

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEACHER IDENTITY IN WRITING INSTRUCTION
AND ASSESSMENT

by

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*To the greatest blessings ever, Analise and Gabriel, who inspire me daily to become
better, dream bigger, and believe that it is never too late to begin again.
This journey, and this achievement, are for you.
Love always, Mom*

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Danielle Nicole Alexander

PREFACE

In this manuscript style dissertation, two versions of the “Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Suburban High School Context” manuscript are presented. The original version submitted to *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* on October 22, 2025 is presented in Chapter 2; the revised and resubmitted version, now titled “Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Secondary ELA Classroom,” that was sent back to the same journal on February 12, 2026 is presented in Chapter 3. In addition, a second manuscript, “Creating Writing Opportunities: How a Secondary English Teacher’s Beliefs and Practices Shape Students’ Composing Experiences,” submitted to the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* on February 14, 2026, is presented in Chapter 4.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEACHER IDENTITY IN WRITING INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

by

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Teaching writing in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms is a complex instructional endeavor shaped by competing curricular demands and institutional constraints (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007). Although a substantial research base identifies effective practices for teaching writing (Graham & Harris, 2019), secondary teachers often report feeling underprepared to teach and assess writing—a challenge linked to uneven preservice preparation and limited opportunities for sustained professional learning focused on writing pedagogy (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Graham, 2019). Less is known, however, about how secondary teachers navigate these conditions in their everyday instructional and assessment decision-making.

In response, this two-manuscript qualitative dissertation examines writing teacher identity as a key lens through which teachers interpret and enact writing instruction and assessment. Grounded in Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory, this research conceptualizes writing teacher identity as dynamic, participation-based, and continually negotiated over time (Cremin & Baker, 2010). The first manuscript employs an instrumental, collective case study design

to examine how the writing teacher identity trajectories of two high school ELA teachers shape their writing pedagogy. Drawing on interviews and naturalistic classroom observations, findings illustrate how teachers' identities are enacted through instructional and assessment routines, classroom roles, and responses to shared challenges related to assessment, professional isolation, and shifting writing conditions. The second manuscript presents an in-depth instrumental case study of a veteran high school ELA teacher, focusing on how his writing-centered beliefs and practices shape students' opportunities to participate in writing. Using interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts, this study demonstrates how sustained participation in writing-focused communities of practice can support classroom environments in which writing is positioned as social, iterative, agentic, and oriented toward learning and growth.

These two studies contribute to writing research by shifting attention from instructional strategies alone to the identity-mediated participation structures that shape how writing is taught, assessed, and experienced in secondary classrooms. The dissertation concludes by outlining directions for future research that attend to writing assessment as a community-supported practice, novice writing teacher sensemaking during instructional transitions, novice teacher engagement with writing-focused professional communities, and adolescent experiences with writing instruction and assessment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OU	Oakland University
LCL	Literacy, Culture, and Language
ELA	English Language Arts
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CoPs	Communities of Practice
AP	Advanced Placement
IB	International Baccalaureate
DP	Diploma Programme
SL	Standard Level
HL	Higher Level
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
MLA	Modern Language Association
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
RQ	Research Question

CHAPTER ONE

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEACHER IDENTITY IN WRITING INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

The research I present in this manuscript-style dissertation addresses a persistent challenge in secondary literacy education: although writing is central to students' academic, professional, and personal lives, many adolescents leave high school underprepared and lacking confidence in their ability to write effectively (Graham, 2019; Graham & Harris, 2019). Large-scale assessments continue to indicate uneven and generally low writing performance (ACT, Inc., 2024; Michigan Department of Education, 2025; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), while scholars simultaneously argue that classroom writing instruction is often insufficient despite the field already possessing the knowledge and tools needed to improve it (Graham, 2019; Graham & Harris, 2019). These tensions are further intensified in contemporary classrooms shaped by post-pandemic conditions and emerging technologies like AI, where both teachers and students are negotiating new writing experiences (Traga Philippakos & Rocconi, 2025).

Why Identity Matters in Writing Instruction

In response to these realities, my dissertation centers on high school ELA teachers in Michigan and examines not only *how* writing is taught and assessed in today's classrooms, but also *why* these practices take the forms they do. Situated in the understudied suburban context, which serves the largest population of U.S. students yet faces its own instructional and structural challenges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Stanford, 2023), this research advances an agenda that foregrounds

writing teacher identity as an important mechanism in shaping writing pedagogy. Specifically, this agenda conceptualizes writing teacher identity as dynamic and socially constructed—formed through teachers’ histories as writers and their participation in writing-focused communities of practice that shape what they value, enact, and sustain in writing instruction (Cremin et al., 2020; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Whitney, 2009).

Grounded in Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory, this research agenda positions writing instruction not merely as a set of strategies or techniques but rather as an identity-mediated practice that evolves through participation, experience, and professional learning. From this perspective, teachers’ approaches to teaching and assessing writing are understood as outcomes of their trajectories within and across writing-focused communities of practice, which can not only shape their beliefs, pedagogical commitments, roles, and responses to instructional challenges (Cremin, 2006; Cremin & Baker, 2010; Cremin et al., 2020) but also the opportunities they provide their students (Cremin et al., 2020; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Woodard, 2016). The two manuscripts in this dissertation are interrelated through a shared commitment to examining how writing teacher identity can operate as a driver of instruction and, therefore, student opportunity in suburban high schools.

Who We Are, How We Teach

Manuscript #1 establishes the foundation of this research agenda through an instrumental, collective pilot case study of two suburban high school ELA teachers who demonstrate differing writing teacher identity trajectories (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Wenger, 1998). This manuscript reveals that writing teacher identity functions not

simply as a personal orientation but as a consequential interpretive lens through which teachers enact writing instruction and assessment, assume classroom roles, and respond to challenges. By examining two teachers working within the same context but following distinct identity trajectories, this manuscript illustrates how students' writing experiences will differ depending on the teacher to whom they are assigned, even within the same suburban school setting.

Who We Are, How We Create Writing Opportunities

Manuscript #2 extends this agenda by focusing on the teacher whose writing teacher identity trajectory reflected confidence and a sense of success in teaching writing, in order to more deeply examine how identity informs beliefs, how those beliefs are enacted in daily practice, and how they may structure students' writing opportunities over time. Using an asset-based lens, this manuscript examines how positioning oneself explicitly as a teacher of writing—grounded in personal writing practices and sustained participation in professional communities—structures instructional design, assessment practices, and classroom opportunities for student composing, reflection, and growth. By triangulating interviews, observations, and artifacts (Stake, 1995), this manuscript moves beyond describing pedagogy to conceptualizing how identity-driven instruction can expand students' opportunities to think, compose, and develop as writers.

Summary

Together, these manuscripts constitute an identity-centered research agenda for understanding and strengthening secondary writing instruction. This agenda positions writing teacher identity—shaped through experience and community participation—as a central lever for pedagogical change, offering a coherent lens for understanding variation

in writing instruction and for designing future research, professional learning, and teacher development that more intentionally supports both teachers and students as writers.

CHAPTER TWO

“WHO WE ARE, HOW WE TEACH: WRITING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL CONTEXT” (MS 1, VERSION 1)

Introduction

Writing is a cornerstone of K-12 education, essential for academic success, workplace communication, and personal expression (Graham, 2019). Yet, standardized test data suggest that adolescents in the United States, particularly at the high school level, are not performing at high levels in writing. Only 24% of 12th graders scored proficient on the most recent nationwide assessment, the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), and the national average on the 2024 ACT Writing Test was just 6.1 out of 12 (ACT, Inc., 2024). Even in suburban schools, which are often assumed to be well-resourced and academically strong, students’ test scores prove to be falling short of proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; Stanford, 2023).

While these assessments highlight a concerning trend, they do not explain the reasons behind it as numbers alone cannot capture how writing is actually taught, supported, or experienced in classrooms. Given writing’s central role across school, work, and daily life— where it is and will continue to be “everywhere” (Graham & Harris, 2019)— it is important to look beyond test scores to examine the everyday realities of writing instruction. Doing so requires turning to those who live this work each day: the English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, whose practices, roles, and challenges shape students’ writing experiences.

Such opportunities connect to ongoing debates about the quality and effectiveness of writing instruction. In a review of 28 studies, Graham (2019) concluded that writing instruction occurring in most classrooms, both in the United States and internationally, was “not sufficient” (p. 280). While prior research has clarified what teachers do and the obstacles they face when teaching and assessing writing, Graham (2019) argued that we know far less about how educational stakeholders, including teachers, shape their perspectives and goals for writing instruction.

To address this need, the following study centers the voices of two suburban high school ELA teachers to understand how and why they navigate writing instruction and assessment the ways they do within today’s post-pandemic, AI-influenced educational landscape. Applying Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice and concept of identity as trajectory as a guiding framework, I examined how the teachers’ levels of participation in writing-related professional learning communities, along with their sense of selves as writing teachers, informs not only what they prioritize and enact but also how they respond to challenges that are inherent of writing instruction. In doing so, the study answers Graham’s (2019) call about going beyond the “what” of teachers’ instructional decisions by showcasing the “why” that underlies them, illuminating the social, contextual, and identity-driven processes that shape writing pedagogy. The implications of this study are most relevant for secondary ELA teachers and the teacher educators, mentors, and department leaders who can support their development as writing teachers.

Secondary Writing Instruction Practices

In the last couple decades, scholars have identified a number of evidence-based strategies for writing instruction at the secondary level. One is explicitly teaching specific

writing strategies to students through modeling and guided practice (Graham & Perin, 2007; Harris & Graham, 2016; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). As a result of directly teaching writing strategies, high school teachers are prioritizing the writing process over the final product (i.e., the “process-oriented approach”)— another identified research-supported technique to improve student writing quality, so long as it is integrated alongside other evidence-based strategies (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Studies have also revealed the importance of teachers incorporating authentic writing tasks that not only mirror real-world purposes and audiences but also connect to students’ lived experiences (Graham, 2019; Graham & Perin, 2007; Whitney, 2017). Allowing students to work together on writing assignments (i.e., “collaborative writing”) has been shown to enhance critical thinking, idea generation, and revision quality, as well (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). A final evidence-based writing instruction example, specifically regarding struggling writers, includes teachers’ incorporation of scaffolding tools, such as templates, graphic organizers, or examples, which have been shown to also improve student writing outcomes, including students with learning disabilities (Graham & Perin, 2007; Harris & Graham, 2016).

In terms of assessment, rather than providing generic praise or solely concerns, secondary teachers should be giving ongoing, specific, and actionable feedback that focuses on both students’ strengths and areas of improvement (Graham & Perin, 2007; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). Peer feedback, however, has also proven effective, particularly when it is structured (Graham & Harris, 2019; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). In terms of self-assessment, scholars such as Graham et al. (2011) found positive outcomes when students were explicitly taught to apply rubrics and specific strategies to

evaluate their own drafts. Also, teachers should be providing opportunities for students to revise based upon the feedback they receive from their instructors or classmates (Graham & Harris, 2019).

Secondary Writing Instruction Challenges

In addition to the range of evidence-based practices for teaching and assessing writing, researchers have also identified persistent challenges that secondary teachers face in their writing instruction. Many of these challenges stem from testing and time pressures, as teachers often navigate competing priorities that limit opportunities for authentic writing experiences (Applebee & Langer, 2011). An example is high-stakes assessments, which can shape curriculum and instruction in ways that promote formulaic writing rather than sustained, process-based composing (Applebee & Langer, 2011). At the classroom level, factors such as large class sizes and institutional policies influence how much time teachers can devote to writing and how they adapt instruction for diverse learners (Graham, 2019). Assessment also remains a significant challenge for teachers, as evaluating lengthy written compositions requires substantial time and effort (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009).

Writing instruction is also complex, so even though evidence-based practices exist, studies show that they do not guarantee success in all settings; therefore, teachers must constantly monitor and adapt locally (Graham & Harris, 2019; Graham & Perin, 2007). Also, many teachers feel underprepared to teach and assess writing as preservice preparation in writing instruction is often minimal and uneven, which decreases teachers' confidence and adoption of evidence-based practices once in the classroom (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Graham, 2019; Harris & Graham, 2016). Moreover, even veteran teachers

report feeling ill-prepared, and school districts rarely offer professional learning to specifically refine writing instruction (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Graham, 2019; Harris & Graham, 2016).

Impact of Writing Teacher Identity on Teachers

While prior research on writing instruction has clarified what teachers do and the obstacles they face, it has not sufficiently examined the underlying factors that shape them. Research on writing teacher identity, however, has deepened the field's understanding by exploring the influence of teachers' self-perceptions as both writers and educators. Often described interchangeably as *teachers' writing identities* (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Tondreau & Johnston, 2023), *teachers as writers* (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Cremin et al., 2020; Whitney, 2009), and *teacher-writer* (Frawley, 2015; Premont, 2022), writing teacher identity is defined as both relational and fluid (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Cremin & Oliver, 2017), continually shaped through reflective engagement and participation in professional learning communities (Cremin et al., 2020; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Whitney, 2009).

Collectively, research has revealed that writing teacher identity powerfully influences teachers' beliefs and thus instructional practices. Those who develop strong writing teacher identities often report greater confidence, risk-taking, and empathy in their instruction, creating classrooms that emphasize process, authenticity, and student choice (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Premont, 2022). They also demonstrate increased resilience and agency in responding to curriculum mandates and institutional constraints (Cremin & Oliver, 2017). However, despite its proven benefits, developing one is difficult. Teachers often experience self-doubt and discomfort when

writing, describing tensions between their roles as expert teachers and novice writers (Cremin, 2006). Additionally, maintaining a strong writing teacher identity amidst institutional pressures can be challenging, as teachers navigate conflicting expectations and shifting roles (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Whitney, 2009). Many teachers also hold narrow conceptions of what counts as “writing,” limiting how they view their own literacies and those of their students (Cremin et al., 2020; Cremin & Oliver, 2017).

Despite writing teacher identity being proven central to how teachers conceptualize and enact writing instruction, little is known about how these identities take shape and operate in everyday classroom practice among in-service secondary ELA teachers. This gap is particularly pronounced in U.S. suburban settings, where demographic shifts, institutional expectations, and accountability pressures uniquely impact teachers’ experiences. Therefore, the present study investigates how two suburban high school ELA teachers understand and enact their writing teacher identities through their instructional practices, assumed roles in the classroom, as well as their responses to the challenges of teaching writing in today’s post-pandemic, AI-influenced educational landscape.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory to examine not only how suburban high school ELA teachers teach and assess writing and navigate instructional challenges but also why they approach instruction and respond to challenges in the ways they do.

Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) stated that communities of practice (CoPs) are “everywhere” (p. 6) and an “integral part of our daily lives” (p. 7). They are places where we “develop, negotiate, and share” our “theories and understanding of the world” (Wenger, 1998, p. 48). They encompass groups of people who “share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). For secondary ELA teachers, CoPs can exist in-person or online and include both formal structures such as grade-level teams, subject-area departments, curriculum committees, or professional learning communities, as well as informal collaborations among other educators who share a commitment to their pedagogy. Wenger (1998) argued that CoPs involve three key elements: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. In the context of my study that specifically hones in on writing instruction, mutual engagement includes teachers collaborating, sharing strategies, and engaging in professional dialogue about writing pedagogy; joint enterprise equals teachers sharing a goal, such as fostering students’ writing skills, which drives their collective efforts; and shared repertoire is teachers’ development of common tools, routines, and language to teach or assess writing.

Identity as Trajectory

Wenger’s (1998) concept of identity as trajectory emphasizes that identity is not a “fixed” trait but rather something we “constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives” (p. 154). As individuals participate in social practices over time, their identities evolve—a path that reflects their past experiences, current engagements, and future professional aspirations. ELA teachers, who not only teach writing but also other literacy skills, may or may not participate in social practices that are specifically tailored to

writing over the course of their careers, which impacts their identity as a writing teacher. According to Wenger (1998), there are five trajectory types: peripheral (i.e., ELA teachers, normally pre-service or novice, who observe or minimally engage in a writing instruction community), inbound (i.e., early-career ELA teachers moving forward toward full participation in a writing instruction community), insider (i.e., experienced ELA teachers who are fully integrated into the writing instruction community, mentoring others and evolving their role as the community's writing practices shift), boundary (i.e., ELA teachers who connect multiple writing communities), and outbound (i.e., ELA teachers leaving the writing instruction community and carrying with them their expertise in teaching writing).

Integration of Theories

CoP and identity as trajectory provide a complementary framework for understanding the social and individual factors that shape the teaching and assessing of student writing over time. The CoP lens captures the collaborative structures— or lack thereof— that influence teachers' identities. Additionally, the identity as trajectory lens reveals how teachers' personal histories and professional aspirations inform both their practices and approaches to problem-solving. By combining these theories, the study examines both how and why two ELA teachers, who possess different levels of writing teacher identities, navigate the complexities of teaching and assessing writing in a suburban high school context the ways they do.

Methods

Given the study's aim to deepen understanding of how writing instruction is enacted within suburban high school classrooms, an instrumental, collective case study

design was used (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). This approach allowed for a close examination of teachers' instructional practices, assumed roles, and responses to the everyday challenges of teaching and assessing writing. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do two 11th and 12th grade ELA teachers in a suburban high school teach and assess writing, and what roles do they assume in the process?
2. What challenges do these teachers encounter in teaching and assessing writing, and how do they respond?

Context

The study took place both on Zoom and in person at a suburban public high school in the Midwest, referred to here as Riverton High School. At Riverton, the 11th graders have three options to fulfill their full-year ELA requirement: English Language Arts 11, Advanced Placement (AP) Language and Composition, or International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) Language and Literature Year 1. The 12th graders must take either the semester-long English Language Arts 12 and a semester-long ELA elective, AP Literature and Composition, or IB DP Language and Literature Year 2. Within the two DP course offerings, there are two tracks: standard level (SL) and higher level (HL). However, students are dual-seated and not separated into different classes based on their tracks; instead, teachers of these courses provide the same instruction but adjust some of their practices and assessment criteria for summative assignments.

Participants

In addition to other courses, Zoe and Walt (both names are pseudonyms) teach upperclassmen at Riverton High. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, as

recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), to identify suburban high school ELA teachers working with upper-grade students. To locate potential suburban school sites, I used the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) "School and District Navigator" tool to confirm suburban classifications, and I then contacted administrators and teachers to recruit participants. Although my two participants taught different upper-level ELA courses—Zoe taught English Language Arts 11, while Walt taught DP Language and Literature Year 1, DP Language and Literature Year 2, and Poetry—this variation was appropriate provided that the study's focus was not on student outcomes nor curriculum-specific comparisons but rather on how each teacher navigated writing instruction within their respective contexts.

Zoe

At the time of the study, Zoe was a novice teacher with two years of teaching experience after completing one full year of student teaching. She taught ELA all three years as well as a semester of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and had worked with students in both the middle and high school settings. Her current classes included English Language Arts 9 and English Language Arts 11.

Zoe shared that she took one course during her teacher preparation program that focused on writing instruction and assessment, and that although she felt "somewhat prepared" to teach literature, specifically through the lens of "disrupting it," she did not feel ready to teach nor assess student writing upon graduation. During our second interview, she reflected:

I mean, it's good that I [learned to] see writing as not just writing an essay [but also] like them creating their advertisements, or, like, doing a commercial, but we

never, like, talked about rubrics, besides, like, one class, and that is one thing I'm like, why did we spend so little time?

Throughout her student teaching year, Zoe said she was fortunate to occasionally have the opportunity to collaborate with her mentor teacher on writing, particularly concerning assessment. For example, they would look at rubrics together, and her mentor would ask her questions like, “What does this mean?” and “Where is it in the essay?” Zoe noted that this was essentially the sole instruction she received related to the teaching and assessing of student writing, prior to working at her current school. She never mentioned personally engaging in writing outside of school.

Zoe described her purpose in teaching secondary writing as twofold. At the heart of her practice is an “idealistic” goal of nurturing “lifelong writers” who view writing as “a way to navigate ourselves and the world.” To support this, she emphasized designing “meaningful” assessments— personal narratives, real-world essay prompts, and other opportunities for students to carry writing beyond the classroom, such as using memoirs for college essays or keeping journals over the summer. At the same time, she acknowledged the pressures of standardized assessments, where writing becomes less about process and more about product. She said she’s constantly grappling with the question of “how can I teach them to write an essay that will earn them a [high score] and help them get into college?”

Walt

Down the hallway from Zoe was Walt, a veteran teacher of 29 years and nearing retirement. Prior to becoming a teacher, he was a poet who was hired to work with elementary teachers as they were setting up writing workshops, which was where he

discovered his passion for being in a classroom setting. He had taught ELA every year since and also had experience in both middle and high schools. His current courses included DP Language and Literature Year 1, DP Language and Literature Year 2, and Poetry, which was an elective offered to 10th-12th graders.

Despite writing no longer being his main focus, Walt said he had “not stopped writing” since becoming an ELA teacher. He wrote both at school and in his personal life. Also, even though he had an academic foundation in writing as well as personal experiences as a writer, he told me he was still, almost 30 years later, seeking ways to improve his practice in the classroom. He explained: “I have always thought of myself as a poet and written poetry, but the more I work with teaching poetry though, the more I realize there is very little I know how to articulate about writing a poem.” As a result, over the years, Walt sought out opportunities both within and outside of his school building in order to grow as a writing teacher. For example, when the IB Programme first came to his school, he volunteered to be the teacher responsible for the development of the language and literature IB courses. Additionally, he had been a long-time member of a local affiliate of the National Writing Project, a collaborative initiative focused on improving writing instruction. Almost a decade ago, Walt also joined a research group, working alongside a professor from a local research university who was studying peer feedback. He had recently shared his experiences surrounding his implementation of the learned peer feedback practices at a local in-state conference for ELA teachers.

Walt described the purpose of teaching secondary writing as creating a classroom where students come to see themselves as members of a community that “uses language to explore and share ideas” and learns strategies for doing so effectively. When he felt

himself losing focus, he said he “would always return to this.” For him, assessment was not only about finished products but also about whether students could “own their thinking” and “own their communication about their thinking.”

Researcher Positionality

My experiences as a high school ELA teacher, private writing tutor, and college composition instructor have deeply shaped my passion for writing instruction and assessment, as well as my ongoing interest in how educators are prepared to teach and assess writing. My firsthand experience of navigating the complexities of teaching writing in the suburban setting provided me with both an empathetic lens and an insider’s perspective on the realities that Zoe and Walt faced. Additionally, my familiarity with the topics discussed allowed me to establish rapport with them and engage in meaningful conversations about their experiences.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my prior roles may have also impacted how I interpreted my participants’ practices and challenges. As I shared with Zoe and Walt prior to receiving their consent, my goal of this study was not to evaluate their approaches to teaching and assessing writing but rather to learn how they function in their “ordinary pursuits and milieus” (i.e., their lived experiences in authentic present-day classroom contexts) (Stake, 1995, p. 1). Throughout both data collection and analysis, I intentionally engaged in continuous reflexivity through memo writing in order to critically assess my influence on interpretation (Saldaña, 2021).

Data Collection

The data for this study included semi-structured interviews and naturalistic classroom observations, both common in case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin,

2003). Collecting both forms of data allowed me to explore the relationship between teachers' stated perspectives and their enacted practices (i.e., what they *said* about their writing instruction and what they *did* in the classroom). This approach aligned with Wenger's (1998) view that "who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves" (p. 151).

To gather these data, each participant completed two one-on-one interviews— a pre-observation interview in January 2025 and a post-observation interview in March 2025. Both interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasted between 33 and 52 minutes, and were audio- and video-recorded to ensure transcription accuracy and allow for examination of nonverbal communication. The pre-observation interviews gathered background information about the courses each teacher taught; their approaches to teaching and assessing writing with juniors and seniors compared to other grade levels; and their current successes and struggles with writing instruction. The post-observation interviews provided opportunities to ask follow-up questions related to topics that surfaced during classroom visits, as well as to discuss desired resources, supports, and changes that might make teaching and assessing writing more effective or enjoyable.

In between the two interviews, I visited each teacher's classroom as a nonparticipant observer four times over the course of February and March 2025, with each observation lasting one hour. Prior to each visit, I confirmed that teaching or assessing writing would be taking place, as defined by the participants. All observations were audio- and video-recorded, and I took detailed field notes. These observations provided complementary, real-time evidence of instructional and assessment practices that deepened and contextualized what teachers had shared in interviews.

Because I was already familiar with ELA writing instruction, I was able to follow the classroom content closely and ask context-specific follow-up questions during data collection. At the same time, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice to monitor how my prior teaching experience might shape interpretation. Reflexivity occurred through memoing (Saldaña, 2021), and these memos— written during and after each data collection event— later served as a critical lens during analysis to ensure that patterns, categories, and themes were grounded in participants’ realities rather than my own professional background.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive, thematic approach, and MAXQDA software was used to support data management and coding. Analysis proceeded in two phases: initial coding and focused coding, allowing for both within-case depth and cross-case comparisons (Saldaña, 2021).

During the initial coding phase, my interview transcripts, observation transcripts, field notes, and memos were read closely and coded, line by line. Over 100 codes were inductively developed to capture the “contents and nuances” of my data in order to “begin taking ownership of them” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 148). Since the aim was not to validate my own experience but rather to focus on my participants’ perspectives, I worked to withhold personal assumptions by prioritizing participant language (i.e., in vivo coding), but some codes were also gerunds (i.e., process coding) in order to capture recurring concepts (Saldaña, 2021).

In the second phase, focused coding was used to determine the “most frequent or significant codes” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 303). These codes were then reviewed and grouped

into broader conceptual categories. Redundant or overlapping codes were merged, and categories were developed to reflect higher-level patterns both within and across the two teachers' cases. Memos also informed category development and theme refinement, providing a space to "discover even better ones" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 71). This multi-step coding process allowed for a grounded understanding of each teacher's practices and struggles while supporting thematic synthesis across cases.

Limitations

Although this study provides insights into how and why two suburban high school ELA educators teach and assess writing as well as navigate writing-related challenges the ways they do, limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study's design did not capture longitudinal data. While the concept of identity as trajectory emphasizes the importance of examining how practices and identities develop over time, my data collection was limited to several months, which restricts the ability to trace evolution. Second, while external factors such as district policies and curricular mandates undoubtedly shape teachers' practices and challenges, this study did not examine those influences directly. Instead, they were considered only insofar as they surfaced through the participants' descriptions and observed classroom practices.

Findings

The first set of findings examines how two suburban high school ELA teachers approached writing instruction, with particular attention to the roles they assumed while doing so. The second set of findings explores the challenges the teachers have encountered while teaching and assessing writing, highlighting how they responded to those challenges.

Current Approaches to Writing Instruction

The two teacher participants drew on a variety of practices, including evidence-based approaches, when teaching and assessing writing. At the same time, each occupied a different role in the classroom, which influenced how they approached instruction.

Writing Instruction Practices

Both teachers typically began their writing instruction with a short mini lesson, followed by independent writing and conferencing time. However, their approaches to these routines differed.

Zoe's Approach to Teaching Writing. Zoe— whether collaborating with students to generate a list of the “dos and don’ts” of slideshow writing or breaking down the elements that make up a children’s book— always began her writing instruction with a whole-group mini lesson. In her first interview, she explained that she used this time to model writing, emphasizing that it was “important for [her students] to see [her write],” so they would not think, “Oh, this girl keeps assigning us work, and she’s not doing anything.”

In one observation, she set a sheet of paper beneath the document camera, so that her paper displayed on the whiteboard at the front of the room. With a marker, she sketched a simple triangle and carefully labeled each corner with the three rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. “So, what we’re going to do is we’re going to do a triangle outline together, so that you guys can get an idea of what you can do on actual test taking day,” she told the class, referring to the upcoming SAT test. She then paused, scanning the room before calling on students to recall examples from the practice passage that aligned with each appeal. As students offered responses, she jotted down their ideas

at the triangle's points, narrating her thought process out loud. She encouraged them to take time on the actual exam to sketch a similar triangle, reminding them that it would ensure each body paragraph had evidence tied to a rhetorical strategy. On another occasion, Zoe used the document camera to model annotating an argumentative text, circling key phrases and underlining rhetorical moves as she talked through her reasoning. She also demonstrated how to transform these annotations into a thesis statement, drafting a sample version in real time. Notably, though, Zoe's modeling never extended to writing full pieces in front of her students. Instead, she concentrated on brainstorming, annotating, and drafting individual sentences rather than composing complete drafts.

Zoe's Approach to Assessing Writing. Following her mini lessons, Zoe provided her students with independent writing time while she walked around and conferenced with each student individually. In order to "avoid burnout," she told me in her first interview that her practice concerning feedback on formative writing assignments included "not doing more work than the students." As a result, she read and provided written or verbal feedback on her students' drafts while standing or sitting right next to them, doing her best to focus on "student ideas" versus grammatical or mechanical issues. She would also often provide students with the assignment rubric, so they could self-assess.

While grading summative assessments, Zoe explained that she always aimed for a "balance" of positive and constructive feedback, making it a point to provide input across multiple platforms. On the paper itself, she left comments in the margins— sometimes as simple as a question mark, meant to signal confusion or invite revision. Within Canvas,

the school's grading platform, she utilized built-in rubrics to streamline evaluation, noting "that is the quickest way because I just click the button, and then I type in a little comment." She also added an overall comment on each assignment, where she summarized both strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition, depending on the assignment, Zoe provided students with the opportunity to revise their writing using a structured revision packet she designed herself. This was something new she introduced in her second year of teaching after realizing the previous year that she had "a huge issue of them turning in the same paper," even after she allotted multiple days for revision. Reflecting on her frustration, she recalled thinking "like why did I give you the time?" With the packet, students could earn points for completing it, but in order to raise their score, she also needed to "see that in practice in the writing, as well."

Walt's Approach to Teaching Writing. Similar to Zoe, Walt typically kicked off his writing instruction with a whole group mini-lesson. I observed him instructing on the differences between commentary and reasoning, revising introduction paragraphs after full drafts were written, and cutting out wordiness in essays. Additionally, Walt utilized this time as a whole group to model but did so from a writer's perspective.

During my first observation, he explained to students that his own revision process as a writer is "basically a process of rewriting the same thing, but each time writing differently." On the large screen, he projected a first draft of a paragraph he had written and asked students to silently read it. Then, he walked them through how he would approach revising it, explaining that he always expects his first drafts to "need work" because getting ideas out is difficult— even for him. To push himself, he shared

with students that he “plays a game” where he tries to write an additional sentence for every one he already has. He then showed a revised version with new additions in a different color, explaining how and why it still fell short of his goal. Finally, he displayed a third version with even more revisions and read it aloud, continuing to add more text to the document in front of the class until his evidence better supported his claim. Even then, he acknowledged there was still room for improvement.

Walt’s Approach to Assessing Writing. Like Zoe, Walt also tried to only read students’ summative work, rarely ever “reading their thinking” (i.e., drafts). He said that not only would adding their “thinking” to his plate be “too much to read,” but between his one-on-one conferences with students, as well as the way he structures conferencing and self-assessments, students’ summative pieces end up being “pretty darn good.”

After his experience working with a research group led by a university professor focused on peer feedback in 2016, Walt explained that a major component of his assessment approach shifted toward what he calls his “social and reflective” activities, which center on using peer feedback and self-assessment to deepen students’ understanding of writing. Before students turn in a final assignment, he creates and distributes structured guides for both peer feedback and self-assessment, which students complete while reviewing their peers’ work and reflecting on their own. In addition to grading students’ summative writing with a rubric, Walt also reads through these completed guides to assess students’ understanding of the writing task. He described this as a way to “triangulate [his] evaluation” and “see what [students] are seeing” in order to determine “if they’re getting it.” If, after these activities, students still “missed the mark” on their assignment, Walt noted that more individual instruction may be necessary but

emphasized that it is typically minimal, and that he always allows opportunities to revise and resubmit.

Roles in the Writing Classroom

Although both Zoe and Walt considered themselves writing teachers, their writing teacher roles in the classroom differed, which impacted how they taught and assessed.

The Empathetic Coach. Zoe seemed to assume the role of an empathetic coach. Understanding that not all of her students enjoyed writing, she encouraged them to choose writing topics that they are passionate about, which she felt helped them “find a little bit of investment in the work.” In our first interview together, she shared that she viewed writing as a way to introduce oneself to others, and in order to motivate students to invest more in their writing, she gave awards to any student whose writing made her cry. As she explained, she resisted the common perception that all adolescents are apathetic: “I think this generation gets a bad rap for being lazy and not caring sometimes, but these kids really do care, and they are really, like, wanting to share their voices.”

Zoe said she also prioritized exposing students to a variety of writing genres and worked to build upon their individual strengths. She told me that doing “stuff that’s more in their wheelhouse” would often “get better writing out of them.” Also, since she could relate to students on how writing a paper can often feel like an “arduous task,” she strived to make writing approachable through “chunking it”—that is, the distribution of graphic organizers with sentence starters and easy-to-follow steps. Finally, when it came to summative assessment feedback, she said she used emojis, as well as words and phrases that her students could relate to. She provided an example:

When [students] were doing memoirs, one of my girls wrote about, like a guy who was horrible to her, and so I left a comment at the end. I was like, “So proud of you for this. Men are trash.” And she came in, and she’s like, “I’ve never had a teacher say that to me, like, I’m so glad that, like somebody sees it.”

By incorporating “student language,” Zoe stated that her students felt like she was invested in and understood them, and as a result of this, she added that she did not get many complaints about her grading.

The “Lead Writer.” Walt self-identified as the “lead writer” in his “classroom learning community,” one where “writing is a central part.” In our first interview, Walt explained that his classroom writing goals applied not only to his students but also to himself. He believed it was “essential” for everyone in the class— including him— to be able to write and reflect on their choices as writers because this was key to the success of their classroom community. While planning his writing instruction, Walt said he was always looking at the desired end goal (i.e., the final written product) and applied his own personal experience as a writer, thinking through what he “would need to know how to do in order to get there” (i.e., the process) and then modeled it. As the lead writer, he said he accepted the fact that not every one of his essays he showed or wrote alongside students would be perfect, but that never stopped him as he understood the value of modeling. Using poetry as an example, he explained:

I just know I’m going to write bad poems in front of students. That’s part of life. Most people write bad poetry, and that shouldn’t stop you from writing poetry. Lots of people play basketball in their driveway, and they don’t have to be a

basketball star, you know? These things can be instructive, even if we're not always creating incredibly powerful literary pieces of writing.

Walt shared that he viewed writing to be “as close to a universal access point to one’s own humanity as well as social standing.” As a result, his mission was to lead writers in ways that build students' confidence and help each one of them see themselves as capable. For example, after his whole group mini lesson, he would often walk around the room and individually conference with students about their writing content. Especially when students showed signs of being overwhelmed, I observed him providing them with encouraging words, such as “Don’t get caught up on uncertainties. You’re going to revise.”; “You’re going to miss stuff. It’s okay. Relax.”; and “You’ll be fine. I’m not grading it.” Overall, Walt felt that because he applies his own writing experiences to his teaching practice and is enthusiastic about it, he is almost always able to “sell it to kids.”

Current Struggles Regarding Teaching and Assessing Writing

In addition to navigating the seemingly never-ending paper load, both teacher participants struggled to a) teach and assess writing amidst a shifting landscape, b) locate resources related specifically to writing assessment, and c) feel supported within their department. Nevertheless, they responded differently to these challenges.

Shifting Landscape

Zoe’s Navigation of the Shifting Landscape. One of Zoe’s main struggles in writing education included “not teaching myself.” During our first interview, she said she was surprised at how writing is taught today because when she was in high school just a few years ago, she had to write essays regularly— sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly— either at home or during timed in-class sessions, all in MLA format with

proper grammar and mechanics. She said she was not sure if the shift was due to COVID-19, but if she were to assign writing like that now, she would get “so much pushback” from both her students and their parents. Despite feeling that prioritizing students’ mental health is really important, Zoe shared during interview one that she is worried for students’ futures if schools continue down this path, especially at a time when “writing already is at such a deficit.” She said:

I think that [this] has kind of lowered our expectations in a way of like, “Oh, we can’t keep assigning them papers because they’re going to get so overwhelmed, and then we don’t want to be the bad guys causing all of [those] feelings,” which I do think is valid. But, I also think that these students need to be, like, understanding that life is not always easy, and that you do have deadlines that you need to make. And then just spelling and grammar, I cannot wrap my head around. It’s like, it’s funny, and then it’s not funny because I’m like, how do you not know how to end a sentence? So yeah, just another [example]...I don’t know how they’re going to make it without being able to structure a sentence.

Zoe said she does try to treat her students like she would herself, challenging them as much as possible, whether they are in honors classes or not. However, she revealed in both interviews that she was fearful of getting in trouble if students and parents complained to administration about her approach to writing assignments and grading. As a result, as long as her students “turn something in that’s not AI-written and that had some investment,” she said she is happy.

Walt's Navigation of the Shifting Landscape. One of Walt's challenges included the developing student dependency on AI. In our second interview, he recalled a recent time when he had been absent, and upon his return, a couple students told him that a lot of their classmates used AI for the writing assignment he left for them to do with the substitute. Although AI had been quite prevalent among students in the school, Walt said he was surprised they thought it would be helpful to use it for a formative assignment, which was rarely graded, and one where a visual needed to be analyzed. He explained:

Like, was I not clear? Did I somehow give them permission to imagine that I thought it'd be fine? Like, it didn't even occur to me that they would do that with this. That just seemed really weird. Like, what's the prompt you give AI for something like this?

He said that AI makes students feel like writing can be easy, which is just "one more thing" that's making the "already hard" process even more difficult for students. Since he said there is no way of completely avoiding it as well as the fact that it is getting better overtime, Walt created a writing assignment where students "played around" with AI with the purpose of seeing firsthand what AI can and cannot do. He said many students found this pilot project helpful, but through its execution, he said it also provided him with insight into what extent AI can be incorporated into the writing process. Through his experiences thus far and despite feeling "weird" about it, it had become clear to him that he needs to be explicit to students about whether assignments can or cannot be "an AI thing," similar to how his high school teachers would tell him if an assignment is "a pen or pencil thing." He also stated that the challenge of AI speaks to the opportunity to

“decenter” the analytical essay as “the pinnacle of academic work in the language arts” since “why would you assign something a machine can write?”

Lack of Assessment Resources

Zoe’s Assessment Needs. Zoe told me in her second interview that assessing continues to be “really hard” for her, and besides needing more time to dedicate to it, there were two other areas within assessment for which she desired support: shared writing rubrics and unethical use of AI. Since she taught at an “IB school,” Zoe said all ELA teachers are “ingrained” to use rubrics, and as a result, students expected them. Despite having used rubrics throughout all of her years teaching writing, she specifically finds the 11th grade rubrics to be challenging to implement since they were not ones she helped create but rather common rubrics her department used. She said they covered “everything” versus a specific skill or even set of skills and were “not very student-friendly.” Additionally, a component of the rubrics covered grammar and mechanics, which was not something she explicitly teaches her students yet is forced to assess. Another assessment desire for Zoe included more support in regards to student AI abuse. Similar to the fear she expressed regarding assigning too much writing, Zoe also did not feel comfortable speaking up when she detected AI in student papers, not wanting “to, like, step on toes or anything.” At the same time, even though she understood that students’ unethical use of AI was likely due to the pressure students felt to perform well, she was frustrated by it, especially since they always practiced everything she would assign them as a class. She shared:

Writing is an investment. It’s a time investment. And if they see that they can write a paper in five minutes using Chat GPT, they’re going to do that.

So, that's shifted my attitude, and [now] I'm like, "Well, do I even bother giving them three hours' worth of feedback if they're just going to sit and write a paper for five minutes that they didn't even write?"

As an attempt to address the problem, she reminded her students that the goal is "share themselves" in their writing, and if they feel like a robot is the way to share themselves, then "that makes [her] sad." However, since Zoe had her students write their SAT practice essays by hand during my final observation due to too many students having a "close connection with Mr. GPT," it was clear that this still remained an issue for her.

Walt's Assessment Needs. Although he felt his social and reflective activities were a step in the right direction, Walt, in our second interview, expressed the desire for "a good framework for assessing students' thinking." If it were up to him, Walt said he would never grade students' writing but rather assess their learning through other artifacts. He said he felt this way because the shift between being the lead writer (i.e., being students' cheerleader and support system through the writing process) and then having to become a referee (i.e., assigning the kids a grade on their writing) is a "bizarre situation." He continued: "The assessment of writing as learning and its teaching opportunity is, to me, just what I'm always trying to look for, and I don't often see it in [students'] writing itself." Walt believed that if a leader could organize a group of teachers under a shared vision for what quality assessment looks like and can help keep the conversation on track, a framework to better assess student thinking could be created. He said that teachers could come up with "really good answers" if there was a clear vision that guided them towards "practices that encourage growth" and "thinking about assessment as a tool for growth," not just as a way to "label kids."

Departmental Isolation

Zoe's Isolation. As an 11th grade ELA teacher, Zoe shared she felt “kind of siloed” when it came to teaching and even more so when assessing writing. When Zoe began teaching at the school, she was assigned a veteran mentor in her department. She described her as “really great” and told me they occasionally met for dinner and drinks. However, since her mentor only taught honors students, Zoe did not feel like her mentor could “see it the way that [she] see[s] it.” Additionally, she said she did not know of any teachers who would “sit down and grade with me,” like her mentor did during student teaching. As a result, she rarely asked her for help when it came to teaching and assessing writing. In terms of working alongside other department members, Zoe said that Walt would, at times, share writing-related resources with her, specifically articles surrounding the topic of student feedback. She compared this to “receiving gifts on Christmas” but said she struggled finding the time to read through them since “there is never any time.” She added that other members of the department were also willing to share materials with her, particularly graphic organizers, but that she is “very much a planner” and wants to have everything ready to go in advance whereas the other 11th grade teachers in her department seem to “plan an hour before class starts,” making sharing difficult. Unlike the ninth grade ELA team, Zoe said the 11th grade ELA teachers do not set time aside to work together on curriculum nor rubrics, and that no one has been willing to initiate this. She has considered “stepping up to the plate” but said she “feels awkward” doing so since she is new. Her wish was to have a secondary ELA coach who could help her, particularly with making the assessment of student writing quicker and more effective.

Walt's Isolation. Despite being at the same school for almost three decades, Walt shared in our first interview that he was frustrated with always having felt “disconnected” from his colleagues. He explained:

When I started teaching full time, I was the young teacher with all these weird ideas about, like, writing workshop, student agency, and elevating student voice, and the old teachers would, you know, [say things like], “Well, you’ll learn. The kids have to write an essay this way.” And I feel like now I’m the old teacher, and the young teachers nod and look at me, and they go, “Well, yeah, but they have to write an essay this way.” And I’m just like, what the hell happened?

Walt said he had one colleague who recently retired who was “likeminded” when it came to teaching and assessing writing, particularly concerning the social and reflective aspects, and the two of them worked with teachers in other districts over the years to improve their practice. Now that she has left, he said he leans on his out-of-school writing project colleagues since they “stand in the same spot of ground” as they “think about teaching together.”

Discussion and Implications

The findings revealed that both teachers implemented a range of practices, including several considered evidence-based. Additionally, they faced related challenges, such as navigating writing instruction in a shifting educational landscape, limited assessment resources, and departmental isolation. Importantly, though, their level of writing teacher identity influenced not only which practices they prioritized and the roles

they assumed while teaching and assessing writing but also how they responded to the challenges they encountered.

Many of Zoe and Walt's approaches to teaching and assessing writing align with evidence-based practices in secondary writing education. Zoe always started her instruction with mini-lessons, which included both modeling and scaffolding techniques, followed by conferencing and a rubric-based self-assessment (Graham et al., 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007; Harris & Graham, 2016). During his mini-lesson, Walt would model both the writing and revision process and prioritized both instructor and peer feedback, as well as self-reflection (Graham et al., 2011; Graham & Harris, 2019; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). However, it was clear that Walt's personal writing background—coupled with his prior engagement in a research group studying peer feedback, ongoing connections to out-of-school writing project colleagues, etc.—had enriched both his instruction and assessment practices despite not feeling part of an in-school CoP. In contrast, Zoe, who also expressed feelings of isolation, not only lacked training coming into her professional role but was currently lacking collaborative structures and resources within her school's ELA department. She also did not engage in out-of-school professional dialogue regarding writing pedagogy nor a sustained writing background herself. This contrast illuminates the impact a CoP can have on one's teaching identity, as well as the “profound connection” between identity and practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 149).

Applying Wenger's (1998) concept of identity as trajectory to the study's findings reveals how the level of participation in professional CoPs also influenced Zoe's and Walt's roles as writing teachers. Walt's active participation in CoPs, both historically

(i.e., with a retired colleague and research group) and currently (i.e., with out-of-school writing project colleagues), reflects both an outbound and an insider trajectory (Wenger, 1998). This engagement reinforced his role as a “lead writer,” confident in modeling vulnerability and integrating innovative assessment practices. Conversely, Zoe’s lack of participation in professional CoPs, combined with her isolation from departmental collaboration and limited mentorship, positioned her on a peripheral trajectory (Wenger, 1998). Her role as an empathetic coach, while effective in connecting with students through relatable feedback (e.g., emojis and “Men are trash.”), was constrained by her lack of access to collegial support, limiting her ability to refine practices, specifically in regard to assessment. These findings align with Wenger’s (1998) notion of identity as negotiated through participation in CoPs, illustrating how CoPs can shape teachers’ confidence as well as pedagogical choices.

The two teachers’ struggles reflect broader systemic issues within the field of writing instruction. The shifting educational landscape— marked by reduced expectations for writing rigor and the increasing use of AI— aligns with national concerns about declining student writing proficiency (Graham, 2019). Zoe’s hesitation to assign more rigorous tasks due to potential pushback and Walt’s surprise at students’ use of AI for formative tasks also illustrate a cultural shift in educational priorities. The lack of assessment resources, seen in Zoe’s reliance on generic rubrics and Walt’s desire for a framework to evaluate student thinking, underscores the ongoing need for stronger teacher preparation and professional learning around writing assessment (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). Finally, both teachers’ experiences of limited collaboration reflect a

lack of departmental or school structures that support shared responsibility for writing instruction (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Graham, 2019; Harris & Graham, 2016).

These findings offer a number of recommendations for writing teacher education, particularly for preparing and supporting high school ELA teachers. As a “locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises,” CoPs “hold the key to real transformation— the kind that has real effects on people’s lives” (Wenger, 1998, p. 85). Thus, in order to encourage stakeholder engagement, teacher educators or those in charge of professional development should integrate the CoP model by facilitating collaborative workshops where pre-service or current teachers could co-create writing rubrics or share writing strategies. For example, Zoe’s issues with the 11th grade rubric highlight the need for improved assessment tools whereas Walt’s “social and reflective” activities, like peer feedback and self-assessment, could be modeled in professional development. Training should also include modules on ethical AI use, encouraging assignments that prioritize original thinking, as Walt did in his AI pilot unit. Of course, if we are going to encourage CoPs, school and district leaders must intentionally cultivate safe and supportive spaces (Tondreau & Johnston, 2023)— or, as Wenger (1998) described, “contexts within which the communities that develop practices may prosper” (p. 10). At the district level, this may involve allocating professional development funds and institutional support for sustained collaboration; at the building level, principals can prioritize and protect common planning time; and at the department level, chairs can ensure access to shared instructional resources and structures for reflective dialogue. Finally, although ELA encompasses a number of literacy skills, if

we want to improve student writing, the priority of these CoPs must, in fact, be writing pedagogy.

Future research should explore how CoPs function in other educational contexts, such as urban or rural schools, to determine if suburban teachers' reliance on out-of-school networks is context-specific. Longitudinal studies tracking teachers' identity trajectories over multiple years could also clarify how sustained CoP participation influences writing instruction and assessment practices. Additionally, exploring digital platforms for facilitating CoPs could address the time constraints Zoe faced when accessing shared resources. Finally, research on AI's impact on writing pedagogy could build upon Walt's pilot project, examining how teachers might leverage CoPs as spaces for collective inquiry and reflection on AI's role in writing instruction— supporting both ethical integration and the continued evolution of writing teacher identity.

CHAPTER THREE

“WHO WE ARE, HOW WE TEACH: WRITING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE SECONDARY ELA CLASSROOM” (MS 1, VERSION 2)

Introduction

Teaching writing is hard. It requires sustained attention to students’ ideas, language use, and development over time, making it a uniquely complex instructional task (Graham & Perin, 2007). In secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, this work is further intensified as teachers support longer pieces of writing across multiple classes while balancing competing curricular responsibilities.

This already demanding instructional work is further complicated by institutional factors that shape, and often constrain, teachers’ instructional possibilities. Even with a strong research base identifying effective writing instruction (Graham & Harris, 2019), teachers must make sense of and enact these evidence-based practices within the conditions of their schools— conditions that can influence what kinds of writing are assigned, how often students write, how writing is assessed, and what forms of feedback are feasible (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009).

These pressures are compounded by the fact that many teachers report feeling underprepared to teach and assess writing. Such uncertainty reflects uneven pre-service preparation (Cremin & Oliver, 2017), as well as a persistent lack of sustained professional learning focused on writing pedagogy (Graham, 2019). For many teachers, feelings of unpreparedness do not diminish with experience but instead evolve— and, in

some cases, intensify— as new technologies, including AI, reshape expectations for writing instruction and assessment.

Writing instruction complexities such as these have been well documented in the literature. However, fewer studies have examined how teachers navigate these complexities in their day-to-day pedagogical decision-making, particularly in the secondary setting. Within this body of scholarship, scholars (e.g., Borg, 2003; Cremin & Locke, 2017; Frawley, 2015; Hsiang et al., 2020; Walls & Johnston, 2023; Woodard, 2015, 2016) have increasingly called for greater attention to writing teacher identity— particularly how it is enacted through everyday instructional and assessment practices. Building on this work, the present study examines how the writing teacher identity trajectories of two high school ELA teachers shape their writing pedagogy. Grounded in Etienne Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory, the study foregrounds writing teacher identity as both participation-based and developmental. The study concludes by considering implications for professional learning focused on writing instruction, as well as directions for future research.

Writing Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is commonly understood as a dynamic, socially situated construct shaped through teachers’ experiences, relationships, and professional contexts rather than a fixed personal attribute (Beijaard et al., 2004; Gee, 2000). Extending this body of work, writing teacher identity emphasizes how professional identity is constructed through teachers’ relationships to writing as both a personal practice and an instructional responsibility. Across the literature, this construct is referred to using terms

such as teachers' writing identities (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Tondreau & Johnston, 2023), teachers as writers (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Cremin et al., 2020; Whitney, 2009), and teacher-writer (Frawley, 2015; Premont, 2022). Despite differences in terminology, scholars consistently conceptualize writing teacher identity as relational, fluid, and continually developed (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Cremin & Oliver, 2017).

Research suggests that writing teacher identity develops through multiple, overlapping forms of engagement: teachers' personal writing experiences, their participation in professional communities where beliefs about writing and teaching are examined and reworked, and their instructional practices (Cremin et al., 2020; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Whitney, 2009). Importantly, writing teacher identity development is neither linear nor uniform but rather shaped through experiences marked by tension, uncertainty, and negotiation (Cremin, 2006; Cremin & Baker, 2010; Whitney, 2009).

Writing Teacher Identity and Pedagogical Decision-Making

Research on writing teacher identity also demonstrates that teachers' understandings of themselves as writers and their participation in writing-focused professional learning communities shape how they make pedagogical decisions about writing instruction. From this perspective, teaching writing is not simply the implementation of prescribed practices but rather an interpretive process through which teachers draw on their prior experiences, beliefs, and professional relationships to make sense of their instructional and assessment choices (Cremin & Baker, 2010). Pedagogical decision-making is therefore closely tied to how teachers position themselves in relation to writing—such as seeing themselves as confident or hesitant writers (Troia et al.,

2011), as fellow authors alongside students (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011), or as instructors navigating institutional expectations and accountability demands (Vetter et al., 2014).

Studies suggest that when teachers develop stronger identities as writers, this is often reflected in their instructional decisions. Teachers who regularly write and view themselves as writers tend to emphasize extended time for writing; offer greater choice in topics, forms, and audiences; and prioritize meaning-making over surface correctness (Cremin, 2006; Cremin & Baker, 2010; Cremin et al., 2020). These teachers also become more willing to model writing alongside students, a practice that repositions teachers from evaluators toward fellow writers engaged in the composing process (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Premont, 2022).

However, research also suggests that shifts in writing teacher identity are not enacted in straightforward or consistent ways. Teachers' instructional choices are shaped not only by their commitments to writing but also by lingering discomfort, self-doubt, and uncertainty about their own authorial authority— particularly when their writing histories included criticism, limited agency, or writing undertaken primarily for evaluative or professional purposes (Cremin, 2006; Frager, 1994). These internal tensions are often compounded by curricular and assessment demands, time constraints, and narrow definitions of legitimate writing, making it difficult for teachers to fully enact evidence-based writing practices in everyday classroom instruction (Cremin et al., 2020; Cremin & Oliver, 2017). As a result, writing teacher identity often surfaces unevenly across instructional moments, rather than as a stable or uniformly enacted pedagogical stance.

This scholarship underscores the need for closer examination of how writing teacher identity is negotiated and enacted through teachers' routine instructional and assessment decisions. Drawing on sociocultural perspectives that conceptualize identity as developing through participation over time, the present study examines how writing teacher identity—formed through teachers' writing histories and participation in writing-focused professional communities—is enacted in everyday writing instruction. From this perspective, pedagogy represents a key site where writing teacher identity trajectories are made visible, making it possible to examine how teachers' evolving identities shape their day-to-day pedagogical decision-making.

Theoretical Framework

The literature positions writing teacher identity as dynamic and socially situated, shaping how teachers interpret and enact writing pedagogy over time. To examine this process with explicit attention to participation and development, the present study draws on Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory.

Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) developed communities of practice (CoPs) as a social theory of learning that conceptualizes knowledge as being constructed through participation in shared social practice rather than individual cognition alone. Through community participation, individuals “develop, negotiate, and share” their “theories and understanding of the world” through engagement in shared practices (Wenger, 1998, p. 48). Wenger theorized that CoPs are constituted by three interrelated elements: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, which together shape how learning

and meaning-making occur within a community. It is important to note, however, that Wenger (1998) argues that CoPs are shaped by power relations and unequal access and may, therefore, reproduce exclusion, resistance to change, and problematic practices.

While Wenger's work focused on professional practice outside of education, his framework offers a useful lens for examining educational contexts. For secondary ELA teachers, CoPs may exist in-person or online and include formal structures (e.g., grade-level teams, subject-area departments, curriculum committees, professional learning communities, etc.) as well as informal networks of collaboration. Within writing instruction specifically, mutual engagement may take the form of professional dialogue, collaborative planning, or pedagogical exchange about writing; joint enterprise may involve shared commitments to students' writing development; and shared repertoire may include common instructional tools, assessment practices, language, and curricular resources for teaching and assessing writing. These communities, however, may reproduce limiting beliefs, constrain pedagogical innovation, or marginalize certain approaches to writing—underscoring Wenger's (1998) caution that participation in CoPs does not inherently lead to productive or equitable learning.

Identity as Trajectory

Wenger's (1998) concept of identity as trajectory conceptualizes identity not as a fixed trait but as a developing process shaped through participation in social practices and movement across forms of participation over time. To him, identity reflects a person's past experiences, present engagements, and future aspirations, forming a developmental path rather than a stable category. As individuals move through different communities and forms of participation, their identities are continuously renegotiated and redefined.

Wenger (1998) identified five trajectory types: peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary, and outbound. Peripheral trajectories involve limited or observational participation; inbound trajectories reflect movement toward fuller participation; insider trajectories represent sustained, central membership; boundary trajectories involve connecting multiple communities; and outbound trajectories reflect movement away from a community while carrying its knowledge and practices forward. Since these trajectories describe forms of participation and not fixed identity categories, individuals may move across multiple trajectories across different communities.

Applied to secondary ELA teaching, identity as trajectory offers a way to examine how teachers' identities as writing teachers are shaped through their evolving participation in writing-related experiences and professional communities over time. From this perspective, teachers' approaches to writing instruction can be understood not as indicators of fixed dispositions or levels of competence but as reflections of their current trajectories of participation— shaped by prior writing experiences, access to writing-focused professional learning, and ongoing negotiations of instructional expectations. For example, a teacher whose participation in writing-focused communities has been limited may enact writing instruction differently than a teacher whose trajectory includes sustained engagement in collaborative writing communities.

Methods

Guided by this theoretical framing, the study aimed to better understand how writing teacher identity shapes writing pedagogy for two high school ELA teachers. Accordingly, an instrumental, collective case study design was used (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). This design was appropriate because it enabled in-depth examination

of each teacher's experiences while also supporting cross-case analysis to identify shared patterns and analytic insights. The study was guided by the following research question:

1. How do the writing teacher identity trajectories of two high school ELA teachers shape their writing pedagogy?

Context

To identify potential research sites, I used National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data to locate public high schools within driving distance of my Midwestern university. Proximity was a primary consideration, as I sought to remain physically embedded in participants' "ordinary pursuits and milieus" (Stake, 1995, p. 1). I contacted administrators and teachers via email at 12 schools. Recruitment materials specified that I was seeking 11th- or 12th-grade ELA teachers in order to focus on a bounded participant group situated at critical academic and postsecondary transition points. Participant selection followed a process of purposeful sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although no administrators responded directly, three teachers facilitated communication with their building principals, who granted formal permission and provided signed consent for the study. IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent.

Data collection initially took place at two suburban public high schools, both in-person and via Zoom. Over time, I narrowed the focus to a single site, referred to here as Riverton High, where two of the three participants worked. Focusing on one setting enabled a same-setting comparison while holding institutional conditions constant. This focus allowed differences in writing pedagogy to be examined in relation to teachers' identity trajectories rather than school-level variation.

Participants

Although Zoe and Walt (both names are pseudonyms) taught different upper-level ELA courses— Zoe taught English Language Arts 11, while Walt taught International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) Language and Literature Year 1, IB DP Language and Literature Year 2, and Poetry— this variation was appropriate because the study’s focus was not on student outcomes nor curriculum-specific comparisons, but rather on how each teacher’s writing identity shaped each teacher’s writing pedagogy.

Zoe

At the time of the study, Zoe was a novice teacher with two years of teaching experience after completing one full year of student teaching. She taught ELA all three years as well as a semester of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and had worked with students in both the middle and high school settings. Her current classes included English Language Arts 9 and English Language Arts 11.

Zoe shared that she took one course during her teacher preparation program that focused on writing instruction and assessment, and that although Zoe felt “somewhat prepared” to teach literature, specifically through the lens of “disrupting it,” she did not feel “ready” to teach nor assess student writing upon graduation. During our second interview, she reflected:

I mean, it’s good that I [learned to] see writing as not just writing an essay [but also] like them creating their advertisements, or, like, doing a commercial, but we never, like, talked about rubrics, besides, like, one class, and that is one thing I’m like, why did we spend so little time?

Throughout her student teaching year, Zoe said she was fortunate to occasionally have the opportunity to collaborate with her mentor teacher on writing, particularly concerning assessment. For example, they would look at rubrics together, and her mentor would ask her questions like, “What does this mean?” and “Where is it in the essay?” Zoe noted that this was essentially the sole instruction she received related to the teaching and assessing of student writing, prior to working at her current school. She never mentioned personally engaging in writing outside of school.

Zoe described her purpose in teaching secondary writing as twofold. At the heart of her practice is an “idealistic” goal of nurturing “lifelong writers” who view writing as “a way to navigate ourselves and the world.” To support this, she emphasized designing “meaningful” assignments— personal narratives, real-world essay prompts, and other opportunities for students to carry writing beyond the classroom, such as using memoirs for college essays or keeping journals over the summer. At the same time, she acknowledged the pressures of standardized assessments, where writing becomes less about process and more about product. She said she’s constantly grappling with the question of “how can I teach them to write an essay that will earn them a [high score] and help them get into college?”

Walt

Down the hallway from Zoe was Walt, a veteran teacher of 29 years and nearing retirement. Prior to becoming a teacher, he was a poet who was hired to work with elementary teachers as they were setting up writing workshops, which was where he discovered his passion for being in a classroom setting. He had taught ELA every year since and also had experience in both middle and high schools. His current courses

included IB DP Language and Literature Year 1, IB DP Language and Literature Year 2, and Poetry, which was an elective offered to 10th-12th graders.

Despite writing no longer being his main focus, Walt said he had “not stopped writing” since becoming an ELA teacher. He wrote both at school and in his personal life. Also, even though he had an academic foundation in writing as well as personal experiences as a writer, he told me he was still, almost 30 years later, seeking ways to improve his practice in the classroom. He explained: “I have always thought of myself as a poet and written poetry, but the more I work with teaching poetry though, the more I realize there is very little I know how to articulate about writing a poem.” As a result, over the years, Walt sought out opportunities both within and outside of his school building in order to grow as a writing teacher. For example, when the IB Programme first came to his school, he volunteered to be the teacher responsible for the development of the language and literature courses. Additionally, he had been a long-time member of a local affiliate of the National Writing Project, a collaborative initiative focused on improving writing instruction. Almost a decade ago, Walt also joined a research group, working alongside a professor from a local research university who was studying peer feedback. He had recently shared his experiences surrounding his implementation of the learned peer feedback practices at a local in-state conference for ELA teachers.

Walt described the purpose of teaching secondary writing as creating a classroom where students come to see themselves as members of a community that “uses language to explore and share ideas” and learns strategies for doing so effectively. When he felt himself losing focus, he said he “would always return to this.” For him, assessment was

not only about finished products but also about whether students could “own their thinking” and “own their communication about their thinking.”

Researcher Positionality

My experiences as a high school ELA teacher, private writing tutor, and college composition instructor have deeply shaped my interest in writing instruction and assessment, as well as my attention to how educators are prepared to teach and assess writing. This professional background positioned me as an insider, enabling an empathetic stance and supporting rapport-building and meaningful dialogue with participants. At the same time, because I had never taught at Riverton High, I also occupied an outsider position in relation to the school’s cultural, organizational, and contextual realities.

I negotiated this dual positionality by intentionally positioning myself as a learner rather than an evaluator, consistently framing my role as one of inquiry and understanding rather than judgment. As I shared with Zoe and Walt prior to consent, the purpose of the study was not to evaluate their instructional approaches but rather to understand their lived professional realities. Nevertheless, I recognize that my prior roles and experiences may have shaped how I interpreted participants’ practices and challenges. Accordingly, I engaged in continuous reflexive practice throughout data collection and analysis through analytic memo writing (Saldaña, 2021) to examine how my positionality influenced interactions, interpretations, and analytic decisions

Data Collection

The data for this study included semi-structured interviews and naturalistic classroom observations, both common in case study methodology (Stake, 1995).

Collecting both forms of data allowed me to explore the relationship between teachers' stated perspectives and teachers' enacted practices, which aligned with Wenger's (1998) view that "who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves" (p. 151). To gather these data, each participant completed two one-on-one interviews: a pre-observation interview in January 2025 and a post-observation interview in March 2025. Both interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasted between 33 and 52 minutes, and were audio- and video-recorded to support accurate transcription and analysis. The semi-structured interviews centered teachers' lived experiences with writing instruction and assessment, with the goal of understanding how they made sense of their instructional practices, challenges, and professional responsibilities within their specific classroom contexts. Specifically, the pre-observation interviews established contextual foundations for each participant's practice, while the post-observation interviews supported deeper reflection on classroom experiences and instructional decision-making.

Between the two interviews, I conducted four nonparticipant classroom observations for each teacher over the course of February and March 2025, with each observation lasting approximately one hour. Prior to each visit, I confirmed with participants that teaching or assessing writing would take place during the observation. All observations were audio- and video-recorded, and I took detailed field notes. These observations provided real-time evidence of instructional and assessment practices that complemented and contextualized participants' interview responses.

Data Analysis

Both interviews and classroom observations were transcribed in full, producing moment-by-moment records of participant narratives and classroom interactions. Transcription occurred alongside data collection, and transcripts were read multiple times throughout the process to develop familiarity with the dataset and gain a broad sense of what was taking shape across sources. This approach allowed me to remain open to what mattered in the data rather than narrowing my focus in advance.

Formal coding began after data collection was complete. All data sources— pre-observation interviews, classroom observations, post-observation interviews, field notes, and analytic memos— were coded together as a single dataset rather than being separated by data type. Coding moved chronologically for each participant, beginning with the pre-observation interview, followed by the four classroom observations, and concluding with the post-observation interview. Data were analyzed using an inductive, thematic approach, and MAXQDA software was used to support data management and coding.

Analysis proceeded in two phases: initial coding and focused coding, allowing for both within-case depth and cross-case comparisons (Saldaña, 2021). During the initial coding phase, data were read closely and coded line by line. Over 100 codes were developed to capture the “contents and nuances” of the data in order to “begin taking ownership of them” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 148). To keep the focus on participants’ perspectives, I prioritized their language through in vivo coding, while also using gerunds (i.e., process coding) to capture recurring actions and practices (Saldaña, 2021). Examples included “not doing more work than the students,” “lead writer,” “modeling,” and “not AI written.” In the second phase, focused coding was used to identify the most meaningful and recurring codes (Saldaña, 2021). These were grouped into broader

categories, with overlapping codes merged and patterns examined both within and across the two teachers' cases. Memos supported this process by helping me think through relationships across codes and categories. This process supported a grounded understanding of each teacher's experiences while also allowing patterns to emerge across the two cases.

Findings

The study revealed that two high school ELA teachers' writing teacher identity trajectories influenced their pedagogy in three ways: their approaches to teaching and assessing writing, the roles they assumed in writing instruction, and their responses to similar writing-related challenges.

Approaches to Writing Instruction and Assessment

Both Zoe and Walt typically began their writing instruction with a short mini lesson, followed by independent writing and conferencing time. While these shared routines created a similar overall structure for writing instruction, important differences emerged in how each teacher enacted these routines. Specifically, their approaches to modeling, feedback, and revision showed how they saw themselves as writing teachers, how they viewed students as writers, and how their professional experiences and communities—or lack thereof—shaped their instruction and assessment. Zoe's instruction and assessment demonstrated a writing teacher identity shaped largely through her day-to-day teaching of writing and her focus on scaffolding and strategic support for student writers, while Walt's practices demonstrated a writing teacher identity shaped through his own ongoing writing and revision practices, as well as his participation in professional writing-focused communities.

Zoe's Approach to Teaching Writing

Zoe— whether collaborating with students to generate a list of the “dos and don’ts” of slideshow writing or breaking down the elements that make up a children’s book— always began her writing instruction with a whole-group mini lesson. In her first interview, she explained that she used this time to model, emphasizing that it was “important for [her students] to see [her write],” so students would not think, “Oh, this girl keeps assigning us work, and she’s not doing anything.”

In one observation, she set a sheet of paper beneath the document camera, so that her paper displayed on the whiteboard at the front of the room. With a marker, she sketched a simple triangle and carefully labeled each corner with the three rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. “So, what we’re going to do is we’re going to do a triangle outline together, so that you guys can get an idea of what you can do on actual test taking day,” she told the class, referring to the upcoming SAT test. She then paused, scanning the room before calling on students to recall examples from the practice passage that aligned with each appeal. As students offered responses, she jotted down their ideas at the triangle’s points, narrating her thought process out loud. She encouraged them to take time on the actual exam to sketch a similar triangle, reminding them that it would ensure each body paragraph had evidence tied to a rhetorical strategy.

On another occasion, Zoe used the document camera to model annotating an argumentative text, circling key phrases and underlining rhetorical moves as she talked through her reasoning. She also demonstrated how to transform these annotations into a thesis statement, drafting a sample version in real time. Notably, though, Zoe’s modeling

did not extend to full paragraphs or essays in front of her students during observed instruction.

Zoe's writing instruction practices suggest an identity trajectory centered on supporting students' entry into academic writing. Her identity trajectory shaped her approach to writing instruction by emphasizing brainstorming, annotating, and sentence-level drafting, reflecting an orientation toward writing as a set of strategic moves that students can learn to execute.

Zoe's Approach to Assessing Writing

Following her mini lessons, Zoe provided her students with independent writing time while she walked around and conferenced with each student individually. In order to “avoid burnout,” she told me in her first interview that her practice concerning feedback on formative writing assignments included “not doing more work than the students.” As a result, she read and provided written or verbal feedback on her students' drafts while standing or sitting right next to them, doing her best to focus on “student ideas” versus grammatical or mechanical issues. She would also often provide students with the assignment rubric, so they could self-assess.

While grading summative assessments, Zoe explained that she always aimed for a “balance” of positive and constructive feedback, making it a point to provide input across multiple platforms. On the paper itself, she left comments in the margins— sometimes as simple as a question mark, meant to signal confusion or invite revision. Within Canvas, the school's grading platform, she utilized built-in rubrics to streamline evaluation, noting “that is the quickest way because I just click the button, and then I type in a little

comment.” She also added an overall comment on each assignment, where she summarized both strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition, depending on the assignment, Zoe provided students with the opportunity to revise their writing using a structured revision packet she designed herself. This was something new she introduced in her second year of teaching after realizing the previous year that she had “a huge issue of them turning in the same paper,” even after she allotted multiple days for revision. Reflecting on her frustration, she recalled thinking “like why did I give you the time?” With the packet, students could earn points for completing it, but in order to raise their score, she also needed to “see that in practice in the writing, as well.”

Zoe’s approach to assessment reflected a writing teacher identity centered on maintaining manageable feedback practices while supporting student ownership of writing. These identity commitments shaped her assessment practices by emphasizing not working harder than students, along with her use of rubric-based feedback and structured revision packets, positioning revision as work students could take on themselves rather than something controlled solely by the teacher.

Walt’s Approach to Teaching Writing

Similar to Zoe, Walt typically kicked off his writing instruction with a whole group mini-lesson. I observed him instructing on the differences between commentary and reasoning, revising introduction paragraphs after full drafts were written, and cutting out wordiness in essays. Additionally, Walt also utilized this time as a whole group to model but did so from a writer’s perspective.

During my first observation, he explained to students that his own revision process as a writer is “basically a process of rewriting the same thing, but each time writing differently.” On the large screen, he projected a first draft of a paragraph he had written and asked students to silently read it. Then, he walked them through how he would approach revising it, explaining that he always expects his first drafts to “need work” because getting ideas out is difficult. To push himself, he shared with students that he “plays a game” where he tries to write an additional sentence for every one he already has. He then showed a revised version with new additions in a different color, explaining how and why it still fell short of his goal. Finally, he displayed a third version with even more revisions and read it aloud, continuing to add more text to the document in front of the class until he felt his evidence better supported his claim. Even then, he acknowledged there was still room for improvement.

Walt’s approach to instruction reflected a writing teacher identity grounded in a commitment to making writing approachable through revision as meaning-making. By publicly sharing imperfect drafts and narrating his revision process, he positioned writing as recursive, effortful, and social, emphasizing that writing and rewriting remain processes of learning— even for him, a poet.

Walt’s Approach to Assessing Writing

Like Zoe, Walt also tried to only read students’ summative work, rarely ever “reading their thinking” (i.e., drafts). He said that not only would adding their “thinking” to his plate be “too much to read,” but between his one-on-one conferences with students, as well as the way he structures peer conferencing and self-assessments, students’ summative pieces end up being “pretty darn good.”

After his experience working with a research group led by a university professor focused on peer feedback in 2016, Walt explained that a major component of his assessment approach shifted toward what he calls his “social and reflective” activities, which center on using peer feedback and self-assessment to deepen students’ understanding of writing. Before students turn in a final assignment, he creates and distributes structured guides for both peer feedback and self-assessment, which students complete while reviewing their peers’ work and reflecting on their own. In addition to grading students’ summative writing with a rubric, Walt also reads through these completed guides to assess students’ understanding of the writing task. He described this approach as a way to “triangulate [his] evaluation” and “see what [students] are seeing” in order to determine “if they’re getting it.” If, after these activities, students still “missed the mark” on their assignment, Walt noted that more individual instruction may be necessary but emphasized that it is typically minimal, and that he always allows opportunities to revise and resubmit.

Walt’s approach to assessment reflected a writing teacher identity centered on collaboration and reflection in the writing process. His emphasis on peer feedback, self-assessment, and “triangulating” evaluation shaped assessment as a shared activity, positioning students as active participants in making sense of not only their own but also others’ writing rather than relying solely on the teacher’s judgment.

Roles in the Writing Classroom

Although both Zoe and Walt identified as writing teachers, the roles they assumed in their writing classrooms differed in ways that revealed how writing teacher identity shapes pedagogy. Whereas the previous section described the instructional structures the

teachers used, this section on the teachers' roles captures how they positioned themselves and interacted with students as writing instruction and assessment unfolded. Across both classrooms, these roles shaped how each teacher supported students as writers and worked to make writing accessible and relevant. While one role was explicitly named by a participant, the other was analytically named by the researcher based on recurring patterns across interviews and classroom observations.

The “Empathetic Coach”

Zoe seemed to assume the role of an empathetic coach. Understanding that not all of her students enjoyed writing, she encouraged them to choose writing topics that they are passionate about, which she felt helped them “find a little bit of investment in the work.” In our first interview together, she shared that she viewed writing as a way to introduce oneself to others, and in order to motivate students to invest more in their writing, she gave awards to any student whose writing made her cry. As she explained, she resisted the common perception that all adolescents are apathetic: “I think this generation gets a bad rap for being lazy and not caring sometimes, but these kids really do care, and they are really, like, wanting to share their voices.”

Zoe said she also prioritized exposing students to a variety of writing genres and worked to build upon their individual strengths. She told me that doing “stuff that’s more in their wheelhouse” would often “get better writing out of them.” Also, since she could relate to students on how writing a paper can often feel like an “arduous task,” she strived to make writing approachable through “chunking it”—that is, the distribution of graphic organizers with sentence starters and easy-to-follow steps. Finally, when it came to

summative assessment feedback, she said she used emojis, as well as words and phrases that her students could relate to. She provided an example:

When [students] were doing memoirs, one of my girls wrote about, like a guy who was horrible to her, and so I left a comment at the end. I was like, “So proud of you for this. Men are trash.” And she came in, and she’s like, “I’ve never had a teacher say that to me, like, I’m so glad that, like somebody sees it.”

By incorporating “student language,” Zoe stated that her students felt like she was invested in and understood them, and as a result of this, she added that she did not get many complaints about her grading.

Zoe’s assumed “empathetic coach” role reflected a writing teacher identity centered on relational support and emotional attunement to student writers. Through her practices such as encouraging topic choice, validating students’ personal experiences, and using student-centered language in feedback, she positioned writing as a space where students felt seen, understood, and supported. As a result, her role shaped students’ experiences of writing as approachable and personally relevant, reinforcing her broader commitment to supporting students’ entry into academic writing.

The Lead Writer

Walt self-identified as the “lead writer” in his “classroom learning community,” one where “writing is a central part.” In our first interview, Walt explained that his classroom writing goals applied not only to his students but also to himself. He believed it was “essential” for everyone in the class— including him— to be able to write and reflect on their choices as writers because this was key to the success of their classroom community. While planning his writing instruction, Walt said he was always looking at

the desired end goal (i.e., the final written product) and applied his own personal experience as a writer, thinking through what he “would need to know how to do in order to get there” (i.e., the process) and then modeled it. As the lead writer, he said he accepted the fact that not every one of his essays he showed or wrote alongside students would be perfect, but that never stopped him as he understood the value of modeling. Using poetry as an example, he explained:

I just know I’m going to write bad poems in front of students. That’s part of life. Most people write bad poetry, and that shouldn’t stop you from writing poetry. Lots of people play basketball in their driveway, and they don’t have to be a basketball star, you know? These things can be instructive, even if we’re not always creating incredibly powerful literary pieces of writing.

Walt shared that he viewed writing to be “as close to a universal access point to one’s own humanity as well as social standing.” As a result, his mission was to lead writers in ways that build students’ confidence and help each one of them see themselves as capable. For example, after his whole group mini lesson, he would often walk around the room and individually conference with students about their writing content. Especially when students showed signs of being overwhelmed, I observed him providing them with encouraging words, such as “Don’t get caught up on uncertainties. You’re going to revise.”; “You’re going to miss stuff. It’s okay. Relax.”; and “You’ll be fine. I’m not grading it.” Overall, Walt felt that because he applies his own writing experiences to his teaching practice and is enthusiastic about it, he is almost always able to “sell it to kids.”

Walt’s “lead writer” role reflected a writing teacher identity grounded in participation alongside students as a writer. By writing with students, sharing imperfect

drafts, and narrating his revision process, he positioned writing as a communal and iterative practice rather than a finished product to be judged. Through this role, writing became a shared endeavor in which uncertainty and revision were normalized, supporting students' confidence and sense of belonging within the classroom writing community.

Responses to Writing Challenges

Even though Zoe and Walt taught in the same school context and encountered many of the same challenges related to teaching and assessing writing, they responded to these challenges in distinct ways. Through analysis of interview and classroom observation data, three shared areas of difficulty became apparent: navigating a shifting instructional landscape, locating writing assessment resources, and experiencing limited departmental support. Despite these shared challenges, each teacher's responses reflected how they understood themselves as writing teachers and the identities they brought to their work. This subsection examines how responses to common writing-related challenges served as another site where writing teacher identities were visible in pedagogy.

Shifting Landscape

Zoe's Navigation of the Shifting Landscape. One of Zoe's main struggles in writing education included "not teaching myself." During our first interview, she said she was surprised at how writing is taught today because when she was in high school just a few years ago, she had to write essays regularly— sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly— either at home or during timed in-class sessions, all in MLA format with proper grammar and mechanics. She said she was not sure if the shift was due to COVID-19, but if she were to assign writing like that now, she would get "so much pushback"

from both her students and their parents. Despite feeling that prioritizing students' mental health is really important, Zoe shared during interview one that she is worried for students' futures if schools continue down this path, especially at a time when "writing already is at such a deficit." She said:

I think that [this] has kind of lowered our expectations in a way of like, "Oh, we can't keep assigning them papers because they're going to get so overwhelmed, and then we don't want to be the bad guys causing all of [those] feelings," which I do think is valid. But, I also think that these students need to be, like, understanding that life is not always easy, and that you do have deadlines that you need to make. And then just spelling and grammar, I cannot wrap my head around. It's like, it's funny, and then it's not funny because I'm like, how do you not know how to end a sentence? So yeah, just another [example]...I don't know how they're going to make it without being able to structure a sentence.

Zoe said she does try to treat her students like she would herself, challenging them as much as possible, whether they are in honors classes or not. However, she revealed in both interviews that she was fearful of getting in trouble if students and parents complained to administration about her approach to writing assignments and grading. As a result, as long as her students "turn something in that's not AI-written and that had some investment," she said she is happy.

Zoe's responses to the shifting landscape of writing instruction reflected how she understood her role as a writing teacher and the kinds of decisions she felt able to make in her classroom. Her concern for students' mental health, combined with fears of

administrative or parental pushback, shaped how she adjusted her writing assignments and expectations. In this way, Zoe's navigation of these challenges revealed an identity trajectory marked by care, caution, and ongoing negotiation, as she worked to support students' engagement with writing while managing the pressures associated with teaching writing, particularly early-on in her career.

Walt's Navigation of the Shifting Landscape. One of Walt's challenges included the developing student dependency on AI. In our second interview, he recalled a recent time when he had been absent, and upon his return, a couple students told him that their classmates used AI for the writing assignment he left for them to do with the substitute. Although AI had been quite prevalent among students in the school, Walt said he was surprised they thought it would be helpful to use it for a formative assignment, which was rarely graded, and one where a visual needed to be analyzed. He explained:

Like, was I not clear? Did I somehow give them permission to imagine that I thought it'd be fine? Like, it didn't even occur to me that they would do that with this. That just seemed really weird. Like, what's the prompt you give AI for something like this?

He said that AI makes students feel like writing can be easy, which is just "one more thing" that's making the "already hard" process even more difficult for students. Since he said there is no way of completely avoiding it as well as the fact that it is getting better overtime, Walt created a writing assignment where students "played around" with AI with the purpose of seeing firsthand what AI can and cannot do. He said many students found this pilot project helpful, but through its execution, he said it also provided him with insight into what extent AI can be incorporated into the writing process. Through his

experiences thus far and despite feeling “weird” about it, it had become clear to him that he needs to be explicit to students about whether assignments can or cannot be “an AI thing,” similar to how his high school teachers would tell him if an assignment is “a pen or pencil thing.” He also stated that the challenge of AI speaks to the opportunity to “decenter” the analytical essay as “the pinnacle of academic work in the language arts” since “why would you assign something a machine can write?”

Walt’s responses to the shifting landscape of writing instruction reflected how he understood himself as a writing teacher who learns alongside students and adapts his practice in response to emerging challenges. Rather than attempting to eliminate AI from his classroom, he treated it as an instructional problem to be examined with students, using it as an opportunity to rethink writing tasks and clarify expectations around the writing process. In this way, Walt’s navigation of these challenges revealed an identity trajectory oriented toward experimentation, transparency, and ongoing learning, as he worked to position writing as a meaningful human practice in a context where automated tools are increasingly shaping students’ experiences with writing.

Lack of Assessment Resources

Zoe’s Assessment Needs. Zoe told me in her second interview that assessing continues to be “really hard” for her, and besides needing more time to dedicate to it, there were two other areas within assessment for which she desired support: shared writing rubrics and unethical use of AI. Since she taught at an “IB school,” Zoe said all ELA teachers are “ingrained” to use rubrics, and as a result, students expected them. Despite having used rubrics throughout all of her years teaching writing, she specifically found the 11th grade rubrics to be challenging to implement since they were not ones she

helped create but rather common rubrics her department used. She said they covered “everything” versus a specific skill or even set of skills and were “not very student-friendly.” Additionally, a component of the rubrics covered grammar and mechanics, which was not something she explicitly teaches her students yet is forced to assess. Another assessment desire for Zoe included more support in regards to student AI abuse. Similar to the fear she expressed regarding assigning too much writing, Zoe also did not feel comfortable speaking up when she detected AI in student papers, not wanting “to, like, step on toes or anything.” At the same time, even though she understood that students’ unethical use of AI was likely due to the pressure students felt to perform well on writing, she was frustrated by it, especially since they always practiced everything she would assign them as a class. She shared:

Writing is an investment. It’s a time investment. And if they see that they can write a paper in five minutes using Chat GPT, they’re going to do that. So, that’s shifted my attitude, and [now] I’m like, “Well, do I even bother giving them three hours’ worth of feedback if they’re just going to sit and write a paper for five minutes that they didn’t even write?”

As an attempt to address the problem, she reminded her students that the goal is to “share themselves” in their writing, and if they feel like a robot is the way to share themselves, then “that makes [her] sad.” However, since Zoe had her students write their SAT practice essays by hand during my final observation due to too many students having a “close connection with Mr. GPT,” it was clear that this still remained an issue for her.

Zoe’s responses to limited assessment resources reflected how she understood her role as a writing teacher navigating assessment expectations she did not fully shape. Her

reliance on common rubrics, uncertainty around assessing grammar and mechanics, and discomfort addressing students' use of AI also revealed an ongoing tension between institutional demands and her instructional values. Zoe's navigation of assessment challenges, then, reflected an identity trajectory marked by caution and negotiation, as she worked to balance fairness, student care, and her own developing confidence in writing assessment.

Walt's Assessment Needs. Although he felt his social and reflective activities were a step in the right direction, Walt, in our second interview, expressed the desire for "a good framework for assessing students' thinking." If it were up to him, Walt said he would never grade students' writing but rather assess their learning through other artifacts. He said he felt this way because the shift between being the lead writer (i.e., being students' cheerleader and support system through the writing process) and then having to become a referee (i.e., assigning the kids a grade on their writing) is a "bizarre situation." He continued: "The assessment of writing as learning and its teaching opportunity is, to me, just what I'm always trying to look for, and I don't often see it in [students'] writing itself." Walt believed that if a leader could organize a group of teachers under a shared vision for what quality assessment looks like and can help keep the conversation on track, a framework to better assess student thinking could be created. He said that teachers could come up with "really good answers" if there was a clear vision that guided them towards "practices that encourage growth" and "thinking about assessment as a tool for growth," not just as a way to "label kids."

Walt's responses to limited assessment resources reflected how he understood his role as a writing teacher committed to growth, reflection, and shared meaning-making

rather than evaluation alone. His discomfort with grading students' writing, alongside his desire for a coherent framework to assess students' thinking, revealed an ongoing tension between institutional grading requirements and his vision of assessment as a learning opportunity. In this way, Walt's navigation of assessment challenges reflected an identity trajectory oriented toward collaboration and leadership, as he sought assessment practices that supported student growth without reducing writing to a tool for labeling or ranking students.

Departmental Isolation

Zoe's Isolation. As an 11th grade ELA teacher, Zoe shared she felt "kind of siloed" when it came to teaching and even more so when assessing writing. When Zoe began teaching at Riverton, she was assigned a veteran mentor in her department. She described her as "really great" and told me they occasionally met for dinner and drinks. However, since her mentor only taught honors students, Zoe did not feel like her mentor could "see it the way that [she] see[s] it." Additionally, she said she did not know of any teachers who would "sit down and grade with me," like her mentor did during student teaching. As a result, she rarely asked her for help when it came to teaching and assessing writing. In terms of working alongside other department members, Zoe said that Walt would, at times, share writing-related resources with her, specifically articles surrounding the topic of student feedback. She compared this to "receiving gifts on Christmas" but said she struggled finding the time to read through them since "there is never any time." She added that other members of the department were also willing to share materials with her, particularly graphic organizers, but that she is "very much a planner" and wants to have everything ready to go in advance whereas the other 11th grade teachers in her

department seem to “plan an hour before class starts,” making sharing difficult. Unlike the ninth grade ELA team, Zoe said the 11th grade ELA teachers do not set time aside to work together on curriculum nor rubrics, and that no one has been willing to initiate this. She has considered “stepping up to the plate” but said she “feels awkward” doing so since she is new. Her wish was to have a secondary ELA coach who could help her, particularly with making the assessment of student writing quicker and more effective.

Zoe’s experiences of departmental isolation reflected how she understood her role as a writing teacher navigating much of her instructional and assessment decision-making independently. Limited opportunities for collaborative planning, a lack of shared time around curriculum and assessment, and discomfort initiating collaboration as a new teacher shaped how she sought— and often avoided— support. Her navigation of departmental isolation revealed an identity trajectory marked by self-reliance and caution, as she worked to develop her writing pedagogy largely on her own while wishing for more structured and sustained support around writing instruction and assessment.

Walt’s Isolation. Despite being at the same school for almost three decades, Walt shared in our first interview that he was frustrated with always having felt “disconnected” from many of his colleagues. He explained:

When I started teaching full time, I was the young teacher with all these weird ideas about, like, writing workshop, student agency, and elevating student voice, and the old teachers would, you know, [say things like], “Well, you’ll learn. The kids have to write an essay this way.” And I feel like now I’m the old teacher, and the young teachers nod and look at me, and they go, “Well, yeah, but they have to write an essay this way.” And

I'm just like, what the hell happened?

Walt said he had one colleague who recently retired who was “likeminded” when it came to teaching and assessing writing, particularly concerning the social and reflective aspects, and the two of them worked with teachers in other districts over the years to improve their practice. Now that she has left, he said he leans on his out-of-school writing project colleagues since they “stand in the same spot of ground” as they “think about teaching together.”

Walt's experiences of departmental isolation reflected how he understood his role as a writing teacher whose instructional values were often misaligned with those of his immediate colleagues. His long-standing frustration with departmental norms, coupled with the loss of a likeminded colleague, shaped his reliance on out-of-school writing communities for professional support and growth. Walt's navigation of isolation, then, revealed an identity trajectory oriented toward sustaining his writing pedagogy through external communities of practice, as he sought collaboration and affirmation in spaces that aligned more closely with his beliefs about writing instruction and assessment.

Discussion and Implications

This case study examined how the writing teacher identity trajectories of two high school ELA teachers shaped their writing pedagogy. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) framework, findings indicate that writing teacher identity shaped the teachers' instructional and assessment approaches, classroom roles, and responses to shared writing challenges. Despite similar contexts and routines, Zoe and Walt enacted writing instruction differently, reflecting distinct histories of writing experiences and participation in writing-related professional communities.

Walt's writing teacher identity was shaped through sustained engagement with writing across settings: continued personal writing, a history of collaborative work around peer feedback, ongoing connections to writing project colleagues, and more. His out-of-school participation supported what Wenger (1998) would describe as identity work carried across communities (i.e., boundary-spanning). In practice, his trajectory was especially visible in his self-positioning as the "lead writer" as well as when it came to modeling imperfect drafts, narrating revision as meaning-making, and structuring assessment through "social and reflective" activities. Consistent with writing teacher identity scholarship, Walt's enactment of writing alongside students reflects how teacher-writer identities can support process-oriented instruction and reposition teachers from evaluators toward fellow writers (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Premont, 2022).

Zoe's writing teacher identity, however, was shaped more narrowly through day-to-day classroom practice and constrained opportunities for writing-focused collaboration. Her limited preparation for teaching writing, ongoing uncertainty around assessment, challenges addressing student AI use, and discomfort initiating departmental collaboration pointed to a need for sustained participation in a writing-focused professional community. In the absence of such a community within her school— and without access to ongoing writing-focused professional learning— Wenger (1998) would characterize her participation as reflecting a more peripheral trajectory. Regardless, Zoe enacted a coherent and meaningful writing teacher identity as an "empathetic coach," emphasizing topic choice, accessible scaffolds, and sustainable feedback practices. Her stance illustrates how writing teacher identity is relational and negotiated amid

institutional demands, including workload pressures and fears of parental or administrative pushback (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Vetter et al., 2014).

Importantly, both cases also reflect Wenger's (1998) caution that participation is shaped by power and access. Both teachers' comments surrounding time scarcity and departmental isolation, for example, underscore how institutional structures can limit mutual engagement and shared repertoires around writing instruction and assessment. These constraints align with broader concerns that teachers often feel underprepared to teach and assess writing yet also have limited access to writing-focused professional learning throughout their careers (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Graham, 2019).

Based on these findings, several principles emerge for supporting teacher learning in writing pedagogy:

1. *Protect time for mutual engagement around student writing and assessment.* Both teachers described isolation, especially around grading and feedback.
Departments can strengthen teacher learning by scheduling recurring, protected time to examine student writing together.
2. *Build writing-specific intergenerational mentorship.* Pairing novice and veteran teachers to co-score samples, co-design revision supports, and jointly reflect on student writing can provide supported pathways into shared repertoires.
3. *Treat common rubrics as negotiated tools, not fixed artifacts.* Zoe's struggle with inherited rubrics suggests that "shared" tools only function as shared repertoire when teachers have opportunities to interpret, revise, and make them student-facing— together. This can also reduce the mismatch between what is taught (e.g., limited grammar instruction) and what is required to assess.

4. *Legitimize boundary-spanning professional learning and welcome it back to the building.* Walt's reliance on out-of-school communities indicates that external writing-focused networks can sustain teacher learning when in-school communities are misaligned. Thus, school districts can support this by creating structures for teachers to adapt and share practices locally.
5. *Develop a shared departmental approach to AI and authorship.* Both teachers' AI-related tensions suggest that teachers should not have to navigate ethical use alone. Departments should co-develop clear expectations for when AI is permitted, how process evidence will be gathered, and what counts as ethical participation in writing.

Future research should further examine how writing teacher identity, as enacted through writing pedagogy, shapes students' opportunities to write. Given the central role of teachers' decisions in structuring these opportunities, studies that attend to identity-mediated pedagogical choices may offer important insights for supporting student writing development. Longitudinal research that follows teachers' identity trajectories over multiple years could also clarify how sustained participation in writing-focused communities of practice influences writing pedagogy over time. Finally, future studies should explore how these dynamics unfold across different educational contexts, such as urban or rural schools, to examine whether suburban teachers' reliance on out-of-school professional networks reflects context-specific conditions or broader patterns in writing instruction.

CHAPTER FOUR

“CREATING WRITING OPPORTUNITIES: HOW A SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHER’S BELIEFS AND PRACTICES SHAPE STUDENTS’ COMPOSING EXPERIENCES” (MS 2, VERSION 1)

Abstract

This qualitative instrumental case study examines how a high school ELA teacher’s beliefs and practices shaped his students’ composing opportunities. Guided by Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice and identity as trajectory framework, the study draws on interviews, naturalistic classroom observations, instructional artifacts, and analytic memos. Findings show that the teacher’s writing-centered identity— shaped through his sustained participation in writing-focused communities of practice and his own experiences as a writer— was enacted through five interrelated beliefs: writing is messy, social, ongoing and agentic, developed through playful experimentation, and best supported by assessment for learning and growth. Together, these practices fostered a classroom community of practice that positioned students as recognized writers.

Introduction

In March 2020, when schools abruptly closed and end-of-year exams were cancelled, a class of high school seniors no longer had any requirement to continue writing. Yet twice a week, they logged on anyway. Over the remainder of the spring, these students and their English teacher wrote and shared poetry together on Zoom— often in greater numbers than when school was in session. This study examines how a high school English teacher’s pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices shaped the

conditions for writing instruction in ways that encouraged his students' sustained engagement.

In secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, student writing is often structured by instructional and assessment conditions that emphasize short, task-like work rather than sustained composing, with the teacher serving as the primary audience (Applebee & Langer, 2011). As a result, writing frequently functions as something to complete for school purposes rather than as a practice students might choose to engage in outside of required classroom contexts. While collecting interview data for a larger study, accounts of this group of seniors' regular and collaborative writing pointed back to the classroom and suggested that how the teacher, Walt, framed and supported writing may have mattered in ways that warranted closer study.

Making sense of the exceptionally motivated high school seniors and other similar moments Walt described led me to examine how he created conditions that supported student engagement in writing, with particular attention to his beliefs and instructional practices. To guide this inquiry, I adopted a single instrumental case study approach to address the following research questions:

- 1) What pedagogical beliefs guide a high school ELA teacher's approaches to teaching and assessing student writing?
- 2) How are these beliefs enacted through instructional and assessment practices, and how do these practices shape students' writing opportunities?

Literature Review

An extensive review of relevant scholarship provided a conceptual understanding of the complex relationships among teachers' beliefs about writing, writing teacher

identity, classroom practice, and students' experiences of writing. However, the review also indicated that further study was needed to examine these relationships in the context of everyday classroom teaching, particularly beyond professional development settings and deficit-oriented framings of teachers' writing identities.

Teachers' Beliefs about Writing and Writing Instruction

Research suggests that teachers' beliefs about writing are shaped by personal histories that position writing as emotionally charged and, at times, unsettling (Cremin, 2006; Whitney, 2009). Across both pre-service and in-service contexts, teachers report limited engagement in personal writing beyond functional purposes (Cremin & Oliver, 2017) and describe fragile or negative writing identities rooted in prior schooling experiences and concerns about judgment (Cremin, 2006; Woodard, 2016). Although teachers often value writing for their students, they commonly express uncertainty about how to teach writing effectively (Cremin & Oliver, 2017) and report greater comfort with reading instruction, reflecting long-standing patterns of teacher preparation that prioritize reading over writing (Gannon & Davies, 2007; Graham et al., 2014). Teachers' beliefs about writing instruction are also rarely singular. Many hold hybrid or polytheoretic views that value explicit instruction, process-oriented practices, and sociocultural dimensions of writing (Troia et al., 2011; Walls & Johnston, 2023). They often place less emphasis on correctness (Brindle et al., 2016), even as accountability pressures and curricular mandates shape what teachers perceive as possible in their instruction (Whitney, 2009).

Writing Teacher Identity and Beliefs about Writing Instruction

Teachers' beliefs about writing and writing instruction are shaped in relation to how they understand themselves as writers and teachers of writing. Prior experiences—including criticism of one's writing, limited opportunities for choice, and workplace-driven composing—can contribute to constrained writing identities and narrower beliefs about writing and instruction (Frager, 1994). However, research suggests these identities are not fixed. Composing alongside peers can surface uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk taking, prompting teachers to reconsider assumptions about writing and learning (Cremin, 2006). Sustained participation in writing and reflection has been shown to strengthen teachers' confidence and support shifts in how they conceptualize writing and its teaching (Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Whitney, 2008). Writing-focused communities of practice that invite teachers to write in multiple genres, share work publicly, and engage in peer response have also been shown to transform teachers' attitudes toward writing and their sense of self as writers (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Cremin et al., 2020). At the same time, writing teacher identity development is rarely linear. Even as teachers take on more writerly roles, they may continue to negotiate insecurity, ambivalence, or tension—particularly when institutional pressures or concerns about student progress complicate their sense of efficacy (Troia et al., 2011; Woodard, 2016).

Beliefs and Writing Identity Enacted in Classroom Practice

Studies of how teachers' beliefs and writing identities are enacted in classrooms suggest complex relationships between professional learning, beliefs, and instructional change. Large-scale evaluations of writing-focused professional development have found limited or inconsistent impacts on classroom practice, in part because participation does not guarantee sustained change or consistent enactment (Anders et al., 2021). Survey-

based studies indicate that teachers' beliefs, preparation, and self-efficacy are associated with reported practices, including time spent teaching writing and the use of evidence-based strategies, while also pointing to wide variation across classrooms and school contexts (Brindle et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2014; Hsiang et al., 2020; Walls & Johnston, 2023). Qualitative studies that closely examine classroom activity, however, begin to illuminate how beliefs and writing identities are enacted in practice. When teachers' identities as writers are actively taken up in instruction, they may design richer writing environments with greater student choice, attention to emotional and relational aspects of writing, and explicit modeling of writing as recursive and uncertain work (Cremin, 2006; Cremin & Baker, 2010; Cremin et al., 2020). How beliefs and identities show up in classrooms, though, depends on relationships, school expectations, and teachers' ongoing negotiations of confidence and authority (Cremin & Baker, 2010; Troia et al., 2011; Woodard, 2016).

Teachers' Beliefs, Writing Teacher Identity, and Students' Writing Experiences

Research examining relationships among teachers' beliefs, writing identities, classroom practice, and students' writing experiences presents a mixed picture. Large-scale evaluations of writing-focused professional development have found little evidence of direct effects on students' writing achievement, even when teachers report positive perceptions of impact, underscoring the difficulty of establishing clear causal links between teachers' beliefs and student outcomes (Anders et al., 2021). Reviews similarly note limited empirical evidence directly connecting teachers' writing identities to measurable gains in students' writing, with findings remaining partial and context-dependent (Cremin & Oliver, 2017). Yet, qualitative studies suggest that when teachers

enact beliefs and writing identities in ways that expand time for writing, increase choice and agency, and position writing as meaningful work, students often report greater motivation, confidence, and ownership as writers and, in some cases, demonstrate growth in writing quality or authorial authority (Cremin et al., 2020; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Woodard, 2016).

The Present Study

Existing literature often focuses on teachers who express uncertainty or limited confidence as writers, typically within professional development contexts aimed at addressing perceived gaps, leaving less attention to teachers who already identify as confident or committed writers (Frawley, 2015). Also, scholars have called for greater attention to the relationship between teachers' writing identities and their pedagogical beliefs, including how writerly identities are negotiated alongside curricular demands and enacted in classroom practice (Frawley, 2015; Woodard, 2016). This work emphasizes the need for triangulated designs that observe classroom enactment in order to examine how beliefs and identities unfold over time in interaction with students and institutional contexts, rather than relying solely on self-report or outcome measures (Borg, 2003; Cremin & Locke, 2017; Hsiang et al., 2020; Walls & Johnston, 2023; Whitney, 2008; Woodard, 2015).

Responding to this need, the present study uses a naturalistic, triangulated case study design, drawing on interviews, classroom observations, and instructional documents and tools to examine how beliefs and writing teacher identity are taken up across instruction and assessment practices. Rather than evaluating an intervention or professional development initiative, the study attends to the work of teaching and

assessing writing within an existing school context, offering a situated account of how a teacher's beliefs and writing teacher identity mediate students' writerly experiences in an ELA classroom.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice and his conceptualization of identity as trajectory to closely examine how a secondary ELA teacher's background as a writer and participation across professional communities shaped his beliefs about writing, his instructional and assessment practices, and, in turn, the writing opportunities made available to his students. As a theory of social learning, communities of practice offer a way to understand learning as something that unfolds through ongoing participation in shared work, rather than solely through the transmission of knowledge or the adoption of individual instructional moves. Wenger (1998) describes communities of practice as "resources for organizing our learning" and "contexts in which to manifest our learning" through an "identity of participation" (p. 271). In these social spaces, members develop shared ways of understanding, talking about, and doing work through sustained interaction. Access to such participation, however, is shaped by relations of authority, recognition, and power and is therefore uneven over time.

Wenger (1998) does not explicitly discuss teacher learning in his work. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, I extend Wenger's communities of practice. Applying his definition to educational settings, communities of practice may include department teams, professional learning groups, or discipline-specific networks. Although teachers are often required to belong to professional communities, sustained ones centered explicitly on writing are less common unless they are intentionally cultivated by a school or pursued

beyond it. As a result, teachers' opportunities to learn about writing— and to develop confidence as teachers of writing— are highly dependent on where, and with whom, they have opportunities to participate.

For Wenger (1998), identity is “always going on,” continually renegotiated as individuals move “within and across communities of practice” (p. 154). He conceptualizes identity as a set of trajectories— namely peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary, and outbound— that reflect how individuals move through communities and come to see themselves as particular kinds of participants. For ELA teachers, these trajectories can shape how they understand themselves as writers, teachers of writing, and assessors of student work, often complicating and possibly transforming their beliefs about what writing is, who can do it, and what counts as successful writing in school. This focus on teachers' participation in professional communities and writing teacher identity also opens up a way to examine how classroom practices function as communities of practice for students. Importantly, Wenger (1998) emphasizes that membership in a community of practice “translates into an identity as a form of competence” (p. 153), linking participation to how individuals come to be recognized— and come to recognize themselves— as legitimate contributors. In writing classrooms, teachers' beliefs and practices— formed through their own professional trajectories— can help constitute a classroom community of practice in which students can learn what it means to write, revise, collaborate, and be recognized as writers. Such communities have the potential to strengthen students' identities as writers by incorporating their past experiences with writing and by opening trajectories of participation oriented toward a valued future— or they may not. Students' opportunities to see themselves as writers are

thus shaped not only by curricular requirements, but by the forms of participation that are made available and valued within the classroom. From this perspective, the framework makes it possible to trace how teachers' professional learning histories shape the writing opportunities available to students and the identities they develop as writers.

Methods

This qualitative study employed a single instrumental case study design to examine how a high school ELA teacher's beliefs about writing shaped his instructional and assessment practices and, in turn, his students' writing opportunities (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Drawing on interviews, classroom observations, artifacts, and analytic memos, the study offers an in-depth, triangulated account of writing pedagogy in a secondary ELA context.

Context and Participant

This case study focused on Walt, an ELA teacher at a suburban public high school in the Midwest. At the time of the study, Walt had been an educator for 29 years. Although he had experience teaching ELA across multiple secondary grade levels, his courses at the time of the study included International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) Language and Literature Year 1, IB DP Language and Literature Year 2, and Poetry, an elective offered to students in grades 10-12.

Walt had participated in a prior study I conducted that examined how writing teacher identity shaped high school ELA teachers' writing pedagogy (Author, under review). During that study, he shared that despite later majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing, he described himself as "the kid who got Bs and Cs" on his writing in high school. Over time, he came to view writing as a means of influence,

explaining that he realized he could write in ways that “had an impact on people.” Since then, writing remained a consistent and meaningful part of his personal and professional life.

Prior to becoming a high school ELA teacher, Walt worked as a poet with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, supporting elementary teachers as they implemented writing workshop approaches. He described these early experiences, along with his continued engagement as a writer, as shaping how he approached teaching and assessing writing. When faced with instructional uncertainty, he drew on his own writing process, returning to what he described as “first principles” to consider the goals of a piece and the steps required to reach them. He also emphasized the importance of collaboration, noting that he regularly leaned on “likeminded” colleagues within and beyond his school, particularly through his involvement with the National Writing Project.

Walt was selected as the focal case based on sustained patterns across the dataset, including his repeated articulation of writing-centered beliefs, consistent instructional routines that foregrounded writing development, and his students’ ongoing participation in writing. From an asset-based perspective, these features made his case especially well-suited for examining beliefs about writing and writing development and how those beliefs were taken up in instructional practice and shaped students’ writing opportunities.

Data Collection

This study drew on an expanded version of a core qualitative dataset that included semi-structured interviews, naturalistic classroom observations, and analytic memos. To deepen the analysis, I extended the dataset through additional interviews and the

collection of supplementary artifacts— specifically instructional documents and tools, as well as students’ written responses— that Walt identified as most fully reflecting his writing pedagogy.

In addition to interviews focused on Walt’s beliefs and instructional decision-making, I conducted follow-up interviews centered on the context of each collected document, including why it was produced, when it was used, and how it was used in instruction. These interviews supported the interpretation of observational and documentary data and informed subsequent data collection. Together, these sources supported an in-depth, triangulated instrumental case study of Walt (Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded inductively and thematically across several phases. To begin addressing RQ1 (What pedagogical beliefs guide a high school ELA teacher’s approaches to teaching and assessing student writing?), I engaged in values coding (Saldaña, 2021), recoding interview transcripts, observation transcripts, field notes, and analytic memos to identify segments of data that reflected Walt’s beliefs about writing instruction and assessment. Throughout this process, I wrote analytic memos to track emerging interpretations and connections across data sources.

Following first-cycle coding, I conducted document analysis of instructional materials and student writing samples (Bowen, 2009). This analysis helped contextualize interview and observational data, provided additional evidence for the beliefs identified through coding, and prompted the development of further interview questions needed to address RQ2 (How are these beliefs enacted through instructional and assessment practices, and how do these practices shape students’ writing opportunities?). After

completing first-cycle coding, I engaged in pattern coding (Saldaña, 2021) to synthesize initial codes into broader belief statements. Once these belief statements were established, I returned to the full dataset to identify the instructional and assessment practices, as well as the supporting documents and tools, that reflected each belief. I then examined the writing opportunities made available to students through those practices. Finally, I conducted, transcribed, and analyzed an additional interview with Walt to ensure that my interpretations accurately represented both his instructional practices and the writing opportunities he believed those practices, documents, and tools afforded his students.

Findings

Across interviews and classroom interactions, Walt directly and repeatedly articulated his view of writing as a “humanizing and empowering” practice— one that all people “need to be able to think of themselves as being able to do.” This view functioned as a throughline across his teaching and guided how he understood both how writing develops and the conditions writers need in order to grow. Accordingly, I address my research questions by organizing the findings around five interrelated beliefs about writing development that emerged across Walt’s data set, illustrating how these beliefs were taken up in classroom practice and, in turn, shaped the writing opportunities made available to his students (see Table 1).

Table 1*Walt's Beliefs, Practices, Documents and Tools, and Student Writing Opportunities*

Belief	Practices	Supporting Documents and Tools	Student Writing Opportunities
Writing Is Messy	Positioned drafting and revision as processes of discovery; asked students to revisit introductions after completing full drafts; modeled how claims emerge through writing; conferenced with students about revision decisions	Revision Plan handout; colleague's co-authored, asset-based self-reflection handout	Opportunities to revise based on emerging ideas; change direction during the writing process; engage in revision as meaning-making rather than correction
Writing Is Social	Structured writing as community participation; positioned himself as lead writer; designed scaffolded peer-review prompts; facilitated group and individual conversations	Eli Review digital peer-review platform	Opportunities to give and receive peer feedback; learn writing moves from peers; participate as valued contributors in a writing community
Writing Is Ongoing, Agentive Work	Modeled authentic, imperfect writing; narrated drafting and revision; emphasized rewriting over polished products; framed writing as thinking in progress	Four Column Note handout; teacher-generated draft models	Opportunities to make purposeful choices about ideas, structure, and revision; experience struggle as a normal part of writing; engage in multiple rounds of rewriting and idea development
Writing Develops through Playful Experimentation	Designed low-barrier, high-engagement tasks; used visual texts for analysis; invited multimodal and collaborative composing	N/A	Opportunities to experiment with genre and mode; focus on reasoning without decoding barriers; engage with writing through curiosity and play
Assessment Is for Learning and Growth	Triangulated assessment using students' writing, reflections, peer feedback, and conferences; treated feedback as developmental; invited articulation of thinking	Eli Review; student reflection rubric; peer feedback rubric	Opportunities to demonstrate learning beyond final drafts; experience assessment as ongoing dialogue; focus on growth rather than performance

Writing Is Messy

Walt consistently described writing as “messy,” rejecting linear views of the writing process. He explained to students that although they may have learned to draft through following “steps,” those steps are “more structured than they actually play out if you’re going to be successful.” Instead, he framed drafting as a process of discovery, emphasizing that “a draft is a journey, and a finished piece is a presentation.” In interviews, he reinforced this belief, noting that he always expected “messy situations”

when teaching writing. He viewed approximation as a productive goal, stating, “If it failed, we’ll do it again, but we’ve made some progress.”

Walt enacted his belief that writing is inherently messy through instructional practices that positioned revision as a meaning-making process rather than a corrective one. For example, in one of my observations he asked students to revisit their introduction paragraphs after completing full drafts, emphasizing that writers often discover what they are truly arguing only after fleshing out their ideas. During one observation, he explained to his students, “There is no law that says when you present your finished essay, you have to start with the question that you said you were answering.” To make this view of revision explicit, Walt, during an observation, walked students through how writers retrospectively reframe their work once their thinking has fully developed using a projected model essay:

The writing of this essay started out with a question, and they did all this thinking, and the question may have been similar to what they say it was, but at the end, they read their conclusion, and they said, “Oh, look: I talked about how Calvin and Hobbes show the monotonous, uninspiring conventions of the educational system, its effects on creative thinking, and its effects on students’ willingness to learn in school, but what question was I asking myself as I went through this? And then they rewrote their questions, and they put it in their introduction as if that was the question they started with. There is no reason you can’t do that.

Students then returned to their own writing as Walt circulated and conferenced with them, supporting decisions about whether— and how— their thinking warranted changes to their opening paragraph.

Walt also made visible his belief that writing is messy through two instructional documents: a long-standing revision-planning handout and a more recently reworked, asset-based self-reflection tool that he had begun using in place of the revision plan document. The original Revision Plan handout (see Appendix A) included four open-ended prompts:

- Articulate the purpose of their writing
- Reflect on the compositional choices they had made and how those choices were working
- Consider possible additions, changes, or deletions
- Identify new thinking that emerged through drafting

In an interview, Walt explained that he appreciated how the document “put a lot of value on what [students] were thinking and therefore doing.” However, he acknowledged that its openness sometimes made it unclear— both for him and for students— what aspects of the writing should be the focus at a given moment.

In response to this same tension, Walt’s colleague developed an asset-based self-reflection handout (see Appendix B) that offered more concrete focal points while remaining revisable across writing tasks and instructional goals, which Walt decided to also adopt. Unlike the Revision Plan, this document could not only be organized around genre- and task-specific assets that their writing should demonstrate, but it was always co-authored with students. For example, one of the co-written, asset-based documents asked students to evaluate whether their claim a) identified an issue or reason for debate, b) took a position related to cause, effect, problem, solution, or implications, and c) acknowledged complexity by recognizing multiple perspectives or stakeholders (see

Appendix C). Students were required to justify their yes/no responses and, when necessary, articulate next steps for revision. Walt did not frame this newer tool as a replacement for the earlier revision plan but rather as a response to its limitations. He would ultimately like to “find a way to marry the two documents together,” explaining that although concrete learning is important, he knew from his own experience as a writer that students learn productive and often unexpected things through writing that extend beyond any single focal skill. Walt’s evolving use of instructional tools reflected his belief that writing instruction, like writing itself, is inherently messy— requiring ongoing adjustment, negotiation, and responsiveness to students’ needs in order to sustain writing as a humanizing and empowering practice for all.

Writing Is Social

Walt also believed writing to be a social practice, emphasizing that his students were “together in the classroom as members of a learning community,” and that writing was “a central part of our community.” In this context, he positioned himself as “the lead writer in the classroom,” guiding students toward shared goals through conversation, feedback, and purposeful attention to writerly moves. Additionally, he consistently reinforced the importance of “group conversation”— whether in a large group, small group, or one-on-one setting— acknowledging that sharing writing can create anxiety but viewing that nervousness as a normal and productive part of writing in community.

One way that Walt’s belief that writing is a social practice was made visible in instruction was through his sustained use of Eli Review, a digital peer-review platform that allowed him to carefully design and scaffold feedback prompts. Walt first gained access to Eli Review through his participation in a statewide peer-review research group

beginning in 2016, where he worked alongside colleagues and a university researcher studying peer feedback. His approach to peer review was shaped by this work, through which he learned that the effectiveness of peer review depended less on students' writing ability and more on the quality of the questions guiding their responses. As he explained, when prompts were constructed intentionally— asking students to name what a peer's writing did rather than what it lacked— students began to internalize those same questions in relation to their own writing. Reading multiple peers' drafts allowed students to see how particular writing moves could be enacted in different ways, which they then carried back into revision. Walt emphasized that this process reframed feedback as an observational, relational act rather than one reserved for experts, as students did not need to “know what good writing is” but rather to notice and articulate how meaning was being made.

Walt described this social framing of writing as particularly significant for students who entered his classroom resistant to writing. He recalled one student who initially positioned himself as someone who “only do[es] reading” and wanted to simply pass the course. While the student struggled to compose assignments, Walt recalled in an interview that he became deeply invested in the peer review process:

This particular student told me that he didn't think he'd be good at peer review because he's not a good writer. But then, like, as he was doing these things, he started to realize he was really good as a peer reviewer because he paid attention to what other kids were trying to say, and kids would tell him, “Oh, thanks for the feedback!” and “Thanks for...” He then started to be willing to write because other kids saw him as a member of this writing community.

For Walt, shifts like this illustrated how peer review functioned as a humanizing practice: when students experienced writing as an interaction between people rather than an isolated performance, they seemed more willing to take risks and persist. Rather than attempting to convince students that writing was social, however, Walt focused on removing barriers that prevented them from bringing that understanding into the classroom, treating writing as “just something that people do” and inviting even the most reluctant writers into participation through community membership. In this way, positioning writing as a social practice supported Walt’s broader commitment to writing being a humanizing and empowering activity— one grounded in relationships, shared meaning-making, and students’ belonging within a community of writers.

Writing Is Ongoing, Agentive Work

Walt described writing as hard, ongoing work— work that requires agency and develops only when students learn to write in ways that “sound like someone who cares is behind it.” For him, meaningful writing began with identifying what students cared about rather than with prescribed forms. He pushed back against approaches that emphasized following formulas, explaining that when students simply do what they are told, they may “breathe a sigh of relief when they’re done” and feel “happy they never have to write again”— an outcome he viewed as a failure of writing instruction. Instead, Walt believed writing development should leave students wanting to continue learning about reading and writing. In interviews, he situated this belief within contemporary writing conditions, noting that “AI, and technology in general, makes so much of writing seem easy,” which he viewed as “one more thing that’s making it hard for kids.” He framed writing as a practice that develops through sustained effort over time, comparing

it to playing basketball in a driveway— something people continue to do even when it is imperfect— and remarked that “most people write bad poetry,” but that this reality “shouldn’t stop you from writing.”

This belief was made visible in Walt’s classroom practice through his modeling of authentic, imperfect writing. Students knew that Walt was a writer, and during one observation in particular, he walked them through how he would approach the same analytical writing task he had assigned. Using a portrait from *Class Pictures* by Dawoud Bey, Walt demonstrated how he would rely on a Four Column Note handout— an adapted close reading tool for students— to generate ideas before drafting (see Appendix D). He then projected his own paragraph and openly narrated his thinking, acknowledging that his first draft “is going to need work” and that much of what he had written was “mostly descriptive.” He explained that this disconnect was expected: “What’s going on in your mind doesn’t just come out...through the keyboard onto the screen. It’s very hard to get the ideas out.” Rather than presenting revision as correction, Walt framed it as an ongoing process of idea development. He described a “game” he plays with himself while writing, in which he tries to add an idea for every sentence. After displaying successive versions of his paragraph, he pointed out where he was still struggling to make connections between evidence and claims, admitting, “I do not think I have even really gotten to the point of developing reasoning yet.” He emphasized that meaningful reasoning emerged through repeated rereading, rewriting, and adding ideas, telling students that they “are not going to have the body paragraphs you want until you rewrite them multiple times.”

Practices like this shaped students' writing experiences by positioning struggle, revision, and imperfection as normal and productive parts of writing— even for him. Walt described one student who initially found the work frustrating and believed her writing was “really bad,” despite trying what he taught. Over time, however, she began to see visible growth in her writing, eventually telling him, “This is the first time I felt like I really was any good at writing.” She later expressed anxiety about writing in future classes, explaining that “no one else teaches writing like they care what we have to say.” Walt interpreted this response as evidence that students wrote differently when writing was framed not as a final product but as thinking in progress. As he explained to both me and his students, “the essay doesn’t matter...it’s about your thinking,” and writing is “an artifact of thought” rather than an end goal. In this way, framing writing development as ongoing, agentic work yet again supported Walt’s broader commitment to teaching writing as a humanizing and empowering practice— one that valued students’ thinking, persistence, and sense of themselves as writers over polished performance.

Writing Develops through Playful Experimentation

Walt believed that students learn to write best when they are given opportunities to experiment playfully with language and ideas. He emphasized that writing experiences students “have fun with” make it easier to later move into more structured academic genres, explaining that when students enjoy writing and experience success, teachers can then say, “Here’s the paragraph that you’re supposed to be writing when you write this kind of thing.” He also pushed back on the positioning of the analytical essay as the “pinnacle” of academic writing, arguing that writing in other genres— such as poetry— requires students to think about language, meaning, and choice in similarly rigorous

ways. For Walt, playful experimentation was not separate from academic writing but rather a pathway into it.

This belief was made visible in his classroom practice through assignments designed to lower barriers to entry while making analytical thinking visible. In the same analytical writing unit described earlier, Walt intentionally asked students to analyze portraits in Bey’s *Class Pictures* rather than a written text. He explained that while many students “don’t read books,” they are “on screens all day looking at pictures,” making images a more intuitive starting point. Because students could immediately see what they were analyzing, they were able to focus on developing ideas and reasoning without also struggling to determine literal meaning. As he explained, using images allowed students to “focus on the writing piece” and made analytical moves more apparent. Although the portraits appeared “deceptively simple,” students were pushed to spend time making comparisons, noticing contrasts in expression and setting, and identifying parallels across images. Walt noted that this process often surprised students, forcing them to recognize “how much there is to say.” The surface simplicity of the images, he explained, created space for deeper inference-making and helped students see reasoning skills— such as comparison and interpretation— as accessible and transferable to other kinds of writing.

Walt also created opportunities for playful experimentation later in the year through collaborative, low-stakes writing tasks. In preparation for an IB assessment that asked students to synthesize ideas across texts, he had students work in small groups to write and perform scripts featuring characters from multiple works they had studied. Rather than assigning a traditional written response, Walt drew on activities he had learned through IB training, describing texts as “conversations with other texts” and

suggesting that this intertextual thinking mirrors what happens in a reader's mind.

Although he acknowledged that he did not have a formal way to assess how the activity shaped students' thinking, he recalled high levels of enthusiasm and sustained engagement, describing students as being "relaxed," "working hard," and "thinking deeply"— markers of commitment to the task rather than a focus on simply "getting it done." My field notes echoed these same impressions: "Students are having fun and laughing about literature," and "They're fighting over who gets to be which character and the best ways to represent them." In this way, opportunities for playful experimentation supported Walt's broader commitment to writing as a humanizing and empowering practice by reducing fear, expanding what counted as rigorous writing, and inviting students into analytical work through curiosity, enjoyment, and shared meaning-making.

Assessment Is for Learning and Growth

Walt viewed assessment as a means of supporting learning rather than ranking students. Across interviews, he expressed discomfort with traditional approaches to grading writing, arguing that scores often obscure the thinking and growth that writing makes possible. Instead, he consistently returned to the question, "What are we really gathering that assesses learning and supports growth?," positioning assessment as something that should encourage development rather than simply "label kids." He contrasted the role of the writing teacher as a "coach" or "cheerleader" with that of a "referee," describing the shift toward assigning scores as a "bizarre situation" that pulls teachers away from supporting students' learning.

Walt enacted this belief in practice through what he described as the triangulation of assessment. Drawing on his graduate coursework, he emphasized the importance of

using multiple sources of evidence to understand what students knew and how they were learning, including student writing, reflections, peer feedback, and one-on-one conferences. As he explained, “I was always trying to find multiple ways to see and understand what students knew and how they knew.” A key shift in Walt’s assessment practice occurred with his adoption of Eli Review, which allowed him to more fully incorporate students’ interactions with one another into his assessment of learning. When students were asked to give feedback in response to carefully designed prompts, their responses revealed what they understood about writing— even when that understanding was not yet visible in their own drafts. As Walt explained, “If I’m asking students to give each other feedback on the right questions, their feedback tells me what they understand about the writing they should be doing.” Peer review thus functioned as both a learning opportunity for students and a formative assessment tool for Walt, giving students space to articulate criteria for effective writing, learn from peers’ approaches, and reflect on their own decision-making while also enabling him to identify gaps in understanding, target instruction, and support revision. Together, these varied artifacts allowed Walt to attend not only to students’ written products but also to their reasoning, decision-making, and developing understanding over time. To make these dimensions of learning visible and assessable, he developed rubrics for students’ reflective writing and peer feedback work (see Appendix E and Appendix F).

Walt also assessed learning by inviting students to articulate their thinking aloud— often before or alongside drafting. As he explained in an interview, he wanted students to “say what they think they know before they try to write it,” both to clarify their own thinking and to help him determine “what we’re ready to do next.” During one

small-group activity, I observed Walt asking students to create shared charts that defined what they currently understood about stakeholder values, satire, and sentence structure—key concepts connected to a recent writing prompt. The purpose of the activity was not application but to give Walt a visual representation of what students knew at that point in instruction. To surface students' thinking and assess their developing understandings, Walt asked each group to present their charts aloud to him and to the class. Groups not presenting were encouraged to cross off ideas that had already been named and to share only what felt new or different. After all groups had presented, I observed Walt making his assessment process explicit, telling students:

I heard a lot of things that I'm like, "Yes!" And then in the other half of my mind, I heard a few things that I'm like, "I need to do more with that." Do you want to know what they were roughly about? For satire and stakeholder values, everything I heard was like, "Yes!" Sentence structure I feel like I need to teach a little more about that, and just so you know, this is not a bad place for us to be at this point in your junior year, so there's plenty of time to worry about it. But, you know, I recognize that probably in most of the places that you feel confused in terms of those things, that's probably because I haven't taught much about it. So it's not like I'm going to mark you down for stuff if I see it looks like you're confused.

Rather than penalizing students for what they did not yet know, Walt reassured them that confusion was a normal and productive part of learning to write. In doing so, he treated assessment as a tool for guiding his instruction and supporting students' growth, framing it not as a final judgment but as an ongoing conversation about learning. In this way,

positioning assessment as formative and dialogic supported Walt's broader commitment to presenting writing as a humanizing and empowering practice— one that prioritized students' thinking, recognized development over time, and resisted reducing writers to scores or rankings.

Discussion

Examining Walt's pedagogical beliefs, instructional practices and tools, and the writing opportunities made available to his students suggests that his sustained writing teacher identity— shaped through his experiences as a writer and long-term participation in writing-focused communities of practice— supported the development of his own classroom community of practice in which writing was framed as “humanizing and empowering” work. Within this community, students were consistently invited to experience writing as meaningful, social, and ongoing, helping to explain why his former students continued to “log on” and write poetry during the pandemic, despite no longer being required to do so.

Aligned with prior qualitative research, this study suggests that teachers' identities as writers can shape students' motivation, confidence, and engagement in writing (Cremin & Oliver, 2017; Dix & Cawkwell, 2011; Woodard, 2016). This research also helps to interpret why large-scale intervention studies often report limited or inconsistent effects on student writing outcomes (Anders et al., 2021). While achievement in writing remains an important educational goal, these findings underscore that writing development involves more than measurable outcomes alone. Without students' willingness, confidence, and motivation to participate in writing, achievement is unlikely to follow. Viewed this way, the effects of writing-oriented instruction appear

indirect and cumulative, taking shape through classroom participation structures that are difficult to capture through short-term impact measures but consequential for how students come to participate in writing over time.

This study specifically shows how Walt's writing teacher identity— shaped through years of seeking out and participating in writing-focused communities largely beyond his school— mattered for what became possible in his classroom. In his English class, writing was not positioned as an assignment to finish or a performance for evaluation; rather, it functioned as a shared practice in which students were invited to draft, revise, and learn alongside others. I do not present this case as normative or inevitable. Rather, it represents a possible trajectory in which instructional decisions can be traced to longer histories of professional participation and the kinds of support teachers are— or are not— able to access. Reading Walt's practice this way shifts attention away from individual traits and toward the social experiences that equipped him to build his own writing community with students. Notably, Walt's confidence did not eliminate uncertainty; it instead enabled him to work productively with ambiguity, making struggle, experimentation, and revision visible and legitimate parts of classroom life. Wenger's (1998) concept of identity-as-trajectory within communities of practice helps name this process, and my findings extend existing scholarship on writing teacher identity as ongoing and negotiated through participation rather than linear or resolved (Cremin, 2006; Whitney, 2008; Woodard, 2016).

Overall, this study contributes to writing research by shifting attention from instructional strategies themselves to the participation structures they make possible. In doing so, it addresses a gap in prior research that has documented teachers' beliefs about

writing but has less frequently traced how those beliefs are taken up in practice to shape students' opportunities to participate as writers (Cremin & Locke, 2017). This focus on participation helps extend existing research on writing teacher identity and student motivation by offering an explanation for how and why writing-oriented instruction may matter in ways not immediately captured by short-term or standardized outcome measures.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

These findings underscore the importance of supporting teachers in examining how their own histories as writers and their beliefs about writing development shape everyday instructional and assessment decisions, shifting attention toward reflection on how beliefs-in-practice shape students' opportunities to engage as writers. Further, the findings point to the value of creating sustained “contexts within which the communities that develop these practices may prosper” (Wenger, 1998, p. 10), allowing teachers to write and talk about writing alongside others— not simply as a means of acquiring instructional strategies but as a way of cultivating writing teacher identities over time. These implications also extend to preservice teacher education, highlighting the need for coursework and field experiences that position future ELA teachers as writers and invite them to reflect on how their developing writing identities may shape the writing opportunities they create for students.

While this study drew on triangulated interview, observational, and document data to examine classroom practice, a fuller understanding of student opportunity will require attending directly to students' perspectives. Studies that foreground students' accounts of what does— and does not— invite them to participate in writing, both in and

beyond school, would offer critical insight into how writing communities are experienced by learners themselves. Longitudinal and comparative case study designs may also be valuable for tracing how instructional practices and norms take shape, stabilize, or shift across contexts, extending writing research by clarifying how the influence of writing-oriented instruction unfolds over time in ways not readily visible through short-term outcome measures. Finally, this study highlights the value of asset-based case study approaches for advancing writing research. By showcasing what teachers are able to do—and how they make sense of their work across time—asset-based cases can surface forms of instructional expertise and professional knowledge often obscured in deficit-oriented or evaluative research designs. In this sense, research that helps explain how classrooms come to be spaces where students continue to write—not because they are required to, but because participation in writing has come to matter to them—offers insight into situated best practices for writing instruction and remains a critical direction for the field.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Overview of Studies

This dissertation examined how writing teacher identity shapes writing pedagogy in secondary ELA classrooms, extending conversations about writing instruction beyond a focus on discrete instructional strategies to consider the assets teachers bring to writing pedagogy. Across two qualitative case studies, I explored how two teachers' writing histories and participation in writing-focused communities informed their instructional and assessment decisions, which, in turn, shaped students' opportunities to write. In doing so, the study complements existing evidence-based writing scholarship by shifting the lens from identifying effective practices to examining how teachers' identities as writers and teachers of writing mediate the relationship between beliefs about writing and classroom practice.

Findings from the first manuscript showed that writing teacher identity functioned as an interpretive lens, shaping how two high school ELA teachers enacted writing pedagogy in their classrooms, even within the same institutional context. The second manuscript extended this work through an in-depth case study of the veteran teacher, demonstrating how a strong writing background and sustained participation in writing-focused communities of practice supported instructional and assessment practices that positioned writing as social, iterative, and oriented toward learning and growth. Together, these studies complicate dominant narratives of writing instruction by showing that how

teachers understand themselves as writers and teachers of writing can fundamentally shape the beliefs, practices, and writing opportunities that emerge in secondary ELA classrooms.

Future Research Directions

Overall, these studies highlight the central role of writing teacher identity in structuring both teachers' pedagogical decision-making and students' opportunities to participate in writing. At the same time, they also point toward a program of future research that 1) closely examines how writing assessment is enacted and sustained through teachers' participation in writing-focused communities, 2) traces how a novice teacher makes sense of teaching and assessing writing across a period of changed instructional responsibility, 3) investigates how novice teachers take up, reshape, or resist opportunities to participate in writing-focused professional communities, and 4) centers students' perspectives to understand how instructional and assessment practices are experienced and negotiated in secondary writing classrooms.

Project #1: An Asset-Based Case Study of Writing Assessment

An important direction for my future research involves returning to data and participants from my prior two studies to conduct deeper, practitioner-facing analyses that were not possible within the constraints of journal-length publications. For this first project, I plan to develop another asset-based case study of Walt, the veteran secondary ELA teacher featured in the preceding studies, drawing on interviews, classroom observations, instructional materials, and student writing that could not be examined in-

depth. This project will specifically focus on how writing assessment is enacted in everyday classroom practice, attending to assessment as a situated, identity-mediated practice rather than a set of discrete techniques. Building on patterns identified in the current studies, the case will more closely examine how Walt's assessment practices are shaped not simply by years of experience, but by his identity as a writing teacher who actively participates in writing-focused communities of practice both inside and outside of school. Attention will be given to how Walt sought out and sustained these communities— especially following the retirement of a “likeminded” colleague— and how that participation informed his beliefs about assessment, student growth, and professional judgment. By treating writing assessment as a practice supported through ongoing community participation, this future work aims to identify the conditions that make responsive, growth-oriented assessment possible in secondary ELA classrooms. For practitioners, the project will offer concrete, realistic examples of assessment practices grounded in professional judgment; for researchers, it will extend current scholarship by reframing writing assessment as a practice shaped through access to and engagement in communities of practice rather than experience alone.

Project #2: A Retrospective Interview Case Study of a Novice Writing Teacher

The next project will be a retrospective interview case study that examines how Zoe, the novice secondary English teacher from my earliest study, reflects on a year of teaching and assessing writing following a significant instructional transition. Building on the initial case, this project returns to Zoe's teaching context after approximately one year to explore how her writing teacher identity, pedagogical beliefs, and approaches to

teaching and assessing writing have evolved over time. Following the retirement of Walt, Zoe assumed responsibility for teaching his IB English courses. This project focuses on Zoe's retrospective sensemaking around that transition, including how she experienced taking on new instructional responsibility, how she navigated the demands of teaching and assessing writing in IB contexts, and how she understood her effectiveness as a writing teacher across the year. Attention will be given to the forms of support, resources, and professional communities Zoe relied on—or wished she had access to—as she taught and assessed student writing. Data collection will consist of more in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit reflection on key moments across the school year, including instructional decision-making, assessment practices, and experiences of professional learning related to writing. Interviews will invite Zoe to identify challenges, successes, and shifts in practice, as well as to articulate how her participation—or non-participation—in writing-focused communities shaped her teaching and assessment of writing. Analytically, this project would center identity and sensemaking rather than evaluation, attending to how Zoe narrates her experiences and positions herself as a writing teacher within her historical and relational contexts.

Project #3: A Comparative Case Study of Novice Writing Teachers' Responses to Writing-Focused Communities of Practice

Building on insights from Project #2, this qualitative comparative case study would examine how novice secondary English teachers negotiate writing teacher identity, instructional practice, and approaches to assessment when opportunities to participate in writing-focused professional communities are intentionally made available. Rather than

assuming participation or change, the study will treat participation itself as an object of inquiry, attending to how invitations are taken up, reshaped, or declined within specific institutional and identity contexts. The study centers on a voluntary, low-stakes writing group designed to approximate key features of the writing-focused communities that supported Walt's development, while remaining intentionally open-ended and non-prescriptive. With the veteran teacher's consent, he may contribute as a consultative informant to help identify which aspects of prior community participation were most meaningful, or if interested, he could become more involved. Data sources will include observations of the writing group to document interactional patterns and moments of uptake, resistance, or disengagement and multiple waves of semi-structured interviews with participating teachers. Optional reflective artifacts and descriptive participation traces (e.g., attendance patterns, topic initiation, moments of engagement, etc.) could also contextualize teachers' accounts. To examine how participation intersects with classroom practice, the study would also include selective classroom observations, instructional materials related to writing instruction or assessment, and possibly student writing artifacts.

Project #4: Student-Centered Study of Invitation and Participation in Writing Classrooms

Project #4 will center on students' perspectives to examine how writing instruction and assessment are experienced in secondary English classrooms. Building on earlier projects that examine teachers' writing identities, instructional and assessment practices, and access to writing-focused professional communities, this study shifts the

focus to how those conditions are encountered, interpreted, and negotiated by students. Using student interviews, classroom observations, and possibly student documents, the study would explore how students interpret writing tasks, feedback, and assessment practices; how they experience invitations to participate in writing; and how they navigate moments of inclusion, exclusion, encouragement, and constraint in classroom writing contexts. Rather than assuming alignment between instructional intention and student experience, the project treats participation as an object of inquiry, examining how students take up, resist, or disengage from writing opportunities over time. By centering student voice, this project would provide a contextualized account of how writing instruction and assessment are lived by students. In doing so, it deepens the research agenda by tracing how teachers' access to professional communities and evolving instructional identities ultimately shape students' relationships with writing.

Appendix A

Blank Revision Plan Handout

Review and describe the purposes of this particular piece of writing. <i>What did you want the writing to do?</i>	
Consider and discuss the compositional choices in the writing. <i>What choices did you make with this draft to meet your goals or purposes? How did those work? How do you know? Refer to specific reviewer comments, if possible.</i>	Explore possible additions, changes, or subtractions. <i>What can you do differently? Where and how?</i>
Affirm your thinking. <i>What do you think now that you didn't think before?</i>	

Appendix B

Walt's Colleague's Blank Asset-Based Handout

Does your (writing)...	Yes or no. Explain.	If no, next steps.

Appendix C

Walt's Colleague's Co-authored Asset-Based Handout (Claim Example)

Does your claim...	Yes or no. Explain.	If no, next steps.
Identify an issue, topic, or reason for concern or debate?		
Take a position regarding the cause, effect, problem, solution, or implications of the central topic/issue/reason for the argument?		
Recognize complexity in terms of related perspectives, issues, and concerns impacting stakeholders?		

Appendix D

Four Column Note Handout (Bey Image Example)

Detail/Quote	Context/Paraphrase	Interpretation/Effect	Device/Evaluation
Green hoodie	Christopher wears a dark green hoodie. This article of clothing seems to take up most of the frame.	The clothing hides Christopher's body. He has his hands tucked into his sleeves and under his arms. You can't see anything but his face. This makes me think of how sometimes you want to be hidden to feel safe. Bey has arranged the photo to emphasize the darkness. Darkness also makes it hard to see things. This connects to Christopher's beanie, which hides his head. All we can see is his face and his eyes. When I think of eyes, I think of how eyes tell the truth. It's like hiding his body is a way of focusing on the truth of who he is.	The color green is a device because green is the color of things that grow. More important is the darkness of the green. Darkness and shadow contrast with the brightness of Christopher's face and eyes. The hoodie is the foreground and middle distance of the image. It is central and dominant, except for Christopher's eyes as a focal point.
Map	Left upper background. Colorful but still dark. Blurred. Angled off to the side. Shows the Mediterranean basin.	This makes me think of symbolism and conflict. There is a history of that part of the world that makes me think of conflict. Travel and encountering other cultures and people. Learning.	Blurring can show how things like culture can be misunderstood. Could be something about where he's from. Could be less important. Could show conflict in his past. This could connect to the text.

Appendix E

Student Reflection Rubric

Level	Descriptor of Proficiency	Moves to the Next Level
1	Student demonstrates ineffective reflection on writing choices. Describes aspects of the task unrelated to key elements of text or choices of composition.	- Name elements of writing to change, add, or remove. - Differentiate between strengths and weaknesses in the writing.
2	Student describes elements and choices related to subject and content of text. Extends, clarifies, or develops claims, ideas, or examples from the text itself without reflecting directly on compositional choices, elements of writing, or changes in thinking.	- Connect additions, changes, or removals to specific comments from reviewers. - State an intended effect of revisions on the reader. - Connect the intended effects of revisions to a sense of purpose of the text.
3	Student reflections demonstrate a partially developing sense of understanding of text elements and author's choices. Student comments, observes, and evaluates based on a vague sense of elements of craft. Description may be limited to choices, thinking, or process, but connections between compositional choices and thinking are not clear or specific. Or very limited understanding of compositional choices.	- When connecting additions, changes, or removals from specific comments from reviewers, offer reasoning for the value of the comment. - Use discipline-specific language to describe choices and intended effects on reader. - Clarify sense of purpose. - Include a partial or proposed draft of changes or additions.
4	Student reflections are based on shared understandings of elements of craft and author's choices. Student identifies elements and compositional choices about those elements and makes specific, explicit connections between choices and changes in thinking. Comments clarify reasoning behind choices and evaluate success and failure by relating choices to goals.	- Evaluate options for achieving the intended effect of the choice on the audience when explaining how the choice impacts purpose. - Evaluate rehearsal of choices and consider alternate options.
5	Student reflections are insightful about shared understandings of elements of craft and author's choices. Student identifies elements of writing and compositional choices, makes specific, explicit connections between choices and changes in thinking, and the student explores and questions possible outcomes related to the range of choices available. Student clearly evaluates the impact of choices on success and failure of specific goals. Reflections demonstrate the author's ability to generate questions about, reflect on, and revise the work.	

Appendix F

Peer Feedback Rubric

Level	Descriptor of Proficiency	Moves to the Next Level
1	Student provides ineffective responses to others' writing. Editing or opinions not clearly related to author's purpose.	• Understand writer's purpose. • Describe claims and evidence. • Explore ideas. • Limit/eliminate editing in early drafts.
2	Student provides responses to others' writing that connect to shared identity as members of a writing community engaged in making meaning. Restatements and responses that show attention to content of text. Comments support the author's ability to reflect on the successes and weaknesses of a draft, and to revise based on these reflections.	• Notice how parts work/don't work together. Say why some parts are strong and other parts are weak. • Recognize some/most criteria. • Focus comments on higher order concerns (ideas, claims, evidence).
3	Student provides responses to others' writing that demonstrate a partially developing sense of understanding of text elements and author's choices. Comments, observations, and questions identify and evaluate based on a vague or very limited sense of elements of craft. Comments may address all aspects of review prompts, but may fail to accurately identify all traits, or misidentify elements. Comments support the author's ability to revise in meaningful ways.	• Notice/label parts of a draft/shifts/lines of reasoning. • Notice/describe how specific choices in organization, tone, sentence structure, and diction achieve or detract from purpose. • Recognize all key criteria/use discipline-specific language. • Pose thoughtful questions that may lead the writer to reflect about claims, evidence, or craft.
4	Student responds and gives effective feedback based on shared understandings of elements of craft and author's choices. Comments accurately identify elements and traits where necessary, and present effective, thoughtful, and insightful responses that may show connections to the text beyond review activities. When prompted, comments include questions about writing based on shared understandings of craft. Comments support the author's ability to reflect on choices and revise the work in meaningful ways.	• Describe the writer's argument in ways that refine the claim or rethink/reframe evidence. • Describe style (tone, word choice, sentence structure) with an awareness of writer's purpose in ways that allow the writer to reflect on strengths, weaknesses, and possible refinements. • Pose questions that invite writers to think in new ways/consider previously unconsidered options for the draft. • Describe and evaluate ideas and stylistic choices from multiple perspectives within the intended audience.
5	Student responds and gives insightful and effective feedback based on shared understandings of elements of craft and author's choices. Comments identify traits and elements of writing and present reflective questions beyond those in the review prompt based on shared understandings of craft along with insights into the specific purpose of the text being reviewed.	• Zero in on the most important changes a writer should consider.

	Reviewer provides genuine audience response that supports the author's ability to generate questions about, reflect on, and revise the work from multiple perspectives and re-evaluations of stated and implied purposes.	• Frame feedback to connect criteria, conventions, and unique rhetorical situation. • Use discipline-specific vocabulary. • Include specific suggestions for improving argument and style from multiple perspectives within the intended audience.
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Appendix G

Confirmation of Submission to *Teaching/Writing*

2/19/26, 9:17 PM

Oakland University Mail - MS #1336: Submission received for Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education



Danielle Alexander <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

MS #1336: Submission received for Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

1 message

Editors of Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education <editors-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>

Wed, Oct 22, 2025 at 11:16 AM

To: =?UTF-8?Q?=22Danielle_Alexander=22?= <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

Cc: The Authors <authors-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>, The Editors <editors-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>

A new submission for Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education has been uploaded by "Danielle Alexander" <dnalexander@oakland.edu>.

The authors are:

"Danielle Alexander" <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

The title is:

"Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Suburban High School Context"

The keywords are:

writing teacher identity, Communities of Practice (CoP), secondary ELA, writing instruction, suburban schools

The disciplines are:

Educational Methods | English Language and Literature | Language and Literacy Education | Liberal Studies | Rhetoric and Composition | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning | Secondary Education | Secondary Education and Teaching

The submission has been assigned #1336. Please refer to this number in any correspondence related to the submission.

Authors may check the status of the submission, submit revisions, and contact editors via the following link:

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/preview.cgi?article=1336&context=wte>

Editors can access the management tools for this submission at:

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/editor.cgi?article=1336&context=wte>

Thank you,

The Editors

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Appendix H

Confirmation of Re-Submission to *Teaching/Writing*

2/19/26, 9:20 PM

Oakland University Mail - MS #1336: Update submitted for "Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Secondary ELA Classr...



Danielle Alexander <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

MS #1336: Update submitted for "Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Secondary ELA Classroom"

2 messages

Editors of Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education <editors-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>

Thu, Feb 12, 2026 at 11:01 AM

To: =?UTF-8?Q?=22Danielle_Alexander=22?= <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

Cc: The Authors <authors-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>, Assigned Editor <editor-wte-1336@dcwmich.bepress.com>

This is an automatically-generated note to inform you that "Danielle Alexander" <dnalexander@oakland.edu> has submitted an update to MS #1336, "Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Secondary ELA Classroom," in Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education.

The reason for update is:
major revision

The changes made are:

The title has changed. The old title was:

Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in the Suburban

High School Context

Previously, a major revision was invited. This is that major revision.

The short title has changed to

Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in Secondary ELA.

The old short title was:

Who We Are, How We Teach: Writing Teacher Identity in Suburban ELA

The authors are:

"Danielle Alexander" <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

A preview of the title page and status may be viewed at:

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/preview.cgi?article=1336&context=wte>

Editors can access the tools to manage this submission at:

<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/editor.cgi?article=1336&context=wte>

Thank you,
The Editors

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Appendix I

Confirmation of Submission to *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*

2/19/26, 9:19 PM

Oakland University Mail - Manuscript submitted to Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy



Danielle Alexander <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

Manuscript submitted to Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy

1 message

Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy <jaal.office@wiley.com>
Reply-To: Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy <jaal.office@wiley.com>
To: "Danielle N. Alexander" <dnalexander@oakland.edu>

Sat, Feb 14, 2026 at 12:16 PM

WILEY

Dear Mrs. Danielle N. Alexander,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript "Creating Writing Opportunities: How a Secondary English Teacher's Beliefs and Practices Shape Students' Composing Experiences" to Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy. Your unique manuscript ID is: 4122078.

We will confirm this submission with all authors of the manuscript.

As submitting author, you will be the primary recipient of communications from the journal. You will be responsible for responding to editorial queries and making updates to the manuscript if needed.

You can visit the manuscript details page at any time to track the status of your manuscript.

[MANUSCRIPT DETAILS](#)

Kind regards,
Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy

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