“THIS PAPER HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH WRITING”:
INFLUENCES ON TWO TEACHER CANDIDATES’ TEACHING OF WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The following dissertation explores what influences teacher candidates when they teach writing in an independent unit during their student teaching practicum. The research is conducted using a cross-case analysis of two teacher candidates in a year-long student teaching internship. Data include interviews, journals, and class documents from the participants. Findings suggest that teacher candidates are influenced by how they identify as writers and teachers, but also by observing and responding to perceived students' needs for current and future writing assignments.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................ vi
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... viii
Dedication ............................................................................................................................................ ix

Chapter 1 – Introduction
Vocabulary ............................................................................................................................................. 2
Purpose of Study .................................................................................................................................. 3
Research Questions ............................................................................................................................... 3
Relevance of Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 4
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 5

Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
Literature Review ................................................................................................................................. 6
What Makes a Good Writer: Teacher Candidates at the Start ....................................................... 6
What Does It Mean to Teach Writing: Perspectives During Coursework ..................................... 9
What Does It Mean to Teach Writing: Perceptions During Practicum ......................................... 11
Relevant Overview of Current Teaching of Writing ........................................................................... 18
Conceptualization of Learning to Teach Writing ............................................................................. 22
Facets of Learning: People .................................................................................................................... 22
Facets of Learning: The Context ........................................................................................................... 25
Conceptualization of Teacher Candidates’ Learning ....................................................................... 26
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology
Methodological Framework .................................................................................................................. 39
Case Study ............................................................................................................................................... 40
Context of Study .................................................................................................................................. 41
Participants ............................................................................................................................................ 44
Data Sources .......................................................................................................................................... 49
Data Analysis ......................................................................................................................................... 56
Definition of Terms .............................................................................................................................. 59
Validity and Ethical Issues and Data Privacy ...................................................................................... 60
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 65

Chapter 4 – Findings
Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 66
Maria ...................................................................................................................................................... 67
Background ........................................................................................................................................... 68
Maria’s Unit .......................................................................................................................................... 69
First Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Writer Identity .................................................... 70
Second Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Teacher Identity .............................................. 74
Third Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Perceived Students’ Needs ............................... 78
Summary of Influences on Maria’s Writing Instruction ........................................ 87
Xavier .................................................................................................................. 89
Background ....................................................................................................... 89
Xavier’s Unit ....................................................................................................... 90
First Influence on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing: Teacher Identity .................. 90
Second Influence on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing: Perceived Students’ Needs
.......................................................................................................................... 95
Summary of Influences on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing ............................... 100
Cross-Case Analysis .......................................................................................... 101
Overview of Influences on Maria’s Use of Writing ........................................ 102
Overview of Influences on Xavier’s Use of Writing ....................................... 103
Cross-Case Synthesis ....................................................................................... 103
Differences ......................................................................................................... 103
Commonalities .................................................................................................. 106
Possible Explanations for Differences in Influences .................................... 112
Summary of Cross-Case Analysis .................................................................... 113
Answers to Research Questions ....................................................................... 115
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 122

Chapter 5 – Implications and Conclusions
Additions to Current Research .......................................................................... 123
Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................... 123
Findings and Current Research ......................................................................... 135
Limitations ......................................................................................................... 141
Areas for Future Research ............................................................................... 143
Researcher’s Reflections ................................................................................... 155
Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 156

Works Cited ...................................................................................................... 157

Appendix A: Questions for First Interview ....................................................... 167
Appendix B: Questions for Xavier’s Second Interview .................................... 169
Appendix C: Questions for Xavier’s Third Interview ....................................... 170
Appendix D: Questions for Maria’s Second Interview ..................................... 172
Appendix E: Questions for Maria’s Third Interview ......................................... 174
Appendix F: List of “Does this count as teaching writing?” used in Interview 3 . 176
Appendix G: Codebook with examples .............................................................. 177
Appendix H: Organization of codes .................................................................. 180
List of Figures

Figure 1. Literature-based Theoretical Framework ......................................................... 27, 125

Figure 2. Maria’s Outline for Unit Assessment .................................................................. 84

Figure 3. Xavier’s Outline for Unit Assessment – Introduction ........................................... 97

Figure 4. Xavier’s Outline for Unit Assessment – Supporting Paragraph ........................... 98

Figure 5: Xavier’s Grading Criteria for Unit Assessment .................................................. 99

Figure 6: Research-based Theoretical Framework ............................................................. 126
Tables

Table 1: Interview Details ................................................................. 50
Table 2: Overview of Influences on Maria’s Teaching of Writing .................. 68
Table 3: Overview of Influences on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing .................. 89
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The English curriculum according to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) includes reading, writing, speaking and listening. And yet, many new teachers do not receive adequate training in the teaching of writing. Instruction in how to teach reading is often given priority in teacher education programs and neither in-service or pre-service teachers feel they have been trained adequately in the teaching of writing (Myers et al., 2016). And the results of this lack of preparation are showing.

According to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011), only 24% of eighth graders tested and 24% of twelfth graders tested scored at the proficient-level in writing. Only 3% in each grade scored at the advanced level. Students’ scores on one test should not be the metric for success or failure, especially when that test assesses students through timed-writings, but research is finding that when students have time to produce more polished pieces of writing, they are still faltering. For example, “Professors state that students can produce journals, narrations, and recounts quite well but that they lack the skills to create a piece of factual writing that is necessary for success in higher education” (Gallavan, Bowles, & Young, 2007) and almost “one third of high school graduates are not ready for college-level English composition courses” (ACT, 2005 as cited in Graham & Perin, 2007). For students to develop the skills to complete assignments that are more complex than journal entries and summaries, they need to have teachers who can help them gain those skills. Unfortunately, writing often takes a backseat in teacher education programs.

Knowledge of this gap in teacher candidates’ (TCs’) preparation is not new to teacher educators, but “[d]espite increasing demands for students’ writing expertise,
writing instruction for teachers is usually embedded into reading methods courses (Morgan, 2010) and few states require a separate writing methods course for certification (National Commission on Writing, 2003)” (Myers et al., 2016, p. 310). Also, despite a desire to become English teachers, some pre-service teachers are not confident in their own writing ability or do not consider themselves to be writers (Street, 2003). Once they get into the field, new in-service teachers comment that they did not receive enough preparation in how to teach writing (Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen, & Konopak, 2007).

Preparing TCs to be effective teachers of writing is a multi-step process and every TC starts at a different point. TCs must overcome what Lortie (1975) calls the apprenticeship of observation and be willing to teach writing in ways they were not taught, they must become confident writers in their own right so that attitude can be passed through their instruction to the students, they need to know the theoretical underpinnings of best teaching practices, and then they need to learn how to apply those theoretically-founded practices in a classroom of students and teachers who may be reluctant to change from the status quo. And all of this must be done often in three to four semesters while TCs are also learning to teach reading, classroom management, unit planning, and all the other pieces of core teacher knowledge.

**Vocabulary**

I have chosen to use “teacher candidate” as a general term for any student who is taking coursework to prepare to teach and/or is teaching in a classroom under the supervision of a mentor. Depending on their placement in a program, teacher candidates may be called pre-service teachers, student teachers and/or interns. Pre-service teachers
often refer to students who are taking courses and are not in a classroom full-time. Student teachers are university students who are in a school full-time for an extended period (semester, trimester, etc.). Interns refers to students who are part of a full-year immersive internship where they take courses and participate in classroom practice concurrently. Practicum refers to any time a teacher candidate is in a classroom and is given teaching responsibilities.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to better understand what factors influence how teacher candidates choose to teach writing when they are given leeway to do so during their practicum. This study will build on previous research that has looked at changes that can take place during coursework and longitudinal case studies that describe the learning process from student to teacher candidate to teacher. As part of most teacher education programs, teacher candidates must plan and implement “their unit” during their full-time teaching practicum, but these units often have to fit within the expectations of the department, school and district. In comparison to previous research, my goal is to focus on the influences of the decisions teacher candidates make when they are teaching “their unit” in their practicum, how they make those decisions and what conflicts arise that they need to resolve.

**Research Questions**

My primary research question is **What influences on writing instruction do TCs identify as impacting their unit and lesson planning and/or classroom practice? How much impact does each influence have at any one time?** To answer this question in more detail, I will also propose findings that respond to the following supporting questions:
• For what purposes do teacher candidates set writing tasks or emphasize writing or offer writing opportunities? And what role does the needs of students have on TCs’ decision-making when planning to teach or teaching writing in a secondary ELA classroom?

• When TCs feels that two or more sources of influence are giving conflicting advice, how do they decide who/what to listen to? What changes would the TCs make if they had more freedom?

• What are TCs’ previous experiences as writers and teaching writing? How do TCs describe “teaching” writing? What does that phrase mean to them?

Relevance of Research Question

In the next chapter I will explain in more detail that there is little research on how future secondary ELA teachers are taught to teach writing and much of the research that does exist shows that many teacher candidates do not receive instruction in how to teach writing or the content is combined with other courses or other grades. This leads me to wonder how these students with little to no knowledge of research-based teaching practices are teaching writing and why they make the choices they do when planning and implementing writing instruction. The goal of my research is to explore how two teacher candidates who received little instruction on teaching writing chose to teach writing during their units and what influenced their decisions. In an ideal world, we, teacher educators, would hope that content we teach in coursework would have some influence on what teacher candidates teach in the field. But, this begs the question, what are they doing and why when they have no coursework or knowledge of the subject?
Conclusion

In the next four chapters, I will provide a review of current literature on learning how to teach writing and a theoretical framework for how learning takes place during practicums. I will follow this with a description of my research study and process including information on my participants and their selection and data collection and analysis. In chapter four, I will share my findings and connect them to my research questions and in chapter five I will explain how my research can further teacher educators’ research and practice.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is four-fold. First, I will review what current research has found about influences on teacher candidates’ teaching of writing. Second, I will summarize current best practices on teaching writing and two pedagogical choices that were present in the school that was the setting for this research. Third, using sociocultural theory as a foundation, I will provide a theoretical framework for how learning can take place that includes common influences teacher candidates meet when learning to teach. Fourth, to illustrate how my theoretical framework could look when enacted by teacher candidates, I will describe how these influences could interact in order for teacher candidates to learn to teach writing during their practicum. Finally, I will explain how “sensemaking” (Allen & Penuel, 2015) acts as a useful tool to understand the decision-making process of teacher candidates as they make decisions about teaching writing.

Literature Review

What Makes a Good Writer: Teacher Candidates at the Start

While writing is a key element of an English curriculum, it is wrong to assume English majors and English teacher candidates like to write or see themselves as good writers (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Teacher candidates come to teacher education programs with positive and negative experiences about writing, but there are ways to alter TCs’ view of writing. Research has shown that changing this perspective is important because teachers who view themselves as writers create a more positive working environment for writing in their classrooms (Gallavan et al., 2007; Gerla, 2010; Street, 2003).
TCs’ perceptions of themselves as writers can come from multiple sources. When looking at their TCs’ literacy autobiographies, Norman and Spencer (2005) found that 90% of the class attributed their self-confidence as writers to “influential people in their environment” (p. 30), with former teachers being at the top of the list. But teachers are not the only source of encouragement or discouragement. When looking at the three teacher candidates he studied, Street (2003) found his “confident writer” had bad experiences with writing until college, but:

Her family support structure proved crucial in maintaining her vision as a writer. [The student's] father, for example—a minister holding a doctorate—was described by [the student] as “always writing.” Furthermore, [she] reported that her mother made sure that the home was a “print rich environment” and “always stressed the importance of reading and writing while [she] was growing up.” (p. 41).

Positive experiences were often equated to the amount of support or feedback the TCs received when they were students. Monica didn't like that her high school teachers would just put a grade with no comments. Lisa, Street’s “developing writer,” was constantly criticized for her handwriting, even in high school. Street found that the self-perceptions each of his teacher candidates had about themselves as writers impacted how they taught in the classroom.

Zimmerman, Morgan and Kidder-Brown (2014) designed their methods course with a writing workshop structure to see if their teacher candidates’ “sense of self as writers and as teachers of writing” (p. 142) changed as a result of the semester-long methods course. By running the class like a writing workshop, the instructors aimed to show the teacher candidates new ways to see what writing in the classroom can look like and to increase
their enjoyment in writing. All of the TCs declared that they had a positive shift in how they viewed themselves as writers. Also, after reflecting on their own writing in the class, the TCs came to some conclusions about how they would teach writing. For example, a TC who wrote a memoir in the class “cried as she realized how much her mother had ‘invested’ in making her the person she is today” (p. 149) and she realized that she would have to make her classroom a safe space for students if she wanted them to take risks and be vulnerable.

In a content literacy course she taught, Peggy Daisey (2008) also wanted to try and adjust her teacher candidates’ perceptions about writing. She asked the teacher candidates in her class to draw their writing process and then used those drawings to assess whether her students’ writing enjoyment had decreased or increased after they wrote a “How to” book in the class. She found the teacher candidates were initially anxious about the genre because it wasn’t a typical term paper; however, as they began to take ownership of their work, their writing enjoyment increased. In a partner study, Daisey (2009) also found that just the act of writing how-to books increased the teacher candidates’ enjoyment of writing and allowed them to see a place for non-traditional genres in the classroom.

Collectively, these studies show that teacher candidates come to education programs with strong feelings about themselves as writers and teaching writing in general. Fortunately, research also shows that when they take courses that model effective writing instruction and are asked to reflect on their own experiences as students and writers, teacher candidates can move beyond their initial dispositions and begin their journey into becoming effective teachers of writers.
What Does It Mean to Teach Writing: Perspectives During Coursework

Depending on the age range of students in a class, teaching writing can look very different. Younger students may be learning how to write stories; older students may be writing multiple-page arguments. While there are commonalities in good writing pedagogy that cover all the grades — the importance of choice, allowing students to take ownership of their work, and providing opportunities for students to write for genuine audiences — the level of complexity of the writing and the ideas vary between a first grader and a twelfth grader. What teacher candidates believe teaching writing should look like in the grades they are teaching and why they should teach it can impact their classroom instruction.

In her work with early childhood educators, Hall's (2017) teacher candidates began the class with unfocused views about what it meant to teach writing and its importance in an ECE classroom. For example, one student, Mary, began the class believing that teaching writing meant teaching students how to write letters. By the end of the course, Mary noted, “I understand now that writing is about so much more than the physical act of forming letters. I realize that writing develops on a continuum and the first stage is when students draw pictures” (p. 149). A second student, Sarah Alice, believed that teaching writing was about taking the students through a step-by-step progression as a group. She wrote on the end of course survey:

I thought that teaching writing could only be done one way and that it was very methodical. What I have learned is that it can be taught in many fun ways. I think it is important for students to work at their own pace and feel like real writing because this is the process real authors use. (p. 149)
The teacher candidates in the class gained a better understanding of what it means to teach writing, but they also understood what functions writing could serve in learning and why it is valuable to spend time on it.

In addition to knowing what teaching writing means in each grade and how a teacher candidate feels about *themselves* as writers, teacher candidates must also come to perceive writing as a skill that can be developed. One teacher candidate in Street’s (2003) study whom he labelled as a reluctant writer “reported in an interview that she ‘doubted writing could be taught,’ believing instead that ‘it was a gift one possessed or failed to possess’” (p. 39). In their study of elementary school teacher candidates, Norman and Spencer (2005) found “more than half (63%) of the [teacher candidates] described writing ability as having characteristics that [Norman and Spencer] classified as a view of writing as an inherent talent or gift” (p. 34). These same teacher candidates, when receiving grades and feedback on their own writing, did not see it as a way to grow and improve as writers, but rather as a final determination of their ability.

While there is research on how teacher candidates’ perception of writing is connected to their use of a solid writing pedagogy in their teacher education courses (Gerla, 2010; Street, 2003), there is limited research on how those perceptions change when the teacher candidates leave the university and enter the classroom. There are multiple longitudinal studies (Grossman et al., 2000; Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky, & Fry, 2003; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003; Smagorinsky, Gibson, Bickmore, Moore, & Cook, 2004; Smagorinsky, Wilson, & Moore, 2011) that show what influences teacher candidates’ practices, but they don’t delve very deeply into whether the teacher candidates
have changed their beliefs about writing instruction or perceptions on the purpose of writing or if they are letting outside pressures dictate what they do in the classroom.

**What Does It Mean to Teach Writing: Perceptions During Practicum**

While the research on how methods and literacy courses can change teacher candidates’ perceptions of themselves as writers and their beliefs about what it means to teaching writing, that is only half of the story. Not all teacher candidates take methods courses that are as rich in pedagogy and reflection as those given by Daisey (2008, 2009), Street (2003), and Wang and Odell (2003). In some cases, the teacher candidates have to seek out ways to learn how to teach writing because the material is not presented satisfactorily in their methods courses (Grossman et al., 2000). And, if they are provided with instruction on the teaching of writing, teacher candidates may be unable to implement practices they learn due to restrictions in their student teaching placements. If teacher candidates are unable to practice teaching writing during student teaching, it is difficult for them to determine what they believe about the place of writing in the classroom since they have only seen one model in practice.

Looking across the case studies focusing on secondary English teachers, two themes emerged:

1) **Inaccurate understanding of instructional tools:** Teacher candidates would describe their classroom activities and the theory behind them in ways that supported best practices, but in reality, such practices were not being used. This pattern demonstrates the need for teacher candidates to practice and receive feedback on what they learn in coursework so they can be sure their practice aligns with the theory it is based on.
2) **Classroom placements:** The placement of the teacher candidates is crucial to their development. Many of the teacher candidates studied were placed in classroom situations that did not provide them with the opportunity to try the methods they had learned during university coursework.

**Inaccurate understanding of instructional tools**

Teacher candidates sometimes molded their instruction to fit what they perceived to be the elements of good teaching. In Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, Place, et al. (2000) teacher candidate Bill believed strongly that writing could be a source of equity and social justice in the classroom. He also believed students should feel a sense of ownership in their writing. But, Bill did not receive a solid foundation on how to teach writing.

Before he entered student teaching, he was able to participate in a professional development session by Jane Schaffer ("Jane Schaffer Writing Program," 2017) and he loved the method she proposed. To an outsider the Jane Schaffer Method seems controlling. It requires vocabulary and specific rules about lengths of sentences and the order of content. But Bill saw it as a method to create equity since "[t]he unit at its heart attempts to place everybody on the same [plane], at least using the same vocabulary" (Grossman et al., 2000, p. 638). Ironically, he felt the strict modeling would provide his students with a sense of ownership:

He hoped students [would] learn that they are in charge of their own writing, and it’s not something that someone else has to dictate for them.... [He] hope[d] to give them more power of their own selves, give them more ownership of pre-writing strategies. (p. 638)
Bill’s actions suggest that he maintained his perceptions that teaching should be used as a form of social justice and that good writing pedagogy encourages students to take ownership of their work, but he didn’t know how to teach in a way that matched his perceptions about writing, so he reworked his vision of what those qualities meant to fit the practical tools he had been given. His perception of “good teaching” hadn’t changed internally, but had changed externally.

The writing workshop model for teaching writing also provided challenges to teacher candidates. While some teacher candidates would say they valued how the writing workshop model encouraged process writing, connecting reading and writing, and taking ownership of one’s work, multiple teacher candidates used the term when, to an outside observer, they were not using a writing workshop in their classrooms. For example, in one case study, researchers observed a teacher from her methods course through her first year of teaching (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). When reflecting on an observation, the teacher said the activity that had been observed was part of a writing workshop as described by Atwell (1987). Key elements of Atwell’s workshop are time, ownership and response, but the observer concluded:

The time factor, however, was compromised by the pace of the curriculum demands. Following the observation, [the teacher] described this constraint as coming both from students’ enculturation to the pacing of school and her own eye on the ticking of the semester’s clock. [...] Furthermore, her focus of the workshop ended up attending to the [school’s] objectives more than students’ meaning-making, raising questions about the degree to which the workshop arrangement contributed to
students’ sense of ownership over their writing. (Smagorinsky et al., 2004, pp. 236–237)

The teacher was trying to implement the format of a workshop without really understanding the theory behind it. As a result, she labeled writing that took place at stations and received peer response as the workshop approach, but she was undermining how important time and ownership are to good writing.

Wang and Odell (2003) observed a similar situation in their research. The two teacher candidates they were studying, Danielle and Pamela, both claimed to be using a writing workshop approach in their classroom, but one of the teacher candidates was only going through the motions of a writing workshop. Pamela and Danielle both worked with the same teacher and saw the writing workshop method being implemented well, but Pamela entered her student teaching believing that direct instruction was a better way to teach certain aspects of writing. By the end of her student teaching, Pamela felt more positive about the workshop model; however, when she started to teach on her own, she reverted to a more traditional model where she controlled the content and the pacing and the topics even though she described her practice as a writing workshop.

These studies show that teacher candidates’ perceptions of teaching writing can change, but these changes do not always manifest themselves in the teacher candidates’ early years of teaching because of curriculum pressures, lack of implementation knowledge or prior beliefs coming back.

*Classroom placements*

Placing teacher candidates in classrooms that provides space for teacher candidates to practice what they learned in coursework is challenging. TCs are in a subservient
position, making it hard to challenge their mentor teacher’s choices (Johnson et al., 2003). They are working with students who have come to expect a certain style of teaching and a certain kind of participation (Smagorinsky, 2010; Smagorinsky et al., 2004).

Smagorinsky, Wilson and Moore (2011) conducted a multi-year case study in which they analyzed the choices a teacher candidate turned teacher, Brandy, made with respect to teaching grammar. They collected data starting when she was student teaching through her first year of teaching. As she entered student teaching, Brandy said she valued practices that fostered inquiry and were open-ended as opposed to teaching in a teacher-centered manner. While she was student teaching, there was little time for her to practice teaching grammar as it wasn’t a major part of the course’s curriculum. She left student teaching still wanting her grammar instruction to be student-centered and taught in context, but she hadn’t had time to practice what this could look like in a classroom as opposed to a reading in a university course.

In her first year of teaching, Brandy reverted to intense grammar instruction when she was teaching writing, attributing this choice to on-site influences 54 times during an interview. Brandy's practices were often guided by a need to control her classes. Later in her first year, Brandy included more open-ended writing assignments, but the focus on her instruction was still on form over content. She also encouraged her students to use a computer program for grammar instruction and practice. While the focus was still on form, this new instructional method gave students more control over their learning, an instructional trait Brandy valued. In the second half of her first year of teaching, Brandy’s school district implemented stricter control over writing instruction, which led Brandy to continue to focus even more on form. Brandy felt her teaching was student-centered.
because she let students pick what they wrote about, even though she maintained control over how they wrote. In this case, Brandy continued to believe in student-centered instruction, but the curriculum limited her ability to embrace that in her class. But given her continued attempts at trying to give student-choice space in the classroom, it is possible that she might align herself more with material learned in her coursework if given the chance.

In “Student Engagement in the Teaching and Learning of Grammar: A Case Study of an Early-Career Secondary School English Teacher,” Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O’Donnell-Allen, and Konopak (2007) examine a teacher’s beliefs about the role of grammar instruction in the secondary classroom. In her teacher education program, Laura was encouraged to teach grammar in context rather than through “drill-and-kill” exercises. During classroom observations, she was able to see how boring rote instruction was for the students and it was her belief that instruction should be more engaging. During student teaching, Laura’s instruction was impacted by the requirement that her students be able to identify parts of speech on high-stakes tests. In an attempt to give her students more ownership over learning discrete information, Laura had them give presentations on the various parts of speech, essentially letting them take over the instruction. The students were engaged and many presentations were good, but there were problems with the content in some. Laura accommodated for the inaccurate information by creating a final assessment that wouldn’t penalize students if their peers had done a poor job of teaching.

Although Laura’s first attempt at teaching grammar wasn’t a resounding success, she at least was given the space in her practicum to try and blend the requirements of the curriculum and her beliefs about student learning. Over the next three years, Laura taught
in two different schools and her grammar instruction looked different in both, but, the authors point out, “she was adapting herself to the environment and the environment to her own notion of effective instruction” (Smagorinsky et al., 2007, p. 68). Because Laura was given space to try out ideas from her methods course, she was able to start understanding what theories and methods of grammar instruction learned in her university courses could look like in a classroom.

In another longitudinal case study, the focus of the research, Natalie, clearly believed in student-centered learning: “The teacher program has taught me ... to pay attention to your students and [the] need to make them the center of the classroom” (Smagorinsky et al., 2004, p. 224). During her student teaching, as Natalie struggled to balance the needs and expectations of her mentor, who used many teacher-centered lessons, and her training, she did manage to include some activities that were more student-centered. But, the students resisted these lessons, leaving Natalie without a clear concept of how student-centered instruction could work.

**Conclusion**

Previous research has examined teacher candidates’ practices in distinct settings, such as one semester of coursework or over a long period that focused on how teacher candidates’ beliefs and understanding about writing turned into classroom practice over a period of years. My work focuses specifically on teacher candidates during their practicum in a program where coursework and classroom practice happen simultaneously. During this practicum, teacher candidates are in a unique space of being both teacher and student. As a result, they must balance the needs of their mentors, the needs of their university instructors, and the needs of the school. In the next section, I will describe a theoretical
framework for how learning can take place in a social environment with multiple “players” on the field.

**Relevant Overview of Current Teaching of Writing**

Current research argues that teaching writing should be considered a practice that focuses on skills that can be transferred across writing assignments and coursework ([*Framework for success in postsecondary writing*, 2012; Gallagher, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007]) and should, whenever possible, reflect authentic writing practices (see Bailey, 2009; Lindblom, 2015; Lindblom, 2007; Whitney, 2017; Wiggins, 2009) where students are writing to an audience outside the teacher and are making decisions about writing based on the genre more than (sometimes) random teacher expectations (see Fleischer & Andrew-Vaughn, 2009; Whitney, Ridgeman, & Masquelier, 2011).

Another way of thinking about good writing instruction is that teachers should not focus on *what* their students are writing in the moment, but should focus on *how* their students will need to think about writing anything either in school or out. For example, Graham and Perin (2007) write that studying models is part of effective adolescent writing instruction. *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2012) says that for students to be successful after high school, they need “Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts” (p. 5). Both these research-backed strategies illustrate that students should be learning to write by exploring writing and its conventions and how those conventions vary from context to context.
Commercial Writing Programs

Unfortunately, not all writing programs used in high schools align with these ideas. I will describe two practices found in the site where my participants taught, one is part of a commercial curriculum and the other is a convention of the English Department. The John Collins Writing Program (“Collins Educational Associates: Collins Writing Program,” 2017) is a commercial curriculum on teaching writing. The program was most recently revised to address changes in states’ curriculums and tests: “If students cannot write, they cannot pass state tests no matter how well they read or know the content” (p. v). An additional goal is to show teachers in all subject areas how writing can be used to help students learn content and how to reflect on their own products to assess understanding of the content and concepts being addressed.

Collins breaks writing assignments into five types:

- Type One requires just one draft and is about generating ideas, not assessing students;
- Type Two is a short piece of writing that can be used to assess students’ understanding of course content, but writing is not assessed for grammar and style;
- Type Three is writing that is assessed for content and for achievement of three Focus Correction Areas, which can also be called specific standards. Type Three writing should be drafted, read aloud and revised before it is submitted;
- Type Four writing is material that has been read aloud, critiqued by another, and requires two drafts. Type Four writing should be “well-written, but not publishable work” (Collins, 2007, p. 33);
• Type Five writing is publishable writing that “can go outside the classroom without explanation or qualification” (p. 35).

The five types of writing in The Collins Method can be used in classrooms, but he approaches writing from a linear standpoint and argues that students must progress through all four types of writing before trying type five writing. The audience, as stated in the handbook, for types one through four, is the teacher and sometimes classmates. He also presents type five writing as being practically unattainable because they require students who are “sufficiently motivated” and “sufficiently skilled” and there needs to be enough time to go through the drafting, feedback and revising process multiple times (p. 37-38). In contrast to the practices described briefly above, in The Collins Writing Program teachers prescribe the types of writing, the formats and the genres that go with them until Type Five. Some elements of The Collins Writing Program are useful in writing instruction, such as giving students areas to focus on in a writing assignment so they can direct their energy towards understanding one or two concepts at a time. But, in general, the writing is very teacher-controlled and not about authentic practices or transferable skills.

**Departmental Conventions**

Over 8 years ago the English Department at the host school agreed that everyone would teach argumentation using the Toulmin model (Toulmin, 1958) starting in grade 7. There are two areas of concern about the widespread use any static, pre-formatted model for writing, but I shall illustrate how the Toulmin model was mishandled at the host school and explain how that mishandling hindered the teacher candidates’ learning to teach writing using best practices. First, the model was not intended to be a way to generate arguments, but rather a way to assess the validity of arguments; and, second, the majority
of the department did not understand the “formula,” and the terms used in the model held less and less accurate meaning. Through its evolution over the past eight years at the high school, the Toulmin method has morphed into three components: claim, data, and warrant. These three elements by themselves are essential to a text-based arguments, which is often found on standardized tests and is becoming more dominant in writing in schools (DeStigter, 2015).

While the Toulmin model (Toulmin, 1958) is found in many composition textbooks (Hillocks, 2011; Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2015; Smith, Wilhelm, & Fredericksen, 2012), Stephen Toulmin’s model for a logical argument was only appropriated by composition scholars and was presented as an alternative to syllogisms when determining an argument’s validity. In formal logic, “in a valid syllogism the reasoner ‘needs to’ draw the conclusion. In contrast, in a Toulmin argument, she is allowed to draw the conclusion. A warrant, normally, is permission to do something, and that permission is conditional.... In many secondary texts on Toulmin’s model, the warrant is called an ‘inference license’” (Keith & Beard, 2008, p. 221; emphasis in original). Because the structure is seen as a formula for arguments, students and teachers struggle to apply this formula in a meaningful way because of that “inference license.” Toulmin's model is a sociocultural way of viewing arguments. If one is making an argument to a friendly crowd the warrant can be unstated because the audience is likely to share the same ideals as the writer. However, if the argument is made to an antagonistic audience, the warrant needs to be stated more explicitly so the audience can choose to agree or disagree with the argument based on the inferences being made by the writer.
The department has chosen to use a sociocultural argument structure for writing that rarely has a specific audience or purpose. This bastardization of Toulmin’s original model results in students who are no longer thinking of how to form a solid argument, they are trying to put together sentences that they think meet the definition of a claim, data or warrant, each of which changes from one writing assignment to the next (Hillocks, 2010). As I will illustrate in chapter four, the adherence to this model had a huge impact on what and how both participants in this study taught writing.

**Conceptualization of Learning to Teach Writing**

In the following section, I will explain how social factors, such as people and setting, can impact how teacher candidates learn to teach writing. I will follow with examples of how these factors can impact the teacher candidates’ practices in teaching writing.

**Facets of Learning: People**

*Personal experience*

One key facet of learning to teach writing is personal experience. In his classic study of teachers, Lortie (1975) found that inexperienced teachers and teacher candidates relied heavily on their own experiences as students to decide how and what to teach, a quality which he coined the *apprenticeship of observation*. This apprenticeship begins in elementary school and plays a strong role in teacher candidates’ views of themselves as writers. These self-perceptions can then frame teacher candidates’ teaching decisions and the place of writing in their classrooms (Street, 2003). Teacher candidates’ personal histories with writing begin to form before they begin teacher education programs. Research shows that it is possible to change how TCs feel about writing (Wang & Odell, 2003) and themselves as writers (Norman & Spencer, 2005), but only if these concerns are
addressed openly in the TE program. I will describe in more detail in chapter 4 how the two participants in this student perceived themselves as poor academic writers and how this impacted their teaching.

**Mentors and Professional Learning Communities**

Another key facet of learning to teach writing is the mentors and other in-service teachers in the department who TCs interact with during their practicum. Mentors can have a huge impact on how teacher candidates learn to teach, but because they can take many different approaches in supporting the teacher candidates in their classroom, their impact is not always positive. Some mentors provide little room for creativity or new ideas and activities on the part of the teacher candidate (e.g. Johnson et al., 2003), others leave the teacher candidate to sink or swim on their own, often using the reasoning “It worked for me…” (e.g. Smagorinsky, Wilson, & Moore, 2011). Ideally, mentors will fit somewhere between these two extremes, but how much they share their classroom and their thinking with the teacher candidates can affect how those teacher candidates come to understand how to teach writing.

Even if a mentor does provide support and instruction to a teacher candidate, there is no guarantee that how they are teaching writing is aligned with the practices teacher candidates are learning in their university coursework or practices that teacher educators would call “best” or “promising.”

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) allow teacher candidates to interact with other in-service teachers. In some schools, a PLC can be made of a group of teachers who all teach the same cohort of students. In other situations, PLCs can be made up of teachers who all teach the same course or grade. PLCs can be used as places of inquiry where
teachers work together to identify difficulties their students are facing and finding ways to support those students. Other PLCs use their time to develop and refine curriculum. The teacher candidates in this study participated in a PLC that focused on developing and refining curriculum. The PLC had decided that all members of the team would teach the same unit at the same time. Therefore, the PLC in this case impacted the content and the pacing of the unit the teacher candidates were teaching. I will describe in chapter 4 how the teacher candidates were provided with some autonomy, allowing them to explore how they wanted to use writing, but also how this autonomy was slowly removed as a result of work with the PLC.

**Peers**

Peers make up another facet of teacher candidates’ view of teaching of writing. Some teacher candidates may work closely with others who are in the same school for an extended period of time. Peers can be the emotional support that all new teachers need, but they can also be a source of mis/information and a sounding board for ideas. In one study of teacher candidates learning to teach writing, Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin and Place (2000) found that a group of teacher candidates were dissatisfied with their methods course so they created a “shadow” methods course on their own time, bringing in materials from their practicums and other ideas. While teacher candidates are student teaching full-time, peers can provide resources or feedback on each other’s ideas based on their own experiences and classroom observations.

Peers can also serve as a conduit to other classrooms. Teachers may not have the time or inclination to share materials or discuss class activities with other mentors’ teacher candidates. However, if two teachers who teach a common course both work with teacher
candidates, those TCs can share and learn from each other, even if their mentors don’t talk regularly. Peers, mentors and personal experience play roles in how teacher candidates perceive how they should to teach writing. But, while these elements work together, they are not always harmonious in message.

**Facets of Learning: The Context**

While personal experience, mentors, and peers are three major factors centered on teacher candidates that influence how they learn to teach writing, teacher candidates do not exist in a vacuum. The context of the school(s) where practicums or internships take place, the curriculum they are required to follow, the students the teacher candidates work with, and the community in which they are working also play a role in teacher candidates’ development.

**Curricula**

Another facet of learning to teach writing is the curriculums in which TCs are immersed. Within a school, curricular decisions that affect how teacher candidates learn to teach writing take place at multiple levels. There may be general topics or books or writing assignments that must be covered. In other situations, mentor teachers may have a required day-by-day curriculum to follow. In some cases, English courses are split between “reading” and “writing,” which prevents, or at least inhibits, teacher candidates connecting reading and writing in their courses, a disservice to themselves and their students.

At Centre City High School, the location of this study, the English department has decided that argumentation will be taught using a slimmed down model of the Toulmin method. As instruction in how to use this method has been watered down over the years, most students learn that an argument has three parts: claim, data and warrant. I have seen
this have two effects on the teacher candidates at that school. First, one graduate from Centre City High School who returned there to do her internship believes that Toulmin is the *only* way to structure an argument. Second, the TCs are not getting exposed to the implementation of any ways to teach argument beyond Toulmin. The goal of the department was to use consistent language in teaching an argument style that is highly valued on standardized testing. In the process, argumentative writing, specifically in this form, is becoming a more present mode of writing in general (DeStigter, 2015). The result has been students being able to define claim, data and warrant, but not know how to use them; and this problem is not unique to Centre City High School (Hillocks, 2005). But it also means the TCs at the school have only learned to teach one style of argumentation in one way.

In the next section, I will describe how the factors explained above work with sociocultural theory to explain how teacher candidates can learn to teach writing.

**Conceptualization of Teacher Candidates’ Learning**

I ground my conceptualization of learning in Vygotsky’s ideas of spontaneous and scientific concepts (Karpov, 2003) and the role that “play” takes in an individual’s learning (Johnson et al., 2003). When deciding how to teach writing, teacher candidates must make decisions constantly to determine what they will do. Whether they are conscious of this decision-making process or not, they are dealing with potential sources of conflict. I frame my discussion of these decisions or conflicts using Allen and Penuel (2015) “sensemaking” theory. (See Figure 1 for Literature-based Theoretical Framework)
Conflict is not always bad. If teacher candidates are placed in environments with conflicts and are forced to choose paths or find middle ground, if their learning is mediated and scaffolded, and if they are given time to reflect on and process the conflicting ideas, then the result can be a reflective practitioner who realizes there is more than one way to teach writing.

Figure 1

*Literature-based Theoretical Framework*

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**Spontaneous and Scientific Concepts**

Teacher candidates are like children in the sense that they are new to seeing schools from the viewpoint of a teacher and their ideas about teaching do not always match with
what they are seeing. In his work on learning and development, Vygotsky noted when children were given no structure or scaffolding in a situation, they would develop “spontaneous” concepts to explain what they were observing. These “spontaneous” concepts” would be true within a specific setting, but not necessarily true beyond it. It is only through guidance and mediation that children could develop a broader understanding, or “scientific” concept, about the events at hand (Karpov, 2003). The same is true for teacher candidates. They need the ability to “play” with the ideas from their coursework so they can move from a “spontaneous” understanding to a “scientific” one.

**Play**

Vygotsky (1978) argues that learners’ understanding of concepts happens over time as learners begin to interact in different social settings requiring them to adapt what they know (or thought they knew) to new circumstances. While “scientific” concepts are more accurate than “spontaneous” ones, if learners only know these concepts as abstract ideas, the learners are not likely to internalize the concepts. Instead, Vygotsky argues, learners need to explore how the “scientific” ideas they learn in school exist in authentic environments. In the case of teacher education, where a dichotomy is created between practice and theory (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985), it is only through blending the theory with the practice that teacher candidates can gain a deep understanding of the why and how of teaching (Smagorinsky et al., 2003)

When I was learning to teach, I participated in a program that prioritized classroom practice over theory. I left the program eager to teach and able to replicate my experiences as a student and the activities my mentor and I had used in class, but I had no concept of the theoretical underpinnings of why my mentor made the decisions she did. My first year
of teaching was very challenging to say the least. If teacher candidates are taught best practices in coursework, but are unable to apply those practices in their practicum classrooms, they are perhaps in an even worse predicament than I was because they had two ways to think about writing and had to struggle with which was “correct.” Hopefully as they progress in teaching, they realize there is no “correct” way to teach writing. But, as new teachers, they are left to play with the concepts from coursework and their experiences from student teaching in a setting without a significant amount of support or time for reflection.

Learning to teach is a long process and certainly the work seen in one unit by teacher candidates can only indicate a starting point on their path to becoming a teacher of writing. But, what these case studies will illustrate is that when teacher candidates have no chance to learn the “scientific” concepts of writing pedagogy, even in the abstract setting of the classroom, they cannot try to apply those concepts in the classroom. As I will show, both students reverted to the modeling and language used by their mentor teachers and the department, raising the question of how well the teacher candidates could handle curriculum expectations in different environments.

**Sensemaking**

To try to understand how the teacher candidates handle these three major conflicts, I use a theory from organizational studies called “sensemaking” (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Two reasons sensemaking can help sort through the teacher candidates’ actions are:

2. Sensemaking is “rooted in social interaction” because people work together to make sense of new ideas by interacting with each other. And, sensemaking is “deeply situated in teachers’ embedded context” (Coburn, 2001, p. 147).

The actions and understandings teacher candidates garner during their practicums about teaching writing are not the result of an individual trying to understand a single concept. Rather, teacher candidates work with each other in courses and in placements, with their mentors and professors, and with their students, in the context of a school when they make decisions about their daily practice. Sensemaking provides a frame for describing how people resolve conflicts within a group of people in a specific system.

**Writer Identities**

The concept of “writer identity” is difficult to define as it can encompass so many elements of a person’s being and doing that leaving it as a singular noun does it a disservice. How people’s writer identities are presented or performed in one location may be different than theirs in another. How they view their identity in one setting, is likely different than how they view themselves in another. When viewed through the lens of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) “communities of practice,” writers’ identities are seen as multi-faceted. Writers develop their identities through their experiences with different people, places and times, and the writers’ positioning within race, socioeconomic class and gender (Eyres, 2017). Writers’ identities are shaped by interactions with people and events in these settings and their acceptance or rejection can impact how they see themselves as writers (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, as cited in McKinney & Giorgis, 2009)

Most teacher candidates are drawn to teaching English because of a love of reading, not writing, and it is common for ELA teacher candidates to not like writing, not feel
confident in writing, and avoid teaching writing (see Gannon & Davies, 2007). But, teacher candidates’ identities as writers are in a state flux. They are in a position where they are moving from, for example, writing essays for teachers or writing journal entries for themselves, to creating a writer identity as a teacher. Teacher candidates’ writing identities are in a “borderlands” (Alsup, 2006) location as they navigate their views of themselves as writers for themselves, writing for social purposes, writing for student purposes and writing for teacher purposes. Alsup argues teacher educators should help teacher candidates create new teacher-writer identities that encompass their identities as students and individuals “in which to experience a richer, fuller and more complex understanding of the self and other’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 15)” (Eyres, 2017, p. 9).

How a teacher candidate identifies as a writer and lives their identities is important in the classroom as the “teaching of writing is tied to their own experiences as a writer” (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Good writing instruction comes from teachers who write with their students, share with them the struggles of the writing process, and help students learn not just what to write, but to how to write (Eyres, 2017, p. 40).

**Teacher Identities**

How teacher identities are formed or what perspectives one can take to look at teacher identities vary. Teachers and teacher candidates do not have a single teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), nor do their identities become static at some point (Beijaard et al., 2004). As TCs move through different settings and have more voice and power in those settings, they will be able to make sense of any tensions differently than before. For example, TCs have very little power to change curriculum in a department, so most TCs must take on an identity that accommodates that role as an “apprentice” and to
resolve the tension by creating an identity that appeases the university and the school. After teaching for a few years, those same teacher candidates may have more of a voice in the department or school setting and can change how they present themselves to students and peers. Reverting back to or revising the sensemaking they used before when they met the same tension between their beliefs and the school’s, teacher candidates, now teachers, can putting their beliefs to the forefront.

For this study, I will focus how my participants expressed their teacher identities from a situated cognition perspective, based around *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and settings in which teacher candidates engage, and the work of Beijaard and Meijer (2017) that examines how personal and professional beliefs of TCs come together to form identities and how TCs can use sensemaking to deal with the many tensions that can arise while developing identities.

From a situated cognition perspective, teacher identities are created through the communities they participate in. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) *legitimate peripheral participation* model is central to this theory of identity development, but a key element to understanding how LPP impacts teacher candidates’ identities’ development is understanding that there are multiple situations and relationships in those settings that create the identities TCs assign to themselves. In addition, teacher candidates’ identities are impacted by experiences in settings they participated in before starting a teacher education program. Thus, teacher candidates might come into TE programs with a strong feeling about one aspect of their identity, but as they participate in the settings of the TE program, those aspects of identities may change.
However, looking to situated cognition to explain TCs’ identities’ formation illustrates some of the struggles teacher candidates have when developing identities that are different from the setting in which they participate. For example, Flores (2007) found that teacher candidates who entered a teacher education program with a strong social justice belief struggled to implement their beliefs because they were in a powerless setting that did not focus on social justice in the classroom (Cherrington, 2017). In general, the legitimate peripheral participation model struggles to address how change can take place with education settings because “situative approaches enculturates student and novice teachers into existing practices and thus ensures the replication of social and pedagogical practices (McNamara, Jones & Murray, 2014)” (Cherrington, 2017, p. 11). The result sometimes is that the teacher candidates’ identities are reformed to match those of the mentor teacher or school or teacher education program. But, by exposing the LPP settings to teacher candidates and allowing them to openly process and question what they are seeing, doing and thinking, teacher candidates can create and maintain teacher identities that they value (Brown et al., 1989).

Another key element to the development of teacher identities is the acceptance that identity formation is an on-going process and identities will change as teacher candidates enter new situations or engage with new people. One way to examine this aspect of teacher identities is to explore how TCs handle conflicts or tensions between beliefs they bring with them to a TE program and the beliefs enacted in the setting by the people they are working with. These conflicts and resolutions help TCs develop their identities. Beijaard and Meijer (2017) explain that teacher candidates may use sensemaking to address tensions they are feeling and this can result in TCs assimilating new ideas into their current
identities, accommodating new ideas where TCs transform their “knowledge and beliefs and [adapt] these to what is new” (p. 6). However, sensemaking does not always result in a positive blending of ideas; TCs can resist or distance themselves from new ideas and use that distance to secure their beliefs, or they can tolerate the tension by acknowledging it, but not change their identities to reflect the new ideas or perceptions presented to them.

In the next chapters, I will illustrate how the two participants used sensemaking to create aspects of their teacher identities through accommodation. In particular, I will explain how the candidates adjusted their pedagogical stances and beliefs about ways students can demonstrate understanding when they met the department’s curriculum.

Conclusion: Conceptualization of Teacher Candidates’ Learning

My work looks at learning through a sociocultural lens that focuses on teacher candidates’ understanding of teaching using Vygotsky’s ideas of “play” and “scientific” and “spontaneous” concepts. Since “play” requires learners to explore new ideas, there is bound to be experiences of conflict as that “play” happens within the structure of a curriculum and a teacher education program. I use sensemaking theory to frame their decision-making process and teacher and writing identities to connect influences on the participants choices.

In the next section, I will explain three situations that may require the teacher candidates to make sense of conflicting ideas: theory and practice, expectations and reality, and personal versus departmental goals.

Conflict One: Theory and Practice

One of the biggest conflicts teacher candidates describe meeting is the theory-practice divide that takes place when the methods and ideas presented in university
coursework don’t appear to match with what they see in their practicum classrooms. As explained above, this perceived split is not necessarily a detriment to teacher candidates’ education if imparters of both the theory and the practice understand their role in the teacher candidate’s education. If teacher candidates are given the chance to talk through how they are thinking about what and how they are teaching, then theory and practice can work well to help teacher candidates support their understanding of “scientific” concepts learned in their abstract form during coursework through applying them with support in the classroom.

In addition, as teacher candidates meet new situations in the classroom they weren’t expecting, university instructors can help them move from reacting to those situations in a one-off manner using a “spontaneous” understanding of the situation by showing them the bigger picture of why this unexpected situation arose, why it might arise again and how it can be handled in multiple situations, not just in the immediate moment, therefore moving the teacher candidates’ understanding from a “spontaneous” concept to a “scientific” one.

With all that being said, it is ultimately teacher candidates who must make sense of the situation and expectations, often in the moment, and decide what aspects of theory and practice they are going to apply at any one time. I would also like to note that the theory and practice conflict does not necessarily have to appear to be on the same topic. There are times when a university supervisor suggests teaching writing one way, while the mentor wants the students taught another way. While this could be seen as a conflict in teaching methods, it could also be a deeper conflict between the university supervisor’s beliefs about teaching and the mentor’s beliefs about teaching. In these cases, teacher candidates
are not only managing the practical in the classroom, they are also making sense of where they stand pedagogically with respect to teaching English.

Conflict Two: Reality versus Expectation

When teacher candidates use writing in their classes, they have expectations about how the students will participate and what kind of work they can produce. When the results don’t meet their expectations, they have to be willing to identify what ideas and ideals were clashing and what changes they can make to align the discordant issues. There are many reasons why reality and expectation may conflict: misunderstanding of the students’ abilities or readiness for an assignment; poor explanation of the task or assignment; conflicting ideas about the purpose and usefulness of different writing activities between the students and the teacher candidates or the teacher candidates and their mentors. For example, when teacher candidates hold expectations for their students that are not met, whether these expectations are behavioral or academic, they must make sense of this mismatch and determine how to move forward with instruction and with expectations.

Conflict Three: Personal versus School Goals

Over the year, teacher candidates will develop beliefs about what is important to teach and how teaching should happen. When they come to take more control in the planning for the classes, these beliefs begin to emerge. But, as more and more schools are regulating curriculums or using commercial ones, teacher candidates must learn to work within the parameters of what the department and district have deemed the right way to teach and/or the right content to teach. This is a particularly difficult situation for teacher candidates to make sense of because so many decisions were made before they started
their teacher education program, and their lack of power gives many little room to suggest alternative ways of teaching, novels to read or final assessments to use.

For example, if a teacher candidate values freewriting because it allows students to explore complex ideas in a low-stakes environment, but their mentor values more structured writing, the teacher candidate must make sense of this conflict when deciding what to teach in class and how much to push back (and how much they can push back) on their mentor’s input. How much they push back can be limited by their mentor, other teachers in the department, or perhaps departmental regulation. For example, I have seen one teacher candidate persuade her mentor to allow her to bring in four new books into the curriculum for choice reads to create a unit around social justice. To do this, she had to persuade her mentor the unit was worthwhile; she had to persuade the other teachers that she was still meeting the demands of the curriculum; and she had to persuade the department chair in order to receive funds to buy the books. Other teacher candidates did not work with such flexible mentors. One of my participants was told that the students should read the core novel for the unit he was teaching because the department had bought copies of it and they needed to get their money’s worth out of it. This novel has been taught at the high school for over 15 years.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explained what current research shows about what influences how teacher candidates teach writing while student teaching. Research shows that mentors, school curriculum, university coursework, and prior personal experience can influence how a teacher candidate chooses to teach writing. In the next chapter I will describe the structure of my research in detail. Specifically, I will address my participants
and how they were selected, the location of the teacher education program, what data was
collected and how analysis was conducted.
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the guiding questions, methodology, data sources, and analysis methods for my study. My primary research question is **What influences on writing instruction do TCs identify as impacting their unit and lesson planning and/or classroom practice? How much impact does each influence have at any one time?** To answer this question in more detail, I also focus on the following supporting questions:

- **For what purposes do teacher candidates set writing tasks or emphasize writing or offer writing opportunities? And what role does the needs of students have on TCs’ decision-making when planning to teach or teaching writing in a secondary ELA classroom?**
- **When TCs feels that two or more sources of influence are giving conflicting advice, how do they decide who/what to listen to? What changes would the TCs make if they had more freedom?**
- **What are TCs’ previous experiences as writers and teaching writing? How do TCs describe “teaching” writing? What does that phrase mean to them?**

In the following section, I will explain my methodological framework, the context of my study, the participants, the data sources and how they helped me explore my questions, and the phases of my analysis. I will end with a discussion of ethical and validity concerns.

**Methodological Framework**

The first decision any social science researcher makes is whether their research question would be better answered using qualitative or quantitative methods. Given the small number of subjects and the abstract topic, I chose to use qualitative research
methods. Within the realm of qualitative research, I used case studies to frame and guide my research process and analysis.

**Case Study**

My research was designed and conducted as a case study design. There are many ways to design a case study, but Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) both provide definitions that, in general, explain that a case study should focus on a specific event in a bounded context. A case study is more than just a way to present data, it is a “research strategy [that] comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 14). Another affordance that comes from using a case study design is how it lends itself to present findings using storytelling and thick descriptions, which in turn allows the reader a greater chance of learning from the case being studied. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that case studies produce “context-dependent knowledge” (p. 222), which allows readers to connect the complexities of the boundaries of a case study with its findings.

The use of a case study also allows for a cross-case analysis that can highlight how different practices are taken up by different individuals in a setting and provide suggestions for why these differences appear. Teacher education programs are complex, and learning to teach is complex; therefore, a cross-case analysis provides a more nuanced picture of how instruction, people, situations, any other identified influences, may affect one TC more than another.

Finally, a case study can build on current research about learning to teach writing. There are studies that look at what teacher candidates believe before they enter the classroom or what they bring to the methods courses with (Norman & Spencer, 2005;
Street, 2003). There are studies that follow teacher candidates from their methods courses through their first or second teaching placement. But there are fewer studies that focus specifically on the sensemaking process teacher candidates work through during the very common assignment of “design and teach your own unit.” I believe that my research can begin to fill this gap and help teacher educators better understand how teacher candidates balance being university students with being classroom teachers, especially in situations where they have little control and little pedagogical content knowledge.

My case study is bound by the location, people and activity in which they participate. Specifically, my research looks at teaching candidates in an intensive year-long internship at Centre City High School who are preparing and teaching “their units.” Both teacher candidates are teaching the same unit on the American Dream using *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925/2004) to the same track of students. They are teaching at the same time of the year and are part of the same Professional Learning Community.

In the next section, I will describe the research site, the participants, and the sources of data used in this research.

**Context of the Study**

**Research Site**

In the following section, I will describe the site of my research. Working from a large perspective to a more focused one, I will describe where the school site was located, the school itself, the department that hosted the teacher candidates, and the teacher education program in which the participants studied.
**Location**

The site for this study is the English department in Centre City High School (all names of places and people are pseudonyms), the only high school in its district. It is located in a mid-Atlantic state and is situated near an R1 university, Atlantic University. The population of Centre City and the surrounding townships that also feed the high school is approximately 100,000, and Atlantic University adds another 6000 graduate students and 46,000 undergraduate students. Centre City HS is referred to as a suburban high school because of its size and the local jobs and tax-bases, but it is surrounded by many rural districts.

**The High School**

Centre City HS has a population of approximately 2300 students in grades 9-12. Its population is 84% white, and the highest minority population is Asian at 7%. Two percent identify as Black and 3% identify as Hispanic. Fourteen percent of students in the district are eligible for free or reduced lunch (citation blinded for anonymity). In addition to the core subjects and foreign languages, the school offers a wide variety of elective courses in subjects such as business, healthcare, construction, and art. The school has a thriving and award-winning theatre and music department.

The high school moved into a new building in January 2017. One of the changes that came from this move was the creation of an English office with working space for all English teachers. Before the move, the department was split between two schools, and the English offices were located in environments with limited space and were often not used.
**The English Department**

The English department was made of 22 teachers. Its offerings ranged from ninth grade courses designed for students with significant learning needs to Advanced Placement Composition and AP Literature. The department began revising its curriculum five years ago. The purpose of the revision was to make sure units were aligned with PA State Standards and to make sure there was more consistency within courses taught by different faculty. To support and continually review the new curriculum, the teachers meet twice a week in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that are organized by grade and course. The department had also participated in professional development in using The Collins Writing Program (see Chapter Two for more detail) in their classrooms. They also adhere to a single method of argument that was formed from the Toulmin model (Toulmin, 1958; see Chapter Two for more detail) referred to as "CDW" by students and teachers.

**The Teacher Education Program**

The teacher education program was a collaboration between Atlantic University and Centre City High School. This program was an immersive one-year internship where teacher candidates worked with the same mentor and students all year and took courses run by university faculty while they were teaching, as opposed to most campus-based programs, where teacher candidates take coursework before starting their full-time practicum experience. The collaboration had been in place for over 20 years, but in the 2017-2018 school year the professor representing the university retired and a new faculty member, Helen, was hired. One of the biggest changes since the new faculty member joined the program was the inclusion of new coursework that was designed and co-taught with graduate students and high school faculty. The classes took place during the school day or
after school. In addition to coursework, the teacher candidates taught in four to five sections with a mentor teacher, participated in their mentor’s PLC(s), and an inquiry PLC run by high school faculty supervisors. Teacher candidates were university seniors or graduate students.

The teacher candidates collaborated and taught with their mentors during the fall semester. In the spring, the TCs continued to co-teach and collaborate with their mentors, but they took the lead in an independently-designed unit and conducted an inquiry project. Generally, the inquiry project and the unit were linked. While the TCs must teach within the curriculum designed by the department, they still had some control over what day-to-day classroom practice looked like.

**Participants**

My research focused on teacher candidates who are in their final stage of student teaching in the previously described immersive teacher education program. Teacher candidates were recruited for this research project using convenience sampling as my funding allowed me to work all year with the teacher candidates at the school. All eight teacher candidates of the 2018 - 2019 school year were invited to participate in the study; seven accepted. One TC who accepted exited the program before my research began, leaving six teacher candidates as possible participants in the study.

Within this pool of possible participants, there is a diversity of backgrounds with teaching. Four teacher candidates were seniors at Atlantic University and the two others were graduate students, one of whom had worked in business before returning to become a teacher and one whom graduated with a Bachelor’s in English in the previous spring semester. While no two teacher candidates are exactly alike, five of the six participants are
white females, a demographic that represents most secondary English teachers. While some of the candidates had participated in short immersion experiences, none of the teachers had been independent instructors in a classroom teaching English/Language Arts to students whose first language is English.

This research focuses on two students, Maria and Xavier. I chose them because they were teaching the same unit at the same time in different classrooms. Further, working with two participants allowed me to conduct a cross-case analysis to add depth to the study. Also, Maria’s and Xavier’s personal and academic backgrounds were very different, and they brought some of those differences into their teaching. I will describe them in more detail below.

Maria

Maria is a feisty young woman who you might find modeling a yoga pose of headstand in the middle of the classroom. She is passionate about bringing minoritized voices into the classroom to counter the narratives usually found in high school novels. Her background and experiences brought her to the teacher education program with a solid foundation in critical pedagogies and literacies. More than once in seminars she said, “I hate all men.” After discussions, it was clearer that she wanted to challenge the patriarchy that holds power in school and in life. Despite her word choices at times, Maria believed that she needed to support populations who didn’t have the voice she did as a college-educated, white woman.

Maria grew up in Virginia, where she was part of a minority white population. She went to a Title I school serving approximately 60% Latino and 30% English-Language learners. In her elementary school, the majority of the students were from El Salvador and
she was “like one of three white kids” in her class. She explained, the “beginning of my schooling was like, very bilingual in like every facet, just because like, that was the nature of my classroom” (Interview 1). In high school, once tracking started, she took advanced courses and approximately 70% of her classmates spoke only English.

She participated in extracurricular activities, such as theatre, swimming and cheerleading. She lived on a cul-de-sac that was becoming less populated due to “white flight” and foreclosures were common, “which is like, really interesting...not interesting, because it’s like, doesn’t have like a negative connotation” (Interview 1). She later moved to a 55-and-older community to live with her grandparents; the community was “like all old, white people with money, like a lot of money.” Since she wasn’t supposed to be living in this age-restricted community, she had to follow certain rules about how often she could ride her bike so her grandparents wouldn’t get in trouble with the Homeowners Association.

Her family fell into two groups with respect to politics:

[Part of m]y family is like a really good example of the type of racist that like half my town is. So like, just being like, ‘Oh my god, like Jesus loves you.’ And like, we love others, but like why are these Mexicans here? But like, we love them, and we want to donate clothes to them. So like that, but then the other half being like, oh, like, ’Duh, Like what are you talking about?’ (Interview 1)

Maria would come to take a critical stance in her teaching, and her experiences with her family and her community allowed her to see how discrimination involved grey areas where people believed they weren’t racists, but still participated in racist practices and others who were not even aware of their racism.
She first started to self-identify as a liberal in high school when she realized not all people, especially her friends who were people of color, had the same access to success as she did. Coincidentally, the revelation came at the end of a unit on the American Dream, the same unit she taught in this study. With respect to her changing beliefs, she explained:

Like I never didn’t complete assignments when I was in high school, but I remember like, very intensely by the end of junior year, I was like, maybe Mitt Romney isn’t a god. Like that was really when I started taking what I was learning out. (Interview 1)

She was a strong student in high school, taking mostly AP and advanced courses. She noted that after struggling through a math class, her view of school changed from worrying about being obedient and earning high grades to thinking about “what am I reaping from this?” She struggled to prioritize working on assignments when she started university, but by the time she was in the program, her ability to balance life and work had settled down.

Maria first came to Atlantic University after her junior year in high school when she participated in a program for students from a minoritized population who wanted to go into education¹. Her work in the program impressed the university faculty and she applied for and received a Fulbright to help cover her expenses so she could attend Atlantic University as an undergraduate.

At Atlantic University she participated in a teach-abroad program in Ecuador and an immersive inner-city teaching program in Washington, D.C. twice. After she graduated from

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¹ Maria is not part of a minoritized population, but she applied to the program at the director’s suggestion and was accepted.
the teacher education program she flew to Colombia to teach English for a year funded by another Fulbright fellowship.

**Xavier**

Xavier is a thoughtful, young man in his early thirties who seems more comfortable in a button-down shirt than a t-shirt. He was married and had one daughter while in the teacher education program. When taking notes during class, Xavier would pull out a sixteen pack of colored, fine-tip markers and write clearly. His office desk was always organized and usually cleared of everything but a small pile of papers and his coffee cup. He spoke carefully and honestly.

Xavier was thirty years old and had returned to Atlantic University to gain a teacher certification. His undergraduate degree, which is also from Atlantic University, was in Public Relations and Marketing. He spent ten years in sales in Washington D.C. and Pittsburgh. He realized that while the money was good, he wasn't fulfilled by the position and returned to university to teach so he could have a job that aligned more with his personal beliefs about humanity.

Xavier grew up in a rural community, and his graduating class was 83. The students at his school were all white, and he was with the same group of students from kindergarten to graduation. Xavier's school didn't offer Advanced Placement courses, but he was able to take courses at Atlantic University when he was in high school for dual credit. He started taking Atlantic University courses in his sophomore year. He admits that when he was in high school, his work ethic varied depending on courses, with his Atlantic University courses often taking priority. He liked English and history courses, but did not enjoy math and science very much.
During his freshman year at Atlantic University, Xavier enjoyed school. During his sophomore year he had to work 40 hours a week while taking classes full-time. This motivated him to graduate, which he did a year and a half early. He notes “The first time around I was just trying to do the bare minimum and get my B’s and B minuses and, you know, that was my that was my goal” (Interview 1). Directly after university, Xavier began to work in sales for a national baseball team.

When Xavier returned to university, he had to take courses to fulfill content requirements for his teaching certification and credit requirements for his Master’s degree. One course he took was about contemporary curriculum studies. Xavier learned about Democratic classrooms and schools in this course, and the foundations of this style of learning aligned with his beliefs about choice and agency, so he studied it in more detail independently. When he designed his unit for the teacher education program, he kept agency and choice for his students in mind.

In the next section, I will describe what data I collected to answer my guiding and supporting questions that can be found at the start of this chapter.

Data Sources

Data came from three sources: three interviews conducted before, during and after the unit, the participants’ work completed as part of their teacher education program, and documents they created to use during their unit.

Interviews

Three genres of interviews were used. The first was a pre-interview whose focus was to determine the TC’s personal connection with writing, experiences learning how to write, experiences teaching writing, and beliefs about the teaching of writing. Interview
questions were based on Chris Street’s (2003) work on teacher candidates’ attitudes about teaching writing. In addition, I asked the TCs questions about what they had already learned about the teaching of writing and from where. The initial interview asked them if they had any concerns or questions about teaching writing. Finally, the interview asked them if they have already met conflict or discord between different sources of knowledge (See Appendix A). The first interview had a formal set of questions, but due to my relationship with the participants, the conversation extended to other topics, too (See Table 1 for interview details).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
<th>Location of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
<td>Hallway in host school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>49 minutes</td>
<td>Office for teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
<td>Office for teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Xavier</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
<th>Location of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>44 minutes</td>
<td>Hallway in host school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>46 minutes</td>
<td>Office for teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
<td>Office for teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of the during-unit interview questions was to facilitate the TCs’ reflection on their teaching and how they think their students responded and performed on any writing assignments. Since the goal is to encourage reflection, my questions were guided by work students had spoken about at the first interview or during more informal
interactions. The teacher candidates both had a specific example connected to writing and writing instruction that they could reflect on. Because each teacher candidate was in a different place when I conducted the second interview the questions asked to each of them overlapped, but were not identical (See Appendix B for questions used in Xavier’s second interview; see Appendix D for questions used in Maria’s second interview).

The post-unit interviews focused on the teacher candidates’ reflection on the unit and writing within the unit, and how their ideas about teaching writing had or had not changed. We also discussed what they would have done differently if given the chance or more latitude.

Finally, because all of the participants had indicated a lack of knowledge about the teaching of writing, I had them review a list of activities to see which they would identify as “teaching” writing, which they did during the unit, and which they would have liked to have done if they had more time or control over their unit. While my intent had been to ask them to differentiate between “teaching” and “assigning” writing, I was not specific enough in my question to be able to gather that data.

I developed the list of possible activities that could count as “assigning” or “teaching” writing using content from Teaching Adolescent Writers (Gallagher, 2006), The Framework for Postsecondary Success (Framework for success in postsecondary writing, 2012) and Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools (Graham & Perin, 2007). I attempted to differentiate between “assigning” and “teaching” by looking at what tasks or activities required students to think metacognitively about writing and which tasks or activities were more about following a path or pattern without being able to explain why. For example, “Defining the requirements of an
assignment (e.g. what the FCAs are, how long it should be, etc.)” in my mind was “assigning” writing because the teacher was making the decisions about the task without student input. While I considered, “Show students sample sentences and have them pick out “good” one [sic] (e.g. good claim, good description, good transitions)” as an example of “teaching” writing because it put control of “good” and “bad” in the hands of the students and required them to think metacognitively about writing choices.

While the questions did not yield the information I had anticipated, they did provide fodder for more reflection on the differences between “teaching” and “assigning” writing. For example, I included “Providing models of the genres the students will be writing in.” Just the act of providing models does not encourage students to think metacognitively about their own writing. It is how teachers and students discuss and use models that shift their use from “assigning” to “teaching.”

Another unintended but useful outcome of these questions was that some responses provided me with the chance to learn about activities connected to writing the teacher candidates included in their unit that they had not spoken about in their interviews. For example, both participants explained that they defined an audience for their students, but neither had mentioned anything about this in their interviews. Also, Xavier had strong opinions about the use of models for teaching writing because he felt that too much reliance on models could hinder students’ creativity in writing.

The original goal was to see how my participants differentiated between “teaching” and “assigning” writing, but due to poor instructions from me, what I learned was they both thought all of the options were connected to teaching writing and they had used some of the activities in class, but had not spoken about them in their interviews or written about
them in their journals. This leaves the door open for future studies that examine when teacher candidates perceive they are teaching writing and when they are, if we accept the definition that “teaching” writing means including instruction and activities that allow students to learn how to think metacognitively about writing processes and work on writing tasks independently to some degree and not blindly follow a predetermined pattern developed by a teacher or a textbook or a commercial curriculum.

Again, because the participants were in different places in the unit when I conducted the interviews, the questions were similar, but not identical. The questions Xavier’s third interview can be found in Appendix C, and those for Maria’s third interview in Appendix E. The list of activities they were given to identify as “teaching” versus “assigning” writing can be found in Appendix F. The list of activities was drawn from Kelly Gallagher’s (2006) *Teaching Adolescent Writers, The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* *(Framework for success in postsecondary writing, 2012)* and *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School* (Graham & Perin, 2007). Because both participants identified as weak writers and both admitted to not knowing how to teach writing, I wanted to gauge their understanding of teaching writing by having them evaluate common activities associated with writing assignments. As I mentioned above, their responses did not provide me with answers about how they viewed “teaching” and “assigning” writing differently, but their responses did let me know that they considered all of the options to count as “teaching” writing and that they had used some of activities in class, but had not shared that with me through interviews or journals. Therefore, a deeper exploration of their answers and other documents could yield interesting findings about whether they were teaching writing more than they realized.
My focus was not on comparing what was happening in the classroom to what they were telling me influenced their writing instruction. Therefore, if they did not consider a certain activity to be writing instruction, then they wouldn’t be able to talk about what influenced it, which was the focus of my current research.

Documents

The documents I analyzed fell into two groups: those written by the TCs as part of their teacher education program (reflection journal and reading log) and those the TCs designed or used as part of their instruction. The reflection journal created for the TE program was designed to facilitate reflection and learning in all areas of teaching English and being a teacher. Some of these reflections were defined by the instructors and others originated with the TC’s wonderings. This means each TCs’ journal varied in length and format and each had a varying amount of information about writing depending on their personal interests, experiences and courses they taught in. The reading log created for the program required the students to read and comment on various texts for their seminars (weekly formal classes). They also used the reading log to take notes on independent readings related in the fall to current wonderings, and, in the spring, to their teacher inquiry project. The third document source I reviewed was their inquiry project, a teacher-research assignment all participants completed in the program. Not all participants used reflection on their unit in the inquiry project, but many did. These documents help provide a context not only for the TCs’ beliefs about teaching writing, but also how often questions about writing came up in their classroom observations and personal wonderings.

The documents connected to classroom practice illustrate how the TCs presented teaching of writing or assigning of writing in their units. The documents the TCs made also
provided a context and invitation for the conversations in interviews, allowing for a more complex vision of the TCs’ practices and motivations. Classroom documents illustrated how the TCs planned to implement the concepts of writing instruction presented to them from different sources. The goal of reviewing these documents during interviews was to provide insight into the TCs’ beliefs about why they were doing what they were doing and, hopefully, with some metacognitive pushing, articulate some decision-making along the way.

**Positioning Interviews and Documents**

Hodder (2000) argues that “there is no ‘original’ or ‘true’ meaning of a text outside specific historical contexts” (p. 704) and “a full sociological analysis cannot be restricted to interview data. It must also consider the material traces” (p. 705). Therefore, it makes sense to use both the documents created by the TCs and their interviews to form a more cohesive understanding of the context of their teaching and choices. However, one challenge emerged when examining the documents created for the classroom that were shared with me; it was impossible to identify with certainty what choices and documents were unique to the participant and which ones were modifications of documents already made by the mentor or the PLC.

Centre City High School uses googledocs extensively, including in their work with curriculum. All documents used in each unit are shared and modified among the members of the PLC. While documents could be listed as “owned” by Maria indicating she started that document, without going through document by document with her, I would be unable to tell how much of the content was hers and how much came from other people. Since the goal of my research is to understand what influenced Maria’s inclusion of writing, this
would have been a good exercise, but I did not feel comfortable asking the participants for more of their time given all their other commitments as teachers and university students.

Because of these technological complications and time restrictions, I limited my analysis of documents to those the TCs spoke about specifically when discussing their own teaching and planning.

**Data Analysis**

To begin the data analysis, I transcribed the interviews using the website otter.ai, which uses artificial intelligence to transcribe audio files. This website provided a basic (and reasonably accurate) transcript of the conversation, but I reviewed and edited for accuracy each transcript while re-listening to the interviews at least twice to fill in blanks, clarify words and note places where the conversation was unintelligible. While doing the transcription, I informally noted topics the participants mentioned including how both stumbled in a college English course when the first draft of an essay was not very good.

Yin (2018) argues a goal in a cross-case analysis is to maintain the integrity of the each case and then compare or synthesize the findings across the cases to look for patterns. To do this, he calls for researchers to look at the data from one case in its entirety and then the others.

Yin suggests that multiple case studies should be “literal” replications where the researcher is seeking to discover if the same results can be replicated in a similar situation. Or if they will change in a predictable manner based on prior research and specific changes. He calls this design a “theoretical” replication as theory is being used to change the case being studied. As my work examined two teacher candidates working in the same setting, teaching the same content at the same time, I consider it to be a “literal” replication. I was
looking to describe the influences present in both cases without manipulating the 
environment through theory to attempt to create a different outcome. Because these case 

studies are replications of each other, Yin suggests coding all of the data of one and coming 
to tentative conclusion and then coding all the data from the other case and coming to 
tentative conclusions. Then, by comparing the data, the researcher can see similarities and 
differences and posit ideas for why they exist.

Therefore, I coded all the data from Maria first and Xavier second. In my first round 
of coding, I assigned descriptors to comments about writing, such as “Assignment - Disc 
Questions” and “Feelings about writing.” I began with a list of codes that included all 
influences that I expected given my previous readings and theory. These codes included: 
Me, the mentor, the university supervisor, other teacher candidates, other mentors outside 
the program, other mentors inside the program, personal history with writing, and 
coursework taken during and before the start of the internship. I added to these codes 
while reviewing the interviews and documents. While I tried to not duplicate codes, this 
inevitably happened when I read through my list of codes too quickly. As a result, I found 
that I had created codes like “Responding and grading” and “Responding to writing.” Upon 
rereading the transcripts, I merged codes that were duplicates of each other.

After completing my first round of coding, I had 61 codes. However, some codes in 
this list were only found in the interviews and documents of other participants who are not 
part of this dissertation; those codes were excluded from subsequent analytical steps. I 
organized the codes relevant to Xavier’s and Maria’s data into 13 parent codes (See 
Appendix G for examples for codes):

1. Grading and Responding
2. Influences – People
3. Influences – Curriculum
4. Influences Other (weather)
5. Influences – Intern Experiences and Beliefs
6. Multimodal writing
7. Teacher Education Program Coursework and Assignments
8. Purpose for Assignment or Writing
9. Rhetoric
10. Writing and Effort
11. Writing Instruction
12. Writing Skill or Element
13. Writing Tasks

After organizing my codes, I looked through the 13 parent codes for themes that connected to what influenced teacher candidates’ decisions about planning and teaching writing. The following four were the most relevant:

1. Influences – People
2. Influences – Curriculum
3. Influences Other (weather)
4. Influences – Intern Experiences and Beliefs

I eliminated “Influence Other (weather)” since the number of snow days (higher than usual that year) did not influence how they taught as much as it influenced how much time they had to spend in the unit. Also, how the participants responded to the snow days were captured in other influences. For example, because the snow days took up so much time,
Maria gave up having her students do freewrites in exchange for more formulaic writing practice because of the influences of people in her community, the curriculum, and the needs of her students.

As I started to organize my findings, I realized that many influences from people were manifested in the participants’ identities. For example, Maria’s opinion of herself as a teacher was significantly influenced by the members of the department. Her opinion of her identity as a teacher impacted her teaching. She felt pressure to conform to the department’s timetable, but she never specifically mentions anyone directly telling her to change what or how she was teaching. The final themes that emerged were writer identities, teacher identities and perceived students’ needs (See Appendix H for illustration of coding organization).

Definition of Terms

**Writer identities** refer to how the teacher candidates spoke about themselves as writers, both in the past and currently. Their identities were formed through comments about their experiences with writing in specific genres and their experiences successfully writing in the past.

**Teacher identities** refer to how the participants saw themselves as teachers. This could include how effective they felt at presenting material to students, their pedagogical beliefs, and what they perceived other teachers thought of them. It also includes knowledge they believe they knew or did not know that impacted instruction.

**Perceived Students’ Needs** refers to observations made by the teacher candidates about content they believed students needed to learn to do well in the course and/or unit. Some determination of students’ needs came during the unit, other observations came from
working with the students in previous units. For example, Xavier knew from his work with students in a previous unit that they struggled to write papers if they didn’t understand the novel. Maria changed her instruction when her students started proposing ideas that could only have come from reading SparkNotes, suggesting they were struggling to understand the text.

**Validity and Ethical Issues and Data Privacy**

**Validity**

Concerns about validity in this study connect with my history as a teacher and my current work as a teacher educator. I am a product of the teacher education program where my research took place. I have also mentored two interns within this program. However, my work as both an intern and mentor happened under a previous director when there were different requirements for teacher candidates. All of this information was shared with the teacher candidates at the start of the teacher education program so they were aware of my history.

Also, I taught at the school where the teacher education program is situated. I was friends with current members of the department, including both of the mentors. I was also a part of the department when the new curriculum was being developed, but I did not have a hand in any of the units the interns could potentially teach as I worked on curriculum for courses in other grades.

Whenever possible, I triangulated my findings from participant interviews with materials from their teaching or the reading log and reflection journal. But, both participants wrote very little about writing and their units in their reflection journals and in their reading logs the only writing about writing took the shape of note-taking rather
than interpretation or questioning. As a result, most of the findings come from the content of their three interviews.

A challenge that arose during the interviews was me switching from researcher to mentor. There were times when my responses were focused on supporting the participants when they were frustrated. In particular, Maria would see herself as a poor teacher based on her experiences in the class rather than seeing how she was a small part of a big system that impacted classroom practice. For example, in the third interview, the following exchange took place:

Maria: Like, I hate my job. My students hate me and the teachers are judging me. So I just dropped everything. And like, focused really on content, because that's what I had to do, because they didn't get it, and I was being shitty. And the end of the unit, I was like, I hate myself, and now they hate me. And I am never gonna do that, again.

KM: OK, well let's just take a step back. You are not shitty. You are a teacher teaching a unit for the first time by yourself essentially. But also, in the constructs of a curriculum that you really had no voice in developing, and in a power structure where you are in a power[less] situation, if we talked...want to talk about people who are marginalized, that is the position that you are in, in this community.

I felt, and still feel, that my need to support this participant at this stage in her teacher education program took priority over my research. I could not ignore my role as mentor and only speak to them as a researcher because I had worked so closely with both participants over the course of the year.
Ethical Issues

Positioning of myself as researcher

My role as a researcher, teacher educator and former high school teacher sometimes overlapped during the research process. I feel it is important to explain my positioning in the setting of this research, specifically my relationship with the participants, school and curriculum to address how those factors could impact the interviews I conducted.

I was a graduate student at Atlantic University who was working as a graduate student instructor within the immersive teacher education program. My roles included co-teaching and co-planning courses, responding to the students’ reading logs and reflection journals, and helping the teacher candidates complete their inquiry projects. Before returning to graduate school, I taught 11th and 12th grade English at the host school for the teacher education program. I had worked with both mentors and consider them friends. I had also been part of the department when it began the process of creating the core units Maria and Xavier would eventually teach; however, I left before the units turned into requirements for all teachers.

I returned to graduate school because I felt I was not helping my students become better writers, so it was difficult to see how traditional my school had become when designing the final writing assessments for each unit and how little autonomy my former colleagues had to make changes. The participants in this study were aware of my connection to the department and curriculum, and aware that I did not think the core novel they had to teach was the best choice for their students. They were also aware that my researched focused on my driving passion, the teaching of writing.
An ethical issue came from my work as the co-teacher for the university courses the interns took. Part of my role was to read and respond to the interns’ reading logs and reflection journals as a mentor, not just a researcher. It was also my job to present material to the teacher candidates during coursework. As my doctoral research focused heavily on the teaching of writing and the role of writing in the classroom, this was the content I had the heaviest hand in developing. This ended up not being a large problem as we were only able to discuss the teaching of writing for one seminar, which took place after both of the participants had drafted their units. The result was that the participants really hadn’t learned a lot about writing that might conflict with others’ expectations.

Because I was in a position with some power over the participants, they were told during recruitment and I reminded them during the interviews their answers would not affect any grades in the program, the program director, mentor and high school faculty supervisors would not have access to the interviews, and they were allowed to not answer any question for any reason. I did not sense any tension or hesitancy on the part of any participant to speak with me. In fact, some were quite frank in their assessments of the culture that influenced their decisions.

To alleviate any concern participants had about what they could say, each participant was told at recruitment and at the start of the interviews:

1. The university faculty coordinator for the program was not allowed access to any material shared solely with me during interviews. The teacher candidates were welcome to comment on instruction and content without worrying about their grades or status in the program.
2. This study is descriptive, not evaluative; therefore, it was not my goal to assess the subjects’ teaching practices or decisions. My research was focused solely on how my participants were teaching and using writing in the classroom.

3. As a high school teacher, I did not consider myself to be a stellar teacher of writing, which is one reason I returned to graduate school. I shared this information with them to avoid the “Grecian urn” (Gallagher, 2006) effect in which they saw me as an expert from experience who might judge them based on my own practices in the classroom.

While studies that count as “exempt” by IRB do not need to have their consent forms approved, this study’s consent form included information about FERPA regulations since some of the data being collected is from coursework. The recruitment was done by my dissertation chair during one of the required courses the students must take.

**Data Security and Privacy**

All subjects were assigned a pseudonym that will be used throughout the data collection and analysis and for papers, presentations and the dissertation that come from this research. All other names of people and places will be changed to protect the subjects’ right to stay anonymous.

Subjects picked the time and location for all interviews. All interviews happened at the high school. Some took place at an open seating area, but most took place in an inner office that was not soundproof. The only time I suggested a student not answer a question verbally was when we were seated in an open seating area directly in front of the office of the department chair. I did not want to put this participant in the position of critiquing a
department convention when she could be overheard by someone who could impact her place in the teacher education program.

The data collected during interviews was not shared with the director of the program, who is in charge of the participants’ grades and making sure they achieve all the benchmarks to earn a teaching certificate and/or degree at the end of the internship. Access to the data is limited to me and my dissertation advisor, per IRB requirements.

The data is stored on a password-secured computer and transcribing of interviews was completed by me and a website using artificial intelligence.

**Conclusion**

In the next chapter I will share my findings about influences on Maria’s teaching of writing and Xavier’s teaching of writing individually and then I will compare these findings. I will discuss why they may have been influenced differently. Finally, I will return to my research questions and propose claims based on my research that answer the questions I asked.
CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will separately describe the major influences on Maria’s and Xavier’s choices when teaching writing in their unit. Then, I will identify similarities and differences across their two sets of influences.

Maria’s use of writing was influenced by how she saw herself as a writer, how she saw herself as a teacher, and what needs she perceived her students had. Her perception of needs fell into two categories: those related to the core curriculum and those related to writing more broadly. Certainly, the broader concerns were voiced during our conversations about the novel and the paper, but what she was teaching and working with the students on could be applied to work beyond this unit. For example, Maria noticed that her students were struggling to understand the novel, so she created a reading guide for each chapter that included forms of writing practice that prepared the students to write about the core novel. There was a strong focus on content as well as writing. In comparison, she spent a lot of time helping the students write warrants, an element of the Toulmin argument style the students were expected to use. She spoke about the use of warrants within the students’ writing, but her emphasis was on the writing of warrants, not just writing warrants for the final assessment.

Xavier was influenced to use writing by his understanding and belief in teaching democratically and, like Maria, his perceptions of students’ needs. Unlike Maria, Xavier only spoke about addressing students’ needs within the context of the unit; when Xavier spoke about using writing and helping the students it was only within the context of writing the final paper. While he noted the students were not reading and/or understanding the novel,
he did not describe specific methods using writing that he used to help his students. However, he did describe how he helped the students write the final paper, giving them one-on-one or small group conferences and providing a structure for the paper that students could use.

First, a note on the context of the unit Maria and Xavier taught. Maria and Xavier were both working with College Preparatory 11 juniors, though they taught separate classes. They both had worked with the same mentor teacher and PLC for the previous units and had co-taught those units with their mentors. The American Dream unit was the first where each of them flew solo within the bounds of the curriculum.

The curriculum at the school that hosted the teacher candidates was developed by the teachers approximately five years ago. Teachers of the same grade created a unit with a common assessment and suggested core novels. In 11th grade, the teachers agreed to teach the same core novel with each unit; not all grades made this choice. When Maria and Xavier began planning and teaching, they were given the unit overview, the required assessment, and the core novel. These three aspects of the unit were not negotiable. The core novel was *The Great Gatsby* (1984/1925) and the required assessment was a definition/synthesis essay that required students to synthesize ideas from *The Great Gatsby* and at least two other texts to write a paper on the American Dream. The exact prompt for the essay was left up to the individual teachers.

**Maria**

Maria was influenced by her identity as a writer, her identity as a teacher and her students’ perceived needs. Maria’s writing identities appeared through her feelings about herself as a writer, her strengths and weaknesses. Her teacher identities were formed
through her goals as a teacher and how she believed others viewed her as a teacher. Finally, her perception of students’ needs refers to reasons the needs of her students, specifically their ability to understand and analyze the core novel and complete specific elements of the required essay.

**Background**

Maria is a college senior in her early 20s who was participating in the teacher education program to earn her B.S. in Curriculum and Instruction for Secondary English. She had participated in two inner-city teaching immersions and one semester teaching abroad before she started this teacher education program. Neither of her previous experiences focused on teaching English/Language Arts. Maria was a strong advocate for critical literacies and had grown up in a location where she was part of a white minority.

Maria was influenced by her perceptions of herself as a writer and teacher, and her students’ needs with respect to helping them generate original ideas, understanding the

Table 2

*Overview of Influences on Maria’s Teaching of Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer Identity</th>
<th>“Maria Brain” Academic Writing weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Identity</td>
<td>Insecurity as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Perceived Needs</td>
<td>Generating original ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Comprehension of <em>The Great Gatsby</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organizing content for the core assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quoting and Warranting a text-based argument</td>
</tr>
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</table>
core novel, effectively using quotations in writing, and using expected writing style and rules for the final unit assessment (See Table 2). In this section, I will describe these factors in detail through my conversations with Maria and her journaling.

**Maria’s Unit**

Maria’s goal for her unit was to shake up the idea of the American Dream, especially how it is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*. To do this she had chosen readings on different themes that she intended her students to read and then connect to *The Great Gatsby*. She explained:

> So I was like, we have sports week, we have a language week, we have a cultural week, we have, like, housing insecurity week. And every week was there was gonna be plus ones that complimented how those progressed and related to Gatsby a little bit, but it was more so like the plus ones and the theme. And like, we would chalk like a specific moment into Gatsby and kind of zoom out on it, because I was just like Gatsby... Gatsby is going to be like more background noise. And then we're going to use it as a connector. (Interview 3)

However, when Maria started noticed her students running into comprehension issues, as I explain in detail below, she had to shift her instruction. During the reading of *The Great Gatsby*, which took about six weeks, her lessons primarily took the format of discussing the novel, watching the movie, and sprinkling in mini-lessons on writing and grammar. The next section, about two weeks long, had the students reading plus-one texts and tying them to the ideas in *The Great Gatsby*, and the final five days of the unit were spent writing the essay in class.
First Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Writer Identities

One influence on Maria’s choices for how to teach and use writing in the classroom is one of her identities as a writer. In this situation, I use “writer identities” to encompass how Maria viewed herself as a writer based on her description of past and current experiences with writing. Maria felt insecure about her writing abilities in certain genres. One reason for this insecurity was her self-described “Maria Brain,” which refers to her belief that the way she explains ideas makes sense to her, but not to others. “Maria Brain” also led her to a second element of her writer identity: freewriting. This writing genre helped her work through “Maria Brain” until she could express herself through writing in a way that others could understand. A third element of her writer identity was her perceived weakness as an academic writer overall, as presented in feedback she received from teachers and standardized test scores. These three elements influenced the way she used writing in her unit.

“Maria Brain”

One element of Maria’s writer identity was a quality she labeled “Maria Brain,” or her ability to express herself clearly “in the moment.” She describes her struggles with “Maria Brain:”

I think the “Maria Brain” thing I was talking about, like, actually communicating my ideas clearly. Because in my head...like I just am a bad, bad speaker, like talker, like, communicator day-to-day. And so to write, like, I can ask 100 questions. But to be able to communicate with you how I like got through that process is very difficult for me to, like, formulate, and perfect and edit to make sure that like my audience
can actually understand what I'm saying. Just because I'm just such a scatter brain.

(Interview 1)

Maria explains how she feels weak at speaking “day-to-day” and that it’s difficult for her to “edit” her writing and speech so she can be understood. She sees part of writing is the act of asking questions and ultimately communicating an idea, but feels her “scatter brain” prevents this from happening.

Maria describes her struggle with the writing process because of “Maria Brain” and her frustration with trying to “translate” her ideas into clear and genre-appropriate prose. She retells an experience with a professor who was helping her to write a paper:

Like, my, your [Maria’s] explanation to your analysis is not written like well, like, I can’t understand it. Because it’s so “Maria Brain” and not like, I can’t access you. I and was just like, “Aaah, like God, like, I talk so weird, like, why do I talk like this.” And so I had to like edit it, and edit it, and edit it, and edit it, and edit it, and edit it.

(Interview 1)

Maria reiterated her need to “edit” her work so her ideas were communicated clearly.

While not initially connecting writing and speaking, Maria prided herself on her public speaking abilities, especially those were she was able to write her remarks ahead of time:

I would be...the area that I dominate most in like in terms of use is speaking, like I talk a lot, but I’m not good at speaking. But day to day, like I think it’s my explanations are in “Maria Brain” and I can’t translate my communication, which is like, my public speaking, like when I’ve written the speech, so it has the written component, I’m a great public speaker, but I have to have the written component to be able to think out how I’m going to do it. (Interview 1)
Maria identifies her speaking ability to be strong when she has pre-written notes to follow. When describing her in-the-moment conversational skills, Maria indicates she is less successful because of “Maria Brain.”

To respond to “Maria Brain,” Maria used freewriting to process and brainstorm ideas when she was writing for herself. She chose to use freewriting with her students to try to respond to some of the needs she saw in them and their work, which I will describe in more detail below.

**Academic Writing Weakness**

A second aspect of Maria’s writer identity that I infer influenced Maria’s writing instruction was her belief that she was a poor reader and writer. Asked if she would call herself a writer, Maria replied:

> I, I would say before, like, I turned 20. I wouldn’t have classified [myself as a writer]...like last year I wouldn’t say like, oh shit, no, this is it. I would just be like I'm not a great writer, especially academically, like I'm not. And so I would have never identified or claimed that. Like, no, that’s not for me. That’s for a good writer. And so yeah, now I can say like, now I'm really bad at writing poetry, I'm really bad at writing academic papers. But I can crank out a real nice story truth like to Tim O’Brien²-vibe Instagram posts that will get you into a space. (Interview 1)

Only a year before her internship, Maria did not identify as a writer because she equated this term with the ability to write academic papers and poetry. During her senior year she

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² The final unit for the year used Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* and the focus was on “story truth” and discussion often centered on how much of O’Brien’s stories were true. The final paper had a more creative element connected to the idea of “story truth.”
took ownership of the term "writer" and allowed herself to claim that title, but only when doing creative writing and writing on social media, in particular Instagram and Facebook.

Linked to her self-perception as a poor academic writer was her feeling that she was a poor reader, based on her Lexile score:

I’m not a strong reader. Like my Lexile range is low. Like, it’s, it’s not great. Like from an academic standpoint, but it takes me, like I have to read things multiple times, like academic texts-wise. (Interview 1)

Maria believes she is not a strong reader because she has to read “academic” materials multiple times. In a later interview, she revisits this idea:

And that’s like a whole other thing where, like, in my processing of teaching this, I’ve had to be like, okay, like, read this four times, because you really need to make sure that you get it because I’m just not in that Lexile range. Frankly, like, ... I’m not strong at reading...So baseline the guides and the writing is because I need them to think about it. (Interview 2)

Again, Maria attributes her weak reading skills to her Lexile score and explains that one reason she had the students write was so they had to process the text.

Given Maria’s repeated mentioning of her reading and writing ability, I believe Maria ended up making the final requirements for the paper, and therefore her instruction in various elements of the paper, align with traditional perceptions of expectations of “academic” writing, such as not using first person pronouns because of her struggles with formal writing.
Summary of Influence of Writer Identity

Maria saw herself as a weak writer, especially in academic genres. One possible reason for her insecurity is her self-described “Maria Brain.” She uses this trait to refer to her natural tendency to meander while she speaks and writes. As a result, she would receive a lot of feedback on first drafts because her ideas wandered. She preferred creative genres with specific audiences, which appeared in her life in the form of social media posts, to more “academic” writing. She described various instances in her life when she had struggled with writing in traditional academic genres in English courses. And while she would earn a good grade in the end, she didn't feel confident writing in certain genres. Maria also valued freewriting as a way to process her ideas and feelings. One goal for her unit was to provide students with a space to play around and share new ideas in a safe space, she used her experiences with freewriting to create this space for the students.

The elements of Maria's writer identity led to her use of freewriting in the unit. I would argue that her emphasis on formal requirements and a rigid structure in the paper came from her struggles with writing literary analysis essays. This emphasis also may have impacted her use of practice writing assignments that followed the structure of the final assessment.

Second Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Teacher Identity

Maria described herself negatively as a teacher, due in large part to comparisons she made between her own teaching skills and those of other teachers, in particular, her mentor and the members of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) she was a part of. Her PLC included her mentor and three other teachers teaching the same novel as her and one other intern, the second participant in this study. The group met two times a week to
review the curriculum and troubleshoot ideas. All the teachers in Maria's PLC had taught *The Great Gatsby* (1985/1925) before and had collaborated on creating the final assessment.

Maria consistently worried her interpretations of the core text were wrong based on feedback she received from her mentor.

But like, you know, Holly (her mentor), like she will straight look at you dead in your eye and not be afraid to like judge the fuck out of you because you made a dumb comment or like you interpreted something "wrong." [Maria used air quotes around wrong]. And I really let that get to me. (Interview 3)

Holly, with 20+ years of experience teaching *The Great Gatsby*, was abrupt in her commentary and feedback with Maria. As a result, Maria reported that she became more insecure with her ideas and slowly began to align her teaching with the methods and assignments preferred by her mentor and other members of the PLC. The PLC was a major source of angst for Maria, both in the moment and upon reflection:

[I]n PLC, I felt like everyone was just like, Fuck you, Fuck you, Fuck you. And I was like, Oh my god, like, I'm not being good. Like, I hate my job. My students hate me and the teachers are judging me. So I just dropped everything. And like, focused really on content, because that's what I had to do, because they didn't get it, and I was being shitty. And the end of the unit, I was like, I hate myself, and now they hate me. And I am never gonna do that again. (Interview 3)
She initially designed the unit so *The Great Gatsby* was a peripheral text and the focus would be on freewriting and mulling over ideas found in her “plus-one”\(^3\) texts. Her plans for the role and type of writing changed because of the judgements she was feeling from the PLC about her teaching. As a result, her freewriting about large concepts associated with the American Dream were replaced by chapter guides and structured paragraphs that focused on demonstrating comprehension of and the ability to analyze *The Great Gatsby* in order to prepare them for the final paper.

Maria’s fear of the PLC resulted in an unwillingness to share her own ideas in the PLC. When searching for a document for me to look at, Maria muttered to herself:

I can just go to the PLC when I was writing. Okay. Is this mine? No, this is Helen’s. Damnit. Where are my edits? Now I’m gonna have to go the PLC document, but I don’t think I would do it in PLC because this is another thing that I do. I like I just I get scared that they’re going to judge me don’t like.... I didn't have it under project ideas. It’s the summative. Maybe it’s in the PLC doc, but again, I really don’t think I would have put it there because they...I would be too scared that they would judge me, 'cause they're not I don’t think they're doing it. (Interview 3)

In this case, Maria was trying to show me the instructions for the creative project she had hoped to do with her students before snow days and PLC pressure began in earnest. She was tentatively going into the group googledoc used by her PLC for this unit, but repeatedly muttered that she doubted she would have created content in that document because she was “scared of being judged.”

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\(^3\) At the host school, “plus-one” texts refer to readings used to supplement the core text. They can be full-length novels, but, in this school, are more often shorter readings that share a topic of discussion found in the core text.
Maria described one time when she changed her plans to include a writing assignment she had not intended to use because of the conversations in the PLC:

And then you know, the assertion paragraphs are just, frankly, because I felt pressure from the PLC to do that, which is fine. You know, like, I told, I think there's merit in it. I understand why it was done, but I didn't like when I planned my unit that was not a part of the plan. But then, when you're like, you have people looking at you like, no, like, okay, so when is your assertion paragraph due? I was just like, Oh, right, Friday. (Interview 3)

While she had included practice writing assertion paragraphs in her unit, she did not include as many of them as the other members of the PLC. She felt pressured to rearrange her assignments and schedule to align with the PLC’s expectations and timings.

**Summary of Influence of Teacher Identity**

Maria's teacher identity was formed by her perceptions of how the teachers around her felt about her. This had a profound influence on how she used writing and what she taught. She felt judged by the outright criticism from her mentor or perceived criticism of her ideas by PLC members while she was teaching the unit. As a result of these critiques, she added components to her unit that included more formal writing assignments that matched the type of writing other members of her PLC had their students writing and were the same genre of writing students would be required to use on the final assessment. Her teacher identity, in particular her insecurity in teaching *The Great Gatsby*, impacted the type of writing she asked her students to complete as they read *The Great Gatsby* and reflected on the American dream.
Third Influence on Maria’s Teaching of Writing: Students’ Perceived Needs

Before the unit began and as the unit progressed, Maria noted areas for improvement in her students. Before the unit began, she noticed that her students were reluctant to share ideas that hadn’t come from SparkNotes or the teachers. In response to this, she included freewriting at the start of the unit to provide students with a space to think through ideas that were new to them or were more complex than they initially thought.

During the unit, Maria noticed that her students were not reading or not understanding – she didn’t differentiate between these two – the text. Maria created chapter guides to guide students’ reading and help them focus on specific elements of plot or imagery or characterization in the chapter she decided were worth focusing on. Within that guide, her students practiced writing text-based analyses, just like they would have to for the final assessment.

As the students were writing informally in their chapter guides, she also had them writing structured text-based arguments about The Great Gatsby. Through her reading of these, she identified that students needed to practice identifying and including relevant content from the text to support their arguments and practice warranting that content so it was clear how the selected text supported the students’ claims. In this case, while she used the final assessment as the place for them to learn how to use and warrant quotes, she spoke about the skills as being relevant to all writing, not just for this paper. In other words, some of the needs she perceived her students having were unit-specific and others had a broader relevance to writing in general.
Generation of Original Ideas

One perceived student need that influenced how Maria used writing in her unit was the students’ reluctance to share original ideas that they hadn’t gotten from SparkNotes or previous class discussion. Maria initially included a lot of freewriting so students could work through their ideas about the American Dream and how it might look to different people in a structureless environment:

And so in a freewrite, it’s like, just so long as you’re thinking, like, I don’t care. Like, really, you can say anything that you want. And if that leads you to some weird thing by the fourth minute, that’s fine, just like are you conceptualizing? I just want to make sure that you’re thinking about it. (Interview 2)

Maria noted that she’s “a huge freewriter, like I love freewrite” (Interview 2). She had her students complete freewrites to work through their reading before they came to class.

And then the freewrites again, came from just assessing that they don’t think for themselves sometimes, whether that be because of fear or because of apathy. So this is not something that I had done in other classes. It’s not something I read about. It’s more just like, what do I need them to know when they come to class? And what am I going to make off of that? So like, again, like the go backwards part of, like, Okay, I need them to know this, this and this. So what am I going to do? (Interview 2)

She found that her students weren’t prepared for class discussions and diagnosed that they “don’t think for themselves” either “because of fear or because of apathy.” She saw writing as a way for her students to have to process what they read before class so she could work productively with them in class. To respond to their needs, the topics of the freewrites
were chosen by her, but the informal structure associated with freewriting remained the same.

**Reading Comprehension**

A second perceived student need that influenced how Maria used writing in her unit was her students’ struggle to read and/or understand the core novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Early on in the reading, Maria became aware of how difficult the novel was for her students to understand and she believed one reason was because they weren’t using reading strategies to work through sections they didn’t comprehend:

I was realizing that we would hit walls in reading. When I say we, I mean, when they would read individually, but they weren’t, like looking anything up or like stopping and being like, ‘Holy shit, like, I need to reread this’ because I don’t know what the fuck just happened. (Interview 2)

She responded to the students’ issues in comprehension by practicing close reading strategies with her students. To reinforce the reading strategies, Maria had the students write out each strategy as they used it and explain how it helped them understand what they were reading. During class, she and her students would read a text closely and use various reading strategies Maria had given to them. While this may appear to be a reading activity as opposed to a writing one, Maria repeatedly made this task a written one by having students explain in writing what strategy they used to understand a passage and how that strategy worked. In other words, how the students used the reading strategies and what they learned was written as well as discussed.

Another support she created to help her students’ comprehension of the novel was chapter guides because of a gap she saw “in the first two units of them not doing anything.
So I was like, well, there’s no way that I can assign a chapter of Gatsby. And because Gatsby is a really freaking hard text” (Interview 2). She used the chapter guides to help students focus their reading and practice writing analytically, a skill she knew they would need for the final assessment. For example, in one guide, she asked the students to “Write two examples of characterization for each character, and write a sentence explaining what this says about them” (Maria’s Chapter 1 Guide; her emphasis). This was equivalent to finding data and writing a warrant. The next task in the chapter guide was to analyze the colors found in the chapter: “Color imagery is used thoroughly throughout Gatsby. Below, explain three quotes where Fitzgerald uses color imagery” (Maria’s Chapter 1 Guide). Below the instructions was a three-column table in which students had to identify a color, write down the quote connected with the color and then explain the connotation of the color or comment on its significance.

In response to her students’ struggles to understand and analyze the text, Maria included reading guides and practice using close-reading strategies to help them understand the text better.

**Text-Based Analysis Skills: Specific to Core Assessment**

A third perceived student need that influenced Maria’s use of writing was the students’ ability to organize their ideas and write a successful final assessment. Throughout the unit, the final assessment began to drive the types of writing she asked her students to do. She described why her students were completing a Writing on Demand for her:

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4 Writing on Demand is an assignment where students write an in-class paragraph or essay without knowing the prompt ahead of time.
And then secondly, that they’re getting, because we do CDW [Claim+data+warrant] all the time for their chapter guides that they have for homework, but I’m very loose on those because I’m more so getting at like, ‘Are you paying attention?’ But this is like, Okay, so we’ve practiced this in a low stakes way, every day. But now I need to check in where you are. To make sure that...so like for the assertion paragraph two, I got that data from assertion paragraph one that they were quote bombing. So I know before we hit definition essay, at the end, what I need to really rehab after we finish the book, in a structured way, so that you can successfully complete those...the definition essay. (Interview 2)

Maria designed assignments to prepare her students for the final assessment. In addition to aiding comprehension, the chapter guides were used to give the students a “low-stakes way” to practice writing text-based arguments, but Maria acknowledges that she was not picky on the format. She was more concerned with her students’ ideas. But, she also had her students complete Writing on Demand paragraphs, which required the students to write a structured paragraph, which allowed her to identify skills she needed to, in her words, “rehab” so her students could be successful on the definition essay.

As the students began to work on the final essay, Maria’s instructions became formulaic. She designed an outline for the students to follow that was color coded to guide students’ writing to be completed in a specific order:

And then you’re going to see red and yellow highlights. So yellow highlights were to be done first. No highlights were to be done second. Red highlights were to be done last.... So like, a lot of them were are like, talking about how when they start an
outline, they just look at the hook and like, just obsess, because they can't think of
something clever. And I'm like, No, do the hook last, always. (Interview 3)

Maria created an outline to direct students not only to write in a specific form, but also to
write elements of the essay in a specific order. (See Figure 2)
Figure 2

*Maria’s Outline for Unit Assessment*

**P1 Intro:**

**Hook:**

**Introduction of texts:**

**Thesis / Definition:** Through these texts, the American Dream is defined as

**P2 Body Paragraph #1: Text 1**

**Claim #1 (how first text supports thesis):**

**Data 1:**

**Citation:** ()

**Warrant 1 - Provide details to support your data (“quote the quote” and explain):**

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
Maria’s creation of the outline and the color-coding was in response to her students’ struggle to draft content and use their time wisely. This outline was specifically designed to help students write the paper they were required to write. While the structure of the outline could be used for other text-based arguments, her focus on using it was to help the students write the paper for that unit.

Based on the work her students produced during the unit, Maria believed her students would struggle to write the final paper. To support them in writing the essay, she provided multiple chances to practice writing paragraphs similar to the style expected on the final essay and, through the chapter guides, to work with the content they were expected to use.

**Text-based Analysis Skills: General Writing**

A fourth perceived need Maria observed was her students’ struggle to use data appropriately to support their arguments and to explain how their data connected to their claims. Through the students’ practice CDWs, Maria decided the students’ use and incorporation of data and their warranting (what she called “quoting the quote”) of that data were two areas where the students needed support. In this context, “data” refers to evidence from the texts the students were reading to support their claims, or assertion, the students were trying to make. It could be a paraphrase, but more often than not, it was a quote. The warrant is the explanation to the reader about how the selected quote supports the writer’s claim. “Quote the quote” is local lingo in the department for a strategy about warrants that involves having the students refer back to specific content in the quotation/evidence/data to explain how that specific content supports their claim. Students often struggle with specificity so “quote the quote” is used to try to remind them
to refer to specific parts of the quotation from the text, as opposed to broad claims that do not reflect the content of the quote they chose.

When asked what elements of the final essay the students struggled with, Maria said:

Quoting the quote, in one class, they struggled with that, which was frustrating for me, because it was a huge point of what we worked on and what was articulated in class and what was in the directions like time and time again, like when you warrant please specifically quote the quote, like every single time. (Interview 3)

She was clearly frustrated by this because she had spent so much time working with the students on “quoting the quote”:

So we did the assertion paragraphs. As we’ve talked about really focusing on claim being specific, arguable, including title, author, genre. We did a lot of in-text citation work, a lot of how to cite, a lot of how to intro data, within those assertion paragraphs. And then quoting the quote work was all in that. (Interview 3)

She described what expectations she and her mentor had for each element of the argument in the formal assertion paragraphs. The claim needed to be “specific, arguable” and include “title, author, genre.” The data needed to be introduced and the warrant needed to “quote the quote.” Maria refers to “quote the quote” once in her second interview. She refers to “quote the quote” or “quoting the quote” ten times in her third interview. All references were about students not warranting their data or her identification of an area of writing that students needed to improve to be successful on the final essay.

Through reviewing her students’ formal paragraphs, Maria identified that students had difficulty writing warrants and integrating quotations. This difficulty led her to include
instruction on and practice in how to write warrants, a task she called “quoting the quote.”

**Summary of Influence of Students’ Perceived Needs**

Maria noticed three areas where she felt students needed extra help in order to be successful in this unit and beyond that resulted in additional or modified writing instruction and use. She had noticed in previous units that her students struggled to share original ideas about course content, so she included freewriting to give the students a chance to ponder big topics connected to the American Dream before having a class discussion. With respect to helping her students successfully meet the requirements of the curriculum, Maria added writing options and practice to help the students understand the unit’s core novel and be prepared to write the unit’s final assessment. In addition to needs that were directly related to the unit, Maria noticed students struggling with key writing concepts they would need on future assignments, in her course and the following year. Because of her observations, she included lessons on how to use quotes effectively and how to warrant the quote in order to connect it to the claim.

**Summary of Influences on Maria’s Writing Instruction**

Maria’s use of writing was influenced by three main factors: her writer identity, her teacher identity and her perception of the needs her students had if they were to be successful in the unit and in future assignments.

Maria felt she lacked coherence in writing and speaking spontaneously, a trait she called “Maria Brain.” She also did not view herself as a strong academic writer based on experiences in writing in previous English courses at the university.

Maria’s teacher identity was formed by judgements she felt were coming from her mentor and other members of her Professional Learning Community (PLC). She included
standard writing practices, formal instruction and a very formulaic essay that aligned with the work being done by the other members of her PLC who intimidated her. After the unit was finished, she regretted many of the decisions she made based on her work with the PLC.

Finally, the needs of Maria’s students influenced her instructional choices. After reading students’ practice paragraphs during the unit and reflecting on her knowledge of the students from previous units, she realized that there were elements of reading comprehension and writing that she needed to help her students with. She perceived students struggling to share original ideas in class so she began having the students freewrite to think through complex concepts. She perceived the students struggled to understand the novel, write text-based arguments, and integrate evidence and write warrants for their claims. To respond to these needs she created chapter guides to help them focus on certain spots in each chapter and practice analyzing the text, she created mini-lessons on quote integration and warrants, and she provided her students with an outline for the final paper.

To be clear, not all of the influences that impacted Maria’s teacher of writing emerged during the unit or were necessarily representative of poor teaching practices. It is good that Maria was responsive to her students’ needs and revised her teaching to help them succeed. But I suggest that Maria’s lack of confidence as an academic writer and her perception of how other teachers viewed her caused her to revise her own plans so there was less conflict with other teachers who were teaching the same unit, and more on helping her students understand *The Great Gatsby* enough to be able to write a paper on the American Dream.
Xavier

Xavier, the other participant, also taught College Prep English 11 and was teaching the American Dream unit the same time Maria was teaching hers. They would chat about the novel and the struggles their students were having, but for the most part their teaching styles and assignments were different. But, as I will illustrate below, his use of writing and writing instruction were influenced by fewer forces than Maria’s use.

Xavier was influenced by his identity as a teacher and his response to perceived students’ needs (See Table 3). His teacher identity was shaped by his interest and implementation of the ideals of a democratic classroom, as opposed to the way he felt perceived by other teachers. Xavier also observed that his students were struggling to understand the novel and write the final assessment, but the use of writing he shared with me focused on writing the essay than comprehending the text.

Table 3

Overview of Influences on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Identity</th>
<th>Democratic Classrooms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Students’ Needs</td>
<td>Core Assessment</td>
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</table>

Background

As stated in chapter three, Xavier is a graduate student who worked for 10 years in sales before returning to be a teacher. His undergraduate degree was in Public Relations and Marketing, but upon his return to Atlantic State, he had taken some English and education courses prior to starting the teacher education program to fulfill state
certification requirements. One course that left a deep impression on Xavier was about curriculum design in which he learned about democratic classrooms and schools. The structure of his unit was designed around two concepts he identified with in democratic teaching: student autonomy and self-direction. In this section, I will describe these factors in detail through my conversations with Xavier and his journaling.

**Xavier’s Unit**

In the unit syllabus, Xavier described the purpose of the unit:

> [Students] will explore how the American Dream has evolved from 1920 to 2019. Students will decide what values of the American Dream they accept and reject, and they will write about how the American Dream has helped and hurt certain groups more than others. Students will create a final project where they support their interpretation of multiple texts examining how the American Dream has changed from 1920 to 2019 focusing on freedom, liberty, opportunity, equality, rights, and democracy. (Xavier’s American Dream Syllabus)

For the first two thirds of the unit, students chose their own vocabulary terms to be assessed on, a method different from previous units, and the majority of the classes was spent on discussing the novel in large or small groups, writing claim+data+warrant paragraphs and some short creative pieces or responding online to plus-one readings. The last third of the unit was spent pulling the ideas from *The Great Gatsby* and the plus-one texts together and writing the summative assessment.

**First Influence on Xavier’s Teach of Writing: Teacher Identity**

One area of influence on Xavier’s teaching of writing was his identity as a teacher as molded by his pedagogical beliefs. Xavier designed his unit with a goal of creating a class
founded on democratic principles. Xavier had taken a course in Contemporary School Curriculums at Atlantic University where he learned about the theory of democratic classrooms. He entered the program wanting to try out the ideals of democratic teaching as much as he could. For his choice readings, Xavier chose multiple articles from *Democracy and Education* to expand his knowledge on the theory and practice of democratic teaching beyond the introduction he received in the one course.

The readings Xavier had completed about teaching democratically left him with clear beliefs about the bigger picture of education and schooling:

> We should teach our students to not just be passive animals waiting to be filled up with information, but inquisitive, questioning people, fully prepared to participate in democracy. (Reading Journal)

He continued with this idea in one of his interviews:

> And, you know, that's...that's a little bit more idealist of an idea where like, I really believe that school can be that place where you're starting to allow students to make choices about their own educational path, encouraging them to own their own education, because once they leave here, no one's going to do that for them. Right? So we're prescribing them worksheet upon worksheet upon worksheet, telling them what they need to know. And as soon as they leave, no one's going to do that for them, right? And then they're going to be in this world of like, wow, I don't...I don't know how to make these choices. It's almost like this...18 is this magic switch that you're like, AHH

---

5 Exclamation of surprise to mimic how students feel when given unexpected responsibilities upon graduating.
Xavier saw school as a place to prepare students to participate in society. A key element to this participation, in his eyes, was the ability to question and think for oneself. He notes that in schools the students are often positioned as passive recipients of knowledge and then they graduate and “this magic switch” changes and all of a sudden, they are expected to be able to identify who they are and become active participants in society. But, in his eyes, they were not asked to think actively in school. While these are generalizations on his part about the idea of the active and passive learners, his ideas do align with those of others who researched and written about the passive and active role of students in classrooms (ex. Smagorinsky, 2010).

During his unit, Xavier had specific visions for how he expected students to embrace and embody the activities and freedom he imagined in his democratic classroom. He wanted to provide the students with opportunities to engage with real audiences, to decide what pace to work at, to facilitate discussions, and to direct the learning of the class.

Xavier tried to foster the tenets of democratic learning when he designed writing assignments that had a specific audience, the other students in the class, with a specific purpose, to generate discussion about various elements of the American Dream. He explained:

I think with my unit, the way that I’m planning on incorporating writing, is going to be a combination of both where they get to be a little bit creative, and thinking about texts and how texts work. And also, there’s a practical element of, I’m producing something for my peers to see and respond to. So there’s an actual real element of, I’m not just writing because they told me to, I’m writing because it’s going to open a conversation or it’s going to start a conversation with someone else. To me, that’s
practical ... [I want to give] the students an opportunity to use writing to communicate with each other, and build...build a conversation based off of their thoughts and they’re wonderings rather than writing just for the simple purpose of "I need to do this for a grade," I’m going to do this in order to communicate with other people. (Interview 1)

Xavier wanted there to be a “real” element to the students’ writing. He also wanted the students to understand "how texts work." He hoped the fact they were producing something for their peers to read would affect their writing either in participation or in quality. He saw his assignments as "practical” and that the writing was intended to "open conversation” as opposed to demonstrate a piece of knowledge or skill to the teacher.

For example, Xavier had designed an activity called “table groups,” which were online discussion boards. Students had to read a selection of texts, write a response about them and then respond to another student’s post. He expected the students would want to engage with this writing practice since they knew what they wrote would be read by other students and that their ideas would be valued since the analysis was their original thoughts instead of a regurgitation of class discussion and (often) the teacher’s opinion.

For the first round of “table groups,” he did not put any specific requirements for the responses. He described the assignment to me: “the prompt was for the initial discussion prompts, write a 300-word response to the following question. In their work, how did these artists/authors tackle the concept of rights and equality?” (Interview 2). He identified some entries as good because they mentioned multiple texts by name and each had its own commentary. He identified weaker comments as those that were vaguer and didn’t specify individual topics or ideas. On the next round of discussions, he provided more instructions,
such as telling students to name each piece being discussed. His purpose for the assignment was for the students to synthesize the texts in writing since that was the ultimate goal of the unit: synthesize multiple texts to define the American Dream.

Xavier used the writing at the table groups to assess students’ ability to synthesize multiple texts and to hold them accountable for reading the texts. The students had the freedom to determine when they completed the task within a two-week window and how to interpret the assignment given the intentionally vague instructions. Xavier saw this as a way to use writing to foster democratic ideals in the classroom given how much choice was given to the students. In this case, Xavier’s teacher identity drove him to create assignments with choice that offered a space for students to share ideas with each other in writing.

Over the course of his unit, Xavier was confronted with many unexpected experiences that caused him to reflect on his vision of democratic teaching. He realized that while he wanted to provide the students with choice and power, they were not prepared for it, and he had an obligation as their teacher to cover the curriculum and prepare his students for the final assessment. He connected this realization with his readings on constructivist teaching:

And as much as we [teachers] want to be, you know, progressive educators and, you know, get behind this idea of constructivism and creativity, and, especially in the humanities. It’s just, it doesn’t happen. Because, you know, the fact [of] the matter is, the world doesn’t work that way, either. You still have things that you don’t want to do and you do. (Interview 3)
Near the end of the unit, Xavier’s focus shifted from thinking of teaching students in a way to allow them to be active participants in their learning to seeing students as people who had to jump through hoops determined by the curriculum. He concluded, “So although I value choice and having a... having a multitude of products that they can choose from, if the...if the goal is a definition essay, you know...” (Interview 2). Xavier wanted his students to have choice and independence, but it ultimately came down to whether they could complete the definition essay because that’s what the unit curriculum required.

**Summary of Xavier’s Identity as a Teacher**

Xavier designed his unit with the tenets of a democratic classroom in mind. He struggled to implement all of his ideas because of how students approached learning and responded to choice. Xavier entered the unit expecting the students to know how to work independently when given freedom to work at their own pace. To foster independence, he created assignments that embodied his identity as a teacher and provided students with more choice and autonomy than they had had for the first half of the year. When he realized the students were not responding the way he hoped they would, he reworked the way he used writing to create a more structured system that left little room for student independence. I will describe this structured system below.

**Second Influence on Xavier’s Teach of Writing: Students’ Perceived Needs**

A second area of influence on Xavier’s teaching of writing was his identification of students’ needs, specifically with respect to completing the final unit assessment. Xavier, like Maria, determined his students weren’t prepared for the final assessment because of the required form of the assessment and the lack of interest in and comprehension of *The Great Gatsby*. Unlike Maria, Xavier only discussed how he prepared students for the final
assessment; he did not discuss any tactics he used to help the students understand the novel better.

He explained to me why the core assessment was difficult for the students. His students needed to master many elements to write the paper, which meant he had to prepare his students for all those elements:

There are a lot of moving pieces. There were a lot of moving pieces in a definition synthesis essay. A lot, a lot that made it so much that it was really following a formula, that if you missed part of the formula, your... your argument took a big hit. And it was very hard for all of our students to fully understand what...what was expected of them and how to craft a synthesis essay in a, in a way that made sense.

(Interview 3)

He described the essay as a “formula” and how it led to students not necessarily learning how to write better, or even express individual opinions:

Because it’s so formulaic, even thinking back to math... And it’s the same way in this type of writing where, you know, you just kind of know, you have to know where things are, and where they need to be plugged in and where they need to go. But you know what that means for me is reading 73 essays that are almost identical...almost identical, that you’re like, wow, I just want this...this rubric...just, you know, it just goes, but I’m still like craving...I’m still craving, like these really cool papers that tell me a whole lot of different things about their thoughts. And, you know, but it just didn’t happen that way (Interview 3)
Because some of his students were struggling to understand how to write the synthesis essay, he created a formula for them to follow that took the shape of an outline similar to Maria’s.

Xavier supported his students by providing a fill-in-the-blank outline where they could “plug in” content from the text (See Figures 3 and 4) and grading criteria in the form of a checklist (See Figure 5). This decreased the need for students to think about the writing of an essay and it became instead a process of finding relevant data, and, I would argue, became an exercise in reading comprehension over writing. During the writing process, which took place over several days in class, he broke students into groups based
on where they were in their writing process and he and his mentor conferenced with students individually to help them with the final product.

FIGURE 4:

*Xavier’s Outline for Unit Assessment – Supporting Paragraph*

**Body Paragraph #1**

Claim #1 (first example): ____________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Data #1: ____________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Warrant #1 - Provide details to support your data (and, how, so, because, illustrates):

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

As a result of the outline and grading structure, to do well, students needed to select and organize content from texts they hadn’t read closely:

And when I...when I say, “[Do] Well,” I mean, like, finding information, gathering data, putting together coherent thoughts, because they're, they were also rereading texts that they really hadn't read the first time and then being asked to think critically on them and how they related to a bigger idea, which just was, it was
cumbersome. They had to, they had to carry a lot of things, just to get to the point of writing. (Interview 3)

Xavier described the process of writing the paper as cumbersome because the students needed to manage a lot of data so they could generate a thesis and write an organized paper that supported the thesis. The result of helping the students organize their data left Xavier reading:

Seventy-three essays that are almost identical...almost identical, that you’re like, wow, I just want this...this rubric...just, you know, it just goes, but I’m still like craving...I’m still craving, like these really cool papers that tell me a whole lot of different things about their thoughts. And, you know, but it just didn’t happen that way. (Interview 3)
Xavier ended up with essays that lacked originality and thoughtfulness.

**Summary of Influence of Perceived Students’ Needs on Teaching of Writing**

Much of Xavier’s writing instruction focused on preparing the students for the final assessment. He responded to their needs by creating an outline to help the students organize their data once they located it in the various readings. His choice to use a point-based rubric also provided students with a way to see this “writing” as a list of elements instead of a cohesive unit of ideas.

**Summary of Influences on Xavier’s Teaching of Writing**

Xavier’s decisions about how to teach writing and what aspects of learning to write he would need to address in his class were impacted by his identity as a teacher and his perception of his students’ needs with respect to being able to write the final assessment.

Xavier also held a strong identity as a democratic teacher and designed and started his unit with activities and goals based on democratic pedagogical beliefs, particularly encouraging choice and self-regulation in the students. Xavier created writing opportunities that would allow the students a choice in content and pacing. While they were completing the task, he felt they were doing well, though he did add more specific parameters for their second submission. However, when it came time to write the final paper, Xavier realized the students did not read or understand or remember as much as he thought they had from their choice readings responses.

Xavier realized his students needed help organizing their ideas into the final paper when they started to write. He considered the paper hard to write because it required students to organize information from multiple sources. But, when they started trying to write, Xavier suspected the students did not read/understand the core novel or the choice
reads. He had to revise his plans for teaching how to write the final essay and ended up providing students with a fill-in-blank outline to follow. Xavier’s instruction and classroom activities were directed by needs he perceived in his students with respect to their ability to complete the final assessment for the unit.

Cross-Case Analysis

In the following section, I will review the findings for each case study and conduct a cross-case synthesis. I describe the trends found in both studies and propose possible reasons for differences. Finally, I will articulate and assess the findings with respect to the research questions in this study. The primary question in this study is What influences on writing instruction do TCs identify as impacting their unit and lesson planning and/or classroom practice? How much impact does each influence have at any one time? To answer this question, in more detail, I will also propose findings that respond to the following supporting questions:

- For what purposes do teacher candidates set writing tasks or emphasize writing or offer writing opportunities? And what role does the needs of students have on TCs’ decision-making when planning to teach or teaching writing in a secondary ELA classroom?
- When TCs feels that two or more sources of influence are giving conflicting advice, how do they decide who/what to listen to? What changes would the TCs make if they had more freedom?
- What are TCs’ previous experiences as writers and teaching writing? How do TCs describe “teaching” writing? What does that phrase mean to them?
Overview of Influences on Maria’s Use of Writing

To review, three main influences on Maria’s teaching and use of writing were her writer identity, her teacher identity, and her perceptions of her students’ needs.

Maria’s writer identity consists of “Maria Brain”, her self-described weakness in academic writing, and her insecurity as a teacher. Maria explained that when she spoke or wrote with “Maria Brain,” her ideas were not clear. Maria also did not identify as an academic writer. She felt stronger when she was writing on social media platforms. Maria’s teacher identity was formed by the way she perceived members of her PLC and her mentor were judging her. She made changes to her unit based on her perceptions of how they viewed her and her teaching.

Finally, Maria’s perceptions about the needs of her students also impacted her use of writing in her unit. Maria noticed that her students were reluctant to share ideas about the readings so she added freewriting to the unit to provide students with a place to work through big ideas related to the novel and the concept of the American Dream. Maria noticed that her students did not understand or were not reading the text so she created chapter guides that provided the students with help knowing what to focus on in each chapter. The chapter guides also included extensive writing practice, though it was in an informal format. Her students also struggled to successfully follow the structure of argumentation they were expected to follow per department expectations, especially how they were to explain the evidence they used to support their arguments: she referred to this practice as “quoting the quote” or warranting. In response to this struggle, Maria instituted workshops and peer reviews focused specifically on incorporating and warranting data.
Overview of Influences on Xavier’s Use of Writing

To review, the two main influences on Xavier’s teaching and use of writing were his teacher identity and his perception of his students’ need to successfully complete the unit assessment.

Xavier’s teacher identity focused on his desire to create a democratic classroom. As part of a democratic classroom, Xavier incorporated a lot of choice and self-direction on the part of the students. He allowed them to work at their own pace and placed as few restrictions on their initial writing assignments as possible. While he was happy overall with the first sample of writing he received on this choice assignment, Xavier realized that he needed to provide the students with more instruction and structure for future assignments. When it came time to write the final assessment, Xavier noticed that his students struggled to remember content from the multiple readings and suspected they had only skimmed the work when they completed the initial assignment. He also began to include more direct instruction about writing, both content and style. To support the students in their completion of the essay, Xavier created a fill-in-the-blank outline that showed students how to organized their quotations and warrants, but, as he noted in interview three, “this paper had nothing to do with writing.”

Cross-Case Synthesis

In the following section, I will compare and contrast influences on Xavier’s and Maria’s writing instruction:

Differences

Writer Identity
Maria’s identity as a writer either explicitly or inferentially influenced how she used writing in the classroom. Maria identified academic writing as a weakness: “I’m really bad at writing poetry. I’m really bad at writing academic papers” (Interview 1). Her examples of experiences with academic writing all were forms of literary analysis. She attributed her weakness to her “Maria Brain” where she had idea in her head that she struggled to make sense on paper. She described the challenge of “Maria Brain” when she was writing papers:

Because in my head...like I just am a bad, bad speaker, like talker, like, communicator day-to-day. And so to write, like, I can ask 100 questions. But to be able to communicate with you how I like got through that process is very difficult for me to, like, formulate, and perfect and edit to make sure that like my audience can actually understand what I’m saying. Just because I’m just such a scatterbrain.

(Interview 1)

Maria identified her struggle to put ideas onto paper as a weakness because she was a “scatterbrain” and her audience couldn’t understand what she said. Maria was able to name genres of writing she did not associate with writing for English classes that she was good at. Maria prided herself in her ability to write on various social media platforms:

I’m fantastic. I can write a beautiful Facebook post. Like I really can churn out [a] great birthday post. Like my success stories are amazingly written. And my Facebook is incredibly honest.... But I can crank out a real nice story truth like to Tim O’Brien-vibe Instagram posts that will get you into a space. (Interview 1)

Maria believed that her writing on social media platforms and her ability to change her writing for purpose and audience as she moved between platforms was a writing strength
for her. While I would argue that her ability to change her writing for purpose and audience is a strength for writers, she did not verbalize that connection.

I suggest that her insecurity as an academic writer emerged when she was creating the final requirements for the unit assessment in that she defined rules of style, such as not use of first-person pronouns:

But a lot of them really started using academic language, like taking it the next step syntactically, and diction wise...because it’s just such a frickin’ academic paper, like taking up the I. And I like looking back on it. I almost wish I wouldn’t have done it that way. Because although that’s what we say, in high school, like, you can't use I or me or my, that’s a lie when you get into higher education, like entirely. (Interview 3)

Making blanket statements can make writing easier for some students because it can reduce the complexities of writing that come with broader parameters. But, while she was strict with some elements, she also provided a chance for students to learn how to use academic language.

Each teacher was allowed to adjust the general question about the American Dream and Maria chose to make her students focus on analyzing the thoughts of other writers instead of sharing their own opinions.

And so I was kind of tailoring mine towards making them not have such a simplistic thesis, but mine did not allow them to say I... So they did not use I or my or we etc.... And mine was you are defining what [the authors of the readings are] saying.... But they were to not use like "I" because it was more about their interpretations, rather than their conclusions, which we worked on like the last day. (Interview 3)
In infer that Maria’s strictness in the voice her students could use and the focus on their argument goes back to her struggles with writing academic papers at university. She struggled to know what to say and how to say it, so she provided her students with greater structure to know what she, as their teacher and grader, wanted them to say and how to say it.

**Commonalities**

**Teacher Identity**

Maria’s and Xavier’s teacher identities influenced how they used writing in their units, but these identities emerged in two ways. Xavier’s identity was manifested in his beliefs about democratic teaching. Maria’s identity was formed from her interactions with her mentor and members of her PLC. This is not to say that Maria did not have a strong pedagogical stance or that Xavier didn’t interact with the PLC he and Maria were in, but these aspects of their identities as teacher did not clearly connect to choices Maria and Xavier made with respect to writing in the classroom.

**Maria, Her Mentor, and Her PLC.** Maria’s identity as a teacher emerged from interactions with colleagues she worked with. Maria was very unsure about her ability to teach. One reason for this may be because she felt like she was being judged by members of her PLC and her mentor. For example, she twice reported about her low Lexile score and discomfort reading *The Great Gatsby*, which she considered to be a difficult text:

I’m not a strong reader. Like my Lexile range is low. Like, it’s, it’s not great. Like from an academic standpoint, but it takes me, like I have to read things multiple times, like academic texts-wise. And even, like, when we read stories, I’m really
finding this out more as a teacher, like Holly [her mentor] will be like, so like, VIPs\(^6\) that you took away from that, and I'll like say stuff. And she's like, Yeah, but like, 'did you miss the...all the symbols’ and ‘I’m like...oh, true, but like, I don’t. I don’t have the training, like up to par that I like need to.’ (Interview 1)

Maria felt she was not living up to the expectations of being a teacher, especially a teacher as good as her mentor, because of her inability to identify the “right” symbols or VIPs. This lack of confidence bled into meetings with other faculty in her PLC where Maria was reluctant to voice her opinions on teaching or content. Maria repeatedly discussed how she felt judged by her PLC collaborators:

But then at the same time, in PLC, I felt like everyone was just like, Fuck you, Fuck you, Fuck you. And I was like, Oh my god, like, I'm not being good. Like, I hate my job. My students hate me and the teachers are judging me. (Interview 3)

Her experiences hurt her self-image as a teacher in the other teachers’ eyes, but also in her students’ eyes. In addition, this judgement make Maria undercut her own interpretations of the text:

And then at PLC everyone's, you know, talking about how this and that thing, and I’m like, Oh, this is, you know, I let myself be brainwashed into like, Oh, this is right, this is right, this is right, this is right. And like they would say like, Oh my God, my students said this one interpretation. I'm like, Oh my god, I'm like, Oh, fuck, that was my interpretation so that’s really weird. (Interview 3)

\(^6\) At the host school, VIP stands for Very Important Point.
Maria felt like a poor teacher because her interpretations were different from her mentor’s and the PLC’s. She even found that her interpretation matched with some students’ interpretations that the teachers negatively commented on.

The element of Maria’s teacher identity connected to the writing she used in class was formed by these interactions with other teachers and her mentor. I infer that her decisions near the end of the unit to make the final paper more “academic” were an attempt to demonstrate that she was holding high expectations for her students and meeting the same standards as the other teachers.

**Xavier’s Pedagogy.** Xavier’s teacher identity was founded in his beliefs about democratic teaching and learning. He explained his goal for students was for them to become active participants in a democratic society. But, he felt that in current classrooms students were too passive. He was irked by the fact that when they left school, they needed to know how to be active participants in society, but they weren’t given that opportunity very often in school:

> And to me, paying your taxes and making money for yourself, sure, that’s a part of the society. But moreover, you have to be a citizen of the world, the community that you're involved in. So to me, it’s just this like feeling of how do you... how do you learn how to be democratic, if you’re not given the opportunity to make choices at a young age, as soon as you turn 18, you're expected to make all these choices, and you had no practice doing that...I really believe that school can be that place where you're starting to allow students to make choices about their own educational path, encouraging them to own their own education, because once they leave here, no one’s going to do that for them. Right? So we’re prescribing them worksheet upon
worksheet upon worksheet telling them what they need to know. And as soon as they leave, no one’s going to do that for them, right? And then they’re going to be in this world of like, wow, I don’t... I don’t know how to make these choices. It’s almost like this 18 is this magic switch that you’re like, Ahh. (Interview 2)

Xavier began the unit using the perspective that the students could guide themselves if he provided the opportunities to do so. Specifically, he created writing assignments that required students to analyze short texts and write responses in a discussion forum where the audience was other students as opposed to just the teachers. He designed these assignments to be discussions by having the students respond to at least one other students’ post. He was looking for them to actively create meaning from their readings.

Xavier believed that giving the students a specific audience beyond the teacher would help motivate them to be more proactive in their learning. While he was happy with their initial work, he acknowledged that they needed more structure and provided it by way of assignment instructions. It was not until the final assessment that he realized the students had not understood the material as well as he believed they had. I will discuss below in “Perceived Students’ Needs” how he responded to that realization.

**Perceived Students’ Needs**

Both Maria and Xavier included writing tasks that responded to needs they perceived their students had with respect to their ability to successfully write the final paper. Maria noticed her students struggling in reading comprehension and accurately writing in the genre of the final paper and incorporated many writing tasks to help prepare her students for the final assessment. Xavier also noticed students were either not reading
or not understanding the text, but the writing tasks and assignments he spoke about focused solely on preparing students for the final assessment.

**Reading Comprehension.** Maria realized early on that her students did not understand or were not reading the novel for the unit. She responded by creating chapter guides that showed the students what areas of the text to focus on and provided them with practice in textual analysis:

> [T]he chapter guides. So there's always writing in those, and that's either the structured CDW, or it's like a piece of it. So like write a claim, or write a claim and then write two pieces of data, or we'll verbally warrant what we did in the chapter guide in class. (Interview 2)

She also used reading comprehension strategies to help students decipher challenging parts of the text. When they practiced using these strategies, she used writing to hold the students accountable for close readings of the text:

Maria: Annotate, so highlight, underline, etc., as well as 10 comments on the document.

KM: Okay,

Maria: Yeah. So, and then within that 10 comments that I required, they had to use five different strategies.

KM: Okay.

Maria: So if you used a lookup strategy, you can’t just write look up.

KM: They actually had to, like...write

---

7 CDW is shorthand for Claim+Data+Warrant, the preferred language for text-based argumentative writing in the department.
Maria: You actually had to actually write what you looked up. (Interview 2)

Maria included writing activities to help her students understand the text better and to practice moving beyond surface-level comprehension towards textual analysis.

**Final Assessment.** Maria and Xavier both believed that their students needed practice and help in writing the final paper. Maria provided practice writing text-based arguments in the chapter guides and practice analysis paragraphs in class. She provided the students with an outline for the final paper. Xavier provided an outline for the final paper, too.

To help prepare them for the final assessment, Maria’s students worked on writing CDWs in various forms throughout the unit. From reading their practice writings, Maria knew that the students did not know how to write a key element of the required argument structure, the warrant. In the warrant, the writer explains how the chosen evidence supports the argument. In response to their struggles with this rhetorical convention, Maria ran multiple “Quote the Quote” workshops designed to help her students write warrants. When the students were ready to write the paper, Maria provided them with a structured outline to follow (see Figure 2) that not only dictated how they should write, but also in what order they should write. This was a significant change from her initial desire to encourage freewriting and find safe spaces for students to try out new ideas.

As Xavier began to prepare his students for the final assessment, he included a lot of scaffolding of writing and differentiation through small group work and teacher conferences. To facilitate his students’ success, he created an outline for them to follow:
I took this piece. And make it a little bit more formulaic because I think for some of our students, that formula really helps...helps them get to that solid definition essay.

(Interview 2)

The outline (see Figures 3 and 4) provided a sentence by sentence layout for the students, which aligned with the grading criteria that took the form of a checklist (see Figure 5).

**Possible Explanations for Differences in Influences**

While Maria and Xavier were teaching the same unit at the same time to the same track of students, there are elements of the situation that were outside their control that could have impacted any decisions they made about teaching writing. Maria and Xavier had different mentors and different relationships with their mentors. Maria was in awe of her mentor's knowledge and skills. In an early journal entry, Maria wrote, “She has met me where I'm at and never shames me for my noviceness. She is fun, engaged and when I'm leading, always has my back, feel supported honestly to my own commitment to growing” (undated). But when it came time for Maria to teach her unit, she was concerned that she couldn't meet the high standard she perceived her mentor setting for her. Maria explained to me how she felt in class sometimes, “I felt like Holly was like, judging me. Like, like, if I like, the video wasn’t getting to, like, the correct idea of the chapter, which is fine, because she's like wicked smart in Gatsby” (Interview 3). While Maria believed Holly was a great teacher, during her unit, Maria felt insecure and judged by her. Xavier’s mentor’s “style is, ‘you go do it, and see what happens’....She's...she's really good at being like, 'Hmm? That really didn’t work out so well’” (Interview 3) and then worked with Xavier to reflect with him afterwards about how the lesson went and could be improved. The impact of the
mentor-teacher candidate relationships could have influenced the teaching and use of writing in the teacher candidates’ units.

The relationship between the teacher candidates and their students is also an explanation for differences that I could not account for. Maria valued seeing her students with humanity and not simply bodies in seats. One aspect of the unit that she felt so frustrated about was how it changed her relationship so she felt like she was treating them “like pegs in a machine” (Interview 3). After the unit was over, she explained, “My students hate me... And the end of the unit, I was like, I hate myself, and now they hate me. And I am never gonna do that again” (Interview 3). Xavier never talked about his students or his relationship with them like this, but Xavier briefly talked about struggling with classroom management with at least one of his classes. The student-teacher relationship between Maria, Xavier and their students could have impacted writing use, but since this was not a focus of any questions, I cannot say if it was or wasn’t.

Summary of Cross-Case Analysis

Both Maria’s and Xavier’s use of writing and teaching of writing evolved during the unit. Both teacher candidates’ use of writing was impacted by their teacher identity and their perceptions of needs of their students. In addition, Maria’s identity as a writer also impacted her use of writing.

Both teacher candidates’ identities as teachers influenced their inclusion of writing. Maria felt insecure with her teaching and expectations, based on perceived judgement from her PLC, so she redesigned her unit to include more formal paragraph writing and practice analyzing the text. Xavier entered the unit with the plan to implement pedagogical practices based on democratic principles, but realized later in the units that the students
had not completed the work the way he expected and he had, perhaps, given them too much ownership over their work too quickly.

Xavier and Maria also perceived that their students needed extra instruction in certain areas of the unit to be prepared for the final assessment. They both noticed students were struggling to understand the text. Xavier noticed his students needed support organizing their ideas. Maria noticed her students needed support using quotations and warranting their claims. Maria supported her students by creating chapter guides that provided opportunities for the students to practice analytical writing and to focus their reading. She also held workshops designed to improve her students’ abilities to use quotations and warrant them to write effective arguments. She provided her students with an outline to use as a guide for structuring their writing. Xavier’s use of writing came in the form of an outline he provided while the students were writing their final assessment. His focus was more on helping his students organize the many ideas they had read about in the core novel and choice readings.

Interviews with Maria demonstrated how her writer identity influenced her use of writing in her unit. Maria saw herself as weak academic writer, attributing this partly this to her “Maria Brain.” To help herself focus her thoughts she used freewriting a lot, a practice she brought into the classroom. I suggest that Maria’s struggles with academic writing also led to her making the final assessment more “academic” in her eyes than some other teachers’ assignments. While other teachers focused on having the students define the American Dream for themselves and support their opinion with readings, Maria expected her students to write about what the authors of their texts portrayed as the American Dream. She also worked hard to help them refine their language to make it less
personal, a trait she associated with academic writing in the moment of working with students on the essays. In retrospect she realized her stylistic rules were not representative of a lot of writing in higher education.

**Answers to Research Questions**

Based on my findings, I propose the following answers to my research questions:

The primary question that I explored in my research was **“What influences on writing instruction do teacher candidates identify as impacting their unit and lesson planning and/or classroom practice? How much impact does each influence have at any one time?”**

The teacher candidates identified explicitly only one influence on their teaching, which was the needs they perceived their students had in order to complete the final assessment and successfully achieve the goals of the unit. I infer from my conversations with them about why and when writing was used that their teaching identities, and, in the case of Maria, her writing identity also influenced how they used writing in the classroom.

Both participants in this study chose to include writing practice and activities based on their perceptions of what their students needed to be able to do to write successfully. Xavier appeared to define “successfully” as being able to write the final paper. Maria appeared to define “successfully” more broadly and chose to incorporate writing practices connected to writing essays beyond the one in this unit. Xavier and Maria were required to use *The Great Gatsby* to teach a unit with the theme of the American Dream, which culminated in a definition essay on the American Dream. During the unit, both teacher candidates realized their students would need more structured help to understand the text
so they could write the required paper. They also realized at varying stages that the students would need a lot of support to write the final required paper.

Entering the unit, because Maria knew that her students needed a place to try out ideas, she included freewriting activities for students to work through difficult concepts while they were reading. While the freewriting was a positive experience for the students, she had to eliminate it so there was more room for chapter guides and practice writing paragraphs. This change was initiated because of Maria’s awareness that her students didn’t understand or weren’t reading *The Great Gatsby*. Maria also added workshops focused on selecting data and warranting it in response to reading their practice paragraphs. In addition to focusing instruction on the parts of an argument, Maria also created an outline for her students to follow when writing (see Figure 2) to help them organize their ideas across the entire essay.

Xavier also noticed his students did not understand or were not reading *The Great Gatsby*, but he did not address how he responded to this problem during the unit. He did journal and talk about why the students might not be engaged by *The Great Gatsby*, but he did not share any ways he used writing to respond to this need in his students. Instead, his conversations with me focused on how he helped them locate and organize content for and write the final essay, which he did by using differentiated instruction and student-teacher conferences. This provided enough structure for the students to be able to go back into the book and the readings to locate useful content. As a final support mechanism, Xavier created an outline for the paper (see Figures 3 and 4) so the students knew what information to include in what order in order to receive a good grade on the assignment.
Measuring the amount of impact any one influence had on a teacher candidate is difficult in qualitative research due to its interpretive nature. But, both Maria and Xavier shared with me repeatedly about how the core novel and core assessment was guiding them when they were deciding what help their students needed in writing. Most of what Maria spoke about was assignments related to preparing students for writing analytical essays, like the core assessment. Xavier did not speak as much about multiple needs he perceived his students had to learn in order to improve as writers. His responses were very focused on the essay for this unit, while Maria also included instruction that could help students on future writing assignments. Maria, when asked directly, said that the freewriting came from her personal experiences as a writer. So, while I cannot measure its impact, it seems the teacher candidates’ perceptions of their students’ needs overrode any personal history about learning to write (Lortie, 1975) or personal beliefs about writing in the classroom (Street, 2003).

**For what purposes do teacher candidates set writing tasks or emphasize writing or offer writing opportunities? And what role does the needs of students have on TCs’ decision-making when planning to teach or teaching writing in a secondary ELA classroom?**

The teacher candidates in this study used writing to help students process their ideas about their readings, practice writing forms needed for the final paper, taking notes while doing a close reading of the text, and writing questions and reflections on the text to foster discussion.

**Teacher candidates set writing tasks or emphasized writing to prepare students for future, larger writing assignments.** The teacher candidates in this study
included writing tasks that were specifically geared towards the unit’s final assessment. They determined what kind of writing to use by reflecting on what needs the students had in order to meet the unit’s assessment. Xavier and Maria both identified areas of improvement for their students in order for them to do well on the final assessment. Entering the unit, Maria included freewriting activities for students to work through difficult concepts while they were reading. She chose to eliminate freewriting so there was more room for writing focused on reading comprehension and essay preparation. This change was partially initiated because of Maria’s awareness that her students didn’t understand or weren’t reading *The Great Gatsby*. Her approach towards teaching writing became more rigid the closer the class came to writing the final assessment. Some of the opportunities for the class to engage in writing included practice paragraphs that reflected a close reading of the text, workshops on writing warrants in essays, and filling in an outline for the final essay.

Xavier entered the unit knowing that students who didn’t understand the text they were reading couldn’t write a good paper about it. While he discussed his awareness of his students’ lack of understanding of the novel, in his interviews with me, he did not describe any activities involving writing he had designed to support their comprehension. The closest he came to this was describing how he refined the instruction for the discussion board assignment to be more specific so students knew what expectations he had. He did respond to students’ needs when it came to writing the final paper. It was clear as they neared the end of the unit that many of his students did not understand the concept of a definition essay. He responded by breaking his students into smaller groups where he could give more focused instruction. He also began having student-teacher conferences to
give more specific feedback. As a final support mechanism, Xavier created an outline for the paper so the students knew what information to include in what order. He even included transitional phrases they c/should use.

Maria and Xavier were able to identify weaknesses in their students based on the goals for the unit as defined by the unit curriculum. Both teacher candidates responded to those needs with varying types and amounts of writing opportunities.

When TCs feels that two or more sources of influence are giving conflicting advice, how do they decide who/what to listen to? What changes would the TCs make if they had more freedom?

The teacher candidates in this study did not identify any major conflicts between sources of advice, but there were conflicts in their goals for students versus the curriculum's. But, in this case, department or school requirements overrode other influences on how to teach writing and what to have students write in the unit taught by the teacher candidates. Both Xavier and Maria wanted to include a more creative project that was not writing-centered. Xavier, in particular, believed that students should have the chance to demonstrate knowledge and understanding in forms other than writing.

As the teacher candidates moved further into their units, they realized they needed to spend more time helping to prepare their students for the final essay, which left no time for them to assign creative projects. The conflict was not between external influences and advice, but rather their personal goals and ideas versus the department's.

While Xavier and Maria did not feel any power to choose between their ideas and the curriculum, they were both aware that in a different situation, they would have chosen their own ideas over the curriculum. Teacher candidates are capable of being reflective
practitioners who can identify weakness in their teaching and plan for adjustments in future teaching. Xavier and Maria were able to look back at their units and articulate changes they would make based on how the unit went this first time, how the unit matched their goals as teachers, and how the unit met the needs of their students. They were also able to look at individual activities and articulate why they were not successful and what they as teachers could do to make their students more successful in the future.

The main change both teacher candidates would make was to not use *The Great Gatsby* as the core text, but this decision was because of student interest rather than issues with writing. However, both Maria and Xavier wanted to include a different final assessment. Each for different reasons, but reasons that reflected on the needs of and their goals for their students. Maria wanted to change the final assessment to a memoir piece so the focus was less on the novel and more on some of the ideas explored in the novel. She explained:

> Like I would rather my kids come out less racist and less ablist and us come out together as like less "ist" than like thinking about opportunity, than like me being able to like, I'm so glad you know who Daisy Buchanan is now, because that's really going to help you with your social capital. (Interview 3)

Xavier wanted to include a creative final assessment to provide students who were good thinkers but struggling writers a chance to share their knowledge and understanding in a form other than an essay. Both teacher candidates were aware of how the decisions they made during the unit were driven by the curriculum and acknowledged places where making changes would have made the unit better in their eyes.
What are TCs’ previous experiences as writers and teaching writing? How do TCs describe “teaching” writing? What does that phrase mean to them?

Teacher candidates come to teaching with numerous positive and negative experiences as writers. In these cases, the teacher candidates received limited instruction on how to teach writing and felt challenged to identify when or how to teach writing in their own classes or reflect on how they were taught writing. When asked about how they learned to write, both struggled to identify specific instruction in classes, but when pushed to explain a time when they struggled in writing and received help, both Maria and Xavier described a similar situation of working with a professor at the university to develop clarity and organization in their writing.

When asked about their previous experiences teaching writing, both teacher candidates said they had seen their mentors teach and they had taught the department convention of using claim+data+warrant to write argumentative paragraphs, but neither could identify a time when their mentors had discussed writing or their beliefs about the teaching of writing with them.

Neither of the teacher candidates articulated what they considered teaching writing to mean beyond preparing students to write CDW paragraphs. I provided them with a list of activities and practices that educators could consider counting as teaching writing (See Appendix F), and they identified activities that they considered teaching writing, such as “discussing changes an author might make when revising their work.” Maria also said that she had used many of the activities on the list, but she didn’t not speak to me about them without prompting from the list.
While neither teacher candidate shared with me specific activities when they were teaching writing, Xavier acknowledged that the final paper “had nothing to do with writing” (Interview 3) and Maria acknowledged she set artificial rules that do not necessarily represent conventions of “good” writing (Interview 3).

**Conclusion**

In the next chapter, I will describe how my findings align with current research and theory on learning to teach and propose future research topics that this analysis suggests would be worthy areas of study.
CHAPTER 5 – IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will explain how my findings add to current research on teacher education, specifically about learning to teach writing. To do so, I will explain my revised theoretical model and connect my findings with current research. I will then address limitations of my study and areas for future research. I will end this chapter and this dissertation with a reflection on what I learned about being a researcher and how I might change my research practices moving forward.

Additions to Current Research

Theoretical Framework

In chapters one and two, I discussed the lack of research on how to teach writing. Research conducted on teacher candidates’ learning to teach writing has shown a variety of influences that impact teacher candidates’ views and use of writing. Street (2003) demonstrated how teacher candidates’ self-image as a writer was mirrored in their classrooms where TCs who loved writing created vibrant writing environments and TCs who did not like writing or feel strong in writing created limiting writing assignments and rote instruction. University instruction is also shown to have an influence on the way writing is taught, though not necessarily during student teaching; rather teacher candidates may return to it after they have taught for a few years and have some context to support what they learned at university (Grossman et al., 2000; Smagorinsky et al., 2007; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002).

Johnson, Thompson and Smagorinsky (2003) and Whitney, Blau, Bright, Cabe, Dewar, Levin, Macias and Rogers (2008) show how teacher candidates and teachers can think they are using strategies from university coursework. In some cases, they had
appropriated terminology or methods, but their work did not reflect the larger writing instructional concept. For example, Johnson, Thompson and Smagorinsky (2003) found that their participant said she was using a writer's workshop in her class when she was really using learning centers focused on a teacher-determined goal. Research has also shown that the school's curriculum can impact teachers' teaching of writing.

Returning to Johnson, Thompson and Smagorinsky (2003), the pressure their participant felt to prepare her students for a writing exam at the end of the year influenced her work throughout the year so students primarily wrote five-paragraph essays. In another study (Smagorinsky et al., 2011), a teacher was required to teach literature and writing/grammar independently. This was antithetical to the way she was taught to teach grammar, but in the second half of the year she stopped trying to follow the methods she learned at university and let her students use a computer program to learn the material. My research supports all of these findings, but also provides a look into how these various factors work together to influence a teacher candidate's instruction.

In my original theoretical model of what influences teacher candidates' teaching of writing (see Figure 1), I anticipated, based on my readings, that the culture of the school would play a major role in the decision-making process.
But, I also included experiences from university coursework and mentorship to have an impact. I included student work, but I did not show how it might connect or interact with other possible influences. I also had the mentor acting as a filter between the teacher candidate and other faculty members and mentors. My research suggests not only one major aspect of teaching that was missing from my original model, but also how various influences interact with each other and with the teacher candidate more directly. The revised theoretical framework (see Figure 6) reflects how learning to teach writing is represented in my research.
In my original model, I omitted the potential influence of a department's curriculum. This includes (1) the formal curriculum that the mentor and other faculty wrote that designed the unit the teacher candidates taught and (2) the informal conventions within the department. Not only were there specific requirements for the unit, but the department also, informally, agreed to use the Toulmin model as their form for an argument. By omitting department curriculum from my initial model, it was difficult to identify how this predetermined argument structure influenced the teacher candidate's teaching. Also, the absence of department curriculum in my model eliminated a way to frame the current and previous work students were completing that could influence how the teacher candidates
were teaching writing in this part of the curriculum, as opposed to future and previous units.

As my research found, the curriculum and the perceived needs of the students were based on the way the teacher candidates interpreted and prioritized the goals of the curriculum. Both Xavier and Maria spoke directly of prior student work or actions seen in other units in the department’s curriculum. For instance, Maria spoke about how she wanted to use writing as a way to mitigate students’ reluctance to share original ideas. Or, Xavier noted that students couldn’t write a paper on a novel they did not read or understand. During the unit, Maria and Xavier routinely discussed taking more time than anticipated to prepare the students for the final writing assignment. This is not something they had named as a goal or as important originally. In fact, both had hoped to do a creative project in addition to the essay. But, when they realized how their students were struggling to meet the goals set for the unit, they removed the creative element and focused on preparing students for the final assignment. Hence, my revised conceptual model reflects the influence of the curriculum on Maria’s and Xavier’s decisions about how to teach writing and what kind of writing to prepare their students for.

My original model suggested that the teacher candidates would be influenced by their mentors and other mentors, but it didn’t take into account members of their Professional Learning Communities (PLC), who were made up of teachers who taught CP English 11, which included Maria’s and Xavier’s mentors and two other non-mentor teachers. Perhaps because the PLC had created the unit, commentary from non-mentors in the PLC was not always filtered through the TCs’ mentors and suggestions for teaching did
not necessarily come from any mentor, but rather any faculty member teaching the course. While in some ways being given advice by any member of faculty could be seen as bringing the teacher candidate into the department more fully, it is important to remember they are not part of the department faculty and may not have a voice to respond to suggestions. In Maria’s case, she felt intimidated by the PLC and her mentor, and she changed her plans to meet their suggestions because of the judgement she felt and the power dynamics in the group.

**Play, Spontaneous and Scientific Concepts**

My revised model also emphasizes how important Vygotsky’s concepts of “play” and “spontaneous” and “scientific” concepts are to learning. Vygotsky’s concept of “play” explains that learners need time to work with new ideas and try to apply them in different ways to internalize a concept. In writing, this might look like teacher candidates using different methods to teach grammar and style to their students, trying everything from rote grammar instruction to rhetorical grammar (Kolln & Gray, 2016) to teaching grammar in context (Weaver, 1996). The goal for the teacher candidate is to internalize concepts of grammar and style instruction and promising ways to help students understand the role of grammar and style in writing.

In my model, teacher candidates’ decisions on how to teach writing are partially impacted by the work the students do and how the TCs respond to that work. Their decisions are also influenced by their mentor and other teachers. Each of these influences can encourage teacher candidates to teach writing in different ways, ideally, allowing them to play with different styles of instruction to learn what works. Maria and Xavier both found student-teacher conferences were effective ways to help students revise their work.
But they both came to this decision after trying other ways of teaching they had observed. However, there were also limitations on how Xavier and Maria were able to play with writing in other aspects of the unit. For example, Xavier and Maria both created outlines for their students to use when compiling the content for the essay. There are many ways they could have given their students to organize their ideas and locate supporting data, but those chose the most restrictive choice and pushed forward. Because of the pressure Maria and Xavier felt to have the students be successful on the final assessment, they chose one path to the end without considering others. They had no time or space to play with how else they could have supported their students’ writing.

This is illustrated in the framework by the separation of university coursework and mentoring from the influences on teacher candidates’ use of writing. In the university coursework, we could have taken time to discuss ways to support students as they prepare to write the final paper and the teacher candidates could have taken these ideas and possibly tried some in their courses. A choice of Xavier’s illustrates how play was not used as much as it could have been to make for better learning. Xavier was trying to help his students organize their ideas and connect content from the novel to emerging themes. His original plan was to have students decide which themes emerged from the novel and then find data from the text to support their claim that a theme was present. Since I knew they had to connect the themes with content from table groups texts as well, I suggested that he have his students create one more line in their organizer and fill in data from the table group texts that also supported the presence of the theme. The activity did not go well. Xavier explained to me:
I tried it in fifth block. And it went so poorly that I ditched it. Because maybe fifth block wasn’t the best...the best one to try it on. But it just...it was...they were...they were confused. They didn’t understand why they were going back to the table groups and why, so it was mostly like, and also behavior issues were just really bad that particular day. So I tried it in fifth block. And I think even one of the quotes that I said was, 'You guys aren’t...aren’t into this, right?’ And they looked at me dead serious. They were like, ‘I...No, we’re not...whatever you’re asking us to do. We don’t...we don’t. Basically, we’re done. We’re not doing this.’ You know, we just kind of abandoned it halfway through and, and didn’t use it.... I just I made the decision that day to not do it in blocks six and eight. But we...but I tried, and it was just like, something’s not meshing, something’s not fitting here.... And, you know, it was one of those moments where I just was like, I have to kind of get them moving on to outlining and it was worth a shot. (Interview 3)

Xavier tried the activity in fifth block, the first of the three sections he taught, but he “ditched” it when it did not go smoothly the first time. Instead of trying to refine it for the next two sections, he just moved on to helping them outline their paper. Xavier chose not to play around with presenting or implementing an activity that had students connect content from the table groups to content in the novel because he felt that is was time to “get them moving on.” Arguably, he was influenced by the requirements of the school and the department, a key element of which involved keeping pace with other teachers and finishing the unit quickly. The pressure Xavier and Maria felt from the department and curriculum limited their willingness to play.
Spontaneous and scientific concepts refer to how well learners understand new ideas. One way a learner creates understanding is by observing the world around them. For example, a teacher candidate may observe students working in groups at tables to answer a set of questions. She is told this is an example of cooperative learning. When she has her students work in groups to answer questions, she identifies this as cooperative learning when it is group work, not cooperative learning. She understood one element of cooperative learning – working in groups – but was not aware of the other elements of true cooperative learning when students support each other and balance each other's strengths and weaknesses to build knowledge as a community. Cooperative learning was a spontaneous concept for this theoretical teacher candidate as she was unaware of all of the elements that differentiate group work from cooperative learning.

Scientific concepts can take two forms. The first kind of scientific concept is when a learner has acquired enough knowledge surrounding a spontaneous concept to understand all its subtleties. From above, this would be when the teacher candidate could differentiate between group work and cooperative learning. Another side to scientific concepts is when learners learn technical language, but do not learn what it means in depth or what it could look like. For example, many students can define “warrant” when asked about it in class, but those same students do not necessarily understand how to write one or its purpose in writing. They have a technical term, but no understanding of how it works beyond the definition.

In the case of my participants, they were familiar with certain terms associated with writing, such as “the writing process” or “modeling,” but they didn’t necessarily understand what these terms could look like in practice. For example, Xavier was very anti-models
because he felt that it hindered students’ creativity and would make them think they have to write in a specific way. He saw models only from the perspective of writing style and not from a perspective of samples of a specific genre that students can analyze to understand its conventions. He understood “modeling” as a scientific concept, but only by name. He did not have the context to understand how modeling can work in a classroom or why a teacher might use modeling. This is my reason for including “University coursework & Mentors” in my revised framework, but do not have it connecting to the teacher candidates’ choices about teaching writing. The teacher candidates I worked with did have university coursework and readings, but, in the case of writing, only enough to grasp the big ideas and terminology.

The teacher candidates in my study experienced teaching writing in a single setting. They learned what one community meant by “warranting” or “academic.” As a result, the teachers candidates’ ideas about how to teach writing fit into Vygotsky’s ideas of spontaneous concepts. The TCs saw what worked and what didn’t work within this setting. When they shared with me changes they would make to their units if given more latitude, they both focused on the core novel and the genre of the final assessment; neither discussed ways they would teach writing differently. One possible reason for this was that they only had knowledge of teaching writing as a spontaneous concept and were therefore unable to articulate how they would change instruction if given the opportunity.

**Sensemaking**

Maria and Xavier did not identify any conflicts that affected their teaching of writing except when it came to their goals for the unit and the goals set forth in the curriculum. They didn’t articulate any disconnect between sources on how to teach writing, most likely
because they received none. When reflecting on the main conflict between their vision for the unit versus the required core novel and assessment of the unit, Xavier put it, “[W]hen [the department head] says something needs to be done some way, you listen” (Interview 3). But, when the daily actions of each teacher candidate are looked at, their sensemaking of the unit’s requirements versus their goals can be seen. Coburn (2001) explains how sensemaking can work when individuals are presented with conflicting or confusing ideas:

> Individuals and groups must actively construct understandings and interpretations. They do so by placing new information into pre-existing cognitive frameworks, also called “worldviews” by some theorists (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989; Vaughn, 1996; Weick, 1995). Thus, teachers notice new messages and construct understandings of them through the lens of their preexisting practices and worldviews (EEPA, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 1999; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). (p. 147)

Sensemaking happens when individuals are able to combine new information into their previous worldviews. One way that this can happen is through discussion with others who are trying to meld new information into their previous worldviews. In the case of Maria and Xavier, they were part of groups who connected to the ideas they had to make sense of, but they were also powerless in many cases, which left them adjusting their worldview to fit the new information they needed to make sense of.

Xavier struggled with the emphasis put on structured writing, especially the claim+data+warrant structure that permeated the department’s writing curriculum. Personally, his goal for instruction was to create independent thinkers and include more authentic writing opportunities, but he argued:
[T]raining [students to write] claim+data+warrant essays are not authentic to who they are as people either. So, you know, finding that...that line of what is authentic writing and what isn’t, is hard to do in CP11, where, you know, we’re also talking try to prepare them for college. And in college, your writing assignments are very much five paragraph essays.

Xavier used sensemaking to come to accept the style of writing he was told his students needed to use. While he believed the idea that writing assignments should be authentic, he was responsible for preparing students for college-level writing, which he believed was mostly five-paragraph essays. Xavier made sense of accepting five paragraph essays as authentic because the students headed to college would have to write in the same genre there. He took information about authentic writing and found a way to fit it into his worldview of the purpose of writing instruction.

Xavier’s was part of a group of English teachers who had to agree on writing their students needed to complete. The rest of the group of teachers he worked closely with believed the five-paragraph essay was the best choice for writing and Xavier needed to find a way to fit their expectations into his schema of what it means to teach writing. Maria’s struggles were less about the teaching of writing and more about how her use of writing led her to feel conflicted about what it means to be a good teacher.

A conflict for Maria was trying to balance what she believed was best for her students with what the rest of her Professional Learning Community (PLC) thought was best for the students in all College-Prep 11 courses. Maria related to students as humans and not just bodies in a classroom. She worked to show them respect and her goal was always on helping them learn, not just “getting through” an assignment. One way she tried
to embody this belief in her teaching was with the use of freewriting to provide students with a space to explore complex ideas without judgement or peer pressure. But, she had to eliminate the freewriting to keep up with the expectations of the other teachers in her PLC. During her unit, Maria’s way of making sense of this disconnect was to assess herself as a weak teacher. However, after the unit, when she was able to debrief with me and put some distance between herself and the unit, she realized that she had done a disservice to her students by not standing up for them more. She worked to make sense of what it means to be a good teacher, as defined by a teacher’s relationship to their students.

Allen and Penuel (2015) explain that for sensemaking to happen, participants in the sensemaking need “opportunities to engage in collaborative and sustained sensemaking to see, understand, and work through incongruities they perceive between” different goals (p. 147). While Maria was part of a collaborative group, her PLC, she was not in a space where she could voice her opinions and push back on those of others. However, when she was with me, she was able to voice her opinion and explain her disappointment in herself, and her realization of what is important to her as a teacher, no matter what topic she is teaching. Maria and Xavier did not focus on conflicts extensively, unless prompted, and both would present the resolution as a done deal that they had no control over. However, sensemaking provides a lens to show how Xavier and Maria were handling more subtle conflicts in their teaching and ideologies.

**Findings and Current Research**

My research findings illustrate how, with these two teacher candidates, the complexities of learning to teach writing interacted to influence two teacher candidates’ writing instruction. My five findings are:
1. Teacher candidates’ identities impacted their use of writing in the classroom.

Prior research studies have focused or included discussions on how teacher candidates’ identities impact their teaching of writing. Street (2003) described how the perceptions of writing impacted the way his teacher candidates included and spoke about writing in the classroom. One participant who had a rich literacy environment growing up brought her love for reading and writing into the classroom and created engaging units and enthusiastic students. A second participant had poor experiences with writing and saw writing as a skill one has or doesn’t have. In her class, writing was dry and unengaging for her students. Norman and Spencer (2005) found that not all English teachers see themselves as good writers and their view of themselves as writers was often the result of influential people in their lives, such as teachers, parents, or friends.

In my research, the teacher candidate’s identities as writers impacted the way they used writing. In the same way that Street’s (2003) participant brought joy and enthusiasm to the classroom around writing because of the place writing had in her own life, Maria brought writing into her classroom to help students thrive and think freely. Despite not identifying as a strong academic writer, Maria spoke eagerly about her non-traditional writing on social media platforms and freewriting that allowed her to explore her ideas and share content with different audiences. Xavier’s more practical use of writing, to demonstrate analysis or comprehension, is also tied to his identity. He viewed himself as a weak academic writer and preferred writing that was short and to the point. His writing assignments were short and required focused information. He did not include assignments that allowed for more creative or unstructured writing.
My work confirms Norman and Spencer’s (2005) findings that not all future or current English teachers view themselves as strong writers. Xavier and Maria did not feel strong as academic writers, though it did not come out in the interviews or journals as to why. Maria had earned a four out of five on the AP English and Composition exam. But both struggled with the expectations set in university literature courses. Despite their insecurities in the literary analysis genre, they both worked hard to engage students using writing and provide them with the support they needed to succeed on the final assessment. At no point did either of them dismiss the need to learn to write or think it couldn’t be taught, a belief held by one of Norman and Spencer’s participants who struggled to teach and include writing in her classroom.

2. **Teacher candidates are able to identify perceived needs in their students’ and can respond to them with instructional changes.**

There are many influences at play when designing and reworking a unit, and student success is an important one. In their case study on a teacher’s experiences teaching grammar, Smagorinsky, Wright, August, O'Donnell-Allen and Konopak (2007) discuss how the teacher they were following changed the way she taught grammar based on her students’ needs, and she changed her method to one that she felt provided more engaging for her students. She began by trying to teach grammar in context, but was working in a school that separated reading and writing/grammar into separate courses. By the end of the year she was using a computer program that allowed students to work and review at their own pace. She felt that this provided more engagement.

When Maria saw that her students didn’t understand the text, she changed the focus on her unit to comprehension of the text and she used writing to allow them to practice
skills they needed to read the dense text. Xavier had a similar problem. His students did not read and/or comprehend the text, but he forged ahead with the novel and his supplemental readings. Perhaps as a result of pushing forward through the text, he had to backtrack when it came time for the students to write their papers.

3. **Department or school requirements overrode other influences on how to teach writing and what to have students write in the units taught by teacher candidates.**

   Xavier and Maria’s practices were strongly dictated by the curriculum at the school. Altering instruction to align with school expectations is not new. In multiple case studies, (see Smagorinsky et al., 2002, 2007, 2011) new teachers and teacher candidates struggled to teach writing in ways that they valued as opposed to the ways the schools or mentors required. Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson (2002) describe how a new teacher used the school’s curriculum unhappily during her first year, but proceeded to modify and eventually resist the prescribed curriculum after three years of teaching.

   Xavier and Maria’s use of writing was strongly shaped by the school’s curriculum. Not only did the curriculum determine what novel and assessment they had to include in their unit, but it also guided them when identifying their students’ needs. For example, in the unit design created by the department teachers, only two out of the four core standards are specifically writing-based. And the State Standards in this mid-Atlantic state do not dictate what genre of writing needs to be used to meet the standards. All of the standards could all be achieved through posters, presentations, collages and multiple other print and media formats. But, because of how the curriculum was presented to them and which parts were highlighted, Maria and Xavier focused on how the standards looked through the lens of the final written essay and used that lens to determine what needs they perceived their
students to have. Their understanding of the priorities of the unit were likely influenced by the verbal messages being sent by their PLC and department chair. This illustrates how teacher candidates’ instruction can be influenced by the confluence of a required curriculum and their students.

4. **Teacher candidates are capable of being reflective practitioners who can identify weakness in their teaching and plan for adjustments in future teaching.**

Good teachers are reflective practitioners who can evaluate their work and their students’ work to look for ways to improve instruction. The teacher described by Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson (2002) was frustrated by the curriculum, but she was able to reflect on her practice to identify the gaps she perceived and each year would adjust the curriculum to try to meet the needs of her students more. Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin and Place (2000) report on a teacher candidate/teacher who began by using a commercial curriculum, but modified the curriculum and teaching each year when he became more familiar with the content, his students, writing pedagogy and his goals for teaching.

Maria and Xavier were both able to look back at their teaching and identify changes they would make if they were to teach the unit again. Both would not use *The Great Gatsby*, but they also described larger problems they would need to revisit to feel better about their units. For example, Xavier realized that his passion to create a democratic classroom was not enough to override half a year’s worth of teaching with his mentor that had allowed students to be passive learners to some degree. He also realized he had an obligation to help his students grow as thinkers, readers, and writers, and this meant meeting them where they were with their ability to be active learners.
Maria was frustrated with the constant need for so many argumentative writing assessments. While she didn’t object to argumentative writing, she felt bullied into making it a priority in her class and felt her students could appreciate the concept of the American Dream better if they were to write a memoir and focus on shorter writings.

Both Maria and Xavier also identified the importance of reading comprehension when assigning text-based writing. This reflection prompted both to discuss why *The Great Gatsby* was not a suitable read for this assignment or group of students.

5. **Teacher candidates with limited instruction in how to teach writing are challenged to identify when or how to teach writing in their own classes or reflect on how they were taught writing.**

If teacher candidates do not receive explicit training in how to teach writing, they may struggle to understand what the concept of teaching means and have difficulty describing how they learned to write (Daisey, 2008, 2009). Without this pedagogical knowledge, they may lean on other sources of support, such as commercial curriculums (Grossman et al., 2000). Or, as Maria and Xavier did, they may rely on context specific ways of teaching writing, which in this instance led the teacher candidates to maintain the same argument structure and language they had observed for the first half of their teacher education program.

In addition, without this pedagogical knowledge, teacher candidates may struggle to know when they are teaching writing and perhaps not make it clear to students everything that can be involved in writing. When Maria and Xavier reviewed the list of possible activities involved in teaching writing, they both indicated they had done some of the activities, but none of them matched with how they spoke about teaching and using writing
with me in our interviews. This suggests that they probably did not frame these practices as elements of writing with their students.

Summary

My research aligns and supports current research of learning to teach writing in secondary schools. It adds to the research by demonstrating the complexities of various influences in teacher candidates’ lives that impact how and what they teach. In the next section, I will address the limitations of my findings.

Limitations

Many limitations to my research come from limitations associated with most case studies: the participant number is low. But, within my collection of data and interactions with my participants, there are also unexpected incidents that limit my findings.

An unexpected limitation to my research was the lack of coursework the participants had in teaching writing. It is hard to gauge how teacher candidates pick between advice they read for or learn about in a course versus advice they get from a mentor, when they don’t have any coursework. The participants in this study were assigned three readings to do on the teaching of writing and both had already planned their unit before these readings. The researchers in all of the other studies that focus on teacher candidates learning to teach writing were either instructors in a teaching of writing course or were part of a teacher education program with a specific teaching of writing course.

I was also more limited in the data than I had hoped. Maria and Xavier shared the documents they used in their courses, but it was unclear which materials were created by them and which were co-created by their mentors and which were created by the mentors alone. I will address a potential research opportunity related to this below. I was also not
allowed to observe Maria and Xavier in the classroom, which left me with only their view of events. However, in retrospect, I feel that my research would have leaned more towards a comparison between how the teacher candidates described teaching writing and what I considered to be teaching writing, which was not the purpose of this research at any point. Also, my presence in the classroom might have added tension to the relationship I had with the teacher candidates as they might consider comments I might make as judgmental rather than inquisitive.

A limitation on my research with Maria was her reflection journal. During her unit, she was struggling with some personal issues and was journaling with one of the high school faculty mentors about the problems she was having. Since I knew there was information she might not want to share with me, or the readers of my work, I told her she could remove or cover up any parts of her journal that she didn’t want to share. As a result, she may have been making numerous observations about teaching and using writing, but I don’t have access to them.

Finally, my research is limited to one unit centered around a novel the students, as portrayed by Xavier and Maria, didn’t understand or care for. It is possible that Maria and Xavier would teach writing differently if they were able to use different texts and different final assessments while hitting the same core standards. Because they were forced into having students write a text-based argument based on a text many of the students didn’t like and/or read and/or comprehend, the final paper was closer to an assessment of reading comprehension than writing ability. Given the focus on demonstrating knowledge based on the book, other influences that could have impacted Maria’s and Xavier’s teaching may have appeared in future units. At the same time, The Great Gatsby is a book taught in
many American schools and writing literary analysis essays is a common practice in secondary English/Language Arts classrooms, which suggests that while I was only able to observe one unit, the teacher candidates were in a situation other teacher candidates might find themselves in.

Therefore I have to limit my claims to what Maria and Xavier described and shared about teaching writing in this single unit. That being said, Maria and Xavier were not in an unusual situation. They were teacher candidates who were given a curriculum to teach. This is the experience of not only many teacher candidates, but also many teachers. I would suggest then that these findings likely apply to teacher candidates beyond the two I worked with.

Areas for Future Research

Working within a Curriculum as a Teacher Candidate

Schools’ curriculums can vary from loosely held goals and limited restrictions on readings and writing to curriculums that are made commercially without any input from the teachers who have to use it. And there are many variations and combinations of these curriculums in between. Teacher candidates are in the precarious role of trying to learn how to teach in the way they were taught in university coursework and restrictions placed on them by the curriculum. Three avenues that could be pursued by research are how teacher educators can help teacher candidates incorporate the ideas from university coursework into schools’ curriculums, how mentors can help teacher candidates navigate the curriculum so they can have space to try teaching in ways that are different than the school’s norms, and how teacher candidates can learn to identify gaps or assumptions in schools’ curriculum and pushback against those they are forced to work within.
**Teacher Educators and Teacher Candidates Navigating a School’s Curriculum**

The disconnect with how teachers candidates learn to teach ELA and how they see ELA being taught in schools is not new (Feimen-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Therefore, especially in consistent school-university partnerships, we can explore how teacher educators can address some of the conflicts before the teacher candidate begins their practicum. For example, at the host school in this study, each unit includes all the standards that need to be met and how the current curriculum meets them. If teacher candidates are given access to this, or similar documents, they could work with the teacher educators to find alternative ways to assess whether students have met the standards and be able to explain why they feel their idea is worth trying to their mentors.

Teacher education programs cannot ignore the reality of standards-based curriculums that are getting more and more restrictive as test scores are becoming more and more valued. But, what they can try to do is prepare teacher candidates to meet curriculums and learn how to negotiate what they look like in practice. For example, Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson (2002) followed a teacher through her first three years of teaching at a school that had a rigid curriculum. The teacher’s instruction changed over the three years as she became more familiar with the curriculum and more capable of blending the requirements of the units with her teaching style, a style she learned in her teacher education program. This pattern of following a curriculum, voluntarily or not, and then revising it to accommodate content from teacher education programs has been shown in other studies as well (Grossman et al., 2000). But, given teacher educators’ knowledge of how schools and curriculums work to create a cycle that keeps the status quo strong (Smagorinsky, 2010), perhaps teacher education programs can take a more proactive role
in helping teacher candidates understand what curriculums can look like and how teachers can work within them to support the progressive teaching practices found in most teacher education programs.

**Mentors and Teacher Candidates Navigating a School’s Curriculum**

In an ideal world, when mentors invite teacher candidates into their classes, they are interested in learning what the TC knows as well as sharing what they know from experience. I will speak in more detail below about the need to explore the mentor’s role in teacher education programs, but a key part to that role, should be conversations about the curriculum, its origin and where there is and is not room for flexibility.

**Teacher Candidates Navigating a School’s Curriculum**

Finally, teacher candidates need to learn how to read a curriculum, identify how core elements (such as central texts and assessments) are present in the curriculum, and what space there might be for suggesting alternative and also examining what elements of the curriculum do not match with TCs’ beliefs about teaching. For example, in this research, both teacher candidates did not like the core novel or the core assessment, but how they covered the content was, to some degree, up to them. While they both reverted to a traditional mode of teaching writing for the final essay, there was nothing in the curriculum that required them to. In fact, the standards the essay was assigned to meet could have been met through other genres of writing. While TCs may not have the voice or power to suggest changes while student teaching, they need the ability to read and understand a curriculum and find wiggle room where they can to bring in more progressive instructional methods, activities and assignments.
**Teacher Candidates with No Restrictive Curriculum**

Both candidates in my study felt constrained by the curriculum they were handed and told to use, but not all teachers are this limited. Even in the host school, classes that were only taught by one teacher had standards, but no required texts or writing assignments to meet those standards. Other teachers would teach the same unit as colleagues who also taught the course, but they chose individually what novel they wanted to use and what the final assignment would look like, within certain parameters. In that case, the emphasis was on standards, but autonomy was given to the teachers on how to hit the standards. This kind of flexibility may feel better to experienced teachers because they are allowed to make more decisions in what they teach and how. However, teacher candidates, especially those without instruction in teaching writing are left with limited options to choose from about how to teach writing (and other content, too).

Research has shown when teacher candidates do not know how to teach assigned content, they revert back to their experiences as a student (Lortie, 1975; Smagorinsky, 2010). In my research, neither teacher candidate had spoken to their mentors about how and why to teach writing and they modeled their teaching and writing content off of how they saw their mentor teachers teaching. But what could happen if teacher candidates are given a solid foundation in writing pedagogy and given freedom in class to implement their learning; will they be guided by their experiences from university coursework or will they be guided by their experiences learning to write during high school and college?

**Learning to Teach Writing**

As mentioned in the first chapter, learning to teach writing is often placed subordinately to reading in teacher education programs, if it is present at all (Morgan,
In addition, many students become English teachers because of their love of reading, not their love of writing (Andrews, 2017, p. xiii). And many do not view themselves as strong writers (Street, 2003). A result of this is writing gets pushed to the side in the classroom and we have more students leaving secondary schools with poor experiences and few opportunities to learn to write. The question is: “What does ‘teaching’ writing mean?”

Since I started teaching 20 years ago there had been a shift in the profession to move away from teaching novels for cultural literacy towards teaching novels for student engagement and reflection. Organizations like NCTE advocate for choice reading and access to books that reflect the lives and experiences of all students. NCTE also advocates for seeing writing as a social process that can serve many purposes:

As composed knowledge, writing thus serves multiple purposes: to help writers develop and document their ideas for a range of purposes and audiences in a variety of contexts; to distribute ideas to other audiences so that they can be revised or recirculated; to help an individual or a community to define, clarify, or even reify its ideas. (Adler-Kassner, L., Baca, I. & Fredericksen, J., 2018)

How can the community of English teachers work together to understand what this definition of writing means in practice? How can teacher educators and teacher candidates help to do this work?

In future research, I believe that “teaching” writing needs to be defined more clearly. Researchers have already discussed how “assigning” writing is different from “teaching” writing, but how much are students learning about how to write when they are producing texts about readings they don’t understand or aren’t engaged with? In the current case I
would argue that Maria and Xavier went thinking they would teach writing. But with abstract audiences and uninteresting content, it is unlikely that the students took much away in the sense of transferable skills. Even within this writing assignment, Maria’s students struggled to transfer the ability to write a warrant from one claim to another.

One question every English teacher and teacher candidate should be able to answer is “Why do we teach writing in English classrooms and what can writing look like?” For over a century, students have been writing five-paragraph essays with standards and rules that seem to transgress teachers and schools. But we are (hopefully) no longer in a time when writing essays is about copying the teacher’s writing or ideas. The goal of writing should be to prepare students to know how to write for the rest of their lives. How can we help secondary teachers reflect on their teaching of writing and challenge them to consider alternative ways to end units focused on a novel and to us writing as an end unto itself that provides students with space to share and explore ideas?

Two key research-based documents about teaching writing to adolescents and preparing students for post-secondary writing provide rationales teacher candidates can bring into the classroom to explain why they want to teach writing differently than their mentor. Both describe the skills students need to be successful writers. Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing (2012), written by members of the Council for Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, provide the following “habits of mind” students need to be a successful writer in a post-secondary setting: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition. These habits of mind can be developed through “writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences [that] aim to develop students’”
rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and ability to compose in multiple environments (p. 5). In a second resource, Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools - A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York, Graham and Perin (2007) provide the following list of “elements of effective adolescent writing instruction:” writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, prewriting, inquiry activities, process writing approach, study of models, and writing for content learning” (p. 12-13). Nowhere in either list does writing about literature or writing a five-paragraph essay appear.

Having taken a course with graduate students who teach freshman composition, a key difference between writing in high school and writing in college is students in college composition courses aren’t writing about literature. They read and they analyze and look at a text from the perspective of a writer, but their major writing assignments are about issues relevant and important to the students. Literary analysis writing is left to English courses and English majors. This begs the question, where does writing instruction belong in primary and secondary schools and what is its purpose? Teacher candidates, along with their mentors and teacher educators, need to consider this question and what values and goals their answers reflect.

Privileging Reading over Writing

An unexpected take-away from these case studies was the connection between reading comprehension and writing. It is hard to say that Maria and Xavier had a genuine opportunity to try to teach writing when they spent the majority of their time helping their students understand the novel they were reading. As Xavier put it, “Writing this paper had
nothing to do with writing” (Interview 3). It had to do with the students proving they understood the book well enough to fill in a teacher-created template.

Teaching writing about concepts relevant to students is very different from teaching writing about novels, a common practice in many secondary English classes. As Kate Roberts explains in her book *A Novel Approach* (2018) teachers have to be careful when assigning end of the unit essays and ask themselves whether they are using that essay to assess their students’ comprehension of the story or their ability to write. This challenge is true for teacher candidates, too. How can we ask them to apply good writing practices when the genre they are required to teach fosters a limited genre of writing?

Instruction in the teacher education program used in this research focused on reading and literature. But, a significant goal of the instruction was not just how TCs could use literature in their classroom, but also why teacher candidates might choose to detour from the practices they are seeing in their mentors or memories of how reading was used when they were students. The same needs to be true for writing; teacher candidates must not only learn research-based practices for teaching writing, but also understand the purposes for teaching writing and how traditional practices and products are not relevant to the majority of students, can be culturally insensitive and privilege one form of writing over all others.

As I illustrated in chapter four, many of the challenges Maria and Xavier ran into were the result of students not understanding the novel. How can teacher candidates learn to teach writing in a way that transcends one assignment, if they are only given the chance to help students write a kind of assignment? And, how can we expect teacher candidates to learn how to do that in the limited time and space they have in the classroom?
Teacher candidates need to have instruction on how to teach writing and how to explain to the mentors why their ideas are worth enacting. In the teacher education program I worked in, the emphasis was on using literature to take a critical stance in the classroom and to provide spaces for all kinds of students to see themselves represented. “Teaching literature” and helping students understand it from a Reader Response theoretical stance instead of a New Critical one valued on standardized tests was emphasized. In this way, the teacher candidates were bringing new ideas to their mentors about reading and were able to slowly change some teaching practices at the host school.

Writing was not given nearly the same amount of space or time so it’s not surprising Maria and Xavier reverted back to the department’s and their mentor’s conventions and practices. In their interviews both stated they didn’t know how to teach writing and neither had spoken to their mentors about how the mentors approached the teaching of writing. How can innovation and change happen if teacher candidates and new teachers don’t know what innovation can look like or how to facilitate it in their classrooms or if conversations about teaching writing aren’t happening?

In addition to this, because many teachers do not view themselves as writers and/or avoid teaching writing, writing takes as much of a backseat in the classroom as it does in many teacher education programs. I find this particularly interesting because the genre teachers have their students write most often is a difficult genre to write well as it is normally created for and read by literary scholars. In fact, literary analyses written by literary scholars are difficult to teach to write well because they are less systematic than other genres like blogs, research papers, lab report or letters. When comparing the structure and conventions of literary analysis essays and scientific essays, MacDonald
found literary analyses (1987) are “far less regularized or conventionalized” and “the literary ‘problems’ are defined in a way less accessible to ordinary (non-professional) understanding” than other genres (pp. 319–320). A result of this is that students are forced to rely on their teachers to determine what qualities of an essay they want and then writing becomes a practice that is about pleasing the teacher, not about analysis or the creation and sharing of ideas.

A starting point for bringing better writing instruction into the classroom is first by providing teacher candidates with research-based practices and the theory they are built from. Teacher candidates then need space outside their mentor’s classroom to play with the research-based practices and try to put them into action. For example, metacognition is a valuable skill when learning to write and teaching others to write, but if teacher candidates are not familiar enough with speaking about writing, they will struggle to implement practices that require metacognition. Writing Next (Graham & Perin, 2007) proposes that students need the chance to study models of good writing. Without a chance to locate and learn how to teach students what they can learn from reading models, this practice is unlikely to last either. While there is limited time in university courses to cover the content all teacher educators wish we could cover, teacher candidates need to be given the space to practice implementing writing strategies and creating lessons and assignments that reflect good writing pedagogy. I would argue, if one must be chosen over the other, time in courses should be spent learning to teach writing more than learning to teach literature because most English teacher candidates come in with a love of reading and the language they can use to talk about it. The same cannot be said for writing.
Mentors are Teacher Educators

Another area of research that could inform our understanding of how teacher candidates learn to teach writing is to explore the mentor teacher’s role in the teacher education process. No doubt, mentors already have the many commitments of a classroom teacher, but they play a critical role in the training of teacher candidates. Both of my participants shared that they hadn’t spoken to their mentors about how to teach writing. Coincidentally, during my first year of graduate school, I spoke with one mentor, Holly, in passing about my interest in learning how to teach writing. She was enthusiastic about this topic as she noted, no one ever taught us how to teach writing. If we are going to have teacher candidates work in classrooms where teachers do not know how to teach writing or are not confident in their teaching of writing, one way a teacher education program could help is to provide professional development for the mentor and teacher candidates, allowing them to work together to learn about writing and collaboratively enact their learning immediately in a classroom setting.

Another reason we need to start examining mentors’ role in teacher education program is the power they wield over how teacher candidates choose to teach after they leave their teacher education program. If mentors have a goal for their students, such as preparing them to ace the end-of-year high stakes test, and teacher candidates come in with a goal, such as letting students use writing as a space to reflect, revise, and publish to a genuine audience, there is going to be a clash. And the teacher candidate is likely to lose the battle. There needs to be a negotiation between mentors and university faculty about the goals of the teacher education program and what university faculty hope mentors can
provide for students and what content and support the mentors would like university faculty to provide.

Specifically, in the context of writing, it would be worthwhile to have mentors share their beliefs and experiences with teacher candidates in order for teacher candidates to explore what practices they might want to mimic and what practices they might not see as much value in.

**Reviewing Class Documents**

As I stated above, I struggled to use the teacher candidate’s class handouts because it was unclear which were created by the participants and which were created by the mentors. A place for future research could be a collaborative document analysis with a teacher candidate or teacher in which, as a pair, the researcher and teacher review classroom documents and trace their histories. This would be another way to explore what influences teachers bring into the classroom.

Given the benefit of googledocs to allow writers to go back to previous versions of a text, it is possible for teachers and researchers to review what content was added and revised and when. For four years in a row, I taught a unit for seniors that culminated in a speech where they focused on a life lesson. The first year I taught it, I gathered the assignment sheets from four other teachers who had previously taught the unit and combined them to make my own assignment. Each year I would go back to the previous year’s version and make modifications based on my previous year’s experience with the assignment, but possibly on other facts that I, as an insider, did not notice. One way inquiry into this topic could be facilitated is through dialogue journals where the teacher or teacher
candidate reflects on their choices and the researcher responds with more probing questions to try to identify any underlying influences on the decisions being made.

**Researcher Reflections**

I did not expect conducting research and analyzing data to be easy, but there were challenges that I did not plan for. A primary issue is my meekness as a researcher. I was so grateful to my participants for taking time out of their schedule to talk to me that I did not push them to clarify answers or directly answer my questions. For example, when I asked Maria to show me an example of her using writing in the classroom, she brought up a task they were doing on close reading, but it required them to write out sentences to explain their observations. While it is interesting to see what Maria identifies as “using writing,” there might have been other activities she was using that could have changed the way I perceived her teaching of writing.

Other challenges I faced were keeping up with analysis of data while collecting more data. Because Maria and Xavier were teaching the same unit at the same time, I was conducting interviews with them at the same time. In the future, I would like to have a more specific plan on what I need to do as a researcher between each interview to get rich data and not just data. I also should have spent more time with their classroom documents to identify what was created by them or by their mentors or the PLC. Because all of the material was kept in a googledoc folder that was shared with all teachers teaching the unit, I was reluctant to look through it while the unit was still unfolding in order to avoid them potentially feeling like I was judging their work.

I also struggled with my position in the researcher-participant paradigm. I was a mentor to my participants and there are times when I couldn't remain impartial and felt
obliged in my mentor role to provide supportive responses. This was particularly true when Maria would say negative things about herself or her teaching. While I feel Maria and Xavier felt comfortable talking to me and the level of trust between an interviewer and interviewee impacts the content of an interview, I wonder how the conversations might have been different if I had not known Maria and Xavier for so long.

**Conclusion**

The influences on teacher candidates’ decisions on how to teach writing are numerous and layered. As teacher educators move forward, it is important for us to expose these layers and help teacher candidates pull them apart to see the influence each might have, how they might work together or against one another, and provide them with space to reflect on their own teaching choices.
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Appendix A: Questions for First Interview

- Describe for me the community(ies) and school(s) you lived in and attended growing up.
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
- If we consider the four major areas of English - reading, writing, speaking and listening - what were your strengths and weaknesses? Why did you label _______ as a weakness? Why did you label _______ as a strength?

Looking at yourself now:

- Would you say that you're a writer? ____ Why or why not?
  - Would you say that at other points in life you were a writer? Why or why not?
- Describe a positive writing experience you have had (in or out of school). Why was it positive?
- Describe a negative writing experience you have had (in or out of school). Why was it negative?
- If you can, describe a writing experience you had that you didn't like at the time, but you now realize made you a better writer.
- What is the easiest part of writing for you? (Rephrase) What do you do well?
- What is the hardest part of writing for you? (Rephrase) What do you feel you need to work on?
- What experiences influenced how you feel about yourself as a writer?
- What kind of writing if any do you do just for you?
• What is your favorite genre of writing? For examples, personal journals, comparative analyses, emails, blog posts, research papers, letters. ________ Why is it your favorite?

• What instruction do you remember receiving in how to write?
• Do you still use that instruction to help you with current writing projects?
• What kinds of writing instruction have you already seen or done in your placement this fall?
• What conversations have you had about the teaching of writing with your mentor?
• What concerns do you have about teaching writing?
• What are you looking forward to about teaching writing?
• How do you see your mentor as a writing teacher? What do you notice about her?
Appendix B: Questions for Xavier’s Second Interview

In general:

- Looking back at the school year, can you identify common problems that appear in students’ writing or in their working through the writing process?
- From your point of view, how is your unit going?
- From your point of view, what is going well?
- Again, from your point of view, have there been any activities or lessons you with you could revise and redo?

Writing:

- What kinds writing assignments, both formal and informal, have your students completed?
- What was their purpose? How do they fit into the unit?
- Where do you get your ideas for your writing activities? Or what process do you go through as you develop writing activities for your students?
- It sounds like from chatter in the intern office that you did want, but maybe don’t want to now, give a second final assessment that was more creative. Did I hear this correctly? How would the two assessments be different? What skills would be needed for each assessment?
- Can you show me a lesson(s) you’ve done that illustrates instruction/activities that you had them complete to prepare for the final assessment? Why did you choose this activity? Was it something new to you or was it modeled on something someone or something else suggested?
Appendix C: Questions for Xavier’s Third Interview

- Let’s talk about the final assignment. If you have to pick three words to describe the assignment, what would you pick?
  - Explain them.
- You’ve shared with me some negative feelings about the assignment. At one point you told me how you agreed with a student that this assignment doesn’t need to be “good writing” and that it is “boring.” What made you feel that way?
- Was there any particular part in the way the assignment was presented/written/created that you feel opened it up to “boring” writing?
- If you had to teach The Great Gatsby again and still keep the same focus of “The American Dream”, what would like to have done?
- You also acknowledged that the grading criteria would make me sad, how would you have liked to assess the writing?
- When you teach, you have information from a lot of people surrounding you and your decision making: Marianne, Michelle and I, your fellow interns, your PLC, personal beliefs and experiences? When these sources of information provide different suggestions, how do you decide which source to go with?
- How did the activity go that we talked about where you extended the brainstorming to allow the students to have a chance to tie the +1 texts into The Great Gatsby?
- What does “teaching writing” mean to you? (see Appendix F for provide list of options)
- So, the unit is over now, how do you feel about the writing your students did on their final papers?
• Thinking just the writing standpoint, as opposed to the content, were you happy with the way they were writing?

• Okay? Um, how about talking about the writing process, being explicit about what are they, like drafting? Revising?

• Um, how about using words like author, audience and purpose of this idea? The rhetorical triangle?
Appendix D: Questions for Maria’s Second Interview

In general:

- Looking back at the school year, can you identify common problems that appear in students’ writing or in their working through the writing process?
- From your point of view, how is your unit going?
- From your point of view, what is going well?
- Again, from your point of view, have there been any activities or lessons you with you could revise and redo?

Writing:

- What purposes does writing serve in your unit?
- What kinds writing assignments, both formal and informal, have your students completed?
- Can you show me an activity that went well?
- Can you show me an activity that didn’t go as planned?
  - What was their purpose? How do they fit into the unit?
  - Where have you gotten your ideas for your writing activities? (Are they modeled off previous work? Readings? Work your colleagues do?) Can you show me an example?
- What is your final assessment?
- What skills do your students need, both writing and not, to complete the final assessment?
- Can you show me an activity or task the students have done to prepare for it?
• Are there any other issues/problems you’ve run into related to writing that you’ve not mentioned yet?

• Are there any great successes in writing that you can share with me?
Appendix E: Questions for Maria’s Third Interview

• What was the final assignment? Can you describe what students were expected to produce and what skills they needed to demonstrate?

• What made a final paper “strong” and what would make it “weak?”

• Let’s talk about the final assignment. If you have to pick three words to describe the assignment, what would you pick?
  o Explain them.

• What skills did the students practice throughout the unit to prepare them for the final assessment? We’ve talked about assertion paragraphs and free writing. Did you continue with those?

• Thinking just the writing standpoint, as opposed to the content, were you happy with the way they were writing?

• Did you approach this unit as a reading or writing unit? Did you know what the final assessment was going in?

• What other activities that you might consider “writing instruction” did the students do to prepare for the final assessment?

• In your inquiry, you mentioned that students don’t read comments. Were you meaning comments on papers and stuff? How did you grade the essays? Again, if given the choice/freedom, would you use this method again or would you have preferred to use another?

• If you were to teach The Great Gatsby again and still keep the same focus of “The American Dream”, what would do differently?
• When you teach, you have information from a lot of people surrounding you and your decision making: Mary, Michelle and me, your fellow interns, your PLC, personal beliefs and experiences? When these sources of information provide different suggestions, how do you decide which source to go with?

• This unit went on a lot longer than you initially planned, which happens to us all. I know snow days were a problem, what else extended the unit?

• What does “teaching writing” mean to you? (see Appendix F for provide list of options)
Appendix F: List of “Does this count as teaching writing?” Questions used in Interview 3

1. Providing models of the genres the students will be writing in.
2. Defining the requirements of an assignment (e.g. what the FCAs are, how long it should be, etc.)
3. Show students sample sentences and have them pick out “good” one (sic) (e.g. good claim, good description, good transitions)
4. Writing a student’s idea on the board and showing them how to revise it to be “academic”
5. Identifying activities as part of the writing process
6. Helping students connect ideas between two different sources
7. Demonstrating how and why to include in-text citations
8. Analyzing models of genres with students to identify authorial choices
9. Using words like “author,” “audience” and “purpose” when explaining assignments
10. Having students play with sentence/paragraph structure to see how it changes emphasis or tone of paragraph
11. Having students identify choices they are making in their writing (e.g. style, content, organization, etc.)
12. Providing students with the opportunity to create grading criteria
13. Providing opportunities for students to explain what genre of writing makes sense for an assignment
14. Discussing what decisions writers make when they are revising papers
15. Discussing what decisions writers make when they are moving from idea to paper
### Appendix G: Codebook with Sample Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Xavier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grading and Responding</strong></td>
<td>A student writes, we give feedback….. Have students write something in response to feedback? Have students reproduce with feedback? What are we having our kids do with the feedback?” (Reading Log)</td>
<td>But again, with a paper like this, where it’s a uniform, holistic grading becomes a nightmare, because it’s a nightmare to give feedback….You know, even though it’s hard to take bias out of grading. The...the one-point rubric makes it a little bit more unbiased, a little bit more fair to all the students who are supposed to do the exact same thing.” (Interview 3)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Influences - People</strong></td>
<td>So the guides came from a huge gap that I saw in the first two units of them not doing anything.” (Interview 2)</td>
<td>And that way, I’m not on my own trying to do this project, and then also jamming a definition essay in there. I don’t think that would serve the students very well. (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influences - Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>But that all got chopped, because when I had to prioritize, am I going to do a plus one or am I going to keep us on pace for Gatsby? It was always choosing...be on...stay on pace for Gatsby because I do not want Gatsby to go on for 10 weeks. (Interview 2)</td>
<td>The good news here is we did not decide on how heavily weighted the definition essay needed to be, so I could make the essay a “pre-writing” part of the project and not weight it as highly. That way it still serves as a summative tool, but the creative project is still the highlight. (Reading Log)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influences Other</strong></td>
<td>So yeah. So we had about 12 weeks. And then the snow days just wiped us out. Wiped us out. Horrible (Interview 3)</td>
<td>But then reality hits, it hits in and you're like, I'm on day 21. There...I can't...you can't...you just it's...it's impossible. Yeah. And...and again, the amount of work that they would need to make something of quality. It was just be a nightmare, a logistical nightmare (Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intern Experiences and Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>Because in my head...like I just am a bad, bad speaker, like talker, like, communicator day-to-day. And so to write, like, I can ask 100 questions. But to be able to communicate with you how I like</td>
<td>So although I value choice and having a... having a multitude of products that they can choose from, if the if the goal is a definition essay, you know. (Interview 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multimodal writing</td>
<td>THIS IS SO COOL -- interactive free writing with sounds etc., students come up with their own ideas to sub in what’s happening in the plot!!!(Reading Log)</td>
<td>I want them to complete the project based on their definition essay where they’re visually interpreting the American Dream and what it means to them through a different media, if they choose. (Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education Program Coursework and Assignments</td>
<td>“If you can’t find it, your students probably shouldn’t be writing it.” WOW what a challenge!!! I AM SO INTO THIS. (Reading Log)</td>
<td>But I would also make an argument that training claim, data, warrant essays are not authentic to who they are as people either. So you know, finding that...that line of what is authentic writing and what isn't, is hard to do in CP11, where, you know, we’re also talking try to prepare them for college. (Interview 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose for Assignment or Writing</td>
<td>Yeah. Yeah, I'm super interesting to track their growth of their conception of the American Dream through the freewriting. Because my questions are, like, gonna be continuously connected off of like, like, responsive. (Interview 1)</td>
<td>I left the prompt intentionally vague, because I wanted to see what they would come up with for this first round. (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>And so I was like, you know, if you were to publish something online that would be for, you know, like an academic community, but that different people who are just readers read and so I was like, you know, Gatsby is like a huge text that people read, just across the nation, not necessarily in like a specific academic context, but a lot of them had read it in a specific academic context. So if you were to use that and extrapolate, you</td>
<td>I’m producing something for my peers to see and respond to. So there’s an actual real element of, I’m not just writing because they told me to, I’m writing because it’s going to open a conversation or it's going to start a conversation with someone else. (Interview 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing and Effort</td>
<td>Nothing coded</td>
<td>“There’s not enough time to write, and edit, and revise and edit and revise and revise again, because that’s, that’s the part of writing that actually makes good writing is the revision part.” (Interview 1)</td>
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<td>Writing Instruction</td>
<td>“Learning how to talk like a writer.” (Reading Log)</td>
<td>I’m going to get two mediocre products, rather than trying to really work hard in two weeks leading up to when that thing is due, to make sure that they fully get it. (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Skill or Element</td>
<td>They did an awesome job with internal citations as a group. Awesome job with transitions. We did that in the last unit as well, though, so those were really beautiful. (Interview 3)</td>
<td>And the... the structure of the essay needed to be the formal, come up with a thesis, think of, you know, make your points. [???] [00:17:59] .... address counterpoints, or whatever else. (Interview 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Tasks</td>
<td>That’s a really powerful skill to master it. We’ve done in my unit that I just started, I do a freewrite every day, answering a question which relates to like, my like, value of developing thought. And so I think freewriting, you have to, like build up that skill, because like, it can be really, really hard to like, get into it first, if you aren’t used to that. (Interview 1)</td>
<td>when I asked the students to write their three questions I went around to each student and marked or starred at least one of them if not all three that would be great questions to ask either Daisy Nick or Gatsby. (Reading Log)</td>
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Appendix H: Organization of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Influence Intern Experience and Beliefs</th>
<th>I. Writing Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Coursework – Pre-Teacher Education Program</td>
<td>a. Coursework – Pre-Teacher Education Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Definition of good writing</td>
<td>b. Feelings about writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Writing definition</td>
<td>c. Instruction in writing (School &amp; college)</td>
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<td>c. Feelings about writing</td>
<td>d. Personal beliefs about writing in general</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Instruction in writing (School &amp; college)</td>
<td>e. Personal experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. TC reflection on unit or task</td>
<td>f. Personal history with writing</td>
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<td>f. Pedagogical beliefs</td>
<td>g. Personal Use of writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Writing Choice</td>
<td>h. Writing identity</td>
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<td>g. Personal beliefs about writing in general</td>
<td>i. Mentor outside host school district</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Personal experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Personal history with writing</td>
<td></td>
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<td>j. Personal Use of writing</td>
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<td>k. Writing identity</td>
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<td>II. Influences – People</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Department Chair</td>
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<td>b. Fellow teacher candidate</td>
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<td>c. Me</td>
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<td>d. Mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Mentor outside host school district</td>
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<td>f. Helen (Director of Program)</td>
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<td>g. PLC</td>
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<td>h. Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Previous Student Work or Units</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. Students’ Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Teacher - non-mentor</td>
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<td>III. Influences Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Assessment</td>
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<td>i. Synthesis Essay</td>
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<td>b. Curriculum</td>
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<td>i. CDW</td>
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<td>ii. CDW (2)</td>
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<td>iii. Collins Method</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Gatsby</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Comprehension of Text</td>
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</table>
VITA

Karen Morris

Education

2020 Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, The Pennsylvania State University

2000 M. Ed Curriculum and Instruction, The Pennsylvania State University

1998 B.A. Comparative Literature, The Pennsylvania State University

Professional Experience

2016 – 2020 Graduate Student Instructor The Pennsylvania State University
2009 – 2016 English Teacher, State College Area High School, State College, PA
2004 – 2008 Graduate Student Instructor The University of Michigan
2005 – 2006 Research Assistant The University of Michigan
2000 – 2003 English Teacher Frederick High School, Frederick, MD.

Publications


Selected Presentations


Morris, K. (2019, July) Rethinking Writing Instruction through Prolepsis, Social Justice, and Authentic Writing Tasks. English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE) Summer Conference. Fayetteville, AR.