required deep and consistent reflection about the early interactions with students to

ascertain how they perceived themselves as writers in September and to subsequently follow their progress through the following months. To understand the development of their writing identities in June, it was critical to gain knowledge of their writing identities as they entered 12th grade. Moreover, building familiarity with the students’ proficiency levels was essential in the subsequent design and planning of appropriate instruction.

As the participant-observer in this ethnographic study of seniors, I was the designer and facilitator of all classroom instruction, which established my role as critical interpreter of the daily events that occurred in this learning space. In her study of racial literacy in the College English classroom, Sealey-Ruiz (2011) viewed her role as both participant and observer, and therefore completed reading and writing activities with her students, while also examining her own learning by taking notes on her enhanced racial literacy development. I viewed my role similarly, and in addition to completing many of the reading and writing assignments along with my students, I consistently joined their small group discussions. Moreover, as I collected the raw data, I wrote field notes and analytical memos. Saldana (2016) described a researcher’s memo writing as “private and personal musings before, during, and about the entire enterprise” that are “a question-raising, puzzle-piecing, connection-making, strategy-building, problem-solving, answer-generating, rising-above-the-data heuristic” (p. 44). This process allowed me to organize the ongoing data collection and make meaning of my developing understandings of how writing identity manifested in the research setting.

Data-Collection Timeline

As discussed in Chapter Three, I had planned three stages of analysis. The first stage involved analyzing and coding writer’s notebook entries, students’ reflections on their literacy experiences, field notes, lesson plans, identity mind maps, and audio and video recordings of

class discussions. My intention was to replicate Wortham's (2008) methods of examining timescales, the literacy events of an individual's life that contribute to writing identity. During stage two, after analyzing the preliminary data, I would continue to code students' formative and summative writing samples as well as my lesson plans and reflexive memos. In the final phase, interviews would be transcribed, coded, and evaluated in relation to my research questions.

Although this approach seemed logical and realistic, as the study progressed, I made several modifications to the initial procedures. Given the organic and complex nature of ethnography, it was not surprising that my research would resist a neat and orderly pattern. Finding the meaning in the events that my students and I were experiencing elicited constant reflection on my part, including moments of doubt of doing justice to telling the story of my students' developing writing identities. To help remedy this situation, I referred to the literature on ethnography that had been guiding my method of inquiry. Goodall's (2000) work reminded me to slow down and pay attention to the raw data I was collecting. Doing so entailed jotting down notes, reflecting on my instructional strategies and my reasons for implementing them, re-reading transcripts of student interviews, and sharing my findings with others, all of which helped to triangulate the data analysis.

To present the findings as succinctly as possible, I divided the data analysis into two phases (see Table 4.1). Phase One covered the time period from September 2019 to January 2020, while Phase Two included the analysis of activities and data collected from February 2020 to June 2020. Consequently, I was able to steer myself back on course when sifting through the amount of data became too overwhelming and sent me in multiple directions. Nevertheless, it was these periods of utter confusion that led me to seeing the meaning in the data and interpreting the process of writing identity development. Table 4.1 also depicts the schedule of

data collection during the two phases of the study. Detailed descriptions of the data are presented later in this section.

Table 4.1

Phase One and Phase Two Data Collection September 2019-June 2020

Phase of Research	Time Period	Data Type	Interpretive Methods
Phase One Pre-dissertation Preliminary Data Collection	September 2019-January 2020	Observations of small group discussions, audio and video recordings, lesson plans, fieldnotes, reflective writer’s notebook entries, college essay drafts	First and second cycle coding Eclectic coding
Phase Two Dissertation Phase	February 2020-June 2020	Fieldnotes, analytical memos, observations, audio recordings, classroom artifacts, reflective writer’s notebook entries	Pattern coding Thematic coding
	June 2020	21 interviews of 30–40 minutes with participants	Thematic coding with Dedoose; hand coding

Phase One Data Collection September 2019-January 2020 – Pre-dissertation

From September to January, I observed students in small groups and wrote field notes and analytical memos. I analyzed their reflective entries in the writer’s notebook and examined their writing as it manifested throughout the stages of the writing process. Doing so provided me with insight into the students’ reading and writing histories. Saldana (2016) advised that coding decisions should be based on the forms of research questions posed and the conceptual considerations of the study. However, he cautioned that the concept of identity has multiple

approaches of coding, depending upon the discipline within which it is studied. Hence, although the epistemological underpinnings of my research questions lent themselves to descriptive process and pattern coding, the philosophical nature of identity can also be viewed from an ontological perspective.

With the growing realization that coding ethnographic data would be messy, I kept an open mind as I sifted through the data, trying to code and make meaning from the depth and breadth of information. From September to January, it was not clear to me what was happening in the classroom or what I was looking for. Therefore, like Saldana (2016) did in a longitudinal ethnographic study, in the beginning of the study, I mixed and matched various coding methods. Overall, I used an eclectic coding system that combined exploratory, descriptive, in vivo, and pattern coding. Ultimately, pattern coding emerged as the primary method used that enabled me to analyze students’ developing writing identity.

***Preliminary Data Collection and Understandings*.** Anticipating that my research would begin relatively close to the beginning of the school year, I had already begun to write reflective memos early in the school year. I knew that preliminary data would be indispensable later in the study to piecing together the story of my students’ individual and collective growth as writers.

It is typical for ethnographers to rely on archived data to provide them with critical information about the group and culture they anticipate studying. Prior to conducting an 18-month ethnography in 2013 on hyper-diverse student populations, Malsbury (2016) began collecting data for her ethnographic case study in 2009 to explore the nuances and intricacies of the community and better understand the cultural context of the high schools she studied. Similarly, for months prior to implementing her research, Snyder (2012) reviewed archived data of future participants, four women from STEM fields who were entering a graduate teaching

program. Various documents such as application essays and field work journals were analyzed and coded to gather evidence of transformative learning. Through the coding process, Snyder became comfortable and connected to the data, which solidified emerging themes and her subsequent steps in the study.

For this study, while reviewing the pages of my lesson plan notebooks from the first week of school in September 2019, I had asked students to reflect on their understanding of the course syllabus. My purpose was not only to ensure that students understood the expectations of the class but to get them talking to each other. Students wrote about their experience working with a partner and were asked to respond to the following questions: (a) Were you uncomfortable for any reason? (b) Did you do most of the thinking and talking, or was it an equal sharing of ideas? (c) What has been your experience in the classroom? Who did most of the talking? Did you feel welcomed and validated in this environment? (d) How would you describe your academic discussion skills? These questions illustrated that reflection and dialogue began immediately. I wanted to establish early on that in this classroom, students would write and talk to each other and that each of their voices mattered.

Although these questions focused on the content of the lesson, which was the course content contained in the syllabus, they also prompted students to reflect on their past learning experiences and dialogic abilities. In the margins of my notebook, I wrote questions to myself and recorded these types of reminders: What is critical reading? When do you do it? Bridging to thinking? How did you become the reader and writer you are today? Start establishing protocols for discussion. My planning notebook became filled with questions, comments, and jottings, all of which illustrated aspects of my own writing identity as well as my thought process when

making instructional decisions, a reminder that identity is constantly developing. These field notes were invaluable as they represented potential sites for rich analysis (Saldana, 2016).

Students were also informed that they would be asked to be part of my dissertation study, which would start later in the school year. We spent time discussing how the research would proceed, making it clear to students that their participation was voluntary and would not impact their grades or infringe upon their confidentiality. My goal was to create an environment in which students would not feel pressured to act or behave in a way that was inconsistent with their natural tendencies. As described in Chapter Three, the signed consent forms from students and parents were kept in a sealed envelope in the English Coordinator’s office, therefore providing assurances to students that any data at the end of the study would only be used with their permission. At the end of the study, when I reviewed the consent forms, all students had confirmed that their data could be used for the purpose of this research.

First-Cycle Coding

Saldana (2016) described coding as being reverberative in nature, suggesting that the process is cyclical. He also identified first-cycle and second-cycle methods that were integral to the analysis of data in qualitative research. In general, first-cycle methods entail the initial coding of data that may include but are not limited to narrative, holistic, or hypothesis coding. After initial themes are established, the researcher moves to a second cycle that requires analytical skills such as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, and theory building. Saldana’s description helps to illustrate the steps I took to collect and analyze the data.

First-cycle coding included examining the writer’s notebook entries for data related to the theoretical foundations of writing identity that had been documented in the literature. Initially, faced with a daunting amount of data gleaned from student writing, audio and video recordings,

and classroom observations, it made sense to begin the analysis with existent conceptual frameworks based on the work of Burgess and Ivanic (2010). Therefore, when reading reflective entries in the writer’s notebook, I first looked for evidence of students’ autobiographical and discoursal selves. Based on Ivanic’s (1998) research, the autobiographical self is understood to be the identity the writer brings to the act of writing—an identity that is shaped by a writer’s life history. In other words, “who we are affects how we write” (Ivanic, 1998, p. 181). The discoursal self is how writers consciously or unconsciously view themselves as writers. These theoretical constructs fueled my preliminary analysis of the students’ reflective entries and focused my interpretation, which subsequently narrowed my coding process. Other in-vivo codes that emerged during this first phase were students’ confidence levels and their insecurities as peer reviewers.

To illustrate how this initial coding process revealed relevant data that would be valuable in the second phase of data analysis, I provide excerpts of reflections and my fieldnotes as examples to validate my conclusions. Evidence indicated that students were forthcoming about their perceived difficulties with the writing process and their lack of confidence in their skills. For example, the writer’s notebook entry for Felicia, written in November 2019, illustrated a critical stance when reflecting on her writing. She was a student from the lower track who possessed a warm and bubbly personality and a genuine desire to become a better writer. The entry reproduced here was a self-reflection of a rhetorical analysis on Nancy Mairs’ essay “Disability” that Felicia had written. In my quest to understand how writing identity develops, this entry prompted me to search for similar patterns in student writing.

Excerpt from my fieldnotes:

> Felicia had a lighthearted demeanor and a seemingly nonchalant attitude about her academics. She exhibited the signs of a student who was not committed to working

harder than was necessary, often stopping after a half-page of writing in the writer's notebook, even though she was expected to write more. When I encouraged her to write more, she would smile apologetically and shrug her shoulders as if to say, "I have nothing else to write." Her attendance was sporadic, and she often seemed disinterested in the content of the course. Prior to the college English course, she had been tracked in regular education classes.

Undeterred by her lack of fluency at this point in the school year, I knew instinctively that with time and consistent encouragement and validation, she would write more. The following reflection written by Felicia in November of 2019, revealed that this young lady had more potential as a critical thinker and writer than was first indicated by her classroom behavior.

In Felicia's words:

In my essay I tended to not support my claims and give a lack of evidence that further explain my thought process. I used too much of my thought process and opinions rather than sticking towards the topic. I trailed off and caused the audience to become confused. Ms. B. commented "Are they excluded or misunderstood?" I realized that now I must execute the main topic more than ramble on about non-sense. I also failed to back up my statement "Mairs uses her diction…" but I still failed to support it with words that Mairs used. Although most of the comments were negative and critical, I still grew from it and realized I can't just spill all my ideas on to a piece of paper and call it a day. I need to organize my ideas, make sure everything coincides with one another along with making sure the reader understands what you're thinking and your concepts. I also realized not everyone will understand my writing like I want them to, so I must use my tone (style) and my certain word choice. The clearer my thought process is on paper the easier it is for the reader to understand how I speak.

Like Felicia, other students in the class also desired better ways to communicate with their audiences and wanted to become more confident in their abilities. Helen, another student from the lower tracks, was equally critical in her analysis of her writing.

Helen's reflective entry:

After carefully re-reading my disability essay, and understanding Ms. B's critique, I've realized the errors I made. I noticed that I had relevant details, but I never explained why they were relevant. I also realized that I was very repetitive in continuously telling the theme which would have been fine if I explained my ideas more efficiently. I feel as if the words I included from Nancy Mairs's article would have been proved as relevant if I explained why I chose those words. Overall, my biggest flaw is failing to explain my thoughts and ideas in an effective understandable manner. I feel as if I am good at finding evidence or something that can be proven, I just need to work on my persuasion and explanations. I also hope to improve the length of my essays. I often include things that aren't significant or all that relevant. Writing my college essay is

> going to be a challenge for me due to this imperfection due to the maximum number of words allowed. I hope to dispose of these imperfections this year.

A closer examination of the students’ reflections affirmed a pattern I had noticed consistently when students were asked to assess their writing performance. In this case, both girls equated deficiencies in writing with failure, which caused me to wonder at what point in their lives had this deficit mindset become part of their writing experience and that perhaps it could be more present in students who had been placed in the lower tracks. However, Fernandez, a student from the higher tracks was also highly critical of his writing performance and used words such as “errors” and “mistakes” to characterize his writing.

Excerpt from Fernandez’s reflective entry

> Immediately when looking at my essay response to the second question, I discovered my first mistake and realized I never introduced the writer’s main point to set the tone of my response. When I wrote the beginning of my response for question two, instead of focusing on the author’s main point, I dove into the paragraphs immediately and explained what the author was trying to convey. I believe that I provided an adequate number of relevant details when explaining how the author used rhetorical terms to convey messages in her writing, but I believe my fault lied in my inability to connect them to her overall theme and message. I believe that I was able to explain how the ideas and details worked together while providing a great amount of background information when describing the paragraph, I was analyzing. Although I was able to explain how Mair’s use of language conveyed the point of the passage, I wasn’t able to explain how they connected to the essay as a whole. I believe when writing this essay, I used sophisticated vocabulary and was able to write a detailed response with little to no grammar and spelling errors. I think that I did well in all of the aspects listed except when tying my explanations back to the overall theme of the disability document.

Although all three entries reflected a deficit mindset of their writing performance, they also indicated a sense of the autobiographical self that Ivanic (1998) argued all writers bring to the classroom environment. Thus, the evidence from the students’ reflections confirmed the significance of the writer’s notebook in supporting the construction of writing identity, which later became the second main finding. Thus, the theory-driven coding lent validity to the

preliminary data reflection and lay a foundation for the subsequent data collection for Phase Two in February. Based on the initial data collection, I wanted to dig deeper into the experiences and influences that had led to the students’ perceptions of themselves as writers.

First-cycle coding also incorporated data collected during student discussions. In February, I had collected audio and video recordings of student discussions, writer’s notebook entries, and had written copious observation notes. Similar to Sealey-Ruiz (2011), I was particularly interested in how student discussions about writing would progress over the next five months, so both inductive and deductive methods were employed to organize and interpret the data. However, at the start of the study, students were engaged in discussing a book they had chosen to read as a group, so I wanted to investigate the nuances of the discussion about texts to identify any nuanced connections to writing identity. My reasoning was grounded in basic tenets of literacy development, which was that reading and writing are reciprocal in nature and that reading contributes to the writing process. Quite simply, as Gallagher (2006) acknowledged, readers make better writers, and knowing the data collection would also include audio recordings and observations of peer review, I was filled with a sense of urgency to start listening to the ways students discussed a written text.

Second-Cycle Coding

Second-cycle coding entailed various procedures that led to organizing the patterns that were becoming prevalent in the data analysis. First, after reading through transcripts of audio recordings of the first book talk and examining initial writing reflections, hand coding and color coding were used to examine the words, phrases, and ideas students were discussing and writing. Also using hand coding, I further refined the codes, using a numbered chart system to make sense of the data. Prior to reading the transcriptions, I had participated with each group of

students and wrote field notes and reflexive memos of the observations of group interactions. Doing so led to further refining of the codes and emerging themes. A data inventory document was then created to begin to monitor the growing collection of data.

The preliminary analysis of student discussions yielded the following codes: emotional reactions; responses to each other, unprompted by teacher input; responses elicited by teacher questions; responses illustrating critical thinking; and patterns of teacher dialogue (see Appendix F for the complete transcription). The following excerpt from my field notes was an example of one group discussion that not only revealed the group's ability to critically read and interpret text but also captured an emerging sense of empathy in the students that later became the third finding of the role of diversity in the writing identity process. This group included two males and three females of mixed-ability levels and varied ethnicities. Students had completed the "20 Questions" assignment, an activity that I have adapted from Gallagher (2006), which simply asked students to read the first chapter or two of a text and record the questions that organically evolved during their reading experience. When students met as a group, they were responsible for sharing their reactions and interpretations. It is important to note that by this time in the year, students had practiced various discussion strategies that had been integrated into daily lessons to support the efficacy and academic quality of their conversations.

> *Neal, Tara, Sam, Evelyn, Sara*
>
> One group (five readers in the group – 2 males – 3 females) is discussing *The Lovely Bones,* a book that is told from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old girl who was raped and killed. One of the students, Tara, comments that "it's depressing," which spurs agreement from Neal and Evelyn. Sara comments that the beginning is "really sad," which generates a comment from Neal that includes a quote from the book "Oh well, by the way, I'm dead". This interplay of discussion captures the evolving ideas of students as they listen to each other and simply share their reactions. Evelyn comments that "at the beginning, it was good," and I ask why. She responds that the whole point of the book is her looking down on her parents grieving her death after…in heaven. Sam comments "that was so neat, but…" which prompts Tara to say, "it was really disturbing". Tara

> elaborates on this vein of the discussion and responds, “yeah, I was sitting there, I really… I was like, this is bad”. The students continue to share their reactions to the rape scene at the beginning of the book. Sam was less reactionary and stated that the character was dead already, so he was expecting ‘it’”. However, Neal reacted to Sam and said, “but the way she described it, she said she was wanting it and…it was disgusting.” Evelyn said she couldn’t read it.

Listening to the students was critical to gaining an understanding of how sharing authority with my students contributed to their literacy development. This early exchange demonstrated that students were listening to each other, and as they did so, they were comfortable sharing their personal reactions to the story. McHaney (2004) noted that one of the inherent challenges in conducting a discussion-oriented classroom was that students fear risking their ideas. Therefore, it is paramount that teachers develop a relationship of trust with their students to allow for and inspire a democratic classroom in which all voices are heard. It requires teachers to become comfortable with being uncomfortable, a mantra I recited in my head as each new school year approached. Removing myself from a position of power was a transition I had already made as a teacher. Actively listening to my students in the early days of the study served to build a sense of trust between the students and me, eventually leading to my understanding that their diverse identities, cultures, values, and experiences were intertwined with their writing identities.

By the end of Phase One, I had collected and analyzed ample data, so when the study formally commenced in February 2020, I was able to approach the data collection and analysis in Phase Two guided by the emerging themes I had started to notice and the questions that had surfaced. During this time, I had several examples of formative and summative writing as well as videos of group presentations, so the goal was to search for the connections between the process of writing identity construction and how it emerged in the student interactions and writing. As

both researcher and instructor, these initial findings served to refine future lesson design and implementation and provided me with insight into how to dissect and understand the literacy processes at work in writing identity construction. Most importantly, the discussions presented here are examples of discussions students engaged in daily in this classroom setting, which directly informed the central research question of how writing identity develops in a sociocultural setting of diverse learners. In particular, the manner in which students spoke to each other cultivated an environment of trust, which is essential when discussing one’s writing.

Phase Two of Data Collection: February 2020 – June 2020

Phase Two was a reverberative process that included several iterations of pattern coding and recoding. The data collected from February to June consisted of writer’s notebook reflections, my field notes and analytical memos, audio recordings of student discussions, lesson plans, classroom artifacts, and end-of-the-year interviews conducted in June. After coding and analyzing the students’ interviews, I realized that that the comments students made about their identities correlated to the data collected from the mind maps students had made in November 2019. Thus, I made the decision to recode the identity mind maps, and in Part Three, I present the data collected from the lesson on identity formation in support of its relevance to understanding how students perceived themselves as writers. Here, I include a detailed analysis of the student interviews to emphasize their critical importance in helping me to answer my research questions.

Interviews with Students, June 2020

In June, after interviewing 21 of the 25 students who participated in this ethnographic study, I had each interview transcribed using Rev.com. It is important to note that although all students gave their signed consent to participate in the study, four of the students did not keep

their appointments for their interviews. However, the data discussed and analyzed are reflective of all 25 students. Prior to the interviews, student grades had been calculated and entered in the school data system.

The most challenging task at this point was to unravel the complexity of writing identity development within the context of my research questions, so trying to categorize and classify student responses became increasingly overwhelming. According to Miles et al. (2014), pattern coding is appropriate for condensing large amounts of data into smaller analytic units, developing themes, and examining social networks and human relationships. Therefore, I selected the first four students’ interview transcriptions and uploaded them to Dedoose to triangulate with the data that were already collected and analyzed. Based on the data analysis in the first cycle, the following codes were applied to the four interviews: writing identity definition, self-perceptions of writing performance, peer-review experiences, and different perspectives on writing. These codes were indicative of the themes evident in the writer’s notebook reflections, student discussions, and identity maps (discussed further in Part Three of the Findings section).

I began to see patterns emerging in the interview data, supporting the data that had been collected from the pre-dissertation phase. Students articulated their perspectives of themselves as writers, their emerging understanding of writing identity, and the writer’s notebook. Their responses also suggested that interactions with others somehow related to writing identity. These patterns provided the clarification for subsequent coding and analysis of the remaining interviews.

After reviewing data, I once again returned to my research questions, an oft-repeated practice since the start of the study. My initial coding of Matt’s and Bella’s interviews revealed

an intense focus on listening to other students' perspectives, which related to how a diverse classroom culture shapes writing identity and suggested that the students' dialogic interactions was also a factor. Both students repeatedly cited that listening to different people's perspectives had a significant impact on them as writers and thinkers.

In an analytic memo written immediately after coding these four interviews, I had expressed the assertion that the diverse abilities and ethnicities of the students had a direct influence on the quality of the discussions and peer review I had observed throughout the study, although I was unsure of how this phenomenon transpired. For example, the group that came to mind was Carlos, Lucas, Keith, Rob, and Matt. They were of mixed-ability levels and varied ethnicities, and their discussions were consistently multi-layered and rich, but I wanted to be able to qualify the reasons why this occurred.

An additional pattern gleaned from these initial interviews was the recognition of the writer's notebook in the writing lives of the students. It became clear that students mostly enjoyed writing in the notebook and realized its capacity for supporting their growth as writers. Students commented that the notebook was a record of their thinking, which could be accessed at a later time for future writing projects. Overall, slowing down and sitting with the data as Goodall (2000) suggested resulted in a rich, dense body of information that became indispensable to the story of writing identity in my classroom. Part Two introduces the student participants in the study and describes the system of tracking that is characteristic of how students are typically assigned to classes in this school district.

Part Two: Meet the Students

When I began teaching the College English class in the fall of 2013, it had a reputation of being an accelerated course, and the students who typically registered for the class were honor-

track students who in their 12th-grade year wanted the opportunity to earn college credit but did not want the added stress associated with the Advanced Placement English course. Students had the option of paying a low fee for 6 college credits and were expected to study composition in the fall and literature in the spring. Teachers had the freedom to create their own program, providing it met the criteria of the participating institution.

Prior to fall of 2013, fewer students from the lower tracks were enrolled in the course, unless a student's language skills and work ethic had been deemed exceptional by the teacher making the recommendation. The omission of students from more advanced classes was customary in this blue-collar community, having been cultivated over the years for various reasons. There existed a mindset among some teachers that only the "best" or "gifted" students should be enrolled in honors classes, as they were the only students who deserved such a lofty accommodation. This was a situation that persisted year after year and resulted in classrooms where white students without IEPs dominated the enrollment in these more challenging courses.

In this school district, as is the case with many schools across the country, the modern system of tracking places students in different levels of the same course or in a course with a different curriculum that is perceived to be more appropriate for the learner (Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 2005). Students in this district tend to remain in a particular academic track as they transition from middle to high school, with decisions on placement dependent upon several factors such as teacher recommendation, standardized test scores, grade-point averages, and student choice. Despite the district's slow progression to becoming more culturally responsive, enrollment in honors and Advanced Placement classes continues to be underrepresented by minority students, ELLs, low-income students, and students with disabilities. As with many school districts in America, the marginalization of these students may be attributed to the predominance of deficit

thinking that has been deeply embedded in educational institutions (Sleeter, 2004; Weiner, 2003).

Deficit thinking is pervasive and often implicit, and results in the perpetuation of educational practices that reinforce oppressive systems and inequities in society and education (Davis & Museus, 2019). Although it is certainly not true of all teachers in this district, in their comments, many of them reveal deficit thinking about the lack of potential and achievement of ELLs and struggling readers and writers. I have heard these comments in various contexts such as when grading the ELA Regents exam or when discussing academic or behavioral issues of students. In truth, although several educators in the high school readily admit to the lack of diversity in advanced classes, many do not.

Luis’s Story

During the school year preceding this study, I had a critical conversation with Luis (pseudonym), a Latinx student enrolled in my Regent’s-level 11th-grade English class. Winter was drawing to a close and hints of spring could be felt in the hallways as the juniors at the high school were meeting with their guidance counselors to make their schedules for the following year. At the time, I was deeply entrenched in trying to clarify the topic for a proposed study on how students with various learning styles and abilities learn to write. The following exchange with Luis is an example of the insidiousness of deficit thinking and how it became the catalyst for delving deeper into the significance of writing identity.

> “What do you mean, your guidance counselor put you in regular English?” I asked intently, trying to remain objective. “I recommended you for College English.”
>
> Luis glanced up at me from his desk, a bit unsure of himself. Shrugging his shoulders, he said nonchalantly, “That’s what she/he put me in.”
>
> “Well, do you want to be in College English?” I probed, wondering if he actually wanted to be in the class.

> He shrugged again and looked away. Knowing that he lacked confidence in himself but not wanting to push him unfairly, but also wanting him to know that I would fight for him, I said, “Well, I think you should be in the class, and if you want, I will email your guidance counselor.”

Although I had already submitted my formal recommendation that Luis should be enrolled in the College English course, his guidance counselor made a different decision. I remember thinking that he had much potential as a writer and that he had stories to tell and ideas to grapple with in writing but might never have the opportunity to do so if not challenged in an appropriate classroom environment. It was also becoming more noticeable to me that all students were not equitably challenged and that many Latinx students, African American students, and students with special needs were often enrolled in less rigorous classes. Bruton and Robles-Pina (2009) attributed this practice of placement as a negative consequence of deficit thinking that contributed to educators having lower expectations of students from historically oppressed social identity groups. Fortunately, after advocating for a change in Luis’s placement, the decision was revisited, and Luis became my student the following year in the College English class. Despite this small victory that in many ways could have changed the trajectory of Luis’s academic career, I had been growing increasingly uneasy about the innate hegemony of the school system in which I was a part.

The disproportionality described here may be due in part to the “structural looseness” that is associated with the tracking protocols inherent in many high schools, a flawed system that also allows advantaged students to manipulate the system in their favor (Oakes & Guiton, 1995, p. 28). Oakes and Guiton argued that the system of tracking is a synergistic collection of contributing factors, such as differentiated, hierarchical curriculum structures, school cultures alternatively committed to common schooling and accommodating differences, and political

actions by individuals within those structures and cultures aimed at influencing the distribution of advantage, a system that continues to operate in varying degrees in high schools throughout the United States.

That afternoon, speaking with Luis was the impetus for the current ethnographic study on writing identity. He had little belief in his literate self, but he thrived in group discussions about books and worked painstakingly to revise his writing. I often reflected on Luis’s situation and wondered if the counselor’s original decision was based on Luis’s apathy that had often emerged throughout his academic history. Or perhaps it could have been a stereotypical judgment based on his last name, but I knew that Luis was one of those at-risk kids who had fallen through the cracks and needed to be challenged and motivated. He had already shown himself to be a critical thinker, which was apparent in his writing through his artful syntax and organized idea development, and he needed opportunities to find his voice. Hence, I viewed the College English course as not only a preparation for students’ future academic and professional careers but also a class that could potentially validate for each student the importance and uniqueness of their ideas and perspectives. Most importantly, no single student could be excluded from the shared practice of writing in this learning community.

Luis’s story is one of many, so it was not uncommon that a senior enrolled in the college-preparatory English course in the current study had experienced less rigorous learning environments throughout his or her school career. At the same time, it was an anomaly for students previously tracked in accelerated classes to share a classroom with peers from lower level or remedial academic backgrounds. I already knew that as a group, these students would find themselves in uncharted waters.

Students from the lower tracks who had never experienced an accelerated class were clearly nervous about taking the College English class. The remedial tracks in this school district were identified as Inclusion, ENL, and Regents. Inclusion classes comprised regular education students and students with disabilities. In the inclusion setting, students with disabilities were provided with a modified curriculum and received additional services such as a one-to-one aide as well as ancillary periods of instruction. Students who are considered regular education students—those not identified with a learning or emotional disability—were placed in a Regents/regular education track. Accelerated courses included honors, Advanced Placement, and classes providing students with the opportunity to earn college credit.

Many students had been immersed in an accelerated English track since the 7th grade, while others had been placed in a regular instructional setting. Some of these students had been classified as having a learning disability, and in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), were eligible for support services that included an IEP, a unique instructional protocol tailored to the needs of the student (Turnbull et al., 2004). Others had been declassified, so they no longer required special education accommodations but could still receive testing modifications as cited in their previous IEPs. These accommodations included extended time on exams or testing in separate locations. Table 4.2 provides a demographic overview of the students who participated in the study.

Table 4.2

Demographics of Students in the College English Class

Pseudonym (*n =25*)	**Low SES**	**Track-Grade 11, ELA**	**Race**	**Special Ed Status**	**Former or Current ELL**	**Interviewed for Study**
Evelyn	No	Honors	White	Declassified		Yes
Neal	No	AP	White			Yes
Helen	Yes	Regents	White			Yes
Carlos	Yes	Honors	Latinx		X	Yes
Colleen	No	Regents	White	Declassified		Yes
Caroline	No	Honors	White			Yes
Brittany	Yes	AP	White		X	Yes
Bella	Yes	AP	White			Yes
Sybil	Yes	AP	Asian		X	Yes
Sam	No	AP	Asian			Yes
Arleta	Yes	Honors	Latinx			Yes
Marlene	No	Honors	White			Yes
Isabel	No	AP	Latinx		X	Yes
Keith	No	Regents	Multiracial (Hispanic/Asian)	IEP		Yes
Matt	No	Honors	White			Yes
Felicia	No	Regents	White			Yes
Jack	No	Regents	White		X	No
Lucas	Yes	Regents	Latinx		X	No
Fernandez	No	Honors	Multiracial (Hispanic)			Yes
Brandy	No	Regents	White	Declassified	X	Yes
Lauren	No	Honors	White			Yes
Tara	Yes	Regents	White			Yes
Sara	Yes	Regents	White			No
Rob	Yes	Honors	White			No
Alyssa	Yes	Regents	White			No

Note. Low SES (socioeconomic status) was determined by a student's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch. Track refers to students' placement in their 11th-grade class. AP refers to advanced placement classes.

Current or former ELLs, students who had received language support services at some point in their school careers, were also part of the makeup of this group of seniors. As I discuss later in this chapter, many of these second-language learners had entered the United States as

toddlers and entered primary school knowing only their native language. I knew each would have a unique story of acculturation, and I had high hopes that through their writing and discussions, students would share these compelling stories with native speakers. In previous years, ELLs had written narratives of their memories of entering the United States, including poignant scenarios of assisting their parents in adapting to American customs such as opening bank accounts and registering for entrance into the school system. In early September 2019, as students entered my classroom, I was acutely aware that for the first time in their lives, as they approached the end of their secondary school career, this was a highly unusual learning environment for many of them. Part Three illustrates the culturally responsive environment of the classroom and discusses the role of dialogue as an instructional protocol.

Part Three: Social Learning, Writing Identity, and Cultural Responsiveness

In Chapter One, I explained that writing identity is a phenomenon that manifests from an individual’s inner self as well as through the social interactions that occur between students and teachers in a learning environment (Ivanic, 1998). Moreover, in Chapter Two, it was established that identity development occurs during the critical stage of adolescence when they experience writing instruction in the classroom (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Understanding how writers develop largely depends on how an adolescent writer perceives himself or herself as a literate individual in the context of a social setting (Connolly, 1991). Young writers’ identities are often conflicted as they move through the emotional and intellectual paths of discovering themselves, making it almost impossible to identify with a single self (Ivanic, 1998). Students also come to know themselves as literate individuals through their classroom experiences as well as those that occur in the home or community, and it is during this critical time that the individual’s identity can be constructed and reconstructed in the learning environment (Nasir, 2002; Noguera, 2003).

Before conducting the current study, I had not thought about writing identity explicitly, although I had often reflected on how my students found their stylistic voices as writers. I relied heavily on research-based writing pedagogy as well as instinct to teach writing to adolescents and believed in earnest that understanding themselves as writers would support students’ development as academic writers. They wrote every day in various genres and were encouraged to use the literacy skills they were learning to become more intuitive about their individual writing styles.

Having Luis in College English prior to the implementation of this study confirmed that young writers often found their voices through opportunities to write about topics that were deeply personal and unique to the individual. For Luis, his writing became the outlet through which he articulated the long-suffering impact of living with a sibling suffering from bipolar disorder. Consequently, working with Luis sparked a renewed interest in how the students’ lives contributed to their growth as writers and developed my consciousness of the inherent uniqueness of each student’s writing identity formation and the importance of increased social interaction between and among students.

Talking, Writing, and Writing Identity

The overarching research question in this study examined how the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners developed and evolved within a dialogic ELA classroom. A significant finding when studying the role of the culture and climate of this ELA classroom was that participation in a community of writers who varied in race, cultural experiences, and previous academic placement had profound effects on how students communicated with each other about their writing. The concept of culture took on a new

meaning as students talked about writing. In Chapter Five, I describe the process of how this happened through an instructional unit on identity formation.

The richness of students’ diversity supported the craft of writing and students’ understanding of themselves as writers. Based on their consistent interactions with peers in a learning-centered environment that included small groups, larger discussion groups, peer-review sessions, and reading groups, students became more understanding of each other’s unique cultures and ethnicities. This was exhibited through their growth in academic conversations about texts that focused on issues of identity, race, ability, and inclusion. Students participated daily in small-group conversations and learned to listen more closely to each other, as was evidenced by their continual efforts to provide valid feedback to other students’ ideas. I was able to track these conversations through audiotaping, videotaping, and field notes. This finding supported and extended an aspect of this study’s theoretical framework, which is that learning to write is a social activity. Through their interviews, I concluded that most students, regardless of previous academic track, race, or ethnicity, felt included in this learning environment and were able to articulate how they learned in ways that they had not previously experienced. Students cited talking to each other as a major contributor to understanding themselves as writers.

Classroom Dialogue and Literacy

The dialogue between and among students in this sociocultural setting created moments and experiences that shaped the process and flow of identity construction. These moments, or timescales (Ivanic, 1998), manifested in the various stages of writing assignments, peer-review sessions, conferences with me, and moments of self-reflection. Each moment spent writing, reflecting, and talking about writing contributed to the continual formation of and understanding of themselves as writers.

Dialogic Teaching

In Chapter Two, it was established that dialogic teaching methodologies—when teachers treat dialogue as a functional construct rather than a structural procedure—promote cognitive development and inquiry, give voice to underachieving students, deepen the level of student engagement, improve student performance on a variety of assessments, and result in overall academic achievement for diverse populations of students (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Lyle, 2008; Michaels et al., 2008; Snell & Lefstein, 2018). In other words, the talking that takes place in the classroom setting is both tacitly understood and explicitly taught. Alexander (2020) defined *dialogic teaching* as follows:

> A pedagogy of the spoken word that harnesses the power of dialogue to stimulate and extend students’ thinking, learning, knowing and understanding, and to enable them to discuss, reason and argue. It unites the oral, cognitive, social, epistemic, and cultural, and therefore manifests frames of mind and value as well as ways of speaking and listening. (p. 200)

A classroom grounded in dialogic methods views all students as capable thinkers and reasoners. Thus, students become increasingly confident in their analytical skills and more expansive in their contribution to others. From the moment students entered our classroom in September, the communicative procedures and protocols were prioritized, so there was no doubt that this class would be one where the teacher did not monopolize the dialogue. These specific procedures are demonstrated in Chapter Five. Students’ conversations, writing samples, and learning scenarios were indicative of this phenomenon. Peer-review sessions played a crucial role in broadening and deepening students’ awareness of one’s self. Through their conversations with other writers, students perceived themselves as writers.

Collectively, these students formed a unique community of learners, which in previous chapters has been described as a diverse educational setting, a descriptor attributed to classrooms that are composed of individuals who are different from one another in many ways. These classrooms included students with identified or unidentified learning disabilities, learners who been labeled highly advanced, ELLs, students in poverty, and students whose degrees of motivation vary for different reasons (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Having read this definition many times in various contexts throughout my professional career, I considered it commonplace, which encouraged no more contemplation on my part other than accepting it as the method by which students were demographically designated.

However, as a result of my experiences with these students, I began to realize that this conceptualization of diversity did not capture the depth of the transformational learning and meaningful human interaction that occurred in a classroom such as mine where students connected with each other through consistent and purposeful dialogue about their writing. I found this to be poignantly true when students, regardless of previous labels or tracks, demonstrated a genuine effort to share their writing with each other throughout the school year. The following excerpts from the interviews I conducted with my students illustrated the quality of the writing conversations that took place regularly in this classroom. One of the students in the study, Matt, a White student who had been previously tracked in an advanced ELA class, reflected on his experiences with peer review during our interview. He admitted to lacking confidence in his writing abilities. Matt recalled how other students’ perspectives had influenced his writing:

Matt: So, say if you can have a difference between someone, but then you guys explain both of your sides and then maybe at one point you guys can come to an agreement that

one was right and then that the other one was wrong. Or maybe you guys still believe they they’re both right and there’s no in-between. But that’s what I liked about having a lot of peer-review sessions because there was more dialogue between my classmates, because it helped us further our writing.

Me: So how did the [discussions] help you further your writing?

Matt: Because you were getting other people’s perspectives, so it wasn’t only your own.

Similarly, during my interview with Keith, another student in the same writing group, who was multi-racial and had an IEP since elementary school, shared Matt’s lack of confidence as a writer and commented similarly when asked about his peers’ influence on his writing development.

Keith: Yeah, I think that helps because not only did I get to talk to other people about how they’re writing and how they can improve on themselves, but they also talked to me in how I can improve my own writing about topics such as my inquiry paper.

Me: Okay. Do you remember anything in particular?

Keith: I got a lot of feedback for it. Basically, they wanted to make some changes to my body paragraph like add transitions and add more stronger vocabulary and apply that to my entire essay. That helped me. That was a suggestion from my writing group.

As our discussion continued, Keith also told me that he thought he had become better at reviewing other students’ writing, and that in the beginning of the year, he was “afraid to say any negative feedback to others” and was not the type of person to “trash” another person’s work. In response to my question about how he critiqued another student’s writing, he proceeded to list several techniques he had learned during the year that now served as a framework for him when assessing writing: vocabulary level, structure, and quality of syntax, each of which we had studied together as a class. Keith’s growing awareness of essential writing attributes reinforced

my belief that the cognitive abilities of students with disabilities are often underestimated in the educational paradigm; yet his reticence to critique another student’s writing, which he equated with “trashing” another student’s writing, intrigued me. Keith’s concern for other students’ feelings emerged as a consistent theme throughout the study, which is discussed in Chapter Five. The majority of students expressed genuine concern for providing relevant feedback for their writing partner. It was a pattern I had observed over time and wondered how students came to equate comments on writing performance with insulting the writer.

According to the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, when students acknowledge the limitations of their own perspectives and demonstrate cooperation and teamwork within the context of a diverse environment, they are practicing sociocultural responsiveness and affirming each other’s cultural identities (NYSED, 2019). Both Matt’s and Keith’s comments confirmed the possibilities for learning experiences that exist in a diverse classroom where students are encouraged to be forthcoming about their individuality, an essential ingredient in understanding one’s developing identity as a writer. It is important to note here that Matt and Keith were members of the same reading and writing group, which consisted of five male students with different tracking histories and various races and ethnicities. As a group, their behavior demonstrated an intuitiveness with regard to sociocultural behavior, and I was curious to follow their progress as the study evolved. The group had been formed a few weeks prior when students were immersed in a project that required them to construct mind maps of their writing identities. Prior to this grouping, students in the class had already had contact with each other through a variety of interactive lessons. Hence, they had started to form relationships with each other. (I discuss this group in further detail in Chapter Five, where I share the findings of this study.)

The Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Classroom

A supportive classroom is one that is grounded in all principles of inclusivity—one that caters to all students. In Chapter One, I discussed that culturally responsive pedagogy urges teachers to create learning environments that are socially and academically empowering and multi-dimensional in their approach (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In this type of socioculturally situated environment, diverse learners are immersed in rich learning situations that enable them to use their language resources to make meaning of a particular context, which includes challenging tasks that encourage meta-cognition and meta-language awareness (Schleppegrell, 2013).

Here, I briefly reiterate the discussion in Chapter Two of three research strands that address the pedagogical concerns of the inclusive classroom: culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant theory of education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Teaching diverse populations requires educators to be cognizant of the cultural and linguistic diversities that can potentially impact learning if not taken into consideration, so undergirding my study in cultural and linguistic responsiveness provided an element of ethical and moral considerations as I studied the exchanges between and among students. My classroom instruction described in the third section of this chapter reflects these considerations.

Gay (2002) described culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of culturally diverse students as cognitive channels for teaching them more effectively. Closely aligned with Gay’s work is that of Ladson-Billings (1995), who proposed a culturally relevant theory of education that identified teachers’ conceptions of the self, student-teacher relationships, and conceptions of knowledge as being critical to a teacher’s level of cultural responsiveness. As the demographics of classrooms in many parts of the United

States continued to evolve, Paris and Alim (2014) expanded on the work of Gay and Ladson-Billings and developed in their view a more current and appropriate lens of teaching and learning that considered more closely how teachers could foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism within the current demographics of today’s classrooms. Rather than approaching the classroom with a deficit mindset that viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of people of color as deficiencies to be overcome, culturally sustaining pedagogy implored teachers to make a shift to an appreciation of multilingualism and multiculturalism (Paris & Alim, 2014). The next section presents examples of an instructional segment from early in the school year to establish how cultural responsiveness, dialogic teaching, and social learning were the theoretical underpinnings that bridged theory to practice.

Part Four: Instruction and Curriculum

To understand the instructional protocols in this ELA classroom, I present a brief snapshot of my instruction as it was implemented early in the school year. These early discussions between and among students illustrated that the environment of the research setting in February 2020 was interactive in nature and had been a consistent practice for the duration of the school year. This section also affirms how despite the chaotic transition to remote teaching with the onslaught of the Covid-19 global crisis, data collection and analysis continued.

In September, students had been immersed in conversations about their past histories as readers in preparation for examining their identities as writers. One of my objectives was to assess their level of literacy awareness to provide me with the necessary data to design instruction to meet the requirements of a new group of learners. Students tended to discuss their reading memories more fluently than their writing histories, and these preliminary discussions would eventually lead to opportunities for reflecting on writing experiences.

Additionally, as dialogic methodologies were the primary mode through which instruction in this class was implemented, it was critical to cultivate discussion protocols early on in the school year. It was established in Chapter One that writing identity is a phenomenon that manifests from an individual’s inner self as well as the social interactions that occur between students and teachers in a learning environment (Ivanic, 1998). Dialogic methodologies are those that treat students’ oral interactions as functional constructs rather than a structural procedure and cultivate an environment of open-mindedness and shared inquiry (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). Providing students with opportunities to interact with other students also allowed me to familiarize myself with the students as individuals and to begin building a community of trust.

A Lesson on Early Memories as Readers

This particular lesson was part of an instructional sequence predicated upon this essential question: How did you become the reader you are today? As with almost all lessons, students were directed to write a response to this question prior to having a discussion with a peer. An instructional staple in my classroom is the writer’s notebook, and throughout the school year, students were consistently engaged in the informal writing process of responding to prompts, ideas, and questions in their writer’s notebook. The notebook is primarily a fluency tool that has been part of my instructional repertoire for many years. Yet, I have come to understand that it is an indispensable component of an individual’s writing development and identity. I discuss the notebook in greater detail in Chapter Five and its profound effect on the students’ understanding of their writing identities.

On the Friday of the first week of school in early September 2019, students wrote about their current attitudes of themselves as readers and their earliest memories as readers. After students wrote the initial entry, they were engaged in conversations with their peers. Teachers

can use a variety of age-appropriate methods to promote student dialogue, such as random pairings, groupings based on student choice, or activities that require students to physically move around the classroom and find a partner with a similar characteristic. The College English classroom contained 30 separate desks that form tables when connected. Students entered the room on that first day and were welcomed immediately to sit where they choose. For this reason, I preferred that the seniors simply spoke to the students at the table they had selected. It provided me with initial impressions of student choices of partners, and it allowed me to move freely about the room and listen to the students’ conversations.

Following these discussions, I facilitated a whole-class discussion with the intent of observing the dynamics of each student’s degree of participation. These invaluable impressions enabled me to plan instruction that would potentially engage each student in subsequent lessons. The next instructional objective was for students to identify descriptors that revealed their perceptions of their literate selves. Hence, students completed a reading survey adapted from Burke (1999) and subsequently were grouped randomly with other students to share their responses to the survey questions and a written reflection about their experience taking the survey. Questions on the survey (see Appendix D) required students to consider their unique reading process, including their level of awareness of strategies they accessed when reading complex text. Here again, I was able to glean relevant impressions of student involvement. Even more importantly, listening to the student discussions, I was able to familiarize myself with the students’ cultures, backgrounds, and reading histories. Additionally, the students’ entries in the writer’s notebooks would reveal another facet of their literate selves.

In truth, when I asked students to share their thoughts and ideas for the first time, I typically experienced a familiar flash of trepidation. Part of me sometimes felt almost apologetic

when asking students to share these personal ideas with other students who were virtually strangers to each other, wondering if it was too invasive; but as always, the moment passed and drawing in a deep breath, I let the talking begin. The following excerpt was taken from the field notes and audio recordings I collected early in the school year. It illustrates the quality of student interaction that occurred regularly during this study.

Bella: “In sixth grade, I remember sitting in a little chair and being forced to read. It killed reading for me.”

Jack: “It’s like a mental prison.”

Me: “That’s sad.”

Stacey: “If it’s boring, I won’t read it. Books [in school] are difficult and boring.”

Emily: “We used to love to read, but reading books has become a chore.”

As I listened to this exchange between Bella and Jack in their discussion group, my first reaction was to dissuade them from thinking of reading in this way, but I quickly realized that these young adults were voicing their genuine thoughts. These negative thoughts about reading were ideas that I had heard year after year; however, the frequency with which students uttered these ideas continued to unnerve me. Another group of students led by discussion leader Tara echoed Bella and Jack’s comments, labeling reading in school as boring, difficult, and uninteresting. They agreed that reading is something they do not have time to do and that it has become a chore in their academic lives. Students in this group cited reading check quizzes, an assessment staple of many teachers, as counterproductive to supporting any engagement in reading. I agreed.

Students continued to comment that they “would not go out of their way to read” and that “everything [they] read is stuck in the past.” Several students proudly proclaimed that they had

never read a book by themselves throughout their school careers. During these preliminary conversations, students told me, as they had in previous years, that they had never discussed their “reading personalities,” a term I used to engage students in an exploration of their literate selves. To hear a student describe reading as a “mental prison,” however, was an indictment of an educational system that was not working, and I was troubled, as I usually am, by their attitudes about literacy. I was not surprised but deeply concerned that a generation of adolescents did not value reading. According to Gallagher (2006), an inordinate number of students suffer from a condition he referred to as “readicide,” which he described as students’ growing apathy about reading brought on by teachers’ excessive use of prepackaged study guides coupled with explicit instruction of text that left little room for inquiry-based approaches. Students felt they were given fewer opportunities to think critically or creatively and also perceived their teachers as sages and therefore capable of superior interpretations and evaluations of text. Students had often reported that the majority of their experiences in ELA classes were characterized by discussions that were primarily teacher led and typically monopolized by a small number of students. The comments of the senior students in this study were no different.

Given the preceding context, it has been established that the classroom depicted in this study is characterized by an environment that appreciates all learners and their unique cultures and experiences. The research setting was also a space designed to promote student interaction through dialogic methodologies and social learning. Expectations were high for all students, and they were expected to read, write, and share their perspectives with each other.

Since the purpose of this chapter is to provide context for the findings to be discussed in Chapter Five, it is imperative that I acknowledge the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic. As stated earlier in this chapter, despite the interruption to the research setting, the instructional

procedures and data collection remained intact. The next section includes a brief account describing how the integrity of the study was maintained throughout the months of March to June.

Writing Identity Continues in the Midst of a Pandemic

When our classroom became fully remote in mid-March, the physical dynamic of the classroom was completely disrupted, and the students and I made the transition to online instruction almost immediately. All staff left work on Friday, March 13, and by Sunday night, we knew we would not be returning to school on Monday. On March 17, I sent a note to the students on Google classroom describing our new way of conducting class (see Appendix E). That Wednesday morning was the first day of online instruction for the seniors, and I was immersed in thinking about how to provide high-quality instruction to all students despite the absence of physical interaction. As a researcher, I was even more confused about how to continue to collect data as I had been doing since the beginning of my study. Although I knew I had to figure out how to sustain the ethical implementation of my study, I was driven more by the practitioner in me and began to plan how to effectively teach 25 students from a distance.

After beginning this study in February, I had started to analyze the recorded discussions of the students during their book talks, a unit of instruction in which small groups chose a text to read together. Following that initial analysis, my research had continued to progress as students were engaged in book talks and peer review. My plan book illustrated the chronology of these units of study and included multiple iterations of literacy-based activities using such texts as *The Danger of a Single Story* by Chimamanda Adichie and *The Perils of Indifference* by Elie Wiesel.

Prior to the transition to remote learning, when students were physically present in class, they had engaged in daily discussions about the texts, after having opportunities to process their

ideas in the writer’s notebook. As I describe later in this chapter, the writer’s notebook emerged as a major finding in this study. In many ways, it was a physical representation of each student’s emerging writing identity. Prior to my classroom instruction being interrupted by Covid-19, my collection of data included recorded discussions of students in small groups, formative and summative writing, the writer’s notebook, my reflective notes, and lesson plans. Although definitions may vary, formative writing assignments are generally those that are not assessed as a final product. Their purpose is instructive and are typically assignments that generate thinking to provide students with opportunities to reflect on a topic or question and prepare them for discussion. In contrast, summative writing implies that a student has progressed through the stages of writing, including peer review and revision. These writing products were representative of knowledge gained and writing performance.

As much as I resisted deviating from my original lesson plans, I understood that modifications were necessary. At first, I was hyper-vigilant about focusing on the instruction and satisfying the learning outcomes, but as the days and weeks progressed, I became more concerned about the emotional well-being of the students. In fact, after a week of online instruction, it became apparent that I was assigning too much work, albeit in an effort to compensate for the new reality of the virtual classroom. After considering the entirety of the situation, it became clear that students were being assigned pages of work from all their teachers and that many of these teenagers were working overtime, often completing schoolwork well into the early morning hours. Although my colleagues and I were well intentioned, we had a great deal to learn about this new way of teaching.

As it happened, after that first week of trial and error, I became more realistic about how to navigate this new kind of instruction. That must not be interpreted as having lowered my

expectations in any way. I just became more flexible in the timing of the assignments, relying on the students’ feedback about the fairness of the dates and amount of work. As I tried to do in the classroom each day, I listened to the students, and by the beginning of April, we had become more comfortable with our new classroom, and students exhibited a genuine commitment to support each other through the process. Although they tried not to show it, they were frightened and unprepared for the impact the Covid-19 pandemic would have on their lives.

From a researcher’s perspective, I remember worrying that my study would be interrupted, but after speaking with my dissertation chair and reflecting on current procedures and protocols, it was clear that I had an ample and reliable collection of data. Despite this, I had reservations about how to ethically continue my research study, while my seniors were experiencing extreme angst over not being able to have a prom, graduation, and other celebrations marking the end of their high school careers. The following excerpts from my fieldnotes were written during the 10th week of online instruction. These notes offer a glimpse into my thought process as I continued to research the development of the students’ writing identities. At the time, students had begun their research projects on a self-selected topic, and I was attempting to replicate the experience they would have had if they were in the physical classroom.

> Monday, May 18th is the beginning of week 10 of online teaching. We have a little less than one month of classes. I have to take students through the process of research and support them as they narrow and draw conclusions about their topic of interest. What will I learn about them as writers as they progress through these stages? Would it be the same if I were meeting them in class on a day-to-day basis? No, Covid has changed the logistics of my classroom, and it has been different/difficult to get a comprehensive handle on my students. From September to February, I was able to get to know them, interact with them more closely, follow their learning more intuitively, make instructional decisions based on the snippets of responses in their writer’s notebooks and their discussions.

> Moving instruction online has created challenges in my ability to intuit how the kids are progressing. It’s more important for me to rely on their writing responses and listen more closely during the class while all I am able to see is a collection of tiles with my students’ faces. Are they focused? Or are they watching videos or texting their friends - something I have more control of preventing in the classroom.
>
> For this reason, I am concerned about the validity and reliability of my research. I have to make every effort to be objective, so as not to see things that aren’t there. It’s even more critical than before for me to revisit my theoretical framework to guide how I am making sense of the data I collect from students.

The preceding entry from May 18 illustrated my personal and professional angst as the process of data collection continued. It also provides a glimpse of my struggle to find the balance between teacher and researcher. The following entry, also taken from my field notes, substantiated some of the instructional decisions I made during full remote learning.

> Today I find myself having many mixed feelings. On the one hand, I know the kids are getting tired of the online learning. I’m speaking mostly of my seniors. I realize today as I am also thinking of my nieces and nephews and how hard it must be for them to end their senior years with no prom, no end of the year activities, no graduation ceremonies. I know that as an adult, at some point in their lives, they will understand that much of this is insignificant in the whole scheme of things, but as kids, it must be painful on several different levels.
>
> That said, I’ve been reflecting on my instruction - making changes constantly for due dates, especially as I am becoming more cognizant of the time constraints inherent in online learning. The final reading assignment is one I changed. If we were in school, things would be different - it would be more celebratory in terms of students reading a book of their choice. So, this morning, realizing that I will need more instructional time for students to practice some research skills and writing their mini research paper, that it would be too much to expect them to do a thorough job on the reading response paper. In revising this assignment, I still wanted to pay homage to student choice, so instead of writing the final paper, they will present it to their reading groups. They will create a slide deck for the book, using the original requirements for the reading response paper as a guide for their presentation. Hence, students are still challenged to think about their book in an introspective and critical manner, but they will not have the pressure of writing drafts, having peer review sessions, and revising for this particular assignment.

After further analysis of my fieldnotes from this time period, I noticed an increasing degree of reflection and sensitivity about the well-being of the students. This next excerpt from

my fieldnotes illustrated the emotional turmoil many students experienced. During Week 11, I wrote the following:

> In today’s online class, students seemed in better spirits. Fernandez had a new haircut, so he did not hide behind his profile shot. Tara was more awake than before - her hair was done and her make up. I wonder if she was going to work.
>
> Bella looked much better. She had on her cute glasses (the ones that help to alleviate the stress of too much screen exposure) and she was more alert. I think this Covid-19 situation has impacted these students more than people realize. Her family struggles financially, so I wonder if her stress last week had something to do with that.
>
> Alyssa, as always seemed a bit bored, but she is deep. I decide that I need to call on her more to keep her focused. I know that today she has her public speaking class, so maybe she is presenting and is preoccupied?
>
> At some point, I noticed kids looking down, so apparently, they are texting - so I address it and ask them not to. They immediately look up. I wonder if they feel exposed in this context of learning. How is that different from being in close proximity to each other every day in class? What is their perception of what they are seeing as opposed to my perception?
>
> Jack is here, thankfully, I will text him now before I forget and tell him. (I just did.) I want him to know that his presence was acknowledged.
>
> Helen showed up. She did not have the assignment that was due - I think she thinks she will get lost in the shuffle, and that I will not seriously check the work. Another reason to be super diligent with these kids. She is refreshingly deep and is able to articulate her interpretations more clearly than others. And she has portrayed herself as being confused many times this year. I wonder why.
>
> She struggles with having a mother who has been less than interested in her life. She lives with the father and stepmother, and I don’t have a clear handle on the relationship. She is a student that has been tracked in lower classes and has not reached the potential she could have. I have to remember to listen to her during the book talks to understand why she says she struggles with writing but is clearly able to interpret text.

As I present the analysis of findings in the next chapter, it is important to note that the level of rigor and expectations for student interactions through dialogic methodologies continued throughout the school year despite the interruptions of Covid-19. Although lesson plans were modified to be implemented virtually, students met in groups online and were accountable for

verifying that individuals participated in group activities. For example, students took screenshots of their phones or Chromebooks, confirming that each student was in attendance when small group discussions began and when they ended. Additionally, as they had done prior to remote learning, students wrote reflections in their online writer’s notebooks. Each student created a folder in Google Drive in which they housed all writer’s notebook entries for the marking period. If students preferred to keep a hard copy of the notebook, they took pictures of each entry and uploaded them to the writer’s notebook folder.

Students were also expected to participate during whole class discussions and were required to post comments in the online group chat box or a shared document. This requirement sustained the accountability that had been established since the start of the school year. Ultimately, transitioning to remote learning was challenging, but it did not interrupt the students’ journey in understanding their writing identities, which is critical to understanding the data collection and analysis procedures discussed in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

When asked to share their early experiences as readers, the students in this study began a joint exploration of their literate selves. Through the daily dialogic interactions of students that Dillion (1994) referred to as a “collaborative pursuit” of inquiry, my students grappled with ideas, learned to be part of a group, and conducted themselves as novice academics. The heart and soul of any classroom lies within the interactions of the students with each other and their teacher. As these individuals came together for a brief span of time within these classroom walls, their unique stories unfolded, and as they negotiated their roles, this shared space became energized with interactive moments that Alsup (2006) described as the cultivation of new understandings of the self and others.

In this chapter, I described an environment that engendered mindfulness, critical thinking, and compassion for others. Within this sociocultural learning space, where diverse students interacted with each other daily through discussions about texts and writing, their values and cultures emerged. Their dialogue with each other inspired self-reflection and contemplation of the varied perspectives of other students. These daily exchanges encouraged students to consider alternate views of important issues and situations, and ultimately led to a heightened awareness of people, their ideals, and their unique selves. As students experienced this intimate human journey, their awareness of themselves as writers intensified. Chapter Five analyzes the timescales of this journey and how writing identity developed through iterations of literacy instruction grounded in student dialogue and writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings: Diversity, Dialogue, and the Writer’s Notebook

“It’s [writing identity] who you are on paper, who you’re trying to portray. It’s influenced by life experience and culture which affects your opinion. Writing identity is your personality on paper, and it’s unique to each person because they have different experiences and different views.”

- Bella

“Yeah. I never really thought about what a writing identity was. I feel like I've never been asked that before. And then all the maps and stuff that we did, that made me realize what a writing identity is.

“I feel like the class itself definitely made us all dive deeper into what writing actually is. We've always wrote, but for essays and stuff like that, we would get assignments. We actually were breaking down who we were as a writer, really studying writing itself, I guess. Like who we are…”

- Helen

“Honestly, for me it has to be the way that your past influences the way you write today. And it can be anything from a vacation that you took, to all the work that you've done prior to writing this piece that you're writing now. I feel like writer's identity is, it's just like all your past, cause that's kind of what makes you who you are today, is what your past and what your past events were.”

- Jack

Bella, Helen, and Jack are examples of students in this study who articulated writing identity as “who you are on paper” or “the way you write.” These phrases captured the essence of the process students experienced as they unpacked their writing identity. In their own words, students equated their writing identity with how they perceived themselves as individuals and asserted that their life histories were part of how they perceived themselves as writers. One way they did this was through a complex literacy process that is detailed later in this chapter. Over the course of the school year, students’ writing identities evolved through a steady and consistent reciprocal process of reading, writing, reflecting, and talking. Within this sociocultural classroom environment, the students began to understand their writing identities.

As the weeks unfolded and students were engaged in talking and writing about various texts, they gained insights into their unique writing process. Their discoveries revealed a multi-faceted image of the elements that contributed to writing identity formation. In earlier chapters, it was established that identity is always in a state of flux and therefore forms and changes over time. Furthermore, identity is constructed in the interactions between and among other people and their sociocultural context. Burgess and Ivanic (2010) explained that the facets of identity included the self a student brings to the act of writing and the self that is further constructed through the act of writing and how the writer is perceived by the reader. As their teacher and the researcher in this study, I became aware that this process of identity formation was apparent not only to me but also to the students.

Hence, this research into writing identity gave me insight into the underlying complexities of each student’s individuality and served to broaden my own narrow perception of the benefits of diversity in the classroom. As described in Chapter Four, the students came from diverse backgrounds. Most often this insight into their diverse identity development occurred as I listened to students discuss texts or controversial issues in their small groups. From this vantage point, I was privy not only to their understanding of content but also to their interests, questions, and concerns about the topics that most interested them.

It became evident that when students shared their perspectives and personal anecdotes, with this diverse group, they were motivated to think more critically about themselves as writers and became increasingly engaged in and accountable for their learning. As students wrote and talked together throughout the year, they demonstrated increased confidence in their literacy skills. Moreover, their innate compassion emerged at various times during the year when discussing significant topics in the novels or texts they read.

Essentially, writing identity was enacted through the students’ lived experience in the classroom through their writing events and social interactions with peers. Analysis of the data from macro, meso, and micro perspectives uncovered two predominant aspects of writing identity. As the introductory student quotes showed, first, students developed understandings of their unique individuality over time that deepened their awareness of writing identity in the writing process or “who you are on paper.” Second, and interwoven into the first finding, the role of teacher-student and student-student dialogue through instructional tools, particularly the writer’s notebook and peer review, repeatedly surfaced as playing integral roles in students’ literacy learning and became another important aspect of writing identity, or “the way you write.” Third, this year-long immersive ethnographic study resulted in new theoretical understandings of how a diverse, dialogic classroom environment with varied instructional processes of writing contributed to both aspects of writing identity formation. In other words, individual identity at the micro level and dialogic pedagogy at the meso level were reinforced and reverberated by the diverse classroom culture’s macro-level processes.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the various ways in which writing identity developed in the secondary ELA classroom. Students expressed parallels in how they identified as individuals and as writers. When examining their autobiographical selves and life histories, they understood their writing identity to be an extension of their perceived understandings of themselves. Ultimately, the findings of this ethnographic study show how the students’ awareness of their developing writing identities were shaped by a collaborative spirit in an environment that celebrated diversity in people, ideas, and perspectives.

Review of the Research Questions and Summary of Findings

It has been established throughout this dissertation that writing identity is partly driven by the autobiographical self that changes and adapts over time and the social context within which it operates (Ivanic, 1998). Hence, the dominant ideologies that exist in any given social setting influences an individual’s identity. Furthermore, through the acts of writing and reading, one’s identity is consolidated over time (Burgess & Ivanic, 2010). According to Ivanic, the mature students she studied, ranging in ages from 30 to 50, often juggled conflicting identities in their academic writing. In the current study, younger writers, ranging in age from 17 to 18, also exhibited similar struggles of conflicting identities. However, this study adds onto Ivanic’s theory by illuminating a third dimension to the writing process. This macro-level process included the social interactions of the diverse students that fostered a sense of camaraderie as they became more aware of their writing identities. To guide me in understanding the writing identities of the young students in this ethnographic study, these were the research questions:

RQ: How do the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners develop and evolve within a dialogic ELA classroom?

RQ1: What role do the culture and climate of this diverse mixed-ability–level ELA classroom play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1a: What role does dialogue play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1b: What role do varied approaches to writing instruction play in the development of students’ writing identities?

Each research question focused on a specific element of writing pedagogy that is integral to a student’s development as a writer: RQ1) A classroom culture that cultivates the social aspect of the writing environment; RQ1a) dialogue and peer review; and RQ1b) writing methodologies.

As writers develop throughout an academic career, writing identity also evolved. Hence, classroom culture, dialogue, and writing methodologies simultaneously influenced the writing process of students as well as their self-perception of writing ability and writing identity. Experiencing this evolution with the participants at this point in their development yielded confirmation of just how compelling each of these components is to understanding the self as a writer. The following is a summary of the major findings of this study.

The Role of Diversity in the Development of ‘Who You Are on Paper’

The overarching research question in this study examined how the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners developed and evolved within a dialogic ELA classroom. With regard to the first research question, a significant finding when studying the role of the culture and climate of this ELA classroom was that participation in a community of writers who varied in race, cultural experiences, and previous academic placement had profound meaning of how students communicated with each other about their writing. Culture took on a new meaning as students talked about writing. The richness of students’ diversity supported the craft of writing and students’ understanding of themselves as writers. Based on their consistent interactions with peers in a learning-centered environment that included small groups, larger discussion groups, peer-review sessions, and reading groups, students demonstrated empathy and compassion for each other and gained new understandings of each other’s unique cultures and ethnicities.

These behaviors were often exhibited through their growing familiarity with each other during their participation in academic conversations about texts that focused on issues of identity, race, ability, and inclusion. Students participated daily in small-group conversations and learned to listen more closely to each other, as was evidenced by their continual efforts to

provide valid and relevant feedback to other students’ ideas. I was able to track these conversations through audiotaping, videotaping, and field notes. This finding supports and extends an aspect of this study’s theoretical framework, which is that learning to write is a social activity. Through their interviews, I concluded that most students, regardless of previous academic track, race, or ethnicity, felt included in this learning environment and were able to articulate that they learned in ways that they had not previously experienced. Students cited talking to each other as a major contributor to understanding themselves as writers.

The Role of Dialogue in the Shaping of Writing Identity

A second significant finding relates to the second research question and the role of dialogue in the development of students’ writing identities. The dialogue between and among students in this sociocultural setting created moments and experiences that cultivated a process and flow of identity construction. These moments, or timescales (Ivanic, 1998), manifested in the various stages of writing assignments, peer-review sessions, conferences with me, and moments of self-reflection. Each moment spent writing, reflecting, and talking about writing contributed to the continual formation of and understanding of themselves as writers. Students’ conversations, writing samples, and learning scenarios were indicative of this phenomenon. Peer-review sessions played a crucial role in broadening and deepening students’ awareness of self. Through their conversations with other writers, students saw themselves as writers. Moreover, the dialogue between and among students was a direct outgrowth of the reflective writing that took place in the writer’s notebook, the third major finding of this study in regards to the third research question.

The Role of the Writer’s Notebook and Peer Review in ‘The Way You Write’

The third research question focused on how varied approaches to writing instruction shaped or contributed to the development of students’ writing identities. The writer’s notebook emerged as a principal finding in terms of its relationship to the development of the students’ perception of themselves as individuals and academic writers. At the end of the school year, students concluded that the notebook itself was a reflection of their writing identity journey. Through interviews with students, I concluded the following: (a) the notebook became a reference for students when identifying features of accomplished writing; (b) writing in the notebook daily helped to cultivate the skills required of formal writing; (c) writing in the notebook formatively, with the knowledge that their writing would not be evaluated as a summative piece, contributed to their confidence as writers ; (d) writing prior to discussions provided them with essential time to examine and evaluate their thinking, which increased their participation during academic conversations with peers; and (e) most importantly, the notebook became a living record of their development as writers from September to June.

Part One revisits how the discoursal construction of identity framework (Ivanic, 1998) was critical in understanding the complex literacy process that surfaced as a significant finding in the shaping of writing identity. Part Two presents an in-depth view of the findings from an instructional unit on writing identity to demonstrate how the students’ writing identities emerged through the process of dialogue, reflective writing in the writer’s notebook, and peer review. A detailed discussion of these three literacy processes concludes Part Three.

Part One: Understanding the Process of Writing Identity

A basic assumption throughout this analysis has been the critical role of student dialogue in the shaping of writing identity. However, the data gathered throughout the study also

emphasized that dialogue was only one literacy process that occurred in tandem with multiple layers of literacy processes. Essentially, it was evident that writing identity was rooted in the complexity of both the oral and aural dynamics of student talk and the act of writing in a diverse classroom environment.

In Chapter Three, I explained that I would analyze samples of student writing at various stages throughout the study to evaluate how writing identity develops. When studying writing identity, Burgess and Ivanic (2010) and Wortham (2008) utilized timescales to categorize the patterns that emerged in the data. Timescales are literacy events or periods of time in an individual’s life that are indicative of a person’s self-perception in relation to a particular stage of life that contribute to writing identity (Wortham, 2008). Woven throughout the chapters of this dissertation is the belief that writing is a social activity that is learned through participation and use of mediating tools, such as instructional strategies in a situated environment (Gee & Green, 1998). Therefore, writing identity is shaped by the iterations of literacy practices in the classroom.

It has also been established in this dissertation that students enter a learning community with their cultural and social histories. Hence, their literacy development has been shaped throughout multiple social and educational experiences. Thus, a student’s writing identity may be analyzed in non-linear heterochronous ways to understand how this phenomenon evolves over time (Elf, 2017). Burgess and Ivanic (2010) and Lemke (2000) identified three dimensions of this complex process through which writing identity may be examined: a micro-genetic timescale (minutes, hours, days), a meso-level timescale (weeks, months, years), and a socio-cultural timescale (decades, centuries). In other words, as Elf (2017) explained, multiple writing events take place within the instructional moments in a classroom that operate on a micro-genetic

timescale. The minutes, hours, and days students are engaged in writing occur on a meso-level timescale within the established culture of the secondary high school English classroom. Both the writing events and the classroom culture are linked to the socio-cultural timescale, the dominant ideologies that have shaped and continue to shape educational practices.

As I conducted my research, these timescales helped me focus the data collection and analysis of writing identity. In his analysis of the ongoing construction of writing identity, Elf (2017) utilized timescales to track and study the development of a Danish student known as Amalie over a four-year period. The textual analysis method used by Elf included examining the student’s writing process in terms of structure and style and the effect of teacher commentary on the student’s development. Culminating interviews with the student were also conducted to analyze how the writing events impacted the writer on different timescales.

After reviewing the data and the study on Amelie, I had originally decided to tell the stories of two students, one who had been previously placed in high track classes and the other whose academic experiences had been in lower track classes. My purpose would be to tell the stories of these students to intimately acquaint my audience with the intricacies of writing identity and how each student, albeit unique in their own way, shared commonalities in their development as writers. Prior to this decision, I had chosen to organize the findings of my study in an orderly format categorized by the research questions.

However, as I continually scrutinized the data, I realized that the story of my student’s developing writing identities was far too complex and dependent upon several factors, specifically their interactions with multiple students. Also, if I wanted my reader to visualize the classroom dynamics, I had to find a way to illustrate the convergence of diversity, writing instruction, and dialogue. From the beginning of this project, my goal was to understand how

students in a diverse classroom setting developed as writers when they interacted with other students. Moreover, I was more interested in the elements of the interaction between and among students, and discussing only one or two students would minimize the cultural richness of the classroom, and in so doing negate the significance of a writing community in the contribution to writing identity development. Consequently, I chose to present the findings using the many voices of the students that brought this story to life.

In Chapter Two, I presented the theoretical framework adapted from Fairclough (1989) and Ivanic (1998) to analyze the data (see Figure 2.1). Using this framework helped me to organize and analyze the accumulation of data. I explained in Chapter One that this framework recognized the power differentials inherent in the classroom setting and that awareness of the existence of the dominant discourse would help me study my students’ writing and dialogue with their peers. Most importantly, Ivanic’s and Fairclough’s framework illustrates how language is embedded in the processes of which they are produced. In other words, any text, whether written or spoken, is inextricable from the processes of production and interpretation that create it, and these processes are likewise inextricable from the various local, institutional, and socio-historical conditions within which the participants are situated (Ivanic, 1998). Thus, the framework emphasizes the critical nature of the interactions that occur in the classroom and shape how students see themselves as writers. However, Ivanic’s and Fairclough’s framework does not show how literacy processes converge in the classroom and how they shape writing identity.

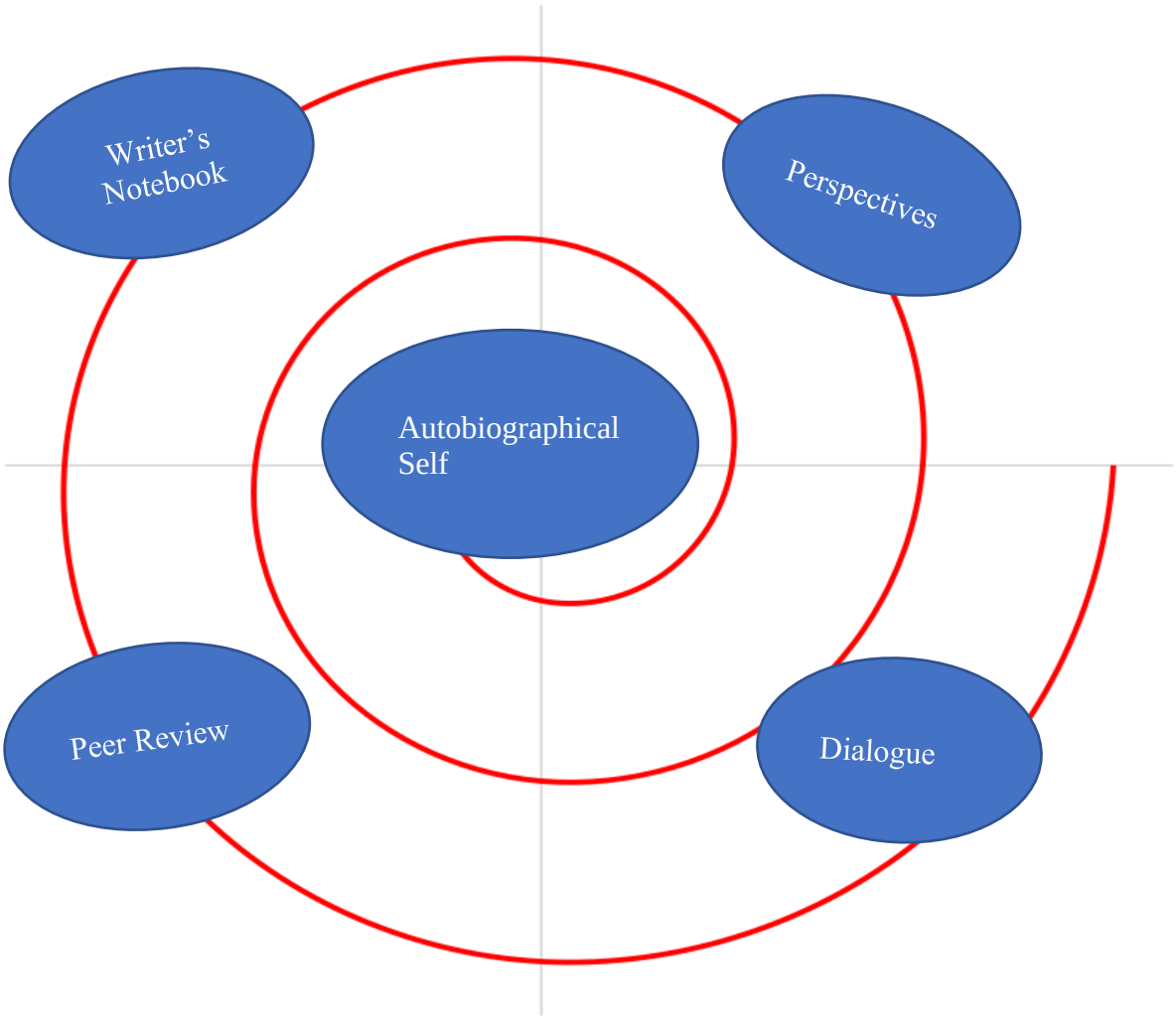
Writing Process in Motion – An Expanded View of Writing Identity

For the purpose of showing how the process of writing identity materializes in a classroom where student-to-student dialogue is embedded in writing instruction, Figure 5.1 utilizes a spiral to depict how it may appear in the meso layer of Ivanic’s (1998) framework.

Spirals have multiple interpretations that typically relate to creation and growth, but essentially, they also represent continuous motion. Writing identity begins with the autobiographical self, and through a continuous flow of experiences and social interactions, it slowly and gradually develops over time (Cremin & Locke, 2017; Ivanic, 1998). Metaphorically, the spiral, like writing identity, also has a starting point at its center and grows and expands or tightens over time, depending on the context within which it is found. Moreover, the nature of the spiral suggests an ongoing and limitless trajectory, much like the process of identity. Each writing event as depicted in Figure 5.1 encompasses the discoursal literacies that shape the writing process. The writer’s notebook, diverse student perspectives, peer review, and dialogue often occur synchronously, creating a learning process that contributes to a student’s understanding of writing identity. Through the lenses of these literacy processes operating within the instructional timescales in the sociocultural setting of the classroom environment, I was able to study how each lens contributed to the construction of writing identity.

Figure 5.1

Literacy Processes in the Construction of Writing Identity

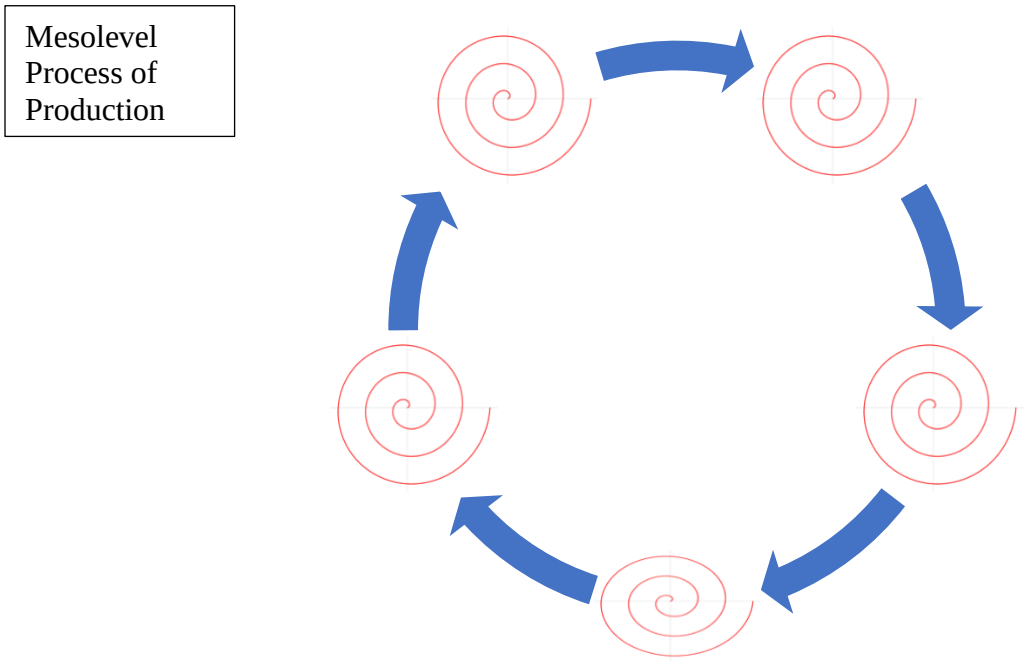


To further understand how the dynamic process of writing identity occurred, Figure 5.2 (see below) illustrates the continuous nature of the process as it occurred in the classroom. The blue arrows represent the ongoing development of writing identity, and the spirals indicate the literacy processes that take place through the writing events or timescales present in the classroom. Each spiral in the diagram marks an iteration of a writing event that occurs along the

continuum of writing identity. In any given instructional timescale, students wrote in their notebooks, shared their ideas with others, and assessed each other’s writing. This process occurred repeatedly throughout the school year. Over time, as students interacted with others in this dynamic process of reading, writing, and talking, their inclinations to experience a richer and fuller version of themselves continued to transform their writing identities (Alsup, 2006).

Figure 5.2

Writing Identity Construction



Context of Instructional Sequence

In Chapter Four, I described a lesson that was implemented at the beginning of the school year to illustrate the layers of instruction inherent in a writing event. The overview of classroom instruction included in Appendix G is also important for understanding the context within which a particular lesson occurred. As the thematic goal for the academic year was writing identity, all

instructional units were designed with the intention of bringing students closer to an understanding of their unique identities. The word *unit* in this context is used with caution, as the word suggests an increment of study that will end when the content is taught. From my perspective, the classroom is a continuum of learning experiences that take place within a framework of pedagogical protocols that are essentially an organic process, so all content and topics are interrelated in either explicit or nuanced ways.

Therefore, although the word *unit* is used for coherence when explaining the findings, all units of study must be understood to be interconnected in that each was a scaffold to the next in both content and meaning. For example, students read texts on writing identity as they prepared to write their college essays. The texts provided a theoretical foundation for students as they conceptualized their own identities. Additionally, the skills students learned from the disability unit were applied to “The Danger of a Single Story.” Furthermore, a common thread woven through the chosen texts for the year was the social, economic, or ethnic marginalization of an individual or group. Overall, each unit served multiple purposes, but the building of literacy skills and development of writing identity were centralized.

Since the exploration of writing identity was at the forefront of my mind as I designed lessons—particularly since I knew that with each act of writing or social interaction, students’ writing identity was developing—I was attuned to any connection to identity in all writing events and discussions. In retrospect, data relevant to writing identity were collected all year, which is why I emphasize the significance of all the events that took place during the school year. Part Two is a collection of student voices that tell the story of how their writing identities developed through dialogue, peer review, and the writer’s notebook.

Part Two Findings: Student Voices

The purpose of this section is to elucidate for the reader a coherent and succinct representation of the findings of this ethnography that were presented in the introduction to this chapter. Of critical importance to the outcomes of this study is that writing identity was enacted through the students' lived experience in the diverse classroom—through their writing and social interactions with their peers. The analysis of the data from macro, meso, and micro perspectives uncovered two predominant aspects of writing identity. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, one finding was that writing identity is "who you are on paper," indicating that the more students understood about themselves as individuals, particularly in the context of a diverse, dialogic classroom, the deeper their knowledge of how they identified as writers. Equally significant was that students described writing identity as "the way you write," which makes a strong argument that the process of writing and a teacher's instructional decisions is an integral aspect of writing identity. A third aspect of writing identity development was the diverse classroom environment. Students' diversity in terms of academics, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic background played an important reverberating role in the other two aspects of writing identity.

Throughout this dissertation, I have been cognizant of sharing student voices to maintain a realistic portrayal of their experience in my classroom. With this in mind, I have organized Part Two to emphasize the three aspects of writing identity uncovered in this study: the students' autobiographical selves and the writing process. In the first section, the unit on identity formation implemented in November 2019 is deconstructed to emphasize that writing identity was enacted through the process of writing, talking, and reflecting. The students' artifacts shared in this section demonstrated how their personal experiences and social histories were deeply embedded

in their identities, which as Hillocks (1995) concluded, leads to the act of writing. I argue that the literacy processes—the cyclical iterations of writing, reading, talking, and reflecting—that were occurring throughout the unit also contributed to subsequent writing experiences.

In the next section of Part Two, I examine how the students’ experiences with the writer’s notebook enacted their writing identity journey. Perceptions of the writer’s notebook showed it was a compelling element, as students reflected on their attitudes and performance as writers. Students’ reflections and interview responses featured in this section substantiate the two aspects of writing identity that are critical to the outcomes of this study.

Part Two concludes with an analysis of the peer-review process and its role in the construction of students’ writing identities. The lesson is part of the Inquiry Paper unit of instruction that took place in May 2020. Peer review emerged as having a significant influence on how students perceive themselves as writers and reviewers. Here again, students’ comments and reflections affirm that writing identity is shaped by students’ self-knowledge and the writing process. Woven throughout is the underlying finding of the role of the diverse classroom environment in the writing identity process. I argue that without that component, the writing identity process would be incomplete.

The Role of Diversity in the Development of ‘Who You Are on Paper’

During her interview in June, Colleen, a White introspective student whose intuitive comments surfaced during group discussions, described writing identity like this:

> I would probably say it’s as a writer your voice, how you speak to your audience and how they perceive you. Your style, depending if you’re sarcastic, witty, if you’re more formal or it just…I feel like it’s you, like you as a person putting yourself out there on a page and it’s just how you want people to perceive you.

Colleen confirmed for me that many students recognized an inner self they brought to the writing experience. It was not apparent to me at first that students like Colleen were becoming increasingly more cognizant of the existence of their writing selves; however, as time drew on throughout the school year and I listened to the interviews and analyzed writer’s notebook entries and other classroom artifacts, it became a repeated pattern in the data collection. In Colleen’s case, she recognized the self as her voice and style of writing that she put on a page. Other students like Carlos used the word “perspective” when explaining writing identity, stating that it is “your own perspective on writing.” Another student, Sam, used the word “perspective” but elaborated that writing identity is something that feels “natural” to him. Further analysis of the interview data revealed students’ varied and diverse perceptions of writing identity (further examined in this chapter). In keeping with the style of ethnographic writing, the students’ voices tell the story of their growing understanding of themselves as writers.

Unit on Identity Formation

In late fall of 2019, students were deeply immersed in refining their college essays and had studied a variety of mentor texts and applied several literacy skills. They had also been practicing discussion-based skills and peer-review protocols. Although the collaborative character of the classroom has been established and reiterated throughout Chapter Four, it bears repeating once again. Logistically, the classroom was much like any other in terms of size, but it was clear to students that their comfort and adaptability were important in this environment. Thirty blue desks in shapes that looked like life-size puzzle pieces gave students permission to move around and talk to different people. In other words, those 30 free-floating desks supported a dialogic space. Students quickly learned that they would rarely work alone in this setting and that they were expected to “show up” each day, ready to talk and think with other students.

As fall transitioned to winter, students had been studying identity formation in preparation for future lessons on writing identity. My goal was to generate student interest in the concept of identity and assess their knowledge of how identity develops. Additionally, I wanted them to extend their understandings to the college essays they were writing.

Table 5.1 is an outline of the instructional lessons on identity that were implemented over a three-week period in November 2019. Each lesson was designed to develop literacy skills and discussion skills. This section is a description of a series of lessons on identity formation to show how a dialogic classroom setting is integral to developing writing identity. The description of the lesson shows the process of writing, thinking, and talking to show the students' developing insights about their identity.

Table 5.1

Instructional Sequence on Identity Formation

Essential Questions:

- What is *identity*?
- How do you identity as a literate person?
- What makes us who we are?
- How do others contribute to our understanding of identity?
- How will becoming more familiar with the concept of identity help you choose a topic for the college essay?

Learning Outcomes:

- Deepen student knowledge of identity formation
- To broaden perceptions of an individual's behavior and cognitive ability
- Develop critical reading skills
- Refine discussion skills

Outline of Instructional Sequence:

1. Students wrote about their initial understandings of identity in the writer's notebook.
2. Students shared their entries and discussed their ideas in small groups.
3. Students wrote a reflection in the writer's notebook on the group discussion and how it added to their understanding of identity.

4. Students viewed the TedTalk "Who am I? Think again" presented by Hetain Patel. In the writer's notebook, students jotted any ideas in the video that informed them about identity.
5. In groups, students shared their lists about the video and added ideas to the lists in the writer's notebook.
6. All group members worked together to exhibit their most significant ideas and contributed to a class list students created on a GroupMe app.
7. Students reflected on their developing understandings in the writer's notebook.
8. Individually, students read and annotated the following articles: "Basics of Identity" by Shahram Heshmat (article) and "How to Discover Your True Identity and Uphold Your Self-Worth" (Internet article). Students were required to identity key points in both articles, including textual support.
9. Students worked in pairs to discuss the articles, review each other's ideas, and refine their thinking.
10. Students responded to a questionnaire about their individual identities.
11. Students wrote a reflection on their new understandings of their identity based on their responses to the questionnaire.
12. Students share their findings in small groups.
13. At this point, students had a collection of data to develop their understandings about identity: notes from the TedTalk, reflections, the list on the GroupMe app, the Identity Questionnaire, and the identity articles. Working in groups of three, students synthesized their ideas and brainstormed a list of influences on identity construction and created mind maps to conceptualize their evaluations and assertions.
14. Each group of students presented their completed mind maps to the whole class. Prior to the presentations, students wrote reflective entries in which they were asked to explain information they still desired, even after studying a variety of sources. When groups presented their mind maps, their peers were expected to evaluate the quality of the mind map using a scoring rubric and the overall theme.
15. Students wrote a reflection describing their learning experience. An example of a prompt was: In what ways did creating a mind map contribute to understanding your identity? How did working with peers influence your understanding of identity?

Notice the cyclical iterations of writing, reading, talking, and reflecting that were in continuous motion throughout the lesson and were illustrated in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Each moment in the classroom was governed by *learning talk*, one of the repertoires that teachers use to implement dialogic teaching. According to Alexander (2020), talking in a pedagogical context involves repertoires that help teachers to engage with essential aspects of classroom culture and

to generate student talking that encourages questioning, extending, discussion, and argumentation. The repertoire Alexander labeled as *learning talk* characterized classroom dialogue as transactional, expository, interrogatory, exploratory, deliberative, imaginative, expressive, and evaluative. In the context of my classroom, this kind of student talk encouraged students to learn to listen and respond to each other by respecting others’ viewpoints and expanding their ideas by exploring the ideas of others. A featured lesson utilized a mind-mapping strategy, so I begin with a brief explanation of mind mapping and its relevance to the writing process.

Mind Mapping and the Writing Process

Mind mapping, created by Tony Buzan, is a graphic technique that unlocks the potential of the brain. It harnesses the full range of cortical skills—word, image, number, logic, rhythm, color, and spatial awareness—and allows an individual to freely expand their thinking (Buzan, 2018). A mind map mirrors the structure of a brain cell with branches reaching out from the center. It may be applied to numerous topics in multiple disciplines. When introducing the mapping process to students, it was important to make the distinction between a mind map and a poster so that students approached the task with purpose and intention. In recent years, mapping has been an instructional staple in both my high school classes and professional development workshops for teachers. Mind mapping encourages a wide range of critical-thinking skills, and when utilized as a group activity, they encourage healthy debate and constructive thinking.

It is also important to note that mind mapping is beneficial for students during the planning stages of the writing process as students in this diverse classroom varied in writing proficiencies, particularly ELLs. According to Bukhari (2016), for many ELLs, the process of writing is hindered when the student attempts to elaborate on an idea. As the learner struggles to

connect details to a central idea, thoughts become disengaged from the main idea and the student tends to add layers of irrelevant details to the piece of writing. ELLs also demonstrate difficulties with establishing cohesion and coherence as they may lack proficient use of appropriate connectors, such as sequencing transitions, which results in a list-like sequence of sentences and a finished text that is underdeveloped (Bukhari, 2016). Hence, mind mapping is a tool that can benefit many writers, particularly during the pre-writing stage of composing. It is most useful when combined with other methods of processing development. For example, when students are gathering ideas for academic purposes, mind mapping allows for arranging the concepts in coherent patterns without the pressure of linear or inflexible outlines or lists. Although these traditional organizational strategies do work for many thinkers who require more order to their planning, the stress of adhering to a strict pattern typically confuses struggling writers or non-native speakers.

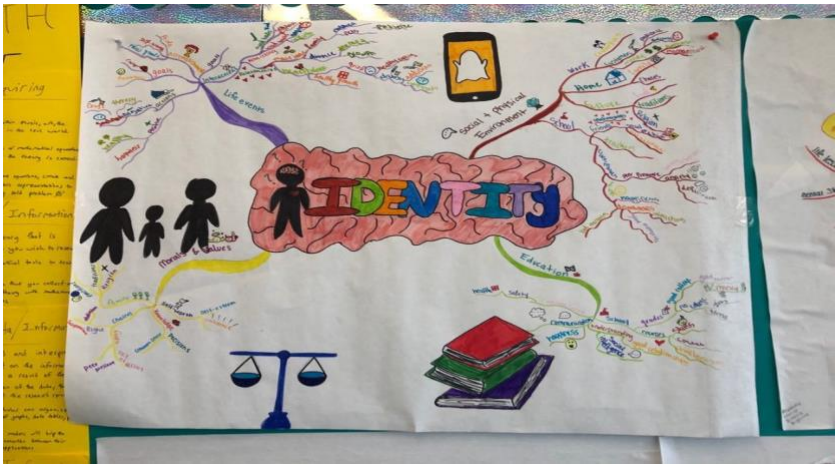
Group Identity Maps

For the mind mapping assignment presented here, students worked in small groups to synthesize their understanding about how a person’s identity is formed. As explained earlier in this section, the instructional sequence was multi-faceted and implemented through iterations of writing, reading, talking, and reflecting. When students presented their identity maps to conceptualize their developing understanding of identity, they had previously read and discussed several texts and had written and discussed their evolving understandings of identity. Moreover, the mind map was a collaborative effort and students were expected to work as a team, so discussion was a key element in the design of the lesson. Assigned roles mandated that all students were text readers, meaning that they were all responsible for closely examining the texts they had read and the reflections they had written to help construct the map.

During the presentations, it was clear that students had definitive ideas about identity as well as many questions (see numbers 13 and 14 in Table 5.1). On the day of the mind map presentations, Isabel pointed to one of the main branches on her group’s map and explained that social media has a powerful influence on the way individuals perceive themselves (see Figure 5.3). Earlier in the school year, Isabel, a Latinx student, had told me stories of being bullied in middle school, much of which had occurred on social media sites. She recalled a difficult period in her life when on the school’s cheering squad, she was ridiculed for being “chubby” and “darker-skinned” than other girls. At the time, she was obsessed with earning the approval of these “mean girls,” as she called them, and suffered depression and anxiety. As a result, Isabel had become quite adamant about the futility of the search for acceptance through a social platform.

Figure 5.3

Isabel's Group‘s Identity Map



These experiences continued into her high school years, but with fierce determination, she eventually overcame the desire for her peers’ approval. As she explored writing identity throughout the unit, she had started to realize the importance of her academic accomplishments and other factors that contributed to her individual growth. One day in class as I conferenced with Isabel’s group as they were constructing their identity map, she looked up from her notebook, shrugged her shoulders, and said, “Last year I posted selfies all day. And this year I’m like “Well, whatever,” as if acknowledging how much time she had wasted worrying about other girls’ judgments of her. Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly, she shared some of her stories with the class during the presentations.

After listening to Isabel’s group talking about identity formation, it was Neal’s turn to present his group’s ideas about identity formation. Neal is a White student who was a lively and exuberant former AP student. He immediately made a connection to Isabel’s comments about the influence of social media. With a look of empathy and understanding, he glanced at Isabel while he spoke and agreed that a person’s identity also emanated from their experiences with others, especially through social media: “I think that if a person is told they’re mean again and again,

they will be more mean. Most people are influenced by other people’s opinions about them. If they’re not good at something, they’ll just give up.” As the year progressed, students repeatedly demonstrated compassion and empathy for their peers, supporting the research on detracking that argues for inclusive schooling as necessary for cultivating equity and achieving social justice (Theoharis, 2010).

Although students chose different words and diagrams to convey their perceptions of identity, the maps had several commonalities. Buzan (2018) stressed the significance of first-, second-, and third-level branches when creating a mind map. First-level branches radiate out from the central topic and identify four main topics. Since the brain does not operate in a linear fashion, the branches are curved, and as they are connected to the second- and third-level branches, the ideas flow from concept to concept, representing the unlimited power of the brain to generate ideas. A close analysis of the topics on the four main branches of the students’ mind maps indicated that students chose life events, social and physical environment, education, and morals and values as significant themes in identity formation. Second- and third-level branches specified multiple determinants of identity, such as cultural experiences, peer pressure, grades, religion, family traditions, interactions, mental health, and goals. Students seemed to have an innate sense of their desires and experiences, and I wondered if they would associate these same ideas with writing identity.

Students’ Culminating Thoughts on Identity

After observing the groups’ mind map presentations, I had written notes in my plan book, a daily practice I have used since I started teaching. When reviewing these notes during data analysis, in addition to reminders to have students reflect on the mind mapping process and their new understandings of identity, I had reflected on the high quality of student work and the

dynamics of social interaction. My observations of the process of the group mind mapping supported the belief that when students talk to each other about significant topics in a structured academic environment that promotes social learning, students deepen their understanding about a topic as they take ownership of meaning making. As Resnick (2015) wrote:

> In a dialogic classroom, students engage [collectively] in a process of argumentation that has the potential to go beyond any individual student’s power of reasoning. The students challenge one another, call for evidence, change their minds, and restate their claims, just as adults do…in the world outside school. (p. 447)

It was also clearer to me that teachers needed to believe that their students were capable of the sophisticated thinking that I was observing. When I first began to use dialogic methods in the classroom, I was often surprised by my students’ cognitive abilities and appreciation of other students’ perspectives, not uncommon for teachers who begin to use dialogic instruction (Resnick, 2015; Resnick et al., 2010).

This initial exploration into identity highlighted how a diverse classroom culture empowered students to share parts of their identity that might have been hidden before. This lesson also magnified how students’ innate ability to reason and display empathy was enhanced by their interactions with a diverse group of peers. Table 5.2 represents a segment of a lesson that was implemented after the group mind maps, which shows the depth of student thinking as they progressed through the unit. These responses were gathered from my observations and entries in the writer’s notebooks and summarizes the most significant elements that students believed to be instrumental in identity formation. The first list is a collection of some of the ideas contributed by individual students, which indicates a rudimentary understanding of identity. However, the second list was compiled after students had discussions and created the mind maps.

Considering the developing concepts that appear in the second list, it is suggested that the interaction of the students was influential in understanding identity at a deeper level. Notice how students admitted that “how we identity ourselves and how others see us contributes to identity.” Here again, the data imply that the diverse character of the classroom was an environment that supported a collective journey toward the origins and aspects of identity, which ultimately connected to writing identity.

Table 5.2

Students’ Developing Thoughts on Identity

Essential Questions about Identity

- Who is the authentic you?
- What shapes and contributes to our identities?

According to you, identity is shaped by:

- Memories from the past
- How we are raised
- The environment around us
- Whether or not we were raised in a secure and safe environment
- People we meet
- School – Teachers
- Our hobbies and interests
- Experiences we have throughout our lives
- Social media
- Our culture and ethnicities
- Religious values

Also, according to you:

- There are different versions of ourselves
- We have a social identity and a personal identity
- Parts of our identity we can control, while others we cannot
- Identity evolves throughout our lives — it’s always changing
- How we identify ourselves and how others see us contributes to identity
- Our physical self reveals identity
- Assumptions others make about identity influences how we are seen and how we see ourselves
- It’s difficult to define our authentic self

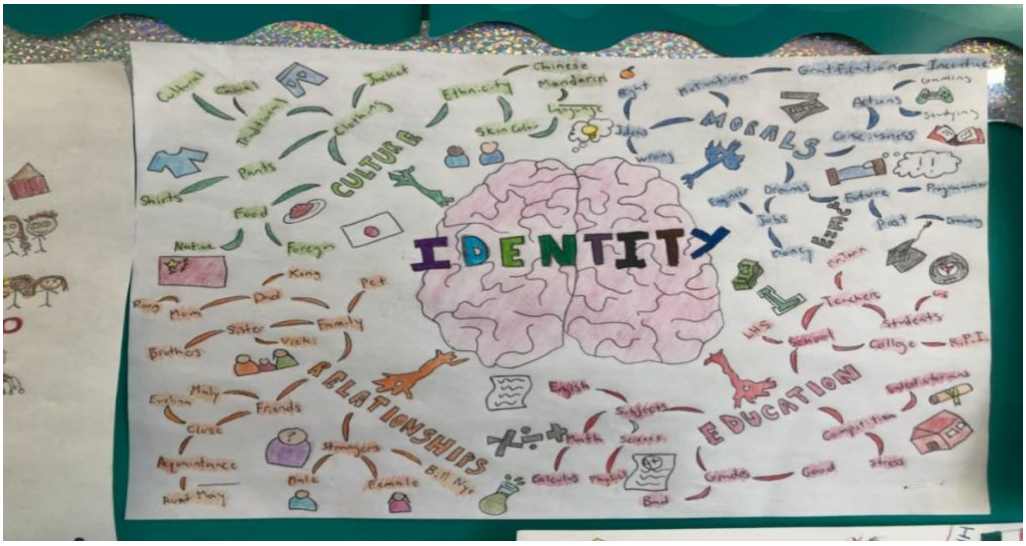
Students' Autobiographical Selves Revealed

Now that students had begun to internalize that identity was a complex and multi-faceted concept that could be examined from various perspectives, I wanted them to analyze their own identity using the same mind-mapping process. The assignment was embedded in the college essay assignment as a prelude to writing the essay. It was inspired by Sir Ken Robinson's book, *Finding Your Element*, in which he argued that finding one's passion is critical for giving life purpose and passion (see Appendix H for the assignment). The artifacts from the classroom included in this section are identity maps belonging to Isabel, Keith, Lucas, and Sam, students of different ethnicities and varying abilities. These maps were representative of the 21 maps collected for this assignment. An analysis of each map revealed that a majority of students prioritized cultural pride and strong familial connections. Additionally, most students valued education and equated it with success.

However, despite the many similarities in these artifacts, each mind map suggested elements that were uniquely relevant to the individual. Sam's map (see Figure 5.4) was predominantly focused on making the most of his education and choosing a lucrative career. Friendships and family were added to the branches of his map, which indicated their importance but were not as predominant as references to school subjects such as calculus, physics, and math. Sam also associated education with stress and competition and included the word "valedictorian" on one of his branches, suggesting his desire to be the best.

Figure 5.4

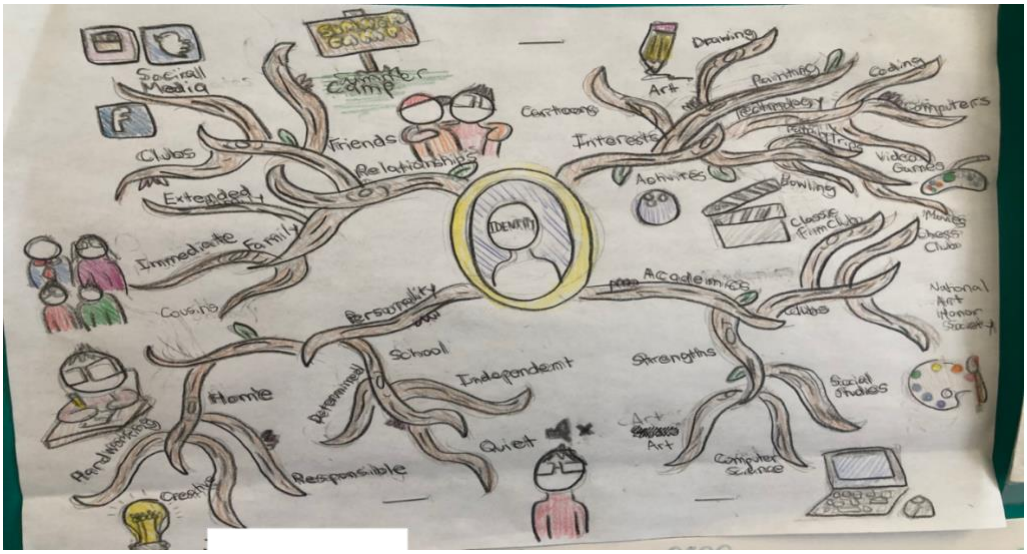
Sam's Identity Map



In contrast, Keith’s map (see Figure 5.5) exuded a more positive view with its emphasis on immediate and extended family as well as friendships. Education was portrayed as a favorable element, despite Keith’s struggles with his learning disability. His branches also revealed his love for art and computers and accomplishments such as induction into the National Art Honor Society.

Figure 5.5

Keith's Identity Map



Lucas’s map (see Figure 5.6) was less condensed than his peers. His map exuded an ambivalence with education and success. In one aspect, he appeared to enjoy the satisfaction of making the honor roll, but he included a branch with the words, “tests,” “failure,” and “excuses,” with an accompanying drawing of a sheet of paper with the word “test” on the top of it and a letter grade of an F. Lucas was a quiet ENL student who had tragically lost his father and cousin in an accident the previous summer while on vacation in his birthplace, the Dominican Republic. His eyes were sad, but he enjoyed the company of his classmates, especially during the book talks. Lucas’s branches also revealed pride in his culture and an interest in sports and video games.

Figure 5.6

Lucas's Identity Map

Isabel’s identity map (see Figure 5.7) also included references to cultural pride, family, and education, but her map also specified an abundance of personal emotions and references to challenges and obstacles she had endured. She included a branch with the words “peer pressure,” “anxiety,” and “social media” emanating from the word “cheerleading.” Isabel’s experiences with being bullied have been discussed earlier in this chapter, and her mind map showed her realization that the situation and how she dealt with it contributed to her identity. Other branches also indicated a passion for life and words that implied an altruistic desire to be a good person.

Figure 5.7

Isabel's Identity Map

Concluding Thoughts on Identity Formation

Overall, each student’s identity map was a record of their perspectives of the self at that moment in time, which is of particular interest to this study on writing identity construction. Ivanic (1998) posited that the autobiographical self that people bring with them to the act of writing is shaped by their prior social and discoursal history. She also explained that this aspect of identity is connected to a “writer’s sense of their roots” (p. 24), having been formed by their experiences and interactions with others, and the ways in which the person chooses to represent these events and situations also provide insight into a writer’s identity. Hillocks (1995) referred to this process as the invention of the self and elaborated on its indispensable role in writing:

> When we write or speak, we posit ourselves as persons with beliefs, memories, motives, and aspirations, none of which exist independently of the others. The person is the integration of all these and more, and our writing derives from the product of that integration. Since those beliefs, memories, aspirations, and motives change from moment

> to moment, we find ourselves in a constant state of reintegration, of reinventing ourselves, as it were. (p. 22)

Both Ivanic’s and Hillock’s perspectives supported how the students’ identity maps illustrated that their life histories were intricately woven into their identities. The students’ choices of words, ideas, and drawings were clear indications of their deepening perceptions of themselves as individuals. Given the evidence in this section, the identity maps show the intensity with which students approached the assignment. Literacy processes utilized throughout the unit supported the student’s ability to isolate the words and phrases on the maps. The instructional flow of the lesson culminated in students’ increased awareness about themselves, which Hillocks (1995) concluded led to the act of writing. Thus, students’ increased familiarity with themselves contributed to their understanding of themselves as writers.

However, still unclear was how aspects of their lives may have influenced their writing styles and the degree to which their educational and social histories were a factor in their writing abilities. As the year progressed and students continued to read and write, I wondered which parts of their identity were instrumental in how they viewed themselves as writers. Some of the answers to these questions were revealed during the end-of-the-year interviews when students commented on the writer’s notebooks. Most of the 20 students interviewed characterized the notebook as being central to how they internalized their writing style and attitudes about writing ability and identity. In the next section, I demonstrate how using a writer’s notebook supported the students’ sense of their unique writing process and evolving writing identities.

The Role of the Writer’s Notebook and Peer Review in the Development of ‘The Way You Write’

> Oh, I love my writer's notebook. I thought, honestly, I thought it was so fun because you give us three questions and I'd have a page and a half, and I was just writing and ranting

> and I'm like, and seriously though, I think that doing it like that where, like I said earlier, just writing and writing and just letting your brain, whatever.
>
> I wrote some things in there, when I read it back, I was like, "Oh, that was pretty smart." And I think that doing it that way, where you're just writing and there's no formal structure, you're able to just, not go on a rant, but you're able to just think of things on the fly, which sometimes, I don't know, are the best things when things are just spur of the moment.
>
> And I think it was super beneficial because again, there was no organization, I was able to think for myself for the most part, there's no limit, two pages only or you have to write two pages. I have my identity in this book because it was my thoughts and my writing.
>
> - Bella

In Chapter Two, it was established that developing writing literacy in adolescent writers requires specific elements of writing instruction. Graham and Perin (2007) identified 11 elements of writing that, when combined, were found to be effective in supporting the writing development of young writers. These elements included the following writing strategies: summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process-writing approach, study of models, and writing for content learning. Hence, awareness of these elements can be extraordinarily valuable to teachers of writing and the importance of knowing how these writing elements contribute to literacy development. My experiences in the classroom taught me the value of these elements, which inspired one of the research questions for this study.

It has been made abundantly clear throughout this dissertation that writing development is an abstract and complex process that is subject to multiple influences (Cremin & Locke, 2017; Ivanic, 1998). Therefore, logic dictates that instructional procedures cannot be dismissed as relevant to writing identity construction. Earlier in this chapter, a unit on identity formation was described to affirm the epistemological significance of writing theory and pedagogy.

Despite the importance of each element, during the interviews with students, it was not a specific strategy that students identified but the writer's notebook that surfaced as highly influential in shaping writing identity. Although I was deeply committed to the inclusion of the writer's notebook in a teacher's instructional program, the intensity of the students' perceptions of its impact on their writing development was unexpected.

What is a Writer's Notebook?

Each student brings with them life experiences that have shaped their personalities and opinions and are integral to how they will present themselves on paper. In the pages of their writer's notebooks, their joys, sorrows, and curiosities were unveiled as they added to its contents, bringing to life a portrait of their writing identity. I remember learning about the notebook while taking graduate courses early in my career and discovering Nanci Atwell's[1] writing workshop approach. Intensely curious about how young people learned to write, I started to read about Atwell's work, which led me to other seminal scholars and teachers. Donald Graves, Don Murray, and Peter Elbow[2] fueled my interest in using innovative methods to ensure that all students had opportunities to write.

Essentially, the writer's notebook is a fluency tool, and teachers can implement it in a variety of innovative ways. Traditionally, writer's notebooks, also referred to as journals, are active intricate records of thinking that help students prepare for discussions and write academic papers (Fulwiler, 1987). Teachers have also used them to help writers experiment with language

[1] Atwell is best known for her work as a middle school teacher in the school she founded, the Center for Teaching and Learning in Maine, a K-8 demonstration school. She is a pioneer of responsive teaching, which rejects the traditional skill and drill teaching methodologies and is largely responsible for providing educators with professional development in how to build and maintain reading and writing workshops.

[2] Graves was also a pioneer in literacy education who revolutionized how writing is taught in the United States. Murray was equally influential as his counterparts. He was a writer and advocate for teaching process writing as opposed to placing excessive focus on the finished product. Elbow has also transformed how writing is taught at all levels. Writing teachers credit him with expanding the uses and implementation of freewriting. He is specifically supportive of all students having the capability to write.

and practice the craft of writing. Bomer (2000) emphasized that writing in the notebook encouraged consciousness in students and that the writing they do in the notebook invites them to examine the world in which they live. Writer’s notebooks or journals are indispensable tools in the development of students’ writing skills, critical thinking, and self-awareness.

In my classroom, many of the 11 strategies cited by Graham and Perin (2007) were easily incorporated into the writer’s notebook. The following is a list of the types of assignments students completed in the notebook: prewriting activities and drafting, including graphic organizers; deconstructing mentor texts to establish the understanding of good writing; written conversations with peers; writer’s craft; genre studies; personality charts; cultural identity exploration; mind maps; college journaling; rhetorical analysis; and word charts. In Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, I presented diagrams to show how literacy processes operate in the construction of writing identity. Note that the types of assignments students wrote in the notebooks integrated multiple literacy skills and consistent interactions with other students.

For example, deconstructing a text is a genre-based approach to writing instruction in which students are given sample texts and inductively analyze its schematic structures and linguistic features. This process gives students an explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and the reasons for its style and structure and stresses that genres are specific to particular cultures (Hyland, 2007). Genre in this context refers to the abstract and socially recognized ways of using language, with the basic premise being that when readers are able to draw on their repeated experiences with patterns they come to see in texts, they are more equipped to interpret the writer’s purpose. When teachers use genre-based writing instruction, students gain knowledge of language forms and how to apply these patterns in their own writing. Although genre pedagogies have been of critical importance for the writing development of ENL

students, they benefit all learners. When combined with process-writing approaches, teachers can design instruction that supports their students’ critical analysis skills.

Deconstructing texts was a consistent procedure throughout the year. When students read Chimamanda Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story” and Elie Wiesel’s “The Perils of Indifference,” they analyzed the text utilizing a genre-based approach. Additionally, these lessons were implemented in an environment where students analyzed the texts together and engaged in student-directed discussion as they worked through the meaning-making process. In keeping with established protocols in place, students wrote reflections and textual analysis charts in their writer’s notebooks.

In this section, I use student voices to exhibit how they attributed much of their understanding of themselves as writers to the notebook. Although I knew the value of the writer’s notebook as an instructional tool, I was genuinely stunned by the students’ comments regarding the impact of the notebook on their writing fluency and skill development. Students not only attributed an emerging awareness of their writing identity to the notebook, but they also credited the notebook for improvement in their academic writing skills. Table 5.3 is a summary of themes that emerged from the students’ interview questions relevant to the notebook.

Table 5.3

Writer’s Notebook Themes

Themes Summarized from Student Interviews
The writer’s notebook reveals identity. Students describe their entries as illustrative of the way they think and feel.

Instructionally, it is a critical component of a comprehensive writing program. When integrated into daily instruction with multiple opportunities for sharing, it helps students find their writing voices.

It represents freedom of thinking where students do not feel the need to censor themselves. Most of the students reported positive feelings and attitudes about the notebook. For the most part, they enjoy writing in it, and for some, it becomes an important archive of their experience as a writer. In this way, the notebook illustrates the developing understanding of the student's perception of himself/herself as a writer.

A record of developing understandings of content for later use in academic writing

A record of developing understandings of content for later use in academic writing
In addition to providing a sense of freedom of thinking and expressing one's opinions, students believe the notebook improves their writing. Students know that the notebook is a fluency and thinking tool and are able to separate it from other writing tasks, so transference to academic writing does occur. Over time, throughout several interactions of timescales over the course of a school year, writing identity is shaped.

When students have consistent opportunities to write in the notebook about complex topics prior to discussions, the stigma of correctness is alleviated and they think more freely about the topic, which increases their ability to articulate their ideas with others. As they do so, they become more acquainted with the way they think, which ultimately leads to understandings of themselves as writers.

***Student Perceptions of the Writer's Notebook*.** Bella, the student whose comments appear at the beginning of this section, was one of the first students I interviewed, and her reflections on the writer's notebook redirected my questioning when speaking with other students. Our discussion in June revealed the extent to which she believed the writer's notebook had influenced her growth and understanding of herself as a writer. When I asked other students to tell me about their experiences with the notebook, they became animated as they described the

entries they wrote. Isabel was the student who had written about how other students had bullied her in middle school and that she had struggled in elementary school to learn English. In fact, it became the topic of her college essay that year. However, she made great progress and had been enrolled in AP English Language prior to her senior year. During our interview, she shared strong feelings about her writing experiences with the notebook.

Isabel expressed her sense of freedom when writing in the notebook and how student choice influenced her process:

> **Isabel:** Honestly, I really like my writer's notebook. I feel like it's...keeps my thoughts in place for me so I know...And like it's very organized...Mine is always very organized I keep like... I keep the dates, and I keep the entry number, and then I keep the title. So, whenever I'm looking for something, I know where it is, and I can see my thoughts that I wrote. However, since I am that type of person that does run on, my entries are so long. So much, sometimes I'm reading it. I'm like, "Oh wait, what did I mean here?" But it just shows how much I like to write. I really did like writing every time you gave us a question because it made me think. And being able to just write about what I was thinking about...
>
> **Ms. B.:** So, do you think it actually helps you to become a better academic writer?
>
> **Isabel:** I think so. I really do, because there's classes where you're supposed to just sit there, read something, and then write an essay about it. You don't really get told, or get asked: What are your thoughts on this? Most of the time it's you read something, you write an essay, that's it. You don't really get asked further questions. So having all these different questions being asked, like when you asked us...There's one where we were talking about earliest memories, just to think about for reflections on reading conversations, critical readings, college journaling; I'm just going through my little notebook.
>
> Allowing us to write about things that we've experienced in our past, like the college journaling. It's questions about like what we...our life. And it gets people more motivated. And I feel like asking people to write about what they feel makes them more motivated instead of asking people to write about something that they probably don't really care about.
>
> When we're made to write out our thoughts about certain things, it lets us feel like there's no right or wrong answer. So, by being able to write how you feel, it helps you understand things better, because, I don't know for me, if I'm forced to write something one way and it's not something that I believe in or something that I understand, it's not really going to help me. But if I'm writing my own thoughts as to how I perceive

> something and then I'm never told that I'm wrong for it...Because in this class you can't be right or wrong about certain things. It's how you write. You just have...You're just given like points and things to like learn how to write better. There's no right or wrong way to write, but you can improve on it. There's no way you can make it go back. So by writing your personal thoughts and writing things, you learn more.

When reviewing Isabel’s comments, her descriptions of her writing in the notebook were characterized by feeling responsible for her learning. The pages in her notebook also captured her life history and became a record of her evolving identity. Matt’s comments were similar in terms of the sense of freedom the notebook gave him. He was the student mentioned in Chapter Four who was previously tracked in honors classes but had not yet developed confidence in his skills as a writer.

Matt explained his enjoyment using the notebook and how it also improved his academic writing.

> **Matt:** I honestly enjoyed it because the writer's notebook was, when you said free write, I actually enjoyed that no one else is going to know, like I just put my opinion down. Whatever we were talking about, I just put my opinion down. I knew at the end of the year you were going to read it when you wanted to grade it. But if I knew none of the other people in the class were going to read it, I would just go straight into my opinion. So, like my opinion could be different than others or they might really not like my opinion. Because like I take different topics that we talked about this year, I take like in a different way. I'm not going to say one that we talked about, but I just took it in a different way, and I didn't want it to be shared at all.
>
> **Ms. B.:** That's okay and it’s one of the purposes of that notebook. Do you think writing those ideas and free writes eventually helps you in your formal writing, your academic writing?
>
> **Matt:** Yes. Yes, I do. I do think that helps in formal writing because writing isn't only about writing essays, writing consists of many things. It consists of your journal entries; it consists of even how you write someone in a letter. That just helped us, I just feel it helped us in beyond many ways. Like it was something so small you wouldn't even notice it and it just helped. It just helped.

Matt’s assessment of the writer’s notebook illustrated aspects of his identity as a writer directly related to his autobiographical self, which Ivanic (1998) explained was integral to

identity construction. He experienced a heightened sense of enjoyment knowing that he could express his opinions freely without the pressure of having to share his ideas with others unless he chose to do so. It is also important to note that Matt used the word “helped” three times when articulating his perceptions of the notebook, a word that was repeated by several students in their interviews. When assessing his skills at the end of the year, Matt commented that many of the assignments “pushed” him to improve his writing style, suggesting that the notebook enhanced his process.

Jack, a former ENL student, was an example of a student who, in addition to finding the notebook as instrumental in improving his writing, also believed it to be a genuine expression of his thinking. When the class transitioned to full remote learning in March, Jack became overwhelmed and anxious. His family was struggling financially, and he was working in his father’s construction business while trying to stay on track with his academic responsibilities. By the end of the school year, he had worked hard to overcome his emotional issues and granted me an interview, all of which spoke volumes about his growth as an individual and a writer. Jack explained how the notebook was a place for him to experiment with his ideas.

> **Jack:** I did have a lot of information there, so I know I'm going to be looking back on that. I think it's a really good idea, a good basis, because it was kind of kind of like a diary. Not so much where you just spill your feelings, but you just write whatever you deemed fit and then you just learn by yourself each step of the way.
>
> **Ms. B.:** What do you mean by “learn by yourself”?
>
> **Jack:** You kind of see the way you write with your own mind and then every day you tone it. That's what I did at least.
>
> **Ms. B.:** Can you explain that?
>
> **Jack:** Yeah. Every day, if you write something like a free write, then every day I would kind of try and step my writing up by a little bit and maybe try something dramatically that I wouldn't try before, whether or not it was incorrect. I give thought and then I would maybe learn how to incorporate that the correct way by doing it the wrong way. We kind

> of didn't have that feeling of...if I do something wrong, I'll get points taken. Not at all. It’s kind of that free writing year.
>
> **Ms. B.:** Does the notebook contribute to you becoming a better writer? A better academic writer?
>
> **Jack:** Oh yeah. 100%. I mean, it definitely doesn't hurt you, and the way that I see it is that it definitely doesn't hurt you. So, it's just a matter of you have to make it, you have to kind of help it help you…you kind of have to allow it to help you. You have to allow yourself to be able to write whatever you deem fit and then you can kind of learn off of that. But if you’re just going to write the same way you would write on any other paper, you’re the problem…because you have to be open in order to write in the notebook.
>
> **Ms. B.:** What do you mean by open?
>
> **Jack:** I mean, for me that means open to trying new things and new...I know that I liked the transitions I worked on in my writer's notebook, so that's something that I wanted to focus on. And in the beginning, it might've not been too good, but with each time that I would learn to incorporate it more and more, I definitely got better, in my opinion.

An analysis of Jack’s responses revealed an emphasis on his ability to learn from his writing experiences in his notebook. Similar to his peers, he credited the notebook for improving his academic writing; however, Jack’s comments also suggested that the agency of the writer is also a critical element in writing identity. Indeed, it is through the freedom of one’s thinking, especially through narrative, that a student’s agency grows and develops over time (Eyres & Locke, 2017). Undoubtedly, the notebook was viewed by many students to be nonrestrictive, which empowered students to write freely and with conviction.

Brandy was also an anxiety-ridden young lady, who had been previously placed in lower-track classes. In the beginning of the year, she often placed her pen on her desk after writing a few sentences, signaling that she had no more ideas. However, Brandy became much more fluent in her writing and attributed much of her growth as a writer to the notebook.

Brandy commented on the freedom she felt to express herself in the notebook.

> **Brandy:** I actually liked the idea because you always say, it could be a free write. Most of it was a free write. You would give us a topic and we would have to answer in like our own words, and I liked that a lot because I love writing, at least for me. I love it, and I feel like I have so much...I'm always thinking about something. So, when you do say, "Write this," I'm like, "Okay." And I think about things in my own perspective. So, I loved the idea.
>
> **Ms. B.:** So, do you think writing in the notebook somehow transfers to formal writing?
>
> **Brandy:** 100%. 100%. I feel like the more that you write about anything, it just gives you more knowledge. You just are able to think about more words. You're able to think more about a topic. I just think that the more you do write, I just feel like the better you get. So, the fact that we wrote in our notebooks pretty much every day, it got easier.
>
> **Ms. B.:** How have you grown as a literate person this year?
>
> **Brandy:** I would say I got more organized with my writing. I feel like when I used to write, I would just be all over the place. I would just do random paragraphs where I was like, "I don't even know what I'm talking about." I just kept writing, writing for a grade. And I was like, "I don't even know what I'm writing about here. I'm just trying to get a good grade." But I feel that this year it was more organized where I was like, "All right, like this goes here, this goes there." Especially in the college essay.

In her interview, Brandy like other students, appeared to make a distinction between being able to write more freely and lucid when unrestricted by the stigma of grades. Yet, her comments did not minimize the importance of academic writing. She had an implicit understanding that in the notebook, she could freely express herself, knowing that was its purpose. Felicia was another student who not only felt liberated by the notebook but also experienced validation for her ideas. Felicia shared that the writer’s notebook was the first time in her educational history that she had a writing journal and how she felt it gave her a sense of authority and agency.

> **Felicia:** So, when I would write about my own opinions and stuff like that, I felt like someone was actually listening to me and cared about my own opinion. Instead of the teacher being like, "Yup, this is what you're going to think. And this is what you're going to do. And you don't have any say in it." So, when I was writing about my perspectives in class and how I think what we should change, what we should do and how the other students are helping me throughout the classes, I felt like I was... I had a say in something.

Ms. B.: And you think that’s important for students, to feel like they have a say?

Felicia: Yes. Students, they want to feel that they're respected, and they want to feel that... just like teachers. Teachers want to feel respected, and they don't want to have a hard time with the students. And just like the students they want to, they want to feel respected, and they want to feel like their voice matters.

Ms. B.: You’re right. I agree with you. That makes a lot of sense. We all feel that way. So, do you think the writer’s notebook contributes to becoming a better academic writer?

Felicia: Oh, definitely! Definitely. When you would collect the books at the end of the year and make sure we're up to pace and like you would actually read through it, and then when you would talk to me about something I've written in my Writer's Notebook, I was like, "Wow. She actually reads them. She doesn't just skim through them."

Collectively, Bella, Isabel, Matt, Jack, and Brandy represented the responses of their classmates. All students in the study recognized the notebook as being influential in their writing development and motivating them to write with more style and sophistication. Additionally, most commented on how the notebook challenged them to think critically and as Marlene put it, “come out of my writer’s shell”. They also credited the notebook for preparing them for discussions about texts and other content. It is also important to note that students genuinely believed that the words they wrote in the notebook were valued by someone. They knew I read the notebooks and therefore felt that their opinions were valued.

When examining the data that was collected from these interviews, there was a pervasive reference to free writing in the students’ comments about the notebooks. Free writing has no prescribed structure and has several benefits for writers. Elbow (2000) described the advantages of free writing as being practical, instrumental in the improvement of thinking, a method that enables the writer to infuse voice, energy, and presence into a piece of writing, and most significant for this study, helps individuals experience themselves as writers in deeply transformative ways.

It was also evident that as students wrote in their notebooks, each writing event or timescale marked an experiential moment in the writer’s development. In other words, students’ writing identities evolved as students engaged in the free writes and other writing tasks completed in the notebook. Each occasion of writing played a part in the students’ understanding of their writing identities. However, as was explained earlier in this section, students engaged in a variety of creative and expository texts in the notebook, including peer review assignments and reflections on writing. In the final section of this chapter, I demonstrate how dialogue through the peer review sessions contributed to writing identity construction and students’ awareness of their development.

Peer Review and Writing Identity

> Constructive criticism is helpful to me because sometimes I write things that make sense to me and not as much as others. So, when someone reads something (I wrote) and says, “That doesn’t make sense,” it helps me a lot so that I can reconfigure what I wrote so that it makes sense to everyone, not just myself.
>
> Strategies you taught were able to make me better at helping others by using those same strategies. Communication is definitely really important. You can see things from other perspectives, see things from other views, and it helps you think past just your thoughts on a topic so that you can write more in depth about things.
>
> - Arleta

Based on the students’ comments on the writer’s notebook discussed in the previous section, a strong argument exists for its role in writing identity development. In terms of the research questions, an additional finding included the indisputable significance of dialogue using peer review and its critical role in the students’ awareness and knowledge of their writing identities. When students provided each other with feedback, the advantages were numerous. During peer-review sessions, students had multiple opportunities to practice elements of constructive feedback, while receiving advice on their own writing.

Arleta was an example of how students benefit from peer review. She was a former ENL student who had been in Advanced Placement English in her 11th-grade year and had a sweet disposition despite having experienced the challenges brought on by the abandonment of her father in her early years. Although mostly a quiet student, she would often be smiling and listening intently to other students. In the beginning of the school year, I had sensed her resistance to group discussions, and after experimenting with a variety of configurations to determine which combinations of students was most effective, I made the decision to place Arleta with a group of students who had similar qualities, hoping they would bond with each other and eventually work through their discomfort. Gratefully, they did, and Arleta proved herself to be an excellent peer reviewer as indicated by her comments at the beginning of this section.

Peer Review Pitfalls and Protocols. Review sessions may be organized with partners or small groups, depending on the assignment and learning objectives. For example, if the focus of the lesson is for students to experience writing for different audiences, then the peer review is best implemented with more than one partner. Teachers can use peer review at any stage of the writing process, and it can be accomplished through online platforms as well as in the physical classroom. Ample strategies and resources are available to teachers to provide students with scaffolded activities that instruct students in the peer-review process.[3] Students can write letters to peers, comment in the margins of each other's papers, use forms that require students to respond to specific prompts. It is also advisable to model the process for students and to provide them with specific phrases and step-by-step instructions.

[3] The Sweetland Center for Writing at the University of Michigan is an excellent resource for conducting peer review. The website includes strategies and sample protocols to support teachers in their efforts

A common excuse from teachers is that students are ill equipped to provide effective feedback on another student’s writing (Brammer & Rees, 2007). Students also complain that peer review is a waste of time and that their fellow students do not know enough about good writing to provide helpful feedback. Brammer and Rees (2007) found students enter the writing classroom with varying proficiencies, and that the more developed student does not trust in the feedback of a peer who may be perceived as lacking the qualities of a good writer. These attitudes and perceptions from teachers and students preclude a smooth and beneficial peer-review process. Having heard these comments voiced by both students and colleagues, I understood and acknowledged the validity of these challenges, but the potential benefits for students far outweighed the effort required to teach students how to be a critical reader of a partner’s essay.

For peer review to work well, a trusting environment is essential, and students must be instructed in how to conduct high-quality peer review. In terms of establishing a trusting environment, one has only to study the tenets of cultural responsiveness to cultivate a space where students can thrive in the peer-review process. In Chapters 2 and 4, I wrote extensively about the characteristics of classrooms that are accepting of diversity and how teachers can foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism in classrooms (Paris & Alim, 2014). When teachers fully embrace their students’ differences as advantages rather than deficits, then students can be comfortable when sharing their perspectives.

Therefore, knowing that learning styles and language proficiencies vary among all students is key to ensuring that peer review does not become a pointless activity. Kim (2015) reported that low English proficiency, difficulty in articulating problems and suggestions, cultural influences, minimal prior experiences with peer review, and lack of confidence were

significant challenges faced by ELLs. However, he also emphasized that not all of these issues pertain to ELLs exclusively. Many of the native speakers in my classroom revealed in their conversations and reflections a similar feeling of being unprepared to provide helpful feedback to other writers. Table 5.4 is a summary of themes that emerged from the students’ interview questions relevant to peer review, illustrating a corroboration of Kim’s findings.

Table 5.4

Peer Review Themes

Themes from Student Interviews
Students consistently cited peer review as a significant factor in their ability to communicate their ideas clearly. Some attributed their final writing products to the conversations they had with peers.
Different perspectives cultivate open-mindedness; students listen to varied perspectives, which are products of students’ diverse cultures and educational backgrounds.
During peer review, students develop an ability to utilize language that is genuine, firm, and appropriate.
The culture of the classroom and shared writing opportunities contribute to a sense of belonging in this writing community, which in turn leads to a deeper awareness of one’s identity as a writer.
A community of learning is cultivated through the establishment of trust.
Dialogue about writing clarifies the writer’s ideas, enhances skills, and supports formal writing.

Peer review works reciprocally to enhance skills of both writers.
Students were consistently cognizant of being polite when providing peers with feedback. The act of peer review accessed the students’ humanity and sense of camaraderie. It also created accountability in students as they felt responsible for helping a peer improve an assignment.
Lack of experience with peer review is also equated with lack of confidence. Students need practice to do this well. This suggests a lack of understanding about the importance of student-to-student communication with each other.
When students have opportunities to work with all students in the classroom, regardless of experience or ability, they become more confident about themselves as writers.

In addition to exuding patterns of support and care for each other, students felt a genuine desire to provide relevant feedback to their writing partners. They repeatedly demonstrated a sincere effort to complete the peer-review assignments as directed, which was also evident in the interviews. Prior student placement and cultural diversity did not disrupt or diminish the process of peer review. Instead, it had the opposite effect on many students in the study, suggesting that all learners benefit from peer review.

Other findings indicated that students lacked experiences with productive peer-review sessions. From the students’ perspectives, their previous teachers’ efforts to conduct peer review were often simplistic and superficial. Several students told me that they did not feel confident in their abilities to comment on another person’s paper, and they were often unsure of the specific aspects of writing that were to be evaluated.

In a diverse environment, students have the potential for learning how to be effective peer reviewers, and once established, this atmosphere of respect and acceptance becomes the framework for successful peer review. By evaluating their peers' writing, students develop critical-thinking skills that ultimately transfer to self-assessment. The process of peer review is reciprocal, so readers gain understandings of how their writing is understood from a reader's point of view and learn to apply the feedback they give to others to their own writing (Kim, 2015). As students discover their strengths and weaknesses, these experiences lead to an increased sense of self as a writer, which is most significant for the current study.

In May 2020, students were engaged in lessons on how to organize and draft a research paper. They had conducted research, generated a self-selected topic, and constructed a research question. In lieu of a traditional outline, students created a digital outline on Google Slides to organize the format of the paper. Table 5.5 illustrates an instructional sequence that included a peer review and student reflections on the process. After students completed the slide decks, they shared them with their writing group.

Table 5.5

Using Peer Review in a Digital Lesson

SLIDE DECK OUTLINE ASSIGNMENT

Directions: This assignment is a variation on a traditional outline for a research paper. Using Google Slides or PowerPoint, create a presentation of approximately 10 slides that illustrates your general plan for your inquiry paper. You will present your outlines in small groups on Wednesday.

Criteria:

- An introductory slide
- Your research question – What is the main question you are trying to answer in this paper? Review entries 6 and 7 to help you identify this question.
- A working thesis – A sentence or two that identifies your stance on the issue

- The three subtopics of your paper – These subtopics will help you develop your thesis.
- The perspectives you will focus on in each section.
- Show how you will utilize the five to six sources in your paper. Identity the sources you will use in each subtopic. (You may use the sources to support more than one subtopic.) ***TWO OF THE SOURCES MUST BE FROM GOOGLE SCHOLAR.**

Evaluation:

Your grade will be based on the following:

- The clarity of your presentation
- How appropriately your subtopics align with the research question and working thesis
- The relevance of the perspectives to the subtopics and the thesis
- Graphics that visually support the ideas you will be writing about in your paper

PEER-REVIEW ASSIGNMENT

Talking Points: As you listen to your peers' explanations of the slides, consider the following questions to receive the best feedback.

Research Question:
Examine the research question. Is the presenter clear about his/her reasons for exploring this question? What does he/she want to know?

Focus:
What is the presenter's thesis? Do you know the exact focus of the paper? If not, ask the presenter to clarify.

· Do you understand how the presenter will organize the subtopics?
· Will the subtopics enable the writer to support his or her thesis? If not, make specific suggestions.

Development:

· How relevant are the perspectives the presenter will be discussing?
· Are the sources well placed in each subtopic? If not, make suggestions.

REFLECTION ON SLIDE DECK PEER REVIEW – WNE #12

After you finish your presentations, think about the comments from your peers and write a one-page reflection. Doing this will help you decide how to start writing your paper. Submit this entry to the classroom tonight.

- How does discussing your writing ideas help you as a writer? In what specific ways did talking about your writing impact you?
- Will you be changing any of your organizational plans? Explain.
- Which peer gave you the best feedback? Explain.

- How did viewing other students’ slide presentations influence your ideas for writing the paper?
- What are your new understandings about perspectives and how they will be used in your inquiry paper?

During this instructional sequence, it was May 2020 on full remote learning, and when students conducted discussions and peer review, they were responsible for providing evidence of the conversations taking place. In this section, the students’ voices demonstrate how peer review was an element in their growing writing identities. The data presented here were reflections the students wrote after they shared their digital outlines with each other. Notice that the students’ reflections revealed genuine contemplation and compassion for their writing partners when responding to the prompts for writer’s notebook entry #12.

Overall, an analysis of the reflective entries illustrated how the peer-review process supported the developing authority and agency students experienced over their writing. It is important to note that when students play an active role in their own learning, particularly when working with peers, they are better equipped to engage intellectually and socially (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). Additionally, they positively influence their lives and the lives of others. Hence, as students have opportunities to share their perceptions of their writing experiences, they acquire accountability for their own writing process (Strom, 2020).

The two writing groups featured in this section were representative of the findings that are presented in this chapter. Group one consisted of Bella, Neal, and Brittany, and group two included Sam, Isabel, and Evelyn. Closer examination of the reflective entries illustrated the seriousness and depth of engagement with which students approached the assignment. Also, students demonstrated an increased sense of confidence when providing feedback and receiving

feedback, which was markedly different from their attitudes earlier in the school year. Furthermore, students showed an appreciation for differing perspectives and how they influenced the writing process. In fact, students credited varied viewpoints as instrumental in making improvements to their organizational plan. Equally notable is that in some cases, the feedback students received validated their intended organizational plans and reinforced their perceptions of themselves as writers.

Group 1 – Bella, Neal, Brittany

Bella and Brittany were bilingual students who valued and took pride in their cultures and enjoyed learning and working with others. Both girls had captivating stories to tell of their early experiences with navigating the English language in their elementary school years. They came to class each day with engaging smiles on their faces and a willingness to be present. Neal was a pleasant young man, always polite and willing to take on a leadership role during group discussions. One day early in the school year, Neal had told me that he was a different person this year than he had been in the past. When I asked him to elaborate, he explained that prior to this year, he characterized himself as someone who lacked empathy for others. He even labeled himself as rude. I remember telling him that the person he described was not at all the young man I had come to know. To this day, his perception of himself still puzzles me, but I am grateful that when he began his senior year, his insights had changed.

Bella’s Reflection 6-3-2021

> Discussing our ideas as writers helps us to gain a better understanding of other perspectives as well as our topic. We all think and formulate our ideas differently so collaborating with different minds and getting different ideas can help us tremendously to potentially evolve our own paper into something even greater than it would have been. Talking about my writing has allowed me to understand my flaws that I did not realize I had when editing my own paper. Specifically with this paper, talking about my ideas I was able to come back to the reality (for lack of a better term) that not everyone sees herbal medicine as effective. As for the organization of this paper, after my discussions I

> decided, I would like to set my paragraphs to be as neutral as possible and leave room within my points to include some opposing thoughts. This will allow for the paper to not stray into a rant and give it direction.
>
> During the peer talk, Neal made a really good point when I was explaining my perspectives. I said that drugs such as Advil are often abused and overused when we have things such as a headache. He brought into question what I meant and asked, "well what else would we use?". As someone who has been brought up in a household where essential oils have replaced common over the counter medicines such as Advil, it occurred to me that not everyone understands, nor does everyone have peppermint and lavender oils just lying around their kitchen (LOL). While he didn't directly mention a specific suggestion, he sparked a realization for me that it might be best to explain how we could become immune to drugs such as Advil and they lose their effectiveness, not so much that Advil doesn't work. I need to focus on making sure I make my stance a suggestion and recommendation rather than a solution. After viewing Brittany and Neal's slides, I kind of felt a little disorganized in my thoughts and felt perhaps I should keep looking into more sources and perspectives. I don't feel my work was bad or wrong, but it didn't feel as complete as theirs did, like something was missing.
>
> My new understanding and discoveries about this topic are that herbal medicine is very much not a new topic, and a lot more studies have actually been completed in the United States than I thought. I am very excited to include them in my inquiry paper as a perspective on American culture and how in comparison to other countries who practice medicine with herbs, we are behind. I would like to also include my findings in a way that reflects on how we as Americans live and view drugs and medicine and how simple changes in our diet could result in dramatically lower rates of disease, illness, and death in our country.

Bella recognized that people think differently and that talking about her writing with her group gave her insight into the "flaws" that she noticed. Notice the specificity with which she identifies areas in her writing that need more clarity. For example, she realized that one of her assumptions that "everyone" would see herbal medicine as effective was unfounded and that not all readers have been brought up in homes that use essential oils as pain relievers. She also referred directly to Neal and credited him for inspiring her to rethink how she would articulate her stance. Bella's reflection demonstrates how another student's diverse perspective contributed to her ability to approach her writing with more focus and logic.

Neal's Reflection 6-3-2021

> Discussing my ideas with other people helps me to get feedback that I had previously not thought of. If I can discuss my ideas with other talented writers, they can

> give me insightful feedback into what I can add, delete, or think about concerning my research paper. I will not be changing any of my organizational plans as I did not receive any negative feedback concerning that, but I might be adding more into my counterclaim on my second subtopic (revenue). I might talk more about how lucrative the TV deals and advertisements really are for the teams and the leagues. This could give more insight into the counterclaim that sports should still return.
>
> The peer that gave the best feedback was Bella. I asked her about my third subtopic concerning the accolades and their asterisks and I didn’t know if it was a valid subtopic, but she reassured me by saying it strays away from the health effects and revenue problems, which makes a good mix of subtopics and opinions. As I viewed Brittany and Bella’s slides, I learned how I can delve deeper into my perspectives of my subtopics, and it would make them that much more insightful. I will use my new insights about coronavirus and its effect on sports to make my research paper better, as my arguments will become more intricate into why returning to sports too soon could cause more bad than good to happen for the world.

Similar to Bella’s comments, Neal also appreciated the feedback from students he clearly considered to be talented writers. Neal’s respect for his peers’ comments was indicated by his decision to maintain his organizational plan based on Bella’s and Brittany’s positive feedback. Most importantly, however, is that Neal was inspired to deepen his analysis of his counterclaim, demonstrating that the writing event is as MacCleod (2004) described; it is always embedded within social and cultural interactions. Since learning and writing is a social process (Vygotsky, 1978), it is logical to conclude that literacy practices, such as peer review have a direct bearing on how students think and how they come to see themselves as writers. Brittany’s reflection also reiterates Neal’s and Bella’s evaluations of the peer review experience.

Brittany’s Reflection 6-3-2021

> Discussing my ideas definitely helps me as a writer. I think it definitely assures me into being confident in my ideas and seeing the reactions from people helps me know that what I am talking about makes sense. Yes, I think I will be changing my organization plans and talk more about what is happening now. When we first started this project the George Floyd incident did not yet happen and all the protests were not going on, but ever since that horrible incident people have been using social media to talk about it. I've seen many different graphic videos and a lot of opinions online and see how toxic people can be. Oftentimes people want to express their opinion and then next thing you know they will all be fighting, and people can't accept others’ opinions which leads to negativity.

> I also realize that I can definitely make my subtopics flow better together. Bella gave me great feedback on how I should include that bullying also causes depression and can lead to suicide and that I should connect them together because I put them as two different subtopics and I noticed I should include that into it. My first sub-topic was about how cyberbullying can affect a lot of teenagers, but I never stated that it can also lead to harmful things and that was my second subtopic so now I will definitely put that into it just to make it more stronger and definitely flow better. For the bigger impact example, I am definitely going to use what is going on in the media right now. I'm not too sure how to incorporate in, but I will default figure it out. I will use how social media has been a platform in that making people argue and not come together during these difficult times when we should all be coming together and not fighting about what this one said and what that one said.
>
> Viewing other group members slide presentations definitely influenced my ideas for my paper. I saw how they incorporated different topics and how each topic definitely made sense and that it was very structured. I saw that they both gave a lot of different evidence and different views to make their claim strong. Both Neal and Bella did a great job in showing how their thesis connects to their examples how all the examples are relevant. I think I will definitely fix up some perspectives and find stronger ones to write about. I think the perspectives that I have right now are good but definitely could be changed to make my thesis stronger. I know I will go into more detail in my inquiry paper on how bad social media actually is with every perspective that I have as in depression and that it could lead to suicide and how self-image is very important. I think the slide deck was just an overview, but I will definitely go more deeper while writing my paper.

The students' reflections suggested that they had become more open-minded about the constructive criticism they receive from others. Brittany, Neal, and Bella illustrated respect for their peers' process and writing style. As Brittany realized, she was becoming more confident in her approaches to the writing process but also gained from the strategies used by her peers.

Group 2 – Sam, Isabel, Evelyn

Sam and Isabel had been friends throughout high school and often gravitated toward each other during peer review assignments. Both were former ELLs, and it is possible they felt connected by their unique cultural experience of approaching school differently from their native-speaking peers. During her interview at the end of the year, Isabel told me that having Sammy as her partner most of the time was a privilege. She also explained that "we talked so

much more” in this class and she learned so much more as a writer, mostly because she listened to other people’s ideas and suggestions. Evelyn credited the iterations of peer review for improving her skills when giving feedback to peers. She also explained, as did many other students, that she had little experience with peer review. Sam did not exude the same level of passion as Evelyn and Isabel, but he did admit to peer review allowing the individual to see the world from a different view. In the following reflections, Sam, Isabel, and Evelyn demonstrated how their peer review experiences gave them more insight into their writing.

Sam’s Reflection 6-3-2021

> By discussing my slides with other people, I can gain insight from another person’s perspective on my topic. I can then use that information and incorporate it into my own. When discussing how to structure my writing so far, my group had generally liked how I formatted my information. I would first start with some basic background knowledge, introducing each of the different types of college and their benefits for each, as well as what negatives they have as well. I then transition into how the cost of college is what people focus on, but there are options for those who can’t afford it. I end off with discussing the benefits after graduating, the higher income compared to those without a degree.
>
> However, Evelyn made a great statement that by just discussing the financial aid on the different income levels, it would not flow well from the previous subtopic of the 3 types of colleges. She suggested that I incorporate information of the effect of scholarships on each type of school, as they all have their own costs. While reading the other slides that my group had, many of them had multiple sources for each subtopic, which I found across all of our subtopics. They also offered new ways to approach things. For example, Isabel’s presented information all relevant to her topic of racism in the justice system, while also exploring other topics that are related, such as racial profiling and white privilege. She is mainly looking at her point from a social perspective, which is a perspective that could be incorporated into my own topic.
>
> Only limiting myself to the financial perspective and the prospect for the future is limiting my view on the topic as a whole, so expanding my use of different perspectives will allow people to understand my view on the topic.

Isabel’s Reflection 6-3-2021

> After presenting my slideshow to my group and listening to their thoughts, I now know how to structure my writing. Evelyn told me that I should write about my thoughts and the evidence supporting me as my first section. Then, she said to write about the counter argument-- the argument that goes against my beliefs-- so that my audience sees

both points of view. Then I will finish it all off with evidence that proves the counter argument wrong. By doing so, I allow the audience to see both sides of the topic, however I will provide information as to why the other side is incorrect. Originally, I wasn't going to add the other side of the argument because I felt like there really wasn't another side to discuss.

To me and many others, racism in the justice system is real and it is evident, but there are people who don't believe in it. It would be stupid of me to not talk about why that point of view is wrong. Including it will make my paper stronger because it shows my audience that I know my stuff. Out of all my peers, I feel as if Evelyn gave me the most meaningful advice. Caroline told me she loved my subtopics, and she believes they really do have to do with what is going on today. Sam said I should try and find more sources since most of mine were written by white people, so I will also do that. However, Evelyn helped me figure out how to structure my essay which I find very valuable.

By viewing the outlines of my peers, I noticed how their perspectives were different than mine. For example, my perspectives for my subtopics have to do with what people believe. Sam's perspectives for his essay were from an economic point. The term perspective means many different things and it's weird to me to see that "perspective" doesn't only mean through someone else's eyes. Maybe I should add an economic perspective to my essay pertaining to minorities and how their towns are viewed as low income, crime ridden places and how that leads police to racially profile minorities as mischievous people.

Evelyn's Reflection 6-3-2020

Discussing my writing ideas with a writing partner or a group helps me as a writer in so many ways. As I talked about my ideas to my group, my group gave more ideas to think about as I write about my topic. For my topic, I am focusing more on the negatives than the positives for my research paper. When I told my group I was doing the negatives more than the positives, they helped me focus on which negatives I can write about. In addition, they gave me some positives to focus on when I decided to switch the position to that side.

Talking about my writing impacted me in many ways as well. I was able to listen to their feedback and even listen to what they had to say about the topic I decided to research. As I went through each slide, we would stop and talk about everything involved with teenage pregnancy. As we did that, I realized that my topic has so many negatives that I can bring about more. For example, if I am saying that families tend to fall apart while a teen is pregnant, I can use tv shows. There are a few shows about teenage pregnancy, and it shows. that families fall apart during these times.

By my group members explaining more evidence to me, it shows me that I am able to use a lot of resources behind it. I will not be changing any of my organizational plans. At first, I wanted to change my organizational plans before I talked to my group. One of my paragraphs I am writing about the positives of teen pregnancy. That paragraph will be about how the rates of teenage pregnancy have been decreasing in recent years. So, I was going to do the first paragraph as a negative, the second as a positive and the third as a negative. After telling my group my plans, they told me that I should leave it

> because it can show the readers that even though there are more negatives, there is a good side to it.
>
> The peer that gave the best feedback was Isabel. During the conversation, she was telling me that I should read the paragraphs. In addition, she explained that she really liked my perspectives because it goes very well with my subtopics. She liked how I was able to explain my perspectives and how I am going to use it for that subtopic. Viewing other students' slide presentations did not influence my ideas for writing the paper.

Here again, the students' reflections demonstrated how peer review supported the individual's writing process, allowing them to make prudent decisions in terms of development and organization. Students were also explicit when assessing the most helpful peer reviewers and articulated their proposed revisions using specific references to their writing, suggesting a sense of compassion for each other. Sam, Isabel, and Evelyn also demonstrated student agency through their choices of topics and seriousness with which they approached their papers. Sam wanted to know more about student debt and the cost of college, Isabel wrote about racism and the justice system, and Evelyn focused on teenage pregnancy. Consequently, the discussions during peer review were rich and encouraged inquiry, validating the perspectives of all students. I end this section with Carlos's assessment of the peer review process that he shared with me during his interview.

> **Carlos:** Prior to this class? I'd say students don't really, I think, understand the potential peer review has. They'd be seen as just a simple exercise that teachers want us to do within students, to keep us engaged with each other. But in reality, peer review is how can their perspective be applied to my writing, to make it better? And I think that some students don't fully understand methods of writing to give advice.
>
> **Ms. B.:** What do you think contributed to the quality of peer review sessions?
>
> **Carlos:** With this class, you had us do many exercises. I feel that opened up the students' perspective to how this author's techniques can be applied to our own writing. So now they have a better understanding of what sophisticated writing looks like. So, they are able to relate to that and give us advice.
>
> **Ms. B.:** Can you think of anything specific we did that helped you learn how to be a better peer reviewer?

> **Carlos:** Better peer review? I think the constant analyzing of other authors' texts…And then also practicing peer review. We didn't just do it once. We did it multiple times whenever we had an essay.

As we continued to discuss peer review, Carlos explained that "students don't really know what to say at first" but then with practice they become more skilled, suggesting that the diverse perspectives students share bring a more in-depth view of the topic. Carlos continued that "when students like him gain more confidence in their abilities, they "don't have to hold back on what they say; this is for the better of their essay, so how can I help?" He further elaborated on his peer-review session with Karissa and commented that many people don't realize that "when you talk, you express your own ideas about your writing," and writers do not often notice areas in need of improvement. However, "the person that's listening to you may pick up on your ideas" and offer relevant feedback, "so now it's an exchange of ideas between people, without them even noticing." Carlos articulated quite well that peer review, in addition to being an essential element of writing development, was a nuanced union between the reader and writer, a connection that sparked the writer's ability to simply write better.

Conclusion

This chapter communicated how a combination of dialogic methodologies, peer review, and the use of a writer's notebook in a diverse classroom setting contributed to my students' understanding of themselves as writers. I had hoped that the voices of the students would support my belief that when teachers cultivate a classroom environment where all students are encouraged to talk to each other about their ideas, values, and concerns about the world around them, they contribute to each other's development as literate individuals. Participation in such a

classroom has the potential for leveling the playing field for diverse learners when it is grounded in a culture of inclusivity.

Evidence suggested that writing identity was enacted through the students’ lived experience in the classroom through their writing events and social interactions with peers. Two significant aspects of writing identity consistently emerged throughout both phases of data collection and analysis. Students perceived their identities to be closely intertwined with their beliefs and attitudes about writing, which they often expressed as “who we are on paper.” Writing identity was also understood as “how we write,” suggesting that the instructional and literacy processes are integral to the construction of writing identity.

This year-long immersive ethnographic study resulted in new understandings of how a diverse and dialogic classroom environment contributed to writing identity formation. Ultimately, the findings of this ethnographic study show how the students’ awareness of their developing writing identities were shaped by a collaborative spirit in an environment that celebrated diversity in people, ideas, and perspectives. Such a culture allowed for moments and experiences that shaped the process of identity construction, which contributed to how students perceived themselves as writers (Ivanic, 1998). As students spent time talking with each other about their writing, regardless of previous academic track, race, or ethnicity, they came to see themselves as writers. In this collaborative space that celebrated diversity, students shared their growing knowledge of the craft of writing as well as their confidence about their abilities as writers.

Carlos, Neal, Matt, Bella, Brittany, Jack, Lucas, Keith, Fernandez, Colleen, Sam, Arleta, Felicia, Sara, Rob, Evelyn, Helen, Caroline, Sybil, Marlene, Isabel,, Brandy, Lauren, Tara, and Alyssa all voiced beliefs that demonstrated their newfound awareness of their writing identities.

These students had entered 12th grade as a diverse group, varying in academic histories and cultural backgrounds. The data collected and discussed throughout this chapter strongly suggested that the culture of the classroom was an integral element in a heightened sense of their unique writing processes and increased confidence in their abilities. Considering the findings in this ethnographic study, construction of writing identity deserves more attention in the discipline of writing pedagogy. The implications for literacy instruction and how teachers may support their students’ growth as writers are discussed in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion and Conclusion

> Yeah. Back in September, I feel like my writing was more of a high school level. It wasn't that I didn't have confidence in my writing, but I was...I felt like I shouldn't go overboard and have to keep it dim because it's high school. And then I feel like over the year, I've felt more confident in my writing to where I let my writer's voice come out and I'm not too afraid to let it be heard rather than just hiding it. I definitely feel like I was given more freedom to write, especially with the writer's notebook. I feel like I was given more of a chance to express what I thought rather than writing for prompt.
>
> - Colleen

Overview of the Study

This ethnographic study took place in a middle-class suburban high school in a college-preparatory ELA course and included 25 seniors who had been previously tracked by ability throughout their high school careers. As was explained in Chapter Three, the data were collected and analyzed throughout the 2019-2020 school year. Triangulation of the data was achieved by coding and analyzing multiple sets of data, including field notes and analytical memos from classroom observations, student writing, audio and video recordings, lesson plans, and interviews with 21 students. Four students missed their interview appointments but did sign consent for their data to be used in this study. Member checking with colleagues was used to clarify and support my coding and interpretations of the data and themes.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One established that despite extensive research on writing pedagogy, national progress reports continue to illustrate the consistent underachievement of high school students’ writing ability. Writing identity was introduced as an inextricable aspect of writing development but one that deserves more attention at the high school setting. A fundamental theme of this study was that writing is a social event, so Chapter Two analyzed the literature on social learning as it relates to identity development, establishing the interconnectedness between students’

identities and the teaching and learning of writing in a dialogic classroom (Gee, 2001; Ivanic, 1998). As a means to elaborating on how dialogue among a diverse group of students shapes writing identity, in Chapter Three, I described my process of designing and implementing an ethnographic study that was conducted in a diverse 12th-grade ELA classroom. I also explained how I relied on Ivanic’s (1998) discoursal construction of identity framework, Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory, and Fairclough’s (1989) social view of language as a combined lens through which to make sense of my data. Chapter Four entailed a perspective of the climate and instructional dynamics of the College English class to demonstrate how it functioned on a day-to-day basis to form a learning community. In Chapter Five, the findings of the study were presented through the voices of my students.

Addressing the Gaps

The research questions and design of this ethnographic study emerged from my experiences while learning how to think and write with my students. Being aware of the abundance of scholarship on writing pedagogy such as the work of Hillocks (1987) and Graham and Perin (2007) that touted effective writing methodologies in the ELA classroom, I was puzzled by the consistent findings in national reports citing that only 27% of graduating high school seniors performed at a proficient level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Thus, one of the purposes of this ethnography was to address the lack of proficiency as well as other gaps in the research, one being the dearth of research on writing instruction at the high school level (Graham & Perin, 2007; Kiuhara et al., 2009). Also, less attention has been given to the impact of cultural backgrounds on a writer’s identity and development (Kwok et al., 2016) and even less to high school students’ writing identities. An additional gap was that fewer studies

focused on the influence of classroom dialogue on the writing process (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

In addressing these gaps, I hoped that a deeper understanding of writing identity may inform educators of better approaches to designing and implementing writing instruction. As explained earlier in this dissertation, our classrooms at the high school had become more diverse, and it was apparent that the ELA department was not equitably addressing the academic needs of this changing population. I wondered if a study of writing identity could inform the extant research on writing pedagogy so that teachers would be able to help students claim agency and power as they developed as literate individuals, which would ultimately enable them to navigate the discursive communities with which they would interact in their lives both inside and outside of the classroom. For this to become a reality, it was also noted earlier in this dissertation that educators must understand how to design instruction that creates spaces for students to see themselves as writers and to talk about their writing with others (Kwok et al., 2016). As a qualitative researcher, I understood that meaning is always derived from a social interaction with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), so from the perspective of this lens, I was able to take on the role of participant-observer and navigate through the layers of the day-to-day literacy events in the classroom and reflect on how writing identity developed.

It was my wish that the findings of this study would contribute to teachers’ understanding about writing pedagogy so that students would have access to the expert instruction they deserved and gain confidence in their perceptions of themselves as writers. Kincheloe (2003) argued that when teachers allow students to construct understandings of concepts in a shared classroom setting, they become engineers of their own learning and begin to experience independent thought. I argue that in addition to the autonomy students develop in such a setting,

through their interactions with each other, they gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their identities and those of their peers. In doing so, all learners develop the potential for using their writing to become agents of change in an increasingly troubled society. Hopefully, this brief glimpse into my classroom truly honors the voices and spirit of the students who talked and wrote together in this study that took place during the 2019-2020 school year.

Ethnography – A Lived Experience

Ethnographic research recognizes the complexity of human social life and the importance of taking the investigative stance in collecting and analyzing data (Tsui, 2014). From this perspective, the ethnographic study is exploratory and a relatively open-ended approach to investigation. In Chapter Five, I reiterated that conducting an ethnographic study would furnish me with an insider’s view of how writing identity developed, and I knew that my personal views and background would, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) affirmed, shape my interpretations of the participants. Denzin (1998) described the ethnographer as one “who stands on the border between reality, lived experience and its representation” (p. 4), so as the teacher and researcher in this study, daily reflection on the data collected was of paramount importance to maintaining objectivity and validity when drawing the conclusions discussed in this chapter.

To gain insights about my students’ reading and writing histories and to initiate the coding process, the data collection consisted of observations, audio and video recordings, lesson plans, fieldnotes, students’ writing samples, and classroom artifacts. From February to June, I analyzed fieldnotes, analytical memos, observations of audio and video recordings, lesson plans, and classroom artifacts. The interviews conducted in June were transcribed and coded and then analyzed multiple times in relation to the previous data collection, all of which resulted in the findings relevant to the research questions.

Research Questions Revisited

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to seek a deeper understanding of how the writing identity of diverse students developed in a classroom where writing was taught utilizing dialogic methodologies. Teaching writing in a classroom that was culturally and linguistically diverse allowed me to make sense of how students developed their identities as writers. By immersing myself as an ethnographer in the learning environment with my students, I experienced firsthand how their unique writing identities developed over the course of an academic school year. My research design was driven by the following research questions:

RQ: How do the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners develop and evolve within a dialogic ELA classroom?

RQ1: What role do the culture and climate of this diverse mixed-ability–level ELA classroom play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1a: What role does dialogue play in the development of students’ writing identities?

RQ1b: What role do varied approaches to writing instruction play in the development of students’ writing identities?

Overall Findings

The overarching research question in this study examined how the writing identities of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse group of learners developed and evolved within a dialogic ELA classroom. As I observed the students’ interactions, read their reflective entries, and analyzed the end-of-the-year interviews, the diverse nature of the classroom contributed to a learning environment characterized by trust and a spirit of camaraderie.

Chapter Five detailed multiple accounts of instructional periods in the classroom to show how students’ literacy processes, interwoven with their dialogic interactions experienced

throughout various writing events or timescales, shaped writing identity. It was argued that writing identity was enacted iteratively as a result of students’ lived experiences in the classroom when social learning was the primary mode of instruction. Two aspects of writing identity emerged, one being that students’ developing understandings of their unique individuality deepened understanding of writing identity. Second, the instructional processes of writing repeatedly surfaced as having a substantial influence on students’ literacy learning and an integral aspect of writing identity. Students interpreted their writing identity as a reflection of their process and approach to writing.

These two aspects are discussed in greater detail in the next section within the context of the findings that include the following: (a) students developed understandings of their unique individuality over time, which deepened the awareness of writing identity in the writing process, or “who you are on paper”; (b) the role of teacher-student and student-student dialogue through instructional tools, particularly the writer’s notebook and peer review, which repeatedly surfaced as playing integral roles in students’ literacy learning and became another important aspect of writing identity, or “the way you write”; and (c) new theoretical understandings of how a diverse classroom culture contributed to both aspects of writing identity.

Conclusions Drawn from Findings

LeCompte and Schensul (2013) described the process and analysis of ethnographic data collection as “sometimes tedious and often exhilarating” (p. 2), qualities that often lead to understanding the story the data tells and the interpretation of its meaning. Although a messy process, interpretation of the data involves explaining how the findings are grounded in empirical evidence and reflect the experiences of the researchers and participants and how they are related to the existing research. Moreover, to make sense to researchers and teachers, interpretation of

the findings must produce both an emic and etic explanation, (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). As emic interpretations are local, they must be meaningful for the people within the community that were studied, while etic interpretations may be generalizable to outside audiences such as researchers who have conducted similar studies.

In this section, I elaborate on the analysis discussed in Chapter Five, with a focus on the significant themes that emerged from my reflections on how culture and climate, dialogue, and instructional methods contributed to writing identity. I also explain how the findings are relevant for the students and teachers in my school community and for researchers and educators who study writing identity.

Writing Identity - “Who You Are” on Paper

Existing literature on writing identity proposed vastly different views on writing identity development. Generally, researchers take an individualist stance or a socially-constructivist perspective. Those who subscribe to an individualist approach emphasized that a writer’s identity organically emerges through a uniquely personal discovery of self, while others maintained that a writer’s identity is socially constructed and materializes through interactions with other individuals and the discourse that exists within their cultural community (Matsuda, 2015). More in line with my view is Ivanic’s (1998) who perceived a less polarized conceptual understanding of writing identity, taking into account that writing identity is both autobiographical in nature and socially constructed.

Students were surprised to learn they had a writing identity, and when engaged in explicit instruction of writing identity, experienced reflective moments that inspired insights into their writing histories and practice. After being immersed in lessons on writing identity, Bella explained her writing identity as her “personality on paper,” while Frank believed its origins to

be rooted in his past. Helen reflected that “we actually were breaking down who we were as a writer, really studying writing itself…like who we are.” Reflecting on student writing and artifacts such as the identity maps led me to conclude that students had developed intellectual acuity about their writing style and process, demonstrating an awareness of their autobiographical selves and its connection to their perceptions of themselves as writers.

However, findings such as the beliefs, values, and cultural histories that emerged from the students’ writing and discussions about identity described in Chapter Five also suggest that students were overly critical about their writing performance and in many cases equated deficiencies in writing with failure. First, this supports Ivanic’s (1998) position that the autobiographical self is a product of one’s discoursal history. Considering that an aspect of a student’s discoursal history is the experience of classroom learning, their negative perceptions of themselves as writers may be a consequence of inconsistencies in access to high-quality writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987). Second, this study shows a fundamental link between students’ perceptions of themselves as individuals and their writing performance and makes an argument that teachers design instructional opportunities for students to engage in critical studies of identity.

The conceptual overlap of identity and writing identity also affirm that writing identity occurs during the critical stage of adolescence when most adolescents experience writing instruction in the classroom (Ball & Ellis, 2008). Analysis of the data collected from the identity mind maps and writing identity mind maps supported the complexities of identity formation and indicated that students were intuitive about their identities and perceptions of themselves as writers. Students are conflicted as they navigate through the intellectual paths of discovering themselves (Ivanic, 1998), and their identities are constructed and reconstructed in the learning

environment (Megan et al., 1994; Nasir, 2002; Noguera, 2003). In consideration of these findings and in the interest of enhancing writing pedagogy at the high school level, I suggest that future researchers of writing identity should delve deeper into the links between identity formation in high school students and their self-perceptions as writers.

Writing Identity, Dialogue, and Instruction

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the research on dialogic pedagogy to establish its multiple benefits in the classroom. Dialogic teaching methodologies have been shown to promote cognitive development and inquiry, give voice to underachieving students (Snell & Lefstein, 2018), deepen the level of student engagement, improve student performance on a variety of assessments (Boyd & Markarian, 2015; Higham et al., 2014; Lyle, 2008), and result in overall academic achievement for diverse populations of students (Michaels et al., 2008). According to Alexander (2020), dialogic teaching stimulates and extends students’ thinking and learning and enables them to discuss, reason, and argue.

As suggested in the literature on dialogic methodologies, language is the primary vehicle for learning, so the deliberative use of language in the classroom is the connective tissue between teaching and learning and cognitive development (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). A classroom grounded in dialogic methods views all students as capable thinkers and reasoners. Data from student reflections and interviews in the present study confirmed that by talking to each other during classroom learning, students became increasingly confident in their analytical skills and more expansive in their contribution to their peers. During their interviews, students repeatedly commented that “talking clarifies thinking,” and being privy to a variety of perspectives and viewpoints enhanced their thinking and encouraged them to respond to their peers. Students like Bella articulated that talking to other people and hearing their perspectives often transformed

their thinking. Similarly, Sam described student discussions as opportunities for students to “get their ideas out of their heads,” motivating others to contemplate the ideas, leading to more complex and extensive discussions.

The analysis of the data in this ethnography supported the positive influence of dialogue on classroom instruction and student learning; however, my study differs from much of the previous literature, as it addressed the function of dialogue as an instructional strategy in a diverse academic setting and its connection to writing identity. Many of the previous studies on dialogic methodologies cited in this study are quantitative discourse analyses of student talk, so in that respect, my study begins to fill the gap and adds a new dimension to the dialogic teaching research and takes into account the aspect of social learning and its influence on the construction of writing identity.

Another promising finding was the critical role of dialogue in the writing instruction design. While writing pedagogy has been studied extensively and has consistently identified instructional methodologies that support writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1987), less attention has been given to how dialogic methodologies influence the development of students’ writing identities when part of a comprehensive writing program. Writing methodologies appeared to have considerable influence on a student’s developing writing identity. The instructional units throughout the academic year combined rich texts and blended writing approaches that supported the craft of writing and each student’s unique style. Most significant was the use of a writer’s notebook that students perceived as a reflection of their identity and a contributor to their improved writing performance. Additionally, dialogic methodologies and peer review emerged as being constitutive elements of writing identity.

Previous studies such as meta-analyses conducted by Graham and Perin (2007) and Hillocks (1987) examined instructional techniques from the perspective of improving the quality of student writing, citing several elements that were identified as effective interventions for writing quality. In contrast, the methodology of my study was a year-long lived experience that relied upon a consistent close examination of my day-to-day observations of and social interactions with 25 students. It also required consistent reflection on my practice and each student’s progress. The main distinguishing feature, however, is this study analyzed how writing instructional methodologies contributed to writing identity. Thus, it adds a unique perspective to the research relevant to achievement in writing.

The Writer’s Notebook – “Student Talk” and Writing Identity

Students’ responses during the interviews in June characterized the notebook as a reflection of their writing identity and was one of the most exciting findings of the study. Instinctively, I knew the writer’s notebook played a significant role in the writing development of my students, but the results of this study provided me with empirical evidence to support my beliefs. Unequivocally, the data analysis indicated that the writer’s notebook was more than a fluency tool. It was the conduit through which students came to understand their writing process or “the way you write.” In fact, one major finding was that students perceived the notebook as an extension of the autobiographical self. Overall, students felt a sense of liberation—being “more free” to write—and purpose when writing in the notebook and believed the notebook pages to be intended for their thoughts with no threat of criticism or a poor grade. It was also indicated through my observations of small-group learning that writing in the notebook prior to a discussion resulted in more extensive and expansive discussions and increased student participation. Findings also highlighted how appropriate textual choices, when combined with

rigorous instructional activities, yielded student work that was illustrative of deeper reflection and critical thinking.

However, the students’ use of the notebook also operated in tandem with dialogue and supported Alexander’s (2020) view of “learning talk” and its role in dialogic teaching. In my view, the most compelling explanation for how students identified as writers through the writer’s notebook was the consistent and deliberate instructional dialogue that took place between students before, during, and after writing in the notebook. Each literacy event in the notebook that students engaged in was accompanied by discussion that was transactional, expository, interrogatory, exploratory, deliberative, imaginative, expressive, and evaluative (Alexander, 2020), an instructional repertoire that encouraged active listening and thoughtful response. As students moved through iterations of writing and reflecting in the notebook and then talking about it, they were opened to exploring their unique writing process.

The data gathered in this study supported much of the existing literature on the strategies and techniques that should be included in a writing program. Graham and Perin’s (2007) and Hillock’s (1987) seminal research have contributed greatly to writing pedagogy, and the results of their scholarship have clarified the elements of writing instruction that help adolescent students learn to write well. Among their proposed strategies are learning the skills of summarization, collaborative writing, inquiry activities, and the process writing approach, all of which were implemented in the writer’s notebook. Findings supported the validity of these writing elements when combined with dialogic methodologies and suggest that the explicit instruction of writing identity using a writer’s notebook—or other reflective tool—be included in the instructional paradigm of writing instruction. In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend these findings to the connection between writing identity and dialogue.

Peer Review and Dialogue

Peer review, when combined with dialogic methodologies, was the second significant instructional strategy that surfaced in the data analysis. From my perspective, the most significant finding was that all students benefited from the peer-review process. The findings from the current study contrast with the notion that students are ill equipped to provide effective feedback on a peer’s writing (Brammer & Rees, 2007). In fact, I vehemently argue that viewing student performance from this deficit mindset undermines the development of peer-review skills and the construction of a writer’s identity. As others have highlighted in their research, deficit thinking is pervasive in society and education and results in the marginalization of low achievers, students of color, and students with disabilities (Davis & Museus, 2019). The results of my study also emphasize the prevalence of these inequities in the school system that deny access to many students.

The analysis of the data in my study supported Kim’s (2015) position that efficacy in peer review situations depends upon the teacher’s awareness that learning styles and language proficiencies vary among all students. Indeed, spending time talking with and observing my students was of paramount importance when pairing them with partners who would maximize the benefits of the peer-review process. It is important to note that Kim (2015) also rejected the assumption that low English proficiency, difficulty in articulating problems and suggestions, cultural influences, minimal prior experiences with peer review, and lack of confidence are issues exclusive to ELLs. This is particularly relevant to my study, since all 21 students interviewed admitted to having minimal experience with peer review in their previous English classes, regardless of their previous track or cultural history. Given the evidence discussed in Chapter Five, it was abundantly clear that students of varying proficiencies also lacked

confidence in their abilities as peer reviewers, although it is inconclusive the degree to which low English proficiency may have impeded peer-review performance.

Findings also led me to conclude that students’ listening and analytical skills were enhanced by their shared reasoning as they progressed through multiple iterations of peer review throughout each unit of instruction. It should also be noted that the writer’s notebook was an indispensable source when gathering information about the students’ attitudes about writing and proficiency levels. Several themes relevant to peer review and dialogue emerged from the interviews: (a) peer-review experiences encouraged increased clarity when revising written work, (b) the exchange of varying perspectives through talking cultivated open-mindedness, (c) students felt a deep sense of responsibility when responding to a peer’s writing, (d) peer-review sessions inspired a sense of belonging and trust, (e) students benefited from talking about their writing with peers from a variety of previous tracks, and (f) students gained confidence in their academic writing abilities and their skills as peer reviewers. Based on the data analyzed from student interviews, observations, and written reflections, dialogue during peer review was an overwhelming factor in students’ development of writing identity. I share Neal’s comments during his interview to substantiate the transformative power of peer review and dialogue and to show his development as a writer and the classroom environment within which his growth was possible.

> At first, I wasn't good at it. I was not good at peer review because I didn't want to give people [negative] feedback because I just felt bad. I would say like the papers weren't up to par, but we have to word it in a way that's not mean. So, usually I do it with my friends. I just pick my friends in the class, but all those kids are my friends, they're all great people. So, it didn't really matter who I had as a peer reviewer, but I learned that I can be really nice and still tell them, Hey, maybe you should change this to that, or maybe you should not start with that sentence, maybe you should not ask a question in the topic sentence and you should just write a regular sentence instead of the question, stuff like that. So, I think it was more of just practicing, cause I was not good at it earlier

> in the year. I wouldn't tell people what was really wrong. I would just say everything was good because I didn't want to be mean to them. But…
>
> So, I realized that I could word what I'm saying a better way and not be rude. So, let's say somebody didn't have a great thesis, I'm like, hey, maybe you could add a couple more words to your thesis or maybe make your thesis two sentences. Instead of one short one, you can make it two or three, but just make them three short sentences or just combine the three short sentences into one long one, stuff like that.
>
> So, it helps because maybe you miss something that the other person saw in the text and that person can tell you, hey look, I saw this in a text and you should add that to your paper, because that'll make your paper sound better, things like that. Because I feel like with a fresh set of eyes, if you ask somebody, they would help you. And they can see things that you don't, like you said it earlier in the year, you may write something that makes sense, but if that person reads it and it doesn't make sense, then maybe you can change it to where it'll make sense to everyone.

Neal’s heartfelt comments solidify the findings on how peer review can be implemented in a diverse classroom setting where all students have access to gaining confidence in their attitudes and skills as writers. Given the previous context, the findings on peer review and dialogue warrant further analysis of the peer-review process in secondary ELA classes. First, there is much to be explored in terms of dispelling the deficit mindset that exists among writing teachers that continues to deny access to high-quality writing instruction for all students (Brammer & Rees, 2007). Second, the relationship between peer review, dialogue, and writing identity deserves further examination. My research extends Graham and Perin’s (2007) and Hillock’s (1987) research on effective writing strategies and proposes that dialogic methodologies are inherent in the peer-review process and, when combined, has great influence on the construction of writing identity.

In summary, the data analyzed from observations, writing, and interviews indicated that deliberative dialogue during writing instruction supported the writing process in the following ways: (a) helped students clarify ideas, (b) encouraged students to experiment with multiple stylistic techniques, (c) expanded word choice, and (d) increased awareness of audience. These

findings raise critical questions regarding the role of the dialogue between teacher-student and student-student in the construction of writing identity. Consequently, this study takes a speculative stance on the individualistic approaches to writing identity that views it as an unteachable construct and one that only emanates from the individual’s unique expression (Matsuda, 2015). The degree to which dialogue enacts writing identity is not yet clear, and I encourage further study of the efficacy of dialogue in instructional processes.

Diversity and Writing Identity

Chapter Four introduced a diverse group of students who, through the shared process of reading, writing, thinking, and talking, gained awareness of “who they are as writers” and “how they write.” Students were an eclectic group of individuals who varied in race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and previous academic placement. Throughout their time together as a community of learners, the iterations of literacy events throughout the year in a classroom grounded in social learning and dialogic methodologies contributed to and shaped their developing writing identities. Students’ comments during interviews showed that they genuinely cared about each other and wanted to help each other write better. Their previous academic tracks and varied races and ethnicities contributed to a strengths-based learning environment that was evidenced by an analysis of students’ discussions and reflective writing, all of which has been documented in Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stressed that inherent in qualitative research is the researchers’ interpretation of participants and events in the natural setting, while Tsui (2014) recognized the complex nature of human life in ethnographic research, both of which require an investigative stance in collecting and analyzing data. It is important to note that my lived experience with the students provided me with rich context about the relationships that were

forming, so my observations each day allowed me to observe and reflect on their behaviors and dialogic interactions from a close angle. By the middle of the school year, students had become increasingly comfortable with their distinct experiences and personalities and demonstrated tolerance and respect for each other, and I pose the argument that this generation of individuals may be less prone to intolerance.

Research on culturally sustaining pedagogy views languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being as critical to fostering a classroom climate that achieves cultural pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2014). This perspective extends culturally responsive pedagogy that supports learning environments that are socially and academically empowering and multidimensional in their approach (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In the current study, students’ discussions about their writing often revealed feelings of compassion and empathy. When the discussions also incorporated texts that were controversial or focused on issues such as gender, race, disability, or human rights, students demonstrated open-mindedness and a level of maturity that surprised me at first. As the year progressed, the students grew to be more adept in their ability to listen to others, contemplate a variety of perspectives, and articulate their own views. Findings from student interviews cited the perspectives of different individuals as highly influential to understanding their attitudes as writers and their writing abilities. Furthermore, as I reflected on the interview data and observations, it was evident that students were interested in their peers who had experienced different cultural histories and in awe of those who spoke more than one language or had traveled to visit family in various parts of the globe.

This pattern of results is compelling and consistent with the previous literature (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014) and demands continued research to initiate shifts in societal perceptions of diversity to one that rejects the deficit mindset and embraces the

transformational power of diversity in the classroom. With this in mind, I argue that data also indicated that the diversity of the classroom was made possible by the detracked nature of the College English class.

Detracking and Student Agency

In general, detracking in schools is an attempt to group students heterogeneously to ensure that all students, regardless of race, class, or academic ability have equal access to high-quality education (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Having been a supporter of detracking for many years, I knew firsthand the benefits of heterogeneous grouping, even though I worked in a school where students were historically tracked by ability, except in college-preparatory classes such as the research setting for the current study. Although the institutional policy of tracking did not drive the design and implementation of this ethnography, findings unequivocally showed how a student’s previous track had influenced their perception of themselves as learners and writers.

Findings overwhelmingly indicated that the inclusive and dialogic classroom environment supported the substantial body of research in favor of detracking (Burris, 2014; Oakes, 2005; Rubin & Noguera, 2004) and rejected the position of researchers such as Adobo and Agbayewa (2011) who argued that grouping by ability, or tracking, is superior for promoting student achievement, allowing the teacher to implement instruction that was more appropriate for a specific ability level. The latter concluded that lower achieving students were more comfortable when grouped with peers of similar ability while high achievers felt held back by students who were considered slower learners. My research adamantly contradicts this position and advocates for the continued examination of the benefits of detracking.

Interview data, student reflections in the writer’s notebook, and classroom observations revealed that early in the year, students who had been previously placed in lower track classes

were anxious when paired with a student from the high track. During initial peer-review sessions, students from the lower tracks were often reluctant to provide feedback to their peers, often citing their lack of knowledge and experience with peer review as the reason. As the year progressed, however, students from the lower tracks exhibited more confidence and efficiency when reading and responding to another student’s writing. Interestingly, all students, regardless of race, ability level, or previous school experiences, became more fluent and specific when providing feedback to their peers, suggesting that the lines that had previously separated students throughout their academic careers had begun to blur.

Based on my observations, I suspected that some high-track students had experienced minimal interaction with their low-track peers throughout their high school years, although it was unclear the degree to which students were aware of each other’s academic abilities or previous track. Ultimately, a student’s previous track appeared to have little bearing on the quality of group discussions and academic interactions. In some cases, it is possible that a student may have realized they had never met or had an interaction with particular students, but it was not a factor during the study. Students from both tracks interacted with admirable sophistication as was evidenced by the classroom environment. Quite simply, students were kind to each other, listened to each other, and supported each other’s growth as writers.

Given the previous context, the findings also raise questions regarding student perceptions of a peer’s academic abilities and suggest that future researchers delve deeper into how student attitudes may influence writing development in the ELA classroom. During peer-review sessions, students from the high tracks exhibited a genuine effort to help their writing partner improve a draft, and there was no evidence of overt resentment when paired with a writer that may have been perceived to be less accomplished. Conversely, students from the lower

tracks demonstrated a heightened sense of responsibility when paired with a writing partner from the higher track, possibly inferring that they did not want to disappoint peers they considered to be more capable. It is also possible that the lower track students wanted to conceal their insecurities. Although these statements are speculative, they support Rubin’s (2003) position that building social relationships between students who do not know each other is critical for the functioning of a detracked classroom, which correlated with the data collected from student interviews and classroom observations.

The literature on detracking reinforces how diversity offers students views of a broader population, promoting pluralism and democracy (Oakes, 2005), which is consistent with the perceived value students in this study placed on having multiple perspectives during peer-review and text-based discussions. Moreover, studies on detracking have consistently illustrated that diversity in classrooms demands that teachers adopt a heterogeneous mindset and work to achieve a balance between instruction that is rigorous, appropriate, and relevant for all students (LaPrade, 2011). Instruction at this level removes barriers to promoting equity and excellence in classrooms for all students and encourages a classroom culture that is flexible, respectful, and collaborative.

One of the unique contributions of this study is that it links the disciplines of dialogic teaching and writing instruction and their combined influence in shaping students’ identities as writers. Unequivocally, all students gained confidence in their ability to talk with each other, as a result of their varied backgrounds, and both high-track students and low-track students benefited from small-group discussions and peer-review sessions, achieving a growing sense of parity as they transitioned throughout instructional units. Essentially, the diversity within this mixed-

ability–level classroom gave voice to all writers and therefore cultivated the potential for all writers to be celebrated.

In this learning environment, students—some of them for the first time in their academic careers—identified as writers. Many of them had never experienced the opportunities to develop their writing identities or to explore how the role of their unique cultures and classroom histories had contributed to their perceptions of themselves as writers. Nor had they been in situations that encouraged them to talk with each other about their writing. Give this agency, students also began to understand that their writing identity was not static, but as depicted by the spiral diagram in Figure 5.1, is a process that continues to evolve through subsequent learning and social interactions.

Therefore, rather than graduate high school have a finite perspective of oneself as a writer, these findings indicate that students are more apt to approach future literacy situations with newfound confidence and enthusiasm. Based on these findings, it is advisable that my school district investigates methods and strategies to offer more mixed-ability ELA classes in middle and high school so that students are exposed to academic, social, and cultural diversity throughout their K-12 career. Although the system of tracking students is deeply embedded in the school culture, the research on detracking discussed in this section and the evidence gathered from my study in support of the literature, makes a strong argument for considering better ways to serve our increasingly diverse student population.

Implications for Theory, Future Research, and Classroom Practice

The conclusions of this study were made possible by examining the data through the convergence of Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory, Ivanic’s (1998) discoursal construction of identity framework, and Fairclough’s (2012) social language theory. Each of these theoretical

underpinnings served as a frame of reference for making sense of how dialogue, culture, and instruction contributed to the writing identities of the diverse group of students with whom I shared my classroom. Chapter One explained how Ivanic’s and Fairclough’s framework was adapted to examine the data gathered from interviews, recordings, observations, and student writing from a micro, meso, and macro perspective. In Chapter Five, the framework was further expanded to include a diagrammatic representation of how writing identity was constructed within the meso layer through the iterations of the students’ writing processes. This section discusses the resulting implications for future research and classroom practice.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

The findings of this study support and expand on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social learning, which views writing as a social activity and learning as the result of the thought and development that occurs through human interaction. Students in the current study developed language skills through daily interactions with a variety of peers and subsequently transferred those skills to academic writing. By the students’ own admission, they credited their fluency and improvement in writing to talking about writing with a variety of individuals.

Vygotsky’s theories of learning continue to have relevance for the increasingly diverse classrooms that are the landscape of contemporary society. In fact, I argue that Vygotsky’s view of human development correlates with the tenets of culturally sustaining teaching, and when considered together have much potential for transforming teaching and learning. According to Smagorinsky (2013), Vygotsky’s emphasis on the social climate of learning is especially critical for teachers to understand, especially for those students whose home cultural practices deviate from the established routines of school. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s work suggests that inclusivity matters in the classroom so that all students feel welcome and “that people who depart from

norms—either through their biological makeup, their cultural experiences, or other factors—do not experience dysphoria and develop the secondary [condition] of feelings of inferiority for having a different orientation to the world (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 201). Given the growing diversity of American classrooms, attention to Vygotsky’s body of work should be re-envisioned to support teachers in training and veteran teachers.

A New Perspective on Ivanic’s Discoursal Construction of Identity Framework

Ivanic’s (1998) framework was foundational for the design and implementation of my research. Through the micro, meso, and macro levels of her vision of classroom discourse, I recognized and helped my students become familiar with their autobiographical selves. Combined with Fairclough’s (1989) position that written or spoken text is inextricable from the internal and external processes that create it, and rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory, Ivanic’s adaptation of the discoursal framework invited a comprehensive and realistic perspective on writing identity development. However, the findings of my research further complicated the square, more linear view of my original adapted framework as writing identity construction emerged as a more circular process.

In the current study, the data revealed particular emphasis on the social discourse that took place in the classroom as students interacted with each other through activities that required them to access multiple literacy processes. These processes were intricately linked with the social conditions that drove the dominant classroom discourse. Moreover, students’ literacy processes emanated in part from their autobiographical selves through their shared cultural and social experiences that took place in the classroom. For this reason, Ivanic’s more linear framework was not sufficient to interpret the layers of complexity inherent in the convergence of dialogue, cognitive functions, and the reading and writing within which students were engaged.

This finding recognizes and emphasizes the essential role of literacy skills in the ELA instructional repertoire. As I discussed in Chapter Four and illustrated in my topical course outline (see Appendix G), literacy skills are not separate from instructional content; they are “constant” in the classroom and students access these multiple processes as they read, write, and talk together. Within the discoursal framework, several avenues exist for future studies on writing identity in middle and high school to further examine the role of literacy skills in the development of agency (see Figure 5.2). I encourage future research that considers the complexity of the process utilizing my spiral framework as a lens through which to examine writing identity.

Writing identity was enacted as a process that evolved through the literacy events within which students were immersed throughout the study. However, this study did not investigate the social conditions of society (Ivanic, 1998) or the dominant discourses that also contribute to writing identity. Although students’ discourse was analyzed throughout the study, there is much to be learned through an analysis of the societal discourses at large that influence students’ writing and shape identity. Within these discourses, identities are constructed, negotiated, and transformed; therefore, a critical discourse analysis utilizing Gee’s (2014) BigD/discourse theory would not only contribute to the findings in this study but also hopefully identity additional research designs incorporating Ivanic’s discoursal framework.

Instructional Considerations

Taken together, writing identity theory and social learning theory discussed throughout this dissertation and the instructional methods described have several implications for curriculum development and practice. Most notable is the impact of dialogic methodologies that have been described throughout this dissertation and its power to transform student learning and their

perceptions of themselves as writers. Second, I recommend explicit instruction of writing identity as part of a comprehensive writing program. Third, the sequence and organization of literacy skills in classroom instruction and the mindful choice of texts are integral to the writing process and the process of writing identity. Teachers can help students claim agency and power as they grow as literate individuals so they can navigate the discursive communities both in and outside of the classroom. Therefore, it is important for educators to design instruction that includes opportunities and spaces for students to see themselves as writers and to talk about their writing with others (Kwok et al., 2016).

Dialogue

When I was a novice teacher, I was obsessed with learning how to utilize groups to facilitate the learning process. Twenty-eight years ago, cooperative learning strategies were a central focus of much of the professional development opportunities for teachers. Some of my colleagues rejected the notion that students could learn from each other and regarded cooperative learning as a waste of time, and it was true that if not implemented effectively, group learning was little more than seating students together and calling them a cooperative group (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). However, cooperative learning that included pre-instructional directions, clear explanations of the task, monitoring for understanding, and opportunities for students to self-assess increased potential for successful group learning.

Reflecting on my early experiences with cooperative groups, I realize why the concept was so appealing to me. Whenever students had opportunities to work together, they talked with each other and learning became more visible (Hattie, 2012), resulting in meaningful exchanges that promoted a sense of positive interdependence that nurtured the development of social skills, entailed higher-level reasoning and frequent generation of new ideas, greater transfer to

individual learning, and ultimately greater productivity than did working alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In my experience, cooperative learning was not a strategy to be utilized once a week or twice a month; it was how students should interact in a classroom on a daily basis.

This study showed that dialogue is and should be present in all learning experiences, whether students are in pairs, triads, or groups of four. The skills of dialogic teaching are teachable and require an open-minded approach to classroom learning. Throughout this dissertation, dialogic interaction in the classroom has been presented as essential for learning, leading to collaborative critical inquiry and an open exchange of thinking (Alexander, 2008; Bakhtin, 1981; Burbules, 1993). It was also demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five that instructional elements such as inquiry activities and the process-writing approach lent themselves to a classroom environment that necessitated talking between students and their teachers (Graham & Perin, 2007). During the interviews, students repeatedly commented that they had minimal opportunities to talk with each other in most of their classes and that the classroom talk was dominated by the teacher. Emler’s (2019) dissertation research on dialogic teaching in a detracked ELA class suggested that future research could examine how a single subject or grade level of teachers facilitate the shift to dialogic teaching by studying their own dialogic process as they realigned curriculum to reflect the transition from teacher talk to student talk. Based on the consistent positive influence of student-student talk in this study and the considerable evidence presented throughout this dissertation, I urge school leaders to acknowledge their responsibility to investigate curricular changes that use dialogic methodologies.

Explicit Instruction of Writing Identity

The insights shared throughout this ethnographic study suggest that writing identity in adolescents demands more attention in the ELA classroom. Although many teachers in the

school where I work allot some instructional time to exploring one’s identity by having students write autobiographical poems or letters to their future selves, there is less evidence of intensive identity formation and its connection to writing identity. As this study showed, students were unaware that they had a writing identity, a concept the ultimately translated to who they are as writers and how they write. Ivanic (1998) and Cremin and Locke (2017) recognized that writing begins with the autobiographical self and through a continuous flow of experiences and social interactions, it slowly and gradually develops over time. Given the consistent evidence substantiating this process, it is recommended that schools offer professional development programs that address methods to integrate writing identity construction. As a start, school districts, such as the one where this study took place, can form collegial circles or professional learning communities for teachers interested in the benefits of exploring writing identity, both theirs and their students.

Literacy Skills

The ethnographic design of this study was critical for understanding the process of writing identity that unfolded throughout the days, weeks, and months of the school year. As both participant and observer, I witnessed the development of writing identity from both a micro and macro perspective, which led to multiple opportunities to analyze the role of literacy skills embedded in the writing process. Findings suggested that literacy skills involving speaking, listening, reading, and writing had a significant influence on students’ thinking and writing identity. Literacy development is shaped over time by the literacy events experienced by the individual (Wortham 2008), and writing identity is in part shaped by these iterations. The analysis of the data as described in Chapter Five illustrated how literacy strategies may be integrated into ELA instruction and their influence of literacy development. These findings

support my view that every lesson in the ELA classroom is an opportunity to support students’ literacy development.

It has been repeatedly shown throughout this dissertation that student-student talk engages students, increases understanding of text, and contributes to writing identity development. Implicit in this notion is the critical role of the text students read and examine, and when choosing texts, it is important for educators to recognize and value the rich diversity in their classrooms (Parker, 2020). In doing so, we must also consider why we are teaching the texts we ask our students to read and whether those selections are best for them. Inviting students to make decisions about the texts they read is a practice educators should pursue. When students are given the option to discuss text selection, it has been my experience that their choices are often relevant and grade appropriate. With this in mind, I urge educators to explore strategies that help students choose texts. One way to gain insight on student interest is to approach the classroom from an ethnographic mindset. Listening to students, reading their writing, and observing their interactions can provide teachers with invaluable resources about student learning, resulting in the reading of texts that are richer and more relevant for students.

In discussions with curriculum specialists in the research setting, it was evident that ELA classes they had observed were overly focused on content at the expense of explicit attention to literacy skills. Although curriculum leaders were concerned that students were not adequately exposed to the benefits of literacy skills highlighted in this study, their efforts to improve practice had not come to fruition. To be successful in high school and beyond, high school students need to develop the skills to communicate socially and electronically in effective and meaningful ways. Using multiple resources that are available to teachers, such as technology, social interaction, and activities to increase fluency, enable teachers to foster an environment of

learning and literacy development (Wendt, 2013). Findings from this study substantiate the indispensable role of literacy development in the high school classroom and propose a district-wide initiative to promote literacy awareness so that all students may develop the skills essential for their continued growth and achievement.

Trusting the Ethnographic Process

Ethnographic research has been described as a relatively open-ended approach to investigation (Tsui, 2014). Although I had an inside view of the day-to-day dialogic and cultural exchanges of my students, there is considerable debate over the legitimacy of the perceived experience and the interpretation of the data (Freebody, 2003). To validate data collected during an ethnographic study, researchers rely on multiple sets of data, read and reread the data, and cross-check with individuals related to the research, all of which occurred throughout the study. In Chapter Five, the data collection and analysis procedures reflected a comprehensive representation of my experiences with students. Additionally, the findings of qualitative research are not intended to be generalized to a broader population but are particularly relevant to the research setting and the theories applied to analyze the data.

It should also be noted that the ethnographic design of this study placed me in a position to examine my own unique writing identity. Many times throughout the study, I would share my writing issues with the students to provide them with a different perspective on the expectations of academic writing. Students were aware that I struggled with my writing process just as they did, which made our journey together more meaningful. Reflecting again on the auto-ethnography that appears at the beginning of this dissertation, 11 years later, I am still learning about myself as a writer.

Conclusion

This study was an ethnography borne from an intense desire to understand how students of varying abilities, cultures, and ethnicities in a mixed classroom setting learn to write. Its purpose was to understand how culture and climate, dialogue, and instructional methods contributed to the writing identity of high school seniors in a diverse ELA classroom. Over the course of my teaching career, I have spent countless hours reading everything I could about writing pedagogy and experimenting with approaches I thought would help my students become better writers. For as long as I can remember, as each new school year commenced, so did a new search for courses and workshops that promised to provide answers to the growing list of questions I had about teaching writing. Ironically, even after participating in professional development conferences such as the National Writing Project Summer Invitational or the Summer Writing Institute at Teachers' College at Columbia, the more I learned, the more I needed to know.

For many years, I experienced a pervading sense of futility when trying to figure out the best strategies or techniques for an effective writing program. I entertained the idea that all my searching and questioning would somehow lead me to a clear set of instructions on how to teach writing. Unfortunately, no such formula existed, but ample evidence in the scholarship on writing pedagogy illustrated consistent findings supporting the essential components of good instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007). Clearly, as a profession, we know the fundamental ingredients of good writing instruction, and it was mind boggling that agencies such as the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that approximately 80% of U.S. students demonstrated only basic competency in writing. Considering all we know about literacy development, why did so many young writers lack proficiency? Although this ethnographic

study was not designed to specifically address achievement, I am convinced that writing identity is a factor in the development of good writing.

Students like Carlos, Neal, Keith, and Bella were my guides while exploring the process of writing identity. They succeeded in giving me a clear image of social learning in action and deepening my understanding of Vygotsky’s language theories. Reading about writing being a social activity and living it are vastly different experiences. As previously stated, this study on writing identity was inspired by my need to investigate methods and strategies that would improve writing performance. In retrospect, the insights I gained about writing identity, social learning, and diversity in the classroom far exceeded my expectations.

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APPENDIX A

Molloy College

Institutional Review Board
1000 Hempstead Avenue
Rockville Centre, NY 11571 www.molloy.edu

Tel. 516.323.3711

Date: January 22, 2020

To: Dr. Alison Roda and Karen Buechner

From: Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: MOLLOY IRB REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF EXPEDITED STATUS

Study Title: Identity Through Dialogue and Social Interactions in the Diverse High School ELA Classroom

Approved: January 22, 2020

Approval No: 11022105-0122

Dear Dr. Roda and Ms. Buechner:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Molloy College has reviewed the above-mentioned research proposal and determined that this proposal is approved.

It is considered an **EXPEDITED category 45 CFR 46.110** (6)(7) per the requirements of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects underwent review to determine if the **45 CFR 46.111** criteria were met.

As **per 45 CFR 46.115(b) and 21 CFR 56.115(b)** require that all IRB records be retained for at least 3 years, and records relating to research which is conducted be retained for at least 3 years after completion of the research.

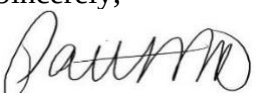
Please note that as Principal Investigator (PI), it is your responsibility to be CITI Certified in both the Responsible Conduct of Research and Human Subjects Research and to submit the evidence in order to conduct your research.

Remember, all consents and recruitment flyers for any research protocol need to have Molloy IRB dated stamps of approval. To obtain the official stamp, please contact Ms. Gina Nedelka (gnedelka@molloy.edu) to arrange a time to meet with her in her office in Kellenberg-Room 009. You will bring one clean consent (of each consent and/or assent) and any recruitment flyers to the meeting with Ms. Nedelka for IRB dated stamp of approval. You then make copies of stamped materials and use those copies for recruiting and consenting.

You may proceed with your research. Please submit an annual report (continuing review form on the IRB webpage) each year your protocol is open and a protocol closure report (form on the IRB webpage) to the committee.

This approval is for the duration of the protocol- unless there is a change to the protocol. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy College IRB of any requested changes to this research (amendment to approved protocol form is on the IRB webpage). A change in the research may change the project from EXPEDITED status and requires communication with the IRB.

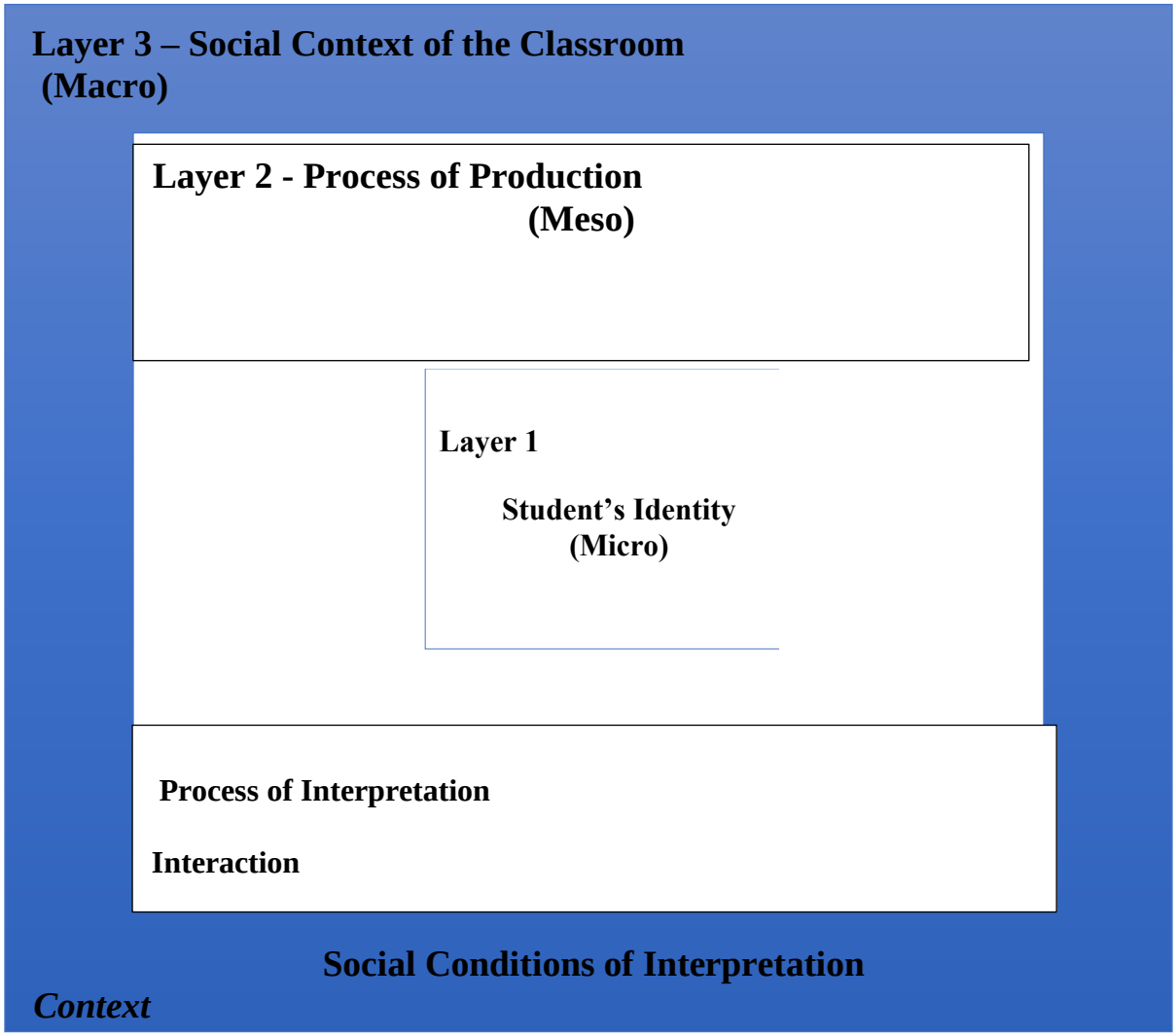
Sincerely,



Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN

APPENDIX B

Discoursal Construction of Identity Framework



Source: Ivanic, 1998; Fairclough, 1989.

APPENDIX C

Student Interview Protocol

Introduction:

1. Please state your name and plans for after high school graduation.

2. How would you describe this class to an 11th grade student who is considering taking it during their senior year?

Writing Identity:

3. What are your current attitudes about writing and your writing identity?

   Probe: What aspects of your personal identity (race, gender, socioeconomic status, culture) do you draw upon when writing?

4. How do you describe yourself as a writer, and how has that perception changed from the beginning of the class?

   Probe: Prior track placement, what does it mean to be a good vs. bad writer

5. What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses as a writer? How has this developed throughout the year?

   Probe: on specific writing assignments; tailored to each student

Writing Process:

6. What is your process when writing academic essays? Have you incorporated any new strategies into your writing as a result of this class?

   Probe: on writing strategies that were taught

7. Describe your experiences in this class with peer review? How would you describe your ability to provide relevant feedback to peers?

   Probe: Are these feelings different in any way from your feelings in September?

8. What do you currently understand about how you use language when writing essays?

9. Which type of writing intimidates you the most and why?

Dialogue in the Writing Process:

10. What are your opinions of the role of dialogue in your learning and writing process? Tell me a story or an example of a time when a peer helped you with your writing.

11. How has your participation in this group added to your perception of yourself as a writer?

12. What in particular have you contributed to the group?

13. Do you believe students in school have more opportunities to engage in academic discussions?

    Probe: Why or why not?

14. In your group, what helped you the most this year in terms of your growth as a writer?

15. What was your most critical discussion during the school year?

16. How did being in this group contribute to or shape your development as a learner?

17. How does your learning in this class compare or contrast with your learning in other classes previous English classes?

18. Reread your first writing reflection from September and think about your responses to the questions. Based on your experiences in this class, what are your understandings about what it means to be a literate person?

Grand Tour Question: Has your story of yourself as a literate person changed at all from September?

APPENDIX D

Reading Survey

Name_____Date_____

Part One

Directions: The purpose of this assessment is for you and me to have a better understanding of your reading skills and the experiences that have contributed to your current attitudes as a reader. Several questions require you to write an explanation to support your response. Follow the instructions for each question.

1. When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do? Do you ever do anything else? Explain.
2. Who is a good reader you know?
3. What makes this person a good reader? Explain.
4. Do you think he/she ever has difficulty understanding the text?
5. If Yes: When _____ comes to something he/she doesn't know, what do you think he/she does?
6. If No: Suppose _____ comes to something he/she doesn't know? What do you think he/she would do?
7. If you know someone is having trouble reading, how would you help that person? Explain.
8. What would a/your teacher do to help that person? Explain.
9. How did you learn to read? Explain.
10. What would you like to do better as a reader? Explain.
11. Do you think you are a good reader? Why or Why not? Explain.

Part Two

Directions: Answer each of the questions as directed.

1. Consider the following types of text. How often do you read these texts? Place a check in the box that illustrates your response.

	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Newspapers			
Magazines			
Textbooks			
Websites			
Self-help books			
Plays			
Snapchat			
Instagram			

Videos/You Tube			
Twitter			
Comics/Graphic novels			
Poems			
Essays			
Plays			
Work-related documents			
History			

2. From the above list, which types of reading do you enjoy the most? Why?

3. Which types of reading are more challenging for you? Choose one and explain.

4. Which class that you took last year asks you to read most? Explain.

5. Which class has the most difficult reading? Explain.

6. Check the following response that best describes you as a reader. Explain your reasons for making this choice.

   ____ I will do what I need to in order to read anything. With enough effort I can understand anything I am asked to read. I am confident in my abilities as a reader.

   ____I try but eventually give up if it is too hard. I understand most of what I read but not as well as I would like to. I am somewhat confident in my abilities as a reader but recognize there are certain texts I just don't know how to read yet.

   ____Reading is hard for me. I rarely feel like I understand what the writer is saying. This is why I give up easily. Even when I feel like I understand it, I don't trust myself and assume I am probably wrong.

7. Check the statement that most matches your own belief. Then explain your response.

   ____ Reading is not important. By the sixth grade you know everything you need to know about reading.

   ____Reading is crucial to your success in the adult world.

____Reading is more important now than ever before.

____Reading is less important than it used to be.

8. Mark those with which you most agree:

____I like it when a book challenges my beliefs, ideas, or assumptions.

____I prefer to read books that do not make me think about familiar things?

____I like to read in order to do things: this makes reading seem useful and valuable to me.

9. I expect the reading I do in school to be: (Explain your choice(s).)

____Boring

____Interesting

____Difficult

____Useful

10. Check the top three strategies that help you understand an academic text.

____Reading it aloud to yourself

____Having someone read it to you

____Talking about what you read with another person

____Taking notes, using sticky notes

____Drawing or doing art in response to or inspired by what you read

____Reading silently to yourself in class

____Talking in small groups in class

____Talking as a class about what you read

-(Adapted from the Burke Reading Interview)

APPENDIX E

Letter to Students Announcing Remote Learning

Hi Everyone.

I hope you are well. I miss all of you. We will be meeting synchronously (existing or occurring at the same time) and asynchronously (not existing or happening at the same time), which means that two to three times per week, we will meet as a class using the ZOOM digital platform. The remaining time, you will be working with partners or groups to complete assignments and checking in with me. We will also conference together about your writing assignments.

I am scheduling an online class for tomorrow morning at 11:00am, which is approximately the same time we meet at school. It will take approximately 40 minutes. At that time, I will give you instructions on how you will work with your groups to discuss the HTRLLAP assignment and how you will create and present your book assignment.

You must have your writer's notebooks, and HTRLLAP books for our online class. You will receive a link for the class discussion. It is a video call, so we will all be able to see and hear each other. I will be sending a link to Zoom. It is preferable that you use a computer because I will also be able to share documents on the screen. If you must use your phone, please download the ZOOM app. I downloaded it to my MAC, and it works well. Please test it out tonight.

As we embark on this new educational journey, let's all help each other with the technical issues. Be kind to each other and patient with yourselves. It is critical that we continue learning together at this unusual time. You will also be working with partners and groups, so be sure and make yourself available to your peers. Talk to you soon! I am planning another classroom meeting on Friday morning at 11:00am so mark your calendar.

Sincerely, Ms. Buechner

APPENDIX F

Example of Preliminary Coding

Overview - Students are engaged in a self-selected text discussion. Students assign the number of pages to be read for each scheduled book talk. Each student chooses an area of focus from the following list for their discussion: protagonist/conflict, other characters, writer's style, literary elements and techniques. (Students alternate roles throughout the reading of the book.) Students complete the assignment in their writer's notebook and use it as a "discussion board" during the book talk.

Book Talk One - Preliminary Coding of Transcribed Audio-recording

This is an example of a preliminary analysis of student behaviors, dialogue, and reactions to text.

Emotional Reactions of Students	Responses to each other unprompted by me	Responses elicited by my questions	Responses that show students thinking on a deeper and more critical level (using literary terminology, referring to specific parts of the text to support an interpretation.)	Patterns of my dialogue Probing Questions Comments Utterances
It's depressing. It's really sad. It was really disturbing. I was like… Did I just read what I read?	You're spoiling it for me. Speaker 1: So I was expecting it. At this point. Speaker 2: But the way she described it, she said she was wanting and… it was disgusting.	KB: Well, they're saying they're really into it. (referring to another group reading the same book) Student 1: At the beginning, it was good. KB: Tell me why.	In response to Why do you think the writer did it that way? Student 1: I think it was to… Well, her best friend Maddie, that she writes through the eyes of, dies in the beginning. Student 2: So I think, since the	Tell me why. Okay. (utterances) Hmmm. The little sister? (I ask several questions like this in response to student comments.)

I had to go back and reread it. I was mortified. The first chapter. It was gross.	Speaker 1: A scene. They say it happened. Speaker 2: Or it'll be like super quick flashed of the scene. Where you can see them moving and…That was full detail. Step by step. Speaker 3: Saying he was groaning and I was like, oh my God. Speaker 1: So the police called and the principal called the …her little sister and called her down to talk with…to talk about it. And then… Speaker 2: Because she said that when she first walked into school, the day she went back, it was that Monday, and here mom said she didn't have to go if she didn't… And she walked in and everybody was talking about it. Like, dead girl's sister and everybody… Speaker 3: It made me angry. There was a part where…Speaker	Student 2: The whole point of the book is her looking down on her parents grieving her death after, in Heaven. Student 3: That was so neat. But I wasn't …at all. I was like… Student 4: It was really disturbing. Student 5: Yeah. I was sitting there, I really…I was like…Every sec, I was like… Did I just read what I read? I had to go back and re-read it. I was like, this is bad.	narrator's not able-… KB: Oh, she's writing from Maddie's…Okay. Student 2: Yes. She's writing through Maddie's eyes. Maddie is her best friend, so that's why Maddie knows everything about her. That's why she chooses Maddie. So basically- Student 1: I think it's really honestly… Student 2: They piece the story in reverse. They start off with the commotion. Speaker 1: Look how they started off. (Proceeds to read from the text.) Speaker 3: The next thing, next piece, she makes you start to interpret it, like she says, "In myself, why…untied me." So she's going mad. She's telling the story. (Lucas is silent for most of this discussion. He nods his head and looks at the others, but doesn't say	And they never found this guy? So why do you think the writer did that? (a consistent question I asked each group) So what are you talking about? Okay, so if someone has cystic fibrosis and someone else has cystic fibrosis….? (a combination of a summary of what the students are saying and a question) So, she's writing about herself as if she's somebody else?

	4: Okay, so what other questions do we have? Speaker 5: The principal told her…		much while I’m here.)	

APPENDIX G

Topical Instructional Outline

Essential Questions/Topics	**Instructional Activities**	**Literacy Skills Addressed**	**Texts**
Becoming a critical reader and how it relates to writing What do good readers do?	Reading Survey	Critical Reading Accessing prior knowledge Self-reflective writing Academic Discussion Skills	Literacy Survey Habits of Critical Readers 9/11 Anniversary Webinars Controversial Advertisements
How do writers use language to communicate ideas? How do writers use language to make political and social commentary?	Visual Analysis Writer's Craft: Exploring Content and Style Self-Analysis on Writing Skills	Textual Analysis Text Deconstruction Techniques Evaluating and responding to written text and digital text Development of Discussion Skills Reading Stamina	"Disability" -Nancy Mairs (essay) "I'm not your inspiration. Thank you very much. -Stella Young (TedTalk video)
Identity Formation **What makes us who we are?**	Identity Mind Maps Partner Presentations: Identity Map Formation	Considering alternative perspectives Double-entry response writing	"Who am I? Think again." -Hetain Patel (TedTalk Video) "Basics of Identity" – Shahram Heshmat (article) "How to Discover Your True Identity and Uphold Your Self-Worth" (Internet article) Identity Questionnaire *7 Steps to Mind Mapping* – Tony Buzan (You Tube video)
*College Essay	College Journaling	Text Deconstruction and Analysis	Model Exemplars of College Essays

How does a writer reveal personality through narrative? Importance of Rhetorical Situation – subject/topic, purpose, speaker, context, audience	Cultural Autobiographical Survey Memory Grid Personality Chart Finding Your Element: Individual Mind Map Writing the Personal Essay Writer's Craft Audience, Tone, Artful Syntax, Transitions	Evaluation of content and style Generative Writing Techniques Drafting Ideas Peer Review Skills Deep Revision	
*Rhetorical Analyses 1 and 2 Uncovering Deeper Meaning as Readers What are the single stories that exist in the world around us? In what ways do single stories impact our unique identities? Rhetorical Appeals	Group Analysis Chart Students Design and Teach Lessons on Writer's Craft Stylistic Devices Informal rhetorical analysis essay	Inductive Thinking Deconstruction of Text Evaluating and Drawing Conclusions about Text Analyzing Effect of a Writer's Rhetorical Strategies Application of New Understandings to Different Texts	"The Danger of a Single Story" – Chimamanda Adichie (Ted Talk video and transcript) "The Perils of Indifference" – Elie Wiesel (Video Nobel Peace Prize and transcript)
*Self-analysis of Writing Performance Essay Is your writing college-ready? How do you know when you are reading good writing?	Essential Elements of Academic Writing FDOC activity College-Ready Writing Part One (Group Charts) College-Ready Writing Part Two (Individual Assessment)	Analysis and Summarization of Text Textual Analysis Listening Skills Practical Uses of Performance Rubrics	Elements of Writing (Informational text) "12 Truths I Learned from Life and Writing" -Anne Lamott
Small Group Book Talks *Literary Essay	The Language of Literary Analysis Review Activity	Literary Analysis Skills – Author's use of language, depth of character	Self-selected novels: *The Zodiac Killer* *The Lovely Bones* *Verity*

Literary Letter Book Talk Presentations How do books educate us about the world, ourselves, and who we are as writers? How do readers discuss books with sophistication?	Protocols for Book Discussions "20 Questions" Effects of Alternative Perspectives on Understanding Student-Directed Lessons on Foster Concepts Book Talk Slide Deck	development, valid interpretations Self-analysis of Reading Skills Reading Like a Professor – Memory, Symbol, Pattern Analysis of Social and Historical Contexts	*Five Feet Apart* *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* – Thomas Foster
Writing Identity What is my writing identity? How will understanding your writing identity influence your continued growth as a writer? What parallels (if any) do you notice between your identity as a person and your writing identity?	Writing Identity Mind Maps	Categorization Skills Organizational Skills	College Essays Rhetorical Analyses: "The Danger of a Single Story;" "The Perils of Indifference;" Writer's Notebook Identity Entries
Rhetorical Appeals How does a writer's use of ethos, pathos, and logos influence the experience of a reader?	Group Analysis and Presentations of Rhetorical Appeals in Selected Passages	Identifying Writer's Argument Analysis of Ethos, Pathos, Logos	Mentor Texts – Passages from Published Writers Student Choice of Opinion Articles: "The Torturers Speak" (*New York Times)*; "The Grisly, All-American Appeal of Serial Killers" (*The Atlantic*); "The Rap Lyrics on Trial" (*The New York Times);* "My grandfather's whole family were murdered – but he found a way to forgive the killers" (*The Guardian*);

			"Sympathy for the Devils" (*The New York Times)*
Rhetorical Analysis of Opinion Article**s** *Original Opinion Essay How does examining a model rhetorical analysis inform our practice as writers? How do writers use stylistic devices to communicate their ideas? How do writers write with conviction?	Group Analysis and Presentations Author's Craft – Development of Ideas	Textual Analysis Deconstruction of Text Examining how examples support a main point Deeper Revision	"Cleaning: The Final Feminist Frontier" – Jessica Grose (*The New Republic)* Mentor Text: "Not Quite a Clean Sweep: Rhetorical Strategies in Grose's 'Cleaning: The Final Feminist Frontier'" – Harriet Clark (essay)
*Inquiry Paper Looking at Problems and Issues Through Different Lenses How does thinking about a topic from various perspectives enhance your understanding of your research topic? Development of Rhetorical Appeals in Writing	Choosing and Narrowing a Researchable Topic Lenses and Perspectives Assignment Slide Deck Outline of Inquiry Paper Group Peer Review of Slide Deck Thesis Statements	Enhanced Generating and Drafting Strategies Textual Analysis Organizing a research paper Integrating sources while maintaining voice Paraphrasing and Summarizing	*A Scientific Approach to the Paranormal* – Carrie Poppy (Ted Talk video) Exemplars of Inquiry Papers Instructional Resources for Research Writing

Note: The asterisk denotes formal writing assignments. See the appendix for links to course texts.

APPENDIX H

Finding Your Element Assignment

Finding Your Element

Have you found your Element?
It's where "natural aptitude meets personal passion," says Ken Robinson, professor emeritus at the University of Warwick (UK) and recognized global leader in helping people, companies and governments cultivate creativity. Robinson's own Element is: "communicating and working with people." It gives him energy, and when he's in his Element, time just flies by. In his book, *Finding Your Element*, Robinson explores why it's important to find your Element, that activity or environment that gives you both purpose and pleasure.

The process of finding your Element is based on three principles.

l. **Your Life is Unique**: Each person's life is unique in two ways: biology and culture. Our DNA and the community we're born into are powerful determinants that we cannot change.
ll. **You Create Your Own Life**: Biology and culture give us our starting point, but from there we determine our own paths through life.
lll. **Life is Organic**: Our lives are shaped by the give-and-take between our actual circumstances and our choices. So while our starting point is outside of our control, what we choose to do with what we have is up to us.

Mind Mapping Assignment: Finding Your Element

Create a mind map that illustrates various parts of your identity. This exercise will help you explore yourself and your relationship to the world around you.

- Follow the seven steps to mind mapping procedures.
- You may create your mind map using a software program or on poster board.
- The size of the paper should be 8 ½" x 11" or 11" x 14".
- Think carefully about the topics for your branches. These choices will guide how you progress through your mind map.
- Remember to use single words and short phrases.
- Color-code ideas that are related to each other.
- Ultimately, when a person reads your mind map, they will have a clear understanding of how you perceive yourself. Most importantly, you will have an increased awareness about yourself.

Include the following information:

- Things you like to do in your spare time
- What you think you are good at
- Talents you have or would like to develop
- Your personality- Think of words or phrases that describe you. Your attitudes? Behavior? How would your friends describe you?
- Interests
- Passions
- Hobbies
- Struggles
- Gender
- Academic strengths
- Favorite places, people, possessions?
- The most important/saddest/happiest moments of your life?
- What makes you happy
- What makes you sad
- What makes you angry
- Your doubts
- Your concerns about life and the world around you
- Your cultural identity: ethnicity, religion, your role in your family, birthplace, traditions, expectations, beliefs, values, languages, family history
- In what ways has your culture been taught to you?
- What artifacts/objects are important to you?
- Your work or responsibilities
- Languages you speak/Languages you want to speak
- Your ideas of success
- Possible career choices