THESIS

"I LOVE DISCUSSING MY WORK": A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE USE OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE BY EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS IN WRITING WORKSHOP

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ABSTRACT

"I LOVE DISCUSSING MY WORK": A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE USE OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE BY EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS IN WRITING WORKSHOP

This case study explored the effect of discourse and oral rehearsal of writing on the progress of eighth-grade writers in the workshop model of writing instruction. Through my position of teacher researcher, I observed three randomly chosen students to determine how learning academic discourse and orally rehearsing writing affected their progress as writers. Results suggested that writing was improved by learning academic discourse and orally practicing writing before putting pen to paper.

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And last but certainly not least, I want to thank my husband, David Jones, who has supported me working full time as a teacher and simultaneously attending graduate school. Thank you- I love you so. Your patience with my work hours and my obsession with being the best teacher made this all possible; I could not have done any of it without your love and support.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents. My parent fought for equity their whole lives. They cared about everyone, from the cashier at the local store to the teacher struggling at their children's public school. They cared about individuals, but they also cared about groups of people, especially people they felt were maltreated by the system, or the local bureaucracy, or the United States of America. They were willing to give up some of what they had to make others' lives better. They never felt that they were helping others to be saviors, but they felt like by helping others, they helped themselves- envisioning a world kinder, fairer, better- a world they could see everyone's children thriving in, not just the privileged few. My mother died young; I have now lived more of my life without her than with her. I still wonder how much better the world and I would be if she had been with us longer, so here is to you, my brave, radical warrior of a mother.

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INTRODUCTION

As a young child, I remember striding down Michigan Avenue in Chicago, holding my mother's hand, both of us dressed in the most opulent of finery. Our destination: the opera. With my red velvet dress and patent leather shoes and my mother's sleek geometric patterned attire, we were the picture of Chicago's privileged elite. The Chicago Civic Opera House, built in the 1920s, is an awe-inspiring, block-long, eight-story building made of limestone that sparkles and shines when the sun hits it. A colonnaded portico runs the length of the building with art deco features and clean straight lines, reminiscent of an ancient Grecian temple. As we turned down Wacker Drive, which parallels the Chicago River, I became excited. I loved the pageantry, the voices, and the theater of the opera. As we approached, I saw the enormous bronze doors that entered into the grand foyer, a place to mingle with the powerful of Chicago. However, my excitement extinguished like a balloon exhaling air as I witnessed the numerous homeless men and women, known by more disparaging names such as “bums,” “vagrants,” and “untouchables” in the 1970s, lining the block.

I wondered, not for the first time, why people like me who had so many material advantages existed alongside people with none? How did that happen? What kind of world not only allowed, but encouraged, this type of inequity? In my 10-year-old head, it seemed wrong and even more than wrong: shameful and spiteful. Why would grown-ups show such blatant disregard for a massive swath of humanity? I stopped my mother and asked, "Mommy, why doesn't anyone care that these people have no homes?" My mother looked down at me, grazed my face with her fingers, and said, "Perhaps darling, that will be your journey to attempt to

answer that question, to help all of us become more human by recognizing the humanity in each other. In the meantime, you might find a way to make the world a bit more equitable."

I was confused by her answer, and I mulled over it for years as I began a journey that has left me vibrantly alive, frequently angry, and sometimes resentful and frustrated. The issues in America I observed as a child in the 1970s are not so different from what I see as an adult. The words and rhetoric we use might be less offensive now, but the underlying pernicious issues of class and race persist. My concerns about the inequalities and systemic racism in our country have persisted throughout my life. Even as a young person growing up in Chicago, I recognized that the schooling experiences of middle school and high school students who lived in the housing projects of Cabrini Green on the city's north side contrasted sharply with the education I was experiencing in the affluent northern suburb of Winnetka. Cabrini Green, built in the 1940s for returning veterans on the north side of Chicago, was a model of public housing. Still, after years of neglect, corruption, and gang violence, it looked like a place that had been chewed up and spit out. Everything was broken—windows, playground equipment, and doors; even the trees were bent and withered. It contained 52 two- and three-story homes. The last of it was torn down in 2011. On the other hand, Winnetka is a beautiful treelined suburb that hugs Lake Michigan to the north of Chicago. New Trier High School, which I attended, is known as one of the best high schools in the country; whereas, the regular public schools in Chicago were and, for the most part, still are some of the worst in the nation. As a student, I couldn't help but wonder, what accounted for these disparities? As an English teacher, I continue to ponder the same question and to commit myself to doing what I can in my classroom to address them.

Sadly, the differences in funding and education quality I observed in my youth continue to persist across much of America today, building brick-by-permanent divisions, entrenching

institutional racism, supporting the lack of opportunity, and embedding generational poverty. In the *Hechinger Report*, a journal that exclusively covers education in America, Barshay (2020) compiled several studies that depict a rising disparity in education in America. For instance, a 2015 federal education report showed a 44 percent gap in funding between rich and poor schools. Additionally, a federal report in 2016-17 stated that one out of every four schools in America was classified as high poverty.

Reardon (2019), a sociologist and professor of Poverty and Inequality at Stanford University, has also built a body of research that indicates that poverty is responsible for the achievement gaps in schools. Another implication of Reardon's research concerns race; Black and Latino children are more likely to be poor than their White counterparts, underscoring the reality that poverty and racism are difficult to separate.

In a study, Reardon (2019) and colleagues at Stanford analyzed 350 million standardized tests scores from 2009 to 2016, which included 50 million students while attending public schools from grades three to eight. They concluded that achievement gaps were significant between Black and White students, but that there were vast differences across districts. Reardon et al. found that the level of school segregation influences the achievement gap and the rate that the gap grows over students' elementary and middle school experiences. The study also suggested knowledge is scarce about how to create successful schools in high-poverty areas in America. If this is true, we as a nation are condemning many of our students of color to an inferior education. One remedy Reardon suggested was addressing segregation (Reardon, 2019). By any and all means, we as a nation must address segregation and the corresponding consequences of it for our youth. At the classroom level, one small but important way to address these growing inequities would be to improve the way we teach students to write in our public

middle schools by adopting the workshop model to teach writing, as advanced by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP). As stated on their organizational website, this professional development program places equity at the center of their mission:

> Our goal is to support young people, teachers, and families in order to develop future generations of expert, passionate, and critical thinkers— young people who use literacy to speak out and to live as engaged, curious, justice-seeking citizens in the world. We aim to create and support teaching that is anti-racist and anti-oppressive, teaching that fosters democratic engagement, empathy, and inclusivity. (n.d.)

Within the TCRWP model, students are taught techniques used by professional writers, coupled with oral discourse, wherein students talk and confer about their writing with each other and the teacher during the writing process. Students are also expected to orally rehearse their writing before putting pen to paper. The workshop model emphasizes teaching students how to use "Academic English" (i.e., the dialect that has been historically privileged in academic settings) in both written and oral discourse in order to expand their ability to think and write for all audiences and gain access to contexts of power within and beyond academic settings.

Research Questions for This Study

My personal commitment to equity provided the context for this study that centers on how a writing workshop model might help fight against the persistent educational injustices outlined above. Prior to conducting the study, I had informally observed how the workshop model enabled many students to progress as writers and encouraged them to embrace a writer's identity. Any method has its issues, however, and I noticed that students' success with internalizing the writing techniques I was teaching was variable. The progress I saw in some students' writing, as well as their engagement during class and their willingness to share their

work, showed that the writing workshop model was working for them. Other students, however, struggled in the very same areas. Rather than just focusing on the quality of student writing, my concerns extended to students' holistic experiences with writing workshop in my class.

Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on the intersection of writing, thinking, and speaking practices in English Language Arts classrooms that implement a writing workshop model.

The following questions have guided my research:

- What social and emotional components must be present in a classroom for adolescents to share and orally rehearse their writing in the workshop model?
- How do student-to-student talk and the oral rehearsal of student writing affect the quality of students' writing and thinking?
- How does modeling Academic English in the workshop model affect the quality and sophistication of a student's writing?
- What is the impact of feedback, specifically oral feedback, during the writing process as opposed to feedback after a piece is published?

Background for Research Questions: Personal and Professional Development Experiences with the Writing Workshop Model

After 20 years in the classroom, I have several general observations that framed my study: (a) teaching English is challenging; (b) enticing students into reading is hard in this visual age; (c) teaching writing is complicated and strenuous work; and (d) the process of assessing and grading students' efforts in reading and writing is intricate and subjective, which can be counterproductive to building progress in a writer and forming a writing identity. Even though teaching English can be difficult work, I also find it to be satisfying and fulfilling. It has been the privilege of a lifetime to guide students into being better humans by accessing their ability to

think, read, and write, a belief I share with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) founder, Lucy Calkins.

I attended the TCRWP Institute on the Teaching of Writing in New York City in the summer of 2018. Calkins herself opened the institute with an address at Riverside Church, which has a long history of social justice. In her address, Calkins said, "This belief rests upon the idea that this work [i.e., the writing workshop model] is the cornerstone of a just and equitable society." Calkins expressed that the ability to write well rests upon good writing instruction in public schools, which she felt should be the writing workshop model for all students.

One of the most significant challenges for an English teacher is hooking students into writing and teaching them the thinking, writing, and reading techniques they need to communicate their feelings, passions, and arguments. This enables students to express their needs and desires and take action in the world, as Calkins suggested. Furthermore, if adolescents can harness the power to write, they can think more clearly, resulting in better life choices and outcomes for adolescents and society as a whole. Over the last several decades, researchers have written about the connection between writing and thinking, observing that writing is a generative process; that is, writing creates thinking, which inspires more writing in turn. In *The Craft of College Teaching,* Di Yanni and Borst (2020) noted the following:

First, students learn to write; then, they write to learn. Writing and learning, like writing and reading, are reciprocal acts; they inform and sustain each other. Putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard prompts thinking as writers consider what to say and how to say it effectively. (p. 160). Over the years, I have experimented with many methods of writing instruction in order to help students engage with this generative process. The one in which I have seen students make the most progress is the workshop model of writing instruction, specifically

as enacted in the “Units of Study” (UOS) curriculum created by Calkins and her colleagues. As I will elaborate in a subsequent section below, this curriculum teaches students the techniques that professional authors use in all modes of writing and emphasizes the use of conferring strategies to give students feedback during the writing process, not after a writing piece has been completed. Conversations with writing partners, small groups, and the whole class help students to generate ideas and plan writing before they even put pen to paper.

I first experienced the workshop model personally as a writer, over a decade ago when I participated in the summer institute of the local Colorado State University Writing Project (CSUWP), which is an affiliate of the National Writing Project. Although CSUWP does not endorse any specific model of writing workshop, participants used many workshop practices during the institute, both as writers and teachers of writing. Personally, I found these practices to be so generative for my own writing that I encouraged the school where I was working at the time to adopt the workshop model, which they did.

After I left the school, I began working in my current district, the Andersen School District (ASD, pseudonym), ASD followed a more traditional approach to writing “instruction” at the time, which was to assign and assess writing rather than to teach students *how* to write. However, several years ago, the district adopted the previously described UOS curriculum at the elementary level, and due to its success, decided to implement it at the middle school level as well. The shift from the assign and assess model to the workshop model is not a particularly easy or comfortable transition for teachers in general, and the same was true for teachers in ASD. The teacher must relinquish the “sage on the stage” posture to be the “guide on the side.” The teacher must curate mentor texts (i.e., model texts with admirable features) they students can emulate in

their own writing. Teachers must write themselves to demonstrate the writing process. In short, the teacher must be vulnerable.

The workshop model can be challenging for students, too. In an assign and assess model, they are used to sitting and getting. As I will review later, adding Academic English to the workshop model adds another level of complexity for students, who sometimes just want to write to get it done. The workshop model begs for participation and collaboration. Students must have a writing partner and share with that writing partner. Students are asked to collaborate in small groups. Students must be active in their education. In short, they must be vulnerable, too.

Teachers themselves need lots of modeling to help them address this paradigm shift. As a teacher-leader who was asked to support other teachers in the district in learning to use the curriculum, I was fortunate to attend the previously mentioned TCRWP Summer Institute on the Teaching of Writing several times. Because I will be referring to key components of the UOS curriculum throughout this paper, I briefly review them in the next section.

Four Key Components of the Writing Workshop Model As Implemented in the Units of Study Curriculum

The UOS Curriculum is based on the principle that the ability to transfer writing skills to other classes and to be able to remember and use them in their future writing is of grave importance to their academic future. Toward this end, the curriculum emphasizes the following components:

1. "Moves" Used by Professional Writers: The UOS curriculum includes instruction on basic moves or techniques that professional writers make in each writing mode. In the writing workshop, teachers provide instruction on these moves during mini-lessons.

2. The Importance of Talk: Talk is everywhere in the writing workshop model. Students are expected to talk with writing partners and in small groups, to confer with teachers, and to rehearse their thinking and writing in the ordinary course of their independent work. One important strategy featured in the UOS curriculum is called "writing in the air," which refers to oral rehearsal before composing on a piece of paper. "Writing in the air" is a solid accelerator for a student's growth as a writer because it allows them to hear their words and get their writing partner's input on the clarity, structure, and craft of their work before they put pen to the page.
3. Conferring: The writing workshop model uses conferences and small-group work to give feedback to the writer as they write rather than waiting until they complete a piece, which research shows improves the quality of the writing (Keh, 1990). During and after teacher-led mini-lessons and during the student-directed portion of the workshop when students are writing independently, they discuss specific pieces of writing in conferences with the teacher and with small groups of peers. These conferences focus especially on how students are implementing the writing "moves" and techniques used by professional writers that they have learned during mini-lessons. Students also mine "mentor texts" (i.e., exemplary texts written by published or student writers) with their writing partners for examples of craft that they can emulate in their own writing.
4. Academic Discourse: As previously mentioned, one premise of the UOS curriculum is that the ability to speak, read, and write in *academic discourse* (i.e., the dominant dialect or patois of a country) is crucial to gaining entry into the

country's power structure. While not without its controversy (Baker-Bell, 2020), one strategy featured in the curriculum is *code-switching,* which is the intentional use of language in conversation depending on your audience.

Summary

In this thesis, within the context of the growing educational inequality in America, this thesis positions the writing workshop model as one small, but important, effort to arm young people with tools to fight oppression and inequities. Toward this end, I examine how the writing workshop model and the role of discourse within it, specifically, affects the progress of middle school writers in my classes.

Before delving into my actual study, I present the literature view in the ensuing pages. I have taken the somewhat unusual approach of interspersing my presentation of the literature with personal "Narrative Interludes" and classroom vignettes, which I refer to as "Classroom Connections." The Narrative Interludes serve to explain why I have been researching the questions that guided this study for most of my professional career, while the Classroom Connections are meant to illuminate the workshop model in action in my classroom and to highlight the interaction that occurs to support my students' growth as writers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking, reading, and writing well in academic English are tools that can help young people rise up, speak out, and perhaps aid in dismantling systems of oppression, just as we see millennials and Gen Z currently doing in the Black Lives Matter Anti-Racism Movement. Writing matters, and one of the best ways to educate young people to enable them to read and think well is to teach them to write well. According to Nagin and the National Writing Project (2006),

> Writing is a complex activity; more than just a skill or talent, it is a means of inquiry and expression for learning in all grades and discipline." It is the ultimate equalizer. If one can write well, one can think well, and one can read well. Teaching our children to write well elevates their access-- their opportunities. Every child deserves the chance to write-to generate thinking about who they are, where they fit into the world and explore the world through their writing. (pp. 9-11)

Nagin and the National Writing Project went on to explain how the idea of writing as inquiry, problem-solving, and discovery has profound implications for all content areas in addition to English Language Arts, such as math, geography, science, and social studies, because writing generates, deepens, and extends learning. Writing *is* learning. Writing enables students to question, inquire, grow, learn, and become human beings who can evolve individually but also participate in society as citizens.

How do schools—and English Language Arts teachers in particular --tackle this task? As I have begun to argue in previous sections, the writing workshop model offers one promising approach to equip students with the tools they need to become active and articulate members of our society. My experiences with implementing the model in my middle-school classroom

prompted me to delve more deeply into the specific conditions that I might emphasize in order for students to take full advantage of the workshop model. In reviewing the validity and effectiveness of writing workshop, I was especially interested in the role of talk during workshop, specifically the oral rehearsal of writing that students use before beginning to write. I was also keenly interested in the importance emphasized in the model of modeling, practicing academic English, and giving feedback during the writing process instead of after publication in order to improve student writing. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate the role that establishing a classroom community built on trust and risk-taking might play in allowing adolescents to immerse themselves in this model.

I precede my review of the research in these areas by contextualizing America's caste system in the following section. I do so in order to underscore the immediate importance of our young people graduating from our public high schools with the ability to communicate fluently both orally and in writing, giving them one tool with which to fight social inequities. Next, a chronological discussion of the trailblazers of the workshop model is included to illuminate how the writing workshop model originated and has evolved over the years. Finally, the literature review will address the four main research questions of this study.

The Caste System in America

Wilkerson's groundbreaking book on caste in America, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020), contended that America's dominant class has systematically built a structure of inequity in our country: one that serves the dominant group (male, wealthy, and mostly White), and one that serves to undermine women and people of color and assures that they are disenfranchised and poor. Wilkerson asserted:

> As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in a darkened theater, flashlight cast down in aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power—which groups have it and which do not. It is about resources—which caste is seen as worthy of them and which is not, who gets to acquire and control them and who does not. It is about respect, authority, and assumptions of competence—who is accorded these and who is not. (p.18)

As Wilkerson pointed out, and as many recent events, such as those prompting the Black Lives Matter movement, have demonstrated, from the beginning of our great American experiment in democracy, there has been a vast difference in wealth and power between the privilege White males in general enjoy in comparison to everyone else in society. Wealth, Whiteness, and maleness translate into power, respect, and resources, creating a paradox in the American democracy, where all citizens are supposedly "created equal," that has persisted to the present day. Furthermore, Wilkerson postulated that many "-isms," especially racism and sexism, ensure that the caste system will endure because they are so thoroughly woven throughout American society and its institutions.

Wealth Discrepancy in America

Historically, the caste system described by Wilkerson (2020), as well as and the pernicious discrimination against people of color, have resulted in a vast discrepancy between the wealth of White and Black citizens in this country. To fully understand this discrepancy, it is essential to differentiate between wealth and income. Wealth refers to savings, houses, cars, etc., which together comprise the value of a household's assets minus its debt. As Wilkerson pointed out, wealth is cumulative and results from family lineage and an individual's decisions about how to use those assets. On the other hand, income is the amount of money a household has at a

particular time. According to a 2018 study entitled "Systemic Inequality," which was conducted by the Center for American Progress, the racial divide is a reality:

> The median black wealth in 2016 amounted to $13,460—less than 10 percent of the $142,180 median white wealth. The average black wealth was 11 percent that of whites, and slightly more than one-quarter of blacks had no or negative wealth, compared with only a little more than 10 percent of whites. (as cited in Hanks et al., 2018)

This vast discrepancy between the wealth that a White person has on hand for future use (i.e., the wealth one has in terms of savings or assets that could be quickly liquified) and a Black person has on hand is one factor that perpetuates these inequities. Without generational wealth or wealth in general, as defined above, it is difficult both to bounce back from financial difficulties and to afford to pay for housing and post-secondary education.

Funding of Public Schools in America

Another significant enabler of the caste system in America is the numerous and bizarre methods used to fund the educational systems across vast swaths of our country. A 2018 report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), entitled *Public Education Funding Inequity: In an Era of Increasing Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation*, described how the methods used to fund education have historically perpetuated segregation based on wealth and race. The report offered Pennsylvania as a case in point:

> Pennsylvania has some of the nation's most inequitably funded schools within a single state, where high-poverty districts spend approximately 30 percent less than more affluent districts on average. For example, the School District of Philadelphia serves many low-income, inner-city students and spends approximately $13,000 per-pupil each year, while the Lower Merion School District in the affluent Philadelphia suburbs spends

approximately $23,000 per-pupil each year. In 2012, Pennsylvania school districts' expenditures per-pupil varied approximately $2,495 from the state's average, or by a factor of 16.8 percent. The range of per-pupil spending is wide in Pennsylvania, from expenditures of $8,700 in more impoverished rural districts to $26,600 in more affluent suburban districts. This inequitable spending amounts to 'larger class sizes, fewer academic options, older buildings, less technology, and fewer art, music, and gym classes.' As a result, teachers are often left to purchase their own classroom supplies out-of-pocket, to make up for the budget shortfall. (USCCR, 2018, pp.55-56)

This example demonstrated how discrepancies in funding result in the inadequate quality of education that many students in public schools receive in this country. Moreover, the report emphasized that a quality education was crucial to preparing students to be participatory members of a democratic government and workers in a global economy. In addition, the commission connected the vast funding inequities in our state public education systems to the highly deficient education that millions of American public-school students receive. Clearly, as a society, we are relegating millions of our young people to a substandard education, which will profoundly alter their trajectory in the future.

The Dangers of Top-Down Pedagogy

These inequities are not only apparent in educational funding, but in the pedagogy used in many public-school systems that emphasize top-down education, particularly in urban schools that experience high teacher-turnover rates and thus rely on scripted curriculum that promises to increase student test scores on standardized tests. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1970/2018) poignantly illustrated how systems and structures in education allow the miseducation of the underclass or lower “caste,” as Wilkerson might suggest. Freire

characterized the traditional education system as a "transmission" or "banking" model, wherein teachers deposit knowledge in students' heads with the expectation that it will be withdrawn later for use in traditional assessments, such as exams. Teachers who actively employ these methods support the prevalent social structure by developing passive students who receive knowledge rather than constructing it, thus resulting in a self-perpetuating oppressive system. Freire explained why this the banking method perpetuated inequities, as follows:

> It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited into them. (p. 73)

In this model, students are not taught to think, read, or write critically or to understand themselves or the world better. They are just viewed empty, passive vessels filled with whatever the state, teacher, or curriculum pours into them. Such a pedagogy keeps less privileged students “in their place,” unable to question the status quo. They are not taught to think of themselves as transformers of society, but as passive recipients. In so doing, this pedagogy is used to oppress.

Even though this book was first published in the 1970s, these practices and ideas are still present today and still serve to oppress rather than enlighten and liberate many of our public-school students.

Narrative Interlude: How My Schooling Made Me a Teacher

My concerns about many of the inequalities and the systemic racism in our country that is outlined above, especially as these play out in schools, have persisted throughout my life,

wrapping their tendrils around me as I grew and squeezing me to see, record, and seethe every time I witnessed social injustice. My parents raised me to observe, to notice others and the environment, and to question. Circa 1970, I attended Dewey Elementary school in Evanston, Illinois, a diverse suburb directly north of Chicago on Lake Michigan. Ironically, my school was named after the great educator John Dewey who emphasized learning by doing in contrast to the banking method of teaching as previously discussed by Paulo Freire (1970/2018). My school sat one block west of Asbury Avenue where we lived in a large old, gray home. A sweeping lawn in front of our house faced east towards Lake Michigan and the predominantly whiter and wealthier side of town. Our backyard faced the west side of our smaller city, which was poorer and racially diverse.

My parents picked this house strategically; they wanted to raise their children with people who did not look like them. They wanted to raise their children to see and fight the same "-isms" that Wilkerson (2020) identified, such as racism and sexism, and they were determined to fight the same -isms themselves. Nearly all my relatives attended private schools, but my parents were determined to be part of our community, which meant sending their children to the local public schools. Not only that, but while holding down a job, my mother was the PTA president and organized community potluck dinners in efforts to integrate the neighborhood. My father spent weeks every year roving the neighborhood with me by his side for the purpose of registering people to vote. In sum, my parents cared deeply about the place where we lived and the people in it.

In terms of my experiences in a public school, third grade stands out as a time of critical revelations in my young life. My teacher Ms. Klein, a woman with a tight frizz of gray curls, proper dresses usually with Peter Pan collars, sensible shoes, and cold eyes, led the class that

year. The class was arranged in a typical fashion with students sitting one behind the other in perfectly straight rows. One epiphany I had that year was that the girls were usually in the front and the boys in the back, especially the Black boys, who were assigned to the last two rows. This seating arrangement struck me as wrong. I did not have the word for it then, but I saw segregation in a microcosm that year. Ms. Klein mostly spoke directly to all the White girls in the front row and did her best to ignore the students in the back row. This also confused me; I wondered how she could be a teacher and disregard a whole group of her students. I spent most of the year reading quietly to myself while surreptitiously watching the back of the classroom, where many boys were either sleeping or creating a ruckus and eventually being sent to the principal's office.

This was also the year that my best friend Rosemary, who was Black, told me that her older siblings said that she could no longer be my friend because I was White. I was devastated. Though we remained quasi-friends for the rest of that year, we no longer hung out by the time we entered fourth grade. In retrospect, it seems we were listening to those subtle and not so subtle messages from a systemic racist institution, the same system my parents were attempting to dismantle. My confusion and consternation ate away at me that year. I remember wishing that I did not notice people's feelings and emotions so deeply, as my parents had taught me to do, and that I did not care so much; it felt like a simultaneous burden and a blessing.

These realizations and experiences ultimately acted as the catalyst for my teaching career persisting to this day and informing my current research questions about how we can use the power of the writing workshop model to elevate the thinking, reading, speaking, and writing of all students without regard to socioeconomic status. To deepen an understanding of the origins and evolution of the writing workshop model, the following sections examine its trailblazers.

Trailblazers of the Writing Workshop Model

> I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. (Dewey, 1897, p. 77)

To provide context for how the writing workshop model started, how it has evolved, and how some of the best teachers and practitioners in the United States developed and grew the model, this literature review will examine the trailblazers of the workshop model and each of the workshop practices they contributed or further developed. For the most part, this section is chronologically ordered with signposts to illustrate some of the critical contributions made by these trailblazers and the different aspects of the model that they emphasized, particularly those which have informed my classroom practice.

Contributions of Donald Murray: Writing as a Process

Donald Murray, a trailblazer in the workshop field, highlighted that writing is a process to be taught, not a product to be assessed (1985). In the early years of the writing workshop, the writing process was framed as consisting of three stages: pre-writing, writing, and rewriting. Murray was one of the first educators to stress the importance of constant revision throughout the process. Murray called his writer's notebook a “daybook,” a term that reflects the same practice that my own students use in my classroom as they write in their writer's notebooks every day. Students use these notebooks for free writing, note-taking during mini-lessons, and brainstorming of all their drafts.

As the following passage illustrates, Murray also equated writing with thinking:

> Meaning in not thought up and then written down. The act of writing is an act of thought.... Writing is not superficial to the intellectual life but central to it: writing is one of the most disciplined ways of making meaning and one of the most effective methods

we can use to monitor our own thinking. We write to think—to be surprised by what appears on the page; to explore our world with language; to discover meaning that teaches us and that may be worth sharing with others. We do not know what we want to say before we say it; we write to know what we want to say (1985, pp. 3-4).

I emphasize to my students that writing and thinking are symbiotic, recursive processes. Writers go back and forth saying an idea, writing it, and then saying it again to someone else reshaping it and generating new ideas as they go. Murray was also known as an academic writer who infused his work with the beauty of narrative, a move or technique that has since become a staple of academic writing in the workshop model that I implement in my classroom, and a technique that I have also emulated here in this study.

Contributions of Donald Graves: The Writing Workshop Curriculum and the Strategy of Oral Rehearsal

Another important figure in the workshop movement was Donald Graves who called Murray a mentor; although, they were near contemporaries. As a trailblazer in the workshop model of teaching writing, Graves expanded the writing process to five stages: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publication. Graves (1985) argued that a strong writing curriculum must include the choice of topic, feedback from teachers and peers, independent time to write, and a classroom community that allows for vulnerability.

Graves further advanced the ideas that trust must be established before a workshop can be effective and that teachers must model vulnerability by writing with their students and being willing to make mistakes in front of them. Toward this end, Graves insisted that teachers should talk their writing through in front of their students in order to model oral rehearsal and invite

collaboration around a piece of writing. In so doing, teachers show how vital talk is in the writing process. Graves said,

> Written language is different from oral language. When Billy speaks, he reinforces his meaning by repeating words and phrases. Unlike when he writes, an audience is present; when the audience wanders or indicates disagreement, he changes his message with words, hand signals, facial expressions, and body posture. This is the luxury of oral discourse. "Error," adjustment, and experimentation are an expected part of oral discourse (Graves, 1985, p. 3).

The verbal feedback that students receive from each other during an oral rehearsal of their writing helps them edit and grow their ideas with an audience and their reactions. If a student starts with an oral rehearsal of writing with a writing partner, their writing can also improve because hearing their words can reveal insufficiencies in their writing to themselves, encouraging them to make adjustments and experiment with academic discourse practices. I have seen firsthand that this practice has dramatically improved the structure and the vocabulary of my students' writing. This practice has also allowed my classroom to be a place where the teacher talks less, and the students talk more.

Finally, Graves also emphasized the importance of the social and emotional state of the writer in the workshop model, suggesting that without a sense of safety and community in the classroom, a student is unable to share their writing and consequently unable to reap the benefits of oral rehearsal and ongoing collaboration with a writing partner. Collaboration, trust, and the establishment of a community are integral to the workshop model. As Graves said succinctly, "Writing is a social act. If social actions are to work, then the establishment of a community is essential" (Graves, 1985, p. 4).

Because of the importance of talk in the workshop model, Graves recommended finishing each independent writing session with students talking with their writing partners and or teachers in order to question, listen, and address both strengths and weaknesses in their writing. After reading Graves' work at the beginning of my career, I created a community- building unit. To this day, at the beginning of each year, my students learn each other's names, create a classroom charter, and decide how we want to feel, interact, and be in our classroom. We spend time getting to know each other, and we delve into the social and emotional needs of adolescents.

Contributions of Nancie Atwell: Workshop in the Middle Grades

Nancie Atwell (1989/2014), another trailblazer in the writing workshop movement, studied the work of Graves and was one of the first educators to write about using both the writing and reading workshop models in the middle school classroom. One of Atwell's greatest strengths, among many, was understanding the social and emotional needs of teenagers. Atwell loved to sit and confer with students over their reading and writing and simultaneously get to know them as people, not just as students. In the 1980s, Atwell closed the classroom door at Boothbay Harbor Grammar School in Maine and began experimenting with the workshop model, reading heavily from theorists such as Graves and Calkins.

In 1989, Atwell wrote about these experiences in a tome entitled *In the Middle*, which is considered a bible for literacy educators. In the book, Atwell explained her use of the workshop model in both reading and writing in detail and elaborated on its transformative power:

> I am confident of these outcomes because I teach English as a writing-reading workshop. Students choose the subjects they write about and the books they read. Because they decide, they engage. Because they engage, they experience the volume of sustained, committed practice that leads to growth, stamina, and excellence. Each year my students

> read, on average, forty books representing fourteen genres. They finish an average of twenty-one pieces of writing across thirteen genres. They win regional and national writing contests, get published, and earn money. Most importantly, they discover what reading and writing are good for, here and now, and in their literate lives to come. The benefits for me, as the grown-up writer and reader in the workshop, are a teacher's dream. I get to demonstrate what is possible, teach what is useful, establish conditions that invite engagement, and support the hard work of literary reading and writing. The workshop impels me and compels them because here the work of doing English is real. Students of every ability are encouraged, hooked, and transformed (p.3).

Atwell went on to start a school called The Center for Teaching and Learning to showcase these methods, which were informed by a particular fondness for adolescents and a practical, realistic knowledge about their stage of development. Behind Atwell's desk was a quotation by the poet John Cardi which read, "You do not have to suffer to be a poet. Adolescence is enough suffering for anyone." In line with Atwell's example, I spend time at the beginning of each year developing an awareness of my student's social and emotional needs, teaching them how to specifically name their emotions and also how to defuse reactive behaviors in their interactions in school and their social lives.

Contributions of Lucy Calkins: The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and the Units of Study Curriculum

Another major trailblazer in the workshop movement is Lucy Calkins. Both Calkins and Atwell studied under Graves at the University of New Hampshire. Calkins started as a teacher and is currently the director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) at Columbia University, which spearheads both nationally and internationally the philosophy,

education, and support of the Unit of Studies curriculum for reading and writing workshop. TCRWP stresses the recursive nature of the different stages of the writing process and emphasizes teaching students the techniques and strategies that professional writers employ in the various modes of writing. This instruction includes teaching students how different types of texts have distinct structures so that students can emulate them.

Calkins and her the colleagues at Columbia University developed the Units of Study (UOS) curriculum to provide teachers with guides and strategies to support reading and writing workshops. The curriculum weaves creative strategies for teaching writing with skills like self-regulation and self-discipline, which have proven to support students' writing development. Self-regulation strategies give students the ability to persevere, keep writing, and to think even when it gets hard, while self-discipline helps them develop a commitment not to resist distractions and focus on the task at hand.

The UOS curriculum asserts that there are seven essentials to writing instruction, which are as follows:

1. Writing must be taught like any other essential skill in school; students must be given real-world writing opportunities.
2. Writers must be able to choose their own topics so that they can write from a place of meaning; students must be given explicit instruction in writing, which should include grammar instruction and strategies and qualities of good writing.
3. Students must be taught how to cycle through the writing process.
4. Students must be given daily protected writing time.
5. Students must be given excellent mentor texts to dissect so that they can learn the techniques of good writers.

6. Lastly, teachers must provide clear goals and constant feedback throughout the writing process (Calkins, 2014, pp.18-23).

As I mentioned previously, having participated in the TCRWP Summer Institute on Teaching Writing, I have learned how to incorporate these essentials into my own classroom and have benefited from TCRWP's detailed emphasis on a process approach to writing wherein teachers walk students through writing using the same techniques that published authors use when they compose.

Contributions of Ralph Fletcher: Writing as a Craft

Another leader in the workshop movement is Ralph Fletcher, who is known for teaching teachers that writing can and should be taught as a craft (1993). Fletcher was part of the first cohort at the Writing and Reading Institute of Columbia College and helped build the model that rests upon the previously mentioned essentials for good writing instruction. Fletcher has spent an entire life working to push out the workshop model and has written extensively about the writing process and the writing workshop.

In his book, *What A Writer Needs* (1993), Fletcher laid out the craft of writing for both teachers and students in the most accessible ways. Fletcher explained and demonstrated numerous craft moves that can easily be taught and modeled, and turned the idea that individuals are either born with writing talent or not on its head. By viewing writing as a craft that can be taught, Fletcher showed how to teach students key principles and techniques related to structure, imagery, and the writing process. This book was indeed the first of its kind. Murray, one of Fletcher's mentors, said it best in the book's foreword:

> Well, Ralph Fletcher's new book is unique. . .The book is an autobiography. Reading this book, you will observe a writer's education as Fletcher reports on what and how his

teachers taught him and allows the reader to share his continual apprenticeship to our craft. His story is—as good writing always is—intensely personal and universal. I learn from his private story and, at the same time, know it is my story. (p. vii)

In the book, Fletcher explicitly laid out techniques teachers could teach during mini-lessons in the writing workshop, and he modeled these techniques using both his professional writing and that of his students. For instance, in chapter four, "The Art of Specificity", Fletcher showed how small details can invoke big issues by including examples from his professional writing and students' writing that employ humor, fluidity, and personal stories. Readers feel like they are being taken along on a private writing adventure, learning about craft, but also immersed in Fletcher's story, which as Murray said, feels like yours, too.

Fletcher also spoke to the usefulness of oral rehearsal for increasing students' fluency in writing: "Fluency along with risk-taking is the foundation of a writing workshop . . . with few exceptions, students have only a fraction of their oral fluency when they write" (2001, p.64). The biggest takeaways from Fletcher that have influenced how I use the writing workshop model in classmates are his endorsement of oral rehearsal, his emphasis on continuously modeling the craft of writing, and his assertion that anyone with who uses the right techniques can be a writer.

Contributions of Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher: Writing Workshop at the High School Level

Two other leaders of the workshop movement, Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher, also contended that talk is paramount throughout the writing process. Both Kittle and Gallagher are classroom teachers and authors who have been at the forefront of the workshop movement for decades. In their co-authored book *180 Days: Two Teachers and The Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents* (2018), they map out a plan for a year of high school teaching, focused

primarily on the reading and writing workshop model. What makes their work especially relevant to other teachers like me is their continued presence in the classroom, which allows them, unlike so many other authors of books on writing pedagogy, to speak directly from their ongoing work with adolescent writers. After years in the classroom, Gallagher and Kittle continue to share what they feel are best practices that stand the test of time. Reflecting at the end of the book, they said, "We remain committed to students. To reading. To writing. To student talk. To volume. To feedback. To conferences" (Kittle & Gallagher, 2018, p. 225) --a commitment I find tremendously inspiring, and which I model in my classroom.

The Power of a Strategies-Based Writing Curriculum

The tremendous influence of the work of the above forerunners on teachers points to the effectiveness of the writing workshop model because of its emphasis on teaching writing strategies. This model is based on best practices in the teaching of writing reviewed in previous sections, such as choice, collaboration, academic discourse, the stages of the writing process, designated time to write each day, and teaching students the strategies and “moves” that professional writers use in all modes of writing through short mini-lessons and feedback during the writing process. A 2012 meta-analysis by Graham et al. attested to the effectiveness of curriculum centered on writing strategies for supporting students’ writing development and improving the quality of their work:

> Writing strategies and knowledge play an important role in students' growth as writers. When students receive instruction designed to enhance their strategic prowess as writers (i.e., strategy instruction, adding self-regulation to strategy instruction, creativity/imagery instruction), they become better overall writers. Likewise, when students are taught specific knowledge about how to write (i.e., text structure instruction), the overall quality

of their writing improves, they determined that increasing how much students wrote improved writing quality (Graham et al., 2012, p. 891).

As will become clear in the sections below, the Unit of Study Model (UOS) developed by Calkins and her colleagues serves as a prime example of a strategies-based curriculum that demystifies writing and the writing process. Philosophically speaking, it also has the added advantage of aiming for social equity. In the Units of Study Guide to the Writer's Workshop, the authors begin with their mission to create a more just world. Calkins writes:

> In a world that is increasingly dominated by big corporations and big money, it is easy for individuals to feel silenced. No one is more apt to be silenced than young people, who too often grew up being taught to listen rather than to speak out, to be obedient rather than to be critical. The teaching of writing can change that. In a democracy, we must help young people to grow up to know how to voice their ideas, to speak out for what is right and good (Calkins, 2014 p. 1).

This mission could not be more relevant in today's world where we see youth protesting and speaking out for radical reform to dismantle the systemic structures of racism in our country. The UOS levels the playing ground for *all* students, not just the privileged few, by providing them with practical tools they need to confront privilege by making their voices heard through writing.

Key Components of the Unit of Studies Curriculum

A group of dedicated teachers, researchers, and professors at Columbia University, in cooperation with several New York Public Schools, took the strategies and best practices described above and melded them into the previously mentioned Units of Study (UOS) curriculum. This curriculum has raised the level of thinking, writing, and speaking of millions of

students over the last several decades. In using the UOS curriculum in my classroom and in training other teachers in my district to use it as well, I can personally attest to its effectiveness for our students. The critical elements of the curriculum include the following:

- the establishment of a trusting community of writers
- dedicated time for students to write
- emphasis on the writing process
- the use of mentor texts
- mini-lessons focused on the strategies and techniques used by professional writers
- support for students' development of skills such as self-discipline and self-regulation
- the use of academic discourse in student-to-student conferences as well as teacher-led conferences.

In the sections below, I describe many of these elements in the chronological sequence as they unfold during writing workshop in the space of a single class period.

The Mini-Lesson. At the beginning of the writing workshop, the teacher leads a mini lesson that should take no longer than 10 minutes. During the mini lesson, the teacher shares a strategy, technique, or "move" used by professional writers in one of the modes of writing while students listen and take notes. This is also a time when students are expected to practice self-regulation. They are allowed to speak to their writing partners if the teacher asks them to do so, but otherwise, they are expected to direct their attention to the mini-lesson without speaking.

Within the mini-lesson are four distinct parts: a connection, the teaching point, active engagement, and a link to application. In the "connection" segment, the teacher connects the day's mini-lesson to students' prior learning. Next comes the "teaching point" where the teacher shares a new strategy, technique, or writing move and students are expected to take notes. This

segment is followed by “active engagement” where students practice the new technique or method with their writing partners. Talking is crucial in this segment of the mini lesson. Finally, the teacher provides a “link” to guide students in immediately applying what they have just learned to their writing during independent work time. Talk is also crucial at this point because students select from the options the teacher has suggested and discuss their plan with their writing partner for independent work time, which takes place in a different area of the classroom. The physical departure from the mini-lesson area is intended to stimulate a response in the student's brain that directs them to buckle down and work hard on whatever plan they concocted with their writing partners (Calkins, 2014, pp.60-71).

Independent Work Time. The second segment of the workshop is independent work time where students are expected to practice self-regulation by exercising self-discipline, resilience, and hard work. During this time, students should be working on individual pieces of writing; receiving feedback from teachers or peers; conferring with the teacher; or orally rehearsing what they want to write with their writing partner, using academic vocabulary.

Giving and Receiving Feedback. Research conducted by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) demonstrates that students improve most in their writing when they receive formative feedback, which takes place during the writing process, as opposed to a summative assessment of their published piece. As stated on the TCRWP website (2020), Hattie’s research (2008) supported this theory, demonstrating that “[for] any learner to grow stronger, that learner must be provided with informative, responsive targeted feedback” (TCRWP). More specifically, the website notes that Hattie reviewed 180,000 studies involving 20 to 30 million students and found that of 100 factors that contribute to student achievement, providing learners with feedback rates in the very top 5%-10% of influences. The feedback is

especially valuable if the teacher helps the learner know where he is going, what progress he has made so far, and what specific activities he can do next to progress toward the goal.

Thalluri et al. (2014) also identified the benefits of peer feedback, establishing that students who have "study buddies" or writing partners are more likely to do well on exams and in their writing and to feel more confident because of their practice with a peer. Unequivocally, this research indicates that teachers should consistently provide students with opportunities for formative feedback in all classes in all content areas. During the writing workshop, one of the best places to give feedback is in conferences with individuals and groups of students. Conferring is all about talk and feedback as a loop. A writer talks about what they would like to write to another writer or a teacher in pairs or small groups, and they practice what they might write and get immediate feedback. Such feedback can be a game changer in helping students progress in their writing.

Conferences. If the student is not writing during independent work time, they have the option to orally rehearse their work with a writing partner or confer with a teacher independently or in a small group. Teacher-led conferences can be as simple and unplanned as a "lean-in" conference, which refers to dropping in on a student while they are writing to ask them what they are working on and offer help them in some way, or conferences can be formally directed toward helping a particular student with a technique they have not yet mastered. In the latter case, the teacher reteaches the technique to the student, sometimes pulling in several other students who need a bit more reteaching as well.

Teachers can also provide direction for students who are ready to move on to a more sophisticated move or technique. Again, the teacher could hold a one-on-one conference with a student or pull in several students at once. Finally, students are expected to confer with each

other at the end of each independent work session in order to discuss the techniques or moves they used or left out of their writing in addition to any other topics about their writing that they want to address.

Oral Rehearsal and Academic Vocabulary. Students have multiple opportunities to experience "the luxury of oral discourse," as Graves (1985, p. 3) referred to it, during independent writing time. Strategies like "writing in the air" allow a student to try out their writing on another student and get immediate feedback on what is working and what is not working. As previously mentioned, the writing workshop model stresses that when a student starts with an oral rehearsal of writing with a writing partner, their writing can improve as they identify errors, make adjustments, and experiment with oral discourse (Graves, 1985).

During all segments of the writing workshop, students are expected to use a shared academic vocabulary when they confer with one another. This shared academic writing vocabulary enables students to talk fluently about their writing with other students in the present moment and is also designed to help all students gain access to future educational and professional opportunities. Using academic vocabulary during oral rehearsal of their writing and when providing peer feedback also encourages students to develop independently as writers by becoming less reliant on the expert in the room, the teacher.

Collaboration. In the final segment of the writing workshop that follows independent work time, students are asked to collaborate and share their "beautiful words" (Gallagher, 2018, p. 43) with each other and the rest of the class. Students might share an entire piece or a portion of their writing that they believe will resonate with their audience or that resonates with them personally. This process of sharing exists on a continuum of formality. Students might share with

writing partners, or they might sit in the "author's chair” in front of the room and share their work with the whole class.

This is such an exciting time in the workshop because students begin seeing their writing as “mentor texts” that other students could emulate. In the process of collaborating in this manner, students model what each mode of writing looks like and once again have the opportunity to engage in academic discourse.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Workshop Model

The overriding goal of the writing workshop model is, of course, to give the writer tools (i.e., techniques and methods) that they can put into their writer’s craft toolbox to pull out whenever they need them. But another goal is to foster independence in students as writers who have the initiative to work with their writing partners, access classroom resources, consult mentor texts, and intentionally implement the writing practices they have learned. Whereas in a traditional classroom, students constantly look to the teacher as the final expert in the room, within the workshop model, the teacher relinquishes substantial power and gives students more independence. The teacher's goal is to gradually release instruction, not to be the dominant expert who employs a transmission model of instruction (Freire, 1970/2018), but to act as a guide who is working their way out of a job. The theories of the *zone of proximal development* and *scaffolding* are foundational to the workshop model.

Zone of Proximal Development

The workshop model is consonant with theories regarding teacher support for students as articulated by Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky studied a child's ability to solve problems independently in comparison with their ability to solve problems with an adult's help. Through his concept of the zone of proximal development, which is the distance between what a child

cannot accomplish alone and what they can accomplish with social support, Vygotsky posited that when a child is learning a new skill or process, guidance and interaction with an experienced adult or a more knowledgeable peer is essential for the child's acquisition of that skill or process. The writing workshop model provides numerous opportunities for student learning in the zone of proximal development, most especially in teacher-student writing conferences where teachers can assess a student's current level of knowledge or development and provide tailored support for their writing development.

Scaffolding

S*caffolding* refers to the level of instructional support provided for an individual as they move through their zone of proximal development. Metaphorically speaking, the teacher creates a scaffold for the student's learning of a particular skill or process, just as one literally would around a building while constructing it, then as the student becomes stronger in the skill or process, the teacher takes down the scaffold until eventually, the student is able to practice the skill on their own (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). One classic scaffolding technique is called "I Do, We Do, You Do." In the "I Do" phase of this technique, the teacher demonstrates the skill in question for students; then in the "We Do" phase, the teacher and the students practice the skill together; and finally, in the "You Do" phase, the student practices the skill independently.

During a writing workshop class period, scaffolding is present in various stages, including the mini-lesson, which provides teacher support through direct instruction and/or modeling; in teacher-student conferences and interactions with writing partners and small groups in independent work time; and during collaboration time at the end of the workshop when students share their work with the class.

The relevance of both of these theoretical concepts for the writing workshop model is that students benefit from multiple, varied levels of support as writers that can be tailored to their needs as writers. Still, the ultimate goal is for the students to become independent writers who have mastered the skills and processes they have been taught so they can and apply them in their own writing. In the next section, I turn to another important consideration when implementing the workshop model that is directly connected to my first research question, which concerns the social and emotional components that must be present in a classroom if adolescents are to feel comfortable and confident enough to share their work.

Social and Emotional Needs of Adolescents

It is becoming a more and more difficult place to be a teenager in the United States. With screen time sometimes replacing actual human contact and the polarization of every sector of our society, teenagers are feeling more isolated and less connected than ever. In 2017, 13% of U.S. teens ages 12 to 17 (or 3.2 million) said they had experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year, up from 8% (or 2 million) in 2007, and "the total number of teenagers who recently experienced depression increased 59% between 2007 and 2017. The growth rate was faster for teen girls (66%) than for boys (44%)" (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality et al., 2017, para. 5).

On the other hand, "Although adolescence may appear to be a turbulent time, it is also a period of great potential as young people engage more deeply with the world around them. Adolescents typically grow physically, try new activities, begin to think more critically, and develop more varied and complex relationships" (HHS.gov).

I have seen firsthand how these challenges and opportunities play out in the lives of my students. On one hand, many of them want more independence, more responsibility, and

expanded experiences. Some want to create new identities in order to establish themselves as "grown-ups." While adults still play a significant role in their lives, peer influence can become tantamount to none. They are often willing to take more risks without really thinking through the consequences that may ensue, and in today's age of social media, the risks and rewards of their actions and decisions are amplified. With the onset of puberty, their sexual identity begins to bloom, and with these physical changes come emotional challenges to express their emotions in mature and socially acceptable ways.

All of these transitions require tremendous energy for both youth and the educators who work with them. Fortunately, for middle and high school teachers, in the past several decades, there has been an increase in theory, research, and resource development on adolescents' social and emotional learning (SEL). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which was founded in 1994, "Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, n.d., para. 2).

The writing workshop model serves as an ideal context for adolescents to develop and reinforce these lifelong SEL skills at the very same time that they are developing their writing skills. As previously described, the workshop model requires students to practice self-regulation, self-discipline, and extensive collaboration with peers and the teacher. It also creates a communal space where students can be guided and supported to exercise vulnerability and practice emotional sensitivity in meaningful and appropriate ways.

Classroom Connection #1: Practicing Vulnerability through Memoir Writing

A closer look at my teaching context demonstrates the relevance of SEL work. For instance, in my 8th-grade classroom, we start each year with narrative writing, specifically

memoir writing, which can be extremely rewarding and, at the same time emotionally challenging for many adolescents. While writing about their experiences can help teens fashion new identities out of the fabric of the past, sharing their indelible moments requires significant vulnerability. This is an emotion that many teens may find difficult, especially if they have experienced trauma earlier in their childhood, yet my students often share their emotional challenges with me through their memoirs.

In my teaching experiences, students can be reluctant to share their ideas and experiences with one another, however, partially because they may question whether their experiences are even worthy of being shared. At that same time, I know that in order to truly benefit from the model, students must share their writing with their peers through oral rehearsal of their ideas during mini-lessons, peer feedback during independent writing time, and collaborative sharing of their "beautiful words" at the conclusion of each workshop period (Gallagher, 2018, p. 43). As such, I have learned that I must take great care to consider students' social and emotional needs when planning and carrying out the writing workshop in my classroom, particularly because talk is so central to the model.

The Expectation of Talk in Writing Workshop

As mentioned previously, in the writing workshop model, students are expected to talk—a lot—an expectation which is related to my second research question concerning the relationships among oral rehearsal of writing, student-to-student interaction, and the quality of students' writing and thinking. In the Units of Study model, students are expected to rehearse their ideas aloud before they begin to write, a process called "writing in the air." They are also expected to talk with peers while composing their first draft, while revising, and, as mentioned in the last section, when sharing their work at the conclusion of each class period.

As Graves (1985) asserted, talk is vital to both student writing development and improvement of writing because it helps students reinforce meaning by writing with an immediate audience in mind. This process aids with idea development, error correction, and experimentation with oral discourse. Graves also emphasized the importance of talk in helping to develop a community of writers. In short, the writing workshop model pivots on a student's ability to talk, share, and care about themselves and their peers, not just to become better writers, but also better human beings.

Classroom Connection #2: Speaking Ourselves into Community

Like Graves, I believe it is my responsibility to foster a caring and trustworthy community of writers in my classroom, which is why I begin each school year with some serious community building. A workshop model cannot exist without trust, and the first step in establishing it is for students to call each other by name. In addition to initially learning each other's names, we circle up at the end of each of the first two weeks of school, and each student must walk around the circle and name each of their classmates. I insist that there is no "he," "she," or "they" in our community, only individuals with names, because this is how we start to recognize each other's humanity.

We also spend several days at the beginning of year doing SEL work by examining and learning about the social and emotional state of adolescence. We decide together what we want our classroom to feel like, and we create a class charter stating our wants and needs, along with some simple rules that will help us achieve our goals. These techniques may not be complicated, but they go a long way in establishing the trust needed to build a writing community where students can share their work.

The Expectation of Academic Language

Nested with the overall emphasis on talk as a tool for writing in the Unit of Studies

Curriculum is the expectation that students will learn to speak and write in the dialect of "Academic English," which is a key concern in my third research question, concerning the connections between this dialect and the quality and sophistication of a student's writing. This dialect has also been known by other names over the years, such as Standard English; Standard American English; Standardized English (Crovitz & Deveraux, 2020); the Language of Wider Communication (National Council of Teachers of English, 2011); Marketplace English (Christensen, 2017); and academic language (Francois & Zonana, 2009). I use the term "Academic English" for the purpose of this thesis with the intent of attaching no judgment to the term, though the necessity of teaching it is not without controversy, which I will describe more below.

Regardless of the nomenclature used, the dialect is usually attached to the practice of "code-switching," which is defined as the process of shifting from one linguistic code (i.e., a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting. In academic settings, code-switching usually refers to shifting between Academic English and the dialect that is sometimes called "home language" to refer to the language that students use in informal interactions with family and peers (Francois & Zonana, 2009).

This is not to diminish students' home dialect or their ability to speak an entirely different language, which are also valuable and powerful tools (Yosso, 2005). In fact, some professional organizations (e.g., Colorín Colorado, n.d.; the National Teachers of English, 2020) have emphasized the special importance of teaching English Language Learners how to use Academic English because "Academic English is the language necessary for success in school. It is related to a standards-based curriculum, including the content areas of math, science, social studies, and English language arts" (Colorín Colorado, n.d.).

Proponents for teaching students how to code-switch have also argued that "knowing how to write and speak in academic language and knowing how and when to code-switch is integral to attaining equal access" (Francois & Zonana, 2009, p. xviii) to the power and influence that privilege the dominant groups in society—usually White individuals with high socioeconomic status. Francois & Zonana (2009) argued that:

> Although many teachers may place value on both our students' home language and standard written English, which we've called academic language, the dominant culture in our society does not. By teaching our students Standard English grammatical conventions and how and when and why to code-switch when they speak and write we are giving our students a key to the world in which they have the right to contribute and participate. After all, knowing how to write and speak in academic language and knowing how and when to code-switch is integral to attaining equal access. This is undoubtedly political work, and it is imperative that we take this on. (pp. xvii-xviii)

Code-switching has become an increasingly contested approach, however, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, acts of racist violence, and Black Lives Matter protests. Recently, a Special Committee of the Conference on College Composition & Communication composed a statement titled, "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!" One of the five demands in the statement was that "teachers stop teaching Black students to code-switch! Instead, we must teach Black students about anti-Black linguistic racism and white linguistic supremacy!" In the book, Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy, Baker-Bell (2020), who was one of the co-authors of the statement, pointed out the power of Black Language reminds us how America and our educational systems have diminished and undermined Black youth and the Black community. Baker-Bell wrote:

> Like the mission of Black Lives Matter, *Linguistic Justice* is a call to action: a call to radically imagine and create a world free of anti-blackness. A call to create an educational system where Black students, their language, their literacies, their culture, their joy, their imagination, their brilliance, their freedom, their existence, their resistance MATTERS. (p. 3)

Narrative Interlude: How, Where, and Whom I Teach Pushes Me to Push Back

Fifty percent of my students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds; their parents struggle with several jobs and worry about keeping a roof over their kids' heads and food in their bellies. The achievement gap between their children and their children's more advantaged peers is vast, with the latter group scoring over four times as high on standardized tests. An almost identical gap exists between white students and students of color, many of whose families do not speak English at home.

I do not cite these statistics to suggest that I view my students from a deficit perspective. In fact, the opposite is the case. My thinking is aligned with Tara Yosso's (2005) "community cultural wealth" framework, which states that lower socio-economic communities and communities of color have a rich array of linguistic, aspirational, navigational, social, familial, and resistant capital, even if and when economic capital is not in place.

This is especially true for many of my students in the area of linguistic capital, which I refer to as a "superpower skill," since they speak in multiple languages and codes, including Spanish, Black English, and more. Throughout the year, I elevate those who speak two languages and encourage those who do not to learn another language. I encourage my students in our memoirs and in all our narrative writing to write in the language that reflects their authentic voice. They are honored for the linguistic and cultural capital they bring into our classroom.

Thus, teaching my students to use Academic English is not meant to diminish their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005); it only enables them to code-switch when necessary.

The linguistic capital that many of my students possess is invaluable, but to access the material privileges and opportunities that the dominant culture in the U.S. benefits from, and to examine the inequitable system so they can change it, they will need to speak and write in Academic English. Baker-Bell (2020) would likely dismiss my argument that teaching Academic English allows students of color access to the current power structure so that they can dismantle it. I acknowledge Baker-Bell's idea that teaching young people of color, "White Mainstream English" (Baker Bell, 2020, p. 3), or as I would say Academic English, will not in itself overthrow a systemic racist system; however, unless there is a revolution, which there might be, one way to dismantle a system is from the inside out. One can only do that if one knows and speaks the language of that power structure.

If a student is not taught Academic English at home, they must learn it at school. I find the argument of Francois and Zonana (2009), two middle teachers of color, who also stressed this idea, as follows:

> Providing access to what we consider the culture of power to those without it has been the impetus behind our work together. After all, if we do not provide tools for our students to access the power culture, they can neither think critically of it nor reform it. We also believe that it is inherently unfair for those of us who do have access to the culture of power to inadvertently deny it to those who don't. (p. 4)

Classroom Connection #3: Providing Opportunities for All Students to Learn and Use Academic English

Frequently, I mention to my students that this dialect called Academic English is the language of high school and college in America. If my students want to be successful in those

institutions, they will want to know the meanings of words and phrases from this dialect and how to use them. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) illustrated the ways that using Academic English benefits students' intellectual growth. For example, conversations build content learning and help co-construct meaning for students. Five essential skills focus on and deepen academic conversations, which are 1) the ability to elaborate and clarify, 2) to paraphrase, 3) to support ideas with examples, 4) to build on or challenge ideas, and 5) to synthesize ideas.

My professional development training in a program called ELAchieve also emphasized that learning academic language is important for ELL students. The program organizes its curriculum around five cognitive and linguistic functions: cause and effect, compare and contrast, explain and describe, proposition and support, and sequence. Each of these functions comes with a set of academic words students can use to better articulate their ideas in each of those functions. While the program aims specifically to support ELLs in learning formal Academic English, I have found that the training benefits all students who can always use more practice with high-level academic vocabulary the dialect of Academic English in general.

Because I hope all of my students will choose to continue their education after graduation, using Academic English during writing workshop is essential to their success in my classroom, so I scaffold their learning through modeling, demonstration, and practice. The following examples show how this process plays out in a mini-lesson and oral rehearsal between writing partners.

Mini-Lesson Example*:* Frey and Fisher (2011) highlighted the importance of giving students structures and templates to ensure that the academic conversations are fruitful and productive.

In my experience, students often resist using unfamiliar and academic language, so supporting students in speaking and writing in Academic English begins with teaching them academic words and "sentence starters" to push their thinking in specific genres.

For instance, when I am teaching memoir writing in the workshop, the following are some sentence prompts I use in minilessons, small groups, or in an individual conference:

- *I used to think . . . But now I am realizing . . .*
- *My ideas about . . . are complicated.*
- *On the one hand, I think . . . On the other hand, I think . . .*
- *Some people think . . . But I believe . . .*
- *When I first . . . I thought . . . But now when . . . I realize that, really . . .*

In the past when I shared these templates with students primarily through handouts, I often found sentence starters and lists of words from Academic English on the floor or in the recycle bins, which decreased the chances that they would actually show up in students' writing. Incorporating academic words into their essays is revision, and revision is complex, especially when mastering the dialect of Academic English. I have seen more success in helping my students integrate words, phrases, and thought structures into their work writing when I have asked them to use Academic English in oral discourse throughout the writing process.

In the example that follows, I provide a sample mini-lesson focused on structure for presenting and analyzing evidence when students are writing literary essays. I use informal language for understanding the analysis of a quote, but I pair my simple words with Academic English so that students can graduate to more sophisticated language after using the simpler words initially presented. (Note: This lesson is informed by the *Units of Study* curriculum, but it is not a script; it is an instance of how the process might look in my classroom, using the mini-

lesson parts described in a previous section, *connection*, *teaching point, active engagement,* and *link*.)

My **connection** today is all about code-switching; when we use our quote analysis, we use the terminology: says, means, and matter. We want to be able to translate those words into high academic language. My **teaching point** is that good argument writers use outside evidence to support their claims. Here is one way you could do it using the language of says, means, and matter. Remember that these terms translate into the quote, analysis, and synthesis format. First you say (the quote), then you tell me what the quote means in your own words (analysis), and then you explain how that quote supports and ties back to your claim to create new meaning (synthesis).

It is important to understand the words—analysis (to break apart for understanding) and synthesis (to bring back together with some greater meaning or understanding). You will encounter these words frequently in high school and college, and you should understand them. Here is a demonstration using the text "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury.

Says and Lead (QUOTE)

> In "All Summer in a Day," Bradbury, from the beginning of the story, uses description and details to show how sad and in pain the children are. They are jealous because Margot has seen the sun, and they have not. Bradbury describes how "Margot stood apart from them, from these children who could never remember a time when there wasn't rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day seven years ago when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall" (p. 4).

MEANS (Analysis)

This line shows the differences between Margot and the other children; she lived on Earth and had seen the sun every day, and in fact, for years. The other children saw the sun when they were two years old, but they do not remember it, and all they know is a world of omniscient and oppressive rain.

MATTERS (Synthesis)

This matters because it illustrates how Margot's self-preoccupation has made her unable and unwilling to see the other children's pain. Her self-absorption and their jealousy dance together, culminating in a world of pain for everyone, reinforcing the theme that jealousy hurts all involved.

Active Engagement: Now, you try using the same text. Pick a quote to support your claim and then try using "the quote is . . . my analysis is . . . and my synthesis is," and tie the evidence back to "the claim is. . ." Talk it through with your writing partner before writing it down. Include any of their recommendations in the draft of analysis.

Link: Go off, my young writers, and try this again. Look for evidence to support your claim and start to vary your words. Use sophisticated Academic Language to explain your evidence. Instead of just saying "means," use "this demonstrates" or "this illustrates." Instead of "matters," use "this connects" or "this supports." Good luck!

Oral Rehearsal Example between Writing Partners:

In addition to using prompts and sentence starters when writing literary essays and argument/position papers, I also ask students to orally rehearse their use of Academic English before or during writing, a technique I referred to earlier as "writing in the air." They can

practice the strategies described in the previous section by themselves, but usually, they do so with a writing partner. They also use these same strategies when they are revising, reading their work to a partner and asking them to look for sophisticated Academic English. If a partner does not find it, they can suggest phrases and where the writer might insert them. Using Academic English in the workshop model in all the different stages of the writing process builds oral fluency and vocabulary, yet one of the most significant benefits as my students practice Academic English orally is that they began to use it in their writing independently, dramatically improving the sophistication of their language in academic genres.

Here is an example of an actual discussion I recorded during writing workshop in my classroom between one of my study participants named Kelly and a peer. I have underlined the Academic Language students are using independently. They both read several texts including *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah, and then they wrote position papers examining the claim that either child soldiers were victims or perpetrators. Kelly reads a paragraph from her position to her writing partner, Alex. In her paragraph, Kelly supports considering children soldiers as victims:

> **Kelly**: Child soldiers should be considered victims because they are coerced by adult soldiers wielding guns who tell them to join or die.
>
> **Alex**: Good <u>evidence for your claim</u> that child soldiers are victims, but where is your <u>analysis</u>—your <u>“means” and “matters”</u>?
>
> **Kelly**: I haven't gotten to that yet. But my <u>“means”</u> might be something like, the offer to join the rebels is not a choice, it is a choiceless choice. Like the ones people in the Holocaust were faced with. Their choiceless choice is to die or join—essentially, there is

no choice. And my <u>"matters"</u> might be something like, "This <u>evidence</u> supports my <u>claim</u> because children with choiceless choices are victims; they are not perpetrators.

Alex: That is good. Ms. Phelan says oral rehearsal supports our growth as a writer. What do you think?

Kelly: Maybe. Anyways, I love discussing my work with another writer who likes to write as much as I do.

Even though this conversation sounds idealized, Kelly likes to talk and write, so incorporating Academic Language into her essays is a breeze for her. As I will explain later in my Methodology section, I would say she represents about 25% of my students, while the majority struggle with the addition of these Academic English and phrases into their writing. Eventually in the school year, though, many of the remaining 75% of my students will pick up the structure of quote analysis—*say, means,* and *matters*—to support their argumentative writing.

The above examples demonstrate how using Academic English in the workshop model in all the different stages of the writing process builds oral fluency and vocabulary; yet one of the most significant benefits as my students practice Academic English orally is that they began to use it in their writing independently, dramatically improving the sophistication of their language in academic genres.

Another benefit of teaching Academic English through talk in the workshop model that these examples illustrate is that doing so creates social and cultural capital by cultivating connection and empathy among students, building relationships, and fostering equity. Additionally, students build psychological well-being through conversations by using positive inner dialogue and self-talk, fostering engagement and motivation, building confidence, and

developing a stronger academic identity (McCarthey & Birr Moje, 2002). During adolescence, getting a student to talk to peers can be deeply meaningful to their social and emotional development.

The high-level academic, social, and emotional skills that are supported by conversation are invaluable for all my students. I believe that if my students can leave eighth grade with a firm grasp of Academic English, the transition to high school will be smoother. Furthermore, they will be able to better advocate for themselves and the changes they would like to see in the world.

Summary

Framed by a commitment to equity and access for all students, this literature review has focused on a detailed look at the essential components of the writing workshop model, the trailblazers who developed it, and its theoretical underpinnings. I have outlined the model's many benefits--social, emotional, and intellectual--for adolescent writers, with a particular focus on Academic English and oral discourse. In the process, I have also provided an occasional glimpse into how the writing workshop model looks with my students.

As demonstrated by the voluminous body of research on the Unit of Studies website (n.d.), the effectiveness of the writing workshop model at the elementary level is well-established. After my review of the literature in the previous sections, it seems likely that with the establishment of a community that fosters the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescents, the inclusion of Academic English and talk during all stages of the writing process, this model could also be one vehicle to empower middle school writers to speak, read, and write well.

Yet it has only been in the last several years that Calkins and her colleagues in the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project have developed a Unit of Studies curriculum for

middle school classrooms. Furthermore, their work has focused more generally on best practices. With a few exceptions (e.g., Atwell, 1989/2014; Francois & Zonana, 2009), less is known about the effectiveness of these practices in particular contexts. This reality prompted me to investigate my students' workshop experiences in my eighth-grade classroom.

In the remainder of this thesis, I take a case study approach to address the following research questions from my position as a teacher researcher:

- What social and emotional components must be present in a classroom for adolescents to share and orally rehearse their writing in the workshop model?
- How do student-to-student talk and the oral rehearsal of student writing affect the quality of students' writing and thinking?
- How does modeling Academic English in the workshop model affect the quality and sophistication of a student's writing?
- What is the impact of feedback, specifically oral feedback, during the writing process as opposed to feedback after a piece is published?

METHODOLOGY

The habit of inquiry has always been at the heart of good teaching. (Goswami et al., 2009, p. 1)

According to Feagin et al. in *A Case for the Case Study* (1991), a case study is an “in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources" (p. 2). Teacher research narrative case studies in particular are characterized by "a habit of inquiry that has always been at the heart of good teaching about the scholarly traditions that inform teacher inquiries, and about the potential of collaborative inquiries to help us create communities of learners within classrooms and beyond" (Goswami et al., 2009, p. 1).

In this narrative study, I used the methods associated with teacher research, as guided by Emig's (1982) classic teacher inquiry paradigm. The first step in this paradigm is to admit that we as researchers have a "governing gaze" (p. 64); we see what we want to see. This leads the researcher to ask questions such as, "What influences the way we see our students? Their capacity to learn? Their use of language-first and second" (Goswami et al., 2009, p.7). To these questions, I would add what is the students’ work ethic? What is their motivation? Allowing ourselves as teacher researchers to acknowledge our governing gaze enables us to consider our positionality in relation to the students we are observing and their context.

Thus, as a teacher researcher, I have a special responsibility to consider my positionality, my governing gaze, which was influenced by my parents who both fought for social equity and justice, as I explained in the Introduction to this thesis. Also, my experiences as I work every day observing racism, sexism, fascism, etc., and fighting against these “-isms” are part of my governing gaze. Another reason that Emig (1982) emphasized that teacher researchers must

identify their assumptions is that they create boundaries for their studies. In this study, my assumptions about teaching writing echo the literature (Atwell, 1988; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2014; Fletcher, 1993; Francois & Zonana, 2009; Graves, 1985: Kittle & Gallagher, 2018; Murray, 1985) in that I concur with the following:

- Writing is better taught collaboratively.
- Writing is improved by teaching students the techniques that professional writers use.
- One way to improve writing is through oral rehearsal.
- Another way to improve argument and literary writing is to teach students Academic English.
- Learning is a social activity and requires collaboration and vulnerability on many different levels.

The second step of Emig's (1982) paradigm requires the teacher researcher to create a coherent theory—a big idea. For my research, my big idea was that writing can be improved when students learn the moves that professional writers make, as well as the dialect of Academic English, in a safe and respectful, collaborative setting, specifically the writing workshop model.

Fecho (2001) offered a broader and deeper perspective on the validity of conducting teacher research by describing some of its strengths:

> This close connection between research and practice somewhat explains why the story of the question is important to most teacher-researchers. Because their research grows out of their practice as much as it grows out of the discussions of the larger research community, teacher-researchers find it facilitative and significant to tell in narrative form how their question and methods emerged. This description frequently links them to a dissonant or disconnecting event that focuses a generic question and sets the study into

> full gear. Responding to an immediate transaction within the classroom, teachers use their intimate knowledge of the context and history of that classroom to enact a study that responds to all three concerns. Telling the story of that moment when some event calls context and history into question seems not only useful but necessary. (p. 18)

Fecho pointed out how important it is for teacher-researchers to tell how and why their questions came about; this is important because of the ongoing daily nature of the interaction between student and teacher. This relationship gives teachers a particularly close perspective from which to conduct their research.

I observed three students for my case study in order to create a powerful narrative of how they learn and how I teach them to develop as writers, but to also determine to what extent these two efforts interact. One reason for doing this research was to improve my pedagogy. More importantly, I wanted to understand the needs and strengths of these students and how I could support their learning and the learning of students like them in the future. Just as a story needs a setting, research needs context. The following section will examine the context of this research and narrative.

Context of the Investigation

This teacher research, this narrative, which focused on three students who were representative of my students as a whole, took place at Maxine Greene Middle School (MGMS, a pseudonym), which is located in a mid-sized city in the western part of the United States. A look at the history of MGMS reveals that change was required from the outset of its opening. As the school was about to open in August of 1972, a fire decimated the building, and it had to be rebuilt entirely and finally opened its doors in January 1973. In the 1970s, the school sat in an affluent socioeconomic area, and the school was state of the art.

Since then, the school context has changed dramatically as the surrounding area has evolved from its formerly racially homogenous and affluent status. Presently, the racial composition of MGMS is 64.4 % Caucasian students, 27.5% Hispanic students, and 4.7% students from two or more races. The student body averages around 600 students. Of those 600 students, in any given year, 14% are labeled gifted and talented, 13% have individualized educational plans, and 13% are denoted as English Language Learners or given "newcomer status." Fifty percent of MGMS students receive free and reduced lunches, which are provided to families whose household income is 130% of the poverty level may apply. On the district website, the MGMS student-teacher ratio is listed as 14 to 1. This number includes educators who work with much smaller groups of students (e.g., special education teachers) in addition to classroom teachers, however; thus, in reality, an average class contains approximately 30 students to one teacher.

Eighth-Grade Students

Eighth graders at MGMS range in age from 13 to 14 years of age. I teach three 81-minute blocks per day, with class sizes up to 36 students despite the district's official report of a 14:1 teacher ratio. All classes are mixed-ability levels, so in any given class, I can have readers that struggle to read at a third-grade level and some who read at a college level. The writing ability of the students is similarly spread out.

Standards-Based Grading vs. Traditional Grading

At the time of this investigation during the 2018-2019 academic year, all students at MGMS were evaluated using standards-based grading. Although standards-based grading is a valid theoretical approach to assessment, applying it in practice at MGMS created unintended complications. In 2012, many middle schools in the Andersen School District, including MGMS,

embraced the model of standards-based grading. This grading system measures how well a student masters a learning standard. This system usually uses a 0-4 to rate mastery: a zero indicates the student has not mastered the standard, and a four indicates complete mastery. Standard-based grading emphasizes the summative grades for assignments rather than the formative practice that supports those final grades. At MGMS, summative assessments are 90% of a student's grade, whereas formative grades make up only 10% of a student's grade, resulting in a low homework and practice completion rate.

De-emphasizing the assessment of homework and practice in standards-based grading often resulted in non-completion of homework and practice work in the classroom if the grade was not summative. Eventually, the eighth-grade teachers and the MGMS principal recognized that this grading system did not prepare students for the rigor and grading they would soon be exposed to in high school. This was because many students would translate their 0-4 summative grades into letter grades at the end of eighth grade in anticipation of high school, which usually resulted in an inflated GPA.

However, since the time of this investigation, MGMS's principal, along with the support of eighth-grade teachers, moved eighth graders to a traditional letter grading system, while sixth and seventh graders retained the standard-based grading system. Our eighth-grade team feared that there was a connection between standards-based grading and retention in high school because a significant percentage of students who graduate from MGMS went on to drop out of the high school that MGMS feeds into. We felt this change would help our eighth graders transition more fluidly to high school. The shift back to traditional grading, as well as the special programs we offer at MGMS, have gone a long way in developing the character and work ethic of our eighth graders.

Special Programs

Most students at MGMS come from the surrounding neighborhood with the exception of students participating in three special programs: the newcomer program, a dual-language program, and a high-needs autism program. Newcomer programs are for students who do not speak English and have recently arrived from another country; dual-language program students are taught in both Spanish and English; and students in the severe autism are mainstreamed in either science or social studies classes. If the students in the latter program are high-functioning, however, they may also be mainstreamed into math and English. Although none of the participants in this study were part of these programs, the existence of the programs, coupled with the change in the neighborhood's socioeconomic status surrounding the school, has combined to create an atmosphere with more diversity, empathy, and acceptance than in the years prior to 2000.

Research Participants

I used random selection to identify the participants in this study in three categories based on my estimation of their writing proficiency, as indicated via their performance in the writing workshop. In the normal course of my teaching, I had my students take baseline formative assessments using common writing prompts, showcasing everything they knew about writing in each of these three modes from the Units of Study curriculum: narrative, informational, and argumentative writing. I drew on their writing samples to develop criteria that reflected their baseline performance as writers in my class, resulting in the following categories: *advanced, intermediate,* and *beginner*.

I always used students' writing samples as starting points for my mini-lessons and to help me determine an optimal formation of small groups and writing partnerships. For the purposes of this study, I also examined these samples to determine the categories of my research participants.

After sorting my writers into groups of advanced, intermediate, and beginning writers, I put the names into three hats and chose one participant from each category. I randomly chose Kelly from my hat of advanced writers, Maria from my intermediate hat, and Diaz from my beginner hat. (All student names are pseudonyms.)

This procedure allowed me to maintain the random selection approach while still observing the conventions of a case study approach. As a result, I was able to delve more deeply into how Academic English, talk, and the workshop model in general moved individual writers at a range of levels.

Funds of Knowledge

Gonzales et al. (2005) fostered the idea that teachers need to incorporate their students' families, communities, and cultures into their classroom and curriculum. They coined the term “funds of knowledge” to refers to cultural mores, the skills and experiences, and the knowledge accumulated over time. The concept of funds of knowledge turned the deficit-thinking perspective that teachers sometimes hold about people of color on its head and instead viewed their background as a source of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Although I did not initially use "funds of knowledge" as an official criterion for my participant selection, viewing students through this lens certainly informed my teaching, and thus, my research in this study; this helped me see my participants not just as students, but more holistically as people.

In the following sections, I describe the funds of knowledge that I witnessed in each participant, along with other attributes that figured into my determination of them as advanced, intermediate, or beginner writers. These included their academic designations as determined by the district; their literacy and language practices; and their demonstrated work ethic and

academic habits. I also offer information on participants' social and family dynamics to provide a more holistic view.

Advanced Writer: Kelly

Kelly, a white, monolingual female, was randomly selected as a representative in the "advanced" category. Prior to this study, Kelly had been labeled gifted and talented (GT) by the district, which meant she was entitled to an advanced learning plan supported by the GT teacher. Kelly's work ethic was evident in the fact that decided for her advanced learning plan to teach herself how to play the guitar, which she did, even though she already played cello outside of school.

In addition to the quality of her writing, Kelly's social support and her writing practices caused me to designate her as an advanced writer. She had a similarly situated group of friends who strove to improve their writing constantly. Along with having a writing partner to converse about her writing, Kelly conferred with and orally rehearsed her writing with a large group of students who were similarly invested in the process of writing. This group of young writers provided significant support for Kelly as a writer, and because of their advice, she was constantly revising and editing her writing. Kelly was also an avid reader. I would recommend new books every day to our class, and she would read several a week. She voluntarily viewed the books as mentor texts by mining them for moves and techniques I had taught her, and then attempting to mimic those moves in her writing. One day, she hoped to be a published author. Finally, Kelly also had tremendous resources and emotional support at home and, as a single child with college-educated parents, she reaped the benefit of her socioeconomic background.

Intermediate Writer: Maria

Maria was randomly selected as my intermediate writer. As I did with Kelly, I relied on various criteria to make this determination, including the quality of Maria's writing and her writing practices. Maria was fluent in both Spanish and English, and her vocabulary, reading ability, and grasp of the English language structure were profound. Considering that her first language was Spanish, her grasp of English at such a young age was the product of hard work. Being Mexican immigrants, Maria's family spoke mostly Spanish at home. While her parents spoke some English, they were much more comfortable speaking in Spanish. Maria intentionally maintained proficiency in both languages, as indicated by her decision to weave her first language in her English writing. When we wrote creatively, Maria would often switch between Spanish and English, modeling herself after Sandra Cisneros.

Although she moved here as a young elementary student, Maria was only an official part of the English Language Development teacher's workload in elementary school. While at MGMS, she had not even been on "monitor status," the step before students were released from Andersen District's English Language Development Program. She tested out of the program; therefore, she was in my classroom without any additional language support.

Maria was emotionally resilient despite the challenges of her family dynamics outside of school. During the year that the study took place, she confided to me that her father recently moved out of their home after repeatedly being unfaithful to her mother, a fact that had caused Maria much distress. Maria was very focused until a boy who had previously attended MGMS returned, and they started dating. Her father's infidelity and her new boyfriend seemed to have affected her willingness to share and be vulnerable in class and in her writing.

Beginner Writer: Diaz

The third participant was a young man named Diaz, who was randomly selected as a representative of a beginner writer in my class. Diaz was both resilient and emotionally mature because he had to be after losing his father at a young age; thus, he assumed a caretaker role with his younger brothers. Diaz's ability to get along with others was evident in the number of friendships in our class. Although Diaz could not speak Spanish fluently, he understood a lot and spoke some of the language. He was an excellent communicator with both peers and adults.

Diaz was labeled gifted and talented in math but struggled in his writing because he did not demonstrate a willingness to practice. Because writing is process-based, Diaz did not make much progress as a result. If I were conferring with him, he would attempt to finish the assignment, but if he was working by himself or with his writing partner, he spent more time socializing than talking about writing. Also, his inattention to structure and his lack of elaboration impeded his progress as a writer.

Several factors made it difficult for Diaz to focus in my class precisely and on school generally. As mentioned previously, Diaz lost his father tragically. His mother remarried an abusive man, and there was documentation indicating that he abused Diaz. He was the oldest of three brothers and had a mother who was still in love with the abusive stepfather, who at the time of this investigation was about to be released from jail.

For the first-three quarters of the year, Diaz worked hard in my class, but similar to Maria, he was also distracted by the former MGMS student who returned and entered our class in the last quarter of the year. In one conversation where I expressed my fears about the downward spiral of his productivity, Diaz told me that he was going to "kick it up" when he got to high school, adding that middle school grades did not count. With the return of the previously

mentioned young man, Diaz would not allow himself to be as vulnerable and engaged as he was at the beginning of the year.

Clearly, all three participants possessed funds of knowledge that showed up in different ways in school. Despite their varied nature of their experiences and abilities, all three participants also brought a wealth of community cultural wealth and real-world knowledge and expertise to our classroom.

Data Collection Methods

All data were collected during the normal course of my classroom teaching and included fieldnotes, writing samples (both on-demand, polished, and published pieces), and recorded discussions of students practicing techniques and academic language in their writing. As a teacher-researcher, I also regularly took notes on what my students were doing, where they were in the writing process, and if and how they discussed their writing in small groups and with writing partners. Then I reflected on what help I believed they needed from me. Intermittently, I asked my students to record their conversations about their writing. I examined samples of my students' writing to see whether orally rehearsing the techniques of published authors encouraged students to use those techniques in their writing. Also, I looked for examples of academic language in the students' writing and conversations and how this might help them with structure and creating voice in their argumentative and literary essays.

I collected audiotapes of academic conversations in the normal course of my teaching as well. As a result, this research did not disrupt my class. Even though I used data that I routinely collected to inform my teaching, the methods I used to analyze this data were more deliberate than if I were reflecting on it to inform my teaching more generally.

Methods of Data Analysis

My methods for data analysis blended Emig's (2009) previously described inquiry paradigm for teacher researchers with the methods of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which includes reviewing data to identify emergent themes and then coding data using these themes upon additional review. Power (2012) notes the compatibility between teacher research methods and constant comparison.

Emig stressed the need for teacher-researchers to address their *indigenous logic*, which is a process that involves looking at one's inquiry to identify the steps, methods, and relevance of research that the teacher/researcher took to conduct their inquiry. Emig elaborated as follows:

> Teacher-researchers must pose the following questions as they examine their data:
>
> - Does this make sense?
> - Is it worth it?
> - Is there something to be learned here?
> - Does the careful articulation of my governing gaze, assumptions, theories, and ideas: the positions of others in my intellectual traditions; [*sic*] and my ensuing methodology create that foundation for systematic inquiry? (as cited in Goswami et al., 2009, p. 10)

Engaging in Emig's process helped me solidify the relevance and need for an inquiry like mine. In the first stage of my data analysis, I used Emig's questions as a lens to identify emergent themes across the three participants. At the second stage of my data analysis, I examined the data by starting with the emergent themes I had identified in the previous step, and then considered each participant through the lens of that theme.

I also took my initial "coherent theory" (Emig, 1982) and overarching research questions into consideration during the second stage of analysis because I was interested to see if retention

of the moves professional writers make, which I taught every day in the workshop model, improved with oral practice. I wanted to understand whether or not students would readily retain techniques and be able to use them more effectively if the workshop model was combined with opportunities to engage in high-level Academic English. More specifically, I searched for instances where students were naming the moves or techniques that proficient student writers typically use to improve their work.

I also searched for the potential impact that using Academic English in conversation might have had on students' on-demand writing (i.e., timed writing completed at the end of the unit). These conversations took place in conferences between writing partners, small group discussions, and whole-class discussion. Although student-teacher conferences are a common element of the writing workshop, I purposefully refrained from an analysis of teacher-and-student talk because of my interest in student-to-student talk. I also wanted to look at how trust and vulnerability enabled collaboration, which could accelerate a writer's progress.

Examining my overarching research questions to initially determine emergent themes surfaced a more refined set of sub-questions which will guide my presentation of results in the next section:

1. How and to what extent do writing partnerships and academic conversation accelerate the progress of a writer?
2. How does the introduction to professional writing techniques coupled with the persistent use of Academic English affect the progress of a writer?
3. What is the impact of collaboration and trust on student writing?
4. How do writing partnerships elevate or lower the writing progress of either partner?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recursive nature of data analysis described above and the sub-questions that surfaced, resulted in two overarching themes. The first theme concerned the power of writing partners coupled with academic talk to increase the progress of a student writer. The second theme pointed to the importance of collaboration, trust, and vulnerability to the entire workshop process, and therefore, also to the progress of a writer. These themes are intertwined; however, they will be discussed separately with some inevitable overlaps. In order to maintain the original character of the students' writing, I have not edited it.

Theme #1: Writing Partners, Academic Talk, and Progress in Student Writing

Writing partners matter. As I reviewed the data, it became abundantly clear that the compatibility of writing levels between writing partners directly affected the quality of the talk, which affected the quality of their writing in turn. If the writing partners were of a similar writing level and pushed each other to discuss writing techniques, the sophistication and elaboration of their thinking during oral rehearsal of their ideas also resulted in more sophisticated writing. This theme revealed that writing partnerships, coupled with the degree of consistency with which they practiced academic discourse, had varying levels of impact on individual writers' development that also resulted in varied levels of progress in their writing. To explore this theme in detail, I move one by one through my research participants, beginning with Kelly, followed by Diaz, and concluding with Maria.

Kelly

Kelly and her writing partner pushed each other to think more deeply about the potential themes they had identified as they wrote a literary essay on Ray Bradbury's short story, "All Summer in a Day." In a recording of their writing conference, the girls zoomed in on the scene

where the character Margot is locked in the closet during the sun's brief arrival on Venus. In the story, the children who had never seen the sun before were so jealous of Margot that they locked her in a closet while the sun appeared; the children did not remember that Margot was still in the closet until after the sun fled, and they then felt remorseful.

In the conversation about the scene, Kelly and her writing partner identified two themes for the story: 1) jealousy might make you do things you will regret, and 2) what might appear to be funny in the moment might not appear to be so funny later. They used their "talking cards" to prompt their conversation. Talking cards are cards with a script asking students to state a claim, support that claim with evidence from the text, then tell the reader what the evidence means and why it matters. Although there is no definitive account describing where this strategy originated, Gallagher (2011, 2015) mentioned a version of it in several books.

As mentioned much earlier in this paper, I was also trained in a professional development program called ELAchieve that emphasizes academic conversation for English language learners. The program uses a version of the talking cards approach through a strategy called “Says, Means, Matters.” This strategy is designed to help students unpack quotations and other evidence from a text in order to explain the connection between that evidence and their claim.

Before writing their essays, Kelly and her writing partner practiced talking through their analysis with each other, and as intended, they found good evidence and explained that evidence well. Part of the talking card protocol was to "write in the air," a practice that involves thinking aloud before they write. Using the talking cards improved the thinking and the level of writing for both partners, as Kelly's first draft demonstrated. In her first draft, written after this discussion with her writing partner, Kelly wrote:

> I believe the cautionary ode “good things don't last forever” is one of the most important themes in the short story. This is because you never realize what you have until it's too late, and it's important to take the time in the present to appreciate what you have.

She elaborated in a body paragraph:

> Back on Earth, Margot probably never even thought about the sun. She might have even complained about its heat during the summer. But on Venus, she refuses to participate and is staring at the window, watching the rain. This shows how much she misses the sun and how she never even realized she would miss it until she cannot see it anymore. Margot is also becoming sick without the sun's light. The author describes her as, “a very frail girl who looked as if she had been lost in the rain for years, and the rain had washed out the blue from her eyes and the red from her mouth, and the yellow from her hair. She was an old photograph dusted from an album, whitened away, and if she spoke at all, her voice would be a ghost” (Bradbury 1). This is a spectacular description and shows how being taken away from the sun is impacting her physically. She doesn't know when her parents will take her back to earth, and by then, it might be too late.

In a second conference, after Kelly and her partner dug into possible evidence for their potential themes, they helped each other determine if their evidence was strong enough to support those themes. They also practiced their analysis of the evidence with each other. Then they revised their analysis based on the verbal feedback. In the discussion that preceded their writing, they incubated ideas, turned them inside out, and found evidence for their claims. In doing so, they practiced the all-important skill of backing up one's opinions or claims with outside evidence and then analyzing that evidence for the reader. After several rounds of talking through their writing, it was apparent from the talk and the follow-up writing that in terms of

sophistication of the writing and quality of the analysis, both students' oral practice produced progress in their work.

In a recorded audio conversation, they recorded when she and her writing partner were discussing potential themes for their essays, Kelly said:

> A possible theme is what might seem funny in the moment might not appear so funny afterward. She says that the kids barely knew Margot or anything about her life on earth and thought she was lying. They thought it would be okay and kind of funny to lock her in the closet because she was not telling the truth. Later on, after two hours of sunlight, they realized their mistake and regretted it.

Clearly, Kelly's discussion and examination of different themes with her writing partner followed by her choice of an alternative theme resulted in the sophistication and evolution of her writing.

Diaz

In contrast to Kelly and her writing partner, Diaz and his writing partner did not record their discussions. My fieldnotes indicated, however, that when I sat in on their discussions around their writing, their conversations were more of a social affair that was dominated by jokes unrelated to the content of the class, rather than an experience that elevated their thinking and writing. Diaz was the participant in this study that I felt had the most to gain from the talk, and he seemed to have benefited the least. Because the academic sentence starters, talking cards, and templates I offered to Diaz and his partner were consistently left untouched on their table, I inferred that they had no interest in using them.

Even though Diaz did not take advantage of the writing partnership, he was a great thinker and an observer of people. In the following excerpt from his on-demand literary essay at

the end of the unit, Diaz compared the short stories "Harrison Bergeron" and "All Summer in a Day":

> In the stories all summers in a day by Ray Bradbury and Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut they both show a common theme between the two of them. They show that equality will never fix this world. No matter how hard people try to make this world fair their [*sic*]will always be people that want more than what's fair. In all summers and a day they lock her in a closet. She has seen the sum not for the past seven years and she is super excited to see it for the first time in 7 years. She gets locked in a closet and never gets to see the sun while all the other kids who have never seen it get to see it now. They have both seen it and its fair but it has messed up her next 7 years. In Harrison Bergeron they try making people even. Making everyone the same. But what they did was cancel out everything good or bad they had about them by making you were the opposite of what they were born with. Either way they were trying to make the world even and in the end it ended up messed up because people are greedy and want more and more and more.
>
> Trying to make everyone equal will never work, people in this world will always take advantage of others. One example of this in the real world is that rich people are rich.

Diaz made some real connections between these stories and his life that are profound for such a young man, but if he had been more willing to engage in productive collaboration, it is likely that the structure and analysis of his writing could have been more developed.

Maria

On the other hand, Maria and her writing partners benefited from their partnership. Maria and her partner only recorded a couple of their collaborative sessions, but fieldnotes taken when I sat in on one of their conferences indicated the positive benefits of their writing partnership.

At the beginning of the year, Maria spent several sessions telling her partner a story, which was the basis of her memoir. She would practice saying her story aloud while her partner reminded her of some of the narrative moves she could use to bring her story alive for the reader.

In addition, when talking about the literary essays they were working on, Maria and her writing partner would practice their themes with each other and then walk through the evidence and analysis of that evidence several times. In this excerpt from her literary essay, the structure of her argument and analysis of her evidence was benefited by the discussion between her and her partner. Maria wrote:

> Equality is not as necessary as society would like it to be, and most of humanity would prefer equality to being unique, having our own style of thinking, talking and expressing ourselves. In the dystopian story "All Summer In a Day" by Ray Bradbury. Margot, the character that made the biggest impact in the story. Margot arrived to Venus, where the story takes place in, which its described where it's as dark, cold and never ending rain, in which every 61,320 hours you can see the sun again, but only for one hour, then it all goes back to a depressing dark place, where you can only see a little of light on this kid's smile, and their hope to feel that happiness again, to feel that warmth the sun gives them, that warmth that the rain doesn't give.
>
> The first reason why the theme is *jealousy kills your heart* for example after Margot draws, talks and writes poems about the sun one of the boys says, "Aw you didn't

write that!' protested one of the boys." This shows that the boy was so jealous of her that he accused her of lying.

According to my fieldnotes, Maria lacked a hook and a summary of the story before talking with her partner, but as can be seen in the above excerpt, she added both after their discussion. She had also neglected to include evidence in her second paragraph, but after conferring with her partner, she went back and added that, too. The collaboration and talk between Maria and her writing partner strengthened both their arguments.

The importance of writing partnerships led to a sub-theme—talk matters. Or in Diaz's case, it may not have. Just as writing is a generative process, *talking* about writing can also be a generative process. In conferences with their writing partners, both Kelly and Maria strengthened their ideas and the evidence and analysis of those ideas by talking through them. In Diaz's case, on the other hand, productive talk with a writing partner might have improved the structure of his essay and might have helped him further develop his ideas.

None of these generative processes could happen without collaboration, which brings us to another critical theme threaded through the data, which I discuss in the next section.

Theme #2: Collaboration, Trust, and Talk

In addition to the importance of writing partners, collaboration and talk matter, too. The willingness to engage authentically with a partner or a small group over a piece of writing was integral to the progress students made in the workshop model. There is a caveat here germane to adolescents: Trust also matters. More specifically, students have to trust their writing partner or small groups of peers and be willing to be vulnerable. As discussed earlier in the literature review in the section on social-emotional needs of adolescence, it is challenging for students to be vulnerable and trust others during this period of their lives.

In the following sections, I focus on my research participants one by one in order to demonstrate how these themes play out. Maria's memoir was about deeply personal issues, which she did not hesitate to share with her partners; therefore, she was able to benefit from oral practice. Diaz and his writing partner would only seldomly allow themselves to be vulnerable, which led to a lot of joking and goofing around and resulted in a lot of wasted time that might have had a positive impact on their writing development. Finally, because Kelly and her partners were willing to be vulnerable, as seen in their willingness to share their ideas and talk honestly about their writing, the quality of their writing benefited as a result.

Maria

Maria started the year out with one set of writing partners and ended the year with a different set. In both groups, Maria was willing, honest, and ready to take feedback. Her willingness to be vulnerable and open led to productive collaboration, which led to honest feedback, and then to more robust, more sophisticated writing. In Maria's memoir that she wrote on-demand at the end of the memoir unit, she focused on her mother:

> Maya is my mother's name. My name comes from her name, Maria.
>
> My mom had a hard life, to me, she's a strong woman, she had her ups and downs, just like everyone else. Sometimes I sit and think about life, and to be honest, I don't want my life to be like hers. I don't want to get married to someone that always wants to control everything I do. I don't want to be sad at times and not be able to show it or let it out. I don't want to be like her, that Maya believes everything bad that people tell her, and always tries to change herself so she can be accepted. I want to be recognized for being the girl that accepts myself just the way I am, I want to be recognized as the girl that is not scared to show what she truly feels inside.

This piece showcased the use of several narrative techniques from prior mini-lessons, such as repetition, to emphasize the differences between her and her mother, and character-revealing actions when she talked about how her mother who always listened to others' criticism and tried to change herself. Maria's writing showcased that she had a sense of her present self and an idea of who she wanted her future self to be. This sophisticated realization by an eighth grader was supported by the talk she did with her writing partner, tying back into the notion that writing is a generative process. Regardless of the genre of writing, talking before composing enabled Maria to grow as a writer by considering ideas and techniques that she might not have alone. I witnessed that this successful partnership benefited both Maria and her partner during the time they worked together.

The depth and sophistication of the thinking in Maria's beginning paragraph about her mother was also evident in the conversations she had with her writing partner about another memoir piece on the topic of when she first got her period. Maria was comfortable enough and trusted her writing partner enough to share that very personal topic. In doing so, the willingness she showed to be vulnerable and trust her partner produced collaborative thinking that supported the growth of both writers.

Finally, Maria's poetic voice shone in an introductory paragraph from her literary thematic essay on "All Summer in a Day." She wrote, "Venus is such a dark and dismal place that the only light one can find is the light of a young child's smile," a sentence that exemplified the quite descriptive and well-written nature of her entire essay. The same was true later in her piece when she described the children's transformation from the sun. During a subsequent unit on fiction writing, Maria switched writing partners, which reflected a different flavor in her work.

Diaz

Conversely, if the writing partners were at very different levels and unable to be vulnerable and talk productively with one another, the student's writing level remained static. Diaz had an effective writing partner who was writing at a similar level, but they did not push each other to improve or progress in their writing. Instead, they shared an attitude of “one-and-done.” In Diaz's first essay, the thematic literary essay on “All Summer in a Day,” the writing was lean and could have used much more elaboration. It was also short in length, which is not necessarily a drawback in and of itself, but in this case, the brevity was due to a lack of analysis.

When they were writing memoirs, though, I witnessed more collaboration. Diaz and his writing partner had both gone to the same elementary school, and Diaz wrote about the first time they met a mutual friend. The friendship that started off rocky with a fight eventually became a solid friendship that always contained some rivalry. During their writing conference while Diaz was drafting the piece, they both told the story to each other several times, laughing hilariously throughout their entire session together. As the boys discussed the story, they added sound effects and onomatopoeia, and Diaz’s partner encouraged him to use dialogue.

Diaz also used all five senses to write about the encounter, and he included inner monologue by showing himself wonder what was going to happen right before the boy punched him. The individual scenes were packed with action, revealing who the characters were. Sadly, I forgot to take a picture of this narrative during data collection because Diaz had handwritten it, so I do not have concrete evidence to present. Suffice it to say, however, the piece was a compelling, and it allowed me to clearly see where the writer had absorbed the techniques of narrative writing and was able to transfer them to a particular piece.

This unevenness in the talk between Diaz and his writing partner reinforced how influential partners can be to the writing process, especially when they can be honest with each

other and push each other to do more, to do better, through critical feedback. Diaz's writing partner was also his friend, so some level of trust existed, but this did not seem to carry into a consistent drive to improve either partner's writing by exerting the extra effort to revise and edit, with the exception of the memoir assignment.

During my time at the Teacher's College Writing Institute at Columbia University in the summer of 2019, we spent time discussing the different types of writing partnerships. After much research, the professors at Teacher's College concluded that friend partnerships work best—probably because of the willingness of friends to share and trust. But in Diaz's case, I did not see this partnership elevating his writing except in his memoir writing.

In another of Diaz's literary essays, which he wrote about a short film near the end of the second semester, he made a claim about the theme. He had evidence to support the claim, and he explained the connection between that evidence and his claim, but the evidence is vague and general as is his analysis. He did attempt to use the analysis formula (e.g., quote, means, matters), but the actual analysis was a bit oversimplified. He wrote:

> In the payee the boy in their remote fishing village the boys decide that they want to play soccer and be in a tournament, but they have nowhere to practice their soccer skills. The theme to this story is never give up because later [*sic*] In life you might regret it and you might want to go back and change it but the chance has already passed.
>
> The first reason the theme in to never give is because they fought all the way and pushed their way to making dream come true and made it happen all by them self's. [*sic*] this is what makes the people who never give up. They also show that they are the kind of people they seem like good people that work hard for what they want and even if the end

product is crappy they still enjoy their work and the blood sweat and tears that they put into making it to where they are now.

This close to the end of the year, I expected a final draft to be a bit more elaborative and to have a more complete body of evidence with supporting details, but Diaz's final drafts were sparse, lacking specific analysis. Diaz could focus, but to sustain that focus, he had to work hard, which did not always happen. To reiterate, when I sat with Diaz and his writing partner, they were productive, but when I left to confer with other students, that fell apart.

Whether Diaz lacked the maturity to embrace this opportunity to grow as a writer due to his tough-guy image, which did not allow him to trust or be vulnerable, or if he simply did not understand the importance of writing for his further educational endeavors, I will never know. Diaz's writing excerpts exhibit the thinking behind his writing; Diaz was such a bright student and he did make progress as a writer, but if he and his partner had truly collaborated on their information and argumentative writing, that progress could have been multiplied. To summarize, this partnership did not work as well as the other two participants' partnerships in this study, partially due to a lack of effort on both sides.

Kelly

As previously stated, Kelly not only had a writing partner, but a writing group, who would consistently talk about and share pieces of writing. Here is the beginning of a memoir that Kelly produced after much discussion with her group:

> The Cast List
>
> My laptop sits perched on the side of the counter, the windows loading sign taunting me. I want to scream at it to hurry up, to move faster, all so that I can see it sooner. My heart seems to spiral out of my chest. I want to know. But I don't want to. But I want to. But I

don't. Cause if I see it I know all my hopes that got so high will crash to the hardwood floor and shatter into a million pieces.

But still, this could be my year. This could be the year I get a lead. This could be the year I finally get to speak. I think I finally have a chance.

My heart thumps faster and my fingers start to quiver over the keys.

I'm logged on.

I click on the blue icon uncertainly.

Outlook is opening.

Load faster!

Outlook is loaded.

I press down hard on the key, opening the email. It flashes before my eyes, the words racing through my head. Cast list, auditions, essays, talent, task, daunting, congratulate, great year, characters, scripts. And the final nail in my coffin.

"I want to congratulate each of you for your work and ask you to remember that you are in the show!"

I click on the list. I hold my breath.

This is it.

I finally get to know.

According to my fieldnotes, while Kelly was drafting this piece, her writing group talked about how to use short, active sentences to create tension and one-sentence paragraphs for emphasis. Kelly’s description and her interaction with her computer enhanced the immediacy of the story; the reader wants to keep reading. The excerpt showed that Kelly incorporated all of her

writing groups' advice into her memoir. She truly benefited from oral rehearsal with her writing partner and group.

Summary

Analysis of the data revealed two emergent themes. The first concerned the relationships among writing partners, academic talk, and writing progress; the second explored the relationships among collaboration, trust, and talk. As I stated in the introduction to my Results section, these two themes were so tightly woven together it was hard to extricate one from the other. When speaking of how integral writing partnerships are to a writer's progress, one must also include talk and collaboration. When speaking of the importance of collaboration, one must also include partnerships and talk. Certainly, progress for a writer resulting from talk is impossible without trust and the ability to allow oneself to be vulnerable. The idea that all these processes are generative is also integral to maximizing the impact of the workshop model.

IMPLICATIONS AND CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

For our country to produce capable, participatory citizens who are treated equally under the law and in all other contexts within and beyond school, students must be able to speak, write, and think in a way that they can argue for how the world should be—not how it is. The progressive educator Maxine Greene (1988) elaborated on this claim in the following quotation from an article entitled "What are the Language Arts for?":

> My point with regard to all this and moral sensibility is that persons are far more likely to perceive deficiencies and lacks and depredations when they began thinking and speaking about what might someday be, what does not yet exist. It is a recognition that what is conceived as normative, what emerges as an image of what should be can in time be brought into existence. This is what is called transformative thinking; since it involves reconceiving, reinterpreting, and sometimes a rewriting of the signs. And certainly, it involves a coming together of diverse persons in the kind of acting and speaking that may enrich and repair what is in-between. (p. 479)

Too many young people in America live in that in-between—unsure of their power to fundamentally change anything. I would argue that the workshop model is participatory and engaging at its core. It is a model that asks students to truly think, write, and speak to find their voices to advocate for a world they believe to be possible not just accept the world as it is.

The results of this study suggest that students should be immersed in the writing workshop model throughout their schooling so that they can find their voices and speak their power. The workshop model should be taught in the primary years, so when students reach secondary school, they are comfortable and trust the model, particularly in the area of talk: talk between writing partners, in conferences with teachers, and in the whole class during mini-

lessons and collaboration time at the end of a workshop class period. Much of this talk could provide feedback for writers not just on their final drafts but throughout the entire process of writing.

Furthermore, because I conducted this research in a school district that had already determined the effectiveness of the Units of Studies curriculum at the elementary level, my findings suggest that if students can experience instruction in the techniques that writers use in all modes of writing, beginning in the primary grades, they will have the opportunity to internalize these moves by the time they reach secondary school so that the techniques should come as naturally as drinking water. At that point, students can both deepen their existing knowledge and add additional tools to their repertoire that will help them continue to progress as writers. Likewise, being taught in the early grades that trust and collaboration are equally natural to the writing process will enable secondary students to consider trust and collaboration an integral part of being a writer, a thinker, and a conversationalist. It is a matter of equity that every child in America has access to this model to be the best thinkers, writers, creators of ideas as possible.

Academic discourse in general, talk around writing in particular, and Academic English within that talk also need to be modeled and taught throughout K-12 education. If young people are going to be able to clearly voice what they see in the world and how they might change it, they must speak the dialect of those in power. Currently in America, that vernacular is Academic English. Because academic discourse is not necessarily used in the home environment, the only place we can ensure that *all* students are exposed to academic discourse is in the classroom.

On a more personal level, based on the results of this study, I will alter the microcosm of my classroom in the areas of my writing instruction during mini-lessons, as well as the

interactions that I have with students and foster among them--especially in the areas of Academic English, oral rehearsal throughout the writing process, and the importance of strong collaboration between writing partners in order to improve the quality of student work.

I will also alter another practice which I adopted from Kittle and Gallagher (2018): a monthly notebook reflection on their reading and writing. In the notebook reflection, I have required students to reflect monthly on what they have read and all the writing they have done, including responses to daily writing prompts and published pieces. I have also had them do studies of mentor texts where they share examples of the techniques they have been learning about through mini-lessons and which they are applying in their own writing. Next year, I will add another component to their notebook monthly check, which will be to have them talk through their notebook reflection before they write it. I believe oral rehearsal could transform and elevate even this genre of writing.

For the most part, my classroom is either in workshop mode or individual rotation stations, but after writing this thesis, I will make sure our classroom is a sea of talk—talk in all its shapes and forms. York-Barr et al. (2016) confirmed the value of engaging in reflection with partners, and all of these practices start with talk. Those who do the talking do the learning.

Finally, I will expand the community-building that I do at the beginning of each school year. Even though I already share my purpose with students on why establishing trust and a community is so important, I feel like I will need to be more explicit in describing how community is essential to sharing your thinking, reading, and writing in the workshop model.

Further Research

Classrooms should be laboratories where students and teachers investigate and solve problems together, igniting their curiosities and sparking their creativity. As my study suggests,

one way of increasing the chances that this will this happen is through implementation of a writing workshop model that cultivates conversation, both academic and otherwise, as opposed to sitting and getting. The classroom should not be a place where a teacher stands at the front of the room, dispensing knowledge like exalted royalty on a throne dispensing favors to commoners. Rather, the post-pandemic classroom should be a place of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect.

Again, a writing workshop model holds great potential to foster such a learning environment, but we need more research on the writing workshop model in secondary classrooms. Researchers will need to examine the efficacy of the writer's workshop model at the secondary level by 1) examining methods for teaching students how to build trust with teachers and peers so that they can be better speakers and listeners who take risks in their writing; and 2) studying the function of academic discourse and talk in general in improving the quality of student writing as well as students' writing development.

To get the fullest picture possible of the writing workshop and its relationship to student growth in writing, we need longitudinal studies that observe students throughout their K-12 education. The writing workshop model is being used in many places worldwide and needs to continue if we want to create a more equitable world for *all* our children.

In 2021, a research study was completed on the Units of Study curriculum and the efficacy of the writer's and reader's workshop model. The research was conducted by The America Institutes for Research (AIR). The researchers used English Language Arts data. Here is a summary of their results:

> This brief presents study findings on the association between school adoption of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) approach and state English

> language arts (ELA) test scores. The TCRWP approach, a curriculum and professional development for teaching reading and writing, is widely used across the country and around the world. Analyses for this brief used publicly available school-level data from New York City, New York, public schools and schools in four districts in Greater Atlanta, Georgia. A comparative interrupted time series analysis examined changes in ELA scores for Grades 3–5 for a sample of TCRWP schools, following their adoption of the approach, compared to similar schools that did not adopt the approach. Consistent with prior literature on professional development for teaching reading and writing, we found no change in ELA scores 1 year after initial TCRWP implementation. Beginning in the 2nd year following TCRWP implementation, however, we observed statistically significant increases in ELA scores among TCRWP-implementing schools, as compared with the matched comparison schools. Between 5- and 7-years following adoption, ELA scores in TCRWP schools were higher by 0.22–0.38 standard deviations, suggesting cumulative effects of use of the TCRWP approach (UOS, 2021, p.2).

If the Unit of Studies curriculum is working in some of the toughest schools in New York City as this study suggests, shouldn't we use it to teach all of our students to write? Research is needed to find out.

To close, I believe our work as educators, especially English teachers, is to guide our students and ourselves to be as radical as possible. Once again, I turn to Freire (2018) who said:

> The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor

> of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (p. 39)

Students and teachers alike need to see the world as it truly is, so we can together see what we need to do to transform it. One way we can do this in our public schools is to embrace the workshop model and talk, talk, and then talk a little more.

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